



Appreciative Inquiry in Asia

Noel E K Tan
Fiona O'Shaughnessy



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Welcome to August 2013 issue of AI Practitioner

Anne Radford, Editor in Chief

This August 2013 issue, Appreciative Inquiry in Asia, takes us to a part of the world undergoing dramatic transformations.

The editors, Noel E. K. Tan and Fiona O'Shaughnessy, show us how organisations in Asia are dealing with the organisational consequences of rapid economic growth. The complexity is compounded as leaders and consultants are looking into where and how they can use perceived western

approaches like Appreciative Inquiry in the context of their Eastern values and philosophies.

In the Feature Choice article, Jackie Stavros shares experience and empirical research on the hugely successful SOAR strategic thinking and planning framework. She also introduces the SOAR 5-I Approach or Quick SOAR as well as the SOAR Profile, a new survey instrument that will be launched in Thailand later this year.

In Research Notes, Anita Singh presents results of research that intentionally seeks

to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches while studying the impact of an AI-based intervention involving Myrada and AI in rural India. (See also *AI Practitioner* February 2013 and August 2011.)

AI Resources lists books culture, focusing on Eastern Asia; websites on social construction and psychology studies in China; and AI-related studies and resources on Asian culture. There are also two new publications, including an AI innovation: AI playing cards.

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Appreciative Inquiry in Asia

Asia, the home of the majority of the world's population, is a rich amalgam of cultures. This issue explores the potential for the interactions between strengths-based practices, including Appreciative Inquiry, the dynamic, fast-changing Chinese cultures, and traditional Asian philosophies and values.

Asia is home to the majority of the world's population, with 1.3 billion people in China and another 1.2 billion in India. Its major cities are hubs of dynamism, commerce and opportunity: consider Shanghai, Mumbai, Tokyo, Singapore, Hong Kong, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur. Yet, in as much as they are similar as urban population centres, they represent the widest mind-boggling range of what Asia might mean to those resident and those visiting.

Living and working in the region, the two editors of this issue of *AI Practitioner* embody the rich amalgam, often surprising, that is Asia: One, born in Ireland, has lived in Asia for the past 20 years and has adopted Buddhist beliefs and practices. The other, born in newly-independent Singapore in the late 1960s, comes from a migrant heritage of pre-19th century Straits Chinese and 19th century Cantonese ancestors who came to Singapore in search of a better life, who now very much enjoys the balance between his Asian identity and his mission school-inspired Western outlook and faith. As life would have it, the editors met at an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) workshop in 2008 and have been firm friends since then and shared a fascination for Asian food.

This issue offers readers an opportunity to "know" Asia and the practice of AI through the lived experiences by our fellow practitioners living and operating in Asia. While the six articles here are at one level about respective best practices, expertise and experiences; they suggest potential deeper understandings in at least two ways.

Firstly, the stories presented here provide insight about the cultural contexts in which our contributors' strengths-based change work is mediated. For instance,



In a seemingly positive situation lies the seed of its own contradiction.

Read more on page 31

Singapore-based Wendy Tan and Beijing resident Paul Wang's article invites us to consider the potential alignments that the practice of AI shares with Chinese philosophical thought.

Readers will also find that their article offers a perspective that allows a richer understanding of duality as embodied in Taoist thought in two dimensions:

1. The negative provides the possibility of a deeper appreciation of the positive in a given situation.
2. In a seemingly positive situation lies the seed of its own contradiction, and vice-versa.

Perhaps the oft-heard criticisms that AI is too 'Pollyannaish' can be answered through a deeper exploration of East Asian philosophy.

Hailing from Taiwan, Laura Hsu's analysis of externally-imposed and internally-generated change is an insightful parallel, as she proposes ways in which two different models of appreciative practices can be of better use in one form over the other. Like Wendy and Paul, she also makes rich connections of AI with Chinese philosophy, which suggest that appreciative practices are inherently human rather than just a product of late 20th century Western positive psychology.

Although coming last in the list of articles, Neena Verma's 7-i model as an integration of appreciative practices with age-old themes from Hindu thought in India is a valuable explication of this theme of cultural context. We see Neena's work as a forerunner of innovations in AI arising in non-Western settings. This rise is likely to accelerate with the spread of AI in the world, and is in tandem with the need for governments, organisations and communities to meet the challenges of rapid, uneven development amidst the turbulence of a globalised world, using a culturally-situated "language" to stimulate positive change.

The other three stories offer readers perspectives into the practitioner's work as an integration of two elements:

1. A response to the opportunities and vagaries of an increasingly globalised world; and
2. The internal journey of the practitioner.

Rochelle Lacina and her colleagues' coaching work in developing resilient managers in organisations with AI-anchored practices arises in the aftermath of the global financial meltdown's impact on Asian organisations. Vincent Hsu and Leo Mao highlight a cross-Taiwan Straits interaction between a mainland Chinese emergency services provider and Taiwanese consultants who discover another point of connection in their affinity with appreciative practice. Our penultimate

Read more about the AI summit for an emergency medical services organization (EMSS) in western China on page 55



story in this issue, a reflective piece by Patricia Nunis about her work and her capacities highlights again that as practitioners, we are the intervention.

As we step back and invite you to step into the experiences of our Asian colleagues, we share a Taoist encouragement for continued discovery and learning, often attributed to Lao Tze:

“A good traveller has no fixed plans, and is not intent on arriving.”

Noel E K Tan and Fiona O’Shaughnessy
August, 2013



Barbara Lewis

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About the November 2013 Issue

The Promise of Appreciative Cities: Compelling the Whole to Act



This issue focuses on how cities use Appreciative Inquiry. The issue will showcase both broad applications like city visioning and more focused applications such as merging departments or redesigning processes.

AI practitioners and municipal officials and employees are invited to share articles, stories, case studies, images, research, models and theory regarding the use of appreciative inquiry to move cities forward.

How does AI engage the whole to surface new ideas and possibilities? How can AI foster a compelling citywide identity (past, present and future) and how that identity sets the stage for community action? How does inclusive engagement of the whole build a foundation for sustaining positive change? How to create the promise of appreciative cities, and what can the evolution be of a city's culture in response to experience with AI principles, practices and processes?

Topics covered in the issue will include:

- Strategic planning/visioning for the future (at the community or organizational level)
- Collective impact: addressing complex community challenges through shared leadership, outcomes, responsibility and action
- Policy development: approaches for changing existing and/or adding new government policies
- Organizational alignment for enhanced efficiencies and effectiveness
- Culture change: moving the organization to the next level of performance and beyond; changing the way we do business

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