

The Regenerative Dynamics of Embodied Dialogue in Resonance with Life

The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science

1–28

© The Author(s) 2026



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/00218863261438266

journals.sagepub.com/home/jabEeva Nummi¹ 

Abstract

This article develops a regenerative perspective on embodied dialogue grounded in autoethnographic action research within a public social and healthcare organization undergoing systemic transition. Rather than treating dialogue as a technique for alignment or control, it conceptualizes dialogue as a relational process through which human systems remain responsive amid turbulence. Through abductive analysis of reflective journals, observations, and dialogic episodes, three interrelated dynamics are identified: coherence, in which embodied presence gathers as settled being-with; potentiality, the ripening of a not-yet quality within that presence; and activation, the emergence of what has taken shape into speech or collective movement. These dynamics unfold as an asymmetric regenerative rhythm across self, relational, collective, and field dimensions. By introducing the field level, the study situates dialogue within wider relational processes and offers a framework for understanding dialogue as a regenerative capacity supporting relational renewal and ethical responsiveness.

Keywords

dialogue, embodiment, regenerative dialogue, relational ontology, living systems

¹Department of Management and Entrepreneurship, Turku School of Economics, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

Corresponding Author:

Eeva Nummi, Department of Management and Entrepreneurship, Turku School of Economics, University of Turku, Rehtoripellonkatu 3, 20500 Turku, Finland.

Email: eeva.k.nummi@utu.fi

Introduction

We live in a time when the conditions that sustain human and organizational life are under strain, requiring new ways of remaining present and responsive within the wider processes of life amid ongoing change. Ecological systems are under pressure, public institutions are fragmented by reform and austerity, and organizations are asked to adapt continuously while preserving trust, meaning, and ethical integrity (O'Brien, 2018; Wahl, 2016; Weber, 2016). In such contexts, the challenge is not only how to change, but how to remain coherent, responsive, and vital while doing so.

Dialogue is often proposed as a response to this challenge. Across organizational research and practice, dialogue is invoked as a means of building shared understanding, resolving conflict, supporting collaboration, or navigating complexity (Bushe & Marshak, 2015; Isaacs, 1999; Senge et al., 2005). Yet in many organizational settings, dialogue is approached instrumentally—as a technique for alignment, problem-solving, or managing resistance. Such framings risk domesticating dialogue into a managerial tool, folding it into the same logics of efficiency, control, and acceleration that often erode relational capacity and resonance in the first place (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Grant & Hardy, 2004; Rosa, 2013).

This narrowing is not merely a practical limitation; it is a conceptual one. When dialogue is treated primarily as a communicative method or intervention, its deeper regenerative potential is obscured. What is lost is an understanding of dialogue as a living, embodied, and relational process through which human systems sustain coherence, hold tension, and release energy into generative movement (Bohm, 1996; Buber, 1970; Shotter, 2008). From this perspective, dialogue is not something that organizations *use*, but something they *live through*—a capacity that shapes how organizing unfolds.

The term embodied dialogue is used here to foreground dialogue as a lived, bodily, and relational process rather than a purely discursive exchange. Embodied dialogue refers to forms of interaction in which meaning emerges through sensing, timing, posture, silence, affect, and relational presence, as much as through words. From this perspective, dialogue does not occur between minds alone but unfolds through bodies in relation, with coherence, tension, and generative movement registered and negotiated somatically and relationally, often before they become fully articulated in language (Gendlin, 1996; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Shotter, 2008).

In this article, I develop a regenerative perspective on dialogue, foregrounding its embodied and systemic dimensions. Rather than conceptualizing dialogue as a discursive exchange between autonomous individuals, I approach it as a relational dynamic through which organizing remains responsive amid complexity and pressure. This orientation builds on phenomenological and dialogic traditions that emphasize lived experience, relational presence, and responsiveness (Bakhtin, 1981; Gendlin, 1996; Merleau-Ponty, 1962), while extending them through regenerative and systems-oriented thinking (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Mang & Haggard, 2016; Wahl, 2016).

This perspective rests on a living-systems ontology, contrasting with mechanistic models of organizing by emphasizing nonlinearity, emergence, relational interdependence,

and rhythmic renewal over prediction, control, and optimization (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Mang & Haggard, 2016; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). From this vantage point, human organizing is understood as always already embedded within wider living processes of transformation. Dialogue, then, is not merely a tool within organizing, but a site in which this embeddedness may become experientially visible—at times felt as resonance with the wider processes of life in which organizing is already situated.

Against this backdrop, the study is guided by the following research question:

How can embodied dialogue be understood as a regenerative, relational, and systemic process through which human systems remain present to unfolding reality and allow movement to emerge amid organizational complexity?

Drawing on an autoethnographic action research study conducted within a Finnish public social and healthcare organization undergoing systemic transition, this study examines dialogic experience as it unfolded under conditions of organizational uncertainty. Through sustained engagement with empirical material and iterative dialogue with theory (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), recurring qualities of these dialogic moments gradually came into focus. Over time, these experiential dynamics were named as coherence, potentiality, and activation—not as predefined constructs, but as analytic articulations that formed around what was repeatedly lived and recognized in the material.

Coherence refers to embodied and relational processes through which attention, affect, and meaning become sufficiently gathered to sustain presence as settled being—with even amid tension without fragmenting (Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Siegel, 2012). *Potentiality* names the ripening of a not-yet-expressed condition that arises when dialogue is alive but still holding its breath—experienced as embodied or relational tension, heightened sensitivity, readiness, or charged stillness leaning toward movement without determining its form or timing. *Activation* refers to the emergence of what has taken shape within that ripening into speech, insight, repair, or collective action.

These dynamics are not treated as ends in themselves, but as analytic ways of tracing how embodied dialogue is sustained, intensified, or interrupted across four interrelated levels of organizing: the self, the other, the collective, and the field. At the self-level, the analysis foregrounds embodied attunement as the ground of dialogic presence. At the relational and collective levels, it shows how dialogic potential gathers, intensifies, and releases through interaction and shared holding. At times, these dynamics extend into a wider relational field, in which dialogue appeared to orient sense-making and movement beyond immediate interaction.

Introducing the field level extends dialogic analysis beyond purely interactional accounts, suggesting that dialogue may also involve forms of embodied and relational orientation that exceed individual intention or group dynamics. The theoretical implications of this extension are developed in dialogue with relational, neurobiological, and process-oriented perspectives.

The article proceeds as follows. First, I situate the study within dialogic, relational, and regenerative traditions, outlining a theoretical orientation that frames dialogue as a life-sustaining dynamic in resonance with life's own processes of becoming. I then

describe the autoethnographic action research methodology and research context. The findings section presents empirical episodes that illustrate how coherence, potential, and activation unfolded across self, other, collective, and field levels. The discussion develops the theoretical, methodological, and practical implications of a regenerative perspective on dialogue. The article concludes by reflecting on dialogue as a vital capacity for sustaining aliveness in organizing under conditions of complexity and change.

Theoretical Foundations: Dialogue as a Regenerative Dynamic in Organizing

Dialogue Across Disciplines

Dialogue has a long and layered history, moving across disciplines such as philosophy (e.g., Bakhtin, 1981; Buber, 1970; Gadamer, 2004), education (e.g., Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1991), psychology (e.g., Gendlin, 1996; Seikkula et al., 2006), linguistics (e.g., Tannen, 1984), and conflict resolution (e.g., Rosenberg, 2003; Zehr, 2002). This breadth suggests that dialogue is more than a communicative technique—it is a fundamental human process that shapes meaning-making, relational engagement, and the co-creation of shared realities.

Across these fields, dialogue is consistently associated with qualities such as mutual presence, deep listening, reflexivity, openness to difference, and the capacity to generate shared meaning and transformation (Bakhtin, 1981; Bohm, 1996; Buber, 1970; Freire, 1970; Gadamer, 2004; Isaacs, 1999; Mezirow, 1991). That so many traditions converge on dialogue points not only to its versatility, but to its deeper potential as a regenerative process—one through which understanding, relationship, and orientation can be renewed through engagement with others and the situations they inhabit.

