AI Practitioner

Mette Jacobsgaard

Mette Jacobsgaard is a Danish lawyer with a Ph.D. in development studies from Cambridge University. She has worked with development aid from grassroots to high government levels for 35 years especially in Africa and Asia. She has used AI in her practice as a consultant, aid administrator and trainer since 1994.
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Anastasia M. Bukashe

Anastasia M. Bukashe, Ph.D. is a scholar–practitioner with a passion for bringing together knowledge and practice in ways that enable a system to move. Born in South Africa during the apartheid era, she became active in the anti-apartheid struggle during her teenage years. She has actively worked in the field of post-conflict reconstruction, transformation and reconciliation in many countries.
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An African Perspective on Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry has deep roots in Africa: the 4D cycle was developed there. As practitioners who have worked (Mette) and who live (Anastasia) in Africa, the editors of this issue of AI Practitioner ask: who is using the approach now? What has the impact of AI been? What is the African context for AI? What are the lessons?

To watch the video conversation between Ada Jo Mann, Mette and Anastasia about the early development of Appreciative Inquiry in Africa go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGj3_yk5aFs&t=248s

Having worked ourselves with and trained a substantial number of people in Appreciative Inquiry in Africa since the mid-1990s, we were curious to know: who is using the approach now? What has the impact been? Is AI being used as just another technique, or has it made sustained transformations? We were particularly curious to learn from Africans living in Africa who have taken AI on board. What impact and changes have been made? Are there innovations that can be attributed specifically to Appreciative Inquiry in Africa?
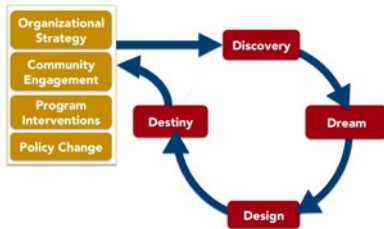
We were curious: how have people in Africa contextualised AI? How do you locate AI in an African context? What lessons are there?

The practice of AI as we know it in its most basic form (the use of the 4D Cycle) was in fact developed in the African context, as is explained in the interview with Ada Jo Mann. What this meant is that the main innovation of translating an approach developed in a Western academic context had already happened early on in the life of our practice – in Africa. Therefore, an assumption that AI as a Western-centric approach would be contextualised differently in Africa is in fact erroneous.

We found through the submissions for this issue of *AI Practitioner* that this basic innovation in practice was possible because of the resonance of the foundational world-view of AI (as articulated in the AI principles); that it is, in fact, African in its orientation. For example, the notion of dialogue at the heart of reality, the interconnected nature of all things and the centrality of story-telling and deep

listening without the need for consensus are all congruent with what can be termed "the African worldview". This point is most fully brought to life in the articles by Freddie Crous (*My Life with Appreciative Inquiry*) and Aster Birke Asfaw (*My Journey with Appreciative Inquiry*) which open this edition.

With this as a background, we flow into the article *From Cynicism to Hope: A Story of Male Change Agents in Kakuma Refugee Camp* by Whitney Fry and Brian Ombaka Odour. They located their work in a refugee camp focused on the impact of war on masculinity in an attempt to reduce gender-based violence. The AI approach served as a positive foundation for a complex issue and allowed conversations to be steered away from a commonly used deficit-based thinking pattern. We have chosen to re-publish an article from the 13th issue of *AI Practitioner* of August 2011 entitled *Dreams to Delivery: An Appreciation of the Appreciative*. It is an article by Father Patrick Shanahan who sadly passed away in September 2016.

Fr Patrick changed lives in Africa by introducing AI as a fundamental approach to the work with street children. His work continues through the many Africans he worked with and whose lives he influenced by encouraging self-worth, self-confidence and valuing the best of what is – even when life is in the street.

We end the edition with two articles focused on AI as a research methodology which remains a cutting edge portion of AI practice. These articles, *The Role of Emergence and Engagement in Sustaining Organizational Change* by Philip Maxton and *Strengths-based Learning in a Kenyan Primary School Community: An Application of the IPOD Model* by Meghan Gowen, Claire Failkov and David Haddad show the dexterity of this approach in very different scholarship settings.

Maxton, being South African, focuses on the banking sector in South Africa and highlights the different types of transformation that participants in an AI intervention can experience. Gowen, Failkov and Haddad, as US academics, locate their work in a school in Kenya and highlight the importance of engaging custodians of tradition and culture, and of embracing a broad interpretation of research. Overall we believe that this edition represents some of the complexity, richness and nuance of what it means to live and work with AI in Africa at this moment in time. We are excited to share this with the world, and grateful to our authors for their willingness to bring this gift. Happy reading!

Mette Jacobsgaard and Anastasia Bukashe
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NOTE: for more examples of AI practice in Africa we refer to Ada Jo Mann's article in the August 2011 of *AI Practitioner*, 'A Positive Revolution in International Development: A Living Laboratory for Appreciative Inquiry', 13(3), 12–15.