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Generative Image

Sourcing Novelty

The task is . . . not so much to see what no one has yet seen; but to think what nobody has yet thought, about that which everybody sees.
—Erwin Schrödinger

The implicit desire to generate novel expressions and insights that can lead to new courses of action is central to all Dialogic OD approaches; however, little attention is usually given to an underlying but important question, where does novelty come from? One could easily get the impression that good dialogue will itself lead to new ideas. This is far from the case. In this chapter we look at one avenue for novelty to emerge: generative images that provide a different conceptual and metaphoric landscape and thereby change our current ways of speaking, our implicit assumptions, and our ideas of what is possible and desirable. The most powerful force for change is a new idea, which is often captured in a novel expression, a new word or phrase. "A new word is like a fresh seed sown on the ground of the discussion" (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 2).

One of the most iconic generative images of the past fifty years is "sustainable development." Before that phrase showed up, environmental activists and business leaders had little to say to each other. Environmentalists were a small group of social activists, with very little influence, who thought all business people were lunatics driving Spaceship Earth to destruction. For their part, business people thought environmentalists were "eco-nuts" and Luddites intent on stopping all technological progress. For example, in early 1987, one of the authors was told that the vice president of future planning for the leading forestry company in the world was overheard in a ski line opining that "this environmental stuff will just blow over." Later that year, when the United Nations' Brundtland Report coined the term "sustainable development," the rate of change across the world was breathtaking. All of a sudden business people, government legislators, and environmentalists found common cause. After years of screaming "listen to us" the world turned to environmental organizations and said, "Okay, we're listening, what should we do?" The change was so rapid and so disruptive that the organization that founded

Greenpeace, in Canada, almost imploded over the internal conflicts that raged over how to respond to requests to sit on boards and committees and certify practices. Yet consider how much change this generative image has created, and continues to create, even though there is no accepted definition of what *sustainable development* means. As we will argue in this chapter, ambiguity is a necessary quality of a generative image.

While the word *generativity* and the notion of generative inquiries and generative dialogues have come into vogue in the past decade, there is very little written on the concept of generative image. A few studies of dialogic change processes suggest it is one important path to change in Dialogic OD (Barrett and Cooperrider, 1990; Bushe, 2010, 2013a; Bushe and Kassam, 2005; Srivastva and Barrett, 1988). The idea of a generative image is similar to that of a metaphor, though not all generative images are metaphors and not all metaphors are generative. In this chapter we will look at some roots of the idea of generative images, review some of the ways it has been applied in organization development, and suggest how the Dialogic OD practitioner might consider its use.

Kenneth Gergen and Generative Theory

As described in Chapter 3, social constructionists argue that we come to know the world through our use of language and that words act on us and others to organize our thinking and experience. At first, social science (and organization development) was inspired and founded with the classical scientific ambition of exercising descriptive neutrality and uncovering laws of human interaction. The insights of twentieth-century postmodern philosophy and the philosophy of everyday language led to a growing shift in conceptual thinking and language about the role of the social sciences. Gergen offered such a critique of the scientific approach to understanding human relations, which had an impact on the development of Dialogic OD practice. He said that "much contemporary theory appears to lack *generative potency*, that is, the capacity to challenge the prevailing assumptions regarding the nature of social life and to offer fresh alternatives" (1978, p. 1344; emphasis added). Gergen argued that our conceptual understandings influence our social worlds and that changes in conceptual understanding can change the world. Scientific approaches to human relationships seemed to produce social and psychological theory with little generative capacity. Gergen offered an alternative image of the goal of social science as providing models and theories that change how people in a society think.

Gergen pointed out that when we talk about "understanding" we are likely to describe it as "apprehending clearly the character, nature or subtleties" of social life (Urdang, quoted in Gergen, 1978, p. 1344). This use of "understand-

ing" is consistent with a scientific view of inquiry and underlies diagnostic approaches to organization development. But Gergen pointed out that there is another way to think about understanding—as "assigning meaning to something," consistent with postmodern philosophy's increasing prominence and influence. From a diagnostic viewpoint, the inquirer's initial task is to observe and accurately document what can be observed. Then inductive logic can lead to generalized statements that "explain" the phenomena in question. But when trying to understand something by first gathering "the facts," what remains hidden is that we cannot decide what a relevant fact is without already having a conception of what there is to be studied. Behind all observation is a theory of what is, and so the "facts" observed will tend to reinforce what is already believed. In addition, no process of inductive reasoning can explain how a person goes from concrete to abstract levels of reasoning. "The most careful observation of all the stone formations on earth, combined with the most assiduous employment of inductive logic, would not yield contemporary geological theory" (Gergen, 1978, p. 1347).

