



# Bushe, Gervase Roy: Progressing Ideas and Practices to Make the World a Better Place

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## Abstract

Gervase R. Bushe, for four decades and counting, has explored, challenged, and evolved the field of organizational change. His passion and conviction flow from a desire for more organizations to become places where people have opportunities to make better choices and be engaged in giving their very best in the work they do. This thread is evident throughout his work, with every strand contributing to collective, participative engagement methods for organizational thriving. His work to build useful, relevant change theory and practice spans the disciplines of organizational design, appreciative inquiry, leadership, and organization development (OD).

With a rich lineage in personal and organizational development, Bushe's influences span intrapersonal, interpersonal, and wider system domains. An eclectic, integrated understanding in theory and in practice appears throughout

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his work, and the complementarity between parts has built over time. Recent examples are the widely used Clear Leadership program; and his paradigm shifting work to frame new emerging threads of OD with the term now known as Dialogic OD.

Bushe has also made incisive contributions within particular areas, perhaps the best known being his work from the earliest days of appreciative inquiry to help test, refine, and amplify its power and effectiveness as a method. Tracking and fanning, synergogenesis, amplification, generative images, generative leadership, and generative change are all ideas born out of this work, and they have returned over time in Bushe's work on leadership and Dialogic OD. Less well known but highly regarded in academic circles is his early work on parallel learning structures.

Bushe's strong grounding in both experiential laboratory education such as T-groups and the action research tradition has influenced his work consistently, giving a clearly recognizable trademark to his contributions, perhaps best summed up as human, accessible, highly practical, and progressive.

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### Keywords

Appreciative inquiry · Parallel learning structures · Dialogic OD · Clear Leadership · Generativity · Action research

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## Introduction

The chapter begins by reviewing the key influences upon Bushe's development before exploring his many contributions to the field of change. We review his work in related but partly separate disciplines and the integration he has contributed to across these. Having considered insights Bushe has uncovered, his approach to educating and developing others is also described, before concluding with some comments on the frontiers, he continues to advance and that more and more people benefit from in workplaces around the world.

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## Influences and Motivations: Activist, Learner, and Collaborator

Bushe studied philosophy and sociology as an undergraduate at Loyola College in Montreal in the 1970s, deeply engaged in the counter culture of the times as a student activist. While a student leader among a highly engaged student body that strongly influenced university affairs from 1974 to 1978 (which culminated in being the valedictorian of his class of 1,200), his change agent tactics evolved considerably. He discovered the world of T-groups, adult education, and action research in this period, mentored by Hedley Dimock and Irene Devine at the Sir George Williams Center for Human Relations and Community Studies, affectionately known as the NTL of Canada. Over this period, he accumulated 150 h of supervised delivery of

T-groups, while studying the work of Lewin, Bradford, Benne, Gibb, Bennis, Schein, and Argyris. Bushe also assisted in action research projects and the design of leadership development programs. This early influence nurtured a deep passion in him for creating democratic, collaborative forms of organizing and for large-scale transformative change processes; these two passions subsequently influenced all his work.

By 1978, with considerable experience in OD and T-groups already, Bushe was accepted on to Case Western Reserve's Department of Organizational Behavior doctoral program at the young age of 23. It was *the* place to study OD and group process. During this time, Suresh Srivastva was key in building Bushe's psychoanalytic understanding of group process; Bushe also deepened further his understanding of experiential learning with Dave Kolb and Ron Fry. Macro-organization behavioral work and organization design with Dave Brown, Bill Pasmore, and Frank Friedlander added a further passion. Doctoral work on implementing quality of work life at General Motors led to interest in how organizational structure could drive development in organizations. He developed the theory of parallel learning structures, working with fellow Case student Rami Shani. During the 1980s, Bushe worked with large, bureaucratic organizations wanting to transform them into more empowered, team-based organizations, writing a series of papers with Rami that culminated in a book in the Addison-Wesley series in OD (Bushe & Shani, 1991). While it was credited in academic circles, it did not gain the deserved profile among practitioners.

In the 1980s, he underwent weekly somatic psychotherapy for 5 years with Ian Macnaughton (2004) that had a profound impact on his understanding of personal and organizational processes. At this point what had been largely an intellectual way of knowing for Bushe became enriched by a much closer attention to the body and to lived experience. This coupled with what was happening in his professional life led to a reorientation away from macro organizational phenomena back to the intra- and interpersonal.

