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Amplifying Change

*A Three-Phase Approach to Model,
Nurture, and Embed Ideas for Change*

In this chapter, we look at the follow-on steps for sustaining momentum for change generated by large-group dialogic events like those described in the previous chapters. Sponsors, design teams, and consultants have a tendency to focus so much on the events themselves that the necessary follow-on structures and processes often do not get the proper attention.

We titled this chapter “Amplifying Change” to highlight that Dialogic OD depends on encouraging and growing the energy, inspiration, and networks created during dialogic events to produce desired changes. While creating a space where motivated people can find each other and generate ideas they are excited to pursue is essential to Dialogic OD, it is just a start. Experience in the field is that without an amplification strategy in place, chances are the energy and momentum will dwindle. OD consultants, sponsors, and organizational leaders will probably find that they have to put more energy and effort into the change process *after* events than before them for really effective change to occur.

Amplifying change is not about asserting top-down action planning and control processes that managers typically use for technical problems, implementing defined solutions, or “change management.” Rather, dialogic events result in new energy, ideas, and spontaneous groups that are motivated to explore the future. Attempts by senior leaders to make quick decisions and choose winners during the early stages following a dialogic event are counterproductive. Instead they need to pay attention to emerging new ideas and *amplify* whatever seems to be working that they want more of. While a dialogic change process may result in proposals or prototypes that require sponsorship resourcing and sanction, more often it produces individuals and ad hoc groups highly motivated to explore ideas that are not initially sanctioned

but that deserve time to be discussed, to cook, and to develop. The job of the OD practitioner is to create spaces in which such spontaneous and useful dialogues can emerge, identify those conversations and discussions that are “juicy” and worth encouraging, and find ways to support and keep building on them.

Amplifying change is thus a highly organic process of organization development that requires openness to spontaneity and a willingness to go with the flow. This approach to change echoes the work of Frank Barrett on improvisational change (1998, 2012), Gervase Bushe and Tom Pitman’s performance amplification (2008) and their “tracking and fanning” (Bushe, 2001; Bushe and Pitman, 1991), and Monique and Jerry Sternin’s “positive deviance” (Pascale, Sternin, and Sternin, 2010; Sternin, Sternin, and Marsh, 1997). In a key study of Appreciative Inquiry, Bushe and Kassam (2005) found that all of the cases of successful transformational change used an improvisational approach to what is classically referred to as the “action phase” in OD. They wrote:

Perhaps even more radical is the prescription to let go of control in planned change efforts and nurture a more improvisational approach to the action phase in action research. Improvised planned change seems at first glance to be an oxymoron but in each case of transformational change that used an improvisational approach, leaders were able to accomplish their change goals, and do so within time frames way beyond what many who work at and study organizational change would expect as reasonable. . . . The results in the cases . . . appear to show that if we can create a collective sense of what needs to be achieved, create new models or theories of how to achieve that and align those with the inherent motivation people have in relation to their organizational life, then a great deal of change leading to increased organizational performance can occur if people are allowed and encouraged to take initiative and make it happen. (pp. 176–77)

Amplifying change is an effective approach to use under conditions of complexity and chaos, where cause-effect relationships are not understood in advance, so that it is difficult to know at first what the right solutions are. Under such conditions, often the smartest strategy is to launch many small-scale experiments to see what works and what does not (Collins and Hansen, 2011; Heifetz and Linsky, 2009; Snowden and Boone, 2007). Leadership’s job is not to choose solutions to implement, but to pay attention, support, and amplify those solutions that seem most promising.

Thinking about how to amplify change should not begin only after a dialogic event. Some things need to be done to amplify change before any dialogic event occurs. Mostly these have to do with ensuring that the right

people are engaged in the process, planning for amplification, and putting aside slack resources that can be used when new ideas and proposals emerge. Right from the beginning, sponsors and change teams should plan for how self-initiated change experiments will be monitored and how key decision makers in the organization will be engaged to support successful experiments. Some of this is covered in Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 14 and we will not say more about it here.

Our focus in this chapter is on things that need to happen during and after a dialogic event. These are described under the phases *Modeling*, *Nurturing*, and *Embedding*. We will offer ideas on how to amplify the momentum that emerges from Dialogic OD processes during each of those phases, and identify some key questions that sponsors and design teams should consider during the amplification process. We conclude with some thoughts on ways to amplify the most profound underlying elements to support Dialogic OD—the formation of new narratives and generative images that can power the change.

Forcing Versus Nurturing Change

In the 1990s, it became fashionable in the change management literature to argue that transformational change required “burning platforms”—the image being if you wanted people to jump into the sea, the fastest way was to burn the platform they were standing on. Yet very few burning platform change programs are successful unless, in effect, they fire everyone and then selectively rehire them into the changed organization. Otherwise, people and organizations demonstrate a remarkable immunity to change.

Dialogic change through the amplification of emerging ideas is *not* change driven by applying brute force to the system, like burning the platform. Rather, it works by encouraging and nurturing the system’s own creative and curative powers. It is more like growing and changing from within. Amplifying change in the organization as a whole involves amplifying change in individuals. Our focus is on changing how people make sense of their interactions and the organization, which in turn leads to changes in the decisions and actions they take on a day-to-day basis. As described in Chapter 9 on enabling change and Chapter 11 on transformative learning, as well as many of the theory chapters in this book, this involves learning and making changes in people’s mental maps, in the narratives that guide their sense making, and in the generative images and metaphors that animate their thinking. Dialogic OD practitioners—OD consultants, sponsors, and internal change agents—have to enable the changes in conversations that will affect how the beliefs people have about the future unfold in their interactions with others, and in the organization’s patterns of decision making.

