AI Practitioner

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Schrödinger's Cat and Questions: Catalyzing Sustainable Development Goals and Shareholder Networks for Impact, Transformation, and Scalable Outcomes.
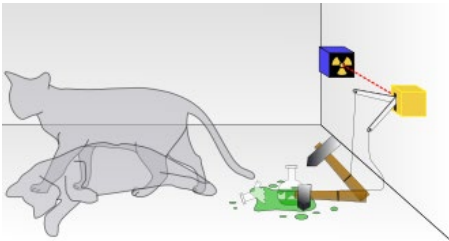
The United Nations' Transforming *Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* has created a global inquiry and call for action to address and provide solutions to the world's most pressing challenges. Its seventeen goals are a most ambitious agenda, addressing issues such as bringing economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, peace and social inclusion. The title of this issue of *AI Practitioner* was informed by Dr. Erwin Schrödinger's famous theory of and was inspired by our goal to seek transformative cooperation.

If you do not know where you come from, then you don't know where you are, and if you don't know where you are, then you don't know where you're going. And if you don't know where you're going, you're probably going wrong.
Terry Pratchett, *I Shall Wear Midnight*

Schrödinger's theory was designed to point out what he saw as a flaw in the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics. In this experiment, he hypothesized what would happen to a fictional cat placed in a sealed box with a hammer, a vial of hydrocyanic acid and a radioactive source. If even one atom of the radioactive source decayed during the hypothetical experiment, a relay mechanism would mean that the hammer would break the vial with the acid in it, and the cat would die. He concluded that, because of uncertainty about the stability of the radioactive source placed in the box with the cat, no one could know the fate of the cat until the box was opened. Thus, he argued, the cat would be both dead and alive at the same time.

We chose Schrödinger's cat to show that there are multiple viewpoints and an inability to predict different phases of reality for the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By inviting our authors and readers to open the metaphorical "box" or dialogic "container," we encourage using the spirit and processes well-documented in Appreciative Inquiry (AI). The seventeen SDGs are an open invitation to bring out the best in people, to affirm past and present strengths and successes, and to perceive their potential. In this empowering and

The cat experiment in diagrammatic form.

Source Wikipedia

inviting space, we can address the complex social, economic and environmental challenges facing the planet nearly twenty years into a new millennium. At stake is how societies and economies function, as well as guidelines and boundaries for our interactions with mother earth.

Terry Pratchett's quote frames (and is a welcome and perceptive comic relief from the narrative of the life-or-death challenge facing our fictional cat) the foundational elements of this May 2019 issue. Navigating the SDGs and associated targets requires not only a compass and a strategic plan but also the ability to process the goals into important and executable calls for action. Taking an AI approach provides a "GPS" to navigate the naming and framing of a mutuality of interests and secure buy-in from stakeholders internal and external. As editors, we are drawn to enlightened self-interest as a philosophy in ethics where people further the interests of others – or the communities or groups to which they belong – while in turn furthering their own.

Looking into a glass onion

We are uninvited guests in a massive project called global survival. As President John F. Kennedy said, "A rising tide lifts all boats". So it is with AI and the power of dialogue. These processes are catalysts that can move the hearts and minds those who will add their own subjective and personal value to growing and supporting the SDGs.

We begin by crafting an "onion diagram"[1] of the topic of the May 2019 issue. The title reflects competencies needed to achieve the SDGs and the components inside the circles of the onion diagram, which invites the reader to take a "view from a balcony" of the layers of what brings life to the global system where the SDGs will be created, discussed, evaluated and deployed. The layers are integrated structural levels of the "foundational", "evaluating" and "actualizing" domains.

The articles selected for this issue reveal a variety of appreciative approaches, values and beliefs, and a world view which provides context for their analysis, findings and recommendations. There are no "right" answers; however, we invite you to suspend judgment and bring a sense of mindfulness and intention to ask "what if" this might work and provide some steps in your own domain to move us towards scalable, sustainable and pragmatic solutions.

