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Research Review and Notes

Appreciative Inquiry and its Impact on United States Municipalities

In 2014, a preliminary review of literature found that Appreciative Inquiry practitioners indicated a need for further research into AI success and failure, identifying the processes and levers that lead to an outcome, and to fill the gaps in AI literature. This study explored the use of AI as a methodology for change by US municipalities.

In 2014, a preliminary review of literature found that Appreciative Inquiry (AI) practitioners indicated a need for further research into AI success and failure, identifying the processes and levers that lead to an outcome (Bushe, 2011; Head, 2005), and to fill the gaps in AI literature (Bushe, 2011; Messerschmidt, 2008). Schooley (2008) examined the viability of public administrators using AI to improve government effectiveness, through interviewing 20 managers from large cities (not exceeding populations of 250,000.) Schooley's study found that negative environments (due to political context) were a barrier, hindering a successful outcome. The specific issue addressed in the present study was to determine why AI outcomes fail and succeed, specifically in US municipalities. First, it was necessary to examine existing literature to understand the AI methodology and how it could be used in organizations. Secondly, it was necessary to organize a theoretical framework for further exploration on the successes and failures with emphasis on AI processes and levers. This study explored the use of AI as a methodology for change by US municipalities. The research questions (RQ) that guided the study are:

1. What are the Appreciative Inquiry key processes and levers that led to application success and failure in those city governments that adopted the methodology in the past ten years and the three highest populated municipalities (populations identified by the US Census Bureau in 2013)?
2. What is the success and failure rate of Appreciative Inquiry initiation in US municipalities that adopted the methodology in the past ten years?

Research Design

To address the two primary RQs, the study utilized a mixed methods exploratory sequential design, consisting of two phases (Figure 1). In essence, this approach addressed the RQs through review of the AI literature and survey research. To build a theoretical basis for exploring and understanding US municipalities' use of AI and causes for its outcomes, the fundamental steps of this mixed methods research were used to gather data for this study, including specifying the problem, engaging in a systematic process of inquiry, and analyzing data for understanding the nature of the problem (Creswell, 2013).

From conducting a qualitative data analysis of the literature, findings were used to help build two instruments, a survey questionnaire and an interview protocol. A sample was taken from three population groups. A nonprobability purposive sampling technique known as judgment sampling was utilized.

Survey

The survey targeted two populations and consisted of members from the web-based LinkedIn social networking community. Many of their members are also members of various LinkedIn groups who identify with their work-related background, which provided an opportunity to tap into people with specialized knowledge and experience in AI. Four AI LinkedIn groups represented population group one, and one municipal LinkedIn group represented population group two:

- Population group one: AI Practitioners, AI Facilitators, other AI Professionals (and has US municipality AI implementation experience within last 10 years), and
- Population group two: HR personnel (with US municipality employment and knowledge of AI within last 10 years, current or former employees).

Survey participants from LinkedIn reside worldwide to include a gender dyad composition. Group one and two population sizes were determined by analyzing the targeted LinkedIn group statistics. To apply the survey questionnaire, a discussion was crafted requesting participation and posted to the five LinkedIn groups. Respondents proceeded to a researcher-created website for prescreening and informed consent, and then to the survey site.

The survey consisted of 20 logically driven questions. There were 16 survey respondents, eight from each group.

