

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY – THE NEW FRONTIER[®]

Stephen P. Fitzgerald, Kenneth L. Murrell, & Lynn H. Newman

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APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY -- THE NEW FRONTIER

Stephen P. Fitzgerald, Kenneth L. Murrell, and H. Lynn Newman

Appreciative Inquiry (Ai) as the new frontier! What a provocative and bold assertion. So what is this appreciative approach and what's new about it? Is it a current fad or truly something new in organization development? Many have called Ai "groundbreaking." Certainly, as conceived of and described in some of the foundational work of David Cooperrider and colleagues at Case Western Reserve University (in the Doctoral program in Organizational Behavior that was created in 1960 by Herb Shephard) and the Taos Institute, Ai reflects the core values of OD practice and theory developed over the last half century. At a minimum, Ai encourages us to rethink and enlarge how we as organization development professionals approach our work, possibly leading to a reinventing of OD itself.

Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) offer the following practice-oriented definition of Ai: Appreciative Inquiry is the cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives a system 'life' when it is most effective and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. Ai involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to heighten positive potential. It mobilizes inquiry through crafting an 'unconditional positive question' often involving hundreds or sometimes thousands of people. (p. 10)

¹ The authors would like to thank David Cooperrider for his feedback on this chapter and helpful additions to it.

It is not a technique or method per se, although there is a basic Ai approach that has been articulated in the literature and practiced in various settings. Most importantly Ai is an affirmative worldview that shapes what we look for in organizational inquiry. It involves a conscious value choice to seek the most affirmative, valuing, and generative information available. The intention is to discover and build upon the strength and vitality of human systems as experienced and reported by their members.

Ai is a novel approach to organizational change work. The affirmative value choice is what distinguishes it from other forms of OD. It influences every aspect of Ai, from the design of topics and questions to explore, to data analyses and feedback. As a strategy of change, Ai inspires collaborative action that engages and serves the whole system.

This chapter addresses the concern that Ai has been viewed as a “conceptual island” within organization development (Golembiewski, 2000). The purpose is to: (a) describe Ai within the context of its historical roots and theoretical foundations (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987, Murrell, 1997, 1998); (b) identify Ai’s place along a continuum of approaches to action research (Ludema, 2000; Newman & Fitzgerald, 2000); and (c) describe the Ai process as it has been applied by organization development practitioners in diverse settings and with other OD techniques. Suggestions are offered for implementing an Ai change approach, and for maximizing practitioners’ effectiveness when doing so.

AI’S HISTORICAL ROOTS AND BASIC PRINCIPLES

Action Research

“Action research” underlies most current OD approaches for studying and simultaneously changing social systems. Kurt Lewin (1946) introduced this scientific process as a way of

generating knowledge about a social system while at the same time attempting to change it. Lewin initially described action research as a “spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action” (Lewin, 1946, p. 34-35).

David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva (1987) first articulated the idea and coined the term “appreciative inquiry” as they re-envisioned the possibility of action research. They noted that action research had not “achieved its potential for advancing social knowledge of consequence and [had] not, therefore, achieved its potential as a vehicle for human development and social-organizational transformation” (p. 130). They claimed that this was due to the problem-oriented view of organizing that pervaded the then current approaches to action research. Their argument was essentially that action research had become too focused on the client and the solving of the client’s problem, to the exclusion of the theory generating aspects so critical to the very definition of action research that Lewin had outlined. And it is true to this day that practitioners too often focus exclusively upon linear problem solving of immediate organizational issues, which is what clients most readily understand and expect.

Other contemporary forms of action research have also emerged, among them “participatory action research,” “action science,” and “action learning.” All of the contemporary approaches, including Ai, emphasize: (1) full client-consultant partnership, (2) collaborative learning throughout the action research process, (3) the importance of local tacit knowledge, (4) a willingness to examine assumptions in the system, and (5) organizational transformation. These newer approaches might be viewed as extending an action research “continuum” that ranges from more traditional, consultant-directed, linear applications toward increasingly collaborative, systemic, transformational change processes (Newman & Fitzgerald, 2000).