The 1990s saw socio-technical systems oriented organization design work evaporate as the large consulting companies entered that space with process re-engineering (socio-technical systems, minus the socio). It was also the time when it emerged that most successful team-based and more collaborative organizations were reverting back to command and control in as little as 6 years. Bushe took a sabbatical to join the Stentor startup (described later) and began exploring the micro-processes that led to the failure of collaborative work organizations – a return to his roots in small groups and leadership. Ron Short's work applying family systems theory to organizational learning, alongside the weekly somatic psychotherapy, the early T-group experience, and an interest in social psychology, led Bushe to develop the Clear Leadership model. This has proved very successful in the organizations in which it has been used, with some profile among practitioners, but very little among academics. Bushe undertook a lot of consulting work over this time with fast-growing hi-tech companies.

Bushe also attended the first conference on appreciative inquiry at Case in 1989. He was friends with David Cooperrider and Frank Barrett, who had also been

students at Case, as well as Ron Fry who had been his doctoral supervisor and had heard about their early AI experiments. He immediately saw the potential and began experimenting with an early form of positive deviance he called appreciative process (Bushe & Pitman, 1991). Experimenting with AI in small groups led him to his first empirical study (Bushe & Coetzer, 1995) and to initial emphasis on the generativity of the inquiry (Bushe, 1998). Later research on large-scale AI change processes (Bushe, 2010; Bushe & Kassam, 2005) amplified the interest in generativity and uncovered for Bushe the realization that treating AI like action research with a solely positive focus may actually repress its transformative potential. This became high profile among both practitioners and academics.

This work evolved into a wider envisioning and articulation of Dialogic OD theory. His first paper on this, entitled “Postmodern OD,” figured at a Taos Institute Conference in 2005. That year he was introduced to the parallel work of Robert Marshak. They collaborated on what came to be a seminal paper (Bushe & Marshak, 2009) then coining the language of Dialogic OD and contrasting this with what they saw to be a largely different and until now more dominant stream, characterized as “Diagnostic OD.” They further developed their ideas through editing a special issue of the OD practitioner (Bushe & Marshak, 2013), before then editing a full book (Bushe & Marshak, 2015). This work appears to be a paradigm setting contribution with global impact. More recently, Bushe has offered the “Generative Change Model” (Bushe, 2020; Marshak & Bushe, 2018) as a contrast to the Planned Change Model and has been developing a vision of the kind of leadership required to lead generative change (Bushe, 2019).

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## **Key Contributions: Clear Leadership, Dialogic OD, and More**

### **Parallel Learning Structures**

Through the 1980s, a collaboration between Abraham (Rami) Shani and Bushe led to a series of publications that culminated in the volume on *Parallel Learning Structures: Increasing Innovation in Bureaucracies* in the Addison-Wesley Series in OD (1991). Parallel learning structures extended Zand’s (1974) concept of the collateral organization to explain how ongoing inquiry and organizational learning could be structured into hierarchical organizations. It incorporated Shani’s research on action research processes with Bushe’s research on quality circles and organization design to identify a way for performance-focused organizations to build a structure and culture for learning without having to redesign the work system. It proposed designing a series of groups that operate in parallel to the formal organization, tasked with identifying issues to innovate around, vetted by a steering committee, and then implemented through the normal chain of command. Their main contribution was to identify how the culture of the parallel groups had to promote inquiry and learning, often diametrically opposed to the operating culture of the formal organization. If the parallel organization was run like a project organization, with performance-oriented norms, it was not able to provide an adaptive

competency. They identified many of the tensions for implementing and maintaining them and how to resolve those. Through case studies they described how parallel structures could be used for pursuing simultaneous efficiency and innovation, solving problems bureaucracies could not handle, implementing system-transforming, radical innovations, developing cooperative labor-management relations, and providing a transitional structure toward team-based organizing. Textbooks in OD picked up and disseminated these ideas (Ed Schein called it the best book ever written on the structure of OD), and the book was translated into Spanish. The book was not a best seller, perhaps because its subtitle focused on overcoming bureaucracy, which did not incite passion. Twenty-five years later the basic tenets of bureaucratic organizing still predominate, and, while parallel structures are commonly used for change projects today, the same mistakes the book address are being made repeatedly. This early work already had the hallmarks of a practitioner and scholar committed to creating engaging spaces for collective learning and change to take hold in organizations.

## **Clear Leadership**

As the 1980s came to an end, Bushe became disappointed by research suggesting even the most well-designed team-based organizations were reverting back to command and control. As he sought to understand why, he abandoned his interest in organization design to explore once more the personal and interpersonal processes that might explain this predicament. While consulting to a new company created as a joint venture by the provincial telephone monopolies in Canada to respond to the newly deregulated long distance phone market (Stentor), he had a series of experiences that were to lead him to an explanation.