In organizational studies, three major currents of dialogue research are particularly relevant. The first is rooted in organizational learning and innovation, where dialogue is framed as a means of surfacing diverse perspectives, fostering shared understanding, and generating adaptive solutions. Influenced by scholars such as Isaacs (1999), Senge (1990), Senge et al. (2005), and Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), this stream emphasizes dialogue as a process of collective sensemaking and knowledge creation (Weick, 1995). Openness, inquiry, and mutual respect are treated as key enablers of learning across boundaries, often linking dialogic processes to innovation, collaboration, and adaptive capacity in complex environments (Bushe & Marshak, 2015; Dixon, 1998; Raelin, 2012). While this literature highlights the developmental and creative potential of dialogue, it tends to privilege intended outcomes and designed processes, sometimes underplaying the less predictable and emergent dynamics of dialogic interaction.

The second major current draws on social constructionist perspectives, which approach dialogue not as a tool for exchanging pre-formed ideas, but as the very medium through which reality is co-constructed. From this view, meaning, identity, and action emerge in the space between people through language and interaction (Gergen, 2009; Hosking, 2011). Cunliffe (2002, 2018) extends this perspective to

organizational life, showing how conversational practices shape not only sensemaking but the ongoing process of organizing itself. Dialogue is thus inherently generative: how people speak, listen, and respond opens or constrains possibilities for thought and action. This orientation aligns with strands of strategy-as-practice research that similarly foreground the constitutive role of language, narrative, and everyday interaction in shaping organizational trajectories (Balogun et al., 2014; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007).

A third influential current is Dialogic Organization Development (OD), which positions dialogue as a primary mode of enabling organizational transformation (Bushe & Marshak, 2009, 2015). Dialogic OD shifts away from diagnostic and problem-solving models toward generative processes that surface new narratives, expand possibilities, and mobilize collective energy for change. It emphasizes large-group and whole-system methods, appreciative framing, and the co-creation of shared meaning as levers for transformation.

Rather than approaching dialogue primarily in terms of what it enables, this study approaches dialogue as a living, embodied, and relational process through which human systems sustain coherence and mobilize movement in the midst of disruption and reorganization. To do so, it brings dialogic traditions into conversation with phenomenology, embodied cognition, interpersonal neurobiology, regenerative systems thinking, and process-oriented organization theory, conceptualizing dialogue as a regenerative dynamic that unfolds through bodies, relationships, collectives, and, at times, a wider relational field.

Embodiment and Presence

Phenomenological and embodied perspectives remind us that all perception and meaning-making arise through the lived, sensing body—in breath, posture, gesture, and the subtle rhythms of presence (Gendlin, 1996; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Todres, 2007). From this view, embodied presence is not a prelude to dialogue; it is the medium in which dialogue takes form. Through bodily attunement, attention steadies, trust deepens, and responsiveness becomes possible before words are fully shaped.

Interpersonal neurobiology expands this understanding by showing how facial expression, tone, and movement are met, mirrored, and integrated in relationship, shaping safety, openness, and the capacity to engage with complexity and difference (Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Siegel, 2012). Such mutual regulation is not merely soothing or supportive; it enables people to remain present with uncertainty and difference without collapsing into reactivity. Dialogic philosophers describe this quality of presence as an ethical orientation—meeting the other, and the unfolding moment, without precondition or control (Buber, 1970; Shotter, 2008).

Together, these perspectives locate dialog not in cognition or language alone, but in embodied relational processes that precede and shape what can be said, heard, or done. Language, from this perspective, does not stand apart from embodiment but unfolds within it, as meaning itself is grounded in bodily experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). What becomes speakable, and how it is received, depends on the coherence

of relational presence; words carry movement only when the embodied space between participants can hold what they release. For this study, they also legitimate a methodology attentive to embodied reflexivity: the researcher's own sensing body becomes a site through which dialogic dynamics are registered, disrupted, and understood in practice.

Despite these insights, organizational studies have often treated embodiment as peripheral to dialogue, implicitly privileging talk, cognition, and communicative skill as the primary sites of dialogic engagement (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Bushe & Marshak, 2015; Cunliffe, 2002; Grant & Hardy, 2004). As a result, the bodily, affective, and relational conditions through which dialogue is sustained, strained, or disrupted have remained comparatively under-theorized (Shotter, 2008; Vince, 2004).

Attending more closely to embodiment foregrounds dialogue as a lived process that unfolds through bodies in relation, rather than as an exchange of ideas alone. This shift opens a different analytical lens on how dialogic engagement becomes possible, fragile, or regenerative in organizational life—particularly in contexts characterized by complexity and turbulence. It also resonates with work on emotion, learning, and relational dynamics in organizing, which emphasizes how affective and bodily processes shape meaning-making, coordination, and responsiveness in practice (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Capra & Luisi, 2014; Chang, 2008).

Regenerative Systems and the Field Level of Dialogue

A regenerative orientation situates dialogic dynamics within broader living systems. Regenerative systems thinking emphasizes that vitality is sustained not through stability or optimization, but through ongoing cycles of coherence, disturbance, and renewal (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Mang & Haggard, 2016; Wahl, 2016). From this perspective, dialogue can be understood as one of the processes through which human systems remain alive to themselves—sensing tension, integrating disturbance, and finding ways to move without collapse.

Dialogic and relational traditions have long gestured toward dimensions of dialogue that exceed immediate interaction. Philosophical accounts of encounter and presence (Buber, 1970), Bohm's understanding of dialogue as participation in a shared movement of meaning (Bohm, 1996; Isaacs, 1999), and relational-process perspectives all suggest that dialogic engagement may open into a wider relational sphere—one that cannot be fully captured through dyadic exchange or conversational analysis alone. These traditions point toward dialogue as participation in something unfolding between and beyond participants, shaping orientation and possibility as much as explicit understanding.

In this study, the term *field* is introduced as a sensitizing concept to tentatively name this wider relational dimension of dialogue. The field refers to moments in which dialogic experience appears to be shaped by shared orientation, affective resonance, or anticipatory sensemaking that is not reducible to individual intention or immediate interaction. Such experiences suggest that dialogic dynamics may extend across time

and context, influencing how meaning and action take shape beyond the boundaries of a single encounter.

Contemporary theoretical perspectives offer language for engaging with this intuition without reifying it. Quantum social theory, for example, proposes that social phenomena emerge through entangled processes in which meaning and possibility take form prior to their articulation in speech or action (Barad, 2007; Wendt, 2015). Regenerative systems thinking similarly frames such dynamics in terms of resonance, aliveness, and responsiveness at the level of living systems (Wahl, 2016; Weber, 2016). In this study, these perspectives are not taken as explanatory frameworks, but as resources for thinking with dialogic experiences that resist linear causality or localized attribution.

How such a field is sensed, how it relates to embodied coherence and dialogic movement, and how it shapes organizing over time are treated here as empirical questions rather than theoretical assumptions. The analysis that follows attends to moments in which dialogue appeared to orient participants toward what was emerging or ending, often before such shifts could be fully articulated or planned.

Methodology

Autoethnographic Action Research

This study employed an autoethnographic action research approach to examine the regenerative dynamics of embodied dialogue in organizing. This methodological orientation was chosen not only for pragmatic access, but because it is epistemologically congruent with the phenomenon under investigation. If dialogue operates as an embodied, relational, and field-sensitive dynamic, then studying it requires methods capable of attending to lived experience, relational attunement, and emergent meaning.

Autoethnographic action research situates the researcher within the unfolding life of the organization, enabling sustained engagement with both personal experience and collective processes (Ellis et al., 2011; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). This approach recognizes the sensing, responsive body of the researcher as an instrument of inquiry, particularly when investigating dialogic processes that are registered somatically and relationally before they become discursively explicit (Shotter, 2008; Todres, 2007). This positioning aligns with dialogic and relational ontologies that understand knowledge as emerging in interaction rather than standing apart from it.