Redefining Resistance

One significant element of the dialogic approach to amplification is that it requires holding a different perspective than the Lewinian notion of “resistance to change,” which creates a narrative that there are people who want something new versus people who oppose it. Rather than speaking of resistance, we find it more useful to focus on how change leaders and consultants need to utilize and manage the different energies that people exhibit throughout a change process. The goal is to encourage emergent ideas of any kind, amplify them to highlight the distinctions among them, and nurture those that offer the most promise. Forchhammer and Straub (2013) identified four different human qualities/energies/roles that help practitioners appreciate and value the contributions made by members, while avoiding premature and unproductive labeling and judgments of individuals and stakeholder groups. Understanding and valuing the positive contribution each of these roles makes to a change process aids leaders and consultants in maximizing their involvement during and after dialogic events; it helps them avoid looking at them as either advocates or resisters. All four qualities are of equal value and all are needed to keep the system in balance, as well as to help ensure that proposals and strategies for change that emerge are likely to succeed. These roles are also not fixed. Different people will step in and out of them (consciously or unconsciously) depending on the context and situation. The four roles/qualities/energies summarized in Table 15.1 can be briefly described as follows:

- *Sensor*. The purpose of the Sensor role is to act as a kind of “warning light” to assess what is going on in the system. People who take this role in the change process help ensure that a diversity of different views are heard and brought to the table. Appreciating different perspectives, being supportive, demonstrating sensitivity, listening empathically, and making frictions and conflicts visible—all are functions of this role. The Sensor can hardly be an advocate for a specific change idea, however. This role must be balanced by others in charge of assertive advocacy, active positioning, conflict resolution, and strategic thinking beyond the needs of individuals.
- *Frame Setter*. People who take this role are driven to establish a sense of identity and direction—for themselves and for the system as well. They provide orientation and guidelines for the change process by taking a wide view and a strategic perspective. Tactical and political positioning may also come into play in their thinking. Frame Setters may lack the capacity to listen and appreciate different perspectives, so they need to be balanced by other roles. Contrary to the assumption that the Frame

Setter role should be taken by the leader or leaders in the system, we encounter this quality emerging in anyone on a team or in the organization, including those not in formal leadership roles. This is a reminder that different qualities and energies for change should not be rigidly allocated to specific organizational roles or functions.

- *Stabilizer.* People who take this role in change efforts provide security, order, structure, and calmness, allowing the organization to avoid chaos. Stabilizers develop plans, structures, and checklists; they pay attention to details and ensure a reliable and consistent delivery. However, people who are ready to take this role are often discriminated against or labeled in the early stages of a change process, as traditionalists too slow to accept change or only interested in sticking with the past. The key to winning the full support of a Stabilizer, and therefore to activating this positive energy for the change, is valuing his or her contribution toward finding a new system balance, so engaging a Stabilizer in the dialogue instead of excluding him or her will pay off in the end.
- *Innovator.* This quality and function is to bring in ideas, inspiration, and energy for change. This role is vital to transcend the “being stuck” state and invite the system into a serious inquiry about the New, whatever it might be. What works well with someone taking this role is to initiate dialogue about what could be. Tap into people’s creativity and ideation, and encourage them to take risks. Invite innovators to fight for their ideas; even if they are incomplete or off base, it is often inspirational for others to listen to a person with Innovator qualities in a change process. While Innovator energy is often the source for new ideas that then can be brought into the dialogue in the organization, this role may lose sight of feasibility and integration with the existing strategy and culture. Thus the need for the other roles.

In any team or organization, these four energies can be brought into the dialogue, keeping in mind that these are temporary positions taken by people in the moment, based on the existing context and the need for balance. In a healthy, open system free of rigid role attributions, people are able to shift qualities as necessary. If one role becomes dominant during the change process, problems of “overdoing it” may arise. If Sensors become dominant, the result can be a collective lament. If Frame Setters take control, the session often ends up in disputes about direction. If Stabilizers dominate, there may be stagnation or “analysis paralysis.” And if Innovators become dominant, the result can be aimless creative efforts and actions just in the interest of appearing innovative. These roles and potential outcomes are summarized in Table 15.1.

Table 15.1 Four Useful Roles for Balanced Change

Role	Purpose	Important Actions	Challenges
Sensors	Act as warning light to assess what is going on in the system	Surface different perspectives, make conflicts visible while keeping people involved	Unlikely to be an assertive advocate for a specific change. May not be appreciated for their importance by those who seek to move forward quickly without airing divergent views.
Frame Setters	Establish identity, direction, and guidelines for others	Take a wide view and a strategic perspective. Can help with positioning and boundary setting	Role should not be assumed to belong only to a leader; anyone might take on this role. If role becomes dominant, people's needs and motivation may be overlooked.
Stabilizers	Maintain order and structure; bring attention to things that have worked well in the past	Help develop plans and structures, and ensure a reliable and consistent delivery	May find themselves challenged for being stuck in the past by Innovators who are losing sight of system balance or necessary stability.
Innovators	Bring inspiration and energy for change, help to move the organization beyond being stuck	Offer ideas, take risks, invite the system into inquiry about the New	May offer ideas that are completely off-base that need to be balanced by the other roles. May lack the staying power for execution.

