



AI Practitioner

Learning is the Spark of Transformation

Guest Editors: Jan Reed, Marianne Tracy and Lena Holmberg

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Learning is the Spark of Transformation

Welcome to a new Appreciative Inquiry Practitioner year!

'Learning is the spark of transformation' begins 2012. Issues on summits, social justice, and Appreciative Inquiry and the shadow will follow.

And there is a new column, Feature Choice. Gervase Bushe launches it with his essay on the history, criticism and potential of Appreciative Inquiry.

Anne Radford
Editor-in-chief
AI Practitioner

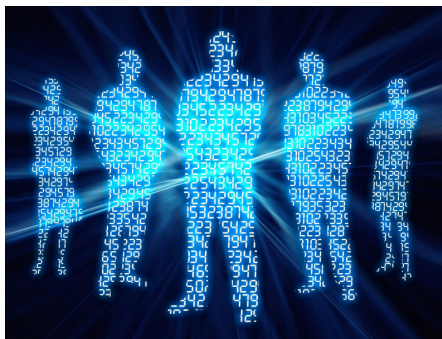


Welcome to 'Learning is the Spark of Transformation', the February 2012 edition of AI Practitioner.

Looking at the papers in this issue we can read about the experience of contributors working in the field of learning in settings with different groups. What Appreciative Learning offers, in all of these many different contexts is a way of exploring and establishing what works. We can read about people planning and delivering programmes in a range of circumstances, and AI as a positive experience, helping learners and teachers to feel valued. This helps people to rethink and reconsider themselves and become aware of their strengths and abilities. The papers here talk about this and how the authors have also learnt about their skills and abilities as students and teachers. We can read, therefore, about supportive rather than punitive programmes which focus on achievements rather than failure.

This of course raises the question of rigour – if no-one fails then how can we know what standards are being used? As the authors here suggest, exploring the process of education gives some insight into transformation. We can invite groups to reflect on the activities and changes involved and look at these reflections. We can move from a simplistic pass/fail verdict to an account of learning which pays attention to the process of exploration and transformation.

We are all learners: every day we learn more about ourselves and the world we live in, as it seems to move at the speed of light, especially in this age of discontinuity. Transformation, enables us to see the world differently, and that requires new experiences and reflections, learning and change. We've heard that organizations change when people change, and there's evidence of that in this edition. Everything we've learned about change involves individual change, which requires introspection, education, a certain set of experiences, and the support of significant others, in exploring who we are and what we want in life.



Kristen Crusoe writes about creating a virtual team in a school of nursing (page 27)

We realize many people have the will and not the skill to change. That's where we as Appreciative Inquiry practitioners come in. This edition of *AI Practitioner* is full of wonderful examples of the individual and organizational transformation that starts with learning.

Transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) is the process of effecting change in a frame of reference. Adults acquire a coherent body of experience – associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses – frames of reference that define the world. Frames of reference are the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape our expectations, perceptions, cognition and feelings. They set our line of sight. Once set, we automatically move from one activity (mental or behavioral) to another. We have a strong tendency to reject ideas that fail to fit our preconceptions, labeling those ideas as unworthy of consideration – aberrations, nonsense, irrelevant, weird or mistaken.

When circumstances permit, transformative learners move toward a frame of reference that is more inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective and integrative of experience. That is what we have accomplished in AI in the following examples.

The lessons we've learned from the stories of practitioners who work with AI and Learning and Transformation provide blueprints and frameworks for all of us. As practitioners, please allow us to express our gratitude and thanks to all for sharing their expertise in this edition of the *AI Practitioner*.

In her account of a program at a prison in Oregon, Michelle Inderbitzin highlights transformative education and what it provides for the inmates and the ancillary effects in the culture. As she describes the stories of the inmates, it provides hope for individuals as they are transformed and reach their destinations in their personal journeys.

Kristen Crusoe's Virtual SOAR is an excellent example of a process to re-vision and realign organizational strengths and clinical practices and learning environments within a complex adaptive system, the Oregon Health Sciences School of Nursing. The article exemplifies excellent AI process and content to support systems change.

In Pamela Lupton-Bowers' article, she emphasizes that new behavior and skills lead to transformation. Her artful description of appreciative learning practices is a must-read for all of us who lead and work with groups and teams. The article integrates psychological concepts and learning theory to form a comprehensive view and an innovative approach to create appreciative learning environments.

Jen Hetzel Silbert's and Laura Timme's article, 'Neighborhood Centers' Road to Building Vibrant Communities across Southeastern Texas' focuses on how the center transformed as a result of their AI process and how the entire region benefitted from the initiative.

In 'Me, Myself and AI', Rob Vinke and Paul Swart focus on 'what is inside' that makes effective AI practitioners. They outline the 'eight habits of highly effective AI practitioners' to create a positive core. Have a look. You'll love it. They're great at being open to new experiences and seeing the world with fresh eyes.



A vibrant community center in Texas (Jen Hetzel Silbert's and Laura Timme's article on page 41)

Many people have the will and not the skill to change.