An admirer of Karl Weick, Bushe was aware of sensemaking processes, and he began to notice how many interactions between people were based on untested sense-making. His job at Stentor was to create a highly collaborative, fully empowered organization. He believed all the people he was working with wanted that; they had a clear vision, the right people, the right structure, and the committed leadership, but it still was not working. He began to notice how people would conduct themselves in meetings to maintain harmony and look good and not surface concerns or issues that could produce conflict or be embarrassing. Instead, they talked about such things “offline” and often not with the people considered to be the problem. He began to focus on what he later called “interpersonal mush” – interactions based on untested sense-making – in his consulting and in his courses with EMBA students, becoming convinced it was part of the explanation for why collaborative work systems fail. He noted that the stories people made up to make sense of others were usually more negative than the reality and that overtime the mush made it difficult to sustain collaborative relationships. What he had not yet uncovered was why the mush was so prevalent.

Encountering Ron Short and John Runyon’s work on their organizational learning model in the 1990s provided two more pieces to the puzzle. Short was a professor

and cofounder of the Leadership Institute of Spokane (later, Seattle) and a pioneer in applying Bowen Family Systems Theory to organizations. Short's (1998) model emphasized that learning from experience required working with experience as it happens in the moment and that ways of managing anxiety identified by Bowen were key obstacles to people's ability to learn from their experience together. Everyone has a different experience because everyone creates their own experience, but in our fusion we want people to have the "right" experience or in our disconnection assume others are having the same experience as oneself.

This led Bushe to his next key insight into how well-intentioned managers destroyed collaborative relationships with employees. When managers try to engage the people who work for them in well-intentioned attempts to learn from their experience together, they almost always try to analyze some past event to uncover what worked, what did not, and what to do, moving forward. But different people may have very different observations, thoughts, feeling, and wants (experiences). The degree to which those differences are noticed and managed strongly influences collaboration, for ill or good.

One common dysfunctional way to manage people having different experiences is to figure out who has had the "right" experience, which normally ends with the manager having the right experience. At this point, the employees no longer feel responsible for the outcome of the conversation, and their sense of collaboration is diminished. Bushe realized that the model for learning from experience he and others had been using was detrimental to sustaining a relationship where everyone's different experiences are valid. It required a completely different way of thinking about what it means for a group of people to learn from their experience, at work, together. He discovered that people did not have to be having similar thoughts, feelings, or even objectives to work together and that people felt most engaged and

**Fig. 1** The experience cube



committed when they could express what they most desire and care about without threatening their membership in the group.

For the rest of the 1990s, Bushe continued to develop a different set of models for organizational learning to support empowered work systems that culminated in the book *Clear Leadership* (2001). He realized that in order for people to learn from their collective experience, they needed a common model of experience and created the “experience cube” (see Fig. 1), a model that seems to have a resonance or impact on most who try it out. The model proposes that experience is composed of one’s moment to moment observations, thoughts, feelings, and wants; that at all times an individual is having all four but that only some are in their awareness and some of their experience is out of their awareness. Individuals vary on how easily and deeply they can access their awareness of each element of experience, and that increasing awareness of experience is a life long journey. With this model, Bushe provides a concrete explanation of what it means for a leader to be “self-aware” and a concrete tool people can use for discussing and understanding their own and other’s experiences to clear out interpersonal mush.

Over the next 10 years of applying the model, he came to the conclusion that collaborative organizations rested on micro-relations of “partnership,” which he defined as a relationship in which all parties feel responsible for the success of their common purpose. Armed with this key insight, Bushe began investigating all the ways in which leaders unknowingly destroyed that sense of responsibility in subordinates, the skills required to design and lead partnership-based organizations, and the shared assumptions required for cultures that supported collaboration (Bushe, 2006). The revised edition of *Clear Leadership* (2009a) incorporated some of those insights.

This social constructivist approach to organizational learning offers real practical insights into leading organizational change. It defines organizations as patterns of organizing (or interacting) and organizational learning as an inquiry by two or more people into their patterns of organizing/interacting that leads to new knowledge and a change in those patterns. It argues that organizational learning happens one conversation at a time and spreads out, though the impact of those conversations is greater, the higher up the hierarchy they occur (Bushe, 2009b). While it is difficult to change others, and difficult to change oneself, Bushe explains that a pattern of interaction can be changed in an instant. Effective leadership of change requires the perspective that everyone is having a different experience, the leader cannot control the experience others are having, and it does more damage than good to take responsibility for other people’s experience or try to ensure they have a good experience. Effective change leadership therefore requires curiosity about other people’s experience and transparency about the leader’s thoughts and intentions. Efforts to produce change by getting people to “buy the vision” only create large dollops of interpersonal mush. Instead, Bushe asserts that it is much more effective to create a space in which people can express very different thoughts, feelings, and wants from each other and from the leader, which a leader can incorporate or not into his/her goals and strategies. Much of what gets called resistance to change is a result of the lack of clarity and the resulting interpersonal mush. A great deal of useful

change occurs simply by allowing people to express their differences and check out their stories, according to Bushe.

