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WAIC 2019: Is It Possible to Create a Better World? / Est-ce Possible de Créer un Meilleur Monde?

Edited by

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The Gift of New Eyes

An Appreciation of the Life of Jane Magruder Watkins, 1937–2019

This issue of *AI Practitioner* is dedicated to the memory of Jane Magruder Watkins, 1937-2019



On behalf of the International Journal for Appreciative Inquiry – *AI Practitioner* – I want to share a loving farewell and profound sense of respect, admiration and gratitude for one of the early advocates and pioneers of Appreciative Inquiry. Jane Magruder Watkins was born May 3, 1937 and passed away August 12, 2019. Jane, as the outpouring of comments spreading across our social media attests, was universally loved throughout the AI community, respected for her mission of social justice and wellbeing for all, and admired by all those who were deeply touched by her personal gifts as an

educator and mentor. Let me say a few words about Jane’s passionate commitment to advance the human condition of the world and then share, more personally, how Jane was not only a decisive developmental force in my life but in the lives of hundreds and thousands of leaders’ activists and the learners she so positively inspired as well.

Jane Watkins was chair of the board of the NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science, and for decades a preeminent author, practitioner and teacher in the field of Appreciative Inquiry. Her first book *Appreciative*

Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination, published in March of 2008 by Pfeiffer and co-authored with Bernard Mohr, was the very first to bring the domain of complexity science and the new physics to the theory and practice of AI.

Jane spent much of her life and work on social justice issues: civil rights in Mississippi and South Africa; economic development programs for women in South Africa, Kenya, and many other parts of Africa; and women’s empowerment programs in India, the Philippines and Haiti. She brought AI into her work with

corporations, non-profits, USAID projects, and the Episcopal, Anglican and Seventh Day Adventists overseas development programs. In one of the largest AI programs in the world she spearheaded, along with Ada Jo Mann, Claudia Liebler, David Cooperrider and Ron Fry, the GEM initiative. GEM was a \$6.5 million dollar USAID cooperative agreement to bring AI's approaches to positive systems change to over 150 international development organizations, from Save the Children to the local NGOs in Zimbabwe, and to organizations such as the Environmental Law Institute, World Vision and Catholic Relief Services.

Jane was tireless and selfless. She was bold and courageous, never afraid of high conflict situations, and she was a mover of whole systems. Known throughout the world of Group Dynamics, Organization Development, Social Constructionism and Appreciative Inquiry, Jane received two lifetime achievement awards. One of the honors was from the NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science and the other was from the World Conference for Appreciative Inquiry held in Nepal in 2009. But perhaps most important, deep down in her soul, Jane was a growth-promoting parent and grandparent and great-grandparent, a teacher, an educator, a mentor. Her heart would sing when she guided "her students" to realize their greatest potentials to help build a better world.

I know it because I felt it. Jane could see things in people and human communities that they could not

see in themselves. I was astonished when we met for the very first time. I was so young, still a PhD student, and it was close to forty years ago. Our first meeting was at a major NTL conference on "Making a Difference in the World", and Jane shared her remarkable (to me staggering) work on uniting people across every boundary to collaboratively forge and create the post-apartheid, multi-racial democracy in South Africa.

In our conversation I tentatively shared a few of the emerging concepts from my dissertation work and early theory-building on Appreciative Inquiry. Within the first thirty minutes of our first meeting, she invited me onto her team. I was astonished. The next time we spoke, and this is a true story, was at the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre in Roodepoort near Johannesburg. There, the Right Reverend Dale White, supported by the Reverend Desmond Tutu, Tish White, Muzi and young leading lights such as Anastasia White (Bukashe), were bringing together the Pan African Congress, the ANC, the white nationalist government, the Zulus, Inkatha Freedom Fighters and so many more including community activists, mediators, business leaders and former prisoners.

I was totally misplaced, in awe, and out of my league. But Jane challenged. She could see the vast potential of AI in the midst of horrific histories of bitterness, separation, anger, fear and anguish. And as a mentor she saw no better way to help people learn than

to throw them into the real world of change. How and why she took such risks with me will forever remain a beautiful mystery.

Jane brought the gift of new eyes, just as in this story this, to hundreds and thousands of people and groups. Jane had an inner spark that burned bright. May we celebrate and honor her countless contributions by carrying forward Jane's mentoring spirit, her belief in the relational goodness of the human being, and her ability to turn Appreciative Inquiry into a force for world benefit.