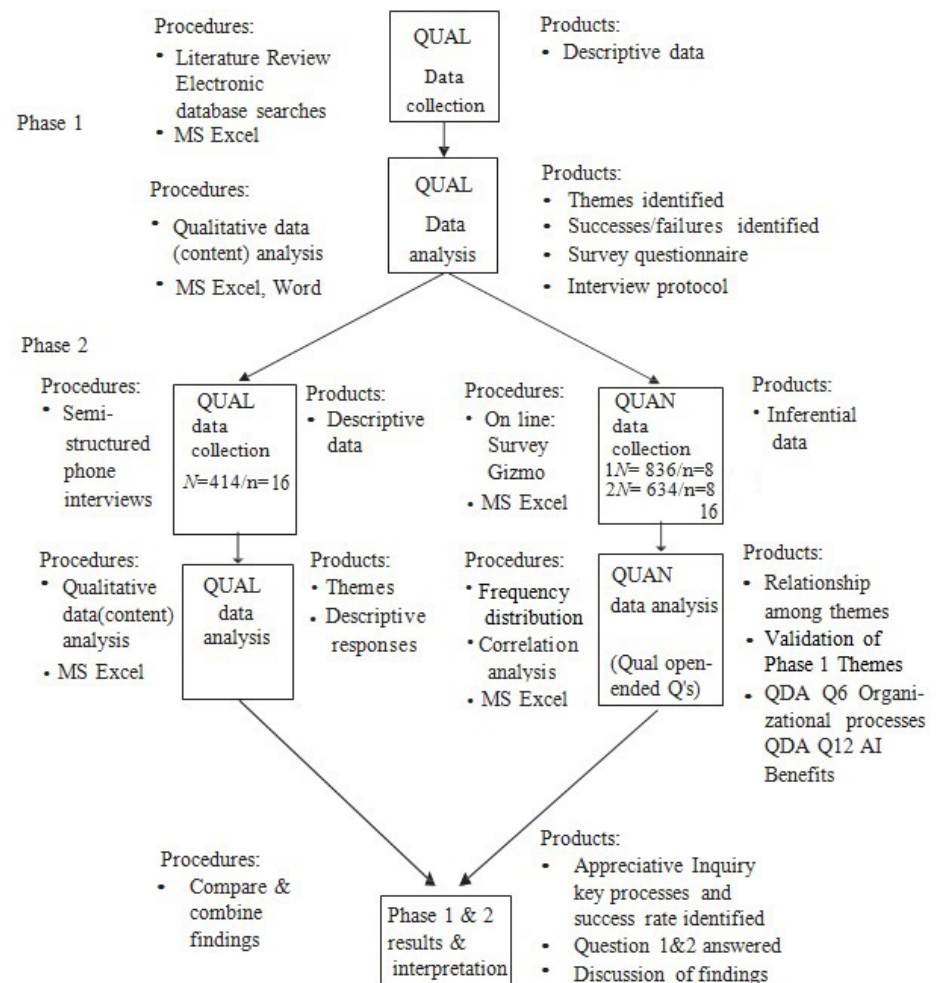
Interview Protocol

Only US municipalities with populations of 600,158 and smaller were identified as having utilized AI. To find out if larger US municipalities utilized AI (New York, Los Angeles and Chicago), the interview protocol was applied to a third population group consisting of:

- Current HR personnel with specialized informed inputs, senior or otherwise.

The interview protocol was semi-structured, consisting of three primary open-ended questions (including sub-questions dependent upon answers), and defining AI to ensure understanding. Group three’s population came from the three cities’ official websites. There were 43 attempts to conduct an interview by phone and 16 interviews were conducted: eight with personnel working for the City of New York, and four each for the cities of Chicago and Los Angeles.

Figure 1. Research Design
This figure is a representation of a flowchart of this mix methods research, identifying phase one and two procedures and corresponding products for data collection and analysis, and with a final step to compare and combine data—triangulate and interpret. N refers to population size; and n to sample size (subjects, participants, respondents, elements).



Summary of Findings

Qualitative content analyses of secondary research revealed eight US municipalities applied the AI methodology in 14 projects from 2001 through 2014 (see Table 1), although four initiatives marginally exceeded the ten-year period for this study.