Adapted from Forchhammer & Straub, 2013.

A Three-Phase Model for Amplifying Dialogic Change

We propose a three-phase model to support the change process during and after the initial dialogic events have taken place. This is a key part of the strategic process design described in Chapters 2 and 9. Recognizing that organizations are flows of simultaneous change and stability, any change model risks reducing a great deal of complexity to something overly simplistic. Nevertheless, we believe this model helps us think about the process, opportunities, and requirements for amplifying changes that emerge when large numbers of people are brought together to dialogue about issues of common concern. The model begins from the point during a dialogic event when new

networks, relationships, and ideas for change are taking shape. It assumes that the initial stages—clarifying what the purpose of the change process is and who must be involved—have already been handled in ways that capture the interest and motivation of the stakeholders who need to be engaged for change to happen, as discussed in earlier chapters.

The three phases are *Modeling*, *Nurturing*, and *Embedding*. They are not strictly sequential but have natural overlaps. The phases might even swing back and forth at various instances. For each phase, we use three attributes to characterize and understand its distinctive nature:

- *Activities* refers to the types of unique change activities that are endemic to the specific phase.
- *Patterns of Acceptance* refers to the types of involvement among people that demonstrate openness and interest in the activities.
- *Integration* refers to activities to integrate and help embed the “new” into the organization—its strategy, structure, and culture.

Table 15.2 provides an overview of the ideas we will be covering as we describe and discuss each phase. We view the three phases as analogous to the organic process of growing something. The Modeling phase is like planting, when ideas are sprouting from the minds of motivated people, and our job is to provide fertile ground in which to plant them so they have a chance to grow. Nurturing is like fertilizing, when we need to add water and nutrients to the most promising ideas to help nourish them so they can develop the structure and strength necessary to take root and survive. Embedding is like carefully cultivating the best and healthiest plants in the garden that is the organization as it moves into the future.

As we describe each phase, we offer some useful methods for OD consultants to amplify the activities of individuals and groups. We also list an assortment of key questions that can help sponsors and design teams navigate the change process. It is important to have clarity on the answers to these questions among sponsors and consultants; otherwise, their actions might dampen the emerging conversations and ideas or create delays that stall the momentum and excitement people have built up.

Note that which amplification actions are worth taking in a specific situation depends on many factors, such as the nature of the issues being addressed, the organization’s culture, sponsor preferences, the urgency of the issues, the resources available, and so on. In general, we like to approach strategic process design by showing the client what an “ideal” change process might look like, then revising it to arrive at whatever is possible given the limitations and constraints the client faces. Alternatively, you can take a “learning into the future” approach, as described in Chapter 9, jointly identifying and selecting

Table 15.2 Three Phases in Amplifying Change during Dialogic OD

	Phase 1: Modeling	Phase 2: Nurturing	Phase 3: Embedding
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ideate and experiment, create prototypes in various groups (e.g., project or emergent initiatives) ▪ Test prototypes with stakeholders or customers ▪ Iterate ideas to improve them based on feedback loops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pilot applications and bigger experiments ▪ Use ongoing feedback loops ▪ Increase engagement of senior leaders in decisions about supporting and resourcing further emerging efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Embed new solutions in organizational structures, processes, and institutional patterns ▪ Ensure addressing the holistic range of variables in order to sustain the New
Patterns of Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support a “work with the willing” and “go with the flow” environment ▪ Involve small groups of contributors (e.g., in projects or in emergent initiatives) ▪ Involve stakeholders/ customers in inquiry process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involve ever larger groups of contributors ▪ Use a “gate model” for decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrate visible changes in leadership behavior that are incorporated into standard operating procedures and become expected by stakeholders/ customers ▪ Promote visible changes in role behavior among all members of the organization
Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make successful new behaviors visible to others ▪ Encourage collective inquiry with stakeholders, customers, and people affected by the anticipated changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage ongoing feedback loops ▪ Increase engagement of nonengaged stakeholders/ customers in “decision gates” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deliberately set up structural elements that support the New ▪ Work to embed the New in the culture of the organization by symbolic actions and role modeling the desired behaviors ▪ Apply the New in strategy, branding, decision-making processes, and longer-term planning

each next step with the client, building on the insights, learnings, and new ideas that emerged from the previous step. When taking this step-by-step approach, the key questions in each phase help identify each next step to take.

Modeling Phase

This first phase begins as new ideas start to emerge during a Dialogic OD event, such as Open Space, World Café, or Conferencing. It has some similarities to the Design phase of Appreciative Inquiry. It is a stage of dialoguing and experimentation, when spontaneous decisions are taken to explore a change in a desired direction. The emphasis is on fostering expanded interactions and dialogue to begin testing the numerous proposals, approaches, and prototypes that are emerging from the Dialogic OD process and then refining them based on preliminary feedback.

Modeling requires the engagement of all four roles: Sensors, Frame Setters, Stabilizers, and Innovators. The OD practitioner might pay attention to the many different perspectives and take care that the four energies are represented among teams that self-organize. Ideally, such teams should reflect the various roles and energies in order to ensure that their interactions represent the many different interests and concerns in the whole system. Leadership might also provide resources for competency and skill development in order to nurture conditions that support emergent change, for example expanding skills for clear communication or dialogue.

