


International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry

February 2016

Volume 18 Number 1

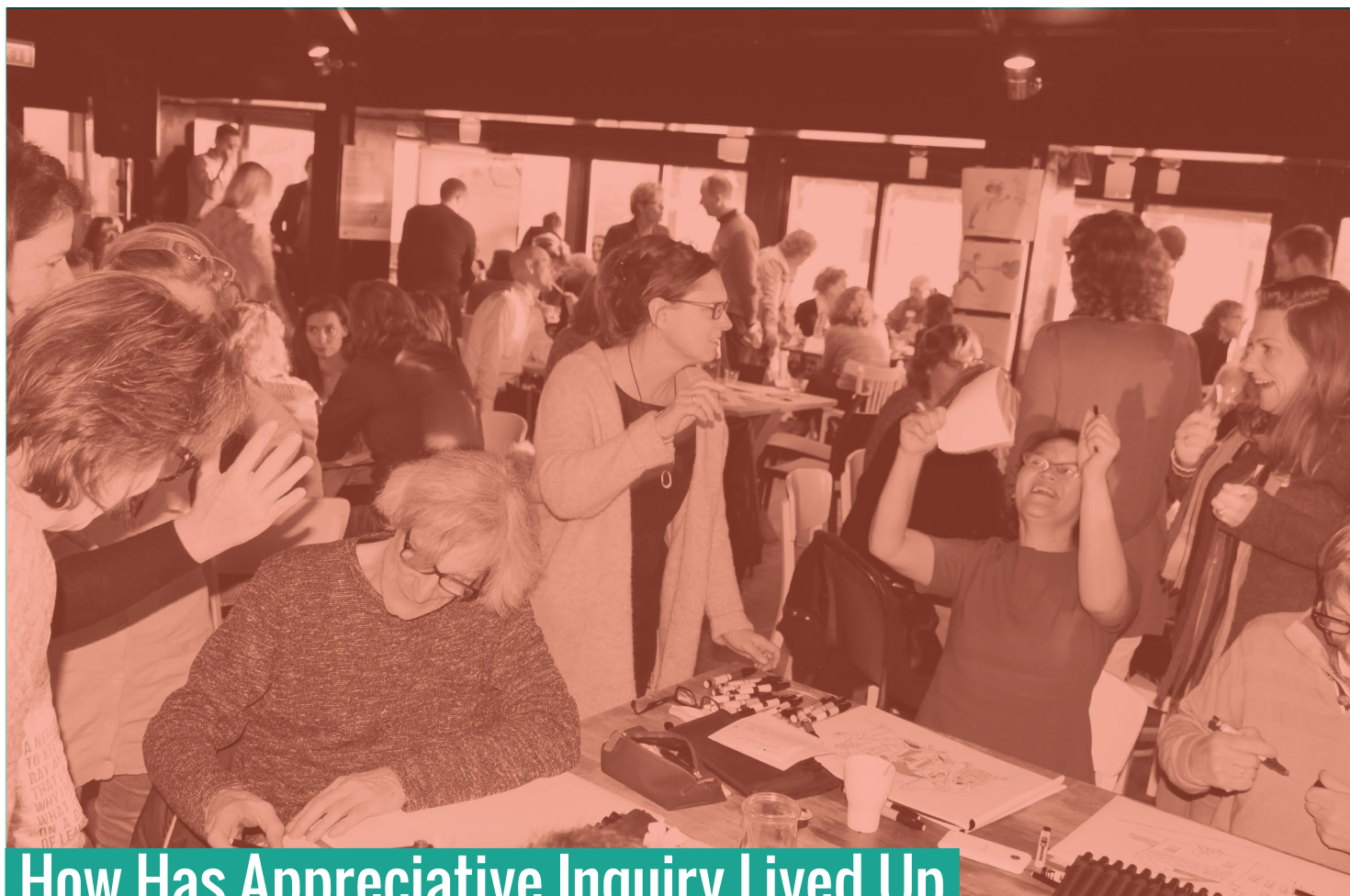
ISBN 978-1-907549-26-7

 dx.doi.org/10.12781/978-1-907549-26-7

AI Practitioner



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How Has Appreciative Inquiry Lived Up To its Promises? What Will the Future of Appreciative Inquiry Look Like?

Edited by

Robbert Masselink and Wick van der Vaart

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AI Practitioner

New year, new management, special offer

To honour Anne Radford's contribution in establishing *AI Practitioner* as the International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry, the new management, the Instituut voor Interventiekunde, have decided to make this inaugural issue free. Anne Radford devoted eighteen years of extraordinary effort to make the journal a truly global enterprise co-authored by contributors from every continent.

You can download the February 2016 issue of the AI-Practitioner without any costs at **www.aipractitioner.com**

This very special issue of *AI Practitioner* reflects on the past and future of Appreciative Inquiry, from its origins in the 1987 article written by David C. Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva up to the present day. This issue is reflective in nature, and we would like to invite you to send your comments and feedback to **instituut@instituutvoorinterventiekunde.nl**

We are very excited about the future of *AI Practitioner* and hope that you will join us in the journey by taking out a subscription to the journal. The subscription year for 2016 will begin with the May issue.

We at *AI Practitioner* will be very busy for the next few months. There is a new look and feel to *AI Practitioner*, starting with this February issue. In the next few months we will be updating our website and webshop in order to continue to provide a good service to all our readers and contributors.

How Has Appreciative Inquiry Lived Up To its Promises? What Will the Future of Appreciative Inquiry Look Like?

Welcome to February 2016 issue of AI Practitioner

When Anne Radford asked me, about a year ago, to take over the responsibility for *AI Practitioner*, I was very enthusiastic, but I didn't realize fully what my "Yes!" really meant. And now, a year later, the first issue since Anne's retirement from the AIP is ready and I hope that you will enjoy it.

For this issue, I've invited my colleague Robbert Masselink as the guest editor. Robbert is one of the leading AI practitioners in the Netherlands and he is extremely curious: he seems to have read all the books about social constructionism and variations in this field.

We have chosen "How has Appreciative Inquiry lived up to its promises and how do we envision its future?" as the topic for this issue. AI has been around now for about 30 years. We wondered what people who have been working with an appreciative approach for

many years have discovered and what their dreams for the future are. We've also invited people who are fairly new to our field to share their thoughts with us.

Lindsey Godwin and Joep de Jong look back on their long experience working with Appreciative Inquiry. So does René Bouwen in an interview with Robbert Masselink and myself. Gervase Bushe, Ralph Stacey and Ingeborg Kooger have contributed reflective essays about the limits of AI and about new fields for AI practitioners to explore.

We've also added a new section to *AI Practitioner*, called "Nourish to Flourish", an idea that came up in a conversation with Keith Storace during the last WAIC in Johannesburg. In this section you'll find: Voices From the Field: short stories by AI practitioners

in preparation for the WAIC in Brazil, 2017; new variations on classical methods and tools; and a book review by Sarah Lewis.

I hope that you'll find this issue of *AI Practitioner* nourishing.

Wick van der Vaart
Editor-in-Chief
AI Practitioner



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**Wick van der Vaart**

Wick van der Vaart has master degrees in Dutch literature and social psychology. In 2005, he founded the Instituut voor Interventiekunde (Institute for Interventionism) in Amsterdam. The core of this Institute is a two-year program in appreciative interventionism. In 2016, he will become Editor-in-Chief of *AI Practitioner*.
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How Has Appreciative Inquiry Lived Up To its Promises? What Will the Future of Appreciative Inquiry Look Like?

A year ago, Anne Radford asked me whether I would take over responsibility for AI Practitioner. I said “yes”. In November, 2015, a few young men killed over 130 people in Paris. Suddenly, ‘we are at war with IS’. What can AI practitioners do? What is Appreciative Inquiry really about? I haven’t come to a final answer to the second question yet, but AI might be able to help our politicians, our neighbours, our clients, our students to make sense of what is happening and move forward. It is my wish that AI Practitioner can play a small part in that endeavour.

“We are at war”, according to Mark Rutte, our Dutch prime minister. I live in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and when I look around me I don’t see any signs of the destruction I associate with war. As I write this in November, 2015, a week ago a few French, Belgian and Syrian young men killed over 130 people in Paris. This event has had a lot of impact on me and everybody around me. And suddenly, “we are at war with IS”.

The words we use create the world we live in. And by using the word “war”, our leaders create a world in which one party must win and another party has to lose. Because a war is something you have to win. The illusion of this “war” seems to be that, by destroying IS, a solution is created for the problems that we call fundamentalism and terrorism. It relieves us of the responsibility to look at it from another perspective, which is that many young Muslims in western Europe feel excluded, that they don’t see opportunities for themselves, and that the existence of a fundamentalist and anti-western belief system has been left untouched. The notion of a war drives people even further apart.

The anxiety, the fear of many people around me, the reactions of our politicians to what they call “problems”, and the presence of really urgent issues – this mix is dangerous and damaging. Terrorism, a fast growing group of refugees, lack of safety, the presence of crime, these are not “problems to be solved”. Nor are they “mysteries to be embraced”, as AI practitioners tend to call them. They are issues to be considered and handled with utmost curiosity and care. And this is where we, as interventionists and managers, can, and do, play our part. We can help individuals, groups, organizations and communities to make sense of what is going on and to move forward, step by step, while reflecting on every step of the way.

We have to use our skills, knowledge and networks to help people deal with important issues

AI Practitioner

I have been a member of the AI community since 2008, when I started the AI certificate track at NTL under the supervision of Jane Magruder Watkins. I finished in 2010, and attended a number of workshops and co-trained with people like Mette Jacobsgaard, Barbara Sloan, Joep de Jong and many others.

All this time I've been asking myself the question "What is Appreciative Inquiry really about?" and I haven't come to a final answer yet. As a starting point, there is my enthusiasm for the field: training people in applied social psychology and my sense of urgency that we have to use our skills, knowledge and networks to help people deal with important issues. In addition, there is my eagerness to understand how things "really" work: I love to read the classic articles and books in the social psychology of interventions that are still perfectly current and relevant to me.

The essence of Appreciative Inquiry

So, in my view, what is Appreciative Inquiry about? It is not about moving away from solving problems. Although our questions for stories about what is working and what is important are a good start, the effect can be that in the eyes of our clients or partners we could still solve problems. That is okay, too.

An appreciative approach is a deliberate choice to focus our inquiry on what's working in the work and lives of individuals, groups and organizations. And this inquiry is always a collaborative process, in which we share our views with other people and in which we may come to a common understanding.

Appreciative Inquiry is, as a dialogical process, part of a new paradigm to do with a social constructionist way of looking at the world, as opposed to more of a logical-positivist way of looking at things. The difference being: logical-positivists belief that we can observe the world and create knowledge about what is real and important. Social constructionists would say that we constantly create the world in day-to-day conversations, and that the world doesn't exist "out there". We are co-creating what is real and important. Three different positions are possible, when the two paradigms are considered.

The first one is an either/or position. "Logical positivists do not understand what is going on in the world, and we, social constructionists, do." This can be a useful position in explaining the differences between a "new" field and an "old" paradigm. Although some AI practitioners may hold this either/or stance, maybe without realising it, most members of the AI community will agree that this does not hold. In fact, by dichotomizing, we do exactly the same as we claim that we have set aside.

The second position – and I think, the most popular among appreciative practitioners – is the both/and position. It is wonderful indeed when you can have your opinion and I can have mine: we do not have to convince each other that one of us (always me, of course) is clearly right. This position could well turn into *laissez-faire*, though: if you leave me in peace, I will leave you alone.

The third and most difficult position is a dialectical one. It means that we take the first, positivist paradigm as the “thesis”, the social constructionist way as “antithesis” and that we try then to create a “synthesis”, in which the best of the two worlds is combined to create a new theory. The differences between the two paradigms are being made productive and are uplifted. The trouble is this is hard work, because we can never take things for granted when we are engaged in a dialectical dialogue.

Shelagh Aitken, the issue editor of *AI Practitioner*, came up with an example: when we move in with a new partner, both with a lot of books, we could:

1. Have an argument about whose collection is best and then throw the worst collection out;
2. Put the two collections next to each other without discussion;
3. Take all our books out and create a new collection together.

Ralph Stacey (2003), who writes about Appreciative Inquiry on page 52, makes the same distinctions and states that the second position is in line with the philosophy of Kant, and that the third position is Hegelian. Apart from these philosophical underpinnings, there has been research done in our own field that is very interesting in this respect.

The beginning of a social psychology of interventions

In the late 1930s, Kurt Lewin and some of his students, Ralph White and Ron Lippitt (read their 1960 book!), were curious to know how they could create a democratic climate in a classroom. They asked teachers to be autocratic one week and democratic the next week. Being autocratic meant: telling the kids what to do, how to do it and to answer any of their questions with the words: “Because I say so.”

Being democratic proved to be more difficult. The first results of their research showed, surprisingly, that the kids did not behave differently under the two conditions: in both situations there was a lot of shouting and fighting, the kids were looking for a scapegoat, they abandoned their work as soon as the teacher left the room, they spoke with disrespect about kids in another classroom, etc.

Upon closer examination, it turned out that the teachers in the “democratic” experiment left every decision to the children in the classroom – everything the kids said and did was okay. Kurt Lewin concluded that the teachers in this condition didn’t behave democratically, but that they had a laissez-faire attitude, which led to the same effects as autocratic leadership. This left Lewin and his fellow researchers with the question how to define democracy. Laissez-faire had proved to have the same effects as autocracy. Democratic leadership then had to combine the best of laissez-faire and autocratic leadership. Lewin and his colleagues concluded that both autocratic and laissez-faire behaviours are automatic responses, unconscious acts. And that every generation has to learn anew how to think and act democratically. I would

Every generation has to learn anew how to think and act democratically.

like to add: that democracy presupposes continuously considered and mindful thinking and acting. It is indeed a new paradigm.

Why is this research so essential to me and for the AI practitioner in general? Because it marks the beginning of the field of fundamental social psychology, being robust, and the start of a practical social psychology, being relevant. Its relevance not only had to do with Lewin's own personal history, as a German Jew who sought refuge in the United States, it also speaks to our present situation. Western society is in dire need of a dialogue about the question: what do we want our democracy to be and how do we make it together?

Bringing AI back to its beginnings

Inquiry in order to appreciate is a powerful start for a conversation. But I would like us, AI practitioners, to take a step back and a step further at the same time. By acknowledging on whose shoulders we as appreciative practitioners are standing, we keep ourselves grounded in practical theories. By renewing our own practices, beyond the appreciative variation of Kurt Lewin's action research model (the 5D model), we can innovate and sharpen our tools.

What were some of the promises implied in the early papers on Appreciative Inquiry?

- To bring spirit back to action research; that is, to build a bridge between relevant practices and robust research. Both this issue's Feature Choice article by Kevin Real and Research Review & Notes column by Freddie Crous address this issue.
- To create more egalitarian organisations. This has become a commonly accepted idea in many organisations and industries. Joep de Jong's and Ingeborg Kooger's articles address this idea.
- To enhance the possibility of transformational change. Robbert Masselink, Gervase Bushe, and Lindsey Godwin write about this issue.

My vision for the *AI Practitioner* is to be a platform for:

- Stories from the field;
- Solid theory as a basis for our work. We could look for these theories and models in our own, sometimes forgotten, past, in academic institutions, and in the dialogical communities around us (see Bushe & Marshak for an overview);
- New exercises, conversations, methods, how to's and more to keep our practices alive.
- Book reviews of books not just in Appreciative Inquiry, but in related fields.

The issues with which we are faced right now demand careful deliberation and conscious actions.



Enhancing possibilities for transformational change in Nepal: read more about three decades of AI in Lindsey Godwin's article on page 24

Because I think that Appreciative Inquiry is the social constructionist paradigm put into practice, I intend to invite scholars and practitioners from other disciplines, such as deep democracy, Theory U, solution-focused approach, positive psychology, complex responsive process theory and other developments. By including those voices in our journal, we will be challenged to think out loud and anew about our assumptions and practices and this may stimulate a constant cross-pollination that is already happening in organizational practice.

A new section in *AI Practitioner* will be “Nourish to Flourish”. This section will contain “Voices from the Field”, a series of short stories by AI practitioners from all over the world compiled by Keith Storace. These stories will build a bridge between the WAIC in Johannesburg, 2015 and the next WAIC in Brazil. It will also include a book review by Sarah Lewis.

What is at stake?

Cooperrider and Srivastva stated in their seminal 1987 article that the life and work of Kurt Lewin pointed out two important aspects of an appreciative approach: curiosity and social innovation. Those two ingredients are becoming extremely important for social scientists and practitioners. The issues with which we are faced demand careful deliberation and conscious actions.

Exclusion, war, poverty, destruction, pollution, all these issues have existed throughout history, and we will never “solve” them. What we can do though is: be mindful and thoughtful. Being curious is a good start, because it allows us to have conversations with people with whom we disagree, to get to know people we do not know and to inquire in order to appreciate. And we do need solid social practices and networks, and other social innovations.

Most of our politicians seem to have forgotten what the core of democracy is. War is not an answer to the questions we are being asked. We might be able to help our politicians, our neighbours, our clients, our students to make sense of what is happening and to move forward. It is my wish that Appreciative Inquiry can play a small part in that endeavour.

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**Robbert Masselink**

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Appreciative Inquiry's Promises and Hopes: What is coming next?

David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva could not have foreseen the enormous impact Appreciative Inquiry would have. The human side of enterprise has become central in many organizations. In this issue of AI Practitioner we want to explore the future possibilities of Appreciative Inquiry. If we were trying to make up a promising agenda for the future, what topics should be on it and why?

When David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva published their first article in 1987, "Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life", they could not have foreseen the enormous impact it would have on the field of Organizational Development, on scholars and practitioners, and on organizations and society in general. Since that time, almost thirty years ago, the way people think about organizing and organizations has changed considerably. The human side of enterprise has become central in many organizations, as well as in organizational and social studies. Developments, such as strengths-based organizing, positive psychology, research in neuroscience and positive organizational scholarship, have greatly contributed to a humanly significant science of organizations and society.

Does that mean that we are done, that Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is firmly established within corporate life and has fulfilled its purpose? David Cooperrider himself believes not:

For me, the long-term call and journey to understand the gift of AI – appreciative ways of knowing, appreciative interchange and ways of relating, and appreciative ways of designing – is still in its infancy and perhaps always will be as the numbers of AI co-authors and co-creators multiplies. AI is not a thing or a static concept, but an ongoing co-construction of reality; it's the result of many voices, time and circumstances, planned and unplanned experiments, new discoveries and designs, narratives and cases, and unlimited imagination. All I am certain of right now is this: AI, as long as it is constructed upon, practiced or inspired by the sense of the mystery and miracle of life on this planet, will never become inert or lifeless.

