Dialogic Organization Development: The Theory and Practice of Transformational Change, edited by Gervase R. Bushe and Robert J. Marshak. 2015. 436 pages, hardback. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler

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Superbly edited by Gervase Bushe and Robert Marshak, the chapters in this book, which introduce *Dialogic OD* into the language of management, are so brilliantly crafted they could have been written by Kurt Lewin himself. By combining old words in new ways, Lewin, the creator of OD, invented the vocabulary of *action research*, *group dynamics*, and what we now call *change management* and the *learning organization*. Before Lewin, no one knew that *action* could also be *research*. Like his counterpart in the United Kingdom, Reg Revans, who invented *action learning*, Lewin insisted that there could be no action without research, and there should be no research without action. Acting is a *method* of researching, said Lewin. Acting is a *method* of learning, added Revans: Don't assume

that learning takes place only inside the ivory tower of a research university, cloistered away from the furious pace of working in business or government.

The term, *Dialogic OD*, coined by Bushe and Marshak, returns us to Kurt Lewin's extraordinary legacy. Seventy years ago, Lewin was doing everything that the editors of this book urge us to do today in Dialogic OD. For example, create *generative images* (Bushe & Marshak, 2015: 101–122): powerful metaphors that have the potential to change minds. After all, who invented the most widely cited metaphor in the applied behavioral sciences: *unfreezing, changing, freezing*? Who but Lewin could have imagined that changing organizational culture might be likened to melting ice? "A book must be an axe for the frozen sea within us," said Kafka. Reading Bushe and Marshak's book hits me like an axe cutting through a frozen sea of conventional wisdom in organizational consulting: First diagnose the problem, say the textbooks, then give your clients data-based advice so they can take informed action. Each author in this book vehemently disagrees with conventional wisdom. Diagnosis *is* action, they insist, and vice-versa. "You can't understand a system unless you try to change it," Lewin said.

Like almost all other Central European intellectuals of his age, Lewin read Kafka closely. Why, I wonder, isn't more Kafka and less structural equation modeling (SEM) taught in business schools? Following Bushe and Marshak's recommendation to create generative images, I'd argue that a few days unpacking the bedbug metaphor in *The Metamorphosis* (Kafka, 2014 translation) are worth more for managers trying to feel alive in death-inducing bureaucracies than trudging through a stream of statistically significant results drawn from the latest SEM research.

METAPHORS EVERYWHERE

At the heart of their book, Bushe and Marshak claim that Dialogic OD consists of three core change processes, each of which involves the creation and application of metaphors of one kind or another. Although they're unsure whether all three core processes are necessary for organizational change to occur, they make a persuasive case that these processes are closely related, perhaps interpenetrating each other.

Change Process 1

"A disruption in the ongoing social construction of reality is stimulated or engaged in a way that leads

to a more complex organization" (Bushe & Marshak, 2015: 20). Let's unpack this key sentence. How do you "disrupt" the data we use to construct reality? What, exactly, is "reality," anyway? At least to my eyes, words like *disrupt* and *reality* are metaphors, just like the word "data," which almost everyone in our field keeps saying is what we need more of. Is "data" really a metaphor? Yes. Etymologically, the word *data* derives from the Latin, *dare*, which means *to give*. Who else but Kurt Lewin could have realized that the "data" in a human experiment can never be objectively measured? But he also divined that data can "give" researchers something very important, something unexpected, even shocking. What might data *give* to researchers? Before answering, let me remind you of a well-known story, included in almost every OD textbook, but twist its meaning just a tad in order for you to get my ultimate point. In 1946, at the famous Interracial Conference in Connecticut, the data "talked back"—to the horror of Lewin's MIT PhD students, all of whom were rigorous researchers who objected to letting any participant enter the debriefing sessions of the cloistered social scientists. "Why not?" laughed Lewin, who enjoyed joking with his students. "Maybe we'll learn something from them about what it is that we're really doing here?" Lewin allowed the "data" to *give feedback* to the researchers about whether they (objective, neutral social scientists) were reading the "data" objectively. The "data," Lewin might have joked in an aside, as he played with its use as a metaphor, could "feed" the PhD researchers' ravenous hunger to create new knowledge and new theories, not to mention publish top-tier journal articles.

