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