**David L. Cooperrider
Char and Chuck Fowler Professor of
Business as an Agent of World Benefit
Case Western Reserve University and
Honorary Chair, David L. Cooperrider
Center for Appreciative Inquiry
Stiller School of Business, Champlain
University**

Ralph Kelly and Jane's family have invited us to share that memorials may be given to the David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry, Champlain University, P.O. Box 670, Burlington, VT 05402-0670.

The funds given in Jane's name will be used for advancing the theory, practice and writing of Appreciative Inquiry through education, mentoring, and scholarships – especially focused on social justice and advancing equality for all. Click [here](#) for your small or large memorial gifts



Jane Magruder Watkins

For over thirty years, Jane's work focused on experiential education and organization development around the globe. An early innovator, she experimented with applying AI to all aspects of organizational life, as well as in personal growth and human development. She developed AI Foundations workshops and the AI certificate program.

Appreciative Inquiry – A Global Phenomenon

ABSTRACT

This article was originally published in the August 2011 issue of AI Practitioner.

Jane Magruder Watkins was, without a doubt, one of the most important driving forces for spreading AI globally. She was the lead author of the bestselling book, *Appreciative Inquiry – Change at the Speed of Imagination*. In 2009 at the global AI Conference in Katmandu, Nepal, Jane received the first Lifetime Achievement Award for spreading AI around the globe.

The GEM Initiative became a living laboratory for sowing the seeds of Appreciative Inquiry around the globe, jump starting the “positive revolution in change” that is now occurring in almost every country and in all continents around the world.

That quote comes from the article about the GEM project written by Ada Jo Mann, creator and manager of the GEM initiative, in the August 2011 issue of *AI Practitioner*. In the article, she describes the major project responsible for spreading Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to all corners of the globe. Mette Jacobsgaard, co-editor, asked Jane to tell the story of the events that led up to the choice of AI as the GEM project's approach to organization change and enrichment. Her response? “Since I can't resist telling a good story, here is my version of the process.”

The story begins at the 1984 conference in Florida sponsored by the NTL Institute of Applied Behavioral Science where I met David Cooperrider who was, at that time, a PhD candidate at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. (The NTL Institute of Applied Behavioral Science is the origin of traditional approaches to Organization Development and a partner in creating the innovative School of Organization Behavior at Case Western where David studied and is now a professor.)

My passion for community organizing came from my experiences in Mississippi during the 1960s that led me, ultimately, into the field of International

Isn't it arrogant of us to go over there and tell them what to do?

David Cooperrider

Development. When I worked for the Peace Corps in the headquarters office in Washington, DC, during the Carter Administration, I became enthralled with the community development work that the Peace Corps was spreading across the poorest countries around the globe. Later, I was recruited to work for the New TransCentury organization founded by Warren Wiggins (a man who had designed the Peace Corps for Sargent Shriver during the Kennedy administration). TransCentury began my journey into those poorest countries where I spread forms of planning and implementation of projects using NTL's participatory approaches and methodologies.

Enriching women's lives in Kenya

I left TransCentury in 1983 to be director of the International Development Office at the Episcopal Church USA in New York City. It was in this capacity that I began to work with women's groups in Anglican communities across Africa. One particularly amazing group of such women was in Kenya. Over the course of a three year project, these women began transforming their communities and enriching the lives of women across Kenya. In 1983, I asked my friend Doe Mayer, a master at creating documentaries, to film these women. We called the film *The Women Will*.

At the 1984 NTL conference, I offered a session to show the film and discuss the work in Africa. Among the small group that came was David Cooperrider. After showing the film, we had a Question and Answer session. David asked the first question. 'Isn't it arrogant of us to go over there and tell them what to do?' I answered that I couldn't agree more and explained that the purpose of this project was to give women a way to develop their leadership and planning skills so that they could be organizers and leaders of groups that focused on improving the quality of life for families and women in particular. We were teaching them a participatory planning process and leadership skills.

Introducing AI

As we ended the session, David asked if I would go with him to hear a presentation by John Carter, an NTL colleague who had applied AI in his work with a large accounting firm – the first such application since, at that time, AI was still largely a theoretical discussion. John had demonstrated how effective AI could be working with large systems and David thought I might be interested. It was the beginning of what became not only a partnership, but also a deep and lasting friendship.

David and I kept in touch. In one phone call he asked if I would work with him on a conference on AI to be held at Case Western in 1989. In preparation for that conference, several of David's colleagues wrote about work they were doing using AI in their research studies. He said to me: "I want to focus on global organizations and particularly in the 'not-for-profit' sector." This intention led to two major projects:

1. The establishment of the SIGMA Center for Global Change at Case Western as a center for research and education dedicated to the study and development of worldwide organizations.
2. The Social Innovations in Global Management Conference that same year that highlighted students' studies of five not-for-profit global social change organizations using an AI approach to the research.