Today, best-selling writers in organizational change management, such as Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey (2016) like to attach a host of adjectives to the metaphor of mind: for example, *socialized mind*, *independent mind*, and *self-transforming mind*. Kegan and Lahey are in the business of changing minds. But why, you may be wondering, do I want to insist that *mind* is a *metaphor* rather than an objective reality? Because no scientific instrument exists that can measure the presence or absence of mind. Cognitive science has never proved—and may never be able to prove—the existence of mind (Personal communication, Csaba Pléh, Distinguished Visiting Professor of Cognitive Science, Central European University, Budapest.) I hope this fact shocks you into changing your mind, as it were, about what you assumed to be true about "mind" before you read this review. Did you know that no one has ever heard, seen, touched, smelled, or tasted mind? We know how to change the brain and its neuronal connections quite easily with electric shocks. However, all talk of *changing* mind—whatever or wherever *mind* is—is metaphorical. In other words, it's *all talk*, just like this review and every single article appearing in the peer-reviewed pages of this journal.

Moreover, the statistical language we take for granted in our data-drenched, top-tier management journals is chock-full of unacknowledged metaphors. Allow me to unpack a few of these metaphors for you. *Statistical significance*. Isn't "significance" a metaphor rather than an objective fact? Meaning can be created only by human beings, not by following an arbitrary cut-off point established almost a century ago by Sir Ronald Fisher. *Standard error*. Is it really an "error" to be far from the mean (French: *moyen*, average or "of the middle")? What about artists, poets, clowns, deviants, and disruptors of the organizational status quo, like Steve Jobs? *95% level of confidence*. How did a mental term like "confidence" get entangled with an objectively calculated mathematical formula? What, exactly, is wrong with using an 85% confidence level? Are you really that much more secure in your research results if you reject the null hypothesis with 95% confidence as opposed to 85% confidence? *Linear regression*. How many human phenomena, other than some of Sir Francis Galton's examples, are linear? Isn't submitting an article that employs linear structural equation modeling often an unconscious way for us to tell a highly complex, *nonlinear story* through a highly complex set of *linear equations* for the purpose of persuading our skeptical peer reviewers that we have found an objective, scientific way to generalize about highly unpredictable human beings, like ourselves and our students? Should anyone who doesn't fit into our equations really be considered an example of unexplained *variance*? Why not call these "outliers" unexplained *creativity*?

In playing a variety of language games in their respective chapters, all the authors in this book, most of whom are PhDs working in academia, are seeking in one way or another to get their readers more curious about two eye-opening questions: (1) Shouldn't we be studying the most successful weirdos in our organizations, rather than always rounding up the usual suspects?, and (2) If we did so, wouldn't we have to find new research methods other than linear regression or SEM to study the rare or even unique?

Having spent 25 years as a social science research analyst at the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in Washington DC before getting my PhD in

management, I always thought that statisticians have way too much confidence in confidence intervals. Maybe we should be paying more attention to the tails of distributions, and search for black swans instead of averages? To research the unique (and often weird) in any organization, perhaps we might make art appreciation, poetry, music, and dance required courses for MBAs, especially those studying *au courant* subjects like Big Data? Based on the continuing economic crisis, new thinking in finance is more important than ever. What about looking more closely at Small Data like $n = 1$, where "1" = Lehman Brothers. To do so, we would have to start teaching more business history in the B-School, because history is about stories that can be narrated, not solved like an equation. By the way, what is it about the intellectual history of the rhetoric of finance that allowed economists, who supposedly care only about equations, to come up with such seductive metaphors as *efficient frontier* (the core of modern portfolio theory); *generating alpha* (earning more on an asset than the expected return); and, my all-time favorite, *liquidity* (turning assets into quick cash)? These metaphors make piles of money for shrewd investment consultants who seem to enjoy throwing verbal sand into the eyes of their often vulnerable clients. I have often wondered: Shouldn't every finance course in the B-School be co-taught with a professor from the English Department so that the subtleties of the finance narrative can be continually deconstructed and reconstructed for our students before they go into investment banking and unintentionally cause another monstrous financial crash?