Teenagers learning about work, and themselves, in Singapore (Noel Tan's article on page 64)

'Appreciative Empathy' by Bob Tschannen-Moran is a breakthrough in emotional intelligence, something we all need in our practices. It is required in human interaction and is a necessary ingredient in AI. Read it and you will augment your AI approach and with practice, increase your EQ.

Gary M. Cook worked with people in a software firm to develop a strategy for change. This strategy was geared towards developing immediate change, as well as change that would be on-going. Using AI learning helped do this because it recognised and built on the things that people were doing, rather than dismissing them and starting again.

Noel Tan has also built on achievements, in this case working with teenage boys. This group is not traditionally compliant and so it is significant that an approach based on AI was successful in encouraging participation and engagement.

Lessons learned

What have we learned from the stories from practitioners around learning and transformation? And what are their results?

According to Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries at INSEAD, the primary precondition for change is willingness to change and a strong sense of motivation. All of these articles speak to these preconditions and demonstrate the likelihood for success when present. Transformation requires considerable learning and all of the authors in this edition demonstrate that AI creates conditions for effective learning. We've seen that effective appreciative learning practices for both individuals and organizations help develop learning capabilities which increase individual and organizational effectiveness. This is the foundation for creating a learning organization with healthy appreciative learning processes.

Learning opportunities sometimes begin by establishing learning objectives that are then translated into specific plans and content. Planning, designing and evaluating these opportunities require a certain set of reflective practices; innovation and creativity integrate process and content as we've seen in our examples. In the articles in this issue, we are encouraged to explore our individual behaviors, motivations, actions and insights to generate new knowledge and learning. This then helps us reflect on our values, beliefs and motivations, as well as why we've utilized Appreciative Inquiry, and understand its significance.



Learning opportunities translated into specific plans: experiential learning in the mountains and countryside in Switzerland facilitated by Marianne Tracy

- *Reflection-in-action* is in the momentary reflection that produces in-the-moment changes in current actions.
- *Reflection-on-action* is after-the-experience reflection without a direct connection to the immediate experience, although future action may change as a result.
- *Reflective practice* is a process of actively thinking about experience, and considering the underlying assumptions that frame the experience in ways that differentiate between routine and unique situations (Schön, 1983).

In almost every discipline, in every walk of life, in every set of circumstances, and in all of the articles in this issue, reflective processes and concrete experiences are identified in order to generate new knowledge; new knowledge, if integrated into new behaviors or new actions, creates progress and change and growth and

New knowledge, if integrated ... creates progress and change and growth and transformation.

transformation. This is the link with our elders, academics and theorists, as Jack Mezirow and Donald Schön show us a practical way of inquiring with reflexivity that leads to new learning and transformation.

An examination of David Kolb's work and learning model suggests that learning requires abilities that are polar opposites, and that the learner must continually choose which set of learning abilities he or she will use in a specific learning situation. In grasping experience some of us perceive new information through experiencing the concrete: tangible, felt qualities of the world, relying on our senses and immersing ourselves in physical reality. Others tend to perceive, grasp or take hold of new information through symbolic representation or abstract conceptualization – thinking about, analyzing or systematically planning, rather than using sensation as a guide.

Academics such as Edgar Schein, formerly of MIT, and David Coghlan, currently at Trinity College in Dublin, theorize and utilize action research as reflection in action, and on action, that leads to actionable knowledge: the foundation of Appreciative Inquiry. So it is easy to see how learning is the spark of transformation and how AI and its many practices and beliefs are able to have such influence and impact in growing and changing organizations and individuals, and to see as well our impact in the world community.

**Jan Reed, Marianne Tracy and Lena Holmberg
February, 2012**

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About the May 2012 Issue: The Appreciative Inquiry Summit: Explorations into the Magic of Macro-Management and Crowdsourcing

This special issue of *Appreciative Inquiry Practitioner* highlights innovative ways the AI Summit is being applied around the world – and innovations in the methodology itself. From cases such as Hewlett Packard's use of Appreciative Inquiry to transform their branding, readers will learn how the AI summit has become more than just an OD intervention tool, and is being used by managers to create organizational innovation.

The AI Summit method and theory of whole system, strength-based inquiry is transforming every domain of management imaginable: organization strategy; mergers (of strengths) between large companies and multi-sector partnerships; OD and organization culture development work; product design and branding; information systems design; and igniting networks. It is transforming world summits at the UN and other global change bodies; launching the design of green innovation possibilities; making operational improvements and taking costs out of a business; transforming customer partnerships and relationships; and turning global issues into business and society opportunities for doing good and doing well.

From stories such as the first ever AI Summit in Peru, readers will learn how the AI Summit is empowering entire organizations to own their own transformation process. Other articles will explore how the AI Summit can lead to the emergence of appreciative governance in organizations.

The growing reach of the AI Summit to truly allow the 'whole system' to participate will be illustrated through cases where collaborative technologies made it possible for every voice to participate in the summit process. From educational summits, to regional environmental and economic summits, the wide range of sectors and domains where we are now seeing the AI Summit being used will be explored.

Advances in the methodology itself, such as innovations in the design phase and destiny phase, including successful post-summit structures and processes that are emerging will also be shared. Whether readers are seasoned AI Summit leaders, or newly learning about the technique, this special issue will offer inspiration, insights, and practical advice to all.

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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.

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