If we were trying to make up a promising agenda for the future, what topics should be on it and why? Is there a new agenda emerging for AI practitioners and scholars, or do and can we continue the existing one?

In this issue of the *AI Practitioner* we want to explore the future possibilities of Appreciative Inquiry. If we were trying to make up a promising agenda for the future, what topics should be on it and why? Is there a new agenda emerging for AI practitioners and scholars, or do and can we continue the existing one?

We have invited several people from the AI community, as well as from outside, in this issue to explore the possibilities for AI in the coming years. What do they notice happening in their communities and organizations? What are the upcoming and important topics, developments or possibilities that make up the AI agenda for the future? So, many of the articles in this issue are of a reflexive nature. They invite you, as a reader, to re-consider what it was that attracted you in the first place to join the AI community and in the second place what motivates you to continue or renew your “membership” for the coming years.

Original and possible promises of AI

Before we let our guest authors answer these and other questions, I want to recall some of the promises that David Cooperrider and the late Suresh Srivastva wrote about in their first article. They serve as good points of reference, with the addition of several questions that reflect my own curiosity. Not all list items are discussed in this issue and most questions will not be answered either. They are an ongoing and ever expanding invitation to you to respond to, maybe in your daily practice or by being stimulated to write a future article in this or in another magazine.

1. Transformative capacity

According to the first article on Appreciative Inquiry in 1987, practitioners of AI aim to develop organizations to a higher level, in which organizational paradigms, norms, ideologies or values are transformed from which a more egalitarian, post-bureaucratic form of organizing can emerge. Where do we see this happening and to what extent does AI constitutes this transformation? If we look at transformative organizations such as Google, Semco and Goretex, which are shining examples of democratic workplaces, what can we learn from them that expands our thinking about AI? Are there factors other than AI principles and a focus on inquiry and appreciation that are contributing towards egalitarian, post-bureaucratic cultures? There might be more to these, and other, examples that is worthwhile to learn about as they can hold the germs for the future development of Appreciative Inquiry.

2. Generativity

Real innovations that shake up a whole market, such as Airbnb and Uber, grow and develop at a great distance from established companies for a reason. Disruptive innovations can seem very scary and dangerous for companies whose successes are based on old business models and protective strategies. So how can AI help these established organizations look the devil in the face so that they dare to challenge their assumptions about themselves, their markets and customers? Are they willing to renew themselves, develop new identities,

Being able to experience mystery is in itself a transformative act.

strategies and relationships? And if so, how does AI support these kinds of transitions over longer time periods? The answers to questions like these can help make the generative potential of AI real, practical and effective.

3. Organizing as a mystery to be embraced

This still is –and may be the most promising – thought in the original article. Being able to experience mystery is in itself a transformative act. People experience it in the moment when they are most real, alive and present. Past and future merge into the here-and-now; every moment is new and fresh. How does AI help people in everyday life to marvel, to be open, curious and mindful? When they start to realize that the state of not knowing is actually more common than the state of knowing? This is especially important in those situations when people want to accomplish something, whether to escape a problem or a threat, or to move towards a goal or purpose. If AI could increase the amount of reflectiveness, contemplation and marvelling in our organizations, communities and families, what would its impact be, and what would it look like? It certainly offers a counter tendency to the fears we experience when we don't want to change, look into unfamiliar situations or when we feel that somehow our identities are threatened.

4. The power of inquiry

Did Einstein discover the Theory of Relativity by accident, a side-effect of what he was searching for, or was it a deliberate and focused act right from the beginning? From innovation theory we know that the principle of serendipity says that many discoveries come as a surprise to the researchers involved and are a by-product of what people were actually searching for. So, does it make a difference if we inquire into topics or situations with a specific purpose in mind, or just because it intrigues or frustrates us, because we are simply curious or come to the question in a state of incomprehension? Whatever triggers the inquiry process, we are never certain what will come out of it, especially when our original question snowballs and turns into an unstoppable movement. So, to what extent do our ambitions, aspirations and goals, as extensions of the past, stand in the way of or stimulate real and authentic inquiry as a process of not knowing? With this knowledge in mind we might start holding inquiry inside organizations more lightly without wanting right from the start to attain that specific goal or end result and become much more sensitive about our motivations along the way as we go.

5. The moral potential of AI

AI is a morally relevant theory and practice: it affects the way people live their lives in relation to one another. How can we increase moral considerations and consciousness preliminary to and during the inquiry process to include as many possible of the stakeholders' concerns and interests? As the choices of topic(s), participants and process design all demarcate what and who are included or excluded, the motives and concerns of initiators, decision makers and facilitators become paramount. The way they co-produce becomes just as important as what they produce. This will not only influence the outcomes

AI is a morally relevant theory and practice: it affects the way people live their lives in relation to one another.

Managers and facilitators who apply AI are part of existing power relations and, whether they are aware of it or not, use them to influence relationships in order to meet particular interests.

of the inquiry process but also its durability and of the AI intervention. So, to what extent do we want to make moral and relational concerns more central to AI – and what are those concerns?

6. AI beyond management fashion

A common complaint from people and teams who use AI often is that they, or their surroundings, have grown accustomed to the 5D steps. They have internalized or incorporated AI well, but in a way that has become routine. AI then runs the risk of practitioners approaching situations again as “problems to be solved”. How do these processes of standardization work, such that as soon as people and organizations become familiar with a process, they start looking out for the next management fashion? How can we sustain and develop creativity, aliveness and curiosity amongst people and in processes to keep AI fresh and new, as if people were using it for the first time? What kind of knowledge and skills support this kind of experience? Besides stimulating AI as a philosophy or action research method in organizations and communities, we have to think about the ways in which we can make AI sustainable.

7. Incorporating notions on power and politics

Authors writing about AI have not so far paid a great deal of attention to the subject of power and politics. Possibly because what we pay attention to might grow. But organizations do pay attention to power and politics. Metaphorically, they can be described as arenas in which differences in opinions, interests and strategies are continuously negotiated and re-negotiated. One reason for this neglect might be that, as AI practitioners, we do not wish to stimulate power and politics inside organizations, although some authors on management do acknowledge its merits and value. If we do not understand the workings of power and politics as distinct features of organizations, or do not pay attention to them, the effectiveness of AI interventions might be severely hampered.

On a more fundamental level, managers and facilitators who apply AI are part of existing power relations and, whether they are aware of it or not, use them to influence relationships in order to meet particular interests. Refusing to admit, or being unaware, that Appreciative Inquiry, is in itself a power-full act, comes at a cost of not achieving generative solutions, of continuing existing power relations and not learning about the power dynamics within the organization. There is great potential in including power and political dynamics: they are indispensable elements of organizational life. This is what Ralph Stacey talks about in his article on the paradox of consensus and conflict. The writers in this issue touch upon some of these questions, and many of their own. I hope they inspire your curiosity and imagination about what AI has in store for us.

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Feature Choice

Communication and Generativity in Appreciative Inquiry Practice: A review of recent peer-reviewed research

This paper examines recent empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals that may be of interest to AI practitioners.

As Gervase Bushe has noted in this journal recently, practitioners face a number of challenges when describing the AI process to potential clients. One way of addressing these challenges is to take advantage of peer-reviewed research. Peer-reviewed research can demonstrate the practicality of AI processes for facilitating communication and generativity, enabling practitioners to challenge existing assumptions, build capacity and enhance people's understanding of what is possible.

Recent issues of *AI Practitioner* (AIP) have focused on dissertations in Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and AI in university settings (AIP May 2014; Aug 2014). In a similar spirit, this paper examines recent empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals that may be of interest to AI practitioners. Although many practitioners know firsthand how transformative and energizing AI can be, there is also an awareness that socially constructed, dialogic practices can be greeted with skepticism in certain quarters. As Bushe has noted in this journal recently (Bushe, 2015), practitioners face a number of challenges when describing the AI process to potential clients. One way of addressing these challenges is to take advantage of peer-reviewed research. The peer review process can act as form of quality control, lend credibility to research findings and provide formal evidence of the effectiveness of AI. Utilizing peer-reviewed research can help practitioners engage clients and provide guidance in the design and development of change processes.

It has been almost 30 years since Cooperrider and Srivasta's (1987) "Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life". Yet that paper is still an important source not only for AI research, but also for highlighting the role of communication. "As human beings, we are constantly in symbolic interaction, attempting to develop conceptions that will allow us to make sense of and give

The 4D AI process created the enabling conditions for developing innovative ideas that were cultivated and refined.

meaning to experience through the use of language, ideas, signs, theories, and names [and] the use of metaphor” (p. 151). Through Appreciative Inquiry, we see that language, conversation and dialogue are inherent to the construction of social and organizational reality. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) have suggested that communication is crucial to AI because it is centered in a “vocabulary of joy, hope, and health” (p. 82).

As Bushe and Marshak (2009; 2014) have noted, AI facilitates the creation of conditions for developing the generative capacity of people and organizations. This article builds on this idea by examining communicative elements contained in recent peer-reviewed AI research. An exhaustive, systematic review of the broad range of literature is beyond the scope of this paper. The emphasis here will be on peer-reviewed studies published in organizational, psychology, business, communication, and health-related academic journals over the past five years. In each study, I review the aims of the research study, the type of AI process used, the research methods employed, the study findings, and the extent to which the research may have highlighted enabling conditions for communication among stakeholders. While many have acknowledged the centrality of communication in AI, this paper seeks to draw attention to the enabling conditions for interactions that arise from AI processes.

There are many boundaries to choose in conducting a review of research, but a logical starting point for this one would be Bushe and Marshak’s (2009) paper on dialogic and diagnostic approaches to organizational development. Their article is a valuable contribution to scholarship and theorizing in this arena. While highlighting the natural strengths of dialogic approaches, Bushe and Marshak indicate that understanding the enabling conditions for conversations to occur may be a fruitful area of research. This suggests a useful place to begin, both chronologically and conceptually. As such, the articles discussed here are the ones published in peer-reviewed journals from 2009 to present.

Richer, Richie and Marchionni: The value of AI in developing innovative ideas in health care

Richer, Richie and Marchionni (2009) conducted a multiple, embedded case study to examine the value of AI in the development of innovative ideas for the organization of health care services. Two interdisciplinary health care teams in outpatient cancer care participated in separate but equivalent 4D AI change processes. The process consisted of eleven one-hour sessions over a nine month period. The researchers used a combination of research methods, including participant observation, interviews, direct observations and documentation. Richer et al. found that both groups developed distinct yet innovative ideas related to processes for interdisciplinary collaboration and care coordination as a result of participation in the AI process. An interdisciplinary forum was created to examine health care quality and efficiency issues in the delivery of cancer care. The 4D AI process created the enabling conditions for developing innovative ideas that were cultivated and

These changes in engagement, mentoring, outreach, collaboration, relationships and teamwork were enabled by shifts in dialogue among teachers, students and staff.

refined through conversations between health care professionals from diverse occupations and backgrounds. AI practitioners could draw upon this study, particularly if working in healthcare, in discussion with clients regarding the capacity for AI to provide for idea generation, development of interdisciplinary networks and formal collaboration through communication.

Bushe: The importance of the quality of the Discovery phase

Bushe (2010) employed a comparative case analysis to study how the 4D AI process could generate changes that would create exceptional learning experiences in an urban school district. The 4D phase, which lasted over 18 months, began with AI training and Discovery, where a representative site team of teachers, students and staff developed affirmative questions for interviewing others as the Discovery process unfolded. Before the AI Summit, the site team engaged in what Bushe (2007) calls *synergenesis*, where stories from Discovery are written down and the team reads each individual story and discusses them one at a time. Each story is reviewed and discussed for its value related to the inquiry and when the team is satisfied it has discussed a story fully, it moves on to the next story and then the next, until discussing more stories does not create innovative ideas. This writing-based approach is useful for amplifying the generative capacity of communicative analysis.

Summits were held at eight different sites and included the Dream and Design phases. The Destiny phase began at the Summits and continued at each of the schools over time. The primary research method was participant observation over the 18 month period, with surveys and informal interviews used as well. Analysis of the data revealed that four sites underwent transformational change, two sites experienced incremental change, and two sites experienced no change.

Those schools that underwent transformational change were those that experienced new and well-defined changes to the normal routines of teachers that led to transformations and that further facilitated communication and related behaviors. For example, one school saw a jump in student engagement as a result of student participation in the AI process and post-summit initiatives to encourage student leadership. These were manifested by increased student mentoring and outreach activities to the local community. Another school saw increases in collaboration among teachers across disciplines, informal mentoring of new teachers, collaboration among teachers and support staff, and teamwork among teachers using new classroom technologies. A third school experienced structural and relational changes that continued even after every participant in the summit had been transferred elsewhere. Each of these changes in engagement, mentoring, outreach, collaboration, relationships and teamwork were enabled by shifts in dialogue among teachers, students and staff. Bushe (2010) suggests these changes highlight the importance of the quality of Discovery, particularly the storytelling processes, and the understanding that participants had of the AI

The AI process empowered students to interpret faculty accounts of professionalism based on individualized narratives.

process itself. The generative capacity for creating innovative ideas and the change in discourse were key findings from this study.

Quaintance: Medical students, professionalism and appreciative interviews

Quaintance et al. (2010) used AI as a method to enable medical students to learn professionalism by using appreciative interviews of their faculty paired with writing up reflections as to what they learned. Affirmative questions (e.g., “Tell us about a time when you or another physician went the extra mile to help a patient”) were used to guide the interviews. Sixty-two students interviewed 33 faculty members and 193 students observed the interviews in small groups. Students then wrote narrative accounts that were analyzed by the authors. Student reflections about the process suggested they learned about professionalism from their faculty through using this AI process. The interviews enabled conversations between physician role-models and students in productive ways. Rather than a normal didactic approach, with faculty incorporating professionalism into lesson plans, this approach enabled faculty to tell stories rooted in their experience.

The AI process empowered students to interpret faculty accounts of professionalism based on individualized narratives, which illustrated facets of medical professionalism such as humanism, accountability, altruism and excellence. It would have been interesting to see what effect this process of narrative inquiry, similar in spirit to Bushe’s (2010) idea of synergenesis, would have had on students’ future enactment of professionalism. Practitioners may consider having participants write reflections of stories they hear for the purpose of generating new ideas, deepening relationships and increasing commitment.

Helms: Identifying best practice in patient handoff

Another study within the healthcare arena, Helms et al. (2012), aimed to understand what the best medical residents did during “sign-out” (also called patient handoff), which refers to communication that occurs when doctors and nurses start caring for a new patient, end their shift or transfer them to another location. The researchers wanted to understand this so that best practices could be developed for medical resident sign-out processes in hospitals. Mixed-methods were used, including surveys, observations, analysis of sign-out sessions and an AI approach for quality improvement. Top residents were identified in a survey of 128 residents and the researchers examined the sign-out process and content of these highly-rated residents. These residents were engaged using an AI interview-based approach to identify exemplary strategies for sign-out. The residents then worked with faculty and other residents to identify and develop best sign-out practices.

The focus of the study – the sign-out – is essential communication in patient care. Improvements to this communicative process were developed through interviews and larger group discussion. The enabling condition for improving

The AI process created enabling conditions for project managers to share ideas, issues and best practices with each other.

Participation in AI was directly linked to relatedness, one of the basic psychological needs.

this process was the strategic use of AI that allowed residents to develop ways to generate effective practices in order to improve communication during patient handoffs. This approach to AI can be useful for practitioners engaged in improving the clarity and efficiency of communication during critical encounters where there are diverse practices and/or modes of thought operating.

Mathiassen and Napier: A generative metaphor for project management

Mathiassen and Napier (2013) applied AI to develop a generative metaphor for strategies in project management. They were interested in how AI can facilitate participatory change in IT project management. The researchers used a 4I phase AI approach (Initiate, Inquire, Imagine, Innovate) with project managers to develop and create a generative metaphor for developing action strategies. The researchers engaged in what they called collaborative practice research, which involved the researchers, the organization leadership as sponsor, a core project management team, and organizational participants (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005). Project managers' participation was assessed by analyzing AI interviews, meeting notes, survey, workshop documentation, ideas and best-practice presentations. The researchers' reported participants gained new knowledge and that AI helped to establish a set of action strategies for a shared approach to project management. The AI process created enabling conditions for project managers to share ideas, issues and best practices with each other. The interviews and storytelling led to a generative metaphor, "win-win contracts", which then guided decisions and actions over time related to the scope, time, cost and quality of project management.

Verleysen et al.: AI Practices and psychological capital

Verleysen et al. (2014) investigated how participating in AI practices was positively related to psychological-need satisfaction and psychological capital (hope, optimism, self-efficacy and resilience). Both psychological need satisfaction (Deci and Ryan, 2000) and psychological capital (Luthans and Youssef, 2007) have been linked to positive organizational behavior and scholarship (Cameron and Dutton, 2003; Cooperrider and Sekerka, 2006; Luthans, 2002). They conducted a survey of 213 people who worked in social profit organizations, 81 with AI experience, 132 without AI experience. The 81 people in the AI group participated in ten days of AI training which consisted of a kickoff meeting on the first day, four days of "AI fundamentals", one day devoted to Design, two days focused on Design and Destiny, and a two-day workshop with presentations to a larger audience. Each of these 81 also worked in organizations where there were ongoing AI practices. The second group (of 132) had no experience with AI.

Statistical tests comparing the two groups found that the AI group scored significantly higher than the non-AI group on all three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness. The AI group also scored higher on two of the four psychological capital variables (resilience, optimism). In a

Both AI conditions had more ideas post-condition than did problem-solving groups.

further test, the researchers found that when AI processes fulfill participants' need for competence, AI processes also had a positive impact on psychological capital (hope, optimism, self-efficacy, resilience). This comes as no surprise: when people believe in their ability to work successfully, they are likely to have higher levels of self-efficacy, optimism, resilience and hope. This study provides quantitative evidence for the notion that AI creates a social environment that supports the satisfaction of basic psychological needs.

The study also found that participation in AI was directly linked to relatedness, one of the basic psychological needs. This relationship suggests that AI processes may open people's eyes to the power of connection to others at work. In this case, AI created conditions that fulfilled people's need to connect and communicate with other people. In discussion with current and prospective clients, AI practitioners could describe the findings of this study in relationship to how AI can positively impact people's basic psychological needs and psychological capital, which have been linked to life-giving, generative and creative capacity in organizations (Cameron and Dutton, 2003; Cooperrider and Sekerka, 2006; Luthans, 2002).

Bushe and Paranjpey : Problem solving, generativity and synergenesis

There is evidence supporting the AI approach across a variety of contexts and implementations.