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1 "Glass onion", it is said, refers to Beatle John Lennon's response to the yogic concept of the lotus as a metaphor for layers of consciousness to be stripped away, much like an onion, through meditation. https://www.songfacts.com/facts/the-beatles/glass-onion

The idea of the glass onion emerged from a series of thoughtful conversations with *AI Practitioner*'s managing editor, Shelagh Aiken, which began well over a year ago. It is my hope this serves as the beginning of a global dialogue with academics, practitioners, and others, and will lead to much more writing on the topic. Special gratitude is also due to Saskia Tjepkema for her guidance and support during the initial formation of our team and in guiding the editing process.

The articles in this issue offer mechanisms for creating, monitoring and garnering potential implementation of the SDGs as unanimously adopted by the 193 member states of the United Nations at the start of a three-day summit on sustainable development on 25 September 2015, with a self-imposed 2030 deadline. Authors were encouraged to employ varied forms of thinking, critical, divergent and convergent, to look at decision making, problem-solving and implementation across public, private and other multiple sectors. Schrödinger's cat was an encouragement to think both within and without the box.

Steve Pyser (right) and co-editor and 'wingman' Dhairya Pujara. This photograph was snapped at a stop lights as we were crafting several guiding principles for this issue in Manhattan on our way to the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI) Global Event at United Nations, 11 July 2018. Photo: Dhairya Pujara

The millenial perspective

From the millennial generation, we sought the opinion of Josh Shapey, a University of Oregon junior college student, who replied:

Imagine placing the earth into a box with a device that has a 50% chance of destroying the planet. What is the state of the earth inside the box? It would be reasonable to say that the earth is either intact

or destroyed. Erwin Schrödinger argued that according to quantum physics, the earth would be both dead and alive at the same time.

Problems exist because solutions are waiting to be discovered, and the problems facing our earth today seem more urgent than ever. There is no real reason to be pessimistic about the future, nor optimistic. Instead, we need to be realistic. No one wins unless everyone wins because the problems facing our planet are interconnected in every way.

Intergenerational engagement

For this issue, we have sought intergenerational viewpoints and use a broad brush to capture the SDGs. The roster of contributors reveals their thought leadership, subject matter expertise and multiple viewpoints. We can learn from each author's insights, filtered through the lens of AI.

I am also guided by the words of Lawrence Bloom, colleague, friend and sustainability expert who pioneered the operations manual that created environmentally sustainable practices in the hotel industry. It is now in use in over five million hotels worldwide:

We know there's a whole range of sounds beyond our ability to hear. Cosmologists know that there are stars and planets we cannot see. We know that there are intelligences beyond our deepest understandings. And if you recognize that, you ultimately have to speak about love. You have to speak about connectedness.
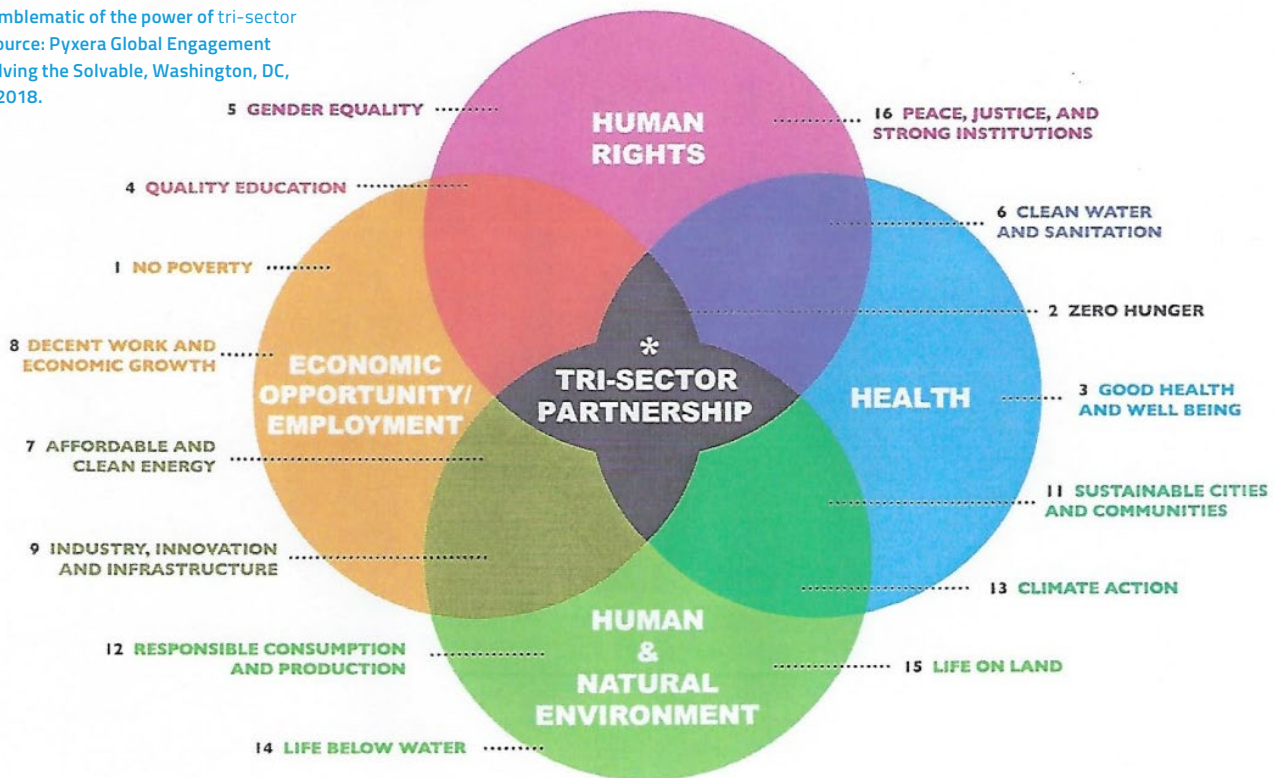
Another source of expert guidance is Pyxera Global Engagement.[2] Their Forum: Live 2018 modeled an inspiring collaborative real-time engagement with global thought leaders solving challenges. We have experienced how tri-sector partnerships are making an impact across the public, private and social sectors and advance the cause of collaboration, inviting us to the vantage point of a "global balcony".

My sense is the integration of tri-sector partnerships[3] into the SDG mainstay can honor the founding principles of AI of discovering and building on the life-giving forces within an organization.

2 https://www.pyxeraglobal.org/
3 A tri-sector partnership is often between companies, government and civil society organization for the purpose of development.

Venn Diagram emblematic of the power of tri-sector partnerships. Source: Pyxera Global Engagement Forum 2018. Solving the Solvable, Washington, DC, October 10-11, 2018.