Preconceptions social scientists hold have a far greater potential to shape what they are studying than in the natural sciences, for two reasons. One is that social relationships are complex, multileveled, and always in a process of unfolding, so that to study them the inquirer has to put boundaries around what he or she will observe, which has a huge impact on what is seen. For example, if you want to study the relations between employees and managers in an organization, do you study the psychohistories of the managers and their employees, their patterns of interaction in a series of discrete interactions, the life they all lead both outside and inside of work, the current cultural meanings of "manager" and "employee" in society, and so on? Each focus will probably provide a way of understanding their relationships, but the nature of that understanding will have been actively shaped by the choices of the inquirer. Because social phenomena do not have the temporal, contextual, and physical stability of natural phenomena, observation actively shapes the phenomenon being observed.

Second, unlike simple natural organisms, humans respond to the same stimulus in different ways because they first make sense of the stimulus. The descriptions and explanations the inquirer uses in the process of inquiry have the capacity to shape how people make meaning of themselves and their relationships, leading to the inquirer observing that which he or she has actually created. We would add a third point to Gergen's arguments: social actors reflect on their experiences and develop stories and narratives and theories to explain things. Hence it is social agreement in meaning making that leads to agreement on scientific explanations.

Social actions have very little intrinsic meaning. For example, suppose someone in your office is constantly offering ideas for how to do things differently.

Whether the person's actions are creative, challenging, helpful, or a pain in the neck is largely a matter of social negotiation. How that behavior ends up being labeled depends on a community of agreement. As a result, the legitimacy of any observational statement is continuously open to challenge. What "is the case" in social life is, therefore, mainly a matter of culture and influence.

If we change our focus about what it means to understand, from observing facts to assigning meaning, then inquiry is liberated from having to focus on "what now exists" to consider instead the advantages and disadvantages of social patterns and relationships as yet unseen. We can shift our concern from prediction and control to generativity—that is, the capacity of an idea, model, or theory to "challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary social life, to foster reconsideration of that which is 'taken for granted' and thereby to furnish new alternatives for social action" (Gergen, 1978, p. 1346). For Gergen this means that "personal values or ideology may serve as a major motivational source for generative theorizing. In this way the inquirer becomes a full participant in the culture, fundamentally engaged in the struggle of competing values so central to the human venture" (ibid., p. 1356).

Gergen does not offer any conclusive answer to our opening question, "where do new ideas come from?," though he points us in an important direction. Making the shift from discovering the truth about social life to assigning meaning to it, we notice that producing new meaning requires suspending or altering our beliefs. Our current way of thinking about anything is formative, and reproduces what we already "know." The idea of generativity challenges OD practitioners to create processes from which novelty can emerge, since it cannot be found.

Donald Schön and Generative Metaphor

Donald Schön, well known to OD practitioners for his work on organizational learning with Chris Argyris, also invoked the concept of generativity, apparently unaware of Gergen's work, around the same time in a discussion of "generative metaphor" (Schön, 1979). While Gergen was heavily influenced by the Frankfurt School of critical social theory (see, for example, Horkheimer, 1972), Schön's work comes more from the hermeneutic tradition and builds on Ernst Cassirer's (1946) view of metaphor as the basis for how we make sense of the world. In this view metaphors serve our understanding of the world by drawing out similarities, assigning meanings to a situation by making connections. Yet at the same time they blind us to what they do not draw attention to (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Morgan (1997, p.7) describes

this phenomenon, arguing for example that the image of organization as a machine is so dominant that "the mechanical way of thinking is so ingrained in our everyday conceptions of organisation that it is often very difficult to organise in any other way," which leads managers who "think of organisations as machines [to] manage and design them as machines made up of interlocking parts that each play a clearly defined role in the functioning of the whole" (1997, p. 7). From this point of view, how we approach problems—how we define them and therefore define the possible solutions available to us—is guided by metaphorical thinking that is mostly out of the awareness of decision makers.

Schön argued that "problem-setting," how a problem gets initially defined, was more important than problem solving to the creation of good policies. Problem settings are mediated by the stories people tell and the images they create about troublesome situations; they inherently identify what the problem is and what needs fixing. For example, if we say that an organization is "fragmented," then it follows that what is needed is more integration. But a fragmented organization might be seen, alternatively, as composed of "semi-autonomous units." By employing the metaphor of fragmentation a tacit image arises of the organization as something broken, something that once was whole and needs to be made whole again. Schön argued that by becoming aware of the metaphors we use, we can do a better job of problem setting, which can make people in organizations perform creative leaps into seeing old problems in new ways.

