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# AI Practitioner



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## Bridging Research and Practice

## Illustrations from Appreciative

## Inquiry in Doctoral Research

**Kristin Bodiford and  
Celiane Camargo-Borges**

Sponsored by

**The Taos Institute**



## Inside this issue **Bridging Research and Practice: Illustrations from Appreciative Inquiry in Doctoral Research**

### Welcome to August 2014 issue of AI Practitioner

*Bridging Research and Practice* focuses on providing research examples and practice options for practitioners in a wide array of disciplines.

Editors Kristin Bodiford and Celiane Camargo-Borges, together with the generous input of Ken Gergen and Sheila McNamee, invited graduates of the Taos Institute Ph.D. Program who completed AI-related dissertations to contribute to the issue.

“The Value of Mediation and Mindfulness: Key Facilitation Skills” is the Feature Choice article from Miriam Subirana, based in Spain. Practices and questions show the power of silence and deep reflection for creativity and learning.

A research review of SOAR is the first in a new series of Research Review & Notes. Eight empirical studies researched the theory and practical efficacy of SOAR.

The AI Resources team of editors, in addition to highlighting websites that showcase Ph.D. dissertations of interest to AI practitioners, have created a website which lists 52 AI-related dissertations completed at Case Western Reserve University.

We would like to thank the Taos Institute for supporting this issue through a grant.

Anne Radford  
Editor, AI Practitioner

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# Bridging Research and Practice

## Designing Research in Daily Practice

Designing research offers ways of 'being' in research that brings a sense of attentiveness, relationality and connection to research that are useful and productive as a daily practice.

Designing Research" is a resource for more intimately connecting research and practice. It is a way of understanding and approaching inquiry. The designing research approach acknowledges complexity, bringing to research the metaphor of living systems – open, complex, dynamic and fluid – as an alternative to more conventional scientific approaches that might hold a metaphor of seeing the world as a machine with linear and cause–effect rationalities.

For a long time, especially in the world of science, theory has been taken as a representation of reality in the sense that it could be translated as an explanatory map that would inform, predict and provide standardized procedures, structured steps and categories of the world. In a rapidly changing environment, there is increasing recognition of the fluidity and complexity of contemporary society. Globalization, technological revolution, post-industrial economies, among others factors, are affecting the ways in which society functions, bringing a need for new frames to tackle new issues (Castells, 2004).

Designing research focuses on co-creation of knowledge and practices that are useful, that support generative change, and that intimately connect research to practice. This perspective focuses on innovation through creative processes that involve the community participating in a specific project, constructing and re-constructing knowledge (Beckman and Barry, 2007). Having the word "designing" before research connects knowledge development as actionable knowledge (Romme, 2003; van Aken, 2004) and puts research into practice (Mohrman, Gibson and Mohrman, 2001; Rynes, Bartunek and Daft, 2001).

Designing research focuses on co-creation of knowledge and practices that are useful, that support generative change, and that intimately connect research to practice.

Furthermore, designers can also be thought of as sense-makers: those who learn by doing things, experimenting and focusing on the utility of what is created (Krippendorf, 2006). This offers a metaphor for embracing research and practice as intertwined and connected to people's daily lives (Trullen, Bartunek and Harmon, 2007; McNamee and Hoskings, 2012).

### Relational approach to research: the constructionist stance

This particular approach to research draws on a social constructionist orientation in which meanings of the world are created through social processes in relationship with others. Within the designing research approach we view inquiry as a relationally engaged form of practice (McNamee and Hoskings, 2012). The selection of choices, such as a method and research objectives and questions, are considered a relationally responsive act, sensitive to the context of inquiry, as a process of constructing and negotiating understanding with all involved. Every decision will create different implications. Every choice of a topic shows already some form of interest, value and ideology. Every form of question brings an invitation to specific directions. What is emphasized is the importance of situating knowledge historically and culturally, acknowledging the values of all involved.

According to social constructionist theory, our social world is a by-product of coordination among people in which meaning and actions are understood as constructed, as opposed to viewing meaning and action as universal entities or objective, neutral and empirical truths (Gergen, 2009). The categories we use to refer to objects and ideas are circumscribed by culture, history and social context, and do not exist outside that context. "Language" here is not taken as picture of the world, but rather constructs it as we coordinate with each other, making meaning and enacting new realities. Social processes, therefore, are fundamental in this approach for continuing to validate, sustain or change what we agree to be knowledge (McNamee and Gergen, 1998). These assumptions bring important implications for designing and engaging in research – about how to frame, engage and make meaning in research(ing).