Change Process 2

"A change to one or more core narratives takes place" (Bushe & Marshak, 1995: 22). Scripting a "core narrative" is merely a fancy way of saying that we intend to talk intensely to an individual, team, organization, or society. Why do we want to talk to them? Because we want to *change their minds*. A narrative is a form of propaganda, and vice-versa, as Ed Schein showed decades ago in his brilliant studies of the brainwashing of Americans captured in Korea. In terms of ethics, there are narratives that promote evil (Hitler's table talks and how he acted on his murderous intentions) and those that promote justice (Pope Francis's denunciation of pedophiliac priests in the Church by naming and shaming the evildoers). Composing a narrative is the beginning of a present or future

conversation. Who else but Kurt Lewin could have been the first to notice that conversations "are continuously created, sustained, and changed through narratives" (Bushe & Marshak, 2015: 25)? There is no stronger testament to the power of narrative in conversation than the T-group, which Carl Rogers, as Ed Schein observes in his masterful foreword to Bushe and Marshak's book (2015), reportedly said was "the most important social invention of the 20th century" (p. viii). The conversation in a T-group, if facilitated skillfully, transforms every participant profoundly, *including the facilitators*. Anyone who has ever participated in a T-group facilitated by a gifted process consultant such as Esther Hamilton, Bill Torbert, or Bill Van Buskirk at the Organizational Behavior Teaching Conference (OBTC) has seen this magical process unfold before their own eyes. Change happens when new words seep into our vocabularies, or when old ones get redefined. When Dick Beckhard and Herb Shepherd named *organization development* they changed the world of management thought forever, even though managers (and far too many management professors) continue to act as if language can be treated as a tool of communication rather than as a creative act of meaning-making—of seeing the world with new eyes. Who knew that organizations could *develop*—from French, *développer*, to "unfold" or "unfurl"—like an old style photograph developing out of its chemical base?

Change Process 3

"A generative image is introduced or surfaces that provides new and compelling alternatives for thinking and acting" (Bushe & Marshak, 2015: 23). Notice that "introducing" an image is a metaphor, just as "surfacing" an image is a metaphor. Or, using a better metaphor, fostering organizational change by an OD consultant means *holding a space* (whatever this metaphor might mean literally) to help others learn how to learn, unlearn, and relearn, as Otto Rank, creator of the first theory of *unlearning as a way of being*, was the first to notice (Kramer, 2012).

Dialogic Organization Development: Exemplary Contributions

There are many remarkable contributions to this book. As an example, Peggy Holman's stunning chapter, Complexity, Self-Organization, and Emergence (123–150), shows why linear thinking is not just a metaphor but, literally, absurd. Can thinking,

which baffles neuroscience, ever be *linear*? Do you ever think in straight lines? Or curved lines? And exactly how do your thoughts, whether linear, nonlinear, or something else, emerge from a three-pound mass of flesh? Unlike your brain, with its 100 billion neurons and trillions of neuronal connections, a thought has no mass, electrical charge, or extension. In his chapter Understanding Organizations as Complex Responses (151–176), Ralph Stacey artfully elucidates "a theory of organization that focuses attention on our actual bodily lived experience of working in organizations—that is, what we as human beings are actually doing as we go about our ordinary everyday activities at work" (p. 151). Why doesn't every B-School include *managerial experience of the body* in its curriculum? Is it perhaps because the body, not the brain, seems to be the site of emotional experience? Feelings are not a subject most professors of finance or B-School deans, among many others in the academy, are especially comfortable with.

Chapters by J. Kevin Barge, Jacob Storch, Tova Auerbach, Yabome Gilpin-Jackson, Chris Corrigan; Ray Gordezky, coauthors Michael J. Roehrig, Joachim Schwendenwein, and Gervase Bushe, and Chené Swart include a wealth of practical insights and valuable tips regarding actually *doing* Dialogic OD. These authors "walk the talk, rather than stumble the mumble," as my mentor Peter B. Vaill (1989, 1996)—author of two books whose titles contain metaphors, *Managing As a Performing Art* and *Learning As a Way of Being*—always liked to say. Vaill, the poet laureate of management, also was the first to use the metaphor *permanent white water* to capture the experience of continual change in organizations.