The recognition of the multiplicity of narratives inherent in any organization, and the detrimental effects of privileging one narrative over others, was one of the early insights that led him beyond diagnostic approaches to organizational change and led to his model of Dialogic OD, discussed later in this chapter.

Acknowledging that his first book had less impact on practice than he and Shani had hoped, Clear Leadership sought, successfully, to directly impact managers and professionals. Bushe identified concrete skills within four skill sets: the Aware Self, the Descriptive Self, the Curious Self, and the Appreciative Self, along with the necessary increases in self-differentiation that are required to use these skills to lead learning in the midst of performing. Building on his knowledge of T-groups and laboratory education, and inspired by the innovations in laboratory education developed at the Leadership Institute of Seattle, he created a course that is transformational for many participants yet can be delivered in only 4 days in a nonresidential setting. Transfer rates of the core concepts have been as high as 90% with most rated by their peers as more effective after the course (Gilpin-Jackson & Bushe, 2007; Gossling, 2006). One case study attributed a shift in employee engagement from the 61st percentile to the 91st percentile in 3 years, in part, to training all leaders and managers in Clear Leadership (Bushe & O'Malley, 2013). It is now licensed in seven different languages around the world.

Again, we see in Clear Leadership a clear intention to create something for organizations and leaders that could transform their experiences of learning and changing together in a truly collective way.

## Appreciative Inquiry

Bushe was an early champion of appreciative inquiry in academic circles. He witnessed firsthand the resistance David Cooperrider received when initially presenting his ideas – laughed at during the 1986 Academy of Management Conference when he suggested that *seeing organizations as miracles to be appreciated* would produce more generative inquiry. At the OD Network that year, practitioners said, “of course we want to talk about what is going well, but we have to talk about what’s not going well too. Your ideas are not practical and our clients would never buy it anyway.”

In the early 1990s before the 4D model, Bushe and Pitman were using and teaching a form of AI based on collective attention to “what works,” instead of “the problem,” and to “tracking and fanning” as a change process that could be applied in micro as well as macro situations (Bushe, 2000; Bushe & Pitman 1991). It had three phases: discover, understand, and amplify (Bushe, 1995). This line of inquiry produced the model of the Appreciative Self found in Clear Leadership (2001, 2009a) as well as the “performance amplification” approach to OD (Bushe & Pitman, 2008).



Bushe is one of a very few who have used empirical methods to study AI. His 1995 paper with Coetzer demonstrated that an AI-based intervention made student teams significantly more effective than a placebo event but so did a standard action research style intervention using task-oriented team building as the diagnostic model and survey. In a later paper (Bushe, 2002), he attributed the effect of the AI intervention in those studies to the newness of the teams, a condition he labeled “pre-identity,” and argued that the nature of AI – particularly what it could accomplish and therefore how best to organize and lead it – depended on whether the people involved identified with the group/organization/community. He has argued in a variety of ways that unless individuals identify with a group, not a lot of energy goes into worrying if the group is getting its needs met or accomplishing its goals (Bushe, 2002, 2004). Bushe and Coetzer’s McGregor winning paper (2007) showed how the initial phase of team development hinges on whether members come to identify with and have a desire to belong to the team. What AI offered pre-identity groups was mainly the opportunity to move through the membership phase and develop a shared identity. Consequently, inquiries that focused on goals, aspirations, and what to be (such as the “life-giving properties” of the group), and only involved members of the coalescing group, were best suited to pre-identity groups, such as AIs that involved multiparty summits. Bushe (1998) proposed that the “best team” appreciative inquiry could help a pre-identity group bypass the “storming” phase normally associated with group development (a proposition that found support in Head’s (2000) study).

In groups with members who already identify with the group (post-identity), Bushe argued that inquiries that only focused on what the group should be would be experienced as unproductive navel gazing. In a pre-identity group, the group is seen by members as one more thing to deal with in pursuing their own individual needs and wants. In a post-identity group, by contrast, members take a personal interest in the needs of the group. Members of a post-identity group already know what the group’s purpose is, and are more interested in how to accomplish that purpose. The focus is more on what the group needs to be and do to be effective in its environment, and an appreciative inquiry will need to include others outside the group who have no interest in joining but are stakeholders (e.g., customers, other parts of the organization) if the inquiry is to be useful. This model explains findings in other studies (Newman & Fitzgerald, 2001; Powley et al., 2004).