USAID and Case Western Reserve University

When Ada Jo invited me to work with her on this large AID funded project, and the staff at USAID giving us the grant suggested that we needed a University as a partner for the project, David's name was first up in my mind. Ada Jo was interested and one of our planning group was commissioned to talk to several Universities interested in international development work. David and Case Western Reserve University became our partners and we embarked on the great adventure of an experimental year working with US based not-for-profit international development agencies.

And the rest is history. Not only did Ada Jo organize us to work with the United States' NGOs that first year, but USAID was so pleased with the success of that project that they increased the grant and extended the project to include international NGOs for several years. I believe that GEM was life-changing not only for those we taught/facilitated, but also for those who staffed the workshops and travelled the globe, spreading the original idea of empowering people to plan and manage their own projects and partnerships across cultures, and also inculcating the idea of appreciative ways of thinking and living that turned out to be far more compatible with the relational cultures of Asia, Africa and Latin America than it is with the Western model of finding what has failed and who is to blame.

GEM was life-changing not only for those we taught, but also for those who staffed the workshops.

The GEM Legacy

From that first AI conference at Case Western in 1989, when the theory and practice of AI was new and involved mostly people who were associated with Case Western, to the most recent Global AI conference held in 2009 in Katmandu, Nepal, AI has become a global phenomenon. The Nepal conference had over 400 participants from 43 countries around the globe. Without a doubt, the GEM project has played a major and pivotal role in ‘infecting’ the globe with a process that is aligned with the rapid pace of change and enables people to search out and build on their strengths, their hopes and dreams, and their confidence that they, too, can create a future full of hope and possibility.

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WAIC 2019

Est-ce Possible de Créer Un Meilleur Monde?

Ce numéro d'AI Practitioner est édité par les organisateurs du WAIC 2019 à Nice, France. Les contributions en Anglais et en Français explorent non seulement ce qui s'est passé lors du congrès mais aussi la manière dont cela va influencer ce qui adviendra dans le futur. Ils ont posé quelques questions aux différents contributeurs. Dans cette édition, les contributeurs partagent leurs réponses aux questions.

Nous sommes en avril 2017 : une praticienne lyonnaise nous invite à participer à la manifestation « Dialogues en humanité » au Parc de la Tête d'Or, véritable poumon dans la ville de Lyon. Cet événement a lieu tous les ans en juin et différentes conférences et animations sont proposées.

Nous décidons, avec quelques praticiens, d'organiser des dialogues appréciatifs avec les passants et entre les passants eux-mêmes et, le 7 juin, nous délimitons un espace avec des panneaux, des banderoles et des chaises pour notre animation. Notre offre intrigue et plusieurs personnes acceptent d'expérimenter ces entretiens sous les arbres. C'est un moment joyeux et riche d'enseignements sur la possibilité de conduire des échanges appréciatifs sans autre objet que l'échange lui-même et la découverte d'autrui.

Le 8 juin, Jean consulte sa messagerie et découvre le mail de David Cooperrider indiquant que, malheureusement, nos amis brésiliens ne pourront organiser le WAIC en 2018 comme prévu.

Très vite, nous estimons que les grandes questions ne peuvent être dissociées et que l'AI s'applique à toutes les situations.

Le prochain WAIC aura donc lieu en 2019 et Jean, spontanément, évoque avec ses associés, Christine et Jean-Christophe, la possibilité que l'IFAI candidate pour monter cet événement. L'équipe, les amis praticiens présents sont enthousiastes ! Ce serait en plus l'occasion de fêter les dix ans de l'IFAI et de permettre à la communauté française, très nombreuse, de rencontrer des collègues du monde entier.

De retour à Paris, nous commençons, Christine, Jean-Christophe, Jean et Kti puis Eric, à réfléchir à une thématique générale adaptée aux enjeux contemporains, attractive, et suscitant des échanges inspirants pour la communauté appréciative mondiale.

Étapes préliminaires

Très vite, nous estimons que les grandes questions ne peuvent être dissociées et que l'AI s'applique à toutes les situations. Nous proposerons donc un « chapeau » général formulé ainsi : « Une communauté AI internationale au service d'une ambition politique : Générer des conversations constructives entre les différents acteurs du Monde pour prendre soin ensemble du bien commun ». Une bien grande ambition donc ...qui ne sera pas déçue !