Benchmarking successful AI and dialogic approaches

Since 2014, Steve has had the privilege of serving under the leadership of co-founder, Professor Dianne Davis as a co-chair of the International Council for Caring Communities (ICCC), in designing and participating in events including "Imagine the Possible: Water Management, Technology, Entrepreneurship and Innovation" and "Imagine the Possible: "Digital Innovation, Health, Rehabilitation Medicine and Creative Education".
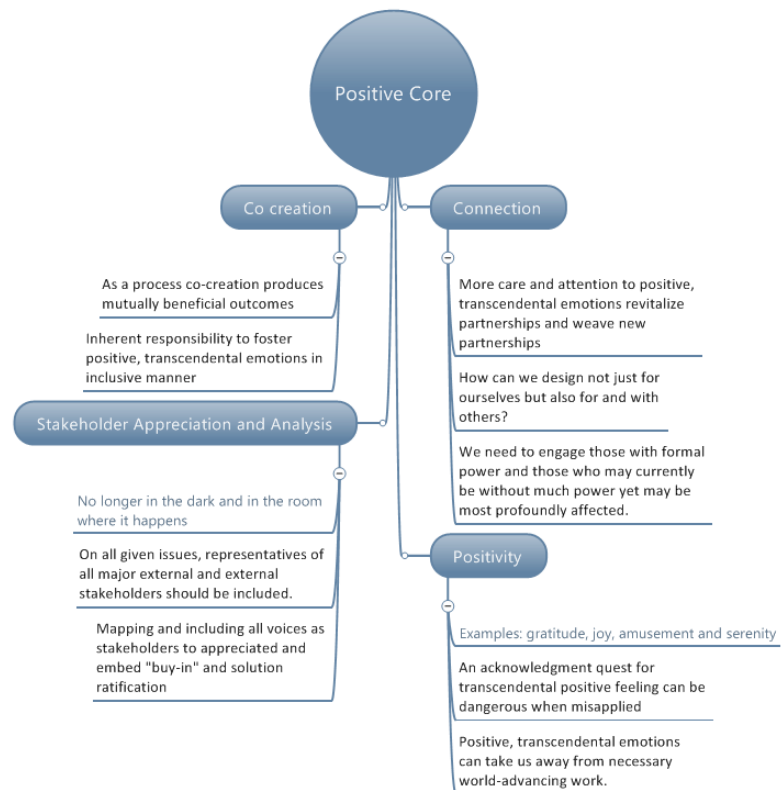
We assess the quality of an evaluation system, and our implementation of it, against its success. My goal has been to use self-reflection, to learn from mistakes and successes and to improve continuously. Editing this volume of *AI Practitioner* was my attempt to add to the literature in a meaningful way while asking the authors my unanswered questions. We create the future by what we can do today. By making every moment count, seeing the good in people, being kind perhaps we can be stewards of the limited space we care for while on this planet.

Positive core as keystone of process

The following Positive Core Diagram was inspired by the communication and gratitude work of Associate Professor Ross Brinkert of Penn State University.

In meetings that took place as at St George's House, Windsor Castle, he described to me his view of an effective process and facilitation using a strength-based approach to inform the process of addressing the SDGs. He was an invited guest at the April 2019 Windsor Consultations organized by Professor Davis and the ICCC. He said that:

The Windsor consultation was profound. It was instructive to me how one group used a UN-related format for presenting items in terms of a preamble, basic problem, proposed solution, and proposed next steps structure. This allowed for individuals to commit to relatively concrete projects and makes it more likely that project accomplishments will support and advance the work of ICCC and the UN.[4]

Final analysis and reflection

We close with a request that you, the reader and AI practitioner, be the intention in your evaluation and assessment of possibilities. Professional athletes begin the new season's training with a "return to basics". Returning to foundational elements allows a collective space of possibilities – thinking with present strengths, successes and potential. Perceiving and embedding the "things" that give life, health, vitality in excellence in civil society and on our planet. It is the sine qua non for bringing solutions for the seventeen SDGs.

4 http://international-iccc.org/windsor-consultation

I am hopeful for the success of the SDGs and for the future, given all the compelling multidisciplinary work taking place through multigenerational conversations, UN consultations, collective dialogues, faculty development, economic development work, reflective practices, integrative learning, experiential education through civic engagement service learning (combining academic classroom curriculum with community service) and so much more.

I return to Josh Shapey, millennial thought leader and subject matter technology expert:

> *The Sustainable Development Goals are just the beginning of a long dialogue, but somebody had to get the conversation going. Even though we may not know the exact path we are taking yet, the next generation is ready to make some positive changes. So let's begin now.*

Where do we go from here?

Public outrage has descended into incivility, name calling and flat-out personal assaults in the public square and on social media platforms. It is tempting to run (not walk); to leave the room as an act of self-preservation. I respectfully suggest that you do not remove your voice from the mix and take comfort that you can be present as one positive voice in the conversation. Carry your message forward with dignity and grace. One never knows where influence begins or ends.

On 16 April 1963, Martin Luther King Jr, while incarcerated in Birmingham, Alabama, wrote:

> *Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly ... Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.[5]*

We can do better. There is no choice but to act. But where do we go from here? That depends on who you are and your perception of the world. At the end of Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* Tom Joad promises his mother:

> *I'll be every'where .... Where there's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever there's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there.*

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5 https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html

With small flags waving and tinny blasts on tiny trumpets, we shall meet the enemy, and not only may he be ours, he may be us.