Bushe and Paranjpey (2014) conducted a field experiment to compare the generativity of three different group conditions – problem-solving groups, traditional AI groups and AI synergenesis groups – to see which approach leads to better idea generation for an employee recognition program. The study, conducted in one organization, assigned 76 employee-volunteers to one of three idea-generation conditions. There were two groups for each condition. To reduce the possibility that outcomes would be a result of cognitive stimulation from doing interviews prior to group idea processes, all of the conditions used the interview process. However, in keeping with the typical problem-solving approach, the problem-solving groups' interview question was "Why do employee recognition programs fail?" The problem-solving groups were instructed to brainstorm ideas related to next steps needed to start an employee recognition program and how such a program could be useful to all levels of the organization.

The two AI conditions both used the Discovery phase, where they asked people to consider times they had been recognized or acknowledged for their work and how that had led to feelings of satisfaction. The traditional AI condition was to ask people to talk about what the stories revealed about employee recognition at its best and to brainstorm all of the root causes of success. Ideas were selected from this process. In the AI synergenesis condition, after the interviews, individuals were asked to write out a story they found most inspiring, then the facilitators selected the stories with the most stimulating and inspiring ideas. The groups then discussed each story and were asked to brainstorm ideas about how recognition can lead to people feeling inspired and coming to work to do their best. Again, ideas were selected from this process.

Communication and generativity are reflexive and operate interdependently to produce new possibilities, visions and actions for people and organizations.

Results indicate that the AI synergogenesis condition produced more interesting and practical ideas than did the other two conditions. Pre- and post- semantic maps showed that both AI conditions had more ideas post-condition than did problem-solving groups. Both the traditional AI approach and particularly the synergogenesis approach provided enabling conditions for increased interaction, exchange of ideas and information flow related to innovative idea generation. Practitioners may want to consider incorporating writing-based approaches like synergogenesis when clients are looking for increased generativity.

Naaldenberg et al.: Reducing health inequities in people with intellectual disabilities

Naaldenberg et al. (2015) were interested in developing ways to reduce health inequities in people with intellectual disabilities. To do this, they engaged 134 conference attendees who participated in a one-day workshop guided by an AI approach. Participants described positive experiences working with people with disabilities and three wishes for improving care. Workshop reports were analyzed using a qualitative analytical approach. Three themes emerged from the data: approach (engagement, connection), know-how (knowledge, information sharing), and visibility (access to evidence-based research). The researchers asserted that fulfilling these three thematic areas will result in “person-centered care”, an enabling condition for improved communication between persons with intellectual disabilities and those engaged in their care.

These eight peer-reviewed studies of Appreciative Inquiry clearly show that there is evidence supporting the AI approach across a variety of contexts and implementations. Some of these studies were broad in nature, encompassing the implementation of the entire AI process over time and following through on how they were implemented. Others were short, workshop-oriented and focused on specific elements of change or improvement. These studies include accounts of enabling conditions for communication. Each provides avenues for practitioners in creating the conditions that allow for generativity.

Communication and generativity

As noted in the introduction to this paper, I wanted to examine how Appreciative Inquiry, as found in peer-reviewed research, created enabling conditions for communication. It is clear from the studies that AI provides contexts for interaction. What is also apparent is that communication and generativity are reflexive and operate interdependently to produce new possibilities, visions and actions for people and organizations. When organizations and groups use the AI process, they engage themselves in a communicative process, a series of interactions at multiple levels that generate ideas and maps for achieving goals based on visions developed in the process. Appreciative Inquiry provides the framework in which people socially construct new ideas through a series of communicative processes.

Conversations are a dynamic source of organizational generativity and innovation, and operate as constitutive elements of everyday organizational

Peer-reviewed research can demonstrate the practicality of AI processes.

life (McPhee and Zaug, 2009). Communication and language are important to constructing the local realities in which we live, work and interact with others. For example, when people use the language of cooperation, support and teamwork, they are describing a setting that is collaborative and open to innovation. A central idea held by many communication scholars is that social and organizational realities are jointly produced through the communication (such as conversations) that occur in our everyday life (McPhee and Zaug, 2009; Pearce and Cronen, 1980). AI does this by allowing individuals the opportunity to jointly reflect on experiences where they thrived at a task or behavior, placing the reins for creation of organizational change into the hands of the people rather than the consultant(s), and encouraging social engagement and the reinforcement of social bonds through the exchange of stories and interpretation of each other's strengths. For example, my colleagues and I have found that AI lays the groundwork for increased employee innovation and engagement, regular open communication and whole system ownership (Trosten-Bloom, Noll Wilson and Real, 2015).

Bushe and Marshak (2014) have highlighted the importance of mindset for practitioners, suggesting that any specific organizational development practice is an outgrowth of a practitioner's mindset. Appreciative Inquiry as a practice advances the idea that language is a means to constitute reality. Practitioners may consider further developing a mindset engaged in creating the enabling conditions for conversations that facilitate generativity. Communication is not the simple transmission of information nor is it merely a conduit for the exchange of ideas (Axley, 1984). Communication is a process in which people co-construct their reality, whether that be in a mundane work meeting or an AI Summit. The use of affirmative questions in Discovery generates new knowledge, ideas and concepts aimed at enhancing organizational processes through a change in dialogue.

Utilizing peer-reviewed research can help practitioners engage clients and provide guidance in the design and development of change processes. Peer-reviewed research can demonstrate the practicality of AI processes for facilitating communication and generativity, enabling practitioners to challenge existing assumptions, build capacity and enhance people's understanding of what is possible (Cooperrider and Srivastava, 1987; Gergen, 1978). *AI Practitioner* is an ideal outlet for disseminating AI research. For Appreciative Inquiry researchers, it can be energizing to see our research extend beyond academic audiences. It is empowering to realize that research can generate new theories and fresh ideas when it is engaged by people involved in dialogues around meaningful social and organizational futures.

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Appreciative Inquiry: Three decades of generative impact

In the thirty years since Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) invited the world to reimagine action research in our organizations as a truly generative tool for social innovation, Appreciative Inquiry has become a generative force in organization development and change. After highlighting in this article some of the many impacts AI has had, horizons for the future of our work as both AI scholars and practitioners are discussed.

“More than a method or technique, the appreciative mode of inquiry is a way of living with, being with, and directly participating in the varieties of social organization we are compelled to study” (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). With this bold declaration, David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva invited the world to reimagine action research in our organizations as a truly generative tool for social innovation. Nearly thirty years and thousands of global appreciative action experiments in communities, organizations, teams and individual lives later, the generative impact of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has exceeded what was imagined when Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life was first published.

Little did we imagine then, that in his last speech at the Academy of Management, MIT’s Richard Beckhard, would say, “Appreciative Inquiry is, in my view, an exciting breakthrough, one that signals a change in the way we think about change...We are looking at something very important. AI will be of enduring consequence and energizing innovation for the field. That’s my prediction” (quoted in Watkins, Mohr and Kelly, 2011, p. xxv). Such a proclamation was perhaps hard to imagine when AI was first presented at the Academy of Management in 1984 and met with dismissive skepticism. Yet, Beckard’s words illustrate the inroads AI has made in impacting the field of organizational change over the past three decades.

Today, AI’s approach to life-centric and strength-based organizational change continues to invite scholars and practitioners around the world to shift our attention from seeing organizational life as a “problem-to-be-solved” to being a world brimming with innovation and a “universe-of-strengths” (Cooperrider, Godwin, Boland, and Avital, 2012). Social constructionist thought-leader, Ken Gergen, affirms, “The growth and application of Appreciative Inquiry over the past two decades has been

We have now seen AI Summits used in all organizational sectors around the world

nothing short of phenomenal. It is arguably the most powerful process of positive organizational change ever devised” (in Whitney, Trosten-Bloom and Rader, 2010, p. x). Before reflecting on the opportunities on the horizon for Appreciative Inquiry, let’s first further highlight some of the impacts that provided the inspiration for Beckhard and Gergen’s declarations.

The AI Summit: Applications around the world

In 1987, could we have imagined that a secretary general of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, would call upon the use of AI to transform the nature of a UN world summit? After the Global Compact summit in 2004, Annan wrote to David, stating, “I would like to commend your innovative methodology of AI and to thank you for introducing it to the United Nations. Without this, it would have been very difficult, perhaps even impossible, to constructively engage so many leaders of business, civil society and government.” Perhaps the most well-known methodology used by AI practitioners, the AI Summit has evolved to become a powerful tool for bringing together “whole systems” to identify the strengths that exist within the organization and to co-create the future vision for the organization. In the decade since Ludema, Whitney, Mohr and Griffin published their seminal resource on summits in 2003, there have been many experiments and evolutions with the methodology. We have now seen AI Summits used in all organizational sectors around the world: large corporations like Hewlett Packard, Fairmont Minerals, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, US Cellular, the BBC, Nextel; in government agencies like the US Navy and the Environmental Protection Agency; in national associations like the American Society for Association Executives; in industry-wide initiatives like the National Dairy Council; in school systems like Houston Independent School District; in nonprofit organizations like World Vision; and in world-wide initiatives like the United Nations and United Religions (Cooperrider, Godwin, Boland and Avital, 2012).



World AI Conference in Nepal: On the stage with President Yadav

A growing global AI community

In 1987, could we have imagined that a global community of AI practitioners would have blossomed with rich networks flourishing in Europe, Nepal, India, Brazil, Canada, Singapore, and elsewhere? Our global community has now gathered for World AI Conferences in the U.S., Nepal, Belgium, South Africa, and is currently planning to convene in Brazil in 2017. In addition to these global gatherings, we have also seen many regional conferences spark new conversations around the world. In 2010, AI Consulting hosted an AI Storython: Celebrating 10 Years Lifting Up Appreciative Inquiry. In 2014, the Office of Appreciative Education at the University of South Carolina convened the first Appreciative Education Conference. Also in 2014, Imagine Nepal convened their first National Conference on Appreciative Inquiry. In 2015, the Southeast Asia Interdisciplinary Development Institute convened the second Asian Appreciative Inquiry Summit on “Co-Constructing Multiple Pathways and Engagements for ASEAN Community Benefit.” These are only a few examples of the myriad of gatherings that have brought practitioners and scholars together to advance the theory and practice of AI.

In 1987, could we have imagined that there would be a “strengths revolution” happening all across our social sciences?

The infusion of AI into a variety of disciplines: From coaching, to families, to education, to strategy

In 1987, could we have imagined that there would be hundreds of published articles, chapters and books on AI and its myriad of applications, or that we would be reading Volume 18 of *AI Practitioner*? Today, our colleagues have infused an appreciative perspective into all areas of our organizational, and even personal, lives. Colleagues like Jackie Kelm have invited us to bring AI into our daily life with works like *The Joy of Appreciative Living* (2008). Hallie Preskill and Tessie Tzavaras Catsambas explored applying AI to evaluation in *Reframing Evaluation Through Appreciative Inquiry* (2006). Diana Whitney, Amanda Trosten-Bloom, Jay Cherney and Ron Fry described how to bring AI into teams with their book, *Appreciative Team Building: Positive Questions to Bring Out the Best in Your Team* (2004). The *Nonprofits’ Guide to the Power of Appreciative Inquiry* (2003) by Carolyn Miller, Cristina Aguilar, Donna McDaniel, Linda Maslowski and Michael Mantel, outlined AI applications specifically for nonprofit organizations. Jeanie Cockell and Joan McArthur-Blair shared examples of AI in our colleges and universities with their 2012 book, *Appreciative Inquiry in Higher Education: A Transformative Force*. In 2008, Jennifer Bloom, Bryant Hutson and Ye He helped reframe advising with *The Appreciative Advising Revolution*.

With the book, *Positive Family Dynamics: Appreciative Inquiry Questions to Bring Out the Best in Families* (2008), Dawn Cooperrider Dole, Jen Hetzel Silbert and Ada Jo Mann invited us to take an appreciative stance through the myriad of seasons and situations we experience with our families. Sara Orem, Jacqueline Binkert and Ann Clancy’s *Appreciative Coaching: A Positive Process for Change* (2007) has been a resource for many to bring AI into the coaching arena. Jackie Stavros, Gina Hinrichs and Sue Annis Hammond seeded our imaginations for bringing AI into strategic planning and giving us an alternative to SWOT analysis with the *Thin Book of SOAR* (2009). Thatchenkery and Metzker invited us to explore our *Appreciative Intelligence* in their 2006 book, *Appreciative Intelligence: Seeing the Mighty Oak in the Acorn*. Diana Whitney, Amanda Trosten-Bloom, and K. Rader’s book *Appreciative Leadership* expanded our ideas on what effective leadership looks like. One could go on and on with titles and contributions colleagues around the world are making, as these are but the tip of the iceberg of the diffuse array of works that are redefining our approaches to human systems with appreciative frameworks.

The strengths revolution in the social sciences

In 1987, could we have imagined that there would be a “strengths revolution” (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001) happening all across our social sciences, supported by a mounting database of research in fields of positive organizational scholarship (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003) and positive psychology (Seligman, Steen & Peterson, 2005)? At its heart, this revolution has been fueled by the very call to re-think our approach to action research proposed by Cooperrider and Srivastva in 1987. These new advances in our social sciences are the realization of their visionary challenge to bring a

When we deepen our inquiries into the miracles of organizational life, our appreciative eye expands to see even more good and possibility in our systems, and in ourselves.

new vantage point to our organizational inquiry by evolving our questions from “What is wrong here to be fixed?” to an entirely new line of questions such as, “What gives life to the system when it is most alive?” Building on the strengths revolution and powered by AI, the emergence of positive organization development has invited the field to make advances in three spheres: (1) the elevation of strengths, (2) the alignment or connected magnification of strengths, and (3) the creation of strengths-based organizations to become positive institutions – vehicles for elevating, magnifying and refracting our highest human strengths outward to the world (Cooperrider and Godwin 2012).

As a result of expanding our appreciative mode of inquiry – our appreciative stance as a way of living with, being with and directly participating in the varieties of social organization we are compelled to study – we are changing not only our social systems, but also ourselves. When we deepen our inquiries into the miracles of organizational life, our appreciative eye expands to see even more good and possibility in our systems, and in ourselves. Parallel to Barbara Fredrickson’s broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) hypothesizes that positive emotions broaden the scope of attention and thought-action repertoires, let’s consider how an appreciative stance broadens our capacity for seeing the good, the better and the possible within our organizations and in ourselves. And as our social constructionist foundations remind us, what we look for, we find. Evidence of this is reflected in the multitude of advances in theory and practice briefly highlighted above.

Looking forward: opportunities for further development

In 30 short years, Appreciative Inquiry has spanned the globe and touched all aspects of our approaches to human systems; it is perhaps no wonder that Beckhard, Gergen and others have called AI a transformative force. In looking backwards and discovering some of the highlights from our generative past, one cannot help but become excited to look forward and dream about what is next for advancing our theory and practice of AI. Some of the opportunities ripe for further development to expand and deepen our global AI work include:

- Further research into the dynamics that support effective AI Summit processes. Questions in this realm include: What are the stages of relational evolution during a summit? How do we best sustain the generative momentum created during a summit? How do we continue to experiment with co-located, technology-mediated participation in summits to truly engage whole systems?
- Expanded processes and tools to help us lift up strengths at all levels – individual, team and whole systems. Questions in this realm include: How do we most effectively identify and leverage the hidden potential and assets that exist in all situations and people? How can we evolve our tools, and even our language, to help us better appreciate the generative capacity in our organizations, and in ourselves, that often lies dormant for lack of discovery?

‘AI is not a thing or a static concept, but an ongoing co-construction of reality.’
David Cooperrider



The dedication of the David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry at the Still School of Business, Champlain College

- How do we keep our focus on what is generative in our organizational lives without truncating our inquiry into only what is “positive”? As Gervase Bushe (2007) reminded us in his *OD Practitioner* article, “AI is not (just) about the positive”; it is not a blind focus on positivity that distinguishes AI, rather “AI is different because it focuses on generativity instead of problem-solving”. Questions in this realm include: How can we deepen our ability to invite inquiry into what is generative in any organizational system? How can we help build capacity within systems to discover, dream and design structures that enable them to sustain generativity at all levels?
- Stretching ourselves on both macro and micro AI applications. Questions in this realm include: How do we evolve our whole-system AI approaches (like the summit) to incorporate best practices from design-thinking and other domains to continue pushing us forward in our convening capacity at the scale of the whole? How do we also advance the daily micro-practices of AI so that our organizations become positive institutions that are indeed refractions of our best selves?

Our global community of AI scholars and practitioners will likely explore these and many other questions in the years ahead. As new discoveries are made as a result of these inquiries, AI will undoubtedly continue to be a generative force in the world because it invites us to continually reach for what is better in ourselves and our systems. As David Cooperrider wrote in the fourth volume of *Advances in Appreciative Inquiry* (2013):

“AI is not a thing or a static concept, but an ongoing co-construction of reality; it’s the result of many voices, time and circumstance, planned and unplanned experiments, new discoveries and designs, narratives and cases, and unlimited imagination. All I am certain of right now is this: AI, as long as it is constructed upon, practiced or inspired by the sense of the mystery and miracle of life on this planet, will never become inert or lifeless” (Cooperrider, 2013, p. 6).

Thirty years from now, what innovations and inspirations from our global AI community of scholars and practitioners will we be reflecting back on in awe? What generative images of tomorrow are you going to begin cultivating today?

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**Gervase R. Bushe**

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How Has Appreciative Inquiry Lived Up To its Promises and What Will its Future Look Like?

I propose that AI has lived up to its promises by making a focus on strengths a common part of change processes, making social constructionist thinking more widely embraced by managers, accelerating the use of large group engagement, and making people's emotional state at work a legitimate managerial concern. What has not happened is much change in how organizations are studied by researchers, nor much attention to what gives life to organizations. I propose that AI is not used more widely because emergent change processes violate the strongly held narrative of leaders as visionaries.

It would be difficult to overstate the impact Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has had on the field of organization development and the practice of change management, particularly in North America. When I give talks to corporate HR-types in the United States and Canada and ask how many have heard of Appreciative Inquiry, at least two-thirds of hands go up. This is many more than for any other dialogic OD method. Probably the second most known is Open Space, and by only by about a third as many. When I ask how many have actually been involved in an appreciative inquiry, however, only a few hands go up. You could look at that and say, "Well, lots more opportunity out there", which I would agree with. You could also ask why a change methodology with such a long, impressive track record is so underutilized, especially in business.

I appreciate being asked to reflect on "how has AI lived up to its promise and what will its future look like?" I want to acknowledge that I am talking from a US/Canada experience, and that the impact of AI is different in different parts of the world. To its credit, it has had impact all over the world. I can only talk to what I've most noticed where I live.

First, I will briefly highlight some of the many positive achievements of AI, and then describe a few things that I think AI wanted to influence, but hasn't. I conclude with some thoughts on why it doesn't get used more, and what's needed to change that.