Schön's point was not that decision makers ought to think metaphorically about issues they face, but that they in fact already do, and that the images often rest upon tacit and pervasive common rhetoric. He called these "generative metaphors" and argued that better decisions would come from making them explicit and open to questioning. When the generative metaphors that underlie, out of awareness, our problem setting and decision making, they accentuate some features and relationships over others that make up a highly complex reality. Consequently:

> They give these elements a coherent organization and they describe what is wrong with the present situation in such a way as to set the direction for its future transformation. . . . It is typical of diagnostic prescriptive stories such as these that they execute the normative leap in such a way as to make it seem graceful, compelling, even obvious (Schön, 1979, p. 146–47).

When we bring the underlying generative metaphor to the surface, our diagnoses and prescriptions cease to appear obvious, we become aware of differences as well as similarities between A and B, and the path from facts to

solutions no longer seems graceful or obvious. We will see one OD application of this later in the chapter when we consider different metaphors for the process of change.

Many of the most important so-called problems leaders face are not so much problems as dilemmas; that is, there are inherent trade-offs in priorities, use of scarce resources, and achievable outcomes. They are, in the language of Heifetz (1998), "adaptive challenges." Any free exchange of ideas about these issues will involve conflicting ways of framing the issues, which are being generated by the different metaphors different people and groups are using to talk about the situation. Schön pointed out that advocates of different approaches often do not disagree about the facts; they attend to and emphasize different facts. Each description of the situation constructs a view of social reality through a complementary process of naming and framing.

For example, take how organizations deal with the challenge of people being reliably at work. In nursing and caretaking it is not unusual for 5 percent to 10 percent of the workforce to be missing on any given day. When the frame used to address this issue is "absenteeism," it naturally leads to an inquiry into the causes of absence and to questions such as "why are people getting sick?" Applying the metaphor of sickness draws upon the medical metaphor of diagnosis and holds implicitly that if we treat whatever is causing sickness we will decrease absence and relieve symptoms. While this seems like a perfectly reasonable course of action, efforts to reduce absenteeism by focusing solely on helping sick people get better do not produce much change (Carroll, et al., 2010). On the other hand, one could use a different frame and notice that 90 percent to 95 percent of the workforce is present. This is more likely to lead people to consider questions such as "why are people reliably coming to work?" Engaging in understanding people's commitment and how it can be supported leads to a totally different conversation about thriving and well-being. Though such a conversation does not uncover causes of absence, a Dialogic OD process using this focus enabled a drop of 27 percent in absenteeism over a period of six months in the healthcare department of a municipal government in Denmark. These experiences were taken to full scale in the entire municipal government of 5,500 employees with a total drop of more than 30 percent over a period of two years (Attractor, 2012). These experiences are in line with a meta-analysis of strength-based practices in organizations. When people believe that they can do what they do best every day at work, they are more likely to score high on performance, which correlates to higher attendance (Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes, 2002).

Schön argued that adaptive challenges are not solvable by the application of scientific methods of data collection, analysis, and deduction. Instead, he suggested that reciprocal inquiry into how our frames are constructed,

"frame restructuring," was a path to producing new and better generative metaphors. In Schön's frame restructuring process we take two descriptions of the situation that are initially advanced as conflicting accounts of the same thing and engage people in searching for a way to bring them together. This follows the same developmental sequence as using a new metaphor to see an old problem in a new way:

1. Initially, attempts to put the two different descriptions together resist combination. Decision makers cannot see how both descriptions can be true, and so participation in an inquiry begins with a felt sense that somehow both must have elements of truth to them, without knowing what those elements are.
2. In an attempt to bring the two descriptions together, participants rename, regroup, and reorder elements of each description. It is essential to this process that participants are immersed in the concrete experience of the situations they are trying to remap. Focusing on the concrete experience, inquirers are now thinking *about* their earlier description rather than seeing the situation in terms of that description. But they are not yet able to frame a new description. At this point, Schön says, storytelling can play an important role. By focusing on concrete experience, inquirers can tell the story of their experience of the situation without being constrained by any of the previous descriptions.
3. Subsequently, the inquirers may be able to construct a new description of the situation from the stories they have told and heard. In this process, a new generative metaphor can emerge.

Schön notes: "It is also important to notice what does not happen. The old descriptions are not mapped onto one another by matching corresponding elements in each, for the old descriptions resist such a mapping. Rather, the restructured descriptions are coordinated with one another, which is to say that some pairs of restructured elements now match one another. . . . The new description is also not a 'compromise,' an average or balance of values implicit in the earlier descriptions" (Schön, 1979, p. 159–60).

