

The attached seminar paper by Rob R. Lipski, entitled “Reframing the Narrative: The Dialogic Mindset within Leadership Performance”, when completed, is to be submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Wisconsin - Platteville in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science in Organizational Change Leadership degree is hereby:

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Dr. Derek Dachelet, Advisor

# REFRAMING THE NARRATIVE

## Reframing the Narrative: The Dialogic Mindset within Leadership Performance

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Rob R. Lipski

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Rob

## Reframing the Narrative: The Dialogic Mindset within Leadership Performance

Rob R. Lipski

Under the supervision of Dr. Derek Dachelet

### **ABSTRACT**

Research has shown that organizations operate in a complex and dynamic space. A constant pressure to perform at a high level, return appropriate value to shareholders and outrun the competitive landscape are at the forefront of the priorities to execute within Executive leadership teams. These leadership teams understand there is a continual need for change and change adoption within their organizations. At times, the urgency placed upon rendering tangible results can narrow a well-rounded perspective or intent and repeatedly manifest it in an autocratic manner regardless of espoused values. They can turn from the cadence of productive and necessary dialogue to premature installation of operational parameters.

When the planning and/or implementation of change initiatives routinely pivot towards a compliance timeline it can have an eventual counterproductive effect. While initial results may spike, resistance can grow over time and alignment can elongate. Layering additional efforts on top of poorly rooted foundational efforts can have negative consequences on the culture of an organization which may then lead to unexpected down-trending performance. The choice to adopt a singular diagnostic mindset may ultimately prove to be the rationale of why cultural adoption did not progress as efficiently as possible. The cost of the necessitated reentry or restart

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may outrun the original cost concerns associated with the choice to move away from dialogic theory.

This paper explores necessary foundational perspectives of organizational change. A review of transformational change and crucial components of change within organizations is also included. Additionally, a review of potential leadership application with intent to better connect the gap between strategic and tactical application is incorporated. Overall, this work posits the notion that in order to ultimately render maximized results over time - organizations would be best served by embracing an agile and situationally balanced approach.

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### INTRODUCTION

Organizations today reside in an environment characterized by accelerating complexity (De Meuse, Dai, & Hallenbeck, 2010). Executives have routinely had to make short and long-term decisions in consideration of return on investment (ROI). Increased competition and a globally dynamic marketplace have accelerated the need to change repeatedly and at times continually. Urgency tends to be defaulted to the paramount need. Additionally, change initiatives are costly, even more so in consideration of the rate of failure. Debate exists around what the actual failure rate is as well as the context for measurement. In a recent study of 1,546 business Executives from around the world (Keller & Aiken, 2009), each were asked if they consider their change programs "completely/mostly" successful: only 30 percent agreed.

A failed or necessitated reentry can have significant monetized and morale-based consequences. In those instances, timelines are elongated and alternate or connected projects and their associated resources are affected and/or potentially reallocated. Seemingly out of that urgent necessity to perform well, many hierarchical companies default to a diagnostic approach and performance mindset. From this perspective, dialogic processes can appear to be of questionable value as they focus on engaging people in reflection and interaction, rely on self-organizing processes and emergence, and seek to achieve desired outcomes by "changing the conversation" (Bushe & Marshak, 2016, p.41). It is in opposition of this thought logic that executive leaders may dismiss these processes.

A focus on strategic nimbleness and the ability to pivot tactically have become necessary components of forward planning. A significant amount of readily available research has highlighted the cost and frequency of failed change management initiatives. It is a curious notion

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that more Executives that demonstrate a pension for systems thinking, decision making and managing risk have not attributed more credence to a more dialogic or blended mindset.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Based on perceived cost, time concerns and complexity, Executives may dismiss dialogic based approaches regarding change initiatives. These dismissals may prove costly as change adoption can elongate or even fail when an overall understanding of what, why and how is limited or is improperly digested by the end-user.

### **Significance of the Study**

To be sustainably successful, organizations have to manage learning as well as performing (Bushe & Marshak, 2016). This paper recognizes that diagnostic and dialogic mindsets are unique applications although in an ever-increasing world of complexity both can be considered and situationally applied. Logic as such can lead to increases in adoption, engagement and overall improved performance. The uppermost thresholds of quantified research posit that approximately 70% (McKinsey, 2017) of formalized change initiatives fail outright or require reentry. However, often overlooked in this debate is that a separate body of research suggests that adopting dialogic practices correlate with far higher probabilities (greater than 80%) of success (Higgs & Rowland, 2011).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to provide support for the consideration of a widened adoption of the dialogic mindset within traditionally diagnostic performance mindset guided companies. Additionally, this provides a framework of application to support change through a

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blended, spectrum-based leadership perspective derived from a generative image that can be applied based on urgency and complexity to better guide problem solving.

### **Delimitations of Research**

This paper is focused on fundamentals of Organizational Change, Diagnostic Organizational Development (OD), the directionality towards an openness to Dialogic OD and their related impact on transformational change and leadership technique. While each concept offers benefits, the research applied does not surmise what is ultimately the best practice to adopt but, rather focused on improving understanding and opportunity for application. Additionally, the effects of real and inferred power, culture and communication cascade technique was given consideration. Peer reviewed articles and credible journal submissions over the last fifty years were considered with prioritization of the last twenty years. Select books were also considered to better grasp the evolutionary context. Search terms such as: Dialogic, Diagnostic, Mindset, Power Distance Index, Generative Image, Change Management, Leadership, Command and Control, Servant Leadership were applied. JSTOR Arts and Sciences VII, ABI/INFORM Collection, Business Premium Collection, Business Source Premier, DOAJ Directory of Open Access Journals and EBSCOhost Academic Search Premier were the primary search tools utilized.

### **Method of Approach**

A limited review of the history of Diagnostic OD and the evolution of the Dialogic Mindset (1900s-present) was completed. The review encompassed literature, research and case studies regarding the foundational tenets of Organizational Change, Diagnostic OD and the conception/evolution of the Dialogic Mindset and applications thereof. An additional, selective review of literature related to leadership application was also conducted. The Elton S. Karrmann

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Library and the available connected resources made available by the University of Wisconsin-Platteville served as the primary hub of information.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Organizations are comprised of complex combinations of processes and personal viewpoints. Many viewpoints exist in consideration of systems, models and application. The exploration of reference material sought to review perspectives and transformation pertinent to organizational change. Additionally, key components of the change process as well as select leadership techniques are examined.

#### **Foundational Perspective of Organizational Change**

##### **Characteristics of Change**

Organizations can be an exceedingly complex sum of interconnected parts and processes. Some parts are strongly and logically connected and others serve in a paradoxical sense. The culmination of these components ultimately generates an output that are then quantified as results. Results or the lack of what was expected tend to be a strong reactionary point of origin for Organizational Change. If one accepts the premises that an organization may be complex; the ability of the organization to alter itself internally to deliver an alternate result follows logically to be complex as well. This alteration or change often can be daunting to begin and potentially more challenging to root and sustain for both leadership and employees. Change events often have many parts in flight concurrently. The path forward, the scale of the disruption and potential alignment will all affect the ability of the organization to temper the turbidity of the goal. Organization change is a kind of chaos (Gleick, 1987). While change can in fact be chaotic, patterns can be discerned across organizations. Practitioners have created a plethora of models to

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assist in bringing guidance to organizations by establishing distinctions of change and organization. It is hard to think about a general model of organizational change without a general model of organization (Nadler & Tushman, 1980).

Schwartz (2012) demonstrated organizations and their respective leadership spend an inordinate amount of time planning for execution in the present, for the near term and planning for the future state. Yet, organizations find themselves needing to alter strategy because of internal and/or external forces. Once realized or forced to, many organizations set upon the journey of planning for their new future and their needed change. Higgs & Rowland (2011) explained documentation exists stating that many change efforts fail, and their futures are not realized as they had planned. Although, it generally is not the lack of planning that causes the failure but a mindset where environmental control is assumptive. In effect, the reach of planning exceeds its grasp (Crossan, Lane, White & Klus, 1996). Power exists in the rigidity of planning and it is critical to change but, conditions exist where spontaneity or nimbleness of open thought is of necessitated value.

Accepted Organizational Change literature designates first-order and second-order change. First-order change consists of “incremental modifications that make sense within an established framework or method of operating,” and second-order change is defined as transformational changes that “are modifications in the frameworks themselves” (Bartunek & Moch, 1987, p. 484). While there is a difference in scope or magnitude of change in these specific orders, organizations still need to be mindful of the interconnectedness of the individual to the method or framework.