How AI has lived up to its promise

Arguably AI's largest impact was making the search for "what works", "strengths", "what we want more of" a common, mainstream activity amongst managers and change practitioners. For those not around before 1990,

Many of us now realize the power of well-crafted questions to change how people relate to each other in amazingly short order.

it's hard to imagine the derision and disbelief that met the idea of focusing an OD effort on only the positive. It seemed nonsensical to those operating from a diagnostic mindset that an inquiry would intentionally not ask about problems. Surely we should study and discuss both strengths and weaknesses?

Positively influencing the social construction of reality

In answering that question AI brought the social construction of reality into the mainstream of discourse about organizations and change, not just in academia, but amongst managers and professionals. Being very mindful of language, using affirmative questions and starting with stories are all common practice now, and are justified on the basis of positively influencing the social construction of reality, although most managers wouldn't use that phrase.

This way of thinking brought greater attention to the role that questions play in processes of organizing and change. Ideas such as, we are intervening from the very first questions asked, that our impact is limited by how bold and aspirational our questions are, and such as, questions help create the social reality they ask about, are now common amongst OD practitioners. Many of us now realize the power of well-crafted questions to change how people relate to each other in amazingly short order.

Almost all large-system dialogic OD approaches incorporate elements of AI. And AI, in turn, has helped organizations try large group engagement processes for the first time. While large group interventions predate AI (e.g., Emery and Trist's search conferences, 1973, Schindler-Rainman and Lippit's preferred futures, 1980), their use was amplified by AI. In recent years Cooperrider has been emphasizing the benefits of adopting large group, emergent processes for leading organizations (Cooperrider, 2013).

AI and positive organization studies

How much AI catalyzed the "positive organization studies" (POS) movement in academia is debatable. I do not think AI had much influence on the emergence of "positive psychology", which POS has strong roots in. It is noteworthy, however, that Kim Cameron spent a few years as Dean of the Weatherhead School at Case Western Reserve, where Cooperrider and Fry are professors, before returning to the University of Michigan and leading the POS movement in US business schools.

I think AI helped to increase attention on the role of emotions in organizational life and organizational change. In the US and a few other countries creating a positive emotional climate is now often seen as part of a leader's job. Ironically, it's been social constructionist academics who have had the most difficulty with the idea of "positive emotions". They would say that happy is not always positive and sad is not always negative, that the meaning of emotions are always local and context dependent. You can't assume which emotions are "positive" ahead of time. That perfectly rational position doesn't seem to reflect or affect, however, what people do and say. Probably

There is little published research using AI as a methodology.

because, in practice, meaning is constructed locally, and people feel they can make judgments about whether their emotions are positive or negative. Furthermore, in North American studies, certain emotions reliably have convivial effects on people and social interactions.

How AI hasn't lived up to its promise

To provide a balanced account, I think, requires noting where some of AI's early premises and propositions that have not been picked up. Appreciative Inquiry started as an alternative research methodology to positivism in organizational studies. For those interested in such things, the original Cooperrider, Barrett and Srivastva papers (1995; Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987) are still an inspiring vision for a new form of social inquiry, with new goals and new methods. But not much has changed in academia. There is little published research using AI as a methodology, and positivism still reigns supreme in organizational studies (though lots of post-modern theorizing gets published in management journals, very few actual studies do). Most published AI studies and graduate theses I've seen are of two kinds: those that study the AI process using an empirical methodology, and those that use appreciative interviews to gather data that then gets subjected to empirical analysis.

Secondly, Appreciative Inquiry was first described as the study of what brings life and vitality to organizations. The passions that first influenced Cooperrider's ideas, like a) the life-centric properties of organizations, b) how positive images and emotions lead to more vibrant social interactions, and c) how inquiry can infuse more vitality into organizations, still animate him and remain central to his message. But the practice of inquiring into what gives life and vitality to organizations hasn't spread. In practice, managers need to be able to show that they are focusing their attention and spending resources to achieve objectives. While it may be that inquiring into the sources of organizational vitality and flourishing will help leaders achieve their objectives and more, the connection is much harder to sell than proposing, say, an inquiry into the organization's current challenges. And that takes us to why it hasn't spread more.

Why AI hasn't spread more

First, I have to acknowledge that AI has spread amazingly far and wide for any social innovation, and it continues to spread. It is foundational to many other dialogic OD methods and theories. But in the grand scheme of things, AI is still an exotic managerial practice. The popular press almost always describe AI as "a new way to...." Use of AI in business is sparse. Yet, what research exists suggests AI can be astoundingly successful at helping organizations transform and meet adaptive challenges. So why isn't it used more?

I propose one of the main forces against this is the ubiquitous "visionary" narrative of leadership. The idea that leaders must have a vision is so rooted in our cultural narrative that any senior executive who tries to lead their organization using the emergent, dialogic approach to Appreciative Inquiry

In practice, managers need to be able to show that they are focusing their attention and spending resources to achieve objectives.

If we can produce a new narrative of leadership that people will find compelling and enabling, they will understand why the CEO isn't giving direction as much as shaping the process for finding aligned direction.

will face obstacles (Bushe & Marshak, 2016). Those they report to will question if they are providing the leadership the organization needs. If it's a listed company, analysts will crucify them if they don't provide the illusion of visions, strategies and KPIs. In addition, those who report to them will question their competence to be their leader. Followers may or may not notice how much more anxiety they feel being given responsibility, especially if it's not how things are usually done. Who wants a boss who makes them anxious? Many will be upset at the leader for not telling them what to do and consider him/her a bad leader. Emergent change leadership is far more successful than the plan and execute kind (Rowland & Higgs, 2008), and is what's needed to lead organizations through complex, adaptive challenges (Bushe, 2015). But the story of the visionary leader, and the strength with which it currently holds sway in business culture, means only a very remarkable individual can hold executive authority and lead emergently, whether using AI, Open Space, Conferencing, or any other large group engagement architecture.

A new narrative of leadership

If we can produce a new narrative of leadership – a story of heroic engagement and emergence – that people will find compelling and enabling, they will understand why the CEO isn't giving direction as much as shaping the process for finding aligned direction. It won't be as anxiety provoking for boards, bosses and followers. If it is a powerful narrative, they will even expect it, and consider it a mark of good leadership. In any group that lives into that narrative, I think AI will flourish.

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Has Appreciative Inquiry Delivered on its Promises? What Might the Next Step Be?

Has Appreciative Inquiry delivered on its promises? To begin with, how do we define what those promises are? How do we measure AI? What are some of the possibilities for the future of AI? In this article, practitioner Joep C. de Jong considers these fundamental questions.

In September 2015, Wick van der Vaart of the Instituut voor Interventiekunde and new Editor-in-Chief of *AI Practitioner* asked me if I would be willing to write an article about the theme "Has AI delivered on its promises and what might the next step be?" I accepted the challenge of addressing this provocative question, realizing that for many reasons it would be a nearly impossible task to answer it – if only for the fact that, from a social constructionist perspective, we could have many views on what "delivering on promises" means.

Another reason this theme is challenging is that Cooperrider and Srivasta (1987) originally introduced Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a generative approach to action research with an emphasis on shared knowledge creation for social innovation (Zandee, 2015). Neither that original article, nor any of the early adopters, such as Ron Fry, Frank Barrett, Jane Watkins and others, make any promise of what AI will or will not deliver.

Modest beginning, enormous impact

Still, when we look at that original article, Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life (Cooperrider and Srivasta, 1987), it is only fair to say that the impact of that modest beginning has been enormous, and this continues until today. And then there is the large number of case studies telling us stories of AI successes in books by Whitney & Trosten-Bloom (2003), Lewis (2011), Watkins, Mohr & Kelly (2011), Masselink & De Jong (2013) and many, many more. We also see a series of successful worldwide AI conferences, from the first in Baltimore (USA) in 2001 to the most recent in Johannesburg (SA) – and the next already being planned for 2017 in Brazil. Those of us who said that they would strive to "lift AI in the world" can certainly claim success. AI is now

Possibly the biggest gift AI brings is that it helps us to reconnect as humans

found on every continent – maybe with the exception of Antarctica – and is being embraced by more and more people, individuals as well as organizations – and by organizations I mean the full spectrum: for-profit, not-for-profit and government.

So if it is not on the successful delivery of promises that we can measure AI – and as a reader you may ask “Do we want to measure AI in the first place?” – what is it that we can say about AI and what it has brought to the world? Ken Gergen (Whitney et al, 2010) says that “the growth and application of Appreciative Inquiry over the past two decades has been nothing short of phenomenal”.

I can only agree with that statement: an idea brought into the world at the end of the 1980s now has tens of thousands of people using it, researching it and bringing its gift to so many people and organizations. And I may also add, as a response to the question about measuring the results of AI, that some of the cases described in the publications mentioned delivered very concrete and measurable results. I refer, for example, to Dan Saint’s statistics on his results at Jefferson Wells (Stavros and Hinrichs, 2009) and my own results at BT Syntegra and Van Harte & Lingsma. I am also aware that there may be additional questions about the extent that our personalities played in achieving these results. I hope to shed some light on that question by the time I have finished my Ph.D.

AI’s gift

Personally I believe that possibly the biggest gift AI brings is that it helps us to reconnect as humans. I recall a conversation with Jane Watkins, who told me that if we were to “strip down” AI, what remains at the core is sharing our most powerful stories, the stories of when we are at our best, especially concerning situations where we overcame the tough(est) situations in our lives. (De Jong, 2015c). Sharing those stories from one human to another, and then through generative dialogues finding the meaning of those stories, is a gift to a world in need of us interacting that way.

Might it be that AI addresses and appeals to possibly the most basic need we have as humans: to be in healthy relationships. “Healthy” in this case meaning that we seek the possibilities and potential in others with whom we form a community, “healthy” also in the sense that in those relations we not only connect, but embrace, share and co-create. The way we primarily do that is by sharing stories and images and, fortunately, more and more music and dance. In that sense we are still very close to the original introduction of AI as a generative approach to action research.

Building AI capacity

Let me fall back here on my own practice and experience in the many situations where I – and those I have been working with – have used AI. Every time that we used AI to address the serious issues we were facing and to make

I see a development from using AI as a tool to a way of being that reflects a much deeper understanding of what it means to apply AI as a leader – which we all are, by the way

meaning of the best stories people shared, we found a positive way forward. This has been especially true when we managed to sustain momentum in an organization. Often I engaged with clients under the conditions that we should be able to a) built an internal AI capacity in the organization and b) stay with the client system for a longer period of time.

When I reflect on the use of AI in my former roles as a manager, board member, director and CEO in those situations, I see a development from using AI as a tool to a way of being that reflects a much deeper understanding of what it means to apply AI as a leader – which we all are, by the way.

That way of being is beautifully illustrated by people like Dan Saint (de Jong, 2015a) saying: “How you act, other people will act.” Trying to understand the principles – trying to understand what it really means to have a generative dialogue – became key to applying AI in the situations I was responsible for. If you really live the structure of the AI approach and its underlying principles, then you start to see the basic goodness in each and every one of us. General John M. Le Moyne (de Jong, 2015b) says it beautifully when he speaks about the task of leaders: “To bring that goodness out.” In my experience, this describes both the way and the purpose of “how” and “why” AI. In my years as CEO, it has been exactly these two things that I have tried to realize by “being AI”: trying to foster a culture of goodness and by doing that, delivering excellent results!

Reflections

When I look at the potential and the possibilities AI offered us from the very beginning I believe we can safely conclude that AI has delivered and still is delivering. I already referred to some of the literature sharing many case studies. Around the world I see many, many situations where AI is applied successfully, often in combination with other approaches, to bring about transformational changes in both the lives of individuals as well as that of organizations; changes that often reflect a much more natural cycle than the “endless growth” perspectives we developed in the second half of the last century. AI has provided us with the notion that individuals and systems can and should develop continuously, which is distinctly different from growing continuously.

Next steps

So what are AI's next steps? I would like to point to a few sources. By being selective, I am aware that I am doing an injustice to the many initiatives currently being undertaken to further lift AI in the world but there is not enough space in an article of this length. One of the most impressive things I see around AI is the apparently endless creativity of people combining different elements and fields, playing with possibilities in every aspect of their lives and the world. Whether it concerns personal coaching using AI; enhancing our education systems; improving the circumstances in the downturn of major cities; or the eradication of hunger and poverty by

Cultivating emotional and spiritual health is the next frontier

We are only at the early stages of carrying out truly generative dialogues

organizations like the World Food Program – in all those situations we see people using AI. So let me just focus on a few of the high-level developments that I see when it comes to further releasing the potential and the possibilities of AI.

Flourishing AI

At the AI Conference in Johannesburg, David Cooperrider shared with the audience his views on the Flourishing Enterprise, as grounded in the publication *Flourishing Enterprise: The New Spirit of Business* (Lazlo et al, 2014). One of the key statements was that cultivating emotional and spiritual health is the next frontier. We see a growing interest in these fields and in adjacent areas like creativity. In my own work of making portraits of appreciative leaders I find that, next to information and knowledge, there is space for other elements, such as emotions, wisdom, wholeness and spirituality. These will be the next frontier.

Generative dialogue

Another high-level development that I am enthusiastic about is the power of elevated experience (Cooperrider & Goodwin, 2015), especially when we use inquiry to sustain generative dialogues enabling true co-creation. Even though people like Gervase Bushe have been talking about it for a number of years now, it feels that we are only at the early stages of carrying out truly generative dialogues. This is not surprising in a world with a primary space for debate and discussions that support the view of a single truth and winner. The emergence of this third stream, that of the generative dialogue, will allow us to truly co-create.

Being AI

Another source I would like to mention is the development of a clear focus on the quality of our relationships and on the importance of actually "being AI". This is succinctly described in the booklet *Appreciative Inquiries of the 3.0 Kind* (Hoogendijk, 2015). Both points support the two other developments of the growing awareness around emotional and spiritual health and the shift towards a true dialogue. This publication, as well as others, stresses that (positive) things will only happen if we are fully aware of the importance of our relationships. Positive effects will happen when we are aware that we exist by the grace of others and that we can realize our full potential when we see the goodness in the other. During the Worldwide AI Conference in South Africa the importance of the concept of ubuntu (I am because we are) was stressed.

The importance of wholeness

We are deepening our understanding of the importance of wholeness – now often listed as the sixth AI principle – and spiritual health. More and more practices in the AI world emphasise this need to include experience, wisdom, wholeness and spirituality, beside the aspects of information and knowledge. I am aware that our Western society still has a strong economic focus, based on the teachings of the last decade of the twentieth century and first decade

The financial crisis of 2008 is still casting a shadow over our societies

Is Appreciative Inquiry helping those of us who engage with it reach a level where we understand that we are relational beings?

of the twenty-first. The financial crisis of 2008 is, in my opinion, still casting a shadow over our societies: many still seem to believe that emotional and spiritual health is something for others, not for them.

Leadership lessons

When it comes to leadership lessons I would like to emphasize the importance of work, such as that of Bushe and Marshak (2015), around generative dialogues, and that of Barrett (2012) about the importance of improvisation. Although some of these items may not be totally new to insiders, Bushe has been writing about generative dialogues for quite some time, just as Barrett has been sharing his thoughts on the jazz metaphor in the AI 4D cycle for many years, nevertheless, we see that their ideas are gathering more and more followers in all walks of life.

A final thought

Could it be that, almost thirty years after David Cooperrider's original paper, AI is now reaching a level of maturity where we are starting to see it realizing its full potential, a potential that, in combination with other related fields, could help us find ways of engaging with each other at a deeper and more meaningful level? Is Appreciative Inquiry helping those of us who engage with it reach a level where we understand that we are relational beings, that we need each other, that we need our ecosystems and our spiritual relations to create a world in which all that lives has a place? Will AI be one of the catalysts that helps us deal with the major issues of our time: how to take care of refugees, how to eradicate hunger and poverty and how to find a way to sustain healthy living for all? I think, feel and believe this will surely be the case!

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Interview with René Bouwen: Reflections on building high-quality relational practices in conflict situations

René Bouwen, from Leuven University in Belgium, is one of the few Europeans who have witnessed the development of Appreciative Inquiry at close quarters. The post-Masters Consulting in Groups and Organizations program connects students from Leuven University and Case Western Reserve University in the United States. The interview Wick van der Vaart and Robbert Masselink conducted with him at Leuven University covers topics from how René got involved with Appreciative Inquiry, to AI and conflict, to his hopes for AI in action research.



Earlier this year, we had the opportunity and pleasure to interview René Bouwen from Leuven University in Belgium. René is one of the few Europeans who has witnessed the development of Appreciative Inquiry from a close distance. Together with Felix Corthouts he established close connections with Case Western Reserve University in the eighties. The post-Masters program Consulting in Groups and Organizations (CIGO) is an example of such a connection in which Belgian and American students visited each other during the program. Robbert was fortunate enough to be in the first exchange program that took place many years ago. We met René at Leuven University on a bright autumn day.

We started by asking René how he got involved in Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Before Appreciative Inquiry existed, René said, he was involved in group dynamics and was especially interested in the subject of conflict. His thesis showed that the most creative groups were those that were heterogeneous and where people showed a positive attitude toward diversity. He participated in the first T-group training in Belgium, organized by Gaston de Cock in the early sixties, and studied organizational development and experiential learning at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, USA, in 1975 under the supervision of Suresh Srivastva and David Kolb. In 1978 he became a professor in organizational psychology at the University of Leuven. In 1985 René went back to the United States for a sabbatical at Case Western. He told us: "I had lost faith in traditional research and became inspired again when I was introduced to the article of Kenneth Gergen".

At that time he also met David Cooperrider, then a doctoral student at Case Western. While David used social constructionism for the development of

Conflicts contain different perspectives and these differences can be used to develop the conflict toward movement or solution.

what was later called Appreciative Inquiry, René, together with Paul Salipante, developed a new conflict model – the conflict kaleidoscope – based on the same theory. Conflicts contain different perspectives and these differences can be used to develop the conflict toward movement or solution. This multiplicity of perspectives was a relief for René, because it made conflicts self-evident for him. He could now start taking a look at what people were producing together instead of trying to figure out what was going on inside their heads. This was a revolutionary step within the field of experiential psychology.

Development of Appreciative Inquiry

In those early days, AI was all about action research and wasn't yet called "Appreciative". The emphasis was on open inquiry into what worked well. The complete term was used for the first time by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva in their article "Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life", published in 1987. David was conducting research at the Cleveland Clinic, well known for its excellent reputation. But he couldn't find this "excellent" organization that Suresh was talking about, and so David asked where he could find it. "Maybe you're asking the wrong questions" was Suresh's reply, and that became the start of the appreciative approach. That's why, for example, Ronald Fry talks about AI as the art of asking questions.

Initially, René wasn't a believer. It was probably his Flemish nature that kept him from adopting this new approach too quickly – as he saw it, it was typical American positive thinking that sounded a bit naive, but with the best intentions. In the following years, when David Cooperrider and Jane Magruder Watkins applied AI in South America, Africa and eastern Europe, he saw a lot of good work being done. Jane had a great influence on the development of AI, as she stimulated the move from AI as an inquiry method toward a practical intervention method. As a result, AI slowly vanished as a research method.

