Planned and Generative Change in Organization Development

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Organization Development (OD) has long been associated with, if not synonymous with, planned change. Early books such as *The Dynamics of Planned Change* (Lippitt, Watson, and Wesley, 1958) and *The Planning of Change* (Bennis, Benne, and Chin, 1961) helped establish planned change as one of the cornerstones of OD along with Beckhard's seminal definition of OD:

"Organization development is an effort (1) *planned*, (2) organization-wide, and (3) managed from the top, to (4) increase organization effectiveness and health, through (5) *planned* interventions in the organization's 'processes,' using behavioral science knowledge" (1969, p. 9, emphasis added).

In recent years, however, an increasing diversity of ideas and methods in OD practice have emerged and begun to converge into an alternative "generative theory of change," and some of this has been conceptualized as Dialogic OD (Bushe and Marshak, 2009; 2014; 2015).

Concurrently, we have suggested that Dialogic OD is powered by attending to the generative nature of conversations (Marshak, 2004), of processes (Bushe, 2013a), of images (Bushe, 2013b; Bushe and Storch, 2015) and leaders (Bushe and Marshak, 2016). The purpose of this discussion is to compare and contrast planned and generative approaches to change and suggest the conditions under which either or both might be appropriate.

Planned Change in OD

The roots of planned change in OD were planted early and run deep. Kurt Lewin considered his seminal approach to social change to be a form of planned change or social engineering. "(The) question of planned change or any 'social engineering' is identical with the question: what 'conditions' have to be changed to bring about a given result and how can we change these conditions with the means at hand?" (Lewin, 1951, p. 171).

For Lewin and his followers identifying what conditions needed to be changed, and the means to change them to bring about a "given result," involved conceptualizing behavior as a function of a field of forces that could be diagnosed and acted upon with targeted interventions to create movement towards a desired change goal. "A successful change includes, therefore, three aspects: *unfreezing* (if necessary) the present level, *moving* to the new level, and freezing group life on the new level." (Lewin, 1947, p. 34, emphasis in the original).

Without delving too deeply into all the underlying premises, nor exploring all the variations in practice, the main features of planned change in OD include:

- Dissatisfaction with the current state is recognized or induced.
- The current state is presumed to be held in quasi-equilibrium by a field of social-psychological forces. Objective, fact-

based diagnosis and analysis is used to distinguish the real problem from the presenting problem and to assess how to selectively alter the field of forces to unfreeze from the current state, create movement, and then refreeze the situation to stabilize a more desired state.

- Diagnosis, assessment, and intervention choices and actions are carried out using participatory processes that involve those impacted by the change.
- A desired future state is established as the goal of the change effort.
- Change occurs hierarchically working from top executive teams to middle and lower level teams and groups.
- Leadership of the change is problem and performance oriented; and sanctions and directs change goals and processes.

- The change agent partners with the system providing process consultation but not expert solutions.

This basic approach to planned change in OD is one form of "action research" and is usually considered to include the following steps in practice: entry, contracting, data collection, data feedback, diagnosis, action planning, interventions, evaluation . The role of the OD consultant is as a change partner who recommends and facilitates client system processes and actions to insure valid data, informed choice and commitment by those involved (Argyris, 1970). See Figure 1 for one version of the OD planned change consultation model.
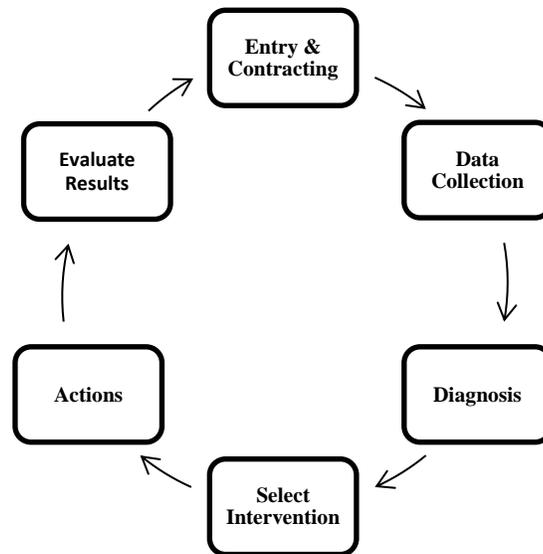

Figure 1: OD Planned Change in Practice

Generative Change in OD

Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) highlighted the essential "problem-solving" nature of this planned change process, arguing that the planned change model lacked the capacity to generate theories that led to new ideas and actions. They challenged OD with the question: if we made the search for 'what could be', rather than 'what is true', the focus of inquiry during planned change, would we create new and better theories? This broadside opened up a field of inquiry and practice that led to the emergence of what we have called Dialogic OD.