Kotter (1996) posited organizations that embrace and are successful at change processes focus on the foundational tenets of what is most pertinent to their end goal. The belief systems

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within the organization prioritize the removal of nonvalue added issues or processes. Issues of continuity are associated with the concept of organizational culture (Trice & Beyer 1993). While an overt culture of constant change can be problematic, one that is grounded in its core values can potentially more effectively transition as needed vs the organization who boasts employees who simply have become superficially “good at change”.

### **Systems Theory**

General systems theory has been proposed as a basis for the unification of science (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972). Large-scale efforts of transformation tend to utilize systems theory more prevalently. In incremental change initiatives, Executive leadership can drive, replace or deploy alternate processes within a silo or more broadly in the company without a dependency on additional support. Wide-scale change incorporates leadership and sponsorship throughout levels of organizations focusing on the interconnectedness. George Bertalanffy (1901) is credited with the early general systems theory work that focused on interconnectivity of organisms in natural systems vs. focusing solely on isolated views. Katz and Kahn (1966) were among the first to adapt this perspective to organizational theory. System theorists refer to these systems as “open” versus “closed” because the system is interconnected with its environments (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972). Open systems thinking is the process of considering how people, processes, structures, and policies all exist in an interconnected web of relationships (Anderson, 2019).

The Open Systems Model has stimulated many new conceptualizations in organization theory and management practice (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972). Open theory allows consideration for the behavior of the employees on a collective level. The ability to evaluate patterns or behaviors of specific groups allow a clarified view of culture. Additionally, the theory can produce a less ambiguous target concerning entry to the intervention phase of change. While the

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individual is important to the system it should be noted that training of the individual should not be a primary focus. Rather attention towards the function of the system should be prioritized.

### **Social Constructions**

Organizations are often given a literal construct. People not only work for them but, they also work in them. Classical organizational theory actually considered organizations to be “living things” with “a concrete social environment, a formal structure, recognized goals, and a variety of needs” (Wolf, 1958, p. 14). The view of organizations as socially constructed differs sharply from the systems theory perspective in many respects (Anderson, 2019). Instead of an assumed agreement of the self-evident inputs and processes, it credits the members of the organization with giving them meaning.

The Social Construction perspective focuses on the complexities and nuances of the scenarios instead of pointing towards a singular manufactured impact. This construct focuses perspective toward the process of sensemaking, which is cultural. Employees are can assume a creational ability concerning change such as departmental restructuring or adapting a best practice. In a sense they have the capacity to discuss events into reality. The comprehension of meaning in organizations are found in its language and history vs. crafted messaging. Events such as title changes or renaming of processes will not necessarily translate into change without the buy-in of the employees. Consequently, the approach assumes that change can best be accomplished when organizational members have the opportunity to work together to define new practices (Weick, 1995). A narrative approach has particular relevance to studies of sensemaking and change, since it enables us to search out the multiple and often conflicting meanings around change that research rarely surfaces, yet are significant to understanding how change unfolds (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

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Various approaches towards organizational change exist. Appreciative inquiry, Large Group Interventions and Action Research are utilized frequently in the change process in organizations. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2011). The AI approach veers away from traditional problem solving and focus on existing positive outcomes. It takes the focus off dwelling on the known issues or negative culture and works toward what is possible. AI suggests that human organizing and change, at its best, is a relational process of inquiry grounded in affirmation and appreciation (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). AI, as a philosophy and process that is based on what is positive and that is applied through collaboration, may provide a paradigmatically different point of departure (Van Vuuron & Crous, 2005). What should be made clear is that there is a possibility to misconstrue focusing on the positives. While a focus away from specific problem solving can be refreshing it does not necessarily equate to an innate focus on positivity. AI is about the generative, not the positive (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). The generative output can be fueled by positive experiences but may indeed be wholly new ideas. A focus on what is possible could have a motivational energy that can allow an organization to gain cultural traction away from negativity.

Large Group Interventions are change methods for involving the “whole system” internal and external to the organization in an organizational change process (Bunker & Alban, 1997). Large group interventions are an important method of organization change (Worley, Mohrman & Nevitt, 2011). For approaches to be more successful they logically require many stakeholders at multiple levels to accept and adopt change. The intent is future focused as well. While there may be smaller breakout groups that consider specific future possibilities or ideas, ultimately the process is connected in its entirety. This approach being highly participative in nature may

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minimize resistance. Large group processes provide ways for a system to understand its history and its current reality while channeling its energy on its preferred future. Although, danger may present if select individuals or small factions are allowed group dominance thusly silencing potential alternate thought streams of the vocally introverted participants. Also, the approach must be mindful of a potential decrease in momentum post event if the ideas generated are then not phased forward in a timely manner.

Action Research has come to be understood as a global family of related approaches that integrates theory and practice with a goal of addressing important organizational, community, and social issues together with those who experience them (Bradbury, 2015). The process contends that change is the result of the augmentation of attitudes and applied research of the problem(s). A diagnosis of the issues commences and supporting interventions are applied. In this paired model an open systems methodology is utilized (Bradbury, 2015). Dissenting opinion exists as to if in the context of business or management that it may fail to realize its potential for actionable knowledge. As Shani and Bushe (1987) point out, accounts of action research have undoubtedly been useful for practitioners, but they have often failed to address the intricacies of generating valid knowledge (Coghlan & Shani, 2013).

### **Transformational Change**

Transformation has become a key survival tool for organizations coping with the turbulence that characterizes today's environment. (Nutt & Backoff, 1997). Because organizations are human systems, the success of any transformation effort lies in the people who are tasked to implement changes (Hechanova & Cementina-Olpoc, 2012). Logic follows that human behavior that models alignment to the change, purposeful demonstration of support and

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assisting in the rooting of change is critical to the overall transformation effort. A myriad of influences affects the capacity for the needed behavior. Internal factors such as perceived organizational support, established values and appropriately crafted communication culture is all relevant. Leadership is conceptually tied to change in many organizations. Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles (Kotter, 1996). The summation and application of these concepts have been termed as Transformational Leadership by certain practitioners.

Leadership scholars have studied organizational change from both conceptual and process perspectives (Latta, 2009). Conceptual approaches focus on the antecedents and consequences of change (the "what"); process views address roles and strategies required for implementation (the "how") (Burke, 2008). Process models are more focused on the implementation components whereas conceptual models key in on strategy and the related perceptions that may affect the change.

### **Modeling**

The Kurt Lewin's model (unfreezing, changing and refreezing) is widely accepted in psychology for implementing change (Hussain, Akram, Haider, Hussain, & Ali, 2018). In a similar form, the Burke-Litwin model illustrates an approach adopted by many process theorists for incorporating organizational culture into models of organizational change (Burke, 2008). Burke's original four-phased model centered on leadership connected to performance. This is combined with a focus on strategic mission with considerations of the external environment, which are the components of cultural factors in this model. Prelaunch, Launch, Postlaunch and Sustainment of change were the tactical components. Leadership introspection and conveying need are central to the model, followed by managing clarity, resistance, navigating new

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challenges and continuation of momentum. The Burke-Litwin model predicts behavior and performance outcomes within a cause-effect paradigm, with cause being organizational conditions and effect being results (Spangenberg & Theron, 2013). This cause-effect model guides both organizational diagnosis and planned, managed change (Martins and Coetzee, 2009). Approaches to organizational change consistent with a social construction perspective look quite different from those explained earlier that are consistent with a systems theory perspective, as they recognize that change is a “messy” and unpredictable phenomenon (Shaw, 1997). Calling these approaches “models,” in the sense that we have just seen, is also misleading because they question the very structures that systems theory assumes (Anderson, 2019).

In Organizational Development the concept of consultancy can be enacted by various players. They could be Executives, managers, actual external consultants or anyone internally that is engaged in the process and attempted implementation. Regarding consultancy and the relationship with the “client” there is a need for an understanding of perceptions and assumptions. Expert, Dr-Patient, Mechanic, and the Organizational Development models while individually unique to each other seek to provide the agent with a deeper understanding of need.