Appreciation

Beyond sharing these characteristics of contemporary action research, Ai choicefully values appreciation. The work of Sir Geoffrey Vickers, published in the late 50's and early 60's in the U.K. and U.S., offered what was for many a completely new understanding of the concept of appreciation. For Vickers, appreciation is a process of developing a full and penetrating understanding of a particular world, as well as a focus on what one wants to make of it. His concept of "appreciated worlds" gave the impetus to go deeply into the meaning of the ideas or events one is trying to assist in changing. He encouraged us to focus on what is right – the glass as "half-full" - and not just what is lacking. Today the Ai practice of creating dialogue helps to bring out what a fuller and deeper appreciation means.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a fundamental underpinning of Ai. This philosophy of science (e.g. Berger & Luckmann, 1967) suggests that we have considerable influence over the nature of the realities that we perceive and experience, and that to a great extent we actually create our realities through collective symbolic and mental processes.

Cooperrider's (1999) initial inspiration for Ai rose from the more radical forms of social constructionism (i.e., Gergen, 1982), out of which Ai emerged as a theory-building process. The notion of "generative theory" is central to this in that it, "has the capacity to challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary life, to foster reconsideration of that which is taken for granted, and thereby furnish new alternatives for social action" (Cooperrider, 1999, p. 1, citing Gergen, 1982).

Reflecting on Ai's early history, Cooperrider (1999) wrote, "it was later, partly because of social constructionism's relational view of knowledge that [we] began doing "theory building"

with organizations... literally creating the theory and propositions with the organizations we were working with... making the theory-building totally collaborative. We invited people to challenge the status quo, to stretch, to provoke new ways of thinking and talking about the future.”

Five basic principles have been described as central to Ai’s theory-base of change (Cooperrider, Barrett, & Srivastva, 1995; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; and Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). Social constructionism serves as the primary theoretical foundation for at least three of those five principles: the Constructionist Principle, the Principle of Simultaneity, and the Poetic Principle. The Constructionist Principle holds that human knowledge and organizational destiny are intricately interwoven. To be effective as executives, leaders, and change agents, we must be adept in the art of understanding, reading, and analyzing organizations as living, human constructions. Knowing (organizations) stands at the center of any and virtually every attempt at change. Thus, the way we know is fateful.

Since organizations are living human constructions, inquiry and change cannot be separated – they occur simultaneously. This is the Principle of Simultaneity. The seeds of change — the things that we think and talk about, discover and learn together, and that inform our dialogue and inspire our images of the future — are implicit in the very first questions we ask. Those questions set the stage for what we “find”, and what we “discover” (the data) becomes the linguistic material, the stories out of which the future is conceived, conversed about, and constructed.

Thus human organizations are a lot more like an open book than, say, a machine. An organization’s story is constantly being co-authored. Moreover, pasts, presents, or futures are endless sources of learning, inspiration, or interpretation —much like the endless interpretive

possibilities in a good piece of poetry or literature. This is the essence of Ai's Poetic Principle. The important implication is that we can study virtually any topic related to human experience in any human system or organization. We can inquire into the nature of alienation or joy, enthusiasm or low morale, efficiency or excess. There is not a single topic related to organization life that we could not study.

The Power and Role of Image

The Ai approach is based upon the formidable power of cognitive image to create action. Consider two different settings: (1) anticipating what we expect may be a conflictual meeting with a friend, vs. (2) anticipation of sharing a favorite activity with a friend. Each of these images creates different expectations and feelings in us that are likely to result in different behaviors. Anticipation is a potent, generative force. It is the basis for Ai's fourth principle.