Research Context and Researcher Position

Empirically, the study is situated within a newly merged Finnish public social and healthcare organization formed through the structural integration of six municipalities and one joint municipal authority. The merger combined previously separate social services, primary healthcare, and selected specialized care functions under a unified governance structure. The research followed dialogic development work during the early

years of this integration, a period marked by restructuring of service lines, redefinition of managerial responsibilities, and the harmonization of divergent administrative systems and professional practices.

“Complexity” in this context was not an abstract condition but a lived organizational reality. It manifested in renegotiated professional boundaries between social workers, nurses, physicians, and administrative staff; in shifting governance arrangements and layered decision-making structures; and in tensions between care-oriented values and increasing demands for efficiency, standardization, and financial control. The merger also carried emotional weight: uncertainty regarding roles, moral distress linked to resource constraints, and fatigue associated with rapid and continuous change. Under these conditions, the capacity to remain relationally connected and ethically responsive was frequently strained.

At the time of the study, I worked within the organization as an internal action researcher and mid-level manager with a formal mandate to support staff well-being and collaborative forms of organizing during the merger. I led a dialogically oriented development team that convened and facilitated multiple types of dialogue spaces, including workplace dialogues, cross-unit workshops, steering group sessions, development team meetings, reflective circles for managers and frontline professionals, and, at times, conflict mediation conversations. Participants included managers, clinicians, social workers, nurses, and administrative personnel from different municipalities and service domains.

This dual positioning afforded close access to everyday dialogic dynamics, including subtle embodied and relational shifts that would have been difficult to observe from an external standpoint. At the same time, it required ongoing reflexive attention to power, responsibility, and the partiality inherent in insider action research (Coghlan & Shani, 2007). Rather than claiming neutrality, the study acknowledges knowledge production as relationally situated and ethically entangled within the very processes it seeks to understand.

Data Generation and Material

Data was generated over a 2-year period through multiple, overlapping sources, including reflective research journals, observation notes, transcripts of recorded dialogues, interviews, and organizational documents produced in the course of development work. This combination supported the integration of first-person, second-person, and third-person perspectives (Torbert, 2001), allowing the analysis to attend simultaneously to inner experience, relational interaction, and collective patterns.

Dialogue functioned both as the object of study and as a mode of inquiry. Facilitated dialogues, reflective sessions, and informal conversations became sites where understanding was generated in interaction. Research journaling played a central role in capturing embodied sensations, affective shifts, images, and moments of resonance that often preceded verbal articulation. These materials were treated as empirically grounded traces of dialogic dynamics unfolding across time.

Vignettes and Representation

To render the findings accessible while preserving confidentiality, the empirical material is presented through short vignettes and illustrative episodes. These vignettes are grounded in diary entries, observation notes, and recorded dialogue excerpts, and were developed through reconstruction and condensation. Some vignettes remain close to singular moments that could be supported by interactional records; others are composite vignettes, combining elements from multiple similar episodes across settings and time.

The purpose of this representational strategy is not fictionalization, but analytic clarity. Vignettes allow processes that are difficult to convey through abstract description—such as shifts in presence, ruptures in attunement, embodied tension, and moments of relational opening—to become visible and experientially intelligible to the reader.

Reflexive and Abductive Analytic Orientation

Given the researcher's insider position, reflexivity was integral to the research process and treated as a condition of rigor in studying relational and dialogic phenomena. Ongoing reflective journaling, dialogic supervision, and iterative engagement with theory supported a continuous inward–outward movement between embodied experience and organizational context (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Rather than seeking distance from the field, the analytic stance emphasized sustained presence, careful sensing, and reflexive awareness of how participation shaped what could be noticed and known.

Analysis followed an abductive orientation (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), moving iteratively between empirical material and theory without coding the data against predefined categories. Instead of starting from fixed constructs, the analytic process involved staying with moments that felt charged, unsettled, or alive in the material, allowing questions and conceptual language to form gradually around them. Engagement with dialogic theory (Bohm, 1996; Isaacs, 1999), phenomenology and embodied cognition (Gendlin, 1996; Merleau-Ponty, 1962), interpersonal neurobiology (Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Siegel, 2012), and regenerative systems thinking (Wahl, 2016; Weber, 2016) functioned as dialogic partners in this process rather than as explanatory frames imposed in advance.

Analytic sensitivity to aliveness, responsiveness, and field resonance developed through prolonged immersion in the research context and continued to evolve through writing itself, which was treated as part of the analytic process rather than as a separate reporting phase.

This reflexive, abductive orientation reflects the central premise of the study: that dialogic dynamics cannot be captured through detached observation alone, but require methodological patience, embodied attentiveness, and responsiveness to what the material itself calls for.

Findings: The Regenerative Dynamics of Embodied Dialogue

The analysis of reflective journals, dialogic interactions, and organizational practices revealed regenerative dynamics unfolding as living rhythms across four interrelated orientations of dialogue: the self, the other, the collective, and the field. These orientations do not represent discrete categories but overlapping spheres of experience through which dialogue gathers coherence, allows potentiality to ripen, and gives rise to activation.

What emerged consistently across the material was that dialogue is sustained not only through spoken exchange, but through embodied presence, relational attunement, systemic holding, and at times field-like atmospheres of connection. In presenting the findings, each orientation is described in turn, showing how coherence stabilizes dialogic presence, how potentiality gathers as settled presence in dialogue, how potentiality ripens as a not-yet-expressed tension or readiness, and how activation emerges as this ripening takes form in movement. Together, these dynamics form a regenerative rhythm through which organizing remains alive and responsive.

The Self: Embodied Presence and Inner Coherence

Regenerative dialogue begins in the sensing body. Before words are spoken, there is the quiet work of arriving: the nervous system settling, the breath finding its rhythm, and attention widening to the textures of inner and outer experience. Presence, here, is not an abstract ideal or communicative stance, but a felt orientation carried in breath, posture, stillness, and a subtle readiness to meet what is present (Gendlin, 1996; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This bodily orientation prepares the ground from which dialogue can unfold as a living, regenerative dynamic.

In the newly merged organization, shaped by accelerated integration processes, shifting governance structures, and mounting efficiency pressures, such embodied arriving could not be taken for granted. Meetings followed one another in rapid succession as service lines were reorganized and roles renegotiated. Emotional demands accumulated amid uncertainty, moral strain, and the effort to reconcile differing professional logics of care and administration. Expectations of clarity and decisiveness often pressed participants to speak quickly, resolve ambiguity, and determinedly move forward. In these conditions, the slow work of listening inwardly—pausing long enough to sense what was forming—could feel almost countercultural. Yet across the empirical material, moments in which dialogue unfolded regeneratively were consistently grounded in prior bodily settling: a quiet, often invisible holding open of experience before speech, decision, or movement.

This holding was not experienced as introspection or withdrawal from the situation. Rather, it took the form of an inner steadiness that allowed engagement without bracing. In my own experience, when such steadiness was present, I felt gathered enough to think, listen, and speak without forcing myself forward or defending against what was emerging. Even when conversations were difficult, there was room to remain present.

The body did not draw attention to itself; it simply was. Dialogue, in these moments, unfolded with a sense of contact and aliveness that did not depend on ease or agreement.

More often, this steadiness became noticeable through its absence. Unease, restlessness, or agitation signaled that something in me had been pulled into haste or reactivity. Attention narrowed, speech accelerated, and listening required effort. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) suggests, embodied orientation typically recedes from awareness when it functions well, becoming noticeable primarily when disrupted.

Over time, I came to name this lived experience of inner holding as coherence. Coherence was not a cultivated state or personal achievement, but a temporary embodied condition in which bodily sensations, emotions, and attention were sufficiently gathered to support presence with what was unfolding. Coherence did not eliminate difficulty or tension; it made difficulty bearable. When coherence was present, I could stay with uncertainty without rushing to resolve, explain, or defend. When it thinned, dialogic movement narrowed quickly.