The Modeling phase is a time for experimenting, trying out a multitude of ideas that have energy behind them. When ideas need the assistance of others to be implemented, prototyping is a useful way to share the vision. Prototyping helps expand ideas and then integrate the best into a model that can be tested with stakeholders or customers before investing much time or money in an imperfectly shaped solution. Design thinking is a useful stream of practice for this phase (Brown, 2009; Lockwood, 2009). In one aspect of design thinking, a group might build a physical representation of their idea (handmade from paper, or diverse handicraft materials) within a brief time span of thirty or sixty minutes and then show this symbol of the new idea to stakeholders in order to test its resonance with them. Their feedback fuels a second iteration of the idea.

In prototyping, it is important that people do not fall in love with an idea too early, so that they are still able to go to the stakeholder/customer with an open mind (and heart). They need to be flexible and ready to hear the others' experience of and reaction to the prototype.

In one of our projects, a group came up with the idea to promote empowerment by installing an open project market where people could suggest and

enroll in just the tasks or projects they would like to participate in or contribute to. The idea had been tested on a small scale in a paper-and-pencil version, but four months later, after it had already gotten some traction, it was enhanced by programming a virtual community solution. The original group recognized the value of the enhancement to their idea, and went with the flow.

In most organizations people expect to have to wait for direction before acting on their ideas, so they need to be reassured more than once that that is not the case this time. Bushe (2013) points out how simple things can be done to increase the chances that people will act on their new ideas and good intentions when they get back to work. For example, building on Salancik's (1978) model of how people develop commitment, he advises creating processes in which individuals take actions that are public, voluntary, and relatively irreversible. Public declarations to make changes or act differently at work can fill the bill.

Sometimes the key activity in the Modeling phase is simply to have people act "differently" when they return to work after the dialogic event.

For example, in one Dialogic OD process, employees of a large accounting firm discovered that most of their organizational peers considered integrity a more important value than profit. Acting on that insight did not require an action team or implementation plan. What it meant was simply that the next time a client called requesting something not really needed, the accountant would make a different choice than in the past and advise the client to forego it. For a long-term shift of this changed behavior to take hold in the organization, though, senior managers needed to find a way to change a culture that rewarded "billable hours" by acknowledging and rewarding virtuous behavior instead, believing this would lead to better customer relations and, in the long run, greater profitability.

Addressing cultural impediments and changing old organizational structures and processes come later, in what we are calling the phases of Nurturing and Embedding. However, the first step, in the Modeling phase, is that some people have to take risks, propose new ideas, and try out new behaviors, and some leaders have to endorse risk taking and reward the effort even if it ultimately does not work out.

Actions to Amplify This Phase

There are numerous Modeling actions that OD consultants, sponsors, and change teams can take following the event to amplify the new possibilities that emerge during the dialogic event and ensure their potential energy is not lost.

- Encourage individuals to try out something new following the event. Perhaps they could create a newsletter with examples of change ideas in other companies that began as dark horses with no expectation of success, but later led to an important breakthrough.
- Work with sponsors to ensure they tell people that they are invited to take action and not to wait for plans from above or approval.
- Provide support via installing online or “on-land” exchange networks wherein people can report back on what ideas they have created, get informal support, and receive feedback from others. This can be potentially facilitated by change supporters.
- Safeguard the space for innovation through clear communication between stakeholders and management (especially those who have not been involved) to give them some room to maneuver and try out new things.
- Sponsors and change teams should find ways to make their own and other leaders’ changes in behavior visible to people, and for all of them to make a point of describing how they are changing their actions as a result of the dialogic events. As pointed out in Chapter 9, the most potent modeling for change will come from leaders. When people see their leaders doing things differently, they are much more likely to feel safe changing their own behavior, too.
- As needed, help individuals or groups define a prototype for their idea that they can try out in an appropriate format in order to get quick feedback.
- Assign “pathfinder” roles to volunteers who are asked to instigate dialogue and further exploration across the organization.
- Provide simple frameworks for dialogue, such as the four-questions framework one of us frequently uses to facilitate joint exploration across the organization. The four questions are (1) What are good reasons, triggers, or influences to initiate changes? (2) What is this good for? What is our idea of a preferred future? (3) How do we get there? How can we build on the resources and potential of our people? (4) What do we need to learn on the way? While the answers to these questions are usually provided top down in traditional programmatic change approaches, in a dialogic approach these questions are explored across the organization, helping members reflect on and share their views toward their collective future.

Questions to Help Be Prepared during Modeling

Sponsors and design teams need to be aware of various complex issues that may arise during the Modeling phase. The following are key questions that they can prepare for:

- How will we get people to believe that they really can act differently when they go back to work after the dialogic event?
- Should we do any screening of proposals for change or experiments before people act on them? If so, what screening criteria should we use and how will we do that rapidly and in a way that increases energy and momentum rather than turning people off?
- What kind of prototyping do we want to encourage?
- If people need resources for initiating change activities (e.g., time, space, money) how will they be able to access them?
- How will we spread great new ideas out into the larger organization in a way that will tap into natural networks of allies and supporters, and bring those people into greater engagement during the modeling process?
- How do we handle ideas that do not get traction or are not in line with what we wish for or commonly agree with? What do we say to the people identified with those topics? What frictions and confusions might we expect to happen, and how can we prepare to deal with them? For example, what do we do if people propose very different solutions to the same problems? What will we do if there are mutually opposed proposals?