Nous organisons, au-delà d'une première journée de pré-conférence animée par les acteurs francophones pour l'accueil et par David Cooperrider et Ron Fry, les trois journées autour des thèmes suivants l'individu, la famille, les organisations (institutions, entreprises) et la société.

Réalisant que nous ne pourrions nous acquitter seuls de la lourde tâche d'organisation (certains d'entre nous sont quelque peu anxieux à cette idée !), nous faisons appel à une agence expérimentée – Carco – dont les responsables, Sébastien et Claire deviendront nos partenaires de tous les instants.

Nous bénéficions également, pour la préparation de notre candidature, du soutien précieux des organisateurs du WAIC de Ghent, ceux-ci nous reçoivent, nous font part de leur expérience et nous communiquent toutes leurs informations. Nous sommes toujours pleins de gratitude à leur égard !

Nous présentons le 8 janvier 2018 notre projet à la commission internationale qui nous exprime sa confiance et, sur sa suggestion que nous suivons bien volontiers, nous incluons dans la préparation les autres candidats et l'ensemble de la communauté française et francophone.

Allons-nous limiter le nombre de participants à l'AC ou tenter d'être très inclusifs ?

Préparer...

C'est donc parti ! Nous commençons à construire le programme avec le soutien actif de Lindsey Godwin et du Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry.

Une nouvelle aventure commence, nous créons un Advisory Committee (AC) et les premières questions se posent. Nous identifions, avec le Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry, différents contributeurs possibles, nous invitons les acteurs et praticiens français de l'AI à intégrer cet Advisory Committee ainsi que, bien sûr, les autres candidats à l'organisation qui ont souhaité mettre leur énergie au service de la communauté mondiale de l'AI. Cette ouverture a une conséquence : plusieurs personnes de l'AC nous contactent pour nous recommander tel ou tel praticien avec d'excellents arguments. Allons-nous limiter le nombre de participants à l'AC ou tenter d'être très inclusifs ? C'est cette deuxième option qui est retenue et elle colorera aussi nos choix ultérieurs.

Constante organisation, ajustement permanent

L'équipe s'organise, de façon informelle ; certes Sébastien et Claire seront plus en charge de questions de communication, de logistique et de budget, Jean-Christophe assurera les meilleures conditions d'implication de la ville de Nice pour obtenir des lieux idylliques, un accueil de grande qualité, Christine et Jean se concentrent sur l'animation de l'AC, sur le recueil et le choix des ateliers, Jean précise le programme des keynotes, Kti organise finement le programme, communique avec les contributeurs et conçoit la maquette du métaprogramme ... mais tout ceci se fait par ajustement mutuel. Ce n'est donc pas une organisation classique en mode projet que nous vivons mais une expérience de constante organisation – « organizing » – qui nous conduit à être en relation constante et en ajustement permanent. Nos forces personnelles nous conduisent à nous investir au-delà de rôles prédéfinis et c'est un bel enseignement pour nous. Ce sont nos conversations qui ont créé, au fur et à mesure du projet, notre organisation.

Ces ajustements ne se sont pas toujours faits sans tensions et la capacité de dialogue franc et positif a toujours permis de tirer quelque chose de constructif des débats.

La capacité de dialogue franc et positif a toujours permis de tirer quelque chose de constructif des débats.

Un tel projet ne se vit bien sûr pas de façon lisse et tranquille : nous avons, par exemple, connu quelques angoisses budgétaires quand, alors qu'une première négociation avec la ville de Nice pour un lieu semblait avoir abouti, un échange ultérieur mentionnait un prix multiplié par cinq ! Heureusement, le budget

Nous avons retenu] ...la volonté d'offrir la possibilité de s'exprimer non seulement aux grandes figures de l'AI, mais aussi à des personnes moins connues qui pourraient témoigner d'actions dans les différentes parties du monde.

initialement prévu fut rétabli...Les angoisses budgétaires continuèrent quand la participation s'avéra en dessous de nos prévisions...

En ce qui concerne le lieu et l'organisation pratique des échanges, nous sommes vite parvenus à l'idée de monter l'événement comme un sommet appréciatif aussi avons-nous imaginé un grand espace commun pour les grandes conférences et des espaces ouverts et visibles les uns des autres pour les ateliers. Le principe de calquer cette conférence sur un événement appréciatif était important pour nous : la forme d'un événement parle aussi du fond et des intentions.