As a consultant, he became fascinated by how conversations could be facilitated to generate new ideas that compelled new actions, seeing this as a practical application of Gergen’s (1978) notion of generative theory. Probably his greatest contribution to Appreciative Inquiry has been his research demonstrating the important role generativity plays in transformational outcomes. His research into appreciative inquiry demonstrated the importance of generativity to the success of AI interventions (Bushe, 1998, 2010; Bushe & Kassam, 2005), leading him to propose that positive emotions were not sufficient for change to occur without generativity and that generativity could be evoked without positive emotions (Bushe, 2007, 2013b). One contribution to AI practice that came from this line of inquiry is the synergogenesis approach to using appreciative stories to catalyze new ideas (Bushe, 1995, 2007,

2010). In this approach to appreciative inquiry, organizational members interview each other and write up the best stories they hear; these stories are collected for synergenesis sessions, where a small group is presented with a question and a deck of people's stories related to that question. They read any story together and then brainstorm answers to the question triggered by the story or by the conversations that ensue. Once they run out of ideas, they read another story and continue to brainstorm. They continue doing so until additional new stories do not generate any new ideas. One field study (Bushe & Paranjpey, 2015) found this technique more generative than conventional dialogue processes used in the discovery phase of AI.

Bushe's scholarship on appreciative inquiry resulted in awards (his 1995 paper was chosen as one of the ten best articles published by the *OD Journal* in the twentieth century; the 2005 paper with Kassam was a runner-up for McGregor Award that year; and many others have been republished) and has made him the "go to" person for academics who want an authoritative voice. He has written the chapters on AI for Sage's *Encyclopedia of Management Theory* (Bushe, 2013c), *Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation* (Bushe, 2018), and Routledge's *Companion to Organizational Change* (Bushe, 2012).

## Dialogic OD

In his work on Dialogic OD, he and Marshak sought to integrate the fragmentation that had occurred in the OD field over the past two decades, demonstrating how techniques that appeared to be quite different, like appreciative inquiry, open space, world café, or Theory U, all rested on the same assumptions about organizations and change. They argued that OD practice had evolved since the 1980s in ways that violated the central tenants of OD orthodoxy but that the key texts in the field were ignoring this and instead presenting these innovations within the traditional action research framework. Their paper on Revisioning OD (Bushe & Marshak, 2009), which won the Douglas McGregor Award that year, identified key differences in the assumptions about change in organizations in what they labeled Diagnostic OD and Dialogic OD. They later went on to argue that two key theoretical currents underlie Dialogic OD: complexity science and interpretive social science (Bushe & Marshak, 2014a). In that paper they proposed that the practice of OD professionals rested on the "mindset" of the practitioner and contrasted two "ideal types" – a Diagnostic Mindset and a Dialogic Mindset. Rather than seeing these as either/or, they argued that both mindsets could coexist in any practitioner, which would lead to the kinds of innovation in practice they were seeing and listed a set of assumptions they called the Dialogic Mindset. They also identified three underlying change mechanisms, one of which they proposed had to be present for transformational change to occur: disruption and emergence, a change in core narrative(s), and/or the appearance of a "generative image" that offered compelling new ways to see old things and motivate new actions. They further suggested (Bushe & Marshak, 2015) that Dialogic OD methods had emerged and flourished because they were better suited to

taking on adaptive challenges (Heifetz, 1998), complex situations (Snowden & Boone, 2007), and wicked problems (Grint, 2005).