Insofar as generative metaphor leads to a sense of the obvious, its consequences may be negative as well as positive. When we see A as B we do not necessarily understand A any better than we did before. Schön emphasized that decision makers need to become aware of the generative metaphors that shape their perceptions of phenomena so that they can attend to and describe the dissimilarities as well as the similarities between A and B. Schön agrees with Gergen that our current ways of speaking express a whole landscape of meaning that largely remains hidden to us in our everyday life, and that transcending

these images opens up alternative moves and directions in organizational life. We would point out that novelty comes from the *emergence* of new operating distinctions, alternative ways of making sense of what we do and can do. This is important for OD practitioners wanting to increase the generativity of their change processes. These new ideas and moves do not come from logic or analysis; rather they result from a kind of inquiry that can get provoked when we connect what appear to be unrelated images and logics.

Generativity in OD Theory and Practice

These ideas were first explicitly applied to organization development in a series of publications by Frank Barrett, David Cooperrider, and Suresh Srivastva. Cooperrider and Srivastva's (1987) first paper on Appreciative Inquiry invoked Gergen (1978, 1982) to support their argument that the main barrier limiting organization development had been its romance with action at the expense of theory. This separation of theory and action was supported by an underlying generative metaphor of "organizations as problems to be solved" and the consequent view of OD as primarily a process of problem solving. To them, too many in the discipline had underestimated the power of new ideas for changing social systems. Theories "may be among the most powerful resources human beings have for contributing to change and development in the groups and organizations in which they live. . . . Ironically, the discipline of action-science continues to insist on a sharp separation of theory and practice, and to underrate the role of theory in social reconstruction. The irony is that it does so at a time when the cultural view of organizing is reaching toward paradigmatic status" (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987, p. 132). To the extent that action is based on ideas, beliefs, meanings, and intentions, organizations can be transformed by changing idea systems or preferred ways of talking. How do we inquire in a way that is more likely to create new, generative images and theories? Appreciative Inquiry was initially conceptualized and offered as a method for producing generative theories.

A key premise these writers offered was that theories are generative when they expand the realm of the possible and point toward an appealing future. In so arguing they moved beyond Schön's and Gergen's use of the notion, and proposed that generativity has to do with our shared and desired futures and our ways of making these futures possible. After reviewing a number of theorists and research studies, they made the point that a method of inquiry that would create generative images would have to proceed from an affirmative stance.

In a later paper (Cooperrider, Barrett, and Srivastva, 1995) the authors offer a way out of the dead-end relativism that can accompany the belief that since realities are socially constructed, there are no ultimate truths "out there" to

be uncovered. Acknowledging that all inquiry in organizations is inherently biased by the positioning of the researcher, they argue that this positioning is no reason to give up the pursuit of knowledge. On the contrary, it frees us to take the idea that organizations are made and imagined to its logical conclusion: that organizational inquiry is simultaneously the production of self-and-world. What we choose to study and how we study it creates as much as it discovers the world, and therefore a wide field of creative, positive possibility beckons to us. In their 1995 paper, Cooperrider, Barrett, and Srivastva report on the impact that an affirmative generative metaphor, "the egalitarian organization," had on the organization they labeled with it and, in turn, the impact it had on them. (They did not use the term "generative metaphor.") The criteria of whether we are describing the world correctly are replaced with the question, "are our ways of describing the world as helpful as possible?" In suggesting such a pragmatic question we put ourselves in the driver's seat, as creators of our own reality. And we respond to the critique of relativism by saying that some views of the world survive, not because they are truer, but simply because they do the job better. Only time will tell exactly which of the stories will prevail, since the criteria by which we can evaluate stories in the present belong to the past and not the future, and it will be the views of the future that will determine what worked well and what did not.

Srivastva and Barrett (1988) extended Schön's conceptualization of generative metaphor to include "proposed metaphors that frame social situations in new, more complex ways." In their study of group development they assert that a generative metaphor, which connects with emerging needs of group members, helps groups transition to later stages of group development. Stereotypes and prejudice are viewed as overused metaphors that are habitually used to categorize different experiences, causing us to see only what we expect to see. In their formulation, generative metaphors put life back into a world that has become conceptually frozen in simplistic, reified ways. A new idea that is radically outside one's current worldview tends to be resisted. Instead, generative metaphors overcome resistance to learning by addressing difficult topics indirectly, allowing for new awareness and building a new sense of reality, much like Petrie's (1979) learning theory. (See Chapter 11 on transformative learning for a different approach to this problem.) Linking this perspective on the influence of generative metaphors to Chapters 4 and 6, we can say that generative images help disrupt the prevailing social construction of reality and alter the ongoing narratives, stimulating the emergence of new possibilities and narratives.