Dialogic OD is a still developing mindset, reflective of a host of methods, that represents the convergence of recent thinking about concepts of emergence and how social reality is constructed, applied to organizational change (Bushe and Marshak, 2014; 2015). Organizations are conceived to be complex responsive, meaning-making systems, wherein narratives, stories, metaphors, and conversations continuously construct social reality through the day-to-day interactions of organizational members. Diagnosis of problems is eschewed in favor of inquiry and generative processes that help stimulate the emergence of new and potentially transformational insights and possibilities that are especially needed when facing highly complex, novel organizational challenges (Marshak, 2013). Leaders and consultants can help foster, support, and/or accelerate the emergence of transformational possibilities by encouraging disruptions to taken for granted ways of thinking and acting and the use of generative images to stimulate new conversations and narratives. Because

social reality continuously emerges through any and all interactions, the consultant is always part of the unfolding processes of stability and change rather than a neutral facilitator who stands apart from the system.

Generative change theory is based on different premises from those in planned change theory. These premises include:

- An organizational dilemma, disruption, or compelling desire triggers a search for new, "adaptive moves" that are different from current ways of thinking.
- Leadership is future focused, and open to possibility-centric framings of the issue.
- Leadership is willing to enlist and engage a range of stakeholders in interactions and inquiry, with a purpose but not a goal or specific outcome in mind.
- The current state is presumed to be fluid with the prevailing narrative(s) that guides thought and action being continuously socially constructed through ongoing conversations and social interactions.
- A diversity of perspectives and narratives are enlisted and encouraged within safe containers to help challenge prevailing narratives and provide new insights, awareness and possibilities.
- New ideas, creative possibilities, generative images, and new shared narrative(s) emerge from those interactions stimulated, framed and guided by generative leadership (Bushe & Marshak, 2015).
- Change occurs through experimentation and iterative moves as emergent strategies, probes, and new adaptive ways

of thinking and acting are carried out by participants throughout the system.

- Leadership focuses not on identifying and directing the change, but on leading the processes of emergent change with special attention given to modeling, nurturing and embedding desired changes.
- The change agent partners with the system providing collaborative consultation but not expert solutions. Furthermore, the change agent is considered to be part of the on-going social construction of reality and not able to stand apart from it as a neutral, objective actor (Bushe and Marshak, 2015).

This basic approach to generative change in OD utilizes a variety of methods for creating containers where new kinds of conversations can take place, but generally has the following steps: entry and contracting, identification of a purpose that is future focused and possibility- centric, the engagement of diverse stakeholders in ways that generate new conversations, the stimulation of self-organized innovations amongst those stakeholders, leader's actions that monitor, scale up and embed successful innovations, and learnings from success and failures lead to new adaptive moves. See Figure 2 for a representation of the practice of generative change in OD.
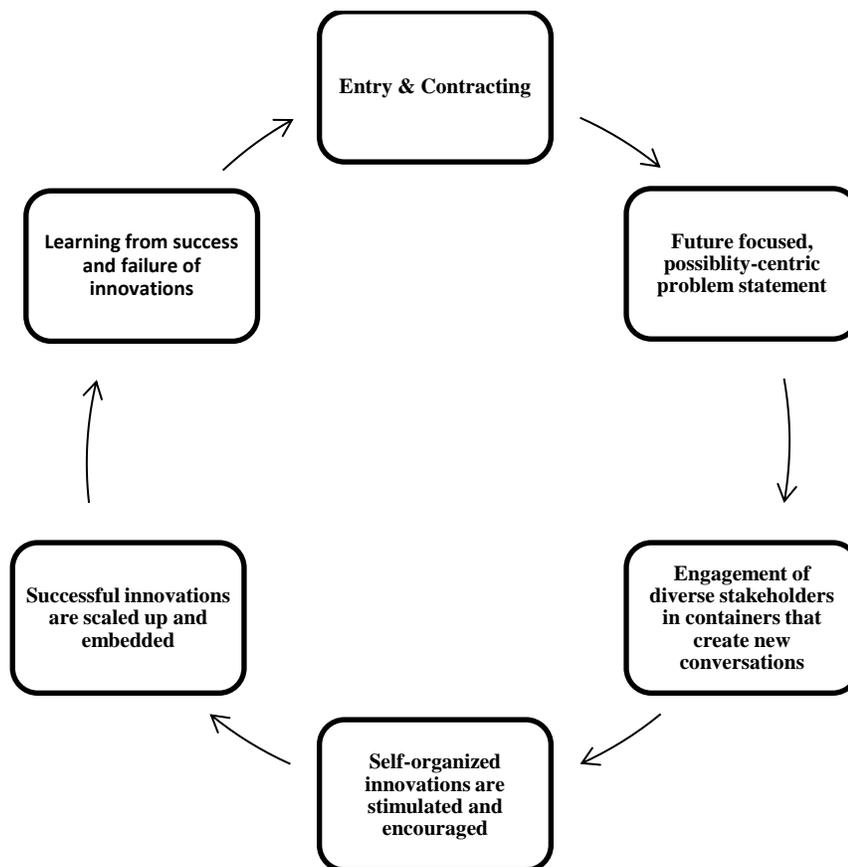
Figure 2: OD Generative Change in Practice