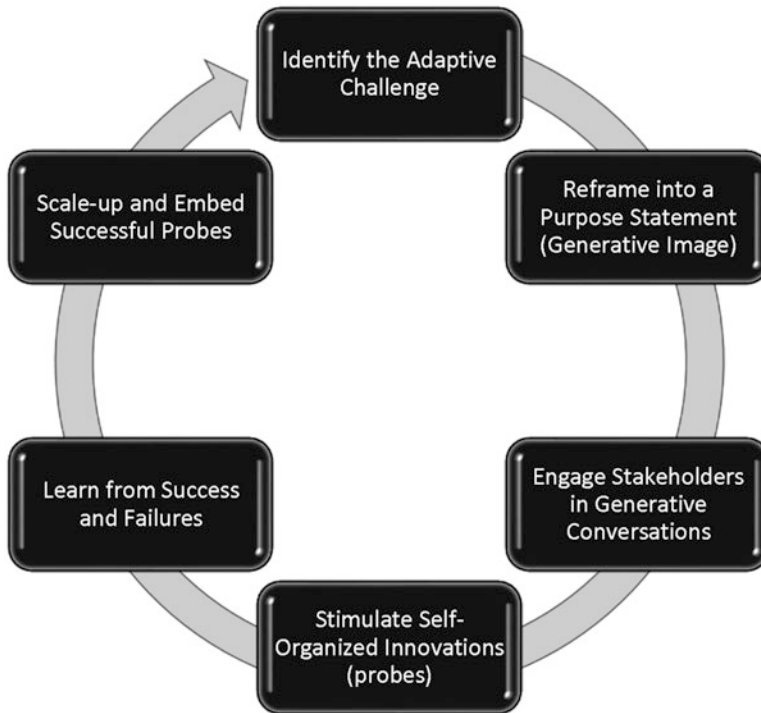
Noting that dialogic change processes have been highly successful, but are not that widely used in business (Bushe, 2016), Bushe and Marshak (2016) argue that the problem is they contravene the “leader as visionary” narrative that holds sway in western business culture. They contend that research is pointing pretty dramatically to the conclusion that under conditions of complexity it is very unlikely for anyone to be able to identify the right answer to an adaptive challenge, and the use of emergent change processes and leadership style is far more successful than conventional diagnostic or change management approaches. The diffusion of Dialogic OD approaches into mainstream acceptance, they argue, will require a transformation in the leader-as-visionary narrative. Bushe has followed this by developing a theory of Generative Leadership (Bushe, 2019; Bushe & Marshak, 2017), which he continues to work on.

While Dialogic OD theory was a synthetic act of scholarship, bringing together and making sense of multiple strands of scholarship and practice, Bushe’s key addition to this is the importance of generative images to the success of Dialogic OD interventions (1998, 2013a, b; Bushe & Storch, 2015). Bushe defined a generative image as “ideas, phrases, objects, pictures, manifestos, stories, or new words with two properties: (1) Generative images allow us to see new alternatives for decisions and actions. . . .(2) Generative images are compelling images – they generate change because people like the new options in front of them and want to use them” (2013a, p. 12).

Dialogic OD has generated a great deal of interest in both scholars and practitioners. On May 31, 2020, a google search for term “Dialogic OD” returned 59,400 pages, and Google Scholar showed 415 citations for the original JABS article. Bushe and Marshak have continued to push research and practice through the development of the Bushe-Marshak Institute for Dialogic OD, which among other things, publishes the BMI series on Dialogic OD, a series of short practical books modeled on the seminal Addison-Wesley series in OD ([B-M-Institute.com](http://B-M-Institute.com)).

## Generative Change

A number of recent publications have advanced beyond strict Dialogic OD theory to develop a model of organizational change that, once more, integrates a wide range of change practice into a simple, practical model for use by leaders and consultants. Ironically, for someone listed in a book of Change Thinkers, Bushe has been arguing that OD is not about change, it is about improvement, and that OD has been hampered by equating it with organizational change. He proposes that OD is really about creating great teams and organizations (Bushe, 2017; Bushe & Marshak, 2018; Bushe & Nagaishi, 2018). While this involves change, it is quite different from change management and leads to different approaches. Arguing that there are no universal models of a great team or organization because of the inherent paradoxes of group life, and the contextually dependent nature of organizing processes, OD is



**Fig. 2** The generative change model

better thought of as an emergent process (Maxton & Bushe, 2018) where leaders lead a process of engaging stakeholders in inquiry and conversations that launch many small innovations that leaders then nurture, amplify, and scale up. Since all models of great organizations, from Likert (1961) to Laloux (2016) envision engagement in inquiry by all organizational members as essential for superior organizing, by using a generative change approach to manage a complex problem, OD creates better organizations. Bushe (2017; Bushe & Nagaishi, 2018) offers a list of three criteria for assessing the developmental impact of OD interventions.

His most recent contribution is to offer a model that takes the complexity of emergent change practice and puts it into a model that he contrasts with planned change that leaders can understand and utilize. The outlines of this model are embedded in his 2013a and 2015 papers, are reformulated in Marshak and Bushe, 2018, and fully realized in Bushe, 2020. As shown in Fig. 2, the Generative Change Model is offered as a method for managing adaptive challenges (Heifetz, 1998) (whereas Planned Change is better for technical problems). The model describes the central role of purpose, as opposed to vision, in emergent change and locates where generative images are most powerful for supporting change. Most importantly, it identifies the need to design stakeholder and multi-stakeholder dialogues to launch self-initiated changes that do not require permission from authorities. His insight that

using such dialogues to produce ideas and proposals that are then given to authorities to do something with puts one back into the planned change approach, with all the attendant difficulties inherent in it. The generative change model envisions a very different role for leaders. It is not their job to identify the change vision and then drive implementation. Rather, they need to identify the purpose connected to the adaptive challenge that stakeholders care about, host generative conversations with those stakeholders in order to launch as many experiments and pilot projects as possible, and then closely monitor and build on what emerges to produce much more change, much more rapidly while creating a more adaptive, agile organization.