### Designing principles

These constructionist assumptions are an invitation to comprehend how aspects of the world that are often taken for granted are socially constructed, thereby opening space for alternative constructions to be forged and for new ways to be crafted to engage people in research. It also inspires the following principles, presented as resources for how we might engage in research as a daily practice.

1. Designing research as relational and collaborative
2. Designing research as useful and generative
3. Designing research as organic and dynamic
4. Designing research as engaging complexity and multiplicity

In relationship, we also bring the ingredients for how we can engage in research together.

### 1. Designing research as relational and collaborative

Designing research holds relationships as central in a collaborative journey. Recognizing that we are relational beings (Gergen 2009), that is, beings developed and sustained within relationship, designing research focuses on responsible and responsive ways of collaborating in research, investing in this specific quality of relationality. In relation, we also bring the ingredients for ways in which we can engage in research together and how it can be of service for all involved. The relational and collaborative stance of a researcher offers a special resource for inquiry where all participants bring skills, knowledge, interests, experiences and stories together to co-create. As we engage in relational and collaborative endeavors, there is a movement of the researcher-as-expert to the researcher-as-offering-expertise; this is a shift from researcher and subjects toward research co-designers and co-participants.

A relational approach is supported by reflexivity and an ability to be in relationship through collaborative processes across differences. It invites a reflexive position – a becoming aware of what we might bring into relationship and how this might impact the research.

### 2. Designing research as useful and generative

The “useful and generative” principle is about how researchers engage in a conversation aiming to create new possibilities and not assuming that the goal of research is to “discover” new knowledge (as if that knowledge were hidden and waiting to be uncovered). It invites questions such as, “How is this useful? How will this create positive change? How will this generate new possibilities, new meaning?” This principle privileges a local view of utility with the partnership of the design process. There is a need for forms of collaborative research that are responsive to local realities and support the development of co-creative solutions. As participants come together throughout the processes new understandings, new meanings and new possibilities are co-created. Ultimately, the creative process of design research is to produce meaningful solutions where we appreciate each system as unique, accept past experiences, and consider and embrace future possibilities (Brown, 2008; Kimbell, 2011).

### 3. Designing research as organic and dynamic

This principle emphasizes the act of doing research as a journey, embracing it as fluid, dynamic and continuous practice, allowing an unfolding as participants engage. While there is an emergent and organic nature to this way of thinking about research, this does not mean there is no framework to support and conduct the inquiry. Having an articulated purpose, principles and direction are important to support people in collaborative inquiry. At the same time, researchers hold plans lightly and are flexible and attentive to change. The path will unfold and encounter twists and turns as part of the process. It is dynamic in the way that participatory practices are being co-created throughout the entire process, involving researchers, participants, theories and methods. The inquiry is fluid as it reconstructs meaning – and therefore realities.

Researchers hold plans lightly and are flexible and attentive to change.



'What new ideas, knowledge, understandings are emerging? What are we creating together?'

Curiosity plays an important role, bringing a sense of wonder, openness and exploration that can expand conversations and generate new understandings with others. To adopt a curious stance is not about giving up our beliefs and approaches, but implies an appreciation and welcoming of other perspectives and creates spaces for new conversations, new possibilities, and therefore new actions.

#### 4. Designing research as engaging complexity and multiplicity

Designing research avoids causal or dualistic positions and engages complexity and multiplicity as rich new soil for action. Different theories and voices are seen as possible resources to complexify and create richer understandings, new knowledge and meaning, and generate new possibilities. Embracing complexity and multiplicity with a relational sensibility expands our view to involve a whole system. It is about considering and appreciating the many different voices involved and welcoming other opinions and points of view to multiply new possibilities. Within this approach researchers are mindful about how people are supported and empowered to participate, and we actively ask questions such as "Whose voices are privileged?" and "Whose voices are left out?"

Designing research engages social facilitation to better elicit multiple ways of understanding what is emerging. We might ask "What new ideas, knowledge, understandings are emerging? What are we creating together?" Patterns begin to become more visible from the interactions between and among people in a specific space and time. You begin to see the relatedness and appreciate the interconnections that enrich possibilities.