Principes de base

Pour construire le programme, nous avons notamment retenu un principe : outre, bien sûr, la pertinence des keynotes et contributions par rapport aux thématiques retenues, la volonté d'offrir la possibilité de s'exprimer non seulement aux grandes figures de l'AI, mais aussi à des personnes moins connues qui pourraient témoigner d'actions dans les différentes parties du monde. Le principe que différentes voix s'expriment s'est traduit par la demande aux keynotes speakers aux animateurs/trices d'ateliers d'être au moins deux sur scène. Ceci a été bien compris de la communauté et a parfois demandé une recherche spécifique aux intervenants.

En ce qui concerne les ateliers, nous lançâmes un appel à contribution qui fut très largement couronné de succès ; nous avons reçu plus de cent-vingt propositions d'ateliers, de petites conférences (« Meet the explorers ») ! Il s'agissait alors de choisir et nous avons fait appel à des membres de l'AC et de la communauté appréciative pour évaluer la pertinence de ces propositions selon plusieurs critères que nous avons élaborés. Et là, surprise : la très grande majorité d'entre elles furent évaluées positivement ou très positivement ! Que faire ? Nous avons opté pour poursuivre notre approche inclusive et choisi de permettre l'expression de nombreuses expériences. Mais ceci nous a obligé à bâtir un programme très dense avec certaines journées occupées du matin 8h au soir 20h ; un vrai challenge ; les participants seraient-ils au rendez-vous à toutes les heures quand la plage et les terrasses de la ville se montrent si accueillantes au printemps à Nice ?

Vivre le WAIC et après...

Le pari de la confiance se révéla gagnant !

Le pari de la confiance se révéla gagnant ! Nous fûmes étonnés de la participation constante aux ateliers, y compris à des heures plus difficiles. Nous avons

Notre équipe a, plus que jamais, vécu le pouvoir fantastique de l'AI : créer des conversations constructives, joyeuses, inspirantes et dont l'impact est profond et durable.

Vivre une conférence mondiale telle que le WAIC renforce notre désir de contribuer, avec l'AI, à la construction d'un monde meilleur, durable, florissant et enthousiasmant pour tous.



Lisez plus de l'article de Vânia Bueno sur la page 21

aussi plusieurs keynotes sur scène portant des propos et des voix de plusieurs continents et pays...

La similitude entre la conférence et un sommet appréciatif fut largement appréciée et elle permit de nombreux échanges entre participants de toutes origines. Ce fut pour toute l'équipe un temps exceptionnel ! Ce que nous vivons dans notre pratique appréciative se renouvela ici avec une communauté qui nous impressionna par sa capacité à vivre ce qu'elle professe et développe dans le monde.

Ouverture, bienveillance, accueil, attention portée aux autres ne furent pas de vains mots : la responsable du « catering » l'exprima très directement en nous expliquant que ses employés venaient avec entrain au travail tant ils étaient heureux des échanges avec les participants ! Claire, de notre agence, souligna à plusieurs reprises à quel point les personnes étaient compréhensives quand des difficultés d'organisation se présentaient.

L'atmosphère des ateliers était joyeuse et studieuse à la fois et les discussions qui les suivaient stimulantes. Les conférences offrirent l'occasion de partager, entre quatre-cents personnes des expériences hors du commun et des émotions fortes qui furent décuplées par le nombre. De riches idées furent exprimées pour une construction par toute la communauté appréciative du prochain WAIC ; nombreux furent les participants qui firent part de leur souhait de poursuivre la dynamique des échanges entre deux WAIC...

Notre équipe, quant à elle, a, plus que jamais, vécu le pouvoir fantastique de l'AI : créer des conversations constructives, joyeuses, inspirantes et dont l'impact est profond et durable.

Vivre une conférence mondiale telle que le WAIC renforce notre désir de contribuer, avec l'AI, à la construction d'un monde meilleur, durable, florissant et enthousiasmant pour tous.

Dans cette édition

Les questions que nous avons posées aux contributeurs de ce numéro d'AI Practitioner étaient simples et profondes. Qu'est ce qui a pris vie pour vous durant le WAIC ? Qu'est ce qui a changé pour vous depuis les moments que nous avons partagés à Nice ? Quel sens s'est dégagé pour vous de ce printemps niçois ?

Cette édition commence par un regard rétrospectif posé par Vânia Bueno Cury sur les potentialités que portait le WAIC 2017 au Brésil, les écueils rencontrés et ce que ces potentialités sont devenues avec l'acceptation, le dépassement

et l'espoir. Dans la composition qui suit, les captures graphiques réalisées par Caroline Tsiang durant le WAIC à Nice ont tout saisi de l'énergie des ateliers et des sessions plénières.