From this embodied ground, movement often began to gather as a felt tension—a sense that something wanted to move without yet knowing how. At times this took the form of quiet pressure or anticipatory stillness; at other times, it surfaced as irritation, frustration, or restlessness. This was not yet expression, but a readiness that hovered near articulation. I came to recognize this as potentiality: a not-yet-expressed condition in which dialogue was alive but still holding its breath.

Activation emerged when this gathered tension took form in movement. Sometimes it arrived tentatively, through a hesitant sentence, a metaphor groping toward meaning, or a pause that invited something new to surface. At other times it came with urgency, as a rush of words that carried force and speed. These contrasting expressions revealed activation not as a polished outcome, but as the emergence of what had gathered within coherence into expression. What began as an inner movement often found its resonance in relationship, as activation met the presence of others and was shaped in the shared space of dialogue.

As organizational pressures intensified, it became clear that the embodied conditions supporting coherence and potentiality could not be assumed. Inner steadiness was easily disrupted by haste, emotional overload, or competing demands. Awareness of this fragility emerged gradually through repeated experiences of losing and regaining my footing in dialogue. Over time, small shifts in how I arrived and oriented myself before dialogue began started to matter as ways of giving myself room to remain present.

One episode illustrates this dynamic clearly.

Before a dialogue session, I arrived early and arranged the chairs in a circle. The room was quiet, empty, and still. From the corridor, I heard hurried footsteps approaching. A colleague entered, visibly rushed—breathing quickly, apologizing for being late, speaking at speed about the stressful situation she was coming from. As she spoke, I felt how easily the urgency could pull me with it, drawing my attention into the same accelerated rhythm.

In that moment, I did not respond outwardly. Instead, I stayed where I was, letting my breath slow and my body settle into the chair. It was not a conscious technique so much as a small embodied resistance to her haste. I remember it as remaining with something steady inside myself, like an inner rope that kept me from slipping into reactivity. From there, I could listen without trying to calm her or manage the situation. The pace of the situation gradually shifted, not through intervention, but through staying present without matching the urgency.

Experiences like this became more frequent. I began to arrive earlier, not to prepare content or structure, but to give myself a moment of quiet before others arrived. Sometimes I sat in silence; sometimes I walked slowly around the room. These were not rituals or deliberate practices at first. They emerged because without them, embodied dialogue was more easily overtaken by haste. When coherence had time to gather, listening required less effort, and speech did not need to be forced. I could meet others as they arrived, without immediately matching their pace or urgency.

This coherence was not experienced as emotional calm, reflective distance, or heightened self-awareness. It functioned as a pre-reflective embodied integration through which attention, affect, and responsiveness remained sufficiently linked for dialogue to stay possible (Siegel, 2012). When disrupted, fragmentation appeared quickly, narrowing perception and constricting relational availability. In this sense, coherence did not precede dialogue as a prerequisite but modulated the quality with which dialogue could be entered and sustained (Buber, 1970; Shotter, 2008).

From a regenerative perspective, this work of inner coherence is inseparable from the renewal of dialogic vitality. Attunement heightens sensitivity to what is alive within and around us, widening the range of what can be met and engaged (Weber, 2016). Interpersonal neurobiology describes this linking of sensation, emotion, and thought as integration—a flexible coordination that supports resilience under strain (Siegel, 2012). In lived experience, this integration was not dramatic. It felt like enough inner steadiness to remain present to what was emerging without immediate contraction.

Yet such coherence was never stable. It shifted with context, pressure, and fatigue. Living systems renew themselves not through static equilibrium but through ongoing cycles of disturbance and re-integration (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Mang & Haggard, 2016; Wahl, 2016). At the self-level, coherence therefore appeared not as a trait or accomplishment, but as a dynamic condition—continually unsettled and reformed through embodied participation in dialogue. Dialogue did not depend on coherence as a prerequisite; rather, coherence and dialogue developed together, each strengthening and disrupting the other over time.

The Other: Relational Attunement and the Emergence of Potential

If embodied dialogue begins in inner attunement, it comes alive in relation to others. When another person entered the room, the quality of experience shifted. Attention moved outward, the space between bodies came alive, and interaction carried weight

in a new way. Dialogue was no longer held within the self alone, but unfolded in the relational space between self and other—a shared field that came into being through the encounter itself.

In this relational space, a sense of potential often began to gather. It was not experienced as inner readiness, but as a relational charge—a felt sense that something was at stake, without yet knowing what it was or how it should move. It appeared as heightened sensitivity to words, tone, timing, and silence. The same sentence could now open or close the interaction; a pause could feel supportive or threatening. Dialogue felt both alive and fragile, shaped by the quality of contact in the between.

Relational attunement proved central to whether this emerging potential could be held without tipping into reactivity. When coherence at the self-level was sufficient, I could stay present with the other without rushing to interpret, advise, or correct. This made it possible to remain in contact even as uncertainty or difference surfaced. When coherence thinned, the relational space narrowed quickly, and potential collapsed into defensiveness, misattunement, or withdrawal.

In some encounters, the relational space felt different from the outset. Without any explicit agreement or shared understanding, there was a sense of contact that made it easier to stay present with one another. I noticed this most clearly in one-on-one conversations, where attention settled into a shared rhythm and interaction felt quietly held. The connection was not located in words alone, but the felt quality of mutual orientation. Over time, I began to name this experience *napayhteys*—a Finnish word that literally translates as “umbilical connection.”

The metaphor surfaced first through the body. I was in dialogue with a colleague when I noticed a felt warmth and connectedness toward them, a sense that the distance between us had narrowed. Without planning it, I lifted my hand and traced an invisible line from my own bellybutton toward theirs, simultaneously naming it *napayhteys*.

The metaphor arose from bodily experience rather than reflection. In moments when *napayhteys* was present, I felt a warm, steady sense of connection in my abdomen, as if a thread ran between us that allowed attention, emotion, and meaning to move without force. The distance between self and other did not disappear, but it softened enough for difference to be approached without defensiveness.

When *napayhteys* held, dialogue could deepen even around difficult or uncertain themes. Silence felt permissible rather than awkward. Words arrived more slowly and with less need to convince. There was a sense that the relationship itself could carry what was emerging, even when neither of us yet knew what to say. In these moments, something began to gather between us—a quiet intensity that made the interaction feel alive and consequential.

The fragility of *napayhteys* became most visible when it was disrupted. A momentary shift of attention, an interruption, or a move toward interpretation could thin the connection almost instantly. The warmth faded, the shared rhythm broke, and interaction narrowed. What had felt alive a moment earlier could flatten into polite exchange.

One small moment captures this:

I was speaking with a colleague in her office about upcoming development initiatives. We were in what felt like an intense exchange of ideas—at least I experienced it that way—when her phone chimed. The small sound cut the connection between us and her attention flickered instantly into another reality. In my body, I felt as if I had been placed on hold—left hanging on the line. It was as if an automated voice had quietly announced: ‘The person you are trying to reach is not available.’ She looked back up a moment later, but I could see in her eyes that she was not quite all there yet. The other conversation lingered somewhere in her attention. It took a while before we found each other again, and our theme.

This brief interruption did not involve overt conflict or explicit withdrawal. Yet the relational space shifted immediately. What had felt alive and shared became thinner, more cautious. Only afterward did I recognize how fully the sense of *napayhteys* had been carrying the conversation until it loosened. Its absence revealed what its presence had quietly enabled: sustained attention, shared orientation, and the capacity to remain with unfolding meaning rather than drifting into polite exchange.

The interruption did not create misunderstanding; it altered contact. Relational potential depended not on goodwill alone, but on continuous participation in the space between us. When attentiveness to the between faltered, the dialogic space narrowed.