#### Bridging research and practice: igniting positive change

When we think of research as a transformative daily practice, it expands who can be considered a "researcher" liberating research processes to the public sphere. This amplifies possibilities for positive change through democratizing knowledge by encouraging all involved to co-create the type of change that is most meaningful and impactful for their lives and their communities. By engaging in inquiry and mutual, collaborative engagement there is already transformation happening where all participants are changed throughout the process.

We have described some key principles of designing research and elaborated on how they are interconnected, emphasizing research activities as relational, collaborative, fluid, emergent, complex and with plenty of multiplicity. The aim is to create something useful for the group involved. The interconnections support the development of an inquiry that enacts generative possibilities.

**Kristin Bodiford and Celiane Camargo-Borges**  
Editors, August 2014

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# Bridging Research and Practice

## Illustrations from Appreciative Inquiry in Doctoral Research

This special issue of *AI Practitioner* focuses on Ph.D. dissertations completed in the Taos Ph.D. program, having a special emphasis on Appreciative Inquiry and related approaches. Articles in this issue illustrate bridges between theory and practice as it relates to Appreciative Inquiry. It is focused on providing research examples and practice options for practitioners in a wide array of disciplines.

### You are a researcher!

Our hope is that this issue will offer practitioners inspiring ways in which practice and research are united in support of positive change. We encourage you to think about how your work is research, even though you may not think of it as such. This view of research draws on inquiry as a form of curiosity. This will help you to make visible the ways in which you are already engaging in inquiry. When we see inquiry this way we expand the value of the research to practitioners, their communities, as well as to the world.

Keep in mind, inquiry is not only transformative; it can also be transformed, depending upon the values of the context. In different communities of practices, there might be different requirements. For example, if you are doing a doctoral dissertation, you will be sensitive to the context and requirements of your particular academic community. If you are involved in community-engaged research, you will be sensitive to the context and inclusion of voices within that particular community.

For AI practitioners, these stories present ways in which you can engage in research, and how research can support your practice. For researchers, these stories present ways that you can use AI to expand possibilities.

### Questions for reflection

1. How can your practice be seen as research?
2. How is it creating positive change?
3. How can you engage with principles of research to strengthen your work?

### Appreciative Inquiry: Providing a bridge between research and practice

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) provides a bridge from research to practice where collaborative and participatory research methods can ignite positive change. The designing research approach invites us to embrace inquiry as an active process that co-creates particular realities as research is designed and choices made. Appreciative Inquiry as a research method recognizes that “The questions we ask set the stage for what we find, and what we discover (the data) becomes the linguistic material, the stories of which the future is conceived and constructed” (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005, p. 49). Thus, the very process of engaging in inquiry is already an intervention in construction. Appreciative Inquiry offers a social practice and meaning-making process that embraces the complexity and multidimensionality involved in creating knowledge and igniting positive social change.

### Bridging research and practice: Illustrations from authors

We begin this issue with an introduction to the concept of “Designing Research” in which research can be seen as a daily endeavour bridging theory and practice. The following articles illustrate this bridge, as the authors share their experience of engaging with Appreciative Inquiry in their research through the Taos Institute doctoral program. This issue was co-created with the authors; knowledge was produced collaboratively through sharing stories of their doctoral research projects. From these stories and conversations, we saw patterns and themes emerging that illustrate how Appreciative Inquiry can serve as a tool for bridging research and practice. These patterns also illuminate the ways in which the principles of designing research serve as resources for inquiry processes, creating generative possibilities. We hope that you find these stories inviting, allowing you to see yourself as co-producing knowledge as part of your practice in ways that can be seen as research.

### Designing principle 1: Relational and collaborative

Although you will find many of the designing research principles throughout each of the authors' works, we found each story illuminated a particular principle. We begin with stories from Loek Schoenmakers and Myra Virgil that both highlight how research is a relational and collaborative endeavour.



To read Loek's article 'I Believe in You!', go to page 25

Loek reinforces how Appreciative Inquiry helps to create a relational context and sense of relational responsibility, maximizing participation and supporting people to become co-researchers and change makers in the process. He offers research as a relational engagement that is a joint adventure, appreciating all participants as co-researchers.

Myra illustrates how Appreciative Inquiry provides an opportunity for transformative dialogue and a reflexive process of participants' relational contexts in the construction of shared meaning-making. The research process recognizes people's relational embeddedness and the impact and possibilities this might have on policy development.