L'équipe de l'agence événementielle nous donne sa perception du WAIC dans une interview réalisée par Jean Pagès et Christine Cayré titrée 400 hugs et 0 réclamations. Dans Nos belles histoires, deux praticiennes françaises, Annie Benzeno et Catherine Mehrand racontent ce qu'elles et leurs collègues français ont appris et ce qu'ils retiennent du WAIC 2019. Hanneke Laarakker and Barbara van Kesteren ont exploré le sujet de l'Appreciative Inquiry et de la Valeur des Conflits dans l'atelier qu'elles ont animé durant le congrès. Dans leur article, elles explicitent pourquoi elles ont choisi ce sujet, comment elles ont provoqué des tensions durant l'atelier et quelles ont été les réponses des participants. Nous avons demandé aux participants d'exprimer en phrases brèves leurs réactions et leurs apprentissages pendant le congrès. Ces fragments ont été réunis et mêlés avec des photos prises durant l'événement composant ainsi un reportage image dans Snippets from WAIC2019.



Pour en savoir plus sur les praticiens de l'IA sud-américains à WAIC2019, consultez la page 51

Miriam Subirana a orchestré une des sessions plénières, réunissant des praticiens AI hispanophones originaires d'Amérique du Sud. Ensemble ils ont consacré leur session à semer des graines dans l'audience en évoquant un futur souhaitable où avec leurs communautés respectives ils sauront co-créditer des actions pour le bien commun. Miriam revient sur cette session dans l'article intitulé « Ensemble vers le Bien Commun : revisiter notre point de départ. » La proposition provocante de Cees Hoogendijk's s'est traduite en un article graphique « Réinventer le WAIC ». Quelles possibilités s'offrent à nous pour le prochain WAIC ?

En Septembre, Peter Pula et Yvonne Hollandy ont organisé ce que l'on peut considérer comme le tout premier rassemblement AI mondial et virtuel avec cette question : « Qu'est ce qui a émergé pour vous depuis le WAIC 2019 ? ». Une douzaine de personnes ont partagé leurs réflexions et mis en commun ce avec quoi ils ont cheminé depuis, fruit de leur participation au congrès. Enfin, Keith Storace, éditeur des Voix du Terrain , inspiré par les échanges lors du rassemblement virtuel a écrit un poème reflétant ses émotions, ses réponses et ses espoirs de voir les effets du WAIC 2019 se prolonger . Intitulé « Appreciative Souls », son poème a été traduit par Jean Pagès pour devenir « L'essence de qui nous sommes ».

Nous espérons que ce numéro restituera l'énergie de l'événement et la fera rayonner par-delà les frontières et en direction de la prochaine édition du WAIC.

L'équipe d'accueil
November 2019

WAIC 2019

Is It Possible to Create a Better World?

This issue of *AI Practitioner* has been edited by the organisers of WAIC2019 in Nice, France. Contributions, some in both English and French, explore not just what happened there, but how it will affect what will happen in future. Contributors were asked: What came alive for you? What has changed for you since our time together in Nice? What new insights did you take away from Nice this spring? In this issue, they describe their responses.

April 2017: A Lyon-based practitioner invites us to participate in the “Dialogues en humanité” (Dialogues in humanness) event being held in the Parc de la Tête d’Or, right in the heart of the city of Lyon. This event takes place every year in June and includes a variety of meetings and presentations.

We decide, along with several other practitioners, to organize appreciative dialogues with and between passers-by and, on June 7, we mark out a space with panels, banners and chairs for our event. Our offer intrigues the public and several people decide to come and experience the interviews we are holding in the shade of the trees. These are joyful moments, full of lessons about the possibility of carrying out appreciative exchanges with no purpose in mind beyond the exchange itself and the discovery of the other.

On June 8, Jean checks his email and comes across a message from David Cooperrider informing him that, unfortunately, our friends in Brazil will no longer be able to host the 2018 WAIC as planned.

The next WAIC will therefore take place in 2019. In conversation with his associates, Christine and Jean-Christophe, Jean, in a moment of spontaneity, mentions the possibility of an IFAI application to host the event. The team of fellow practitioners are all enthusiastic! What is more, the event will tie in with the 10th anniversary celebrations of the IFAI and will give the large French community the opportunity to meet colleagues from all over the world.

Back in Paris, we (Christine, Jean-Christophe, Jean, Kti and later Eric) begin to think of an overarching thematic focus linked to contemporary issues: something appealing, which will encourage inspiring exchanges among the worldwide appreciative community.

Very quickly, we came to realize that the major issues could not be dissociated from one another and that AI can be applied to all situations.