Diagnostically, problem definition and diagnosis transitions into action planning. This is followed by acting, and then evaluating results completes the cycle. While different descriptors exist the basic stages of the approach is a circle of 6 stages: Entry/Contracting, Data Gathering, Diagnosis, Feedback, Intervention and then a Determination for exit or necessitated reentry (Martin & Coetzee, 2009). These steps are fluid and do not close as there may be a need to gather more data or obtain different feedback as new information arises or unanticipated symptoms occur. More recently there has been a convergence into the organizational development realm in the way of social construction. This perspective is contrasting to the

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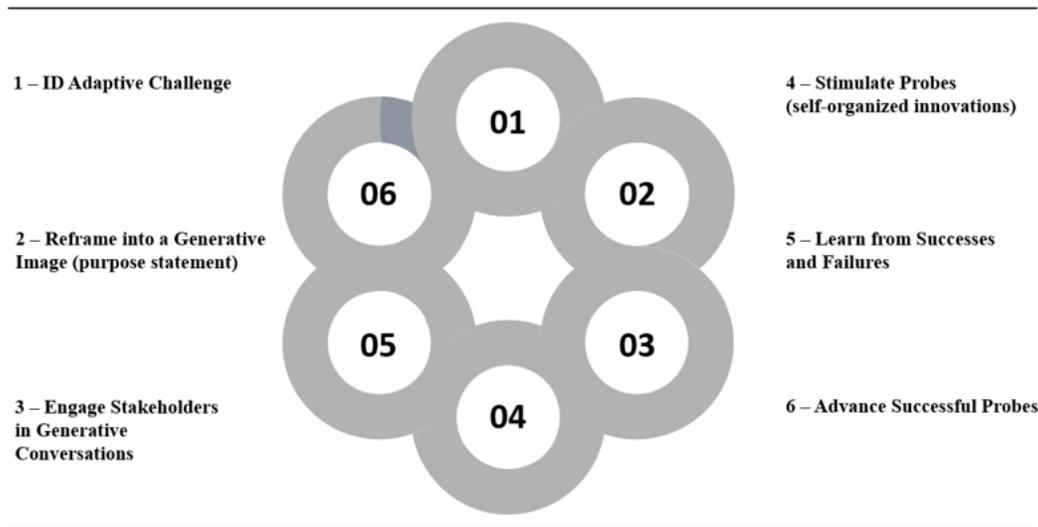
standard 6-step diagnostic approach prevalent in action research and traditional application. This dialogic approach reflects a different underlying philosophical foundation from the diagnostic or classic approach (Anderson, 2019).

This dialogic approach is fundamentally different than the diagnostic approach. What if we were to acknowledge that there is no real single “truth” in the organization and that “there is no way of grasping what is real in a way that somehow steps outside of our discursively shared horizon of meaning” (Hutton & Liefoghe, 2011, p. 79)? In essence, the organizational view of what reality is cannot actually be affirmed. There may be an adopted mindset, but each individual and their related groups ultimately translates what reality is. Dialogic OD is partially based on the combinations of the systems where individuals and groups construct actions socially through prevailing narratives, stories and created histories versus a focus on open systems.

In 2014, Bushe and Marshak designated two stages within the dialogic approach. The first, Generative Change Model, is called the structured approach – referenced in figure 1. The second is called the dialogic process consultation. In the structured approach, leadership is engaged towards the future by holding events based in dialogue. The focus is not literally on the dialogue, but rather the notion that these events are not about predetermined solution or their implementation, it is new. The second stage that they described is “jumping into the flow”. This concept means that not all issues need the planned formality of the first stage. It is possible to enter and encourage an ongoing conversation through the offering of insight as needed. Figure 1 graphically represents the Generative change model.

**Figure 1**

*Model of Generative Change*



Note. Adapted from “Generative Change Model,” by G. Bushe, 2019, Generative leadership development. Canadian Journal of Physician Leadership, 5(3), p. 143. Copyright 2019 by Canadian Journal of Physician Leadership.

### **Diagnostic Approach and The Performance Mindset**

Select scholars give significant credit to Kurt Lewin and Ron Lippitt as well followers such as Leon Festinger towards the development of the Diagnostic OD Mindset based on work completed as early as the 1940’s. Change is conceptualized as a planned process of “unfreezing” a current social equilibrium, creating “movement” to a new and more desirable future equilibrium that then needs to be “refrozen” to sustain the change (Schein, 2015). A Performance Mindset looks at all activities as a means to an end - how they are instrumental to goal setting and achievement, preferably with assurances that they will reliably produce desired outcomes (Bushe & Marshak, 2016). From this perspective, dialogic processes can appear to be of questionable value as they focus on engaging people in reflection and interaction, rely on self-

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organizing processes and emergence, and seek to achieve desired outcomes by "changing the conversation." It's all talk and no action (Marshak, 1998).

Organizational leadership is under constant pressure to perform. In publicly traded companies, the production of increased shareholder value becomes a primary concern. That statement does not serve as vilification, simply an underscore of reality. In top-down organizations, the pressure to perform flows from the Board through the Executive leadership into middle management and ultimately to the ability to execute at the point of customer interaction. Sales and profitability at the company level are a sum result of the ability of each division to perform to standard. An inordinate amount of metrics and measures of productivity are enacted to ultimately deliver the best possible return. While some of those metrics are overt such as location sales some may be more obtuse such as the measurement of an effectiveness of an advertising campaign or sentiment gained through philanthropic efforts. Regardless of platform, the concept that performance matters become espoused. This mindset transitions into leadership. One's ability as a leader is often measured as their ability to render results on paper. To simply quantify more strongly than another in select buckets is an indicator of current competency and future potential. If one cannot render results through their people, they are considered poor performers, potentially failures and/or liabilities. The ability to render those results are culminated by the ability to communicate, connect, sustain and grow all in the shadow of accountability. Stack ranking and the concept of managing outliers become the "go-to" strategy in many customer facing scenarios.

Because of the constant pressure to perform, many in top-down structures default to the diagnostic view and continually apply it. That logic assumes that with the proper leadership the overall company can advance. It is thought of as an open system where everything is related and

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connected. If all areas can perform optimally the company is then at optimum health and can most effectively compete in their respective competitive landscape. It is assumptive in this thought logic that a diagnosis of influences is both possible and necessary. This notion can be an incredibly successful tactic to drive performance in the short-term in consideration of a pyramid structure. When it is constantly and broadly applied to all metrics it has the propensity to be viewed as system abatement and potentially destructive to the overall understanding of why an expectation has been set or more importantly the needed rooting of behavior.

Telling people specifically what to do and how to do it does breed productivity and in some ways aligns with the potential power of role clarity. Those charged with being the tactical application of the Executive leaderships plan could become entrenched in a never-ending circle of the 6 diagnostic steps. This continual transactional approach may inhibit full managerial understanding and may limit potential application of resources to adequately deal with the unexpected results or problems that present during the process. Middle management lacks influence and junior Executives may lack the political clout or power to differently affect the process upwardly. Ultimately, change processes to drive performance elongate and the actual original intent could be lost on the greater audience.

### **Dialogic Mindset – Generative Image and Narrative Comprehension**

A Performance Mindset is not necessarily fully opposed to the Dialogic Mindset. Performance in fact does assume a need for learning. Organizations with dominant leadership tend to perform well against external crisis or normal challenges (Osborne & Hunt, 2007). Inspiration, charisma, storytelling, calls to action from strong figures all can guide an organization towards success. What may become problematic to these environments is when the problem to be solved is not obvious or of a natural process timeline. Long lived billion-dollar

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enterprises have been built on best practices that worked well most of the time, until they simply did not anymore. History is littered with stories of collapses based on the inability to adapt.

The attempt to solve complex issues by continuing to apply a mindset that chooses to not fully consider all parameters is counterproductive. The Performance Mindset knows very little about how to inquire into collective experience in ways that catalyze the emergence of new ideas, processes, and solutions by aligning with and amplifying the untapped wisdom in the organization (Burke & Marshak, 2016). Instructions on how and what to do accompanied by why and when moves the individual towards improved alignment. In the dialogic mindset the company seeks to understand the motivation of why the end user performs or acts as they do. In consideration of the contrasting framework Figure 2 articulates core divergence in the realms of influence, change and stance of consultancy.