Comparing Planned and Generative Change

A brief contrast of some of the important differences between the planned and generative change theories is provided in Table 1. The emphasis here is on contrasting the two, but it is important to note that both theories are forms of OD sharing the same or similar bedrock values, a participatory, collaborative approach to working with client systems (Bushe and Marshak, 2015), and the use of engagement and inquiry to improve an organization while working on a specific issue (Bushe and Nagaishi, 2018). The dimensions in the table should be understood as the main tendencies or areas of emphasis for each theory rather than black and white dichotomies. Thus a planned change approach might mainly use analytic methods such as survey research and quantitative data presentations, but might also use an analogic method such as drawing a picture at some point in the change process. Similarly a generative change approach might mainly seek to stimulate innovations using creativity methods, but also augment that approach with some data analyses or scientific findings.

Table 1: Planned and Generative Change Emphases

Aspects	Planned Change	Generative Change
Approach:	Social engineering	Social innovation
Reasoning:	Analytic	Analogic
Thinking:	Vertical	Lateral
Methods:	Scientific and engineering oriented	Dialogic and social agreement oriented
Role of Leaders:	Performance oriented and directive	Possibility oriented and supportive
Outcomes:	Solutions to problems and/or to achieve a desired state	Adaptive actions and/or transformation
Use when:	State of the art approaches and solutions exist	Beyond state of the art approaches and solutions are needed

Approach. In a general sense the essence of each of the theories might be captured by considering whether the approach is more one of identifying and then implementing a predetermined outcome or experimenting and learning as you go. Recall that Lewin

himself referred to planed change as a form of social engineering. Diagnosing the factors and forces that need to be modified in order to realize a predetermined change goal and applying known social technologies are all central aspects of planned change practice and all are aspects of engineering an outcome. In contrast generative change practice places emphasis on stimulating experiments that go beyond current thinking and learning from and scaling up what works.

Reasoning. The planned change approach relies predominately on analytic reasoning where what to do and why to do it is driven by collection and analysis of valid data combined with diagnostic reasoning. While generative change practice might include use of data-based reasoning it relies more heavily on analogic methods to stimulate "out of the box" creativity and innovative thinking. These could include use of metaphorical reasoning; scripted or improvisational theater; sculpting, drawing, or otherwise constructing analogs representing the situation or challenge; re-authoring the story of why things are the way they are; inviting people to "café discussions" or to speak in positive not problematic ways; and so forth.

Thinking. Edward de Buono (1970) introduced the concepts of vertical (logical) and lateral (creative) thinking to describe two different thinking processes that also help capture some of the essential differences between planned (vertical) and generative (lateral) change thinking. According to de Buono:

- "Vertical thinking is selective, lateral thinking is generative" (p. 39).

- "Vertical thinking is analytical, lateral thinking is provocative" (p. 40).
- "With vertical thinking one uses the negative to block off certain pathways. With lateral thinking there is no negative (p.42).
- "With vertical thinking one uses information for its own sake in order to move towards a solution. With lateral thinking one uses information not for its own sake but provocatively in order to bring about repatterning" (p.45).

