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AI Practitioner February 2009

Working Boldly with Appreciative Inquiry

Whatever you can do or
dream you can do, begin it.
Boldness has genius and
magic in it. Goethe

We are currently excited by ideas of boldness. We know that stories of others' boldness inspire us to be bold ourselves. This issue of *AI Practitioner* is about boldness in the UK AI network. There are stories about people in organisations: fire officers and business leaders working in new ways; consultants working with others to bring new thinking to traditional areas like debriefing projects and improving factory productivity. We also found out that writing about boldness had a significant impact on the authors, 'I started going deeper and seeing new things' was how one described it.

'Is there already a scientific 'law' that says "the degree of richness of an experience is directly proportionate to the level of boldness required", or have we just discovered it?' (Carolyn Caldwell and Angela Hayes, page 23)

In the AI community, we know that when we look for success, we find it. Appreciative Inquiry offers a way of shining a light on successes: a lens for seeing and understanding them more clearly. So when we started looking for boldness, we weren't surprised to find it – in abundance – right in front of us. When *AI Practitioner* unexpectedly needed editors and a focus for February 2009, the UK Appreciative Inquiry network stepped up and answered the call. Boldness was in the air and in our minds. And what we have discovered along the way is that thinking, writing and acting boldly creates more boldness, more growth and more adventure, until people are saying to themselves 'suddenly, I'm this bold person!'

As we approach the celebrations of our first year, the UK network is a flourishing, emerging, sparkling group of people with a passion for Appreciative Inquiry. 70 members are connected through e-mail, blogs, network meetings, phone calls, skype calls, shared projects and collaborative working. This edition of AIP glows with the enthusiasm and commitment of explorers and practitioners working boldly with Appreciative Inquiry.

'The traditionally branded businesses that have followed the finance-only model have already run into significant difficulties. However, times of crisis can be times of transformation.'

There are contributions of all shapes and sizes from people working in different ways and in different contexts with AI. People who have never considered contributing to AIP before are writing about their work and their experiences. In the spirit of boldness, we offer the stories in two collections: new models and unfolding destinies.

New models, new ways, new places

The traditionally branded businesses that have followed the finance-only model have already run into significant difficulties. However, times of crisis can be times of transformation. (Anne Radford, page 10)

We have stories about leaders developing a new business model after being dissatisfied with only focusing on financial results; and stakeholders taking a radically inclusive approach to safeguarding children, appreciatively finding new adoptive and foster homes for children who need them and transforming social care for adults with disabilities. Officers in a fire service are leading everyone internally to create a vibrant vision for the service and a beleaguered community finds new hope and pride in appreciative connections.

- Anne Radford, *A New Business Model: An Insider's Guide*
- Lesley Moore and Julie Barnes, *Safeguarding Children: a Compelling New Model*
- Liz Martins, *From Scrutiny to Appreciative Inquiry: Shifting Culture and Practice in Adoption and Fostering Panels*
- Carolyn Caldwell and Angela Hayes, *Taking Appreciative Inquiry Boldly into the World of Adult Social Care*
- Steve Loraine, *Creating a Vision for an Appreciative Future with West Midlands Fire Service*
- Ann Shacklady-Smith, *Imagine St Helens – Town-wide Appreciative Boldness*

Unfolding destinies

We have stories about evaluating leadership programmes with AI to discover their lasting outcomes, debriefing regeneration projects and in building co-operative learning out-of-doors for children. There are personal journeys about discovering and experimenting with AI and first impressions of using appreciative interviews to collect stories on the future of health, arts and wellbeing in a major city. There is also a provocative call to action for AI networks and practitioners across the globe.

- Wendy Briner and Eunice Aquilina, *Leaders Going Boldly Forward*
- Tim Slack, *Learning from the Military: Developing an AI-based Project Debrief Toolkit*
- Paul Dearlove, *Out-SMART and AI: Connecting, Reflecting and Team building through mini-adventures*
- Sharon Sephton, *A Big Conversation...a Client's First Impressions of Working with Appreciative Inquiry*

'I start going deeper and seeing new things. The process is shifting me – I am becoming bolder and clearer in the work. It helps me reflect on my journey and why I started this.'

- Margaret Wright, *At the Speed of the Imagination ... from Coaching to Applying AI in Six Ways in as Many Months!*
- Roger Wythe, *Impact on Professional Lives, a Church and a Plastics Factory: A Bold AI Journey*
- Lena Holmberg, *What Does It Take to Transform a Nation?*

At a recent AI-UK network meeting, we invited some of our authors to tell us how they experienced writing about boldness. They said:

- *I start going deeper and seeing new things. The process is shifting me – I am becoming bolder and clearer in the work. It helps me reflect on my journey and why I started this.*
- *Being given permission to be bold, makes you more bold – ‘so now I am this bold person’.*
- *It’s helping me to tell my story. Writing it as my story is the bold leap for me.*

One of our authors, Jo Tait, started writing an article about her experience of being involved in a project using AI, and found a more meaningful expression of her connection with AI in the form of a wordle (word cloud).¹ (See Figure 1)

Being bold in the familiar and in the new – boldness creates more boldness and sometimes the familiar supports us to be bold.

When we look for boldness we find it. When we act boldly we change both ourselves and we inspire others.

We hope you enjoy these rich and varied stories as much as we have.

Julie Barnes and Anne Radford
Guest editors, February 2009

Figure 1: Wordle by Jo Tait



1 More versions of Jo Tait's wordles, Appreciative Inquiry with boldness, are at http://www.wordle.net/gallery/wrdl/346983/appreciative_inquiry_with_boldness and http://www.wordle.net/gallery/wrdl/347046/appreciative_inquiry_with_boldness 2

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ISSN 1741 8224

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Purpose of AI Practitioner

This publication is for people interested in making the world a better place using positive relational approaches to change such as Appreciative Inquiry.

The publication is distributed quarterly: February, May, August and November.