When relational potential is sustained, however, it does not remain static. Over time, it begins to press toward articulation. Something wants to move—a difficult sentence, an unsettled difference, a truth that has hovered at the edge of speech. Whether this movement unfolds generatively or collapses into reactivity depends on how the relational space receives it.

In many conversations, I listened for long stretches. I let others speak, especially those who were more verbal or more hurried. I took in what I heard. But at a certain point, it became difficult to remain silent. Pressure built in my body. I shifted in my chair. I sighed. Then I had to speak.

I had not been preparing a response. I had been listening. Yet something within the unfolding dialogue required articulation. When it came, it often came with force—sometimes as accelerated speech. Especially in moments when it felt that my voice might otherwise not find space, the words pushed forward.

In slower, more dialogically held moments, my speech entered differently. It emerged more tentatively, weaving connections rather than breaking into the flow. The difference was palpable—not only in how I spoke, but in how what I said was received.

Activation, in these encounters, marked the emergence of necessary difference into the relational space. Forceful expression did not indicate lack of reflection; it signaled a mismatch between what sought articulation and the capacity of the interaction to

receive it gently. Activation thus revealed both vitality and fragility: it brought forward what could no longer remain unspoken while simultaneously testing the openness of the space between us.

Dialogic theory helps illuminate why such moments carry ethical weight. Meaning does not emerge through harmony, but through the articulation of difference within a shared relational space (Bakhtin, 1981; Buber, 1970). Interpersonal neurobiology likewise suggests that relational integration depends on sustained mutual attunement; when such integration weakens, expression is more likely to emerge with urgency rather than ease (Siegel, 2012). Activation, then, marks a threshold: can the space between self and other remain open when difference enters with force?

From a regenerative perspective, activation at the level of the other is neither breakdown nor success. It is the emergence of relational potential into movement. Whether that movement renews or depletes depends on the capacity of the relational space to remain open under pressure. Regenerative dialogue is therefore not defined by smoothness or agreement, but by the resilience of the between—the capacity of relational space to hold necessary difference without collapsing into defensiveness or withdrawal.

The Collective: Shared Holding and Regenerative Movement

When dialogue widens to include the collective, the scale of attention shifts. Presence ripples through webs of relationships, histories, and shared purposes. Meaning-making becomes a distributed process, emerging not from any one voice, but from the interplay of many. The collective does not speak with a single mouth. It speaks through overlapping rhythms of agreement and dissent, through resonance that builds when ideas align, and through the generative friction that arises when they do not. Regenerative dialogue makes room for this multiplicity, recognizing that coherence at the collective scale is not the erasure of difference but the capacity to hold it without fracture.

In my experience, collective coherence did not arise through agreement or alignment, but through a shared willingness to stay with what was difficult without rushing toward closure. Moments of silence, hesitation, or tension often marked the group's effort to remain present to what was emerging, rather than the breakdown of dialogue. In such moments, the collective itself became an active participant in the dialogue, shaping whether difference could be received, transformed, or expelled.

The following episode offers an illustration of collective dialogue as a site of amplification, where accumulated relational potential intensifies and seeks expression. It shows how collective activation can function as a metabolizing moment when tension that has been held implicitly is brought into shared awareness. Through these dynamics, the regenerative character of dialogue becomes visible: dialogue sustains vitality not by smoothing tension, but by enabling groups to stay with it long enough for movement to occur. At times, collective tension intensifies to a point where articulation becomes unavoidable.

Prior to the episode described below, accumulated tension in the work community had largely been managed through avoidance and misdirected relational conflict, leaving little space for shared holding at the collective level. This case illustrates how

collective coherence and activation then unfolded through the direct naming of what had remained beneath the surface.

In a dialogic development process, a supervisor had recently become responsible for a new service area in a newly merged public organization. After meeting employees individually, she sensed that ‘something was badly wrong’ in the work community—something ‘bubbling and smelling’ beneath the surface. She invited the dialogic development team to support the process and chose to bring this concern into the collective space.

In a recorded dialogue reflecting on the process, she described how difficult it had been to speak this aloud:

Supervisor:

‘I have to say, that was one of the hardest choices I’ve made in these processes, because I didn’t know the group that well yet. And then what had already started to spill out to me before the process. I thought long and hard: is this the right moment, should I do it? But I decided: I have nothing to lose. It was an important opening—that the lid was opened. Because something was brewing and boiling underneath. That shit-well.’

“Shit-well” was a blunt Finnish expression used by participants themselves to describe a relationally toxic undercurrent in the work community—something unpleasant, avoided, and yet urgently in need of attention.

My colleague, the dialogue facilitator, responded by naming what had made this move effective:

Dialogue facilitator:

‘But the way you did it—and said it like that. You did it intelligently, with finesse, but you named it directly. There was no way to interpret it as anything else. You said it calmly and left it there.’

Supervisor:

‘I threw the ball in the air.’

Dialogue facilitator:

‘And I caught it. Like, okay, we’re starting from here. And that one sentence changed the whole process. The next session was entirely about cleaning the shit-well. Everything changed because of that one phrase. They understood: now we’re actually going to deal with this.’

The facilitator then described the intensity of what followed:

Dialogue facilitator:

‘I remember writing on the flipcharts as it came out. And it was so damn ugly. The whole flipchart filled up—and it stopped them. You could see it in their faces: we can’t fake our way

through this. This is real. And afterwards... you drove home and I drove home and both of us had a headache. The whole evening it was like “eeee!””

The supervisor added how strongly the employees had described the same tension and subsequent relief:

Supervisor:

‘It was such a physical experience—for them too. Afterwards people said: ‘I was so nervous I almost started crying’ before the shit-well opened. But when it was over, the feeling of relief was so strong they almost cried again. It was like a violin string, stretched to its limit.’

This episode shows collective activation as the shared emergence of accumulated relational potential through direct naming. The supervisor’s decision to speak what had remained implicit did not resolve the organizational situation, but it altered the collective field in which it was held. What had been sensed individually as tension became collectively visible and speakable. The bodily intensity described by participants—nervousness, headaches, tears, and relief—suggests that activation operated not only cognitively or emotionally, but as a collective embodied process.

Dialogic and relational theories suggest that transformation in groups does not arise from smoothing over tension, but from the capacity to remain present to it without fragmentation or premature closure (Bakhtin, 1981; Seikkula et al., 2006; Shotter, 2008). From an interpersonal neurobiological perspective, such moments can be understood as processes of integration, in which previously fragmented relational material is linked into shared awareness (Siegel, 2012). What is restored is not harmony, but the group’s capacity to hold difficult truths together (Zehr, 2002).

Seen through a regenerative lens, this collective activation functioned as a metabolizing moment. Disturbance was not eliminated but reorganized. Regeneration at the collective level unfolded as the shared capacity to bear tension long enough for meaning and responsibility to shift. Activation marked not emotional discharge alone, but a reconfiguration of relational orientation. Through such cycles of disturbance and integration, organizing remains connected to life amid ongoing turbulence (Capra & Luisi, 2014).

The Field: Resonance Beyond the Immediate Interaction

At times, embodied dialogue opened into a dimension that felt larger than the people in the room. In these moments, interaction seemed to connect participants to processes already underway—transitions, endings, or emergent possibilities that exceeded individual intention or group deliberation. Dialogue did not merely unfold between us; it felt as though we were participating in something wider, something that could be sensed but not fully named.

This field was not reducible to individual contributions or observable group dynamics alone. It was experienced as a shared orientation that subtly shaped how interaction

unfolded. Such moments were rarely dramatic or sustained. More often, they appeared quietly—as a sense of resonance, rightness, or attunement that guided attention without instruction. Speech slowed, listening deepened, and insights emerged with a quality of inevitability, as if drawn from a coherence that preceded deliberate reasoning. Even when dialogue remained complex or unresolved, participants later described these moments as unusually clear, meaningful, or alive.