One of the basic theorems of this Anticipatory Principle is that the image of the future guides what might be called the current behavior of any organism or organization. Much like a movie projector on a screen, human systems are forever projecting ahead of themselves a horizon of expectation (in their talk in the hallways, in the metaphors and language they use) that brings the future powerfully into the present as a mobilizing agent. To inquire in ways that refashion anticipatory reality — especially through the artful creation of positive imagery on a collective basis — may be the most productive thing any inquiry can do.

Further, research from diverse fields substantiates the power of positive imagery to generate positive action (see Cooperrider, 1990 for a thorough treatment of these concepts). For example, in medicine the well-documented "placebo effect" results from people's positive expectancy about the healing potential of medication that they are given, even when — without their knowledge — it contains only sugar.

Classic research in the field of education found that a so-called “Pygmalion Effect” occurred when teachers were told that some of their students had high potential when in fact they were no different from other students. In study after study, the supposedly “high potential” students significantly out-performed their classmates. This positive expectancy effect has been demonstrated in the workplace as well as in the world of sports. It is the basis for Ai’s fifth principle.

This Positive Principle grows out of years of experience with Ai. Building and sustaining momentum for change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding — things like hope, excitement, inspiration, caring, camaraderie, sense of urgent purpose, and sheer joy in creating something meaningful together. We have found that it does not help to begin our inquiries from the standpoint of the world as a problem to be solved. Instead, we’ve seen that the more positive the questions we ask in our work, and the longer we can retain the spirit of inquiry of the everlasting beginner, the more long-lasting and successful are our change efforts. The thing that makes the most difference is to craft and seed, in better and more catalytic ways, the unconditional positive question. Changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized.

In sum, Ai is relationally linked to contemporary forms of action research. It is rooted in radical social constructionism, appreciation, and the generative power of positive imagery. These historical roots are the bases of Ai’s five basic principles. In addition, there are complementary innovations in other fields that are co-constructing a similarly affirmative worldview (for example, “Solution-Focused Therapy” in counseling psychology (De Shazer, Berg, Lipchik, Nunnally, Molnar, Gingerich, & Weiner-Davis, 1986)).

THE ESSENTIAL Ai PROCESS

Ai's five underlying principles (constructionist, simultaneity, poetic, anticipatory, and positive) come to life through the design of the basic Ai process, which is typically presented as a cycle of four phases known the "4-D Cycle" (Cooperrider, 1996, p. 8). The phases are: (1) *discovery* of people's experiences of their group, organization, or community at its most vital and alive, and what made those experiences possible; (2) *dreaming* together to envision a future in which those exceptional experiences form the bases for organizing; (3) *designing* appreciative systems and structures to support the manifestation of the co-created dreams; and (4) *destiny* or delivery, which involves implementation of those systems and structures in an ever-expanding positive-feedback loop of appreciative learning.

Ai practitioners have developed several variations on the 4-D Cycle involving additional phases for use in a variety of settings. One addition which had always been considered a precursor to the 4D's is an initial "*definition*" phase in which three to five topics are collaboratively selected to focus the inquiry. Key practitioner guidelines on each of these five phases are described below.

Define

Based on Ai's underlying principles, the most powerful tools at our disposal are our capacity to inquire together and to focus the nature of our inquiry. Hammond (1996) notes that "what we focus on becomes our reality." Therefore, defining the topic(s) for an appreciative inquiry is perhaps the most critical phase of the process.

To ensure broad-based support and whole-system impact, include representatives of all stakeholder groups in defining the topics for the inquiry. For large applications topic definition may require a preliminary two-day Ai retreat and/or system-wide Ai interviews. During this

process value-rich, locally meaningful topics are collaboratively developed (for example, transform “leadership development” into “open, just, and inclusive leadership” (Newman & Fitzgerald, 2000). As a general rule of thumb, three to five broad topics are the maximum for an Ai process. Ai interview questions are then developed out of the chosen topics.

Discover

The discovery phase typically begins with paired appreciative interviews exploring participants’ peak experiences of each topic and what made those experiences possible. The interview questions and process are designed to elicit and revitalize the positive affect associated with participants’ stories, which in turn nurtures intrinsic motivation.