Barrett and Cooperrider (1990) described a case of using a generative image with a management team stuck in defensive perceptions as an invitation to see the world anew. They argued that images are generative when they help to create new scenarios for future action. By fusing two different ideas, fresh

insights can be transferred almost instantly, bringing about semantic and perceptual changes. They offered a "generative metaphor intervention process" that can help the OD practitioner work with generative images:

1. Focus attention away from the issues themselves, toward something else that has metaphorical potential for the client. The authors point to the work of psychotherapist Milton Erikson (as described in Haley, 1973), who was able to get people to change around difficult-to-discuss issues by working with them metaphorically (e.g., instead of asking a couple to explore their unhappy sex life, he would encourage them to dine together in new ways and discuss that).
2. Find ways to make the exploration of the metaphor positive and exciting, kindling hope and positive anticipations of the future.
3. Provide for immersion in experience of the metaphorical and emphasize what there is to value in that experience.
4. Allow people to describe and discuss that experience without pointing directly back at the issue you are trying to change.
5. Then invite them to discuss how they want to create a different future.

In conclusion they argued that "metaphor is generative to the extent to which it serves to break the hammerlock of the status quo, serves to reorganize perceptual process and ingrained schemas, helps provide positive and compelling new images of possibility, and serves as a bridge for non-defensive learning among contexts" (Barrett and Cooperrider, 1990, p. 236). New metaphors can be generative. Established metaphors that underlie the current narratives and ways of thinking reenforce and re-create the status quo.

Marshak (1993, 2004, 2013) proposes a way for OD consultants to use metaphors generatively in everyday process consultation and coaching. By listening for both the explicit and the implicit metaphors, analogies, and images the client uses to think and talk about situations, the consultant can reflect those back and support the client in exploring their implications. Marshak argues that doing so helps the consultant to understand the client's way of experiencing the world more deeply and can help clients to become aware of how they are seeing things that may be limiting possibilities and choices (2006). For Marshak, generative conversations come from offering or helping to generate alternative metaphors and images the client can consider in experiencing the same situation.

One category of metaphors Marshak has explored is metaphors of change (1993, 1996, 2002). He argues that common ways of thinking and talking about organizational change cluster into four metaphors, as shown in Table 5.1. By having clients explicitly talk about their change objectives using different

Table 5.1 Metaphors of Change

Metaphor	Underlying image of change	How a client might talk
Fix & Maintain	Repair something that is broken	Repair, tinker, adjust, fine tune, get the right tools
Build & Develop	Improve on what already exists	Add to, grow, nurture, train, get bigger/smarter/faster, develop
Move & Relocate	Transition from one state to another	Move forward, go from A to B, clear steps, milestones, avoid obstacles
Liberate & Re-create	Transform, break from the past to create something anew	Wake up, out of the box, new paradigm, break free, reinvent

Adapted from Marshak, 1993.

metaphors of change than the ones they currently use, new generative metaphors can emerge that allow for new and better decisions about how to change.

In a series of papers, Bushe (1998, 2007, 2010, 2013a; Bushe and Kassam, 2005) focuses on the generative potential of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), leading him to propose a theory of practice for Dialogic OD based on the power of generative images to produce change (Bushe, 2013b). The early work described how AI in teams could lead to the emergence of a generative image that helped groups get unstuck from whatever was causing them problems (Bushe, 1998). A meta-analysis of twenty published cases of Appreciative Inquiry found that in all seven cases that showed transformational changes, new ideas and a generative metaphor had emerged, while in the thirteen incremental change cases none seemed to produce new ideas and only one described the emergence of a generative metaphor (Bushe and Kassam, 2005). A later study of eight Appreciative Inquiries in a metropolitan school district compared the change process in four sites that experienced transformational change with four that did not and found that the main difference was that new, generative ideas emerged in the transformational sites while none did in the other four (Bushe, 2010). This study also found that all the transformational change processes addressed issues that were widely seen as important problems, while that did not happen at the nontransformational sites. This led Bushe to argue that people would not put in the effort required for transformational change unless there were widely held concerns motivating the change, but that AI addressed problems through generativity, not problem solving.