The field tended to become perceptible in moments of sustained tension, when coherence, relational potential, and activation aligned—when individual and collective presence were sufficient to remain with what was unfolding without forcing resolution. In such moments, dialogue no longer felt like something we were producing alone. It felt as if we were being oriented by processes already in motion, yet intimately connected to our embodied and relational experience. The field carried an existential quality: dialogue became oriented toward what felt true, necessary, or ethically unavoidable, sensed bodily as consonance or dissonance rather than reached through argument.

One episode from the empirical material illustrates this field quality particularly clearly.

In one recorded dialogue with my team, we were speaking about the future. The conversation took place a few months before we were informed that our development work would be terminated and the team disbanded. I did not know this at the time in any factual sense. Still, I remember carrying a strange bodily certainty—as if something in me had already registered an ending that my conscious understanding had not yet caught up with.

As my colleagues shared their thoughts and concerns, I suddenly felt oddly detached—almost as if I were floating in empty space. Then, almost at once, a clear image appeared: a supernova. It was not a thought I reasoned my way into, but a kind of instant knowing—compressed, vivid, and oddly precise. A bright star had exploded, leaving behind only the heaviest elements and a faint glow. The image carried an ending and a beginning at the same time, not as separate phases but as a single realization: new stars are born from the debris of earlier ones. The death of the star was not something to be feared or prevented. It felt natural, and necessary for something new to emerge.

Only later did I begin to translate this clarity into language. That evening, I found an image of an interstellar cloud on the internet and sent it to a colleague with the message: ‘This is what I saw.’ In the days that followed, I returned to the experience in my research diary, slowly trying to give words to what had arrived all at once in the moment. Yet when I later read the dialogue transcript during analysis, my contribution appeared only as a single sentence: ‘All I see is emptiness.’

The contrast struck me. It revealed how much can be carried in the shared field of experience—held behind words or beneath them—while remaining largely invisible in the textual surface of recorded dialogue.

This episode illustrates the field dimension of dialogue as a mode of knowing not fully accessible through spoken interaction or textual records alone. What was sensed in the moment did not take the form of propositional insight, but of compressed, imaginal clarity that oriented understanding without requiring articulation. The absence of this experience from the transcript highlights a central feature of field-level phenomena: they may shape meaning, timing, and direction while remaining largely invisible in discursive exchange. The field does not replace dialogue as talk; rather, it surrounds and informs it, carrying anticipatory, relational, and embodied knowing that may only later—and partially—find expression in words.

The field-level experiences described here address a persistent challenge in dialogic and organizational research: how to account for forms of relational and embodied knowing that are experientially salient yet not fully reducible to individual cognition, interpersonal interaction, or collective sensemaking (Gendlin, 1996; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Shotter, 2008). Such knowing often precedes articulation. It arises through pre-reflective bodily attunement and relational orientation, and is frequently psychologized as “intuition” or treated as emergent group dynamics when it resists discursive capture.

Introducing the field level extends dialogic analysis beyond observable interaction while remaining grounded in relational ontology. Meaning, agency, and direction are understood not as properties residing within bounded individuals, but as emerging within unfolding configurations of relation (Chia & Holt, 2009; Hernes, 2008). Bohm’s dialogic work is especially resonant here. Drawing on his notion of an implicate order, Bohm (1980, 1996) suggested that both thought and dialogue unfold within a shared field of meaning from which patterns temporarily emerge. Dialogue becomes transformative when participants attend not only to what is said, but to this deeper background from which thought itself arises.

Interpersonal neurobiology offers a complementary articulation. Siegel’s concept of *intraconnectedness* proposes that mind is not confined to individual brains but emerges within distributed systems that include bodies, relationships, and environments (Siegel, 2023). From this perspective, experiences of anticipatory knowing or imaginal clarity need not be located inside an isolated subject. They can be understood as expressions of relational processes already in motion.

Relational interpretations of quantum theory similarly describe social reality as constituted through entangled processes in which possibilities begin to take shape prior to their articulation in speech or action (Barad, 2007; Wendt, 2015). Entanglement foregrounds inseparability: participants are not discrete units who subsequently connect, but always already part of unfolding relational processes. Field-level moments—such as sensing an ending before it is announced—can thus be understood as orientations arising within these entangled configurations rather than as purely individual insights.

From a living-systems perspective, human organizing is embedded within wider movements of life (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Mang & Haggard, 2016; Wahl, 2016). Regeneration is not something organizations manufacture; it is part of life’s ongoing rhythm of dissolution and renewal. Most of the time, this embeddedness remains

implicit. Occasionally, embodied dialogue renders it palpable. Participants may sense transitions before they are formally recognized, feel directions before they are strategically defined, or register ethical necessity before it is reasoned through. Comparable intuitions appear in leadership scholarship that describes sensing emerging futures within collective fields of attention, where orientation precedes formal articulation (Scharmer, 2016).

The field, then, names moments when this entangled aliveness becomes perceptible within organizing. Coherence gathers, potential intensifies, and activation emerges—not as isolated human achievements, but within the wider flow of life in which human systems are already situated. Regenerative dialogue does not generate renewal from outside this flow; it is an attuned participation in renewal already unfolding. At rare but consequential moments, dialogue makes this participation visible, allowing organizing to orient more consciously within transformations that exceed any single actor or moment.

Discussion: Regenerative Embodied Dialogue in Resonance with Life

This article develops a regenerative perspective on dialogue grounded in autoethnographic action research conducted within a public social and healthcare organization undergoing systemic transition. Rather than approaching dialogue as a communicative practice or organizational intervention for managing complexity, aligning perspectives, or producing predefined outcomes, the findings position dialogue as an embodied and relational mode of participation through which human systems sustain aliveness and remain responsive under conditions of strain.

What becomes visible across the analysis is that dialogue, at its regenerative depth, does not merely facilitate exchange. It restores a quality of relational presence that may be described as *being-with*: a connected participation in unfolding reality where complexity can be experienced without prematurely closing what is still forming. In such moments, dialogue resonates with the ontology of life itself—life understood not as abstraction, but as situated, responsive, and continuously becoming within relational fields.

Coherence, Potentiality, and Activation: The Regenerative Rhythm of Dialogue

Across the empirical material, dialogue unfolded as a regenerative rhythm structured by three interrelated dynamics: coherence, potentiality, and activation. Rather than operating as linear stages or intended outcomes, these dynamics functioned as relational conditions shaping when and how dialogic movement became possible. This processual understanding aligns with dialogic and practice-based perspectives that emphasize emergence and responsiveness over control or sequencing (Bakhtin, 1981; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

Coherence refers to embodied and relational processes through which attention, affect, and meaning become sufficiently integrated to sustain presence with uncertainty, tension, or difference. Yet as lived within the research process, coherence was not merely integration in a technical or neurobiological sense. It carried a quality of settled, undivided being-with. When coherence held, participants were neither withdrawn nor forceful. Sensing remained possible without compulsive reacting, and nothing required premature resolution.

Importantly, coherence did not imply the absence of inner multiplicity. Mixed emotions, competing interpretations, and dialogical voices remained present. What shifted was not the presence of difference, but the capacity to remain with it. Coherence allowed plurality—within the self and in relation to others—without fragmentation. It did not produce harmony; it made contact with complexity possible without collapse.

In such moments, attention remained in touch with what was unfolding rather than being pulled into defensive reflexes or imposed agendas. This resonates with phenomenological accounts of embodied orientation (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and Gendlin's (1996) notion of felt sense as pre-reflective bodily knowing. Dialogic theory situates such presence in embodied attunement rather than cognitive control (Shotter, 2008), while interpersonal neurobiology describes integration as supporting relational stability under strain (Siegel, 2012). If "integration" names processes at a neurobiological level, "being-with" captures their experiential quality.

Coherence, then, was less an achievement than a settling—a shift from reactive fragmentation toward participatory presence in reality as it unfolded.

