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Appreciative Leadership

An Insider's Perspective on Changing Reality

ABSTRACT

Appreciative Leadership (AL) is based on Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Leaders not only need to know, understand and use the concept of AI and strength-based development – they need to BE it in their everyday life. We created a course inviting participants to internalize AI, facilitating a development from inside out. Participants transformed, evolved and expanded AI into new dimensions, the way open source software programmers co-develop code. In the end it's not a style or a technique shining through, it is their own leadership!

In a country like Sweden, it is a challenge to recognize and work with strengths: one's own and others' as well as the strengths of an idea or a business. Given this, we saw a great need for a course in Appreciative Leadership. Entrepreneurship is about creating and introducing the new as well as being able to make things grow; we took the opportunity to pilot and introduce the course to young venture leaders.

In the autumn of 2005, the Appreciative Leadership course started at Chalmers School of Entrepreneurship (CSE), Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg, Sweden. The course was created and given by Maja Helena Saiduddin.¹

At CSE, students learn to change realities by developing an innovation into a growth venture. This education develops students into entrepreneurs who express their own need for learning and personal development while being engaged in business development.

This special issue is about the impact of the Appreciative Leadership course designed to leverage both personal and business development. We invited entrepreneurs, who had taken the course after graduating from CSE or its sister-school GIBBS, to share their own stories.

In the spring of 2008, the course expanded into an open course, targeting students at masters level at Chalmers University of Technology. The focus was on building capacity related to 'leadership over yourself'. To many of the students the course represented a profound shift in perspective. Thanks to it, they learned about their own strengths as well as those in different situations. They also started to acknowledge reality in all its shapes and forms. Instead of judging situations they started to value them.

¹ Helena started editing this issue under the name of Helena Kovács, but with her recent marriage in Mexico is now using her married name.

Appreciation is about valuing rather than judging

The insider's perspective

We wanted to share stories from inside: stories told by people who are appreciative leaders in everyday life. Instead of telling stories about them, they themselves give a true insider perspective. As those practitioners normally do not write, we decided to support their writing processes by using the AI coaching method taught in the course to have the practitioners themselves extract and write down reflections and stories.

In this issue, we invite you to listen to their voices and stories from the inside. The articles are all about being an appreciative leader in daily life. As a bonus, the leaders' answers to the three core questions on AI and AL are clearly presented in the sidebars of each article.

- What does AI mean to you?
- What does AL mean to you?
- How have you changed reality and why is it important?

Our hope is that the blend of voices will give you as a reader insights and reflections on sustainable ways to change realities – personal realities, organizational realities and ultimately societal realities.

The issue is divided into three sections, each describing Appreciative Leadership from a different angle.

In the first section, *Inspiring: Exploring Leaders in the Making*, eight CSE and GIBBS alumni tell their stories of using AI to transform their unique realities.

In section two, *Wake Up Call: Leaders of the Future*, three masters students enlighten us about their journeys to become strong appreciative leaders and build a profound base for the future.

The last section, *Discovering: Appreciative Leaders Already Out There*, comes from appreciative leaders who have not been on the course, who are already practising AL.

Appreciative Leadership

Inspired by Jim Collins and his book *Good to Great*², we wanted to promote a leadership full of contrasts, consisting both of humility and personal drive. A leadership that does not only create short term, but sustainable growth. The leaders presented in Collins' book had a natural inner driving force.

We wanted to create a platform that made the participants tap into their own inner driving force. It is a delicate process. You need to go beyond introducing a concept. You need to guide the participants to see it themselves, to embrace it with their hearts. It is when you combine what you think, feel and do that you practise for real.

Its heart

The heart of Appreciative Leadership is Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciation is about valuing rather than judging, about expanding the strength rather than eliminating the problems. Inquiry is about initiating a thinking process, both

² Jim Collins. (2001) *Good to Great*. Random House Business Books

Inquiry is about initiating a thinking process

within individuals and groups, by asking questions as well as communicating and using the stories revealed.

Its core principles

The six principles of AI capture these elements by understanding that:

- We co-create reality (Constructionist Principle)
- We create growth by building on strength (Positive Principle)
- We create what we imagine (Anticipatory Principle)
- The process of change begins with the first step (Principle of Simultaneity)
- The words we choose affect our reality (Poetic Principle)
- We can create a solution never perceived by connecting to the collective (Principle of Wholeness)

The question is: how you do this in your everyday practice and in busy, stressful times? How do you align what you think, feel and do?