To read about Shayamal's experiences designing research in the Philippines, Bangladesh and Africa, go to page 42

### Designing principle 2: Useful and generative

We then continue with stories from Ginny Belden-Charles, Shayamal Saha, and Jeff Fifield, highlighting how research is useful and generative.

Ginny's story demonstrates the role of research in making the invisible visible. In her research, she uses different appreciative and relational practices, and there is a generation of new knowledge that helps to make actions more visible and useful. In addition, Ginny proposes that the process of engaging in this type of inquiry itself can be useful to help identify and strengthen positive relational patterns within groups and organizations.

Shayamal shares how using Appreciative Inquiry in his work supports social change where the interactions themselves are transformational. His commitment to creating a better future for communities is evident in his reflection on the impact of power and position on the research process and the move from a problem solving approach to one of appreciation that supports more engagement and participation.

Jeff Fifield shows us how research can be an act of creating something together, building our capacity, and generating new knowledge through action research. He also proposes that constructions developed in research gain their significance through their utility, through how people coordinate their actions in ways that are useful.

### Designing principle 3: Organic and dynamic

Laine Goldman and Bonnie Milne's stories demonstrate how research can be seen as organic and dynamic. Laine's story relates an experience of research that offers freedom to experiment and be in a curious conversation. In these conversations, she maintains an open mind as people's journeys unfold and take unexpected twists and turns.

Bonnie's story shares a method of using Photovoice that allows for a creative and dynamic engagement, enriching people's experiences and expressions. Bonnie demonstrates the organic nature of using arts-based methods. In her story, participants' dreams evolve through sharing their photos and stories. Each time, in dialogue, new elements emerge representing our selves and our experiences as rich and multistoried.

### Designing principle 4: Complexity and multiplicity

And finally, Samuel Mahaffy and Jody Jacobson share stories that illustrate engaging complexity and multiplicity. Samuel shares how an inclusive and multi-voiced perspective serves to complexify and create richer understandings and new possibilities. In his efforts to involve the whole system, Samuel supports a relational space of storytelling for those most often not included, voices he calls "storytellers of vital necessity" who are often marginalized and excluded.



Using Photovoice for creative engagement, page 58



A young co-researcher participates in community dialogue, page 63

Jody's story offers systems thinking as a resource for engaging complexity and multiple ways of exploring the world. She bridges paradigms of different and multi-faceted ways of being, by bringing together tools from systems thinking, quality improvement and AI that help explore and make more visible the patterns and connections in the system of inquiry.

All of these research projects demonstrate how research using Appreciative Inquiry focuses on co-creation of knowledge and practices that are useful, that support generative possibilities, and that intimately connect research and practice. The stories also show us how principles of designing research are interconnected, where the activities are simultaneously relational, collaborative, fluid, emergent, complex, and engaging multiplicity. Maybe most important, each of these stories illustrates the possibilities of research to ignite positive social change. We are grateful to the authors for sharing their wisdom and experiences.

**Kristin Bodiford and Celiane Camargo-Borges**  
**Editors, August 2014**



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# About the November 2014 Issue

## Spirituality and Appreciative Inquiry

The November 2014 issue addresses the confluences of spirituality and AI theory and practice. Ten AI practitioners offer theoretical, practical and research-based reflections on how AI influences their spirituality and professional practices, and on how spirituality influences their practice of AI.

Spirituality among individuals and communities provides ways of speaking about ultimate goals and values, establishes visions for wholeness, and promotes practices meant to shift from “what is” to “what can be.” It is earthly and transcendent, particular and embodied; it moves people into futures where wholeness, community, and transformation can be realized.

The November issue includes articles on co-created learning, the practice of humility, appreciative inquiry into the practitioner’s “inner world,” transformations in pastoral leadership through AI principles, psychotherapeutic relationships, and parallels between Zen Buddhism and AI principles. In addition, case studies explore denominational and congregational transformation through AI, the roles of relational presence and stories of gratitude and purpose in congregational life, and how spiritual caregivers use AI principles to increase vocational awareness among employees in Dutch hospitals.

These articles do not define or promote a particular spirituality; rather, they describe situated spiritualities that are simultaneously representative of human diversity and universality. They suggest a limited consensus about the real, the good, and the valuable; offer a way of talking about awareness or knowledge of ontological realities; provide a set of practices or ethical guidelines for human transformation; and reflect an existential experience. Ultimately, they provide insight into the spiritual basis and capacities of Appreciative Inquiry, and offer examples of how AI can be applied in varied contexts and seen as a spiritual practice.

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