'Building relationships happens a lot faster when you start affirming each other.'
René Bouwen

AI as relational practice

Slowly, AI became a part of the CIGO program in Belgium. Ronald Fry, a great ambassador for AI, visited Belgium often then, and still does. He has put more emphasis on the inquiry aspects of AI by stating that it is about asking the right questions.

René's emphasis was more on the application of social constructionism within innovation and conflicts. It was a great combination that was effective because it allowed for the exceptional. Encountering the work of John Shotter, who approached social constructionism from a relational point of view, was another breakthrough for René: he understood why AI was so effective. He told us: "If you want to establish strong connections you'd better start with a positive discovery instead of a negative one. Building relationships happens a lot faster when you start affirming each other. When I saw Appreciative Inquiry as a high-quality relational practice, I could understand its working. This is what made me a believer."

Appreciation is only one language among others, so you have to frame and reframe the situation in order to create allowance for differences.

Appreciative Inquiry and conflict

Because René specialized in conflict, we asked him how AI deals with it. He observed that this is a rather complex relationship. When you have the whole system in the room (one of the principles of AI), conflict can be dealt with effectively. But when you have multiple systems in the room e.g. in multi-actor collaboration projects, and you try to establish common ground when differences can't be negotiated, applying AI is hard: appreciation is only one language among others, so you have to frame and reframe the situation in order to create allowance for differences. Then you can re-negotiate these differences and start your inquiry in order to establish common ground. That is why many people find the Design phase of the AI process so hard. It is in this phase that appreciative stories and future images meet practical realities of what is achievable and what is not. You have to start a new inquiry process, often with new participants, in order to connect the here-and-now reality of AI with the multiple there-and-then realities of the other participants. This can be a tough job. Here lies fertile ground ahead for researchers and practitioners.

Appreciative Inquiry as generative co-inquiry

After a short break, the interview shifted to become more of a conversation. It was as if we were moving away from defining and discovering into dreaming and designing. An appreciative and relational approach creates the conditions for a conversation about what we really want together. We are always creating the things that we truly desire within a given context.

AI doesn't really touch upon the issue of context, in René's opinion. In a context with multiple perspectives, we need an interdisciplinary and systemic approach. And although AI practitioners claim to have answers to systemic questions, our questions have to be stated, heard and responded to in much more complex situations than that of single-system ones.

One way to do this would be to inquire into what works well and what people need to attain their desires from a multi-systems perspective. This means putting emphasis on the relational process, on co-inquiry and provocative questions, which can create sustainable conditions to continue the collaboration and to create new possibilities. For René, sustainability is not only a topic for inquiry, but also a process by which sustainable relational systems are made and continued.

In his own practice, René Bouwen found and explored the idea that a multi-stakeholder, multi-logical, and multi-voiced context demands an appreciative plus a generative co-inquiry. He still wonders how we can make multi-vocality really productive. Curiosity alone is not sufficient: the issues demand a great number of different stakeholders, and require inspiration and beliefs. We especially need a belief in our connectedness, a social belief in who we are as a society, complementary to the firmly established belief in who we are as individuals. That is because our most important questions today – for example immigration and the environment – deal with who we think we are

Searching for and enhancing bridging and re-connecting practices among different actors and issues goes beyond mere positive or negative terms.

as a society, or rather, a multiplicity of societies. So we have to keep asking questions of ourselves and of each other about our shared ambitions. We would like to thank René for sharing his experience, insights and future expectations with us.

Afterword from René Bouwen:

Thanks to Wick and Robbert for this creative conversation to help to write my history with Appreciative Inquiry. I want to add a short comment: AI as a coaching and intervention approach became successful in consulting contexts rather quickly, but it is only recently that academic research is joining the scholarly discussion again. The “generative turn” (as it is expressed by Gervase Bushe and Ronald Fry), the overarching “positive”, as well as “negative”, framing of issues can perhaps reconnect AI with its action research origins.

This generativity of AI is anchored in its capacity to build high-quality relational practices that can reconnect differences between diverse actors. Issues can be framed with so-called positive or negative terminology, but the connecting power of AI practices may be the crucial element to create new possibilities. Our social and organizational world is full of challenging differences and strong oppositions. Searching for and enhancing, bridging and re-connecting practices among different actors and issues goes beyond mere positive or negative terms. Re-framing is carried by relational practices that can enact common futures. When diverse actors want to engage in participatory action research, AI can be the high-quality relational practice to carry the social construction work. AI can perhaps become a lasting contribution to the methodology of qualitative social research. Such an academic recognition can only contribute to further creative applications in here-and-now consulting work.

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Reflecting on a Summit as a High-Relational Practice

In the autumn of 2015, a large-scale AI conference was held in a mental health institution in the Netherlands. Its aim was to inquire into the topic of addiction recovery. One hundred and fifty people gathered consisting of (ex-) patients, addiction recovery experts, psychiatrists, therapists, managers, staff personnel and people from other institutions. It turned out to be a beautiful conference, and afterwards, in the evening, all the participants joined the party where they, and many of their colleagues, celebrated the 25th birthday of their organization.

How the conference developed

The participants arrived at the residential site just before noon, in time for lunch. Afterwards, the CEO opened the conference with a personal and heart-felt welcome. The participants interviewed each other on the central topic. At first people had to find their place at the tables, but when they began the dialogue with each other you could feel the energy changing. It was a thrill to see how everybody started asking questions, telling stories about how they had dealt with difficult situations in their personal lives, emerging stronger than before. What happened as a result of this kind of questioning was that functional boundaries fell away as people started talking to each other as human beings, instead of as functionaries. For some of the participants this was tough; they had not considered that these questions would be answered from a personal point of view, only from a functional one. But when they did, it changed the quality of the conversation and of the relationship they had with the colleague or a patient. During the Discovery phase the relationships as well as the contents of the conversations were altered and this had a definite impact on the emergence of new possibilities.

In the second phase of the conference the participants introduced each other by exchanging stories about situations when they had shown resilience and courage in difficult situations. Mostly, these stories showed great admiration for the sometimes very difficult situations in which participants had found themselves, and nevertheless had recovered successfully from. People recognized their common humanity in each other's stories and this changed their mutual relationships as well as their view of the identities they had held of each other.

They created vivid images of the future in which they positioned themselves as a part of their preferred future.



During the final phase of the conference the participants dreamed of a future in which all of the elements that contributed successfully to addiction recovery were commonplace. They created vivid images of the future in which they positioned themselves as a part of their preferred future. The participants were supported by professional illustrators, who made their sketches come alive, as you can see in the illustrations which accompany this article. The groups from each table presented their future images to the whole group in a creative way and added their stories about what they saw happening in the near future. When all was said and done, the CEO thanked all the participants for their contributions, concluding by saying that within a couple of months the inquiry process would be continued with next steps.

Appreciative questions asked

1. With our policy on recovery addiction we offer our clients the support to rebuild a meaningful life. Do you recognize that after a difficult period, when you did not feel well and when you were feeling vulnerable, you were able to find new meaning in your life? Can you tell me a story about that?
2. I'm curious if there was a moment in your life when you did something that you were afraid to do, but you did it anyway? A moment where you showed the guts to do something and that made you stronger? Can you tell me about that moment?

Offering a window for reflection

As the main facilitator, I wonder what it was that made the conference go so well. I remember that before we started we – the facilitators and organizers – felt nervous; it was a critical group of people. Improving addiction recovery within this institution had begun three years earlier, and after some major changes and initiatives, the development process had slowed down in the

A relational practice perspective on AI turns our attention from the cognitive content towards the relational aspects

eyes of management. This conference – and the ones that were to follow – was regarded as a revitalizing event. What we had heard was that groups of participants saw the conference as an offense because they were still working very hard on improving addiction recovery. The CEO and his fellow managers were uneasy about the attitudes with which the participants would enter the conference. But the conference succeeded above expectations. So, what were the main factors that contributed to its success?

Rene Bouwen and others have written extensively on what constitutes a “relational practice”. This can help us gain understanding about some of the elements that make AI work. A relational practice perspective on AI turns our attention from the cognitive content towards the relational aspects of the conference: i.e., how people are doing “things” together and with each other, who is included or excluded, and how this is done. The quality of the interaction gives an indication of “what really works” in ongoing interactions for change. Bouwen regards a relational practice as any communicative or task-oriented interaction that is characterized by a certain quality of interacting between at least two actors. Examples would be: an event to start a project, a management team meeting, a group training session, a large group summit, a joint field visit, an occasional meeting between coworkers and/or supervisors or any moment of “joint acting”.

To characterize the quality of the conference as a relational practice, one can look for the following concrete and observable qualities:



People were not judged by others on the validity of their stories but appreciated for their contribution to the conference.



1. Reciprocity in relationship
2. Joint “authorship” and “co-ownership”
3. “Talking with” instead of “talking to”
4. Mutually open and illustrated communication, the possibility of mutual testing and contradicting
5. Mutually energizing conversations through joint appreciation, active engagement and the continuing possibility of being authentically present with others
6. Mutually appreciative inquiring
7. Joint reflection on the here-and-now group interaction and relationships that are developing
8. Dialoguing that offers the possibility of “frame-breaking”

Reflecting on the conference

What I saw happening at the conference was a wide variety of people gathering in order to discuss a topic that mattered to them, an opportunity they wouldn't normally have. Their everyday discussions were always temporal, local and solutions-focused. By sharing their personal experiences, the topic gained subjectivity. It was no longer about a topic there-and-then but a topic that was alive in the here-and-now. It mattered personally, and how it did so was what was talked about. Because people spoke from their personal experiences, their stories could never be denied by anyone. They were real and as people expressed their individual realities through their stories they discovered what connected them. This created a “we” identity.

Participants also found out that every story counted. People were not judged by others on the validity of their stories but appreciated for their contribution to the conference. For many participants it seemed an opportunity to really be heard by others, an affirmation and an inclusion of their concerns, expectations and desires into the whole of the organization. If there were any

Experiences and stories could contradict each other, and still be accepted as valid.



feelings of anger, disappointment, shame or guilt, as we had expected, they were sometimes expressed but more often replaced by feelings and emotions such as pride, happiness, self-esteem and connectedness. They were creating shared meaning based on what they had in common instead of what separated them. They experienced ability during the conference to create a common story and a shared ambition. And the images they designed of their future evoked joy, enthusiasm and laughter amongst the participants.

Many of the factors that contribute to high relational practice were visible during the conference, including advancing reciprocity and equality amongst the participants, concrete conversations that were based on personal experiences, co-creating a common and shared reality by means of conversations that were energetic and alive. Participants were talking with instead of about each other. Experiences and stories could contradict each other, and still be accepted as valid. There was real inquiry going on as well as joint reflection on what was created during the exchange of stories and future expectations of each other. The conference strengthened some mutual relationships, renewed others and established new ones. From a relational point of view this shows what is actually going on in the communications and interactions that take place during an AI event, and can explain the effects we see so often when we put AI into practice.

An urge to embed high relational practice

The AI case that I've just described is one of the many conferences that I have facilitated during the years. I always feel grateful for having the opportunity to be part of these special occasions. But it also makes me realize that, most of the time, these people do not have these kinds of experiences inside their organizations. What they experience is the opposite; it is the background

We have to consider the question of how we embed and sustain relational practices in the daily operations of organizations

which sets the AI event off as such a remarkably positive and memorable experience. In daily practice people often work in environments which display a lack of value and meaning, where they are silenced – or they silence themselves. Where they experience feelings of shame, guilt, frustration, separateness, boredom or powerlessness, probably based on the fear of being excluded or judged by others. Or where they do not feel themselves to be part of a larger and meaningful whole.

If this is the background by which participants appraise the AI meetings they attend, we have to consider the question of how we embed and sustain relational practices in the daily operations of organizations in a way that eliminates the discrepancy between off-site events and normal day-to-day operations. This would propagate a more “political” stance for AI practitioners, in which they not only facilitate AI events, but aim for a higher purpose: to show the intention and commitment to contribute to more sustainable organizations in which the human side of business – creating high relational practices – becomes primary instead of secondary. This mirrors an ethical responsibility to raise the bar considerably from the realization that sticking to straightforward AI facilitation might result in an unwanted contribution to continuation of a situation that is exactly opposite to what people desire in their normal day interactions with each other.

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The Paradox of Consensus and Conflict in Organisational Life

This article is an invitation to reconsider the dominant image of Appreciative Inquiry – that is an approach that unilaterally advocates harmonious relationships and positive interactions – which creates an incomplete image that conceals the real processes going on when we are negotiating our realities. The consequences of not noticing what we are engaged in is a diminished understanding of the nature of the game we are invested in, leaving us open to manipulation.

Introduction by Robbert Masselink

If it is the aim of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to change fundamentally the way we organise ourselves, (to establish more egalitarian organisations or to become more self-organised, for example), then we can not circumvent the fact that as a process it contains inherent conflict as power configurations are altered and the status quo re-evaluated. In this interesting article, Ralph Stacey explains why this is the case. For AI to be really generative, it has to rely on doubt, disagreement and thus conflict. An interesting question is how AI deals with the dynamic tension between consensus and conflict in such a way that organisations evolve to higher levels of coordinating actions and negotiating meanings.

Ralph Stacey's message is an invitation to reconsider the dominant image of Appreciative Inquiry – that is an approach that unilaterally advocates harmonious relationships and positive interactions – which creates an incomplete image that conceals the real processes going on when we are negotiating our realities. This impedes organisations' and individuals' learning about what they are actually doing: while they think they are practising AI, they are in fact avoiding really inquiring into different realities in such a way that the outcomes are a combination of changed identities, altered beliefs and world views, and altered courses of action.

Today's dominant thought-collective of practitioners, consultants and academics concerned with leadership, management and other organisational matters is characterised by thought styles which, in a completely taken-for-granted way, equate success with positives, sharing, harmony and consensus

There seems to be a scarcely-concealed dread of 'negatives,' such as conflict

(Fleck, 1979). Leaders are called upon to communicate inspiring, compelling visions of desirable futures shorn of all problematic features. Followers are to be converted to sharing the vision and committing to the mission so that everyone “is on the same page”, “singing from the same hymn sheet”, “climbing on board”, “on the message” and “a team player”. This whole raft of idealisations is taken even further when it is accompanied by a relentless emphasis on the positive aspects of all situations. There seems to be a scarcely-concealed dread of “negatives”, such as conflict, and a half-expressed conviction that success can only be achieved when all share the same view, with breakdown as the consequence of not doing this. If conflict is noticed it is immediately followed by calls for the practice of “conflict resolution” or approaches which rapidly move people from anything negative to a focus on the “positives”. A popular example of the prescription for positive consensus is provided by Appreciative Inquiry (AI).

Proponents of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987) point to how the dominant approach to leading, managing and changing organisations focuses attention on problems, deficits and dysfunctions. They argue that this approach is demoralising and ineffective in bringing about change and call, instead, for a focus on opportunities and what is working, because focusing in this appreciative, positive way raises morale and promotes generative inquiry. It is claimed that AI generates spontaneous, transformational action on the part of individuals, groups and organisations which leads to a better future.

Critics of AI (Fineman, 2006; Grant and Humphries, 2006, p. 401) problematise the focus on positiveness, arguing that positive and negative feelings are intimately connected and conclude that AI is a method whose proponents show little self-reflection or evaluative critique of what they are proposing. In response, Gervase Bushe of the Segal Graduate School of Business has published a paper titled “Appreciative Inquiry Is Not (Just) About the Positive” (Bushe, 2007).

This unrelenting emphasis on the positive, harmony and consensus functions to cover over conflict, difference and real-life attitudes towards deviants

Bushe agrees that AI can become a form of repression when it suppresses dissent and focuses on the positive as a defence against the anxiety of dealing with reality. However, he then immediately goes on to say that when AI is used in appropriate ways, which he does not identify, people do not wallow in mutual pain but tell each other uplifting stories instead, which sooth tensions and release energy. Instead of focusing on conflict, bridges are built between conflicting groups. In his view, people who want to talk about what they do not like should not be stopped from doing so but they should not be asked to elaborate on these matters. They should be encouraged, instead, to talk about what is missing, what they want more of and what their image of their organisation ought to be. He talks about small group meetings where everyone reads the same story together. Much the same points can be made about another positiveness movement called Positive Deviance, which is basically an idealised form of “benchmarking” and a sanitisation of “deviance”.

People continue, as they always have done, to disagree and subvert what they disagree with

The dynamics of identity

This unrelenting emphasis on the positive, harmony and consensus functions to cover over conflict, difference and real-life attitudes towards deviants because to bring these matters out into the open is to reveal patterns of power relations, the dynamics of identity-forming inclusion and exclusion, and the ideologies sustaining current power figurations. As a consequence, public discussions of organisational life take the form of a kind of rational, positive fantasy that focuses our attention on only a small part of what we ordinarily experience in our daily organisational lives.

People continue, as they always have done, to disagree and subvert what they disagree with: organisational life is characterised by ongoing conflict in which, at the same time, people normally manage to achieve sufficient degrees of consensus, tolerance and cooperation to get things done together. In order to understand what we are ordinarily engaged in during the course of our daily organisational lives we need to avoid thinking in terms of a duality of consensus and conflict, where we can decide to move from the one to the other, and think instead in terms of the paradox of consensus and conflict. We engage in – we are heavily invested in – organisational games displaying the paradoxical dynamics of consensual conflict or conflictual consensus, which is transformed as inquiry and the ordinary politics of everyday life.

The American pragmatist sociologist, George Herbert Mead, articulated these dynamics particularly clearly a century ago. For him, the evolution of social forms emerges in interactions between different groupings of people. A highly developed and organised society is one in which the individual members are interrelated in a multiplicity of different intricate and complicated ways, whereby they all share a number of common social interests – interests in, or for the betterment of, society – and yet, on the other hand, are more or less in conflict relative to numerous other interests which they possess only individually, or else share with one another only in small and limited groups (Mead, 1934, p. 307).

Mead is arguing that a complex society of interdependent individuals can only exist if those individuals share common interests to some extent, but that this can never be complete because of the conflict between different interests.

Social and asocial selves

Mead is arguing that a complex society of interdependent individuals can only exist if those individuals share common interests to some extent, but that this can never be complete because of the conflict between different interests. The implication, I think, is that society can only evolve through the conflict of interests: the evolution of organisations occurs through processes of identification with others and economic exchange, and these processes are essentially conflictual as well as consensual. Mead goes on to argue (Mead, p. 321) that there is a conflict between two aspects of the self: the social, which is impersonal and ethical in the sense that it integrates selves with each other and so is conducive to the well-being of society in which individuals cooperate with, and are equal to, each other; and the asocial, which is personal and unethical in the sense that it creates unique oppositions between people in which they have feelings of superiority over others which disrupts society. The

Allen and his colleagues... argue that change in organisations occurs through an ongoing process of co-evolution in which behavioural types interact with each other.

asocial self is socially (in a non-ethical sense) formed just as the social self is and they cannot be separated.