Table 1: Appreciative Inquiry initiated in US municipalities

City	Form of municipal government ^b	Population ^c	Year(s) AI initiated	Resistance identified
1 Berkeley, CA	Council-Manager	112,580	2002	No
2 Buckeye, AZ ^a	Council-Manager	50,876	2008	No
3 Cleveland, OH	Mayor-Council	396,815	2009	Yes
4 Denver, CO	Mayor-Council	600,158	2001	No
5 Denver, CO			2004	No
6 Denver, CO			2010	No
7 Hampton, VA	Council-Manager	137,436	2001	No
8 Longmont, CO	Council-Manager	86,270	2006	No
9 Longmont, CO			2008	Yes
10 Longmont, CO			2008	Yes
11 Longmont, CO			2010	No
12 Longmont, CO			2011	No
13 St. Louis Park, MN	Council-Manager	45,250	2006	No
14 Worcester, MA	Council-Manager	181,045	2012	No

Note. ^a Became a city in 2013 per J. Rogers, personal communication, February 16, 2015.

^b As reported on each city's official website. ^c Population size as per 2010 United States Census.

Thirteen initiatives utilized the 4D Cycle; one was not specified (refer to Table 2). External consultants facilitated ten of the 14 AI initiatives. Internal staff received specialized AI training and facilitated the change effort in four initiatives. Regarding the survey, respondents indicated external consultants were utilized to facilitate the AI initiative. The survey questionnaire reflected a combined 15 respondents (population groups one and two) involved in an AI at a US municipality; seven from group one and eight from group two (although there were eight respondents from group one, the data from one respondent did not meet the criteria). There were no AI initiatives identified through utilizing the interview protocol (population group three).

Eight of the 14 AI initiatives identified in secondary research showed that the motivator for AI usage was internal, specifically from city council and the mayor. Survey findings revealed that the political environment affects change positively more than negatively, as indicated by 73% of those surveyed (11 of 15 respondents of both population groups). All of population group one respondents selected positively. Population group two were split 50-50, indicating that they thought the political environment affects change both positively and negatively. Two set of eyes (internal and external personnel) equate to two perspectives.

Table 2: Similarities and differences among the 14 AI initiatives

US City	Project goal	AI Motivator / facilitator	Application framework	Initiating frameworks, activities; Number of participants
Berkeley 2002	Collaborative partnership	Internal leader / consultant	-	Retreat setting; 89
Buckeye 2008	Develop vision	City council / consultant	4D	Mini-Summits Workshops; 40 Interviews; 200
Cleveland 2009	Sustainable vision	Mayor / consultant	4D	Summit; 700
Denver 2001	Merge two departments	Internal leader versed in AI / consultant	4D	Summit; 50
Denver 2004	Enhance cross-functional relationships and mutual support	Internal leader versed in AI / consultant	4D	Mini-Summits; 200 Interviews; 600
Denver 2010	Collaborative partnership	Internal leader versed in AI / consultant	4D	Mini-Summits; 12 Interviews; 25
Hampton 2001	Reenergize workforce	City Council / internal staff ^a	4D	Workshops; 246
Longmont 2006	Police and community sustainable plan	City Council / consultant	4D	Summit; 200
Longmont (first) 2008	Police and Fire Strategic plan	City Council / internal staff ^a and table facilitator	4D	-
Longmont (second) 2008	Internal customer service strategic plan	City Council / City Manager ^b	4D	Workshops; 40
Longmont 2010	Community branding economic plan	City Council / internal manager ^a	4D	Focus groups; 250 Survey; 2000
Longmont 2011	Downtown development plan of action	City Council / Consultant	4D	Workshops; 75 Interviews; 1000
St. Louis Park 2006	Develop vision	Internal leader / consultant	4D	Summit; 200
Worcester 2012	Partnership creation–three-year energy plan for Sustainability	National Grid senior leaders / consultant	4D	Summit; 300

Note. A dash (-) indicates specified data was not identified in the literature.

^aFrom affected area, ^bfrom unaffected area.

Across all 14 AI initiatives identified in secondary research, 14 key AI processes and levers were identified that led to a successful AI interventions (none were a failed AI; refer to Table 3). All 14 AI initiatives were identified with collaboration and the positive principle; 13 were identified with inclusion and the wholeness principle; and tied for the fifth most salient, 11 were identified with the design task/question, AI education, and the anticipatory principle. No initiative was identified as utilizing all 14 processes and levers.