**Figure 2**

*Contrasting Framework of OD*

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	<i>Dialogic OD</i>	<i>Diagnostic OD</i>
<b>Influences Reality by:</b>	New awareness, knowledge and possibilities emanate from Social Inquiry	Facts and influences are considered scientifically prior to intervention
<b>Change Involves:</b>	Emergence of new possibilities are created from disruptions of established norms through engagement of stakeholders	Freezing, movement and refreezing of the intended change is applied to manage implementation
<b>Consultancy:</b>	The agent is involved and part of the system process	The agent is neutral

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Note. Adapted from “Contrasting Frames for OD Practice,” by G. Bushe and R. Marshak, 2015, *Dialogic Organizational Development*, p. 37. Copyright 2015 by Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Decades ago, Kenneth Gergen offered a strong contrarian perspective to the scientific approach in relation to understanding human interactions. Gergen pointed out that when we talk about “understanding” we are likely to describe it as “apprehending clearly the character, nature

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or subtleties” of social life (Urdang, quoted in Gergen, 1978, p. 1344). Summarily, this challenge impacted the development of the dialogic OD practice. In comparison to materials regarding dialogic viewpoints, there is currently little written about generative images. The idea of a generative image is similar to that of a metaphor, though not all generative images are metaphors and not all metaphors are generative (Schein, 2015).

Two logical examples that aid in the understanding of generative images are “sustainable development” as well as “global integration”. In prior decades, there were factions that were concerned about either protecting the planet and green spaces and then there were those that were squarely focused on development. The concept of incorporating green spaces and protected areas that could function in conjunction with forward progress was unheard of. Currently, one would be hard-pressed to not see robust commentary and plans about sustainable development in any respectable developers portfolio. At first no one knew what "global integration" really meant, but it served as a generative image (Bushe & Storch, 2015). This idea was generated from a divisional merger where open dialogue was encouraged throughout levels of a company. Individual and group ideas that spanned from strategy to cultural identity were brought forth, which ultimately advanced and brought this notion into reality for them.

Narratives are like storylines that get used to produce accounts that make sense of events (Schein, 2015). Culture, reality and the meaning of events and their grass roots interpretation can differ greatly from an organizational assumption or want. People continually attempt to interpret deeper meanings of events or circumstance and ascribe importance to them. When a strong organizational fit does not exist or a communication cascade is flawed, the intent and message may be reconstructed. Often, people will seek out their peers, friends and family to help assign meaning to a change. Those people rarely have the full picture of the intent or need. Ultimately a

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new reality is brought into existence because of the evolving and reinforced shared viewpoint. As we make meaning of the events and actions of our lives, we weave them together in coherent storylines that end up as “identity conclusions” (White, 2004, p. 31). Prevailing narratives, which explain how things are, are shared by a group of people, help them make sense of their world, and provide a rationale for decisions and actions (Schein, 2015). While this process of identity establishment and intent rationalization is natural it is potentially counterproductive to change efforts if not fully understood.

### **Organizational Change**

#### **Culture**

Organizational culture consists of shared values and assumptions (McShane & Glinow, 2017). Values can be considered as a framework of reference towards preferential outcomes. They intend to be a stabilizing influence within the confines of the organization, as well as points of unification. In consideration of organizational culture, they can mostly define what is right versus wrong contextually. Phrases such as “living our values” is a commonality in organizations striving to be value-based. In these organizations the values are considered shared. Each silo or division can look to their core values to guide policy and procedural mapping.

Within the culture of an organization shared assumptions also exist. The assumptions are notions that are essentially taken for granted during day to day actions concerning thought logic within the employee base. This shared mindset is often not overtly discernable to an outsider without evaluation and comparison of multiple individuals and their associated reactions to scenarios. Select experts believe shared assumptions are the root of internal culture (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

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Companies have both enacted values and espoused values. Espoused values are values that corporate leaders hope will eventually become the organization's culture, or at least the values they want others to believe guide the organization's decisions and actions (Kabanoff & Daly, 2002). Enacted values are what is actually demonstrated and applied. As organizations are made up of individuals that possess diversity of thought and experiences, it is possible that their personal values do not fully match with the company's espoused values. Espoused values tend to be publicly desirable and well received. The development of a strong intended culture could be challenged when leadership does not demonstrate espoused values. This scenario can allow the personal values of select individuals to become the guiding framework if alignment is not sufficient. Often those alternative personal values can become contrarian to the desired future state.

Several models for corporate culture exist. Some of the more frequently used have approximately seven to nine anchors. Alternate models may only have four to five anchors but, with added clarifiers to account for both internal and external optics. These organizational culture models and surveys are popular with corporate leaders faced with the messy business of diagnosing their company's culture and identifying what kind of culture they want to develop (McShane & Glinow, 2017). A common issue in the re-creation, analysis or assumption of what culture is or is not in an organization is that of oversimplification. Individuals have many values, which then produces many more combined versions of values when comingled with others' views in a social context. It is logical that modeling alone may fall short of fully capturing what truly exists. Many companies list many espoused values. It logically follows that each company will then have many more enacted values. Secondarily, it is difficult to measure shared assumptions so a commonality amongst companies is that this collective voice is not sufficiently

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understood. A third concern is that many measures of organizational culture incorrectly assume that organizations have a clear, unified culture that is easily decipherable (Martin, Frost & O'Neill, 2006).

Often when culture is discussed within a company, one is referring to the dominant culture. Regardless of the intent and want of most senior leaders' desire for the dominant culture to be fully saturated, it often is not. Subcultures exist whether a result of history, a divisional perspective or potentially a combination of strong personalities in one sector of the business. The subcultures can support, run parallel or even be considered a counterculture. Leadership can make a mistake by trying to silence voice especially if it is assumed to be contrarian to their espoused values. It is of note that these subcultures can prove valuable in the spaces of mindfulness of actions and the need to evolve.

Shared values and assumptions are not easily measured through surveys and might not be accurately reflected in the organization's values statements (McShane & Glinow, 2017). To obtain the most accurate understanding of a company's culture, their artifacts need to be examined. Artifacts can be robust: emails, written documents, broadcasts, speeches, how visitors are treated, workspace organizations and employees understanding of the stories told by leadership are all examples (Mason & Leek, 2012).

Stories and legends are told and created in companies with the intent to strengthen the current or evolving culture. At times stories are told to underscore the great performance of an area or a leader to connect with an idealized future. Other times they are used to vilify past cultures or scenarios. These stories are intended to create a social construct to what is right or wrong going forward. Organizational stories and legends serve as powerful social overtures of the way things should or should not be done. They can connect a company's expectations to its

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employees and give them a base context for either success or the guardrails of accountability. Stories also produce emotions in listeners, and these emotions tend to improve listeners' memory of the lesson within the story (Deal & Kennedy, 1983). What can be challenging and potentially dangerous towards cultural progress is when an excess of superlative language is used or the actual telling of the history is either intentionally or unintentionally inaccurate. Society is fraught with the rewriting of history; companies should be aware that poorly executed re-creationism may elongate the adoption of espoused values.

Many leaders will point to a strong culture as the root of their success. Some of these ultra-strong cultures have been likened to the demonstration of cult like behaviors, although obviously not in the literal sense (Spector & Lane, 2007). While it seems logical that a strong culture would drive results, it is of note that select conditions do exist. Control systems, social glue and sense making are all involved. Organizational culture is a deeply embedded form of social control that influences employee decisions and behavior (Wiener, 1988). Organizational culture is the social glue that bonds people together and makes them feel part of the organizational experience (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Organizational culture assists employees in processing "the why".

Many experts agree that changing a culture is a monumental undertaking (Howard & Bray, 1988). To that point a select few experts argue that the entire process cannot be fully managed and caution to not waste too much time in this arena alone (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Five basic components are common across industries regarding strategies to change and/or improve culture as shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**

*Core Strategies for Augmenting Organizational Culture*



Note. Adapted from “Strategies for Changing and Strengthening Organizational Culture,” by S. McShane and M.A.V. Glinow, 2017, *Organizational Behavior*, p. 401. Copyright 2018 by McGraw-Hill Education.

### **Power**

Power is the capacity of a person, team, or organization to influence others (French, Raven & Cartwright, 1959). Power regarding organizational culture has multiple components. Power here is not literal in the sense of augmenting someone’s actions or attitude, rather it is the capacity to be able to. The strength of the power is based on the recipient’s perception of the power holder/wielder. Third, power involves asymmetric (unequal) dependence of one party on another party (Pfefer & Salancik, 2003).