Survey measures in that study showed that participants at all sites had high levels of positive feelings and positive anticipations about the future after

their AI summits. While there are good reasons to believe that positivity supports generativity, the evidence suggests that a focus just on what is considered "the best of" something is not enough, in itself, to power transformational change. Bushe argues that too many practitioners and publications place too much emphasis on AI's "focus on the positive" and not enough on generativity (Bushe, 2007). We think there is a tendency to get stuck in an idea of positivity as something that can be represented by a distinct language; that is, to be positive is to express yourself in a way that generates a personal or collective emotion of being "upbeat," having a "good attitude," and a "can do" frame of mind. This approach to positivity can produce a pretty unhappy organization, where people feel unable to express what they experience in a language that is comfortable to them. Instead they are expected to perform a kind of self-censorship according to the leader's notion of what is "positive." Under such circumstances, "positivity" may restrain creativity and generativity because it does not point toward possible desired futures, but instead toward known speech genres. Bushe (2013a) demonstrates that a focus on what is meaningful may be more generative than a focus on the positive, even though the meaningful is not always experienced with positive emotions. Moving from "positive" to "meaningful" opens up alternative ways of assigning appreciation to whatever people might find life giving, effective, and desirable in the unique circumstances in which they perform.

Bushe (2013b; Bushe and Marshak, 2014) argues that one of the paths to change underlying all Dialogic OD techniques is the presence of a generative image. In addition to emerging from a Dialogic OD process, a generative image could be developed by leaders or consultants at the outset of an intervention and used to stimulate an inquiry or conversation. For example, any Dialogic OD event, whether using Open Space, Future Search, Conferencing, or just about any other event-based technique, could be convened with a problem description (e.g., how much to spend on quality control?) or with a generative image (e.g., quality is free). The generativity of an image depends on the group of people with which it is used. To be generative, Bushe argues, an image has to have two qualities. First, it allows people to look at old problems in new ways. The image, metaphor, idea allows people to see new opportunities for actions and decisions they had not considered before. Second, it is a compelling image; that is, people want to act on the new ideas the image generates.

This definition of "generative image," which we use here, builds on but is a little different from both Gergen's "generative capacity" and Schön's "generative metaphor." It may be, as Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) argue, that all generative images, as we define the term, rest on affirmative projections of a preferred future. Schön would probably point out that one could be as compelled by negative images as positive ones. Storch and Ziethen (2013), how-

ever, building on the philosophy of Richard Rorty (1979, 1989, 1999), on how we come to see old things in new ways, argue that truly generative images must begin as words or phrases that do not initially make sense. Rorty argued that because we make sense of the world through the language we use, sense making is only transformed when our language changes. He proposed that changes in how we think do not come from discovering "what's there," but from redescribing it in new ways. Rorty (1989, p. 7) argues that "speaking differently rather than arguing well is the chief instrument in cultural change." Storch and Ziethen discuss the impact that using the nonsense word "re-session" had on a consulting company in Denmark that was reeling from the impact of the 2008 banking crisis. Wanting to transform the widespread angst about the recession, as something scary and hopeless, into something engaging and energizing, the company's leader began a daylong meeting by suggesting that what the company now needed to do was to "re-session" itself to the changing market, and asked people to meet in small groups to discuss "what voices the idea of re-sessioning ourselves call forth in us." A follow-up study of the impact of that meeting and the follow-up strategic work found that it had a profound impact on the company, attributing the company's ability to grow in the following year, while all its competitors were in decline, to the generativity this "redescription" evoked (Storch, 2011).

In discussing the opportunities and limitations of redescription as a generative OD intervention, Storch and Ziethen (2013) caution that not all new images sustain the functioning of the organization and that people can be resistant to attempts at redescription. They suggest that successful redescription requires a number of success factors: a good image, introduced at the right time and place and by a person with the right status. It has a higher risk-reward ratio than more conventional OD processes. "What can be won by the (image) is a new world, and what can be lost is one's acknowledgement as a rational human being in contact with reality" (29).

Bushe (2013a) suggests that our understanding of generativity will be enhanced if we conceptually separate and study the nature of generative capacity, generative process, and generative outcomes, and the relations among them. He defines "generative capacity" as the ability of an individual, group, or organization to engage in a generative process and produce generative images. A generative process is one that leads to generative outcomes, and a generative outcome includes the new ideas, opportunities, and networks that result in self-motivated actions to produce positive changes. Bushe and Paranjpey (2015) used this framework to explore the generativity of different modes of inquiry using group dialogues in a public transit organization in the midwestern United States. They tested how generative three different idea-generating processes were (appreciative discovery, synergenesis, brainstorming during problem solving) by having an expert panel judge how original, compelling, and

practical the ideas that came out of the groups were and by using semantic maps to explore changes in the mental maps of participants in each of the three conditions. The study found that synergenesis, a technique designed to increase the generativity of the discovery phase of Appreciative Inquiry (Bushe, 2007), created significantly more compelling and practical ideas than the other two processes, which showed no significant differences in expert-panel ratings. Changes in participants' semantic maps showed that synergenesis and discovery led to much richer conceptualizations than problem solving, suggesting that both were more generative than problem solving.