Table 3: US Municipalities: Themes for a successful Appreciative Inquiry

City	Collaboration (x-factor #4)	AI principle positive	Inclusion (x-factor #3)	AI principle wholeness	Design task (x-factor #2)	AI education	AI principle anticipatory
Berkeley	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪
Buckeye	▪	▪	▪	▪		▪	
Cleveland	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪
Denver 2001	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪
Denver 2004	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪
Denver 2010	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪
Hampton	▪	▪	▪	▪		▪	▪
Longmont 2006	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪
Longmont 2008	▪	▪			▪		
Longmont 2008	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	
Longmont 2010	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪		▪
Longmont 2011	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪
St. Louis Park	▪	▪	▪	▪			▪
Worcester	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪	▪
TOTALS	14	14	13	13	11	11	11

City	Strategy	Generativity recognized	AI principle constructionist	AI principle enactment	AI principle simultaneity	AI principle poetic	Facilitator skills importance
Berkeley	▪	▪			▪	▪	
Buckeye	▪						
Cleveland		▪	▪		▪	▪	
Denver 2001		▪	▪				
Denver 2004		▪		▪			
Denver 2010		▪	▪	▪			
Hampton	▪			▪			▪
Longmont 2006	▪						
Longmont 2008	▪						▪
Longmont 2008			▪				
Longmont 2010	▪	▪					
Longmont 2011	▪	▪					
St. Louis Park	▪						
Worcester	▪	▪	▪		▪		
TOTALS	9	8	5	3	3	2	2

Regarding how AI was beneficial from the survey respondent’s point of view, Figure 2 reflects one of the two open-ended questions on their prospective, presenting similarities and differences.

Figure 2. SQ12: Benefit resulting from using AI in respondent’s municipality. The data represents the answers of the respondents, displayed to show the similarities and differences in their answers between both groups in answering this open-ended question.

<i>Population group 1 responses</i>	<i>Population group 2 responses</i>
<i>Similarities</i>	
Innovative ideas	Ideas Work ideas
Improving efficiency	AI itself Better processes
Widespread motivation	Increased motivation Improved energy renewal Increased motivation from top down
New partnerships	Partnering Improved working relationship
<i>Differences</i>	
Three successful improvement projects	Improved commitment Retention increase
Many successful initiatives	Happy employees
Project completion time; Time saved is a factor for benefit	Improved environment Happier place of work Inclusion Culture change More work

RQ1 Answer

Table 4 presents triangulation of the salient AI processes and levers identified from the literature and survey. Clear validation between the review of the AI literature and the two surveyed groups were realized among the majority of themes. Dr. Cooperrider’s (2012, 2013) generativity x-factors for success, specifically 2, 3 and 4, plus the positive and wholeness principles were instrumental. RQ1 is answered.

AI education helps diminish resistance to the change process. The literature revealed that knowledge of how AI works is an important factor for its success, as 78.6% (11 of 14) of the identified AI initiatives involved participant understanding of AI. In having some basic understanding of the change process, participants can become susceptible to buying in to the change effort, diminishing resistance. Educating staff to understand a change methodology in which they become participants is not the normal process in change efforts, but is normal with AI. Survey respondents were, at a minimum, all aware of the AI methodology by name.

Table 4: Appreciative Inquiry processes and levers for success in a US municipality

Secondary AI initiatives and %		AI processes and levers	Survey (SQ8 ^a) Respondents and %	
14	100%	Collaboration (x-factor #4)	15	100%
14	100%	Positive principle	10	66.7%
13	92.9%	Inclusion (x-factor #3)	14	93.3%
13	92.9%	Wholeness principle	10	66.7%
11	78.6%	Design task topic/question (x-factor #2)	8	53.3%
11	78.6%	AI education/awareness	15 ^b	100%
11	78.6%	Anticipatory principle	4	26.7%
9	64.3%	Strategy	7	46.7%
8	57.1%	Generativity recognized	3	20%
5	35.7%	Constructionist principle	3	20%
3	21.4%	Enactment principle	2	13.3%
3	21.4%	Simultaneity principle	1	6.7%
2	14.3%	Poetic principle	1	6.7%
2	14.3%	Facilitator skills importance	5	33.3%

Notes. Triangulation of the literature and survey are presented.