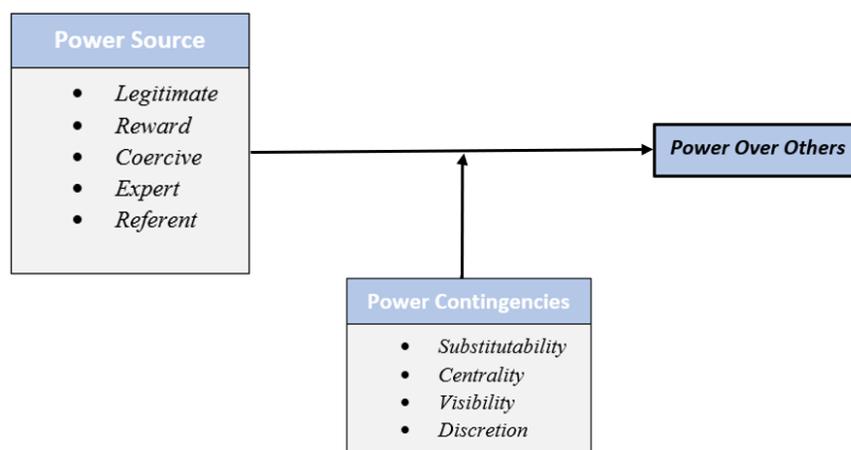
Although dependence is a key element of power relationships, we use the phrase asymmetric dependence because the less powerful party still has some degree of power - called

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countervailing power - over the power holder (McShane & Glinow, 2017). Essentially the target, which often is at the touchpoint to the external factor, retains some power and forces a brokerage of kind. Specialized skillsets, demonstrated runway and customer relationship touchpoints are examples of power the end user employees hold against titular power. Against is not necessarily oppositional in nature but rather that leadership cannot directly affect results in the way the front-line employee can. The employee-manager relationship is a crucial component in any company. Regardless of the hierarchy of power, trust is a needed component for power relationships to be maximized. A half century ago, social scientists John French and Bertram Raven identified five sources of power that exist in organizations (McShane & Glinow, 2017). Variations of thought have developed over time but at its core, this basis of power dynamics has remained mostly constant. Within this modeling, five basic sources with consideration of four contingencies comprise power within an organization as Figure 4 illustrates.

**Figure 4**

*Power Sources and Contingencies*



Note. Adapted from “Sources and Contingencies of Power,” by S. McShane and M.A.V Glinow, 2017, *Organizational Behavior*, p. 280. Copyright 2018 by McGraw-Hill Education.

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Legitimate power emanates from the agreements in organizations driven often by formal job descriptions and/or rules of engagement. It is usually the most important source of power in organizational settings, particularly between employees and managers (Rylander, 2015).

Reward, coercive, expert and referent power are all very much actively at play in the overall power dynamics of an organization. The opportunity for recognition and/or incentives or the fear of accountability is quite prevalent in performance-based companies. Individuals with specialized knowledge or demonstrated competencies are sought out by others to further leverage results. The bond felt when employees discover commonalities in background or idealism also result in power.

Substitutability varies with the degree of control an individual or a group has over a resource. Centrality refers to power holders importance based on the degree and nature of interdependence with others (Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, & Pennings, 1971). Visibility equates into physical presence and a visual reinforcement of qualifications. Finally, discretionary power tends to be less present the lower a manager resides in the hierarchy – essentially the overriding direction is to not deviate, simply execute. Social networks can permeate levels of hierarchy or divisions. When leadership transitions in companies one can usually hear an approximation of “we have eliminated the old boys network” resonating through talking points. Depending on the present state of culture and the effectiveness of the communication cascade these statements can at times be digested as we simply traded one “network” for another one – which in reality may or may not “feel” any better to the broader organization.

Inappropriately wielded power can be dangerous. Power applied constructively can help set groundwork for transformational results. While power is the ability to affect others, influence

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is the actual attempt to change established feelings our outcomes. Influence is the tactical application of power. Figure 5 expounds upon tactical technique.

**Figure 5**

### *Application of Tactical Influences*

<b>Tactic of Influence</b>	<b>Application</b>
<i>Silent Authority</i>	To influence behavior through legitimate power without explicitly referring to that power base.
<i>Assertiveness</i>	Two actively apply legitimate and coercive power by applying pressure or threats.
<i>Information Control</i>	Two explicitly manipulate someone else's access to information for the purpose of changing their attitudes or behaviors.
<i>Coalition Formation</i>	Two form a group that attempts to influence others by the pooling of resources and powers of its members.
<i>Upward Appeal</i>	To rely symbolically or in reality on people with higher authority or expertise to support their position.
<i>Persuasion</i>	To use logical arguments, factual evidence, and emotional appeals to convince people of the values of a request.
<i>Impression Management</i>	To actively shape, through self-presentation and other means, the perceptions and attitudes that others have us. This includes ingratiation, which refers to the influencers attempts to be more liked by the targeted persons or groups.
<i>Exchange</i>	Two promised benefits or resources in exchange for the targeted persons compliance.

Note. Adapted from "Types of Influence Tactics in Organizations," by S. McShane and M.A.V Glinow, 2017, *Organizational Behavior*, p. 291. Copyright 2018 by McGraw-Hill Education.

The movement towards change is a dynamic across a horizontal spectrum from left to right: Compliance > Resistance > Commitment. Leadership attempts to influence the base through a combination of soft and hard techniques. Persuasion, ingratiation, upward appeal, assertiveness and overt control can be applied downwards. In some scenarios compliance is sufficient although over time results can reverse and resistance can rise. Additionally, a varied level of satisfaction, reward, tasks, stress and citizenry exist in each company. Essentially, these

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concepts equate into organizational politics. A workplace that is perceived as politically charged can hinder results and lead to an elongation in the journey from compliance to commitment.

### **Communication**

Communication is a crucial component for all organizations. From a certain perspective many companies may not be able to exist without it. It guides the greater organization around what, why, who and when as well as serving as a means of coordination. Additionally, it supports the need for organizational learning, decision making, assisting in changing behavior as well as to support employees in general. At a basic level, communication could be defined as the ability for the organization to appropriately encode and then upon receipt have the employees properly decode the message. Audience, content, mindset and digestibility are all considerations of communication. Multiple channels for communication exist. Written, phone, email, internet-based pushes, intranet portals, social media platforms and face-to-face interactions are many of the most common modes. During change efforts companies may attempt to address information overload or time inhibitors by highlighting the reduction of email or reporting to select levels. While well intentioned, danger presents as often one system is simply replaced for another.

Additionally, within many of the communication channels the notion of the interpretation of nonverbals need to be considered. Nonverbal communication includes facial gestures, voice intonation, physical distance, and even silence (Leathers & Eaves, 2015). An additional barrier to effective communication is that of noise. The sender can incorrectly assume the receiver translated and understood everything that was sent because in their mind the communication was processed. Unfortunately, the intentional needed ambiguity in select messages from Executive leadership can leak into lower levels and be misapplied. A significant gap in communication cascades is that the transmitter can assume completion once it is out of their outbox or it is

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uploaded to the portal. When navigating many information streams, false comfort can be afforded by over focusing on the action of what is in the message. Teaching, coaching and actively practicing the concepts of sensing, evaluating and responding can help mitigate difficulties of receipt. Beckhard (1992) explained that direct interaction between top members of leadership and lower levels of employees prove helpful to message alignment. Conversely, companies need to be actively aware that grapevines and informal information hubs exist that are socially formed over time and that incorrect or improperly received information exists at the base levels of the organization. When communication is for the intent of change, companies must consider being overtly proscriptive in their actions. The direction of change is widely communicated and communicated for both understanding and gut level buy-in (Kotter, 2002). In *the Heart of Change* (1996), John P. Kotter outlines various concepts for leaders to keep front of mind in a positive sense as well as from an avoidance perspective.

- + *Keep communication simple and heartfelt rather than complex and technocratic.*
- + *Do your homework before communicating, especially to understand what people are actually feeling.*
- + *Speak to anxieties, confusion, anger, and distrust.*
- *Be wary of under communicating, which happens all the time.*
- *Speak as though you are only transferring information.*
- *Do not accidentally foster cynicism by not walking the talk.*

### **Adoption and Sustainability**

Successful change is more fragile than we often think, or wish to think (Kotter, 2002). Companies and change sponsors spend an inordinate amount of time designing, working for and supporting change. By conceptual definition there will be a delicate balance between rooting

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change and stability. In transformational change efforts many of the same ideals, principles and individuals can become a hindrance to forward momentum as they continue work tirelessly for the entire organization to adopt their set of values and version of the future which may not be fully attainable in large organizations.