Between coherence and activation, the analysis identifies potentiality. Potentiality was experienced as a not-yet-expressed condition—sometimes sensed as bodily or relational tension, at other times as heightened sensitivity or anticipatory stillness. Yet potentiality was not simply accumulated pressure awaiting discharge. It resembled ripening.

Ripening carries temporality, fragility, and non-forcing. Something begins to form within the field of coherent being-with, but it is not yet ready for articulation. Premature intervention risks distortion; excessive delay risks stagnation. Potentiality thus names the phase in which life gathers toward form. It depends on coherence because ripening requires a space that is not fractured by reactivity or overdetermined by intention.

Activation refers to the emergence of this ripened potential into speech, gesture, silence, or subtle shifts in orientation. It did not necessarily appear as decisive action. Often it emerged tentatively—in a faltering sentence, a prolonged pause, or a softening of tone—allowing meaning to approach articulation without being prematurely fixed. At other times, activation arrived with urgency, introducing difference or tension into the dialogic space. Such moments did not signal failure, but reflected situations in which something could no longer remain implicit. Bakhtin's (1981) notion of answerability illuminates these instances as ethically charged responses to what demands expression.

Crucially, what differentiated regenerative from depleting activation was not intensity but resonance. When activation emerged from coherent being-with

and ripened potentiality, it did not feel imposed upon the situation. It felt responsive to it. Movement arose in contact with unfolding conditions rather than in abstraction from them.

This asymmetry remains important. Coherence can be intentionally supported through embodied and relational practices such as slowing interaction and sustaining presence (Bohm, 1996; Seikkula et al., 2006). Activation, by contrast, resisted orchestration. It marked a threshold where dialogic energy tipped into emergence beyond planning or technique. This challenges instrumental framings of dialogue that assume outcomes can be reliably produced through facilitation (Bushe & Marshak, 2015; Isaacs, 1999).

Taken together, coherence, potentiality, and activation reposition dialogue as a regenerative rhythm in resonance with life's own processes: settling into undivided presence, allowing ripening, and releasing emergence when conditions are ready. Dialogue thus appears less as a tool for producing change and more as a participatory mode of engaging with ongoing becoming.

Dialogue Beyond Interaction: The Field as an Emergent Extension

The empirical material points to dialogic dynamics that, at times, exceeded immediate interaction without detaching from it. In certain episodes, coherence, potentiality, and activation appeared to take shape within a wider relational atmosphere that oriented participants toward what felt possible, necessary, or emerging. These moments are conceptualized here as occurring at a field level of dialogue—an extension of the regenerative rhythm rather than a separate domain.

The field became perceptible when coherent being-with was sustained long enough for potential to ripen without premature closure. In such moments, participants reported sensing direction, legitimacy, or transition before it was cognitively formulated. This is not treated as metaphysical causation, but as experiential embeddedness: organizing becomes palpable as part of wider processes of dissolution and renewal.

A central contribution of this study lies in conceptualizing the field dimension as participation in entangled living processes. Dialogue, at depth, reveals human systems not as isolated decision-making units but as situated within relational ecologies (Barad, 2007; Wendt, 2015). In this sense, “in resonance with life” names an analytic claim: regenerative dialogue reflects the same logic as living systems—responsive, contextual, non-forcing, and attuned to timing.

At the field level, activation rarely appeared as immediate decision. Instead, it manifested as subtle reorientation that shaped subsequent organizing across contexts and over time. Organizing thus appears influenced not only by observable interaction, but by relational resonances that persist and accumulate. Dialogic theory has long gestured toward such dimensions, most explicitly in Bohm's (1980, 1996) understanding of dialogue as participation in a shared movement of meaning. Read in this way, the field is inseparable from embodied and dialogic practice: it is what becomes perceptible when fragmentation quiets and relational participation deepens.

Studying Regenerative Dialogue: Methodological Sensitivities

Conceptualizing dialogue as resonance with life carries methodological implications. Coherence, potentiality, and field resonance were often registered somatically and relationally before becoming discursively visible. Approaches limited to external observation risk flattening precisely those dynamics through which dialogic vitality unfolds (Shotter, 2008; Todres, 2007).

An abductive, process-oriented design proved suited to tracing ripening and emergence without imposing predefined categories (Langley, 1999; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Writing itself functioned as a site where what had been implicitly sensed could gradually take form. Methodological sensitivity thus mirrors the phenomenon: studying regenerative dialogue requires the same patience and responsiveness that regenerative dialogue itself demands.

Implications for Practice: Cultivating Conditions for Regenerative Dialogue

The regenerative perspective developed here shifts applied behavioral science away from implementing dialogue as technique and toward cultivating conditions under which being-with, ripening, and emergence can occur rather than management of outcomes (Bushe & Marshak, 2015).

First, coherence—or settled, undivided presence—becomes foundational. In accelerated organizational environments, constant reactivity fragments attention and undermines ripening. Slowing pace, allowing silence, and sustaining embodied attentiveness are not preparatory gestures but conditions for life-like responsiveness (Bohm, 1996; Seikkula et al., 2006).

Second, practitioners must recalibrate their relationship to action. Organizational cultures often privilege decisiveness and output. Yet regenerative activation depends on ripeness. Acting too early fractures coherence; acting too late stifles emergence. Discernment lies in sensing timing rather than imposing it (Stacey, 2012).

Third, regenerative dialogue carries ethical implications. To remain in being-with is to resist the temptation to dominate unfolding processes with cognitive agendas. This is not passivity but disciplined responsiveness. It requires humility: recognition that organizing participates in living systems it does not fully control (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Wahl, 2016).

Finally, attending to field-level resonance expands practical sensitivity. Subtle shifts in atmosphere or orientation may signal ripening or transition before they become strategically visible. Protecting such fragile emergence requires restraint as much as initiative (Bohm, 1996; Bushe & Marshak, 2015).

Taken together, these implications reposition dialogic practice as cultivation of resonance rather than management of outcomes. Regenerative dialogue does not guarantee success; it strengthens the relational capacities through which organizing can move in ways that remain connected, proportionate, and ethically responsive.

Conclusions: Dialogue as a Regenerative Capacity in Organizing

This study has developed a regenerative perspective on dialogue grounded in autoethnographic action research within a public social and healthcare organization undergoing systemic transition. Moving beyond technique-oriented framings, the analysis conceptualizes dialogue as an embodied and relational mode of *being-with* unfolding reality. Rather than treating dialogue as a method for managing complexity, the study positions it as a participatory dynamic through which responsiveness, ethical presence, and renewal become possible in turbulent contexts.

Across the empirical material, dialogic movement unfolded through three interrelated dynamics: coherence, potentiality, and activation. Coherence appeared as settled, undivided presence—a connected way of participating in unfolding reality in which complexity could be experienced without fragmentation. Potentiality emerged within this coherence as ripening: a not-yet quality in which something was forming without being prematurely shaped. Activation arose as emergence when that ripening could take form into speech, reorientation, repair, or collective movement. Together, these dynamics formed a regenerative rhythm that shaped organizing across self, other, collective, and field levels.

By tracing these dynamics across four interrelated levels, the study extends dialogic theory in several ways. It reframes dialogue as a regenerative dynamic, conceptualizes coherence as integration lived experientially as being-with, theorizes potentiality as ripening within relational fields, and understands activation as emergence in resonance with unfolding conditions. The field situates embodied dialogue within entangled living processes, showing how shared orientation, resonance, and atmosphere can render participants' embeddedness in ongoing movements of dissolution and renewal perceptible within organizing. Attending to this dimension brings into focus phenomena that are often sensed but seldom theorized in organizational research.

Methodologically, the findings underscore the importance of embodied, reflexive, and participatory approaches for studying dialogic and regenerative processes. Coherence, potentiality, and field resonance were frequently registered somatically and relationally before becoming discursively visible. Abductive engagement with lived experience and theory allowed these dynamics to be articulated without reducing them to predefined categories. In this sense, regenerative dialogue carries epistemic implications: it is not only a subject of inquiry, but a process through which what is forming gradually becomes speakable.