Mead is here using the word social in two different senses: the first and most usual sense is simply to denote any and all processes of interaction between persons without any ethical implications; and the second restricts the word “social” to mean cooperation and equality, which he takes to be ethical and contrasts with asocial – that is, acting according to personal or parochial interests – which he sees causing ethical problems. It seems to me that the first notion of social points to universal processes of human interaction that do not necessarily reflect any ideology. However, the second use immediately reflects an ideology which enables the making of judgements about what is ethical and what is not. However, this cannot be a hegemonic ideology because of the conflict between the social and the asocial emerging in the wider social processes, in which ideology emerges. For Mead, the ideal social situation (Mead, p. 322) is one where everyone takes the attitudes of all of the others so that there is no competition or hostility. However, actual conduct also involves the asocial when individuals compete and are hostile to each other. It is essential for the order of society that individuals have common attitudes “but over and above that sort of social endowment of the individual, there is that which distinguishes him from anybody else, makes him what he is. It is the most precious part of the individual.” (Mead, p. 324) Social evolution can therefore be understood as conflict between ideologies and as such is absolutely dependent on difference.

Complexity sciences, evolution and life

The complexity sciences make the same point about the evolution of nature and of life. Reynolds’ (1987) models of flocking show that when interacting agents all follow the same rules (consensus) then they are restricted to one pattern of behaviour. Ray’s (1992) models show that when agents differ from each other (conflict), their patterns of interaction evolve.

Allen and his colleagues (Allen, 1998a and 1998b; Allen et al, 2005; Allen et al, 2006) work in the tradition of Prigogine (1987) to argue that change in organisations occurs through an ongoing process of co-evolution in which behavioural types interact with each other. The underlying mechanisms of such evolution involve micro diversity and it is this that drives ongoing, emergent, qualitative changes. Diversity is defined in terms of the number of qualitatively different types of individuals, each type having different attributes. As an organisation evolves, changes occur in both the attributes internal to each type and the configuration of interactions between types. Evolution requires the invasion of a population by new behaviours which grow to a significant level. The model shows how an ecology of strategies emerges, indicating that agents are not susceptible to adopting the same strategy, contrary to prescriptions for best practice or benchmarking to be found in organisational literature.

*In ordinary, everyday
organisational life, consensus
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Diverse behaviours and learning rules lead to more rapid evolution of market structure at a lower cost than benchmarking. However, the explorations or innovations tried out at a particular time cannot be logically deduced because their overall effect cannot be known ahead of time. The conclusion is that co-evolving agents with underlying micro diversity, idiosyncrasy or deviance, automatically lead to the emergence of new structures. Consensus and the positives without conflict and the negatives would simply kill evolution. Fleck, referred to above, also makes the point that thought collectives police particular thought styles. The evolution of thought and the creation of the new rely on deviants at the margin who disagree and so generate conflict. Really generative inquiry relies heavily on doubt, disagreement, and thus conflict.

Pure consensus

So how might we understand consensus and conflict in organisations? Following Mead we can say that pure consensus can only exist in extreme cults where all the members give up any independent thought and simply act out the absolute beliefs of the cult. Of course it sometimes happens in this extreme way, but something approaching this condition does also appear in ordinary organisations, as people come to act out fantasies of subscribing to visions and seeing only the positive rather than thinking about what they are in fact doing.

Pure conflict

At the opposite end of the spectrum, pure conflict occurs only when social norms and conventions break down completely in conditions of highly anxiety-provoking crisis. In less extreme forms, differences become polarised, and such polarised conflict can be expressed as violence. In ordinary organisations, the closer people move towards polarised conflict, such as in intractable labour disputes, the closer they move towards organisational breakdown.

Dynamic tension

However, in ordinary, everyday organisational life, consensus and conflict are held in dynamic tension which reveals important differences and provokes the reflexive thinking and acting in which organisations continue to evolve. The problem about talking about two extremes, and about a dynamic between them, is that many immediately conclude that it is the role of leaders and managers to operate on processes of consensus and conflict to design the “right” balance. This is a misguided move in thought which immediately loses the notion of paradox. The dynamic of consensual conflict/conflictual consensus is emerging in the interaction between people in an organisation, in the interplay of their intentions and those of other groups of people outside the organisation. No one can design or control this interplay. What we can do is become more aware of the pattern of consensus and conflict at the same time, and in our own participation avoid taking up positions at the extremes.

The consequences of not noticing what we are engaged in is a diminished understanding of the nature of the game we are invested in

Human interdependence and human interaction

So why can we never escape the tension between consensus and conflict, other than in resorting to idealistic fantasies? The answer lies in the fundamentals of human interdependence and human interaction. If no one can control the interplay of intentions then all of us have no option but to exist in conditions of uncertainty, or more accurately, in the paradoxical dynamic of certainty and uncertainty as displayed by the modelling of natural complexity scientists. When we undertake any task together, therefore, none of us can know with certainty what the “right” thing to do is. We inevitably see situations differently and therefore have different views on what to do next. Such difference is the basis of disagreement/conflict which prompts us to negotiate our next actions, on which neither totally disagree, nor totally agree.

Conflict is an inevitable consequence of uncertainty. Furthermore, conflict is an inevitable consequence of human interdependence. This interdependence means that we enable and constrain each other and since this is what power is, it follows that patterns of power relating are central to human life. But power is tilted to some and away from others and this too is the basis of conflict (Elias, 2000/1939). Power relations can be felt as patterns of domination and this will always evoke patterns of resistance. We are skilled at practising the arts of resistance, at operating on hidden transcripts while publicly expressing the public transcript Scott, 1990).

The consequences of not noticing what we are engaged in is a diminished understanding of the nature of the game we are invested in, leaving us open to the manipulation of the more perceptive. If the immediate response to conflict is to avoid it and to develop defensive fantasies of harmony, we avoid more open discussion, we avoid inquiring into difference, we avoid critique and criticism, and so we are trapped in repeating clichés that block our further evolution.

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The Elephant in the Room: A critical inquiry into Appreciative Inquiry's struggle with appreciating power-resistance relations

Appreciative Inquiry claims to bring social constructionism into practice and is suggested to be a forerunner in democratic change management (Bushe, 2015). However, AI still contains positivist premises that are in tension with its social constructionist philosophy and affect its emancipatory promises. In this article I review AI's recent developments in addressing power-resistance relations to contribute to the reflexive awareness of this underdeveloped topic.

Resistance as the elephant in the room

Research suggests that actual change does not occur unless it addresses problems that are of real concern to an organization's members (Bushe, 2012). The expression of such concerns is regularly categorized as resistance to change. As a former social worker, I have a weak spot for change theories that seem to have taken a humanizing turn: participation models that acknowledge followers as co-leaders, and theories that replace the traditional vertical autocracy with a post-modern, horizontal facilitator. From the perspective of emancipatory ideals this might sound attractive; however parallel truths remain. Since change initiatives tend to stir up emotional turmoil and conflicts with organization members, power-resistance relations are undeniable, vivid and require consideration (Moon, 2008; Ager, 2011). Although some of Appreciative Inquiry's literature hints at these dynamics, it only scratches the surface and portrays little reflexivity regarding the position of AI practitioners in power-resistance relations.

AI simultaneously celebrates, devalues and even denies the relevance of resistance. Initially, AI's perspective can be positioned as an approach that celebrates resistance as part of successful change, since AI primarily manages the change process through the creation of an inclusive dialogue that enhances emergent avenues for change (Piderit, 2000; Ford et al., 2008). The underlying assumption appears to be that a change practice grounded in social constructionism incorporates resistance as part of the negotiations of meaning (e.g. Elliot, 1999; Bushe, 2011, 2012).

AI has remained largely silent on the topic (Johnson, 2013). Although Johnson's contribution initially advocates AI as a method that embraces resistance,

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a closer look provides an illustration of AI's concurrent devaluation of the concept. While at first glance resistance is explicitly celebrated, it is implicitly devalued by an unreflexive¹ reinforcement of the distinction between change "agents" and "recipients". Johnson's unclear conceptualization of resistance as "difficult emotions" also involves two complications (2013, p.191). With regards to the word "difficult", one might ask: difficult for whom? In her elaboration she primarily addresses organizational members' emotions as difficult for the consultant. Furthermore, by equating resistance with emotions, resistance is implicitly linked to lack of rationale. She suggests that, when people question AI's usefulness, "resistance" stems from a lack of understanding.

The positivist premise

The positivist premise remains that resistance is to be overcome. This theoretical contribution is but one of the ambiguous examples in AI's literature that describe AI as a suitable method to overcome negative reactions toward the change initiated (e.g. Bushe, 2001; 2005; Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2006; Day & Holladay, 2012). Although Johnson's contribution has added considerable nuance to AI's practical implications in the complexities of change, it still legitimizes the position that the consultant labels what constitutes resistance and whether it is facilitative to the change process or not.

Other writings even applaud themselves for the absence of the concept of "resistance" altogether (e.g. Cooperrider in Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The preoccupation with frequently encountered words – such as dialogue, co-creation, creativity and freedom – shows AI's assumption that everyone has the ability to exert the same amount of influence in the change process. This emphasis on individual agency and equality, together with AI's positive bias, simultaneously implies the other side of the coin: it casts a shadow that neglects resistance as a problem or deficit. Widespread engagement is seen as a remedy that allows concepts such as resistance to be ignored. Fitzgerald et al. confirm this as the dominant tendency in AI's approach toward resistance and describe this as "ignore it and it will go away" (2010, p. 229).

The power to disregard power-resistance relations

Fitzgerald et al.'s summary of AI's approach toward resistance also seems to apply to the concept of power. By viewing organizational members as free to construct new beliefs, AI over-emphasizes individual organizational member's agency and simultaneously reaffirms negative images of power by eradicating the constraining possibilities (e.g. Elliot, 1999). Furthermore, this view has contributed to the omission of the consultant's position from the few discussions on power and resistance (e.g. Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Oliver, 2005).

*Fitzgerald et al. ... describe
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¹ There are a number of definitions for the word "reflexive" in English. The definition as used in this article is: "taking account of itself or of the effect of the researcher on what is being investigated" (Oxford English Dictionary). Thus, unreflexive would be the opposite, that is not taking that effect into account.

The AI practitioner is primarily depicted as a neutral external facilitator

As with the concept of resistance, power as a theoretical concept is conspicuous by its absence. In agreement with most change management literature, AI treats resistance and power separately, although a social constructionist philosophy treats these topics as relational and recursive (e.g. Bushe, 2010; Johnson, 2013; Duncan & Ridley-Duff, 2014). Power is defined here as “the capacity to influence others with [these] political interests in mind. It is a resource to get things done through other people to achieve particular goals.” (Fleming and Spicer, 2014 following Hannah Arendt, 1958; 1970). Cooperrider promisingly states that power is a topic that “deserves priority attention” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 10). However, the writings that address power primarily conceptualize it as “the power to”, a resource that serves to enable the emancipation of all organizational members “to add great value to organizations and communities” (Ibid., p. 269, see also Elliot, 1999; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Duncan & Ridley-Duff, 2014; Ridley-Duff & Duncan, 2015). Differences in influence are denied by the statement that “no organizational group, level, or function is more receptive to organizational oppression than another” (Ibid.)

In this context “oppression” is depicted as a flawed social realist perspective: “They [i.e. the oppressed] experience and describe themselves with neither the position nor the power to change anything. (...) The world is the way it is and there is nothing they can do about it” (Ibid., p. 270). Notably, AI’s social constructionist philosophy serves as a reinforcement of this view: “The first step toward the liberation of power (...) begins when people recognize that the world and their organization is open to social change as created by and through human interaction and creativity. (...) Theoretically, we call these people social constructionists—people who understand the socially crafted nature of our realities” (Ibid.)

The consequences of power-resistance relations

AI’s ideological positive bias and lack of reflexivity thus seem to result in a one-sided portrayal of power as an enabling resource. Power struggles are made irrelevant and organization members who say that they are feeling marginalized are deemed to simply lack understanding. The underlying assumption appears to be that hierarchy and differential access to resources of influence constrain dialogue, which conveys a negative image of power.

Furthermore, it neglects the implications of relational and informal aspects of power, such as cultural hegemonic discourse and domination (Lukes 1974; Foucault, 1980). In fact, one could even argue that AI’s normative discourse itself can become an impersonal system of control for both organization members and AI practitioners. By minimizing these relational and informal aspects of power and resistance, AI further obscures the consequences of power-resistance relations.

While some authors may hold privileged positions in terms of their ability and the resources available to them to introduce new meanings into the

The classical distinction between change agents and recipients is retained

multi-authored process of change (Thomas et al., 2011), the AI practitioner is primarily depicted as a neutral external facilitator. However, as Schall et al. state, “any group of persons attempting to accomplish goals collectively face three crucial tasks: setting direction, creating and maintaining commitment, and adapting to the challenges that appear on the way” (2004, p. 153). Planned change thus calls for the use of power to serve a certain purpose and to set boundaries for inquiry.

The consultant’s role in the social construction of change

AI literature has shown little reflexivity regarding the consultant’s role in the social construction of change. Indeed, the classical distinction between change agents and recipients is retained (e.g. Bushe, 2001; Cooperrider and Sekerka, 2006; Camargo-Borges and Rasera, 2013). As a result, the empowerment of marginalized voices becomes something done by liberated change facilitators to the not-yet-liberated change recipients. From a social constructionist point of view, the consultant is another change actor, just as much included in the multi-authored process of meaning-making that underlies change. Unfortunately, AI literature frequently shows that the objective of change is a taken-for-granted point for departure that is not open for dialogue (Letiche in Masselink and De Jong, 2013). In this context, the consultant’s role is no longer just facilitative but actually includes declarative power. The premise that every individual has equal agency underlies a lack of reflexivity toward the emancipatory implications of the consultant’s positionality in the social construction of change.

Conclusions and future avenues for reconnecting AI’s premise to its promise

A social constructionist change method should consider the influence of power-resistant relations on change actors’ constructions of meaning. Ignoring the elephant in the room does not mean he goes away. This review has shown that AI’s approach to change still contains positivist premises that support the neglect of power-resistance relations in organizational change. These blind spots extend to the role of the AI practitioner, since guiding or facilitating planned change calls for the use of power. A lack of reflexive discussion on how to conceptualize and deal with power-resistance relations threatens the realization of AI’s emancipatory promises (e.g. Johnson, 2013; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2006; Bushe, 2001). So how can we find new avenues that reconnect AI’s premises and promises into a coherent change philosophy and practical approach? I would like to close with two promising developments in AI literature that provide at least two avenues to move beyond AI’s inherent ontological tensions. These avenues could use further exploration to strengthen AI’s potential as an emancipatory change practice.

First, several scholars have addressed AI’s underlying tensions in relation to unintended consequences that emanate from its ideological and normative background. These contributions slowly shift from the dominant focus on the positive principle and the use of simplistic dichotomies such as “positive”

To develop a coherent emancipatory social constructionist change method, it is pivotal that power-resistance relations and the place of the AI practitioner in the social construction of change are reflexively explored.

versus “negative”, and “strengths” versus “deficits” to a more nuanced and holistic understanding of AI (e.g. Bushe, 2012; Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004; Oliver, 2005; Grant & Humphries, 2006; Fitzgerald et. al, 2010; Johnson, 2013; Ridley-Duff & Duncan; 2015). They acknowledge that what people consider to be positive or problematic is inherently pluralistic and constituted within different narratives that depend on attributed and contextualized meanings. However, these writings still reveal the difficulty of finding a different angle toward AI’s positive principle and clearly conceptualizing a central idea, such as appreciation. Attempts to reposition and reconceptualise appreciation can provide further development to AI as a social constructionist change practice with room for the discussion of power-resistance relations.

Second, interpretive research, reflexively conducted, is necessary if we want to enhance our understanding of how context-sensitive meanings influence actual change work (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Accordingly, bringing greater reflexivity is an important suggestion that has been made for the further development of AI (Oliver, 2005; Fitzgerald et al, 2010; Johnson, 2013). To develop a coherent emancipatory social constructionist change method, it is pivotal that power-resistance relations and the place of the AI practitioner in the social construction of change are reflexively explored. This advice has generated little further consideration so far and is therefore a large, unexplored frontier.

It is my hope that, enriched with these two avenues, and probably new ones to come, Appreciative Inquiry can address the blind spots identified in this article and fulfill its promise as a social constructionist change method with an emancipatory character.

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Nourish to Flourish



Nourish to Flourish is a new section of AI Practitioner, which brings together existing elements of AI Practitioner with new ideas.

Voices from the Field



Keith Storace

Based in Melbourne Australia, Keith Storace, a registered psychologist, is driven by a deep interest in social inclusion. He has worked across the health and education sectors. Maintaining an active interest in the organisational benefits of AI, Keith is currently developing the Motivation and Capacity Framework (MaCF) for managers and leaders.



Maaïke van der Velden

Maaïke van der Velden is an Organisation Development professional, with a focus on talent and personal development. She has had the privilege of working in both the not-for-profit and profit sectors, in the Netherlands and abroad. Key topics are: education and learning systems; women's empowerment; talent management and team development.



Dr Claudia Gross

Dr Claudia Gross is an Organisational Development consultant with working experience in Germany, the Maghreb, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa. She is both the founder of human-centred Organisational Governance which promotes life at work, and the initiator of speakGreen, which offers a generative, constructive language for the future.



Karen Venter

Karen Venter is a lecturer at the School of Nursing, University of the Free State, South Africa. She is responsible for the practical facilitation of service learning in several undergraduate and postgraduate programmes within established community higher education partnerships. She is currently studying towards a Ph.D. in Higher Education Studies at the same university.

A Consultant's Journey



Mark Lough

Mark Lough is a practicing psychotherapist and OD consultant working in Aberdeen, Scotland with a particular interest in leadership and team development as well as adult psychotherapy. He has run an independent practice since 1997 and has worked across many different sectors. Mainly based in the UK, Mark has worked with cross-cultural leadership groups in the Middle-East and Russia.



Wick van der Vaart

Wick van der Vaart has master degrees in Dutch literature and social psychology. In 2005, he founded the Instituut voor Interventiekunde (Institute for Interventionism) in Amsterdam. The core of this Institute is a two-year program in appreciative interventionism. In 2016, he will become Editor-in-Chief of *AI Practitioner*.

Book Review



Sarah Lewis

Sarah Lewis, C. Psychol., is an experienced strengths-based organisational consultant. She has particular expertise in Appreciative Inquiry and other co-creative change processes. Her latest book, *Positive Psychology and Change*, will be available June 2016. More information can be found on her website www.acukltd.com.