The highlights and most “quotable quotes” from participants’ stories are then shared in small and large groups. This essentially builds a live, collective database of organizational excellence *that includes metaphor, imagery, and affect* in addition to concrete examples. Capturing these elements graphically on large surfaces (i.e., in addition to and/or instead of expressing them in verbal and written words) greatly amplifies their impact throughout the process.

Dream

During the dream phase the best of the past is amplified into collectively envisioned and desired futures. Working together in groups, participants review the images, metaphors, hopes, and dreams that were generated in the discovery phase. (Note: paired appreciative interviews typically conclude with questions that elicit individuals’ hopes and dreams regarding the Ai topics). Participants are then encouraged to expand, stretch, and elaborate their collective dreams, and to creatively embody them through skits, artwork, songs, and so on, which are then shared with the entire group.

Design

During the design phase participants identify key facets of organizational systems and structures that will be needed to support the realization of their collectively generated dreams. The facilitator may introduce a model of organizational structure for participants to work with, or may support participants in generating their own model(s).

Working again in groups, participants craft bold, affirmative possibility statements (or “provocative propositions” (PPs)) that express their expansive dreams as already realized in the present tense. Language, imagery, and examples from the discovery and dream phases are incorporated into these design statements. Each statement is crafted around a facet of the organizational structure. The finished PPs are then visually displayed and shared with the entire group. Together, the PPs form the basis for developing vision-guided action plans.

Deliver

This fifth phase may begin prior to the conclusion of an Ai summit (see the section on “large scale system change” below), but it extends into the ongoing life of the group, organization, and/or community. Participants self-select into task groups according to the design statement(s) that they feel most strongly drawn to. They then work together to ground those design statements in action steps. Action plans may then be shared with the entire group. Participants then self-select projects or tasks that they’d like to work on or otherwise support. Actions are then implemented over time in an iterative, appreciative learning journey.

ORGANIZATIONAL APPLICATIONS

Ai processes have been successfully implemented in a wide variety of organizational settings in the business, government, and non-profit sectors. Ai applications have ranged from appreciative human resource practices, team development, diversity initiatives, and strategic

planning, to the transformation of global corporate cultures and social change organizations (e.g. Hammond & Royal, 1998; Head, 2000; Mohr, Smith, & Watkins, 2000; Newman & Fitzgerald, 2000; Whitney & Cooperrider, 1998; Williams, 1996). The diversity of these applications continues to increase as practitioners explore Ai approaches in a wide variety of organizational settings.

When to Use Ai

Given the breadth and diversity of Ai applications, some may protest that Ai is being hailed as a “magic bullet” that works in all situations. Yet to make this same claim for the highly accepted problem solving orientation is not that unusual. The problem-identification-analysis-solution approach is so firmly grounded in our culture of critique that it is seldom questioned as to the overall effect it has on the way we characterize the world as a problem to be solved.

There are at least four reasons for choosing Ai for large scale applications: (1) when high levels of participation and cooperation are required, (2) the change process needs to be accelerated, (3) the work requires innovation among diverse groups in a high stakes environment, and/or (4) multiple change initiatives need to be synthesized (Whitney & Cooperrider, 1998, pp. 7-28). Even when these conditions are met, however, Ai may not be appropriate when sufficient resources are not available for adequate implementation, and/or leadership does not support affirmative approaches or full-system participation. A sampling of successful organizational applications are briefly described below.

Large Scale System Change

In its fullest expression Ai is an approach to large-scale system change. Whole-system Ai transformation is the ideal because it impacts the mindset and culture of the entire enterprise,

influencing every facet of organizational life. Thus Ai is approached not as an intervention or event, but as a continual, systemic, self-reinforcing learning journey.

A cornerstone of large-scale Ai system change is the Appreciative Inquiry Summit (Whitney & Cooperrider, 1998). The Ai Summit integrates the best of current large group change processes into an appreciative framework. It is typically a four-day event that includes the entire organization and its customers, suppliers, and other community stakeholders. An Ai Summit incorporates the full 4-D cycle. It also provides unstructured time for informal relationship-building, which is crucial to the effectiveness of any significant change initiative.