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## **New Insights: Learning with Gervase Bushe**

As already highlighted, Bushe's regular cycling between theory and practice lies at the heart of his approach. That action research stance no doubt contributes to Bushe's theory and method having such insight and relevance for scholars and practitioners, respectively, myself included. Consulting relationships, executive teaching, and field research in a variety of organizations allows Bushe to triangulate between practicing leaders' contexts and the evolution of thought in academic circles. Each practical assignment is a chance to expose language and method to business scrutiny, in the process sharpening the translation of theory and research to workplace application. In turn this informs where research goes next. Below is a personal view of what some of these contributions mean in practice.

### **Style and Approach**

In teaching, Bushe has used a variety of experiential learning processes to create active learning through doing rather than passive absorption of knowledge. Bushe is a developer as well as an educator, however. Alongside his work at large systems level in organization change, Bushe continues to work at the coal face of interpersonal skill development in leaders and developers. Having observed and participated in ongoing group process work over many years, Bushe is at home in laboratory interpersonal relation methods such as encounter groups and T-groups but has found ways to make such experiences highly accessible, retaining sufficient power but with less risk of the overwhelm that can push participants away from learning in these confronting settings. This background has shaped Bushe's participative, challenging style of training and consulting – a theme across both domains is his desire to create spaces and opportunities for participative work and learning to truly take hold, for everyone's benefit.

Bushe's personal presence, as much as his thoughts, collaborations, and outputs, may be a key factor in his impact in the world. From my first encounters, I experienced him holding a still, quiet attention making it easier for me to find my words. His responses are offered with warmth and respect but also an incisive conviction. This quality of connection seems pertinent, given the contributions he

has made. A particular example is his thinking on the notion of containers, illustrated below from a live video stream to the European OD Network conference in spring 2015:

I have seen enough instances of change work failing where most of the rules of good practice were being met and as many instances of change work succeeding where none seemed to be being met, to conclude that other things may matter as much. One of these maybe the quality of the container; is it really about having the right structure and process or about the quality of the people in it? Imagine the energy in a group and then consider: “what would it be like now if Nelson Mandela walked into the room?”. Certain qualities of presence in and around people seem to matter more than almost anything else about the situation in which people find themselves working together.

It is also notable that, while this was delivered over video stream, the room was captivated by Bushe’s screen presence several 1000 miles away.

My own belief here is that change work in organizations is so commonly accompanied by high levels of anxiety, in the client and the wider system, that the quality of presence in the practitioner plays a key role. This presence has no doubt also played a role in Bushe’s ability to collaborate with others in service of generating new knowledge and method.

Bushe practices what he preaches in Clear Leadership too, with a disarmingly simple (not simplistic) direct style of communicating, grounded in his keen ear for language in both his practice and academic worlds. His written work is accessible to most, from journal papers to books, and his spoken word connects with leaders and practitioners across many disciplines and sectors. Bushe has the knack of explaining complex ideas in practical terms without oversimplifying to the point of contradicting the underpinning philosophy. This is evident, for example, in his navigation of the field of complexity sciences as it can be applied to social processes. In doing so, Bushe avoids the common trap of simple prescriptions but goes further than some purist academics may in providing both principles of practice and some methods.

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## **Legacies and Unfinished Business: Many Seeds Sown and Flourishing**

Bushe has contributed so many insights to the field of organizational change in part because of his own capability, determination, and curiosity to explore and develop the wide range of disciplines covered already in this chapter. Below are some examples.

On Appreciative Inquiry, Bushe and Pitman’s work (1991) in the early 1990s, focusing on “what works” rather than “the problem,” predated the 4D model – Bushe was in near the start and the development of ideas and practices to do with amplification remain at the heart of the appreciative philosophy and method. Furthermore, Bushe’s exploration of where and how AI has resulted in transformation and generativity (Bushe, 2010; Bushe & Kassam, 2005) filtered the background

noise and excitement that AI generated over its first two decades in use and illuminated some key success factors. This has shaped my own (and other practitioners' I know) use of AI in practice, highlighting traps and opportunities to be vigilant for throughout the process. His efforts to distinguish between the meaningful and the positive in AI have added further refinement to the methodology (Bushe, 2007, 2013b), offering a linguistic reframe that I have seen greatly reassure clients as they decide whether or not the AI approach can work for them, particularly in less positive scenarios. A further refinement, on stages of group identity and its bearing on the focus and impact of AI, signposts another important factor that determines the particular approaches most likely to work in a given context. The power of all of Bushe's contributions in this space as in others is a characteristic of his work – they have real practical utility.