Voices from the Field

Keith Storace

Following a deeply insightful and inspiring World Appreciative Inquiry Conference (WAIC) in Johannesburg, South Africa 2015, the true spirit of ubuntu – humanity towards others – continues to illuminate in our new series of reflective stories titled “Voices from the Field”.

As we move towards WAIC Brazil 2017, the *AI Practitioner* journal will feature contributions from WAIC 2015 participants who have been invited to reflect on how Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has influenced their work and their lives, and how they see this benefiting the future of AI. Our voices from the field in this edition of *AI Practitioner*, Maaïke van Der Velden, Dr Claudia Gross and Karen Venter, present their own unique experiences and expressions of life and work in the context of Appreciative Inquiry.

The Appreciative Power of Mothers

By Maaïke van der Velden

Instead of focusing on business development (as I usually do) I took the opportunity to truly connect with my inner voice and to reflect on how to apply AI in my life.

When I returned to Amsterdam, I reflected on a wonderful week attending the WAIC2015 in Johannesburg. The sessions about Being AI stood out for me. They taught me more about the value of appreciated questions and constructive dialogue within our daily lives. Instead of focusing on business development (as I usually do) I took the opportunity to truly connect with my inner voice and to reflect on how to apply AI in my life. The results of this connection for me have been more joy in life, a rigorous change in my career, more connection with my loved ones, and time and energy to pick up plans I had put aside for a while. One of these plans I will highlight in this article.

Over the last few years, I have had sincere and open conversations with many women in the Netherlands about the first year of being a mother. I’ve discovered that lots of women experience tremendous joy, but on the other hand they also faced difficulties finding the right balance between their child, work, partner, social life, etc. Within our Dutch society, it has become standard that women gain good education and thereafter find a good job, start a family, buy a house and have a lively social network. Although I believe that the access women have to education and labour has a high positive impact on our society, I also feel it contributes to the pressure many women feel to combine everything. I had this experience myself:

Two years ago, I was fortunate to become the mother of a beautiful girl. The first year of being a mother had a huge impact on my energy level and the ability to truly connect with myself. While my baby girl slept by the book, I had difficulties sleeping myself. It took a while before I dared to express my doubts, my fears and all my questions. Because I acknowledged this and because people asked me appreciative questions, I had the opportunity to connect with the woman and mother I am and want to be.

Showing your doubts and vulnerabilities as a mother is still a taboo. I see lots of similarities with leaders in companies, who are afraid to admit they don't have the answers. How beautiful would it be if we could openly share our doubts and differences? Therefore, I am working on an initiative for women who have just become mothers: a group of between six and ten women meet together four or five times. During these sessions, we construct a dialogue between these mothers and exchange stories. Appreciative questions can support women to switch from problem focus to constructive topics and opportunities within their new family life. As neuroscientist Barbara Fredrickson clarified at the conference: "stimulating positive emotions has a positive effect on our health and wellbeing".

My dream for Brazil is to present many stories of women who have experienced more value during the first year of motherhood because they made a positive connection with themselves and with other mothers. I want to do more research on effective interventions and will certainly use some models I have learned about during the conference, like Jeanie Cockell and Joan McArthur-Blair's ALIVE model.

My AI Journey: From learner via practitioner to contributor

By Dr. Claudia Gross

During my AI Introduction training, I experienced the magic and power of the AI interview myself. Ever since, I have been eager to provide a similar experience for other persons.

What is the most memorable experience of your work in this team?

In the Discovery phase of team building retreats, I love asking this question to connect the participants with their team at its best. Based on sharing their stories with colleagues, they can dive deeper to discover their key strengths, core values, and three wishes for the team's future. Presenting these outcomes afterwards and having an exchange on them is always an eye-opening experience filled with deep insight and connection.

We co-create our future

Two years after my initial training, I attended an AI for Strategic Planning training in London (coinciding with the January 25, 2011 revolution in Egypt where I live, but that is another story). There I had the chance to add some practical methods and approaches to my AI toolbox.

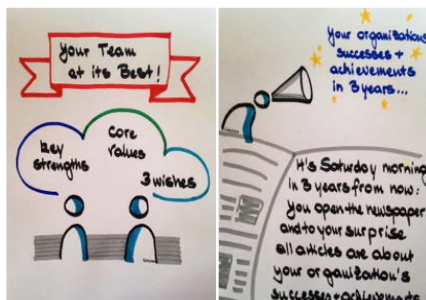
Imagine it is Saturday morning 2018...

This time journey is one of my favourite questions when facilitating strategic planning workshops. It unfolds its magic best when presented slowly, with a certain fairy story-telling tone of voice. Once the participants have done their time-travelling, I ask them to write down individually all the changes they can feel, see and hear. Those post-its or cards will serve in the working groups to develop a newspaper page, filled with their future successes and achievements.

"What you
focus on grows.
What you
resist persists."

what works
what doesn't work

'Work is love made visible.'
Khalil Gibran



The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new

If we can dream it, we can make it

When in your life have you felt most joyful and energized at work?

This is the opening question of my initiative Human-Centred Organisational Governance, and it certainly is inspired by AI.¹ On the quest for finding another way of working, I collected many practice-oriented activities individuals can bring into reality right away in their teams and organisations. The activities can be checked online in the form of two source lists and lead to an instant analysis. It is important to note that they are formulated in a generative language, focusing on what we want to experience more of (with only few exceptions that state what not to do). The purpose of this initiative is to bring humanity back to work and co-create meaningful and life-giving workspaces around the world.

“Work is love made visible.” Khalil Gibran

Is it dangerous to hit the deadline?

Makes one wonder, right? Questions like this one are part of my initiative speakGreen that provides a new emerging vocabulary for the authors of the future: us. With highlighting the green alternatives, it focuses attention on what we want to have more of, expressed in almost 700 posts so far, which have led to over 12,000 “likes”.

Wouldn't it be wiser to focus on “Peace” instead of “No War”, telling people to “stay confident and optimistic” instead of “don't worry”, and engage to “increase employment” instead of “decrease unemployment”? And then you might opt to drop deadlines and speak of due dates or big days instead.

Express the change you want to experience in the world.

Appreciative Inquiry and Service Learning

By Karen Venter

Globally, organisations recognise continuous challenges faced in the field of pro-active transformation of society. Communities call for active engagement to promote and develop social responsibility and awareness towards social and economic development. Service Learning (SL) serves as an academic pillar of community engagement. As a form of experiential learning (EL), this teaching approach and philosophy promotes active engagement, collaboration and advises partnership formation with a diverse variety of stakeholders. However, within the dynamics and complexities of diverse partnerships, challenges always remain a reality. Therefore, solutions to unravel these challenges need further exploration.

Taking into consideration the “positive change” foundation of AI, I wish to reflect on and inquire into the possibility for AI and SL practitioners to connect. In this reflection I will compare these two approaches, discover the

¹ For more information, check Claudia's website www.claudiagross.com to find both initiatives: www.hcOrG.com; <https://www.facebook.com/lifeatworkmovement>; www.speak-Green.com; <https://www.facebook.com/speakgreenmovement>

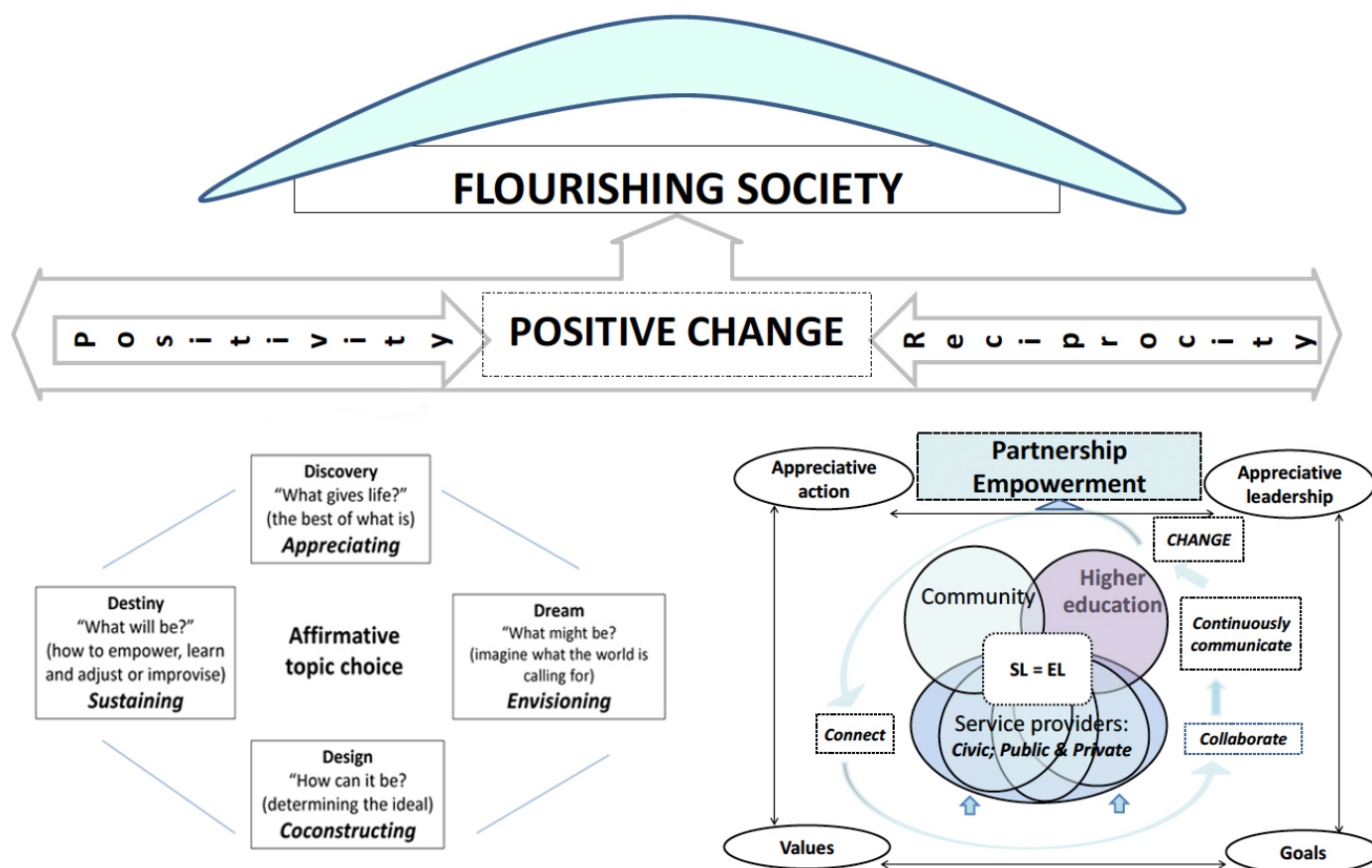


Figure 1 Reflection on AI and SL partnership connection. Sources: For AI: Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros (2008: 5); For SL: Adapted from Venter, Erasmus and Seale (2015: 16)

strengths, dream of what could be established from such a connection and suggest a possible structure for collaboration for these change strategies.

In both the AI and SL processes, collaboration succeeds towards the product of positive change. Figure 1 depicts a comparison and suggested co-design between the processes involved in AI and SL.

As indicated in Figure 1, connection, collaboration and continuous communication initiate change. Both processes establish a connection for further collaboration. However, AI action focuses on an area of interest for improvement within an organisation or community, where SL action focuses on meeting common needs or addressing problem areas and rendering service to community members. SL envisions holistic growth, namely development of cognitive, psychomotor and affective learning from experience.

Both of AI and SL stakeholders collaborate towards common goals and values. AI works towards the discovery of strengths; passions; unique attributes and focuses on patterns and creating statements of ideal possibilities. Through AI conversations, stakeholders co-determine what should be and plan practical action steps. Finally, action is taken. SL focuses on analysis of service needs and learning from social interaction. Further, the values of reciprocity and

*Positive values, caring
dialogue and action or service
empower communities
towards sustainability*

mutuality specifically guide the relationship in a SL partnership, which also requires action.

AI and SL stakeholders continuously communicate through reflection on change, and the monitoring and evaluation of their action. Then celebration of success follows! The process of AI focuses on new possibilities, thereby generating energy for continuous action towards positive change. SL nurtures mutual learning from service rendered; and focus on new SL needs to be towards the common good of society.

Through reflection I have discovered that in both these processes, it is positive values, caring dialogue and action or service, which empowers communities towards sustainability. I dream of future co-discovery of lessons to be learned from best shared stories. AI and SL could contribute to "wholeness", where positivity from AI, reciprocity from SL, and the shared element of learning could infuse a connected togetherness of passionate change-makers. I am positive about speaking of a possible destiny where a successful joint initiative towards positive change could be added, contributing towards a flourishing society.

A Consultant's Journey: Building personal resources for working in complex environments

By Mark Lough and Wick van der Vaart

This is an account of a transformational learning experience that was designed for consultants, coaches and managers, launched in August 2015. Our idea was to offer participants the opportunity to come together in a shared experience that drew upon the principles of AI without relying upon the structure of the 5D cycle. We wanted to explore ways of working that honoured the social constructionist principle and to explore a more relationally responsive, dialogical approach, which can be obscured by an over-reliance on method.

Each person was invited to engage their spirit of curiosity to appreciate more fully what they offer as professionals and to explore those things that enrich their capacity to work creatively and effectively, even in the midst of complexity.

We wanted to create an opportunity to explore some of the more challenging elements of process work; namely, those moments when there is no protocol and where more complex dynamics are at play. In this respect, we wanted to

*We wanted to create an
opportunity to explore some
of the more challenging
elements of process work.*

How do we develop a deeper appreciation of the metaphors that shape our sense of identity?

invite the development of intuitive capacities that would enhance personal confidence.

We were also interested to adapt the T-group model¹ to see if an adapted form could provide a different kind of learning opportunity for participants – one that was theme-centred and which would create similar opportunities for real-time learning and experimentation. Additionally, we wished to draw upon insights that are emerging from Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB) as an additional theoretical lens. Elements in the programme included:

- Integration of professional and personal development
- Theme-centred small group experiences
- Theoretical inputs regarding metaphor, curiosity, intuition and relational practice

Why did we want to work in this theme-centred way?

Our view is that there is no magic in the work that we do. Although there may be no easy explanations for “why things work” between people there are capacities that we can each develop to support our engagement with the complexity of professional life. Many of these lie in our understanding of theory and technique, and in the unique way that we integrate and express our personal qualities whilst holding an “in this moment” awareness of the context.

What questions did we seek to explore?

- How do we think about the narratives that inform our work at an individual level?
- How are those narratives being recreated in the “here and now”?
- How can we work intuitively with emergent elements?
- How do we develop a deeper appreciation of the metaphors that shape our sense of identity?
- How can we use this growing awareness of our work to enhance organisational effectiveness and personal growth?

The unfolding

In August 2015, seven participants arrived at Les Chabannes in France. All were Dutch, aged between 27 and 59, with a range of professional backgrounds including public-service management, safety, management, and organisational consultancy and health. Although the workshop was nonresidential, all participants were encouraged to use the different elements of the programme as opportunities for reflection and as a means of furthering their own professional/personal questions.

¹ A T-group is a form of group training where participants use feedback, problem solving and role play to gain insights into themselves, others and groups.

The experience of 'being in nature' created opportunities to focus on sensory inputs and bodily awareness as an essential element of intuitive processing.

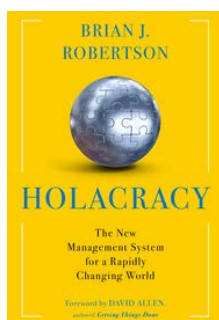
The structure of the week was set out as combinations of theme-centred group experiences supported by discussion and reflective processes as well as short theoretical inputs that reflected the topics and themes. Each participant developed images of their own learning paths and goals which were explored and further developed as the week progressed. Opportunities to practise and experiment were encouraged in the group intensives and reflected upon in journals and conversation.

The experience of "being in nature" created opportunities to focus on sensory inputs and bodily awareness as an essential element of intuitive processing. The metaphor of "Lord of the Rings" was identified in our preparation as a unifying story for what we were doing, as it conveys the importance of fellowship in a group as well as the value of a shared purpose and the emergence of shared leadership across the membership.

Although we worked to a particular structure with a range of themes in mind, we also wanted to facilitate the group to develop its own unique process and to follow opportunities as they emerged in order to create a real-time exposure to working with what emerges in a more considered way.

Reflections and learning

- By focussing on themes that were relevant to the group, we discovered, during the group sessions, that the conversations were productive right from the start. In this way the group time became a useful variation to the classical T-group, allowing a safe place for powerful exploration of individual and shared development opportunities.
- By spending time on appreciative interviews and crafting individual metaphors, we found that the participants had a lot to talk about and reflect upon during the group time. Narratives were identified and explored in a way that facilitated individual creativity.



Book Review

By Sarah Lewis

Holacracy: The Revolutionary Management System that Abolishes Hierarchy
Brian Robertson Portfolio Penguin, June 2015

Why this book?

This book claims to offer an alternative way of organising that breaks away from the command-and-control model or as the author of the book calls it, "the predict and control" model. This seemed sufficiently in line with our aspirations as Appreciative Inquiry (AI) practitioners to warrant further investigation.

In this model the organising process itself becomes the ultimate power.

Brief account of the book

The book has noble, honourable and inspiring intentions: it offers holacracy as a “new operating system” for organisations that will create a “peer-to-peer distributed authority system”. This operating system creates empowered people who are clear about the boundaries of their authority, about what they can expect from others, and are able to be highly effective in their roles.

In this model the organising process itself becomes the ultimate power, more than any individual, and every individual can have a voice in designing and altering the process. It is a flat system of roles and links that delivers high autonomy. It is predicated on a system of roles (essentially disembodied job descriptions), decision-making circles (meetings by another name) and a process of links. It bravely attempts both to relieve leaders of the pressure of the demand of omnipotence, and to make it possible for weak signals of dysfunction, lack of alignment, gaps in accountability, missed opportunities etc. to be attended to promptly and effectively by empowered individuals. It offers a clear process for distinguishing working in the business from working on the business. It presents a view of strategy as “dynamic steering” by simple rules or principles towards a general purpose. In this way it attempts to simulate evolutionary development processes and indeed sees itself as an evolutionary model.

Reading this book was an interesting experience. The book is a “how-to” book and it sets out the process model in great detail, describing the purpose of key facilitator roles and the process of key tactical and governance meetings (“circles” in the terminology of the model). It is not hard to tell that the author and originator of this model has a software development background. My initial impression reading it was reminiscent of getting to grips with the complex board games of allies and axis that my sons and husband loved to play some years ago: a complex set of rules about the properties and powers of various pieces and cards subject to the rules of the dice. In the early stages as much time was spent consulting the rule-book as playing the game.