Next steps in the success pattern

How inspired are you to act to support the SDGs? Are there larger voices calling you to this work? Wherever you go is where you are supposed to be – vote with your feet and actions. Be mindful. Look for SDG operations "in country" and as part of a larger global system. It has been said that politics is conflict and conflict is contagious. Race, religion, national origin, gender or other characteristics can bring us to together or push us apart. American cartoonist Walt Kelly (of Pogo fame) offered this in June 1953:

> *Traces of nobility, gentleness, and courage persist in all people, do what we will to stamp out the trend. So, too, do those characteristics which are ugly. It is just unfortunate that in the clumsy hands of a cartoonist all traits become ridiculous, leading to a certain amount of self-conscious expostulation and the desire to join battle. There is no need to sally forth, for it remains true that those things which make us human are, curiously enough, always close at hand. Resolve then, that on this very ground, with small flags waving and tinny blasts on tiny trumpets, we shall meet the enemy, and not only may he be ours, he may be us. Forward!*
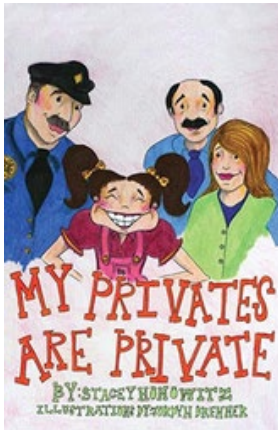
Where shall we look for conviction, motivation the energy to help heal the world? N. Eldon Tanner said, "Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth." We are humbled intellectually by the co-creation and production of this issue and empowerment to move intentionally and deliberately with equanimity – a state of being calm and balanced, especially amid difficulty. The Buddha said, "Reaction is the supreme art in life".

In this issue of *AI Practitioner*, you will find articles by academics, practitioners, lawyers, and business people setting up startups to change the way we learn, interact and take care of the planet.

We start with Robert Giacalone's article questioning why some great initiatives fail. Why don't they move some people to acceptance and action?

The digital age influences every aspect of our lives. In "Schrödinger's Cat and the Sustainable Development Goals in the Digital Age", Sam Lanfranco and Klaus Stoll discuss possibilities for the way that the SDGs can mesh wtih digital technology.

The next four articles look at projects and programs that are already catalyzing the SDGS. Michael D'Italia shows how one university, Rutgers University – Camden, USA, has become an anchor institution that supports the SDGs in practical, local ways.

To read more about Stacey's contributions to keeping children safe, go to page 37

To read about Maanch's goals to support SDGs, philanthropists and projects, go to page 50.

Another local story, written by Miranne Schapmans, Chené Swart and Griet Bouwen, takes us to Belgium, where the Holiday Participation Centre in Flanders set up not just a program of affordable holidays for those on low incomes, but also a project to document and share their stories, both validating and valuing their experiences.

In "Using Appreciative Inquiry in a Brainstorm", Gert Jan van Schaik describes an AI intervention at an annual networking and idea-sharing conference for the mobility industry in Amsterdam to look at how the industry can use electric vehicles to implement the UN's SDGs.

Stacey Horowitz has thirty years' experience as a prosecutor in the Sex Crimes Unit of Broward County in Florida. Cassidy Pyser interview asks how Stacey's step outside her comfort zone to write two children's books ties in with the SDGs.

Peter Classetti reviews Petra Kuenkel's book, *Stewarding Sustainability Transformations: An Emerging Theory and Practice of Sustainable Development Goals Implementation.*

The final two articles look at recent startups with global visions. The first, by Hannah Bergstrom, discusses how blockchain technology can be leveraged to change the education sector. In the second, Darshita Gillies and Emily Stubbs of Maanch describe the start-up organization's dreams of becoming the vector for making connections between philanthropists and projects requiring capital.

We hope that you find this May 2019 issue positive, empowering and inspiring, that it connects you in ways that encourage you to step forward, leverage your own gifts and commit to this important work of supporting the success of the Sustainable Development Goals by the 2030 deadline.

Steven N. Pyser and Dhairya Pujara
May 2019