Clear Leadership (Bushe, 2009a) is also creating impact on the ground, and in many places, having entrusted his ideas and methods to many different partners in several different languages to run the program. While on the face of it, Clear Leadership may seem separate from Bushe's early work on parallel learning structures (Bushe & Shani, 1991), and other ideas, the influences exist in the theory base, and the success of Clear Leadership must in part be due to this solid ground upon which the program sits. The sound practical insights that have emerged from several previous strands of Bushe's achievements have found a deserving integrated home in practice. From personal experience, the impact of this program far outweighs the deceptive lightness of touch of just a 4-day program. Bushe has combined his deep knowledge of theory and powerful practical method to create an experiential program that can fundamentally change awareness and behavior in leaders, almost regardless of their prior level of experience and understanding. Given the growing need for collaboration, partnership, and other contemporary ways of organizing work, global demand for this efficient, effective model may well expand dramatically.

Bushe's contribution also flows from his humility to know his limits of knowledge and to invest the energy in seeking complex collaborations that extend and connect a wider and deeper range of practice and thought than anyone could achieve alone. The most recent example of this on a large scale has been the previously mentioned book on Dialogic OD (Bushe & Marshak, 2015). Bushe and Marshak's collaborative approach to this has drawn out the key ideas and developing practices from a wide range of scholars and practitioners at a particular moment in the evolution of OD. Rather than inviting chapters on topics and compiling these without modification, authors were asked to permit substantial editing until Bushe and Marshak were satisfied that a consistency of style and thread of argument ran throughout the volume. The coherence that emerged from negotiation and rewrites totals an offering of great consistency and continuity.

While Bushe and Marshak developed their thinking on Dialogic OD over many years among a broad community, its profile has grown greatly since the label emerged. To create as substantial yet compact a volume on the topic as they did, over just 18 months with more than 20 contributors, suggests that an energy surrounds Bushe and the work that he has framed and helped to evolve in the

process. It is testament to Bushe's work in generativity and generative image specifically that in deploying it in the coining of the term Dialogic OD itself, it has created such generativity.

At a time when the ideas and language of complexity and transformation have become established in the global lexicon of leadership and organizational change, Dialogic OD should prove a very timely contribution to thinking and practice. Based on my personal experience, stories of colleagues, and much of the literature available today, a significant proportion of organizational change work still appears confused in method and philosophy. Change failures appear to be a product in part of ungrounded and outmoded thought and practice as well as being casualties of organizational and societal expectations that hinder the learning needed for real change to flourish. My own experience suggests that Bushe's work to rally a diverse field of evolving practice is helping to re-educate leaders and change practitioners in the complexity of organizational life and the approaches that can withstand scrutiny and deliver results. Bushe is humble enough to acknowledge that the ideas and practices of Dialogic OD have been around for some time and continue today in many people and places, but not in as consistent and coherent a form as might serve its ongoing development:

There appears a great deal of convergence in what successful dialogic practitioners do. There just wasn't much convergence in how they described what they do. (Bushe & Marshak, 2015, p. 402)

Drawing on this careful selection of expert sources while bringing his and Marshak's long and deep knowledge alongside others' required him to enact his own principles of collaboration in the production process, but these collaborative ventures are not limited to the written word. Bushe was also instrumental in convening the, to date, one and only Dialogic OD conference in Vancouver (2015), drawing on his own network and energy to convene scholars and practitioners, in a singularly successful event that lived Dialogic OD in practice as 140 participants from around the world engaged in inquiry.

Bushe may be on the cusp of another generative image, in his reusing of the old term heroic/great man leadership (Bushe & Marshak, 2016), investing it with new meaning. Rekindling the "good king" archetype (Bushe, 2005) with a twist, the leader's heroic act may still be to bring the greatness out of every follower, only now less to lead the way with a vision, and instead more to create and contain spaces for others to lead in a multitude of complex ways. The heroism may come more in having the strength and humility to allow (contain, just enough) the tensions that this inevitably creates, so that they can be tolerated within an organization (Bushe, 2019; Bushe & Marshak, 2016).



## Conclusion

Bushe's practice and scholarly rigor, his wider vision of the field of theory and practice, and his capacity to invite many into spaces of collective exploration, while also having the clarity of thought to find coherence in diversity, combine to mean that Bushe has brought to the world many important developments in thinking and practice for organizational change. Bushe's own leadership across these different areas of thinking and practice seem to flow from a heartfelt conviction, perhaps not dissimilar to many of the founders of OD many decades ago, to progress ideas and practice in ways that can make the world and its workplaces better places to work and to fully express individual and collective potential.

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