Nurturing Phase

The phase of Nurturing is about ensuring that learning comes from the impacts of ideation, dialoguing, prototyping, and acting differently at work that emerged in the Modeling phase. In contrast to traditional project management, the goal is not to get ahead of the energy and pull the trigger on one “big bang” implementation of something that was modeled. That is often premature and backfires. Trying to change too quickly is one reason why organizations tend to revert to old ways; the new state remains ill defined and has not had time to be integrated into the organization’s communication patterns and decision-making processes.

In terms of our organic growth metaphor, Nurturing is about continuing to nourish experiments and conversations begun during the Modeling phase. It is a good time to acknowledge any accomplishments in order to support the message that the organization welcomes change and growth. The intent is to nourish even small ideas that can change the patterns of interaction at work, and thereby shift behaviors to new levels. If each individual who is testing out new ideas and each group that is prototyping is fertilized in the right ways, the potential for change in the organization starts to grow like a field of new seedlings. Another key element in this phase is to weed the field, by making space for concerns, frustrations, and fears to be aired, discussed, and addressed.

One effective way to amplify this phase is to put “learning loops” into place, whereby people are encouraged to observe changes in the desired direction and share this feedback with others, particularly sponsors and others with resources to support and further amplify desired changes. Many insights can occur out of the learning loops in this phase. People can begin to recognize and therefore anticipate barriers that might make it difficult to implement new ideas and ways of working. They can see which experiments are succeeding and which are failing to meet expectations. There is often great learning that comes from surprises, both pleasant and unpleasant.

While it is useful in this phase to hold people accountable for commitments they made during Modeling, it is important that commitments are evaluated based on trying something, not whether they succeed. If people feel they are being held accountable to successfully implement a solution, they tend to repress reporting on learning, keep failures to themselves, and spin results to look good. Instead of holding meetings between sponsors and change teams as if they were project status updates, in which those lower down are supposed to report out on milestones and accomplishments, these meetings need to feel more like a group of allies getting together to explore what is working, what is not, and what can be done to further amplify positive changes. When sponsors and leaders engage in open and nonjudgmental conversations with people who are trying to make change, the eventual solutions, strategies, and culture can be slowly aligned through recurring dialogue and feedback loops.

An example from our consulting work illustrates this.

One of us was called to help an organization manage its projects more efficiently and effectively. The initial idea was to provide a course on project management for people involved in customer projects. However, a clarifying session with the management team surfaced that a number of training programs for this same target group had already occurred, so there might be other factors preventing some projects from achieving greater success. We decided to bring together project managers, people involved in projects, and their leaders into a session we called a “project management dialogue.” From that emerged a different narrative. Inefficiencies and obstacles in some projects were not due to a lack of skills, but rather to a leadership mindset of “Don’t bring me problems, bring me solutions.” Project managers refrained from bringing up sensitive issues and problems early in the process for fear of leaders criticizing them. This prevented the whole system from learning about problems until it was too late, in some instances, to finish projects within the intended time, quality specifications, and cost.

Based on this new insight they decided that having another training program on project management might be an expensive waste of effort. Instead they decided that both project managers and leaders needed to evolve and recalibrate their mental models about project delivery and success. The new

narrative was further nurtured through ongoing discussions with the organization's leadership. This sparked an initiative for regular dialogues on projects, providing for an ongoing joint exploration into how the organization could enhance project successes. An existing global project management curriculum, which had been basically a programmed course with multiple-choice testing, was now complemented with action learning elements, discussing real cases and projects. Dialogue formats and peer consulting sessions became included in the organization's leadership learning programs to help leaders reframe their beliefs about learning and their way of dealing with negative news.

During the Nurturing phase, ideas successfully tested in the Modeling phase should be resourced for further development and testing. As mentioned earlier, resources necessary during this phase need to be budgeted for earlier in the change process, before events take place. To facilitate resource allocation, it can be useful to follow a gate model (in which there are defined phases to go through and transparent decision-making criteria) to mark the transition between the Modeling and the Nurturing phase of a new idea or change. A gate model allows for robust decisions and commitments about resources, depending on whether an idea or solution is useful enough to invest resources in. It also serves as a litmus test on whether the leadership team will stick to its intent to support emerging ideas that have made it this far.

The motivation and goodwill of employees or stakeholders can be damaged in this phase if leaders kill ideas or solutions that have already garnered broad involvement and acceptance. It is essential that the leadership team stays actively involved in the change journey through this phase—or even better, that members of the leadership team actively participate and contribute to the project groups or initiatives formed during the foundational dialogic event and in the Modeling phase. Creating the future of the company is a joint responsibility of the whole system, and in our view, paving the way for this is a special responsibility that the leadership subsystem cannot delegate.

Actions That Can Amplify This Phase

These are some actions that OD practitioners, sponsors, and change teams can take to amplify the activities of this phase.

- Become a place where individuals and groups can go to ask questions and dialogue about whether they are going in useful directions. Help others by providing feedback in line with the generative image they have created.
- Encourage sponsors to engage and continue tracking and fanning individuals and teams. Without sponsors staying involved, momentum among individuals and teams can be easily lost.