Too much routine - sticking with values, ideas, methods, or practices that no longer work - is dangerous to adaptation, but too much change can mean low productivity, frustration, and confusion (Anderson, 2019). Over focusing on the creation of stability in the midst of a complex and dynamic marketplace is both dichotomous and a potential path towards failure. The primary drivers of organizational effectiveness are fluid and dynamic; so too must be the primary elements and processes of strategy and organization (Lawler and Worley, 2006). It is possible that a need may exist to move away from the Lewin methodology of freeze/unfreeze towards a focus on nimbleness. The organization has to know how to continually monitor its behavior—in effect, to learn how to learn. (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990). Leadership needs to continue to remove barriers, engage in active monitoring of both developing external and internal pressures and evolve or at some point they may be considered as not dissimilar with the environment they once urgently tried to augment.

In 1977 Bernard and Harris recommended seven components to sustain change. Periodic team meetings, sensing meetings, intergroup meetings, renewal conferences, goal-based performance reviews, outside consultant evaluations and formalized rewards were the core components they suggested to better understand the change and sharing of information. In 1999, Armenakis, Harris, and Field posited an additional seven concepts to institutionalize change:

1. *Active participation*
2. *Persuasive communication*

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3. *Management of internal/external information*
4. *Human resources management practices*
5. *Diffusion practices*
6. *Rites and ceremonies*
7. *Formalization activities*

Following this logic, success could be defined by not only the organizations that achieve prowess of these concepts in singularity but rather combines the mastery of them with how they plan and encourage the next future to form. This view of sustaining change is less about institutionalizing and stabilizing practices, and more about learning how to change effectively as a regular part of organizational life (Anderson, 2019). This concept can become difficult to bring forth especially in top-down publicly traded companies as many of the next chapters are ambiguous until a board affirms. Evaluation can support the next concept of success and work towards the next chapter through providing focus, facilitation of support, feedback for change and growth of leadership.

### **Leadership and Technique**

#### **Command and Control in relation to Diagnostic OD**

Using one type of leadership style does not necessarily work at all companies, and the traditional (command and control) style is prevalent in quite a few (Pafford, 2018). Historically, command and control was most prevalent in top-down, hierarchical inclined companies although it does exist in some flatter structures. Command and Control is not only a leadership application but, it is also an actual culture. The military has utilized the theory in evolving plans of tactics in warfare as well as to coordinate the much broader branches of the system. The creation of

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Unified Command and the more recent analysis of C2 have continued to evolve the concept as the world continues to change. Some would argue that the concept is actually more that of command and coordinate vs. control as there are simply scenarios in warfare or business that are never under control. Rather it is a set of defined practices and contingencies that are outlined in application to act, react and counter act (Pafford, 2018).

The origins of the theory are complex, but it had its roots in both warfare and production. Many decades ago, a mechanical engineer, Frederick Winslow Taylor (1947), sought increases in factory-based operations. A scientific approach leaning heavy into time studies was applied and eventually summarized in multiple publishing's, some as early as 1911. Important components of scientific management include analysis, synthesis, logic, rationality, empiricism, work ethic, efficiency, elimination of waste, and standardized best practices (Taylor, 1947). During this similar timeframe, Henri Fayol (1949), a French engineer was working to expand organizational efficiency of management from the perspective that it is heavily centered on people. To manage is to forecast and plan, to organize, to command, to coordinate and to control (Fayol, 1949).

History showed that post World War II, the US saw an influx of the technique in business as service men and women returned to civilian life and began to apply some of the military learnings in their professional lives. As a subject, Command and Control has a reputation for being arcane, even among individuals who arguably are or have been practitioners (Alberts & Hayes, 2006). The actual words and philosophy are differently interpreted and applied by many different communities. Command and Control should not be considered finitely but rather as a tool towards the creation of value such as accomplishing a mission or bringing a project to implementation. Specifically, Command and Control is about focusing the efforts of a number of

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entities (individuals and organizations) and resources, including information, toward the achievement of some task, objective, or goal (Alberts & Hayes, 2006). Practitioners seem to have a proclivity to focus on why it is needed for success rather than what components need to be well executed to create and sustain value.

Command and Control can seem like a natural fit for an organization who embraces Diagnostic OD. Diagnosis and problem definition transitioning to action planning and then into action/evaluation is well served by role clarity, operational compliance and overt tactical guidance. Organizations that employ a version of Command and Control are able to maximize value in various ways. Overall results can be maximized by defined role clarity, expectations, performance thresholds and tactical blueprints. The people within the system, in theory, understand what is expected, how to perform in various scenarios and know to seek overt guidance from above during periods of ambiguity or chaos. In areas where compliance excellence is necessitated this application and theory can perform well. When force applied it can become problematic as it does not appropriately allow for flexibility or empowerment of the individual. It can limit diversity of thought and feelings of self-worth which then potentially reduce an individual's alignments to the organizational values. It can also become frustrating to the end-user when applied to scenarios that are complex in nature and do not have obvious answers. The traits exhibited by Command and Control leaders tend to focus on themselves. They view leadership as levels of rank and power. They use their power to drive results. Success is defined by the rendering of results vs. others. They actively engage in speaking, telling and directing. They view themselves as the primary focus.

### **Servant Leadership in relation to Dialogic OD**

Similar to the concept of Command and Control, pointing to a single person or point in time and crediting them with the creation of the concept of Servant Leadership is not realistic. In recent times, Robert K. Greenleaf was the first to coin the term in 1970 when he published an essay, *The Servant as Leader*. Humanity can look back thousands of years and reflect upon various religious and philosophical theories that cumulatively contain the ethos of what many now consider an approximation of Servant Leadership.

While there are many iterations and attempts at the organizational application of being a servant leader most of them minimally consider versions of five basic tenets. Leadership is seen as an opportunity to deliver to others what they need to be successful. Leaders share their power. Growth and development are key success metrics. They actively listen more than they speak or direct. They understand where they fit as a leader but, they primarily focus on the employee and not on their own agenda.

Servant Leadership seems to align well inside of the Dialogic mindset. The relationship between dialogue and Servant Leadership is both intimate and complementary insofar as Servant Leadership is brought to life through dialogic communication (Gigliotti & Dwyer, 2016). Performance based companies that poorly apply or fail to appropriately teach the fundamentals to all levels of leadership can suffer a significant disruption in productivity, performance and general direction of the base line employee.

### **Convergence through a Spectrum Based Approach**

As time moves forward and global complexity increases the concept of how leadership can be maximized has become a necessary and increasing focus. Over the years, the definition of

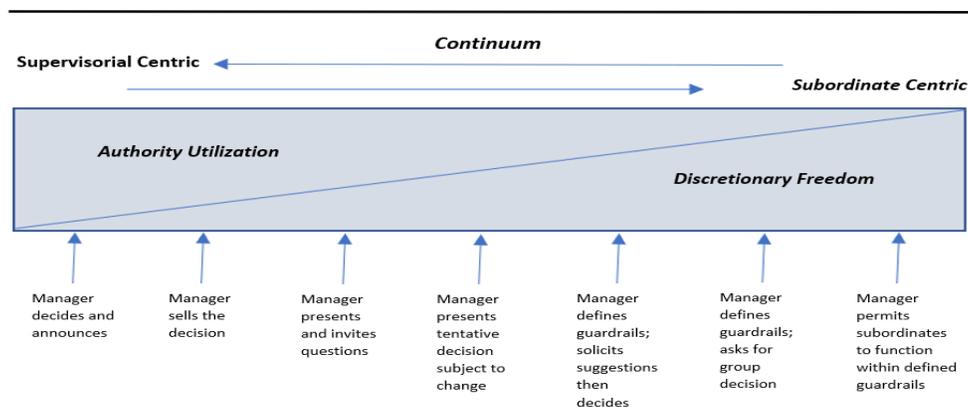
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what a leader looks like has taken a seemingly pendulum arched path. Success of the company, board direction, mission/vision, competition and industrial norms all can and have shaped the rolling definition. The successful Executive was generally pictured as possessing intelligence, imagination, initiative, the capacity to make rapid (and generally wise) decisions, and the ability to inspire subordinates (Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1973). Now, seemingly at an increasing rate, adaptability has become more pertinent than ever before.

Organizationally, there is an ebb and flow between the need for an employee base to feel empowered and to execute specified directives. The authority that exists often flows downward. Employees or groups of employees choose to what extent they align with that authority. In some instances, transactional direction is needed and at other times a group dynamic should guide tactical application. Within that spectrum there are variations of managerial technique that are exhibited. Figure 6 displays the continuum of supervisorial vs subordinate centric technique.