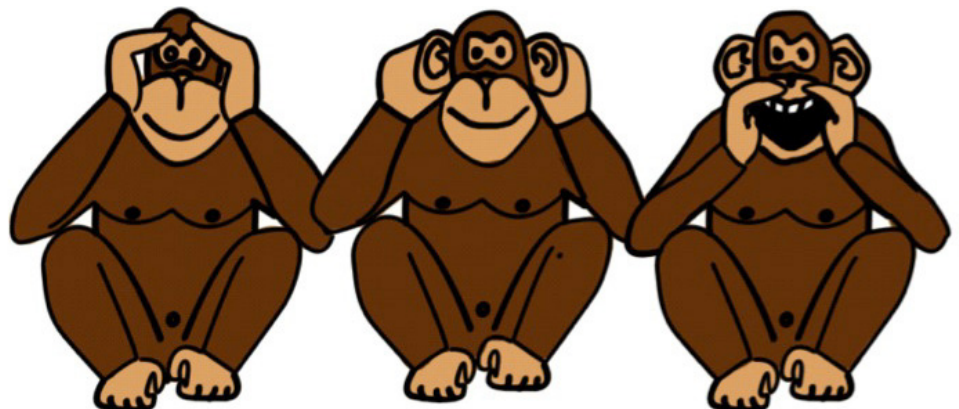
The core challenge of the course

We aimed at going beyond understanding and occasional use of AI. We wanted the participants to internalize Appreciative Leadership and make it their own. By making it their own we wanted them to tap into their inner driving force as well as to evolve AI in new ways.

We set up a vision for the course that captured the essence of doing AI and being an appreciative leader. We all surely recognize the famous picture of the three monkeys that cannot see, nor hear, nor speak. We use the picture to summarize what an appreciative leadership is:

- To see: To observe what is happening with yourself, your surroundings, how people interact and what is not said but communicated in other ways.
- To hear: To listen to people and be open towards what is said by valuing rather than judging. To listen inwards and understand your own process and actions.
- To speak: To communicate in a way that creates a clear path to full understanding.

Awareness helps you be both humble and driven



Appreciative Leadership
embodies core AI
principles, and acts in
alignment in everyday life

Appreciative Leadership is about actualizing these abilities in a specific moment as well as in everyday life.

Same essence, many forms

By being an appreciative leader that sees, hears and speaks you create awareness of yourself, others and your organization. This awareness helps you be both flexible and structured, both humble and driven.

Appreciative Leadership can and should take many forms. In the end it is based upon the unique strength of the individual, the situation and the organization. However the essence remains the same; using strength, being aware of yourself and your surroundings, seeing reality in all its colours, valuing instead of judging and creating a flow of communication. This can be summarized by the words to see, hear and speak. Appreciative leaders do not only practice it for themselves. They integrate it in their organization and subsequently they build business as well as personal and organizational capacity.

Content and pedagogies

The pedagogies are based on David Kolb's theories (Professor at Case Western Reserve University in USA) that to create change you need to experience the different phases of feel, observing, thinking and doing. Relating this to the AI circle, we created the following pedagogical elements to ensure all possible ways to reach the participants:

- *Feeling*: When a new concept is introduced, exercises are given to the participants enabling them to practice the essence of the method directly. The next seminar begins with participants recapitulating the core concept of the last seminar. This is to reinforce their own experience. Coaching is another element used to enhance reflection and active practice. Participants coach each other in pairs following the AI circle.

- *Observing*: During the course, practitioners of appreciative leadership are invited to present their perspectives and experiences. After each seminar the participants are invited to reflect on their own perceptions guided by the following questions:

(1) How would you summarize the seminar in four headlines?

(2) What was most important to you and what can you put into practice directly?

(3) Was there a positive turning point?

(4) What brought you the most energy?

- *Thinking*: The basis is seminars introducing different methods. A reading list is given to students, to be read during and after the course. Further, the participants are asked to summarize the course in their own way by creating a handbook to be used as a guide in future.

- *Doing*: The participants are asked to run a workshop within their respective organizations, which gives them an opportunity to interpret and use the concept and methods in their own way. After, they are asked to share their experiences with each other.

Instead of presenting fixed solutions, the participants are invited to reflect upon appreciative leadership by answering the following questions: How can you become an appreciative leader who promotes an organization that sees, hears and communicates? How you do it is based on your own strengths as a leader as well as on those of your colleagues.

What does being an Appreciative Leader imply?

You will find your own way to observe, listen and communicate. We live in a time of constant movement: we therefore need ability to both build and adapt. There is no one way to be a leader. Movement almost always exists. If you stand still, you stop evolving: you stop being an appreciative leader. You need to be in the movement, building on what you already know, evolving by embracing the new, continuously building and changing realities.

Appreciative Leadership is the art of doing. It is about developing a style of leadership from inside out which embodies core AI principles, and acting in alignment in everyday life.

Many of the participants from the course do not know the AI principles by heart, but they surely embrace them!

Maja Helena Saiduddin, Sara Larsson and Mats Lundqvist

Guest editors, November 2009

Appendix A: The course structure and reading materials Methods introduced during the course

- Appreciative Inquiry
- Strength based development
- Appreciative Inquiry coaching
- Clear leadership
- Question Thinking
- Storytelling and presentation

Reading list

Adams, Marilee G. (2004) *Change Your Questions – Change Your Life*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Cooperrider, David and Whitney, Diana. (2005) *Appreciative Inquiry: a Positive Revolution in Change*. Berrett-Koehler

Buckingham, Marcus. (2006) *One Thing You Need to Know*. Simon and Shuster

Bushe, Gervase R. (2001) *Clear Leadership*. Davis Black

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Creative projects depend on the personal skills of individuals. Good projects capsize when creative energy is misused on noncreative tasks such as administration, funding and project management
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AIP World Contacts and AI Practitioner Subscription Information



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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.

