

This is not your typical Organization Development (OD) book. It brings together 20 international academics and practitioners who are engaged in new ways of seeing and doing OD that are different to traditional diagnostic approaches and recognize its complexity. Dialogic OD embraces a social constructionist philosophy to frame organizations as emerging systems of meaning making in talk, multiply understood and co-produced. Within Dialogic OD, consultants and clients engage in collaborative inquiry – which emphasizes relationships, the need to include diverse voices, and to pay attention to how language works in often taken-for-granted ways to support and/or undermine change processes. It is, as Bushe and Marshak emphasize, a mindset that incorporates the use of many dialogic methods.

After historically situating the conventional Diagnostic and the emerging Dialogic forms of OD, the reader is taken thoughtfully through the assumptions underlying the latter, from social constructionist (Barrett), discourse-based (Marshak, Grant and Floris), and complexity theory (Holman, Stacey) perspectives. Engaging with these assumptions is crucial in understanding the shift in thinking and acting required to generate change and learning within this approach. This shift is underpinned by two main integrating threads that run throughout the book: dialogue and reflective practice. The first emphasizes how care-ful conversations can produce useful and actionable knowledge. Barge, for example, explores how co-inquirers can develop a dialogic sensitivity; Storch how to create coherent and convincing narratives; Southern how to craft appropriate questions; and Roehrig, Schwendenwein and Bushe how to amplify new narratives and generative images. The importance of the second integrating thread – reflective practice on the part of clients, coaches (Swart) and consultants – becomes evident as one reads through the book. It is a multi-level practice directed towards the problem, power and politics (e.g., Stacey, Shaw) and the consultant's own assumptions and practices (Goppelt and Ray). In addition to the practical guidelines for contracting for (Averbuch) and conducting Dialogic OD in ways that will lead to generative practice and transformative learning (e.g., Corrigan, Gilpin-Jackson, Gordezky), it is the detailed explication of these two threads that give the book its distinctiveness and credibility.

Dialogic Organization and Development connects the theory and practice worlds through a compelling and accessible explanation of a different way of doing OD, which, as Ed Schein says in the Forward “could not have arrived at a better time”. The book is full of rich resources for existing and potential dialogic OD consultants and researchers. Particularly helpful in contextualizing the skills, models and tools offered, are the vignettes and the many examples used by the authors themselves. It is an interesting and challenging read for those not versed in Dialogic OD, but well worth the journey.

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