Early stages

Very quickly, we came to realize that the major issues could not be dissociated from one another and that AI can be applied to all situations. We therefore put forward a general summary which read: “An international AI community working towards an inclusive goal: Generating constructive conversations between different global actors in order to work together towards the common good.” Clearly a very grand ambition ... and one which wouldn't go unfulfilled!

Besides an initial pre-conference day, to be covered by French participants (for the welcoming ceremony) and by David Cooperrider and Ron Fry, we organized three days focused on the following themes: the individual, the family, organizations (institutions, businesses) and society.

Realizing that we could not manage the difficult task of organizing the event alone (several of us felt somewhat anxious at the thought!), we called on the services of an experienced agency – Carco – whose directors, Sébastien and Claire, became our partners for all stages of the project.

In preparing our application, we also benefited from the valuable help of the organizers of the WAIC held in Ghent, whom we went to see, and who shared both their experience and their information with us. We are still so grateful for their help!

On January 8, 2018, we presented our project to the international commission, who granted its approval. Following a suggestion from the commission, which we were more than happy to put into practice, we included the other candidates as well as the entirety of the French and French-speaking community in the preparation process.

Time to prepare...

And off we went! We started putting together the program with the active support of Lindsey Godwin and the Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry.

And started a new adventure. We created an Advisory Committee (AC) and the first issues were raised. Working with the Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry, we identified various possible contributors, we invited French AI practitioners and participants to join the AC, as well as, most importantly, everyone involved in the other applications for the event who wanted to work towards helping the global AI community. This openness had an impact

Should we limit the number of participants to the Advisory Committee or should we try to be as inclusive as possible?

– several members of the AC got in touch to put forward some very convincing recommendations for specific practitioners. Should we limit the number of participants to the AC or should we try to be as inclusive as possible? Ultimately, we decided on the second option, which would then come to influence our later decisions.

Constant organizing, continuous adjustment

The team took shape in a laid back manner – Sébastien and Claire, would, of course, be in charge of all things related to communications, logistics and budgeting; Jean-Christophe would make sure we did things in the best possible way when securing idyllic venues in the city of Nice so as to ensure a high-quality welcome for all our guests; Christine and Jean would focus on organizing the AC as well as gathering information on and selecting workshops; Jean was given the task of making the detailed program for the keynote speakers while Kti fine-tuned the schedule, communicated with contributors and drew up a model for the meta-program ... but all of this was done through mutual adjustment. It certainly wasn't a classic project structure, but rather an experience of constant organization – or organizing – which forced us to constantly exchange with each other and continuously adjust our actions. Our personal strengths drove us to commit ourselves beyond our predefined roles, which made for a good learning experience. It was our conversations which, as the project developed, went on to create our organization.

Our capacity for positive and frank discussion ensured that something positive could be garnered from our debates.

These adjustments weren't always implemented without tensions, but our capacity for positive and frank discussion ensured that something positive could be garnered from our debates.

It goes without saying that working on a project like this isn't always the smoothest and most laid-back experience. For example, we had a few budget concerns when – just as a preliminary negotiation with the city of Nice about the reservation for a venue seemed to be coming to a successful conclusion – a last-minute discussion brought to light that the fee was in fact five times higher than we initially thought! Fortunately, we were able to get back to the original pricing ... but our budgetary concerns made a second appearance when the number of participants turned out to be lower than we had anticipated ...

When it came to venues and the practical organization of our meetings, we almost immediately decided to organize the event as an appreciative summit and planned for a large shared space for major talks as well as open spaces, each within viewing distance of one another, for the workshops. Basing this

conference on an appreciative event was extremely important to us – the format of an event reflects on its content and its intentions.

Core principles

It is important that a platform not just be offered to renowned figures from the Appreciative Inquiry community.

In building the schedule, we stuck to a core principle: while keynote speeches and contributions in the selected topics are obviously relevant, it is also important that a platform not just be offered to renowned figures from the Appreciative Inquiry community, but also to lesser-known people who could showcase their actions in different parts of the world. Our decision to showcase different views was implemented with a request sent to keynote speakers and workshop presenters asking them to take to the stage with at least one other person. This request was well understood by the community and sometimes required the speakers to search for a specific collaborator.

