Changing Culture through Conversations

The theory and practice of Dialogic Organisation Development

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Pressing Questions......

How can we co-create organisational cultures in which compassionate attitudes and behaviours are the norm?

Where can we find the wisdom we need at this time?

What ways of working and relating will support continuous culture development?
Framing Questions

How does conversation change organisational cultures?

What are the current trends in Organisation Development (OD) theory and practice?

How can we create spaces in which conversation can be used intentionally within organisational contexts?

How do we develop the skills to operate effectively as a Dialogic OD consultant (or any other type of consultant)?

Session Outcomes.....

- Distinguish between Diagnostic and Dialogic Organisation Development
- Understand the values and assumptions unpinning OD work
- Connect conversational practices with culture change
- Review your approach to developing OD capability
Organisation Development (OD) as we have traditionally known it....... 

‘OD is an effort planned, organisation-wide and managed from the top to increase organisation effectiveness and health through planned interventions in the organisations processes using behavioural science knowledge.’  
(Beckhard 1969)

And a more recent definition........ 

‘A field of knowledge to guide the development of organisation effectiveness, especially during change.’  
(Cheung-Judge and Holbeche 2012)
OD’s original core assumptions

1. Systems theory- a set of elements standing in interaction (Von Bertalanffy 1950)

2. Action Research Theory- a process of diagnosing, planning, action taking and evaluating—spiral steps (Lewin 1947)

3. Field Theory, Group Dynamics and 3 step model of change (Lewin 1947)
Under-pinning values

- Democracy and participation
- Openness to lifelong learning and experimentation
- Equity and Fairness—the value of every individual
- Valid information and informed choice
- Enduring respect for the human side of enterprise

(Cheung-Judge and Holbeche 2012: 19)

Why move from Diagnostic OD to Dialogic OD?

- Linearity to Complexity
- Organisational to System
- ‘Machine’ Metaphor to ‘Living Human Systems’ Metaphor
- Problems to Strengths
- Solutions to Inquiry
- Slow to Rapid
- Critical Realism / Social Constructionism
Two more recent core assumptions

1. Social Constructionism - our realities are co-created by our interactions (Gergen 1997)

2. Complexity theory - living in an uncertain environment (Stacey et al 2002)

Manorfield Primary School – a Dialogic OD Case Study
February 2012-Inspection

‘Achievement is inadequate’

‘Teaching is inadequate overall’

‘The leadership and the management of the school are inadequate’

‘Take urgent action…………..’

But ...... ‘The school is a harmonious community in which pupils feel safe.’

(Ofsted Report 2012)

My first conversation with the client

Conversation is a meeting of minds with different memories and habits. When minds meet, they don’t just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought. Conversation doesn’t just reshuffle the cards: it creates new cards. (Zeldin 2000)

An experience between two or more people who, through the expression of thoughts and feelings, create of new ideas, perspectives and understandings. (Cantore 2004)
Listening, speaking and searching

‘….. where we each have a chance to speak, we each feel heard and we each listen well.’ and........

‘Human conversation is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate the conditions for change-personal change, community and organisational change’

(Margaret Wheatley 2009:3)

‘Truth is not born nor is it found inside the head of an individual person it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction.’

(Bakhtin 1984:110)

Conversational (Dialogical) Consulting

• A contracted, helping relationship through which people skilled and knowledgeable in conversation as a change process work with clients to create conversations that make a positive difference to businesses/organisations.

Or

• A contracted inquiry relationship, through which client and consultant learn, how to enable the social construction of new organisational and system realities through dialogic processes.

(Cantore 2014)
Wendy asks how we can enable...

- Full staff involvement in the change process
- A ‘coaching culture’
- Empowered and distributed leadership
- Rapid culture change
- Dramatic and quick improvement in student achievement
- A strengths-based approach to change?

What could I offer?

Dialogic Organisation Development (OD)

- The change process emphasizes changing the conversations that normally take place in the system.
- The purpose of inquiry is to surface, legitimate, and/or learn from the variety of perspectives, cultures, and/or narratives in the system.
- The change process results in new images, narratives, texts, and socially constructed realities that affect how people think and act.
- The change process is consistent with traditional organization development values of collaboration, free and informed choice, and capacity building in the client system’.

(Bushe G. and Marshak R.2009:15)
Dialogic Organisation Development

1. Sponsors and change agents identify concerns driving change
   - Reframe it in a future orientated and possibility centred way
   - Plan conversational processes

2. Community conversational processes
   - Generative images to spark new insights and energy

3. Individuals and groups think and talk in new ways
   - People make new choices

Three key components of Dialogic OD

- Future Orientation
  - What is possible?

- Conversations leading to generative images

- New choices, attitudes, behaviours and conversations
Social Constructionist underpinnings

- Meaning and understanding are central to human activity
- Ways of meaning making are embedded in social-cultural processes and are specific to particular times and places
- People are self-defining and socially constructed participants in their shared lives
- A critical perspective on what is assumed to be reality is appropriate.
- There is a desire to inquire into understanding human nature-what is happening between us all.

(After Lock and Strong 2010)

Theoretical Framework

Philosophical underpinnings:
- Karl Marx
- Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann
- Kenneth Gergen

Application to practice:
- David Cooperrider
- Patricia Shaw
- Gervase Bushe and Robert Marshak
Co-creating spaces for conversation

July 2013 - Another Inspection!

‘Highly effective teaching’
‘Pupils making rapid progress’
‘Quality of leadership and management at all levels is outstanding’
‘The school does not stand still. Improvement is not temporary’

(Ofsted Report 2013)
Developing Dialogic Consulting Skills

Individual Development

Collaborative Inquiry

Inquiry with Clients

Resources to support practice

- http://www.theworldcafe.com/
- http://www.artofhosting.org/home/
- http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/
- http://www.openspaceworld.org/
- http://www.sapere.org.uk/
- http://www.peerspirit.com/

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- CANTORE, S. and HICK, W. (2012) 'Dialogic OD in Practice :Conversational Approaches to Change in a UK Primary School ' OD Practitioner 45 (1), 5-10

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Thank You