Practically, this work suggests an orientation grounded in attentiveness to coherence, protection of ripening potential, and discernment in moments of activation. Dialogic vitality depends on conditions that support relational presence—time, trust, and the capacity to remain with complexity without premature closure. Rather than offering a technique for producing outcomes, regenerative dialogue invites practitioners to cultivate the relational capacities through which movement can arise.

Taken together, these findings suggest that dialogue, when approached as a regenerative capacity, supports organizing as participation in life-like processes of becoming. In this sense, regenerative dialogue operates in resonance with life's own dynamics—settling into presence, allowing ripening, and enabling emergence without forcing form. In contexts marked by ecological strain, institutional fragmentation, and sustained pressure, such capacities enable human systems not only to remain responsive and ethically engaged, but to move in ways that do not force becoming into abstraction. If contemporary challenges call for new ways of sustaining life within and beyond organizations, regenerative dialogue offers one pathway—not as a technique for control, but as a practice of attuned participation in the rhythms through which life continues to unfold.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks colleagues in the Finnish public health and social care organization where the fieldwork took place and acknowledges funding from the Kymenlaakso Regional Fund of the Finnish Cultural Foundation and the Finnish Work Environment Fund. OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-5, August 2025 version) was used for language refinement, formatting, and reference verification; all substantive content is the author's own.

ORCID iD

Eeva Nummi  <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-3038-4489>

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Finnish Work Environment Fund and Kymenlaakso Regional Fund of the Finnish Cultural Foundation.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2000). Varieties of discourse: On the study of organizations through discourse analysis. *Human Relations*, 53(9), 1125–1149. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726700539002>
- Ashkanasy, N. M., & Humphrey, R. H. (2011). A multi-level view of leadership and emotions: Leading with emotional labor. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22(2), 214–224. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.02.003>
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (M. Holquist, Ed.; C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). University of Texas Press.

- Balogun, J., Jacobs, C., Jarzabkowski, P., Mantere, S., & Vaara, E. (2014). Placing strategy discourse in context: Sociomateriality, sensemaking, and power. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51(2), 175–201. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12059>
- Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Duke University Press.
- Bohm, D. (1980). *Wholeness and the implicate order*. Routledge.
- Bohm, D. (1996). *On dialogue* (L. Nichol, Ed.). Routledge.
- Buber, M. (1970). *I and Thou* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.). Scribner. (Original work published 1923)
- Bushe, G. R., & Marshak, R. J. (2009). Revisioning organization development: Diagnostic and dialogic premises and patterns of practice. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 45(3), 348–368. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886309335070>
- Bushe, G. R., & Marshak, R. J. (2015). *Dialogic organization development: The theory and practice of transformational change*. Berrett-Koehler.
- Capra, F., & Luisi, P. L. (2014). *The systems view of life: A unifying vision*. Cambridge University Press.
- Chang, H. (2008). *Autoethnography as method*. Left Coast Press.
- Chia, R., & Holt, R. (2009). *Strategy without design: The silent efficacy of indirect action*. Cambridge University Press.
- Coghlan, D., & Shani, A. B. (2007). Insider action research: Developing reflexive practice. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 16(1), 107–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13594320601115054>
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2002). Social poetics as management inquiry: A dialogical approach. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 11(2), 128–146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10592602011002005>
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2018). Alterity: The passion, politics, and ethics of self and scholarship. *Management Learning*, 49(1), 8–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507617727738>
- Dixon, N. M. (1998). Dialogue at work. *The Learning Organization*, 5(1), 8–15. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09696479810199599>
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1), Article 10. <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-12.1.1589>
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* ((2nd ed, pp. 733–768). Sage.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Gadamer, H. G. (2004). *Truth and method* (2nd rev. ed.; J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall, Trans.). Continuum.
- Geller, S. M., & Greenberg, L. S. (2012). *Therapeutic presence: A mindful approach to effective therapy*. American Psychological Association.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1996). *Focusing-oriented psychotherapy: A manual of the experiential method*. Guilford Press.
- Gergen, K. J. (2009). *Relational being: Beyond self and community*. Oxford University Press.
- Grant, D., & Hardy, C. (2004). Struggles with organizational discourse. *Organization Studies*, 25(1), 5–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840604038183>

- Hernes, T. (2008). *Understanding organization as process: Theory for a tangled world*. Routledge.
- Hosking, D. M. (2011). Telling tales of relations: Appreciating relational constructionism. *Organization Studies*, 32(1), 47–65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840610394296>
- Isaacs, W. (1999). *Dialogue and the art of thinking together*. Currency.
- Jarzabkowski, P., Balogun, J., & Seidl, D. (2007). Strategizing: The challenges of a practice perspective. *Human Relations*, 60(1), 5–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726707075703>
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1999). *Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought*. Basic Books.
- Langley, A. (1999). Strategies for theorizing from process data. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(4), 691–710. <https://doi.org/10.2307/259349>
- Mang, P., & Haggard, B. (2016). *Regenerative development and design: A framework for evolving sustainability*. Wiley.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception* (C. Smith, Trans.) (pp. 1–466). Routledge.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- Nonaka, I., & Takeuchi, H. (1995). *The knowledge-creating company*. Oxford University Press.
- O'Brien, K. (2018). Is the 1.5 °C target possible? Exploring the three spheres of transformation. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 31, 153–160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2018.04.010>
- Raelin, J. A. (2012). Dialogue and deliberation as expressions of democratic leadership in participatory organizational change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 25(1), 7–23. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09534811211199574>
- Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (Eds.). (2008). *The SAGE handbook of action research* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Rosa, H. (2013). *Social acceleration: A new theory of modernity* (J. Trejo-Mathys, Trans.). Columbia University Press.
- Rosenberg, M. B. (2003). *Nonviolent communication: A language of life* (2nd ed.). PuddleDancer Press.
- Scharmer, O. C. (2016). *Theory U: Leading from the future as it emerges* (2nd ed.). Berrett-Koehler.
- Seikkula, J., Alakare, B., & Aaltonen, J. (2006). Open dialogue in psychosis I: An introduction and case illustration. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 19(3), 161–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10720530600691191>
- Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. Doubleday.
- Senge, P. M., Scharmer, C. O., Jaworski, J., & Flowers, B. S. (2005). *Presence: Human purpose and the field of the future*. Society for Organizational Learning.
- Shotter, J. (2008). *Dialogism and the polyphony of voices*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Siegel, D. J. (2012). *The developing mind* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Siegel, D. J. (2023). *Intraconnected: MWe (me + we) as the integration of self, identity, and belonging*. Norton.
- Stacey, R. D. (2012). *Tools and techniques of leadership and management: Meeting the challenge of complexity*. Routledge.

- Tannen, D. (1984). *Conversational style: Analyzing talk among friends*. Ablex.
- Timmermans, S., & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis. *Sociological Theory*, 30(3), 167–186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275112457914>
- Todres, L. (2007). *Embodied enquiry: Phenomenological touchstones for research, psychotherapy and spirituality*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Torbert, W. R. (2001). The practice of action inquiry. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 10(3), 250–260. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492601103005>
- Tsoukas, H., & Chia, R. (2002). On organizational becoming: Rethinking organizational change. *Organization Science*, 13(5), 567–582. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.13.5.567.7810>
- Vince, R. (2004). Rethinking emotional intelligence in organizations: A critical review and research agenda. *Human Relations*, 57(2), 167–187. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726704042923>
- Wahl, D. C. (2016). *Designing regenerative cultures*. Triarchy Press.
- Weber, A. (2016). *The biology of wonder: Aliveness, feeling, and the metamorphosis of science*. New Society Publishers.
- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Sage.
- Wendt, A. (2015). *Quantum mind and social science: Unifying physical and social ontology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Zehr, H. (2002). *The little book of restorative justice*. Good Books.