**Figure 6**

*Supervisorial vs. Subordinate Continuum*



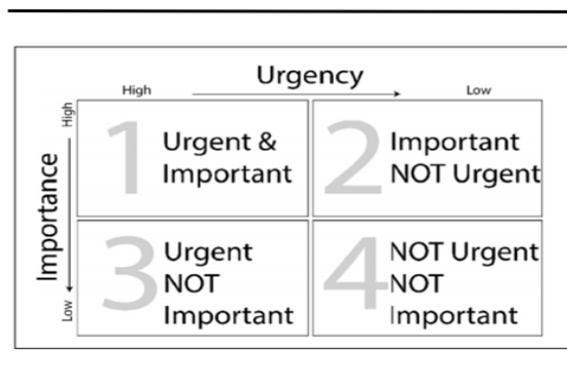
Note. Adapted from “Continuum of Leadership Behavior,” by R. Tannenbaum, 1973, *How to Choose a Leadership Pattern*, p. 2. Copyright 2008 Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation.

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Former President Eisenhower is credited with the formation of what was labeled The Eisenhower Decision Matrix (Bast, 2016). Early in his Presidency he made statements that his two problems were things that were important and things that were urgent, and that the two of them had a related but at times adversarial relation. Leadership can unintentionally create resistance by making everything important or highlighting too many “number one priorities”. Leaders can inadvertently mandate that all things that are important are urgent. Figure 7 demonstrates Eisenhower’s premise on the relationship of the two concepts.

**Figure 7**

*Decision Matrix - Eisenhower*



Note. Adapted from “The Eisenhower Matrix,” by F. Bast, 2016, *Crux of Time Management for Students*, p. 72. Copyright 2016 Journal of Science and Education.

In consideration of a changing world and increasing complexity, select scholars have looked to the emergence of scientific thought and the difference between Newtonian and Chaos theory. In the early 1990’s, Margaret Wheatley attempted to connect these emerging scientific ideas to organizational life. She believed that most organizations were designed in a Newtonian view – the leaders assume predictability and order but, never in actuality receive it. She argued that we need to ground theories, designs, and actions in today’s science and described how they

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can inform beliefs and actions around participation and relationships, the role and use of information, and the importance of autonomy and self-reference (Bushe & Marshak, 2015).

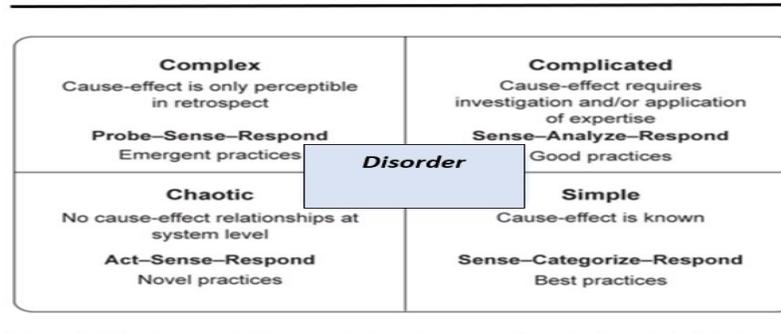
In the early 2000's, select leaders and academics further explored the need to consider a leadership model to differently navigate complexity. Pascale, Milleman and Gioja (Year) proposed the "nature of nature model". They incorporated learnings from many entities but, most notably from Monsanto, the US Army and Sears. They focused on four principles: prolonged equilibrium precedes death, things move towards the edge of chaos, systems (living) can self-organize at that edge and it is only realistic that they can be disturbed - not fully directed. Pascale's work is based off hierarchies being assumptive in the design which is a potentially significant point of entry for the dialogic mindset into a very traditional space.

In an effort to deliver a decision-making framework to better solve for complexity David J. Snowden divided the concept into four quadrants and a point of centrality around disorder (Bushe & Marshak, 2015). Leaders can assess their situation and choose actions based on four of the contexts: simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic (Bushe & Marshak, 2015). The framework has been utilized successfully across a broad diversity of cultures such as the Department of Defense for counterterrorism work as well as large company product launches (Bushe & Marshak, 2015). Snowden named the model "Cynefin" (pronounced ku-*nev*-in), a Welsh word conveying the idea that multiple factors in our environment and our experience affect us in ways we can never understand (Bushe & Marshak, 2015). Figure 8 layers dialogic context into Cynefin.

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**Figure 8**

*Dialogic Consideration - Cynefin*



Note. Adapted from “Contrasting Frames for OD Practice,” by G. Bushe and R. Marshak, 2015, *Dialogic Organizational Development*, p. 179. Copyright 2015 by Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

## Theory

### Responsibility of Leadership

Several years ago, 54 leadership experts from 38 countries reached a consensus that leadership is about influence, motivating, and enabling others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members (House, Javidan & Hanges, 2002). In a stakeholder society, Executive leadership and specifically the CEO are responsible to ensure the company remains solvent into the extended future. Marketplace opportunities must be captured not in just terms of share but also in assets and talent. Constant effort must be put forth to understand the environment and diligently work towards capitalizing on emerging trends. Winning strategies that benefit all shareholders must be developed and implemented. Clear missions, visions and values must be established. Appropriate support structures need to be enabled to fulfill those directives. They need to possess the ability to convey a message that allows the Board to be able to see the broader picture, past quarterly results and short-term plans.

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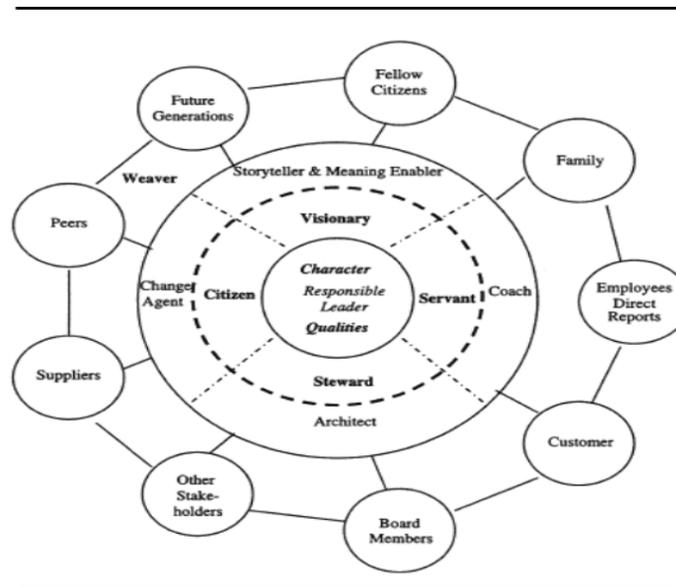
Responsible leadership is the art of building and sustaining good relationships to all relevant stakeholders (Maak & Pless, 2006). The CEO and their Executive team needs to actively question if the power and the message wielded levels below them is appropriate and effective - situationally and role level specific. Being able to accept external and internal criticism without deflection needs to be prioritized. An understanding that many versions of the company message exist, and that alignment is varied at any given time. Motivation and compensation must not be assumed as equal or applied broadly, as significant gaps exist between leadership, managerial, supervisory and front-line employees.

In a stakeholder society, leadership has to reach beyond traditional leader-follower concepts (Maak & Pless, 2006). Leadership should demonstrate continued positivity. Active internal and external talent identification streams should run concurrently. Historically, successful tactical applications cannot be assumed to always translate to a similar result in different places and times without adaptation. Value of voice and an openness to continued change should be strived for. An understanding that an effective communication stream does not end with message delivery. All leadership should demonstrate ethics and integrity.

A list of the responsibilities of leadership in an organization is significant. As there is a case for multiple styles of leadership, applications of technique and styles of strategy so too is the notion that the list of leadership responsibilities will be varied. Logically, there is not one all-encompassing playbook. Situationally and in context of complexity the importance of the components will vary. The best skilled leadership teams are able to flex accordingly. In consideration of complexity, leadership's most important responsibility arguably may be their ability to rally their teams to a vision that motivates action. Figure 9 illustrates an example of the interconnectedness of a responsible leader.

**Figure 9**

*Responsible Leadership – Role Model*



Note. Adapted from “The Role Model of Responsible Leadership,” by T. Maak & N. Plass, 2006, *Responsible Leadership in a Stakeholder Society: A Relational Perspective*, p. 72. Copyright 2006 *Journal of Business Ethics*.