In a work of such richness, I hesitate to single out individual authors, but I feel compelled to draw attention to two more contributions. Nancy Southern's chapter, Framing Inquiry: The Art of Engaging Great Questions, (269–290) offers a text deceptively easy to read but one that may require years of reflection on how to actually do what she wants us to do: engage great questions (what a beautiful metaphor: to *engage* a question!). In my experience, only Ed Schein's (2013) slender book, *Humble Inquiry*, the product of a lifetime of thinking and feeling, teaching and consulting, shines brighter than Southern's gem. Allow me to quote one great question posed by Southern that almost every university department of management member might profitably ask him- or herself at a faculty meeting at least once a year: "Why do we continue working in ways that no longer serve us, our customers, and our community? " (Bushe & Marshak: 282).

Another chapter, coauthored by Joan Goppelt and Keith W. Ray, with commentary by Patricia Shaw, Dialogic Process Consultation: Working Live (371–400), is in itself written as a *bricolage*—"creative coconstruction with whatever materials come to hand" (Patricial Shaw's comment: 392)—the very same process that that the chapter's authors recommend for consultants who want to help organizations change.

With their book, Bushe and Marshak clearly intend to promote, extend, and deepen the metaphorical process of *consciousness raising* in the hyperspecialized and siloed academic fields of management and OD theorizing. The title of Stephen R. Barley's (2016) 60th anniversary essay in *Administrative Science Quarterly* is "Ruminations on How We Became a Mystery House and How We Might Get Out." Feeding this metaphorical challenge is the fact that many of us in the management and business disciplines are now paying a steep price for encouraging so much novelty by tenure-track faculty in order for them to get published in "A-journals" that we have paid little attention to the field's own intellectual history, much less the larger world of the history of ideas. In yet another metaphor, this one with distinct echoes of M. C. Escher, Barley suggests that, as a field, "we might wind up climbing staircases that go nowhere" (2016: 5).

"The notion that we are continuously moving forward along paths we individually and collectively shape gives me pause ... working to have a better future should inherently mean a heightened awareness of our past" (Kenworthy, 2014: 138). Our past has given us this book. It has given us Dialogic OD. For it was the greatest social psychologist of the 20th century, Kurt Lewin, who once upon a time thought up most (if not all) of the ideas and even many of the practices that we will now, over the next decade or so, rightfully be calling Dialogic OD. I recommend that the editors of this book, in their second edition, ask themselves, "How can we honor the legacy of Lewin while continuing to expand on his thoughts as we freeze the change we want people to make in the way they think about OD?" Yes, we now return once again to the seminal metaphor of Lewin, a metaphor that the authors of this book, and all other books devoting to changing thought on a wide scale, will always employ, consciously or unconsciously, until the end of time: *unfreezing, changing, freezing*. And please don't complain about Lewin's metaphor (e.g., "Change can never be frozen; surely we need to update Lewin's creaky old idea for the complexities of the 21st century"). Naturally, we have to remember

that the word *freeze* is used as a metaphor, never to be taken literally.

How Should I Use This Book?

Read it. Read it again. Assign a few chapters (almost any will do) as required reading for MBA students. Then do some action research. Instead of flashing your usual PowerPoint slides on "motivation," or "equity theory" or "transformational leadership" (or whatever), take your MBA students to a poetry reading in the English Department. After the reading, ask them to compare and contrast what they learned about how poets use language with how language is used by their favorite management scholar—including any of the contributors to this book. Listen carefully to your students' feedback. Allow the "data" to talk back to you. You will hear a lot of metaphors … "Sorry, Professor, it really *sucked*" … "Wow, poetry in a management course. I *love it*" … "You know, I have to tell you, I just *don't get it*" … "Professor, I think the poems *went over my head*" … "Will you *cover this material* in your next lecture?" And so forth… Respond in whatever words or images or grunts that come to you. This friendly exchange with your students—many will be bewildered, a few thrilled—is a sign that you are engaging in some form of *Dialogic OD*, which is exactly what Bushe and Marshak and the other authors of this book would encourage you to do.

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