

The cover artwork is a close-up, textured painting of a human face. The left side of the face is painted in shades of light blue and green, while the right side is in dark blue and black. The eyes are dark and expressive, and the mouth is slightly open. The overall style is expressive and somewhat abstract.

AI Practitioner

Embracing the Shadow through Appreciative Inquiry

Guest Editors: Stephen P. Fitzgerald and Christine Oliver

Inside:

Feature Choice: Appreciating the Best
in People

Generative Birth Shadow

Integrating Shadow Work and AI

Two Things that Keep Us from
Embracing the Shadow

Appreciative Reframing of the
Shadow Experience

A Social Movement's Council Practice
Addresses its Shadow using AI

The Wholeness Principle and Stories
of Diversity and Inclusion

Appreciatively Embracing the Shadow
in Training and Supervision

The Power of Yes Within the No

The Shadow of Managerial Logic

Positivity Kills the Cat

Stepping Cautiously Past 'The
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AI Research Notes: Using AI and
'Conversational Consulting' for
Doctoral Research

AI Resources: AI and Shadow

International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry

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Embracing the Shadow through Appreciative Inquiry

ABSTRACT

The metaphor of shadow has provided a generative container for exploration of the scope and depth of Appreciative Inquiry theory and practice. The idea of shadow can be a useful tool for opening up important areas of discussion that carry anxiety and can amplify the liberation of energy for change.

It is with pleasure and interest that we take up the task of editing this issue of AI Practitioner. Our initial adoption of the metaphor of shadow (Fitzgerald and Oliver, 2006) arose from our own experience of dissonance through participation in and consideration of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) practice of which we were (and are) a part.

The metaphor has provided a generative container for exploration of the scope and depth of AI theory and practice, as evidenced by the rich, diverse contributions in this special issue, which begin at the very gateway of life – the birthing process! We open with Barbara Bain’s beautiful and provocative exploration of “the generative potential of the human psychological shadow through the midwifery model of care and its reflexive practice of normalizing shadow as a fundamental, integral part of human experience”.

Speaking from the heart

Deepening the theme of purposeful integration of shadow, Steve Onyett and Marianne Hill introduce us to Shadow Work (SW) practice and its fruitful integration with AI and Council Practice (Zimmerman and Coyle, 2009), which they illustrate through several brief examples in contexts marked by diversity, structural inequalities, power differentials and polarities. They make the important point that judgements within a process not be based on fear or habit, noting that “such work asks a lot of practitioners”, encouraging each of us to explore our own shadow through “practices concerned with facing what is and listening and speaking from the heart”.

The two articles that follow illustrate practitioners doing just that. First, Joan Hoxsey shares her reflections on becoming aware of the implications of inadvertently taking on the role of “AI protector” on the steering committee for an AI Summit. Next, Neena Verma shares a powerful story that reflects the generative potential of non-judgmental acknowledgment of and appreciative



The Occupy Santa Ana movement.
Read Madeleine Spencer's article on
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engagement with one's own personal shadow. The life-transforming experience that she underwent while struggling with a medical condition led her to create and devote her life's work to a 4-step AI-based intervention process she calls *MARG* (Hindi for "path") that "applies AI principles to purposefully engage with the 'shadow experience', uncover its gift and transform its energy".

Like Onyett and Hill, Madeleine Spencer integrates AI with Council Practice while working as an activist in a social movement called Occupy Santa Ana, marked by power differentials, community diversity and conflict. In her very first work with AI, Madeleine applies it as a purposeful intervention into the group's Shadow, which helps "the group to air their differences and anxieties", "resolve the group's past confrontations, divisions and differences of opinion", and "reengage, and reopen to the holistic process shared by the group in practicing Council".

The complex dynamics of diversity

Next, Ilene Wasserman brings the theme of diversity, tacit in the Spencer and the Onyett and Hill articles, into sharp relief by invoking AI's Wholeness principle. Echoing Spencer, Ilene finds that "[t]he tension of holding the appreciative perspective with issues of social justice has been particularly challenging". Integrating AI with coordinated management of meaning, intersectionality, and dominant and subordinate social narratives frameworks, she explores, through two case stories, the engagement of the Wholeness principle in attending to complex dynamics of personal, positional and cultural diversity.

The interplay of diverse personal, positional and cultural identities is integral to the role of the supervisor, and provides context relevant to John Wade's subsequent article on training and supervision. He observes that supervision "can both prompt the emergence of the shadow through the evaluative nature of the process, which tends to increase the desire to reject or hide 'undesirable' aspects of the self, but effective supervision also provides a wonderful opportunity to embrace the shadow and use the energy for transformation and growth ... Supervision involves providing a holding environment and message of acceptance for the inherent discomfort of the process and at times the examination of the shadow".



J. M. W. Turner's 'Snowstorm':
ambiguities and emotional involvement
in real experience on page 42

Similarly, Marjorie Schiller and Theresa Mortimer Bertram argue that “the courage to be authentic includes acknowledging our discomfort”, which for AI practitioners may mean counterbalancing a focus on “yes” with “accepting our need to say ‘no’”.

Gervase [Bushe] suggests reframing ‘positive’ as inquiry into what is personally meaningful and deeply important.