Insights and Implications for the Dialogic OD Practitioner

With so little research on generativity, most of our advice to OD practitioners rests on our years of practice and anecdotal learning. However, looking at the much richer literature on creativity in organizations (e.g., George, 2007) provides some useful starting places for thinking about generative capacity and generative process.

Research on Creativity in Organizations

Research on creativity tends to look for single variables that explain why some people are more creative or why for the same people some cognitive and emotional states result in more creativity than other states. There are many studies showing that intrinsic motivation produces more creativity than extrinsic motivation (e.g., Amabile, 1988, 1996; Shalley, Zhou, and Oldham, 2004) and that positive emotions produce more creativity than negative ones (e.g., Amabile et al., 2005; Isen, Daubman, and Nowicki, 1987; Isen, et al., 1985). But recent research is providing a more nuanced understanding of how internal states interact with context to produce creativity (George, 2007). For example, extrinsic motivation is a powerful force in organizations; problems need to be addressed, competition focuses the mind, economic survival increases the need for creative solutions—necessity is the mother of invention. Under positive affect people are less likely to see a need for novelty and creativity, while negative affect makes it more likely people will identify situations requiring creative solutions and focus more carefully on the facts on hand rather than relying on preexisting ways of thinking (Kaufmann, 2003; Martin and Stoner, 1996; Schwarz, 2002). Negative moods have been found to lead to more creativity when people expect to get recognition and rewards for creativity and clarity of feelings are high (George and Zhou, 2001). It may well be that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, positive and negative emotions, indeed probably any internal state can contribute to creativity

depending on context and how people make meaning of the situation they are in.

Similarly, recent research suggests that what influences creativity in organizations is more complex and interrelated than simple lists of single variables. Things that appear to relate consistently to creativity in organizations are signals of safety, creativity prompts, good supervisory relations, and social networks that share and spread divergent ideas and perspectives (George, 2007). Yet research is finding ever more context-dependent relationships. For example, Lee, et al. (2004) studied people's willingness to experiment in organizations and found that when evaluation pressures are high, people facing uncertainty (which makes people feel less safe) were less creative, but when evaluation pressures were low, people facing uncertainty were more creative. The implication is that it is difficult to make definitive statements about simple mechanisms to promote generativity in organizations; practitioners need to take a nuanced approach, paying careful attention to how context shapes the experience people have. That said, we offer the following as things that, in our experience, make it more likely that new ideas and actions will emerge from a group of people.

Using Generative Images in Dialogic OD

1. Work with leaders and design teams to produce generative images to guide change processes. Bushe (2013a) argues that the ability to craft generative images as the focus for inquiry explains why some AI practitioners are more successful than others. The focus of any change effort can be defined in a way that is more generative in and of itself (that is, leads people to think differently and is compelling). For example, instead of working to reduce sexual harassment, Avon of Mexico used a dialogic change process to increase "exceptional inter-gender working relationships" (Schiller, 2002). We suggest that the way the change initiative is framed can be more or less generative, and the more generative it is, the higher the chances of success. It is worth the time and effort at the beginning of a Dialogic OD project to engage sponsors and other stakeholders in identifying the best possible frame for the project. For the project to work, it needs to:

1. *Capture the core issue those sponsoring the change are interested in*. If the topic is too loosely defined it could result in people heading off on tangents the sponsors are not interested in or willing to support. Because Dialogic OD processes require emergence and self-organization, the topic frame acts as an essential boundary. For example, if the sponsors are interested in increasing market share, framing the project as something

vague and inspiring (e.g., "being the best in the world") is likely to result in people heading off in lots of unrelated directions. If they are then told to stop, all the energy and momentum generated by the change effort is lost and people will be more cautious about engaging in any future dialogic change process. Something like "being the best in our markets" is more likely to produce ideas our hypothetical sponsors would support. Of any frame practitioners consider, they need to ask what kinds of projects people could possibly come up with that would still be within reason given the frame. If projects fall outside the sponsors' interests, the frame needs to be tightened up.

2. *Capture the interest and energy of those people who need to be engaged in the change*. Often, participation in Dialogic OD processes is voluntary for some if not all of the people required for the change effort to be successful. It is essential, therefore, that the topic be framed in a way that will be appealing to those people. When considering different topic framings, work with stakeholders to identify what they find most compelling. Remember, this is not about creating catchy slogans—the generative image needs to frame and focus what the work is about.
3. *Frame the focus of the inquiry in a way few people have considered before*. Framing a Dialogic OD topic as something like "increasing market share" has no generativity, since it is a topic people have talked about many times, forming an established narrative that is reinforcing the status quo. Finding a fresh way to refocus people on that topic is more generative. What will be experienced as a fresh refocus depends entirely on the organization's culture and history, so again it is imperative to test out topics with informed stakeholders and to include a diversity of participants and viewpoints in the dialogic process. A great example of this comes from the change process at British Airways that emerged from an interest in finding new solutions to the problems caused by delayed passenger luggage (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Here the topic was framed as "exceptional customer arrival experiences," something people at British Airways had not thought about before but that was a compelling image to engage with and that led to a host of innovations.