- Begin creating the structures and processes that will make positive changes visible. Given that sponsors are usually busy senior managers who do not have much time and depend on the consultant and design team to identify the successful experiments, the OD consultant can play a role in helping to explore what structures and processes may be needed to implement the ideas that are gaining adherents.
- Relentlessly encourage people to take responsibility for their new ideas, to test them out, and after prototyping and refining them, to find ways to communicate their insights horizontally and vertically in the organization and to outside stakeholders.
- Set up ways to identify and celebrate movement and small wins. Events can be held regularly to highlight and discuss positive changes taking place. Intranets and web pages can be used to capture and describe results. These days most people are walking around with cameras in their pockets; they can quickly capture a short video and easily upload it to a site, creating greater tangible awareness about the changes emanating from the dialogic change process.

Questions to Help Be Prepared during Nurturing

These questions can help consultants, sponsors, and design teams be prepared to amplify change during the Nurturing phase:

- How do we want to respond to the initial evaluative feedback on the effectiveness and potential of prototypes?
- How can we ensure that barriers and impediments to good ideas are recognized and dealt with?
- Have any goals changed and, if so, what effect does this have on the solutions proposed so far?
- How will we create the time and space for people with busy lives and jobs to take on substantial change initiatives that have not been defined or budgeted for?
- What additional skills are needed for implementing new ideas, prototypes, and solutions?
- How can we help people better integrate the different perspectives that emerged from the dialogic event?
- What resources and infrastructure are people and groups who are pursuing worthy changes likely to need? How will they get these resources?
- How will we make decisions about what changes to support and resource (or not) and how will we describe this decision-making process and communicate those decisions?

- Where and how will leadership teams throughout the organization engage in the actual change work—hosting dialogue sessions, contributing in project teams or initiative groups, ensuring ongoing accountability and commitment, and so forth?
- How will we ensure platforms for exchange of experiences, peer consultation, action learning, and so on?

Embedding Phase

Embedding is about institutionalizing the small-scale experiments, prototypes, and step-by-step changes into the larger system. It is a phase when leaders must begin jointly identifying the organizational *structures* and *processes* that can support the new reality and help establish it in order to sustain the changes, at least until the next wave of change comes along.

- *Structures* include anything to do with how work is divided up and coordinated. They are all the variables about how tasks and roles are designed, how work is coordinated, how people are grouped, and how authority is allocated.
- *Processes* are both formal and informal aspects of the organization that guide or channel behavior, including policies, procedures, rules and regulations, reward systems, norms, values, beliefs, culture, and “what your boss pays attention to.”

It can be valuable to invite everyone who has been participating to identify the elements that need to be addressed in order to institutionalize the intended changes. The prior prototyping and piloting will prove useful now, as they allowed for testing, feedback, and enhancements to be made. They helped clarify which changes might turn out to be successful and which might not. This is especially important when the changes required are complex and their effects difficult to predict ahead of time. New approaches that actually worked and were experienced as beneficial can now become incorporated into the organization and its culture.

It is almost always inevitable during the Embedding phase that transformational change will bump up against constraints that no one foresaw. If the change effort included participants representing the four roles and they were able to blend and integrate their ideas as described earlier in the chapter, constraints will have been accounted for and should be fairly easy to deal with. If change momentum flounders, it will often be due to a lack of engagement from some part of the system that has not been invited into the dialogue and has little understanding of and commitment to the change process. This is

why it is so important to ensure that sponsors have built and nurtured the appropriate networks and support at senior levels of the organization as the change process unfolds. If a new idea, experiment, or solution reaches a level of maturity to pass a decision gate, the leadership team must be ready and willing to make the decision to support its realization. If leadership balks at this time, it is like throwing cold water on all the energy and momentum so far created—making it highly unlikely that people will maintain their commitment and willingness to change.

The Embedding phase should also include taking stock of lessons learned along the journey and making them available for future change efforts. As part of these lessons, it is important to celebrate successes and acknowledge the achievements made. Given that the organization is constantly changing and evolving, and may already be on another change journey on some other issue, these lessons provide a useful platform on which the organization can build a sense of its collective wisdom and self-esteem that can fuel future change journeys.

As an example of Embedding, a global corporation decided to train 60 percent of its employees, who at the time totaled more than seventy thousand, in dialogue skills. This initiative was started after a painful turnaround and was intended to help the organization gain new confidence and to connect across organizational and country boundaries, helping to establish a culture of trust and continuous learning. The three-day training was held in groups of forty to fifty participants across levels, units, and geographies. It was delivered by internal facilitators in fourteen languages globally. The rationale was that once more than half of the organization had been enabled to have strategic or even generative dialogues, then the whole system would be engaged in constant high-quality interactions and therefore be in tune with what is going on and continuously learning. The global human resources director sustainably supported this approach for ten years.

One of us was responsible for orchestrating the training activities in one of the company's world regions, delivering the training to more than two thousand people year after year. The positive effects from this broad conceptual and skill enablement were clearly evident. People across all levels and business units developed a common language around topics of change, and found it much easier to connect with colleagues from other areas of the business. Concepts like "creative tension," "mental models," and "strategic dialogue" became widespread ideas that facilitated dialogue across the organization. In working with teams across the global group, we noticed that people found it increasingly easier to communicate and enter joint exploration.