The organizational shadow

The next two articles illustrate the potential for AI to be co-opted, and its transformational potential undermined, by the shadow of organizationally dominant logics. First, Robbert Masselink enriches the triad of AI-shadow relationships that we originally articulated: (1) AI inadvertently creating shadow; (2) AI as a deliberate intervention into shadow; and (3) AI reflecting and expressing a cultural shadow of discomfort with painful or difficult conversations (Fitzgerald, Oliver and Hoxsey, 2010) by proposing a fourth AI-shadow relationship: AI may perpetuate an existing organizational shadow and not challenge it. He describes how the shadow of managerial logic expels “the mysteries of which AI speaks” and makes “the lived experiences of people in an organization subservient to its own agenda”. Second, Patrick Goh and Phil Simpson illustrate how AI can be co-opted by the shadow of a capitalist worldview, exemplified in the way that some HR managers articulate and use AI. Pre-eminent AI theorist and practitioner Gervase Bushe concludes the issue by exploring how embracing both the positive and shadow can support generativity. Based on a surprisingly generative outcome through an appreciative inquiry that inadvertently evoked painful memories of childhood experiences in a largely immigrant, refugee community, Gervase suggests reframing “positive” as inquiry into what is personally meaningful and deeply important: that which profoundly touches us. The generativity of his example appears to be consistent with the wisdom reflected in several stories throughout this issue (e.g. Onyett and Hill, Spencer, Wasserman), and with Ilene Wasserman’s observation that “people who hold deeply embedded historical narratives of having been marginalized, not only need to tell their story, but need their stories to be heard and acknowledged as the storyteller’s truth as well. It is then, and only then, that people can move on together to create a new vision of what they can potentially create together”.

Polarized opposites ... are treated as contextualizing each other.

In this way, it may be that inclusion of shadow in Appreciative Inquiry is generative at least of readiness to change, particularly in contexts marked by diversity, structural inequalities, power differentials and polarities. Bushe goes further in suggesting that “It might be that inviting people to tell stories where we take an appreciative stance toward painful experiences is even more generative than one in which nothing painful or difficult is touched”. This insight is consistent with the dramatic impact of storytelling in literature, theatre, and cinema – even in comedic genres. As Carl Jung (1912) observed, “[w]e know that the wildest and most moving dramas are played not in the theatre but in the hearts of ordinary men and women”.

Bushe also warns that “there are dangers lurking in ‘embracing the shadow’, just as there are dangers in too facile an embrace of ‘the positive’”.

Although we agree that it is important to be cautious when engaging in any dialogic OD process, we do not juxtapose shadow with negative, and argue that doing so tends to perpetuate the very sort of polarization that generates shadow. We have been troubled by the tendency for polarization in general (e.g. positive versus shadow, problem solving versus appreciation) and the polarization and normative ascription specifically of positive and negative in the AI discourse.

'... if he only learns to deal with his own shadow, he has done something real for the world.' Jung

Thoughts and feelings we may want to push to the margins are best treated in a complex way, for instance, the fact that we can feel pain means that we are enabled to protect ourselves from danger: "the truth is that shadow is not just about the 'messy dark of coal' but also the 'glittering diamond' hidden inside the coal mine. Shadow is where the dark and light co-exist and get co-created" (Neena Verma cross ref). Polarized opposites, such as shadow and light, positive and negative, pleasure and pain, are thus treated as contextualizing each other. "Whenever a group recognizes one attribute of itself, the presence of its antithesis or polar quality is implicit. Indeed there is every likelihood that someone in the room actually holds the polar view to that which is being expressed, and that in holding this view they are experiencing something that expresses an important issue for the wider system" (Onyett and Hill).

Bushe, positioning the Shadow in the tradition of Jung as a psychological archetype, fears that "it will engage forces outside our control" (Bushe). We suggest that the metaphor not be treated as an object but more as a tool for opening up important areas of discussion that carry with them anxiety. Often, unless such forces are engaged with, there is a danger of releasing forces that are experienced as outside the control of the group: "taking something out of shadow gives it less power" and makes it less likely that destructive forces will be acted out (Onyett and Hill). Further, it may amplify the liberation of the energy for change which, as Bushe suggests, may be even more generative than an inquiry in which nothing painful or difficult is touched. According to Jung (1945), "[o]ne does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light but by making the darkness conscious", and (1938) "... if he only learns to deal with his own shadow, he has done something real for the world".

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About the February 2013 Issue

AI and India: A Generative Connection between Ancient Wisdom and Today's Endeavors in the Field

The Feb 2013 issue of AI Practitioner seeks to honour and strengthen AI's generative connection with India by uncovering AI as it is emerging in India, along with some powerful Indian stories that have the potential to inspire strengths-based developmental work on a world-wide basis. 'Namaste', the traditional Indian greeting, implies 'bowing to the divine in you'. This is 'appreciation' at work ... simple yet profound.



*asato ma sadgamaya
tamaso ma jyotirgamaya
mrtyorma amrtam gamaya*

Lead me from the untruth to the truth.
Lead me from darkness to light.
Lead me from death to immortality.
(Bhadaranyaka Upanishad — I.iii.28)

February 2013 will bring to you a special issue of AI Practitioner, bringing to the fore the generative connection between Appreciative Inquiry and India.

The legendary seeker and mystic poet Sant Kabir Das highlighted the essence of the Constructionist principle 500 years ago through his profoundly simple metaphor of 'shabd' (the word):

*Shabd shabd sab koi kahe, shabd ke hath na paanv
Ek shabd aushadhi kare, ek shabd kar ghaav*

"Everybody talks about the word, but no one knows the high power it possesses. Words have no hands or feet, yet they are so powerful; one word can be a cure to you and yet another can cause a wound."

"Namaste", the traditional Indian greeting, implies "bowing to the divine in the person being greeted". This is "appreciation" at work, in a simply profound and ancient way of acknowledging, affirming and celebrating the heliotropic connection between human beings.

A reservoir of AI knowledge and wisdom has been generated on Indian soil through the high-quality practice and model-building of strengths-based approaches for business and social change. Indian change practitioners' credibility and impact is growing phenomenally in global AI space.

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