### **Necessity for Nimbleness of Application**

Command and control leadership has seen advocacy decline over the years, to the point it is rarely audibly suggested for prioritization of application in a business setting. It is possible select Executives may not feel strongly enough about transitioning styles or thought logic. After all, the culmination of their skillsets and results from their crafted techniques allowed them to assume the role so why would they need to adapt? Leadership may be caught between the factual need to adapt and the fear of the resulting chaos that may ensue and the potential consequences. They know perfectly well that their companies need to become more innovative and they suspect it won't happen unless they're willing to push power, decision making, and resource allocation lower in the organization (Ancona, Backman & Isaacs, 2019).

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Autocratic, transactional, charismatic, democratic, and servant leadership all have the capacity to produce powerful results if applied appropriately. However, striving to apply a singular model to an organization can prove problematic and at times divisive. A more nuanced or distributed approach may better support driving improved results. A strategic mindset, apt communication, and an understanding of the multiplying effect are all staples of successful organizations. Strategy must be understood at all levels. A robust, multi-streamed communication plan must be employed. The power of many must be harvested through inclusiveness of alignment to expectations and not solely be focused on pyramidal outliers.

In consideration of a focus on being organizationally nimble, it should be understood that risk is real. The early phases of change can result in reduced shareholder confidence as well as a potential reduction in stock price. Although, it is not difficult to think of scenarios where leaders or companies failed to act or waited too long. In many instances, companies were lost, or the leaders transitioned. There are also many examples of leadership making repeat, quick decisions that proved misguided. Carelessness, self-doubt and pursuing an unproven course of action are relationally closer than some people care to admit.

Companies and their leadership may be vulnerable to suffer from a size stigma. Leadership may describe the organization as a large vessel and that it takes time to turn it. That message, while potentially intended to advise patience, if continually used to explain timeline elongations ultimately only serves as placation. In actuality, large organizations can turn pretty quickly by adjusting their heading – if all levels of leadership choose to.

Although inaction is understood by many as a negative concept, it may be utilized at times when organizations need to analyze and recharge. Short cycles of stability can increase the capacity for change when reengaged. Transformational change is constructed from a

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preponderance of smaller change efforts, organizations need to ensure these efforts root. In this smaller context, there should exist a greater probability of success – essentially practicing for the larger moves. While the strategic vision is a critical component of the successfully nimble company the tactical steps below need to also be flexible. In most instances, the change pursued is not an immediate zero-sum game. Ideally plan A should not fail, but leaders who build in supporting options and even have nuanced plan B's and “what if” plan C's in queue are better prepared to make sure it does not.

Leading an organization is fraught with peril. The success or failures can have real life impact on the shareholders. In that sense, human nature tends toward safety – to ensure solvency and hopefully substantial success. It is of this notion that change or being nimble can be considered unsafe. In some ways that statement is true, but with tactical awareness the power can be harnessed. Unsafe Thinking is about changing the conformist behaviors and habits that most readers will have been taught their entire lives (Gritzo, 2019). Seeking information from both non-traditional and traditional sources become necessary. Leadership, through practiced thought begins to increase their acumen of intuition. Ultimately, they are able to turn fear, trepidation and angst into opportunities for success through the ability to navigate the complexity of change more deftly than others.

### **SUMMARY**

This research has the capacity to serve as a reinforcement for the need of Executive leadership to embrace a more nuanced approach to driving change and ultimately ROI regarding implementation. It is intended to be a foundation for leaders to consider their beliefs, styles and situational application. The materials can be incorporated to support thought leadership and application throughout an organizational hierarchy. Additionally, the concepts, if appropriately understood and applied, could assist in moving the overall culture towards adoption.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

An appropriately tempered operationalized strategy with a deeper understanding of urgency and complexity can mitigate resistance. If culture consistently reinforces that all priorities are both urgent and important an elongation of adoption can occur. A consideration and potentially tactical incorporation of dialogic theory could support a deeper rooting. A nimble leadership perspective with operational agilities built into an organization can better maximize results over time. The organization that understands alternate narratives exist and actively works towards embracing diversity of thought and value of voice at all levels is well prepared to maintain sustained success. The organization that appropriately tailors messaging and more importantly validates that their espoused values are concurrent with their enacted values is poised to drive results in the present.

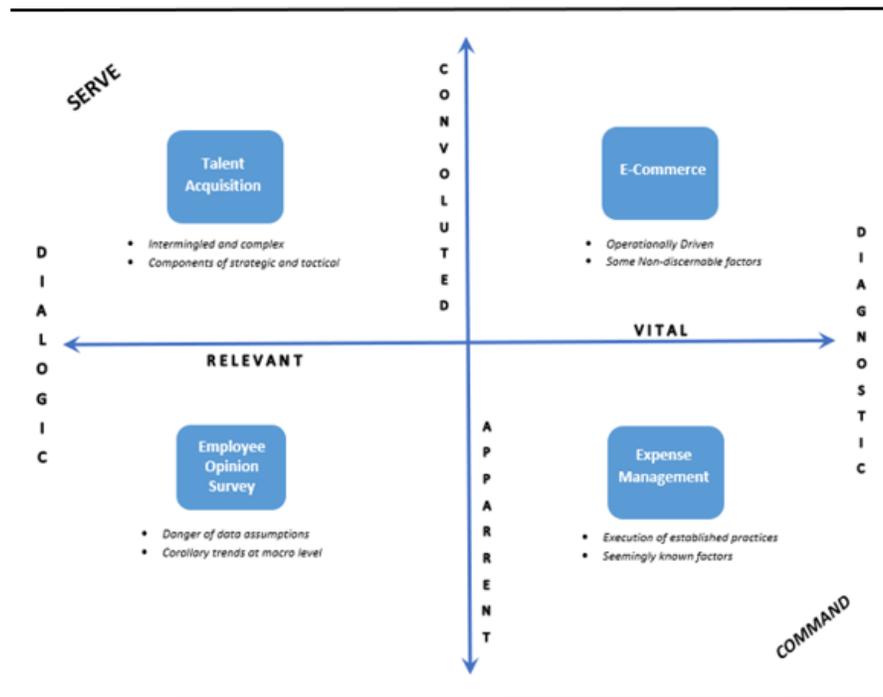
A multitude of leadership models and problem mitigation frameworks exist. The nimblest of leaders can better choose and utilize select components of them even to the point of creating new framework. A spectrum-based approach to problem solving strategies that considers importance vs. urgency within the greater context of complexity could prove valuable

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to leadership in top-down performance-based organizations. This approach could be applied in both short term and forward projection dialogues. A model that is organizationally specific, presented as a matrix to serve as a tactical support framework for leadership, could also prove beneficial. Figure 10 illustrates a hypothetical convergent generative image based framework. It combines tenets of servant leadership and command and control aligned within the dialogic and diagnostic mindsets – hence the name of Servant Command. The matrix contrasts complexity and urgency. The framework could be further customized and prove useful to all levels of organizational leadership. To aid in understanding of application, basic concept examples are provided within each quadrant.

**Figure 10**

*Servant Command – Performance Based Adaptation*



Note. This chart represents a hypothetical framework based on merging the concepts of servant leadership and command and control as applicable to the dialogic vs diagnostic mindset. The examples are potential component applications within a performance based company.

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If a problem were to be mapped into quadrant II (talent acquisition example), leadership would solicit many stakeholders to understand a 360 degree view of the potential problems or solutions while providing minimal, if any, initial framework. This quadrant would have the most open ended time frame as the problem is complex or does not have an obvious or singular solve. A result mapped into quadrant III (employee opinion survey example) would require leadership to be more participative, providing perspective and guardrails while still allowing for diversity of thought. It is logical that not as many stakeholders would be involved. It would be considered a guided process. In quadrant I (e-commerce example), leadership would be highly participative, soliciting even fewer voices to help consider the unknown. It would be a matter of tempered control. They would be actively mitigating risk and preparing to move rather swiftly. Quadrant IV (expense management example), would most often see applicable singular leadership out front, dictating a course correction and a recommitment to diligence of execution.

Results matter - the ability for leaders to be able to lead from where they are best needed in the moment is paramount. When increased risk is present or in moments of chaos, scenarios dictate action. Often a small cadre of Executive leadership is the best choice to lead the organizations forward in a benevolent dictatorial manner. Conversely, when there is no apparent solution or initial efforts have fallen short Executive leadership would best serve the organization by broadening the scope and increasing the time in the pre-action phase. The ability to plot problems into a framework provides tactical guidance towards problem resolution. The framework can also be used as an on-going development tool for all levels of leadership as they work towards an increased acumen of nimbleness.

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