Ai Summits have proven to be effective in a wide variety of organizational settings. For example, “launching a union-management partnership throughout GTE; strategic planning for the entire company, Nutramental; for culture change in numerous organizations in health care, government, and consulting services; for economic development in a region of the country; for citywide community development and for drafting a charter for a newly emerging global organization” (Whitney & Cooperrider, 1998, p. 21).

Team-Based Applications

While whole-system, large-scale Ai implementation may be ideal, applications with teams can also be successful. Further, Ai success with one or more teams can lead to wider organizational implementation.

That is exactly what happened in the case of an Ai strategic planning session with the executive team of a 120-person nonprofit health care facility (the “Clinic”)(Newman & Fitzgerald, 2000). A large-scale organizational change effort had been in process at the Clinic since 1996. Traditional action research approaches (for example, customized survey to identify organizational issues, executive coaching, and so on) were used in the first years. A trusting

relationship between the executive director and lead consultant developed over time, allowing for the implementation of increasingly collaborative action research processes.

By the third year the executive team wanted to increase creativity in its problem solving and strategic planning. An Ai design was incorporated into the executive retreat. The interview questions focused on the topic of “open, just, and inclusive leadership” so as to address issues that had been identified in that year’s employee survey.

Results far exceeded expectations. Team members generated a powerful vision of inclusive leadership. They created fundamental structural changes that addressed key organizational issues from a place of vision expressed through their PPs.

Ai has also been used effectively with teams experiencing significant conflict. In one case, an engineering design team was six weeks behind schedule at the eleventh month of a strategically critical twenty-month project. At that point Ai was employed in a team retreat. As a result, the team finished a month ahead of schedule and “delivered a product that performed significantly above specifications for less than the expected cost” (Brittain, 1998, p. 228). The team’s success resulted in Ai being implemented for all product design teams throughout the organization.

A recent empirical study (Head, 2000) substantiates the efficacy of Ai in fostering the development of heterogonous teams. Three interventions – Ai, team-building, and a control group – were divided among eighteen new management teams in the U.S. Postal Service. The Ai teams exhibited: (1) the largest decline in self-directed behaviors and greatest increase in team-related behaviors on the Group Style Instrument, (2) the best results (although not statistically significant) on external measures of team performance, and (3) significantly more positive imagery regarding their future interactions and performance. Further, a statistically significant,

strongly positive correlation ($r(34) = .74, p < .001$) was observed between group image and performance, indicating that the more positive a team's image of itself, the better it's performance. "The results lend support to the theory that Ai aids in assisting groups to improve their image of the future and that allows groups to more quickly develop and perform" (Head, 2000, p. 66).

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation has traditionally been approached as a past-focused critique. However, Mohr, Smith, and Watkins (2000) collaborated to develop a vital, appreciative program "valuation" for the R&D division of SmithKline Beecham. Over a six-week period they conducted 109 appreciative interviews with research scientists in two countries who had participated in an innovative simulation-based training program. To their surprise, they found that: (1) the scientists were very receptive to the appreciative approach, (2) the process "increasingly became a forward-focused intervention in its own right, rather than the backward look of a typical evaluation study" (p. 39), and (3) "not only were these traditional evaluation questions effectively met with this approach, but the corporation benefited from both the learning reinforcement that occurred and the richness of data which would not have been captured in a normal evaluation process" (p. 49).

In another example, an appreciative approach was used in a follow-up evaluation for the Academy of Management's "ThemeSummit," from the design of the survey instrument to the analysis, display, and discussion of the data (Fitzgerald, 1999).

Human Resource Practices

Many traditional human resource practices have also been redesigned from an appreciative framework. For example, Bosch (1998) describes her experiments in approaching

exit interviews with “an appreciative eye.” Based on learning derived from her experience, she provides detailed ideas for improving Ai-based exit interviews.