In our view, the impact this initiative had on the company's culture was significant, while the organization itself achieved new levels of success

throughout this ten-year span. The dialogues and the enablement that started in the training sessions sparked further dialogues across the organization, allowing people to evolve and grow ideas for change, embedding new elements, such as the processes for effective dialogue and joint inquiry, into the culture of a global corporation and changing the patterns of interaction over time in a sustainable way.

Actions That Can Amplify This Phase

These are some actions that OD practitioners, sponsors, and change teams can take to amplify the results during the Embedding phase.

- Initiate discussions with leaders to ensure they are aware of the structures and processes needed to sustain new practices that have emerged in the previous phases.
- Organize presentations from teams that have developed prototypes or pilots so they can share their results with relevant stakeholders and identify lessons learned.
- Facilitate off-sites in which the leadership team reviews the strategy and culture with regard to its alignment and “fit” with newly discovered elements or design criteria.
- Help with decision making on putting new elements of structure or process in place and build awareness around cultural implications. Keep in mind that letting go of old processes of work or informal routines of interaction will be best enabled when new processes or routines actually create more value for the people involved. Thus, create ways for people to experience the new processes and help them see the benefits for themselves, so that they can become advocates for the new.
- Hold simulation workshops, allowing people to experiment with new processes and ways of doing things while witnessing management support for these new practices. These workshops might also be part of the Nurturing phase; however, they are useful in Embedding as well if the management team is involved and makes decisions on the new processes after feedback and iteration with the people in the workshop.
- Help leaders model the change they want to see in the organization, which is a strong contribution to embedding new structures and processes. Leaders must be fully aware that they are viewed as role models—either good or bad. If, for instance, a proposed change is for leadership feedback to be introduced as a regular activity, top management should go first and speak openly about their results and their learning.

Questions to Help Be Prepared for Embedding

The following questions may be useful to help identify ways to amplify change during the Embedding phase:

- What experience have the people involved had so far? How can this help us evaluate the success of this journey?
- Who needs to be recognized and appreciated (coworkers, managers, senior managers, outside stakeholders)? By whom (coworkers, managers, senior managers, outside stakeholders)?
- How do we ensure that legacy systems and cultural norms do not scuttle the changes that sponsors and the people involved want to support?
- How can we encourage leaders to go first and model desired behaviors? How do we deal with leaders who do not?
- Who should we involve from all parts of the organization to help us fully anchor the changes that sponsors and others involved want to see emerge from this effort?
- What have we ourselves, and the organization, learned about processes of change? How can we institutionalize our learnings to promote innovation?
- What has been achieved that we had not initially envisioned and how do we want to deal with those results?

An Example of a Dialogic Change across the Three Phases

Here is an example of a change that illustrates the three stages.

During a dialogic event with senior managers (an annual planning session), the group examined how they could better connect annual goals and key performance indicators (KPIs) with a long-term sense of direction. As we entered the Modeling phase, a series of conversations in the broader leadership of the organization took place, one of which led to a strategy workshop with an extended leadership team (both examples of Modeling). In that workshop, three long-term strategic moves intended to help the organization keep the leading role in its home market and as part of a major global corporation emerged. These strategies were (1) nurturing a new leadership culture that would enable (2) connecting with the globally networked business environment, and clearly focused on (3) becoming a leader in innovation. Following that event, participants initiated a broad inquiry into these three areas, taking their ideas into the Nurturing phase. They intentionally expanded the diversity of opinion, hosting a large group event that brought together experienced leaders and younger talent from all parts of the organization. During this dialogic event, several groups self-organized around different questions to explore further. As these groups navigated themselves through the Nurturing phase, they created an

even broader engagement across the organization. Various self-organized groups prototyped new ideas (returning to the Modeling phase though at a new level).

For example, in order to nurture the strategic change toward innovation, the company began experimenting with “platforms of designed irritation” for people across its various businesses. One of them had participants visit a museum of modern art and reflect on how to surface mental models and make them part of their dialogue. Following that, leaders from different business units chose to actively explore and evolve some of the new ideas into potential business opportunities (Nurturing). Through further conversations and feedback loops, this exercise guided leaders to promote developing additional capabilities through a new training program (Embedding) to establish “innovation agents,” whose role would be to instigate dialogue around innovation and future business opportunities across the organization. Leaders and innovation agents next met in a series of workshops that were formally oriented to generating new business, based on the opportunities that had been identified in the process so far (Embedding).

All these dialogic conversations, workshops, and leadership involvement emerged largely on the fly, taking one step at a time based on the prior one. There was never a strategic process design or road map in place. There was, however, a CEO with a true sense of curiosity and the emotional intelligence to engage the whole system in this change journey.

Working to Amplify the Deep Forces: Narrative and Generative Images

Up to now, we have been looking at how to amplify changes that come from good ideas coupled with motivated people. In this section we explore how OD consultants can support amplifying new narratives and generative images that are important sources of ongoing transformation in the organization. As has been emphasized throughout this book and especially in Chapters 4, 5, and 16, the communication and decision-making ground on which transformation in organizations lies is the stories people use to make sense of things and the images and symbols that allow them to think of things anew.