For the workshops, we launched a call for bids, which was met with overwhelming success – we received over 120 proposals for workshops and shorter talks (“Meet the explorers”)! It was then just a matter of choosing which proposals to accept. To do so, we called upon members of the AC and figureheads within the appreciative community to evaluate the proposals according to a set of criteria we had determined. To our surprise, the vast majority received either positive or very positive evaluations! What to do? We decided to continue with our inclusive approach by choosing to allow the presentation of several experiences. But doing this forced us to pack our schedule extremely tightly, with activities continuously from eight o’clock in the morning to eight o’clock in the evening on some days. This represented a real challenge – would the participants choose to attend the conference at all hours of the day with the beach and the terraces of the city of Nice in the spring as such an enticing alternative?

Living and breathing the WAIC, and then...

Our gamble of being confident and staying the course paid off!

Our gamble of being confident and staying the course paid off! We were shocked by the continuous attendance in the workshops, including at the most unsociable hours. We also had several keynote speakers in attendance who brought forth points of view and opinions from several different continents and countries...

The similarities between the conference and an appreciative summit were viewed positively and allowed for several exchanges between participants from all kinds of different backgrounds.

Our team experienced the incredible power of AI more than ever before – creating constructive, joyous and inspiring conversations that are having a profound and long-lasting impact.

Experiencing a global conference like WAIC has strengthened our desire to use AI to build a better world – long-lasting, thriving and full of wonder for all.



Read more in Vânia Bueno's article on page 21

It was an exceptional time for the entire team! Everything we experienced in our appreciative practice was renewed afresh through a community that amazes us with its ability to live what it professes and to continue spreading throughout the world.

Openness, generosity, hospitality and giving attention to others were not just empty words here – this became obvious when the catering director told us her employees started work in the morning with enthusiasm, because they enjoyed their interactions with the participants so much. Claire, from our agency, stressed several times how understanding people were whenever they encountered organizational difficulties.

The atmosphere in the workshops was simultaneously both joyful and studious, while the conversations that followed were always stimulating. The talks gave the opportunity to share extraordinary experiences with 400 people; these powerful feelings were intensified by the number of people present. Several great ideas on the organization of the next WAIC were put forward by the entire appreciative community, with some participants declaring that they hoped to continue the exchanges between this WAIC and the next...

Our team, for their part, experienced the incredible power of AI more than ever before – creating constructive, joyous and inspiring conversations that are having a profound and long-lasting impact.

Experiencing a global conference like WAIC has strengthened our desire to use AI to build a better world – long-lasting, thriving and full of wonder for all.

In this issue

The questions we asked the contributors to this issue of AI Practitioner were simple and profound: What came alive for you? What has changed for you since our time together in Nice? What insights did you take away from Nice this spring?

The issue begins with a look backward by Vânia Bueno to the possibilities that were the 2017 WAIC in Brazil, the problems encountered and what those possibilities became with **Acceptance, Overcoming and Hope**.

In the graphic essay that follows, Caroline Tsiang's graphic documentation of the WAIC in Nice recaptures the energy of the workshops and plenary sessions. The members of the event planning agency describe their responses to the event in an interview with Jean Pagès and Christine Cayré's **400 Hugs and 0 Complaints**.

In **WAIC – Our Great Stories**, two French AI practitioners, Annie Benzeno and Catherine Merhand report on what they and their French colleagues learned and what they will take forward from WAIC2019.

Hanneke Laarakker and Barbara van Kesteren explored **Appreciative Inquiry and the Value of Conflict** in the workshop at the conference. In their article, they explain why they chose the topic, how they provoked tension in the workshop and the participants' responses. Participants were asked to provide snippets during and after the conference commenting on their reactions and learnings. In **Snippets from WAIC2019**, these have been brought together with photos taken during the conference to create a photo essay.



[Read more about South American AI practitioners at WAIC2019 on page 51](#)

Miriam Subirana brought together one of the plenary sessions with Spanish-speaking AI practitioners from South America who devoted their session to planting seeds in the audience to co-create a future in which they and their communities generate actions for the common good. She reports on the session in **One-ness Towards Common Good: Revisiting Our Starting Point**. Cees Hoogendijk's provocative proposition led to the graphic article **Flip the WAIC**. What are the future possibilities for WAIC?

In September, Peter Pula and Yvonne Hollandy organised probably the first digital, global AI Huddle, asking the question **What has Come Alive for You Since WAIC 2019?** in which a dozen people shared reflections on WAIC and what they have taken forward as a result of attending. Finally, AIP's own Keith Storage, editor of *Voices from the Field*, was inspired after the Huddle to write a poem reflecting his emotions, responses to and hopes for the ongoing effects of WAIC 2019 in **Appreciative Souls**, which Jean translated into French, entitling it **L'essence de qui nous sommes**.

We hope that this issue will convene the energy of the event and radiate beyond the frontiers towards the next edition.

The planning team
November 2019

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