In addition, many innovative Ai applications (for example, 360 degree feedback processes) have not yet found their way into books or journals. The Ai listserve and newsletter are prime sources for current information on the development of Ai theory and applications around the world.

DELIVERABLES

Traditionally, OD consultants contract with their clients to produce specific tangible products – or “deliverables.” Common deliverables include customized surveys, data analysis reports, and so on. Consistent with the positivist worldview, these deliverables are generally prepared independently by the consultant serving as a “neutral observer” of the client system.

Ai deliverables are dependent upon the nature of the particular consultation, as illustrated in the organizational applications described above. Consistent with more participatory forms of action research, the consultant may support the client in producing deliverables in order to promote ownership and organizational learning, or may co-create them in full partnership with the client (for example, Mohr, Smith, & Watkins, 2000). In either case the Ai practitioner serves as a proactive participant with client co-participants, rather than as a neutral observer.

Ai deliverables may be tangible and/or intangible. Potential tangibles include a compendium of best practices and/or stories, visual displays, customized appreciative interview protocols and/or surveys, organizational design and action plan statements, train-the-trainer plans and meetings, skill-building activities for client personnel, customized Ai workshop curricula, meeting designs, and/or special events such as a whole system meeting.

Intangible deliverables may range from process consultation and appreciative data analysis approaches to culture change and organizational transformation. In his detailed rendering of an Ai proposal for large-scale organizational change, Cooperrider (1996) provides vivid, real-life examples of intangible deliverables (which he calls objectives), for example, “to build an affirmative atmosphere of hope and confidence necessary to sustain, over the next several years, the largest whole-system transformation in the company’s history” (p. 25).

As in any OD consultation, clarifying Ai deliverables is a vital, integral part of the contracting process.

Slaying Ai’s Mythical Dragons

As the affirmative “knight in shining armor” of OD, Ai has surfaced its share of mythical dragons that appear as fearsome threats to its validity and/or applicability. Several of the most prominent dragons will now be taken on!

Warm-Fuzzy Dragon. This most formidable dragon labors under the unfortunate misconception that while Ai excels at facilitating warm and fuzzy “group hugs,” it has no basis in or use for “hard data.” In fact Ai is as data driven as any OD application. As discussed above, however, the nature of the data – and how it is collected and analyzed – is different.

Ai thrives on rich, qualitative data, but quantitative data is often incorporated as well. As in traditional OD applications, qualitative data from interviews and focus groups may be used to support the development of a quantitative survey instrument for wider organizational implementation. Williams (1996) illustrates the efficacy of such an approach using an Ai framework in transforming a serious crisis situation (significant loan losses leading to a 10% downsizing, hostile takeover attempt), in an \$11 billion regional commercial banking institution with 8,000 personnel.

Scaredy-Cat Dragon. This dragon’s fire is fueled by the illusion that Ai cowers behind a security blanket of positive thinking and therefore cannot – and should not – be used to address difficult organizational challenges. That dragon evaporates in light of the banking institution (Williams, 1996) and product design team (Brittain, 1998) cases described above, and others. Further, Ai differs from positive thinking in that *meaning is collectively and continually co-created*, whereas positive thinking is an individual practice that strives to maintain affirmative thought patterns and to hold fast to particular affirmative images.

Wildly Imbalanced Dragon. This dragon thunders that Ai is dangerously lop-sided in its unwavering devotion to the affirmative, and that so-called “problem-solving” OD approaches have always balanced a search for problems with a search for strengths (for example Golembiewski, 2000). Three points may help to tame this dragon.

First, although many traditional OD applications include a search for strengths, scant attention is given to discovering the factors that make the strengths possible and how they might be profitably amplified. Further, as a byproduct of the pervasiveness of our deficit-elimination “continuous improvement” culture, “negative” data automatically and unconsciously steal focus, no matter how positive the overall results may be.