2. Pay attention to the metaphors that are currently generating people's understanding of the situation and try different metaphors. This could be useful in topic framing or at any point in a Dialogic OD process. When you become aware of an explicit or conceptual metaphor that is being used by a lot of people to talk about the current situation, try introducing different metaphors. For example, if people are talking about the need to fix something, invite them to consider what would happen if they reinvented it. If

people are talking about "going into battle," invite them to consider what they would do if they were "playing to win" or "preparing to change the game." If possible, invite people to suggest different metaphors from the ones they are using and explore what new avenues of thinking and acting they provoke.

3. Consider either/or thinking, polarities, and paradoxes that are not being challenged as places where generative images can be created. A number of different people have pointed out that groups and organizations can get stuck when they frame issues in either/or ways, and that those that are successful look for "both/and" solutions (Collins and Porras, 2004; Hampden-Turner, 1990; Pascale, 1990). Johnson (1996) calls this "polarity management" and points out that in organizations, things that appear to be opposites (e.g., centralization and decentralization, hierarchy and empowerment, specialization and generalization) are actually both needed for effective operations. Bushe (1998) has observed that Appreciative Inquiry in groups can surface a generative image to resolve some kind of paradox that is keeping a team stuck. So to find where a generative image would be most useful, pay attention to where organization members are polarizing around qualities that are actually both needed and provide a both/and image. "Sustainable development" took what appeared to be opposites (economic development versus protection of the environment) and created a both/and image. Other examples are "flexible control," "rapid slowness," and "centralized autonomy."

4. Design dialogic processes to increase the chance that generative images will emerge and be visible to all. We have observed that the following increase the generative capacity of people during OD interventions:

- trust and respect among participants
- positive affect
- playful mind
- feeling free to speak
- generous listening

We have observed that the following increase the generativity of change processes:

- high energy
- situations in which people confront themselves
- disturbances to patterns of thinking
- conversations that are different from normal
- bonding around desired outcomes/futures

It can also be useful to describe what generative images are and the role they play in change; invite all participants to be on the lookout for them and to name them when they see them.

5. Design questions and inquiry processes to be generative. Bushe's (2007) model of the four qualities of generative questions is:

1. *They are surprising.* They are questions that people have not discussed or thought about before. They are questions that cause people to reflect and think. This open-endedness in itself increases the generative potential of the question.
2. *They touch people's heart and spirit.* Generative questions touch on issues that are personally meaningful and that people care about. Talking about these things is likely to evoke emotions. This connectedness to self and others is generative for two reasons. First, it is what really matters to people, so what is discovered by generative questions is more likely to be meaningful and therefore impact meaning making. Second, it surfaces a great deal of energy, which will be required for generative action.
3. *Talking about and listening to people answering these questions will build relationships.* Generative questions engender conversations in which people feel more connected to each other. They think they have revealed something important about themselves and learned something important about the other person. Asking and answering these questions engenders a greater sense of vulnerability and trust. There are many indirect effects on generativity from this sense, but the direct effects are increased generative capacity through increased open-mindedness and a greater willingness to publicly dream that is more likely to manifest when people feel safe and affirmed.
4. *They invite us to look at reality a little differently,* either because of how they ask us to think or because of who we are listening to. Sometimes reality can be reframed by the way a question is asked. Sometimes reality gets reframed because the person we are listening to is telling us something very different from our stereotypes or assumptions. The open-endedness that results from having our current beliefs disturbed increases the chances that a generative image will emerge.

Conclusion

A generative change process produces new images and ideas that provide people with new eyes to see old things, resulting in new options for decisions and actions that they find appealing. A generative change process will cata-

lyze people to produce and act on proposals for change. Part of the effort, then, can be focused on increasing the generative capacity of people and organizations—that is, increasing their ability and motivation to produce new ideas and images. Part of the effort can be focused on the generativity of the process itself—the extent to which the process of change stimulates collective production and embracing of generative images.

Dialogic OD is itself a generative image: it appeals to OD consultants and other change-oriented professionals who have found conventional diagnostic approaches to change limiting, but had no accepted language for explaining or discussing what they were doing or finding a community of practice to work with. It is generating new theory and methods, as this book demonstrates. Thus an expansive and important field of inquiry beckons those of us who choose to explore its dialogic pathways.

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