One of the most important skills for Dialogic OD practitioners is the ability to recognize when a new, potent narrative or generative image shows up. This is more art than science; more like literary criticism than data analysis. Dialogic OD practitioners need to be vigilant for signs that a generative image or a powerful storyline might be surfacing. It might happen by noticing a change in energy or a new pattern of thinking that gets repeated by people. Ironically, it often comes from the consultant’s own self-reflection. When consultants have fully joined with the organization in the reflexive way described in

Chapters 4, 7, 9, and 17 they become more attuned to their own shifts in energy, curiosity, or interest. In that moment, there is often a narrative or generative image forming. Unless these are caught, highlighted, and worked with, what could have been a powerful transformative image or narrative may just drop back down under the radar.

It often takes effort to capture a generative image or new narrative. They do not usually spring fully formed from participants in dialogic events. The OD practitioner must often take on the role of sculptor, shaping and polishing a work of art out of a rough stone mined during the dialogic event. Inman and Thompson (2013) describe a case wherein the internal Dialogic OD consultant, after running a World Café with two warring managerial teams, wrote a new story for them based on what the consultant had heard. In this narrative, the consultant sought to capture the aspirations he believed were lying latent in these teams, helping them to change their own stories of themselves. After reading the story to each team, he offered them a chance to revise it, if they wished, testing to see if they would take defensive positions and revert to their old stories. As it turns out, none of the managers revised the story, but embraced it. Even after eighteen months, the two teams still referred to this story as the thread that pulled them together in a newfound collaboration (Embedding).

Once you have surfaced an image or narrative that seems to have potency, there are several things you can do to amplify its impact. Say it, write it, and symbolize it at every opportunity—and get the organization's leaders to adopt it. Culture change in organizations requires leaders to lead the way, and they do this by embodying the change through the stories they tell and the images they use. As a recent example, Pope Francis initiated his papacy by seeking to transform the Catholic Church using the generative image of “a church of healing.” He continued to reinforce this image through his writings and speeches about the poor and the excesses of capitalism. Even the name he took for himself, *Francis*, is a symbol of the overarching narrative he puts forth, in honor of Saint Francis of Assisi, the monk who abandoned all worldly possessions. Like Saint Francis, this Pope also symbolically eschewed the flamboyant pontifical accessories, dispensed with the papal palace for a modest two-room apartment, and opts to drive around town in a Ford Focus instead of a chauffeured Mercedes limousine. This Pope's new generative image and story have already had a powerful impact, rallying Catholic flocks for the first time in decades. How successful he will be at transforming the oldest, and one of the largest, organizations on the planet is yet to be seen, but he looks like a Dialogic OD practitioner to us.

Amplifying the power of narratives and generative images to boost transformative work comes by integrating them tangibly and symbolically into the everyday fabric of organizational life. Over time, they must become as

institutionalized as any process or structure in the organization to be fully realized.

Conclusion

Dialogic change processes help organizations be prepared for a world of constant change. As in life, constant change in business requires spontaneity, flexibility, and the ability to stay ahead of the game. Dialogic change processes work when they emphasize improvisation, emergence, flow, and experimentation—all of these being the organic elements of a world that never ceases to change. Unlike top-down approaches to change, the dialogic process invites anyone with ideas to participate, whether proposing new models for change or providing feedback to others.

We have offered a three-phase framework (Modeling, Nurturing, and Embedding) to help you think about dialogic change and how to amplify the opportunities created after dialogic events. We have outlined how to plant the seeds of change, fertilize them, and grow them into positive new models for the organization. Modeling always requires sponsors who are willing to work with self-organizing processes, who support people trying things out for themselves, encouraging them to take risks and act on what they care about. When planting such seeds, the emphasis needs to be more on trying than on succeeding. Nurturing will always depend on making the tiny shoots of innovation and positive change visible, so sponsors will know where and when to fertilize. Embedding will always depend on sponsors integrating the change, with the support of other leaders, into the overall organization so that structures and processes support, rather than impede, the changes that are unfolding more complex, responsive, and adaptive processes of organizing.

OD consultants can play a strong role in guiding dialogic change. In addition to creating the right sponsorship, building the design team, creating a strategic design with multiple and appropriate dialogic events, bringing together different perspectives, framing the inquiry, and hosting containers, they need strategies for amplifying the energy and ideas unleashed during the dialogic change process to turn good ideas into new organizational realities. This means building on small wins, successful experiments, ideas that pick up steam, surprising achievements, and unintended positive results. They may also need to help put structures and processes into place that sponsors can use to “track and fan” the changes emanating from dialogic events.

As Schein notes in the Foreword to this book, the tools, practices, and orientations for the dialogic approach to change have been around for more than sixty years, yet a relatively small number of organizations apply this approach consciously and deliberately. In our view, this demonstrates how we are still stuck in a leadership style built on the scientific management theories of the

early twentieth century. That approach to management no longer works well outside simple, mechanistic structures.

As organizations have become more networked, problems have become more complex and “wicked,” and today’s creative class more demanding of co-creating their workplace and business. We need organizing frameworks that are more participatory, inviting, and flexible. It will take great effort among OD professionals to integrate dialogic thinking into our organizations, because subliminal pressures and anxieties can often overwhelm reason and logic.

No matter what happens, this much is clear: how we learn to change is changing. We foresee a world in which organizations become far more open to exploring new ways of approaching and managing change in a dialogic and collaborative way. In our view, this is the only suitable answer to the adaptive challenges of our networked economies in the twenty-first century.

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