Second, the rationale for a “balanced” design may be predicated on the underlying assumption of a “normal” bell curve. That assumption may fuel the unconscious co-construction of a purposefully normative organizational reality that strives to reduce or eliminate behavioral variations to the mean. Such a homogenization process substantially subdues the human spirit so vital to effective organizations.

Third, Ai is grounded in at least three legitimate forms of qualitative sampling: (1) a search for the “extreme” or exceptional, in which learning derives from “highly unusual

manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28); (2) a dedication to maximizing the diversity of the positive exceptions discovered in the inquiry – a form of “maximum variation sampling” (p. 28); and (3) a delight in “taking advantage of the unexpected” – that is, “opportunistic” sampling (p. 28).

Practice Tips

Clearly Ai is a powerful new approach to organizational development. Yet Ai is not a disembodied miracle worker. As with all OD work, results are dependent upon the practitioner’s experience with the approach, attunement with self and others, and his or her overall physical, spiritual, mental and emotional well-being. Further, effective Ai practice is built upon living a solid foundation of traditional OD values like inclusiveness, integrity, developing trusting relationships, challenging the status quo, collaboration, and contracting effectively.

The following practice tips are designed to support all levels of Ai practitioners in strengthening their appreciative muscles.

Getting started:

- ◇ Begin with yourself. Practice being appreciative of yourself and others. Catch people doing something right and acknowledge them for it.
- ◇ Experience Ai and get more Ai training. Take an Ai workshop. Partner with a seasoned Ai practitioner.
- ◇ Read everything you can about Ai and its foundations and applications.
- ◇ Practice crafting appreciative questions.
- ◇ Try some Ai interviews with your co-workers and family.

- ◇ Begin meetings with appreciative questions like “describe something that you/we did really well this week, something that made you excited and proud of our work together. What made that possible? What can we learn from this?”
- ◇ If you don’t have access to the top of the organization, start where you are; it may lead to the top!

With clients:

- ◇ ALWAYS educate clients on Ai’s basic assumptions and research foundations. Make sure you include enough time in your contract and design for this.
- ◇ Make sure your clients are on board philosophically, and that they are fully committed to including the voices of all stakeholders.
- ◇ Encourage your clients’ (and your own) sense of adventure and innovation. Make sure they understand that no one really knows precisely where this (or any other real change process) will lead. “Consultants often focus on the need for opening up the thinking patterns of their clients without considering the same need on their part” (Mohr, Smith, & Watkins, 2000, p. 51).
- ◇ Let your light shine. Share your enthusiasm. Participate fully. Act consistently with Ai principles (see Kelm, 1998, pp. 161-174 for additional tips on introducing Ai to clients).
- ◇ Co-design an iterative, on-going Ai learning journey, rather than a one-time event.

Advanced tips:

- ◇ Establish a mutual learning partnership with your clients, rather than contracting to serve as an Ai expert or vendor (Mohr, Smith, & Watkins, 2000, pp. 49-50).

- ◇ Pay careful attention to facilitation of the design phase, which is a challenging exercise in social construction. Allow ample time for this when designing an Ai process (see Brittain, 1998, p. 227 for additional information).

Some things to avoid:

- ◇ Mixing Ai with problem-solving approaches.
- ◇ Trying to “make it happen.” Pressing forward in an inhospitable environment (that is, with autocratic leadership, lack of support for inclusion of all stakeholders, inadequate resources, and so on).
- ◇ Analyzing Ai data and/or finalizing the provocative propositions on behalf of the client without their direct participation and ownership.

CONCLUSION

Although Ai’s evolution and diverse applications have been briefly reviewed here, it is important to note that Ai is not, and will never be, “finished.” True to its philosophy, Ai is in a constant state of experimentation, learning, and self-reflective appreciation for innovation. It can be an exciting and challenging evolution for OD practitioners as we create and explore this new frontier together. It requires continual change, development, and renewal within both ourselves and our field. We invite you to embark on this appreciative learning journey.

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