Methods. The methods or social technologies that have framed most of the OD planned change approaches over the years are based in scientific or engineering thinking. That includes an implicit embrace of positivism and that the social world and the people in it can be measured, analyzed, acted upon, and developed in predetermined ways to realize desired outcomes "using behavioral science knowledge" (Beckhard, 1969, p. 9). The prescription of data collection, diagnosis, and feedback methods as core elements of OD action research is a good example of this. Generative change on the other hand is not based on objectively studying and acting on something to realize predetermined outcomes. It is based on sociological thinking about how social interactions continuously create the world we experience and thinking in physics and biology about how systems self-organize to adapt under complex conditions. Conversations and social agreements amongst people create, maintain or destroy "reality" anew each moment, and organizational change results from changing the on-going organizational conversations and implicit social agreements about what is right and possible. Diverse and

marginalized perspectives are included to disrupt established narratives and stimulate creative, generative possibilities. Since people act on how they make meaning out of their experience, and everyone creates they own experience, what emerges in any interaction is not fully predictable. The emergence of transformational outcomes can be intended and encouraged, but not pre-planned.

Role of Leaders. In planned change leaders are predominately problem and performance oriented (Bushe and Marshak, 2016). When partnering with an OD consultant they are open to ideas and inputs but usually maintain a directive role regarding specifying change outcomes and to a degree sanctioning change methods. They often assume the mantle of a visionary leader who analyzes and advocates for their desired outcome(s) with the help of a consultant. In generative change the leader acknowledges uncertainty about the complexity of the situation and his or her ability to analyze or direct effective actions. Instead the leader supports methods that encourage those who will have to change to identify and act on local innovations and learn as they go (Bushe & Nagaishi, 2018). The leader therefore becomes supportive of engaging a diversity of actors in ways that sanction and encourage innovation. The leader may set boundaries (such as time and cost) to delimit the full range of possibilities to some degree, but avoids the directive role. Once new possibilities are identified the leader then endorses, provides resources to support, and otherwise advances the most promising possibilities.

Outcomes. Especially in its early decades planned change in OD, as described in the leading texts of that period, was intended to resolve problems or achieve a desired state. Following Lewinian thinking about force fields and refreezing changes, planned change approaches also explicitly or implicitly sought to comprehensively understand a situation and then develop an intervention approach that would lead to a lasting "solution". In the generative change approach, being able to comprehensively understand/diagnose a situation and seek a lasting solution does not make sense. Instead the approach is to bring diverse and marginalized perspectives together in ways that facilitate or encourage the emergence of agreed upon adaptive actions that are the best option in the moment knowing that organizing is a continuous iterative process of adaptation (Bushe and Marshak, 2018).

Use When. At this point in time practitioners are using intervention approaches mainly based on one or the other change practice with aspects of the other approach perhaps included in some way. For example, a data-feedback, diagnosis-driven, team building intervention that might include some creativity activities. This makes it difficult to categorically assert which practice is being employed and when one approach might be better than the other. Most important of course is for practitioners to understand the premises and logic of whatever approach they are taking and why, besides personal preference, they wish to use it. The logics of the two change theories as presented here, however, suggest that OD planned change practices may be more applicable for addressing situations that are less complex,

where cause-effect relationships can be predicted and where there are established methods for seeking to realize established outcomes. Generative OD change practices might be more applicable in complex contexts where cause-effect relationships are uncertain and unpredictable, and only knowable in retrospect. The thoughts and reactions of potential client leaders is also a major consideration. Planned change might be more appealing and less anxiety-inducing to leaders wanting more assurances that an intervention approach will guarantee the desired outcome (Marshak, 2016). Generative change might be appealing to a change leader facing an intractable wicked-problem knowing that current thinking and approaches have not worked and who is willing to pursue an innovation-oriented rather than engineering approach.

Concluding Comments

The purpose of this article is threefold. First is to attempt to delineate two theories of change that are currently underlying intervention approaches used by OD practitioners. One emerged during the origins of the field and is based on premises that assert that changes can be planned or engineered. The other emerged from more recent theories and premises that assert changes can be intended and encouraged, but not planned in the sense of being able to control and act on social situations.

Second is to stimulate the thinking, texts, and teaching within the OD community to recognize and articulate models of change that are effective, but don't adhere to the traditional Lewinian planned change model. This might also encourage further

development and innovations regarding these approaches, and perhaps other approaches appropriate to even more chaotic and disordered situations.

A third purpose is to stimulate the thinking of practitioners who currently may be using one, both, or a combination of these two theories of change in their practices. Greater clarity about the underlying premises of whatever change practices are being used or offered might help consultants to be more effective in their practices and more clearly and confidently explain to an anxious client why a particular intervention approach is being suggested.

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