^a SQ8 Summary of Population Group 1 and 2. What are the Appreciative Inquiry key processes or levers that led to application success or failure in US municipalities (within the past 10 years)? (Combined n=15). ^b Data from SQ14, which asked if the respondents were aware of the AI methodology was being utilized for the change effort. All 15 respondents to this question indicated awareness of AI at the time of the change effort.

Where SQ8 was a closed-ended question, providing possible answers (Table 4), Figure 3 displays an open-ended question – respondents were requested to provide the processes and/or levers that were key to AI success. For both groups, collaboration and inclusion were apparently predominant levers for success.

Figure 3. SQ6 Key organization processes and levers.

Group	Participant Responses
7 responses from population group 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4D Cycle, design task, collaboration among key personnel • Anticipation leads to increased motivation to enact through collaborative efforts • Flexibility in decision making • Group ownership of the process • Ensuring everyone is involved in the project and the summit • Planning group, AI summit • Positive principle and collaboration

<p>8 responses from population group 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy, collaboration, and central question • Strategy: Expanded several achievements over to areas where issues dwelled • Engaging employees • Including key staff affected and the strategy to implement • Partnering with key people in the community leading to ideas and projects • Asking employee input and motivates employees after learning about AI • Senior leader driving the initiative and including the correct participants; Generative question and stories • Engaging with the key staff and stake holders to come up with multiple projects and see transformations in attitude...climate and culture shifting to “we” rather than “me or I”
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RQ2 Answer

All AI initiatives identified in this study were found to be a success – by the voices that had direct experience in the change (survey respondents), and those that created the literature (see Table 5). The rate of success for AI needs no statistical analysis if 100% of the identified initiatives were successful; it is too simple a calculation. The failure rate of AI in US municipalities is zero percent, since no initiatives identified failed. RQ2 is answered.

Table 5. Triangulation of AI initiatives, resistance, and success rate across US municipalities

Source	AI initiatives	No resistance	Resistance identified	Volume of Resistance	AI Success
Survey	15	7	8	53%	100%
Secondary	14	11	3	21%	100%
Protocol	0	-	-	-	-

The survey sampling was not performed for identifying the institution the respondent was addressing in answering the SQs. Due to the low number of cases identified in secondary literature regarding AI use in US municipalities, a low survey sample was expected. The respondents answered the questions regarding their experience of one AI initiative within a US municipality with which they were involved. Respondents were not asked the name of the US municipality they were involved with when using AI because of the potential for a respondent to choose not to participate if failure had occurred or they had an undesirable experience. This researcher felt a more truthful response could

be obtained if there were anonymity. So, although there is no US municipality for the respondent to correlate their answers to, the data remains relevant, as it validates the researcher's findings in secondary research, thus validating the answers. to some degree. Through triangulation, using quantitative and qualitative data directly contribute to validity of the results (Yauch and Steudel, 2003; Denzin, 1970).

Conclusion

Content analyses of 14 AI initiatives revealed 14 processes and levers key to achieving AI success. This mixed methods exploratory case study contributed to proving that AI is 100% effective when initiated in US municipalities, which is in direct opposition to Schooley's findings (2008). The political environment did not have a negative effect in any AI initiative identified in this study. Although resistance was present in some AI initiatives, it was overcome in all cases. This study found that AI is a proven model for US municipalities. Proponents of positive change and AI should inform public administrators of AI and these findings after their reading of this study. This researcher wholeheartedly recommends AI in the local government workplace, positing that collaboration and inclusion of government employees can lead to new workplace relationships and achieving highly desirable results.

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