If this, then that

As I read on I realised there was a strong binary flavour underpinning much of the process, an “if this, then that” logic driven by an implicit flow chart of binary decision-making. The author’s argument is that these tight constraints work to create an empowered freedom within them. However, it is noticeable that much of the instruction reads “no discussion allowed” as the process is strictly followed. In essence he is trying to programme out the negative aspects of the human element in this organising process and to create an organisational process that functions effectively despite the emotionally and relationally wayward behaviour of people. This takes a lot of discipline on the part of all the players; which is to say it takes organisational energy.

The author is honest enough to point out that this new process does not always “take” in organisations despite various people’s interest, energy and support.

He identifies that the key challenge, which is also at the heart of the model's power, is the need for those with current power in the system to give it up.

He identifies that the key challenge, which is also at the heart of the model's power, is the need for those with current power in the system to give it up. The author is of the opinion that after an initial period of painful discipline, the benefits will become clearer to all and the process will become more self-maintaining. It is clear that not all organisations make it over the hump. Similarly, while initially he took a whole-system "all or nothing" approach to implementation, he has since softened his views and in this book he offers a chapter on "holacracy-lite" possibilities that offers guidance on how to implement parts of the process.

In summary

The book is well written, offering a clear and detailed explanation of the holacracy organising process with a worked case study and anecdotes from experience used to illuminate how the various meetings and roles work.

My take on the model presented

This model is likely to appeal to those who have great faith in rationality and like highly structured, detailed and disciplined processes. In this sense it reads as very bureaucratic. It put me in mind of Lean, another process that, in theory, makes perfect sense; however in practice often takes a lot of energy to maintain. Both demand great human discipline. Robertson is clear that the role of facilitator "requires that you override your instinct to be polite or 'nice' and that you cut people off if they speak out of turn", amongst other skills and abilities. In this way it is trying to programme out the emotional, irrational human decision-making influences such as ego, fear and group think, to create a less contaminated system of governance.

In many ways this model seems aligned with Appreciative Inquiry and co-creative ways of thinking. For example, it is more wedded to biological than mechanical metaphors, it prioritises adaptability over predictability, and it is focused on releasing collective intelligence within a leader-ful organisation. However, it seems to work against human nature, or human psychology, rather than with it. It is this constant fight against core features of human systems that, in my opinion, is at the heart of the gap between the promise of these kinds of models and the frequent experience of the lived reality.

However, I do think it offers a real, well-thought-out, and to some extent tried and tested alternative to our current creaking-under-the-strain-in-the-modern-era command-and-control organisational model. It will be interesting to see to what extent it is adapted across the organisational domain and I would love to hear from anyone who has either direct experience of working in an organisation based on this model, or who has attended training on it.

In the next issue I will be reviewing Firms of Endearment by Sisoda, Wolfe and Sheth, a book much quoted at both the World Appreciative Inquiry Conference and the World Positive Psychology Congress this year.

It is this constant fight against core features of human systems that, in my opinion, is at the heart of the gap between the promise of these kinds of models and the frequent experience of the lived reality.

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Appreciative Inquiry Research, Review & Notes

Authors Kaplan and Kaiser have postulated that too much of a good thing – such as being too appreciative – can actually be detrimental to both the individual and the organisation. However, a more recent study by Charlotte Crisp has found there cannot be too much appreciative leadership if the aim is to increase work engagement.

Can a Leader Be Too Appreciative?

In a 2014 literature study, a former Master's student of mine, Charlotte Crisp, found that many organisations which strive towards high employee engagement do so by encouraging those in leadership positions to employ appreciative behaviours alongside their task-orientated leadership behaviours. As such, the regression line between appreciative leadership and employee engagement should be linear, suggesting that as appreciative leadership increases, so will employee engagement.

Then we stumbled upon the work of Kaplan and Kaiser (2009; 2013), which suggests that an individual (e.g. a manager or leader) may demonstrate too little optimal, or too much, appreciation – each of which may have a unique effect on the organisation's employees. Moreover, the authors postulate that too much of a good thing – such as being too appreciative – can actually be detrimental to both the individual and the organisation. My colleague Deon de Bruin and I subsequently challenged Charlotte to test Kaplan and Kaiser's suggestion that the relationship between appreciative leadership and work engagement is curvilinear, meaning that too much or too little appreciative leadership is negatively related to work engagement, while optimal appreciative leadership is positively related to work engagement.

She took up the challenge and developed the **Appreciative Leadership Questionnaire** with the aim of measuring five strategies of appreciative leadership: inquiry, illumination, inspiration, inclusion and integrity (Whitney, Trosten-Bloom & Rader, 2010). Each strategy was measured using two items; the scale therefore consisted of a total of ten items. Each item presented the participants with a scenario, and the questionnaire required the participants

There are ... only two significant categories of appreciative leadership, namely under-appreciation and over-appreciation.

to select one of three responses (in each case) that best described how their leader would most likely react in a given situation. The three possible responses were structured to represent a team leader/floor manager who is respectively unappreciative, optimally appreciative, or overly appreciative. An example of an item from this questionnaire is: "I feel overwhelmed, because I believe that I do not have the skills required to successfully complete my work tasks. I approach my team leader to explain this. My boss is most likely to...". The participants were required to choose one of the following responses:

- (a) highlight my weaknesses or skill deficiencies;
- (b) highlight my strengths, and align them with compatible and attainable target outcomes; or
- (c) overemphasise my strengths.

For the measurement of work engagement the UWES-9 (Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006), which is a shortened version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), was used. The scale, which has sound metric properties, measures work engagement in terms of three factors: vigour, dedication and absorption.

Charlotte conducted her research at a call centre in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Her sample (n = 171) consisted of call centre agents and their team leaders.

The results of Charlotte's study do not support Kaplan and Kaiser's claim, indicating that the relationship between appreciative leadership and work engagement is not curvilinear, but linear: as appreciative leadership increases, so does work engagement. Furthermore, the results show that there are, indeed, only two significant categories of appreciative leadership, namely under-appreciation and over-appreciation. Charlotte's study implies that there cannot be too much appreciative leadership if the aim is to increase work engagement. Moreover, as far as her findings are concerned, there appears to be no optimal level of appreciative leadership.

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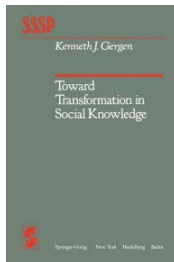
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Appreciative Inquiry Resources

Appreciative Inquiry Resources features a rediscovery of classic and new resources for your use. Resources will include list-serves, books, journal articles, book chapters, DVDs, websites, blogs, podcasts, etc. ... all in one place useful for learning more about AI to help with your consulting practice, internal work, teaching, training and extending your knowledge base and resources.

As elsewhere in the February 2016 issue of the AI Practitioner, we are sharing resources that span the young history of Appreciative Inquiry.

Starting with one of Ken Gergen's influential resources from 1982, we decided to look for resources that show the development of Appreciative Inquiry in (roughly) five-year periods of time. If you are new to exploring these Appreciative Inquiry resources, we hope you enjoy seeing the progression of AI throughout these years. For those of you who are revisiting these resources and the development of AI, we hope that you enjoy revisiting the evolving story of AI and these resources as much as we have.

**1982****Toward Transformation in Social Knowledge**

Ken Gergen (1982)

ISBN: 978-1-4612-5708-0

Ken Gergen's ideas in this book were influential in the development of Appreciative Inquiry. The discussion on generative theory is embedded into the core of AI philosophical discussions as well as AI methods. Ken Gergen published a second edition to this text in 1994.

**1987****Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life**

David Cooperrider & Suresh Srivastva (1987)

In *Research in Organizational Change and Development*, Vol. 1 (129–169)<http://goo.gl/sh1PiL>

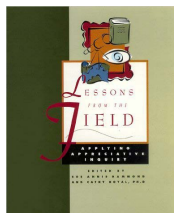
This chapter summarizes well many of the early ideas of AI. Much like David Cooperrider's doctoral dissertation, this chapter is a call for action research to reach its potential as a tool for fostering social innovation and to advance theory and practice.

**1992****A Chicago Case Study in Intergenerational Appreciative Inquiry**

Bliss Browne (1995)

<http://goo.gl/phwaCn>

Imagine Chicago was created in 1992. This article by Bliss Browne is an early writing about the use of AI by Imagine Chicago to foster intergenerational civic engagement and community development.

**1997****Lessons from the Field**

Sue Hammond and Cathy Royal (1998)

This is one of the first published books that focused on practitioner stories about AI. The book is divided into five sections, including case studies, community application and application of theory, as well as other resources. Sue and Cathy also published a revised version of this text in 2001.

**1998**

To further contribute this sharing of stories by practitioners, Anne Radford published the first electronic AI Newsletter in 1998, leading to the development of *AI Practitioner*.



2002-2004

In the years around 2002, there were three cases of Appreciative Inquiry that demonstrate how AI had broadened its application into multiple sectors by this time. These sectors were the military, education, and global politics and corporate citizenship. The following are three resources that tell the story of three events from these three sectors.

US Navy Leadership Summit (2002)

<https://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/practice/ppNavy.cfm>



Many of the documents and resources related to the US Navy Leadership Summit and its AI design are still available on the AI Commons.

Leap of Faith: ReDiscovering the Wonder-Full World of Education (2003)

<https://goo.gl/oUz9dN>

This summary PowerPoint presentation tells the story of this wonderful gathering of people focused on AI and education.



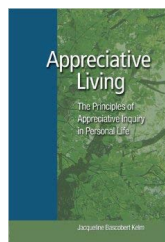
UN Global Compact (2004)

<https://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/intro/commentFeb05.cfm>

This page in the AI Commons provides commentary and resources related to the UN Global Compact gathering in 2004, where the Appreciative Inquiry approach was used with about 500 participants.

2007

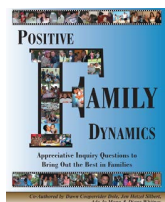
Just like a series of events around 2002 showcase the development of Appreciative Inquiry, a series of publications about five years later reveal how the roots of AI were spreading into different fields. In 2005, Jackie Kelm published her first book on Appreciative Living. In 2008, Dawn Cooperrider Dole, Jen Hetzel Silbert, Ada Jo Mann and Diana Whitney shared their ideas about using Appreciative Inquiry to help families thrive. Then, in 2009, Jackie Starvos, Gina Hinrichs and Sue Hammond published a book about SOAR. At this point in time, the practice of AI had clearly grown in many different directions.



Appreciative Living: The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry in Personal Life

Jackie Kelm (2005)

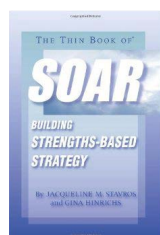
ISBN: 978-0977216109



Positive Family Dynamics

Dawn Cooperrider Dole, Jen Hetzel Silbert, Ada Jo Mann, Diana Whitney (2008)

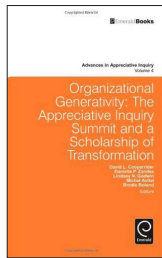
ISBN: 978-0971231290



The Thin Book of SOAR: Building Strengths-based Strategy

Jackie Starvos, Gina Hinrichs, and Sue Hammond (2009)

ISBN: 978-0982206805



2012

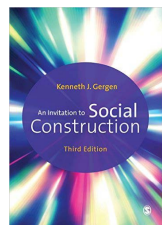
A Contemporary Commentary on Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life

David Cooperrider (2013)

ISBN: 978-1848554887

doi: 10.1108/S1475-9152(2013)0000004001

In the fourth edition of *Advances in Appreciative Inquiry*, David shared his latest ideas about Appreciative Inquiry in organizational life. It is most interesting to pair this chapter with a revisit to the Cooperrider & Srivastva article of 1987 shared above to get another sense of the development of AI through these years.



2015

An Invitation to Social Construction (3rd Edition)

Ken Gergen (2015)

ISBN: 978-1412923019

It seems fitting that the most recent resource we share is connected to a resource that is so much a part of the foundation of Appreciative Inquiry. Ken Gergen's latest edition of this book on social construction is written especially for readers who are new to the idea of social construction.



Papers and Blogs

Systemic Inquiry – Exploring Organisations

Louis Klein (2005)

Kybernetes, Vol. 34(3/4), pp. 439-447

doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/03684920510581620>

The theory of Applied Narratives from which the systemic inquiry (SI) methodology is derived relates to Heinz von Foerster's impact on the practice of organisational development, change management and systemic intervention. Understanding an organisation being an observer of itself gives way to benefit from constructivism and systems theory and puts the people and their contribution back into the centre of interest. Systemic inquiry shows a way to work closer with the organisation and the people and overcomes the necessity to deal with resistance.



Assessment of the State of AI: Past, Present, and Future

Therese F. Yaeger, Peter F. Sorensen, Ulf Bengtsson (2005)

Research in Organizational Change and Development, Vol. 15

Series editor(s): Richard Woodman, Professor William Pasmore, Abraham B. (Rami) Shani

ISBN: 978-0-76231-167-5

eISBN: 978-1-84950-319-8

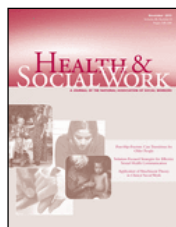
This article presents an assessment of 50 studies based on a review of more than 400 publications and papers. The final section includes a summary and discussion of the state of Appreciative Inquiry up to the date of publication.

A Blueprint for Change: Appreciative Inquiry

Terri D Egan and Ann Feyerherm(2010)

<https://gbr.pepperdine.edu/2010/08/a-blueprint-for-change-appreciative-inquiry/>

The authors note that there is a perverse belief that struggling is an honourable pursuit. What if life and work were effortless that what people wanted flowed from what they could imagine and then create? They suggest that the process of change need not be one of pain and struggle, but one of stirring the imagination, creativity and energy.



Using Appreciative Inquiry to Facilitate Implementation of the Recovery Model in Mental Health Agencies

Laurene Clossey, Kevin Mehnert and Sara Silva (2011)

Health & Social Work, Vol. 36(4), pp. 259–266.

doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/hsw/36.4.259>

This article explores how AI could be helpful in shifting an organization's culture to render it compatible with recovery through descriptions of two mental health centers' use of the tool. The experiences described indicate that AI, if used consistently, empowers staff.



Appreciative Leadership: Delivering Sustainable Difference Through Conversation and Inquiry

MacNeill, Fiona and Vanzetta, Jillian (2014)

Industrial and Commercial Training, Vol. 46(1), pp. 16–24

doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/ICT-09-2013-0058>

The aim of this two-year evaluation study was to explore the impact of designing a bespoke Appreciative Leadership Programme (commissioned by Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust), around a specific set of organisational values and the associated sustainability linked to the delivery using conversation and inquiry.



Organisational Development, Appreciative Inquiry and the Development of Psychologically Informed Environments (PIEs): Part Two: The Pilot Study and Evaluation

Suzanne Quinney and Leo Richardson (2014)

Housing, Care and Support, Vol. 17(3), pp. 131–41.

This paper describes the application of Appreciative Inquiry in homeless hostels and demonstrates the benefits of using AI with the staff and residents, as both a personal development and an OD tool for hostels who want to become a psychologically informed environment (PIE).

A Complex Adaptive Systems Perspective to Appreciative Inquiry: A Theoretical Analysis

Payam Saadat (2015)

Leadership & Organizational Management Journal. Vol. 2015 (2), p. 127

In the literature, analysis of the effectiveness of AI is confined to psychological and managerial explanations such as highlighting the promotion of positive mindset and collective organizational planning. This paper discusses a Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) perspective and present a new model for understanding the functionality of AI, exploring the effects of AI on the behaviour and interactions of agents/employees related to how they cope with change.



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Appreciative Inquiry Theory and Practice in Amsterdam

The Instituut voor Interventiekunde (Institute for Intervention Studies) was founded in 2005 by Wick van der Vaart for two purposes:

- To train coaches, trainers, consultants and/or managers in the craft of appreciative interventionism. Students range in age from 24 to 65.
- As a network of practitioners who use an appreciative approach in working with individuals, groups and organisations.

The programs the Instituut voor Interventiekunde offers are both theoretical and practical. Our students not only read the works of Kurt Lewin, Chris Argyris, Edgar Schein, Karl Weick, Kenneth Gergen, David Cooperrider, Gervase Bushe and many others, they learn to apply these theories in their daily practice.

Our main programs are:

- A two year basic program in interventionism;
- International programs to become an AI practitioner, an AI master practitioner, and an AI meta practitioner.

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If you would like to sponsor a future edition of *AI Practitioner* please contact Wick van der Vaart at instituut@instituutvoorinterventiekunde.nl

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Tony is the founder and director of a social enterprise called Reflective Learning-International in the UK and a professor in applied positive psychology. His work focuses upon building positivity and the utilization of strengths in sport and high performance environments. He has published 16 books and over 125 articles and chapters on using strengths-based reflective practices.
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About the May 2016 Issue

Bettering Sport Through Appreciative Lenses and Practices

This issue of AI Practitioner illuminates the synergy and promising practices that emerge when Appreciative Inquiry, positive and performance psychology, together with the emerging strength-based approaches of learning through reflection, are brought together.

This special issue revisits, broadens and re-frames some of the significant messages described in *AI Practitioner's* groundbreaking article by Diana Whitney and Barbara Fredrickson (August 2015) called, 'Appreciative Inquiry meets Positive Psychology'.

Drawing upon examples from a wide range of sports, we constructively challenge deficit-based approaches to performance improvement and explore the gains when athletes, coaches, coach educators and sports organisations create and sustain appreciative spaces and positive relational practices. The issue illuminates the synergy and promising practices that emerge when Appreciative Inquiry, positive and performance psychology, together with the emerging strength-based approaches of learning through reflection, are brought together.

Through stories, conversations and other cameos from sports such as rugby, football, golf, cricket, netball and speed skating, the issue addresses deep-seated processes in sport such as the tendency to focus on fixing weaknesses and getting rid of what is not wanted, because knowing how to learn from our successes and amplify what is desirable is not perceived as a strength. Additionally the issue touches upon important mental and emotional states and processes such as being resilient, optimistic, hopeful and resourceful, and how these can amplify wellbeing, foster love and a sense of achievement in sports participation and nourish human flourishing.

Whether readers are active in sport or not, this issue offers plenty to reflect upon, to question, explore and apply in the pursuit of "bettering" ourselves and others.

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Purpose of AI Practitioner

In 1998, Anne Radford founded the newsletter which became *AI Practitioner* in 2003. She was editor-in-chief of *AI Practitioner* from 2003 to 2015.



This publication, distributed quarterly in February, May, August and November, is for people interested in making the world a better place using positive relational approaches to change such as AI.

AI Practitioner Editor/Publisher

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The postal address for the publication is:
Instituut voor Interventiekunde
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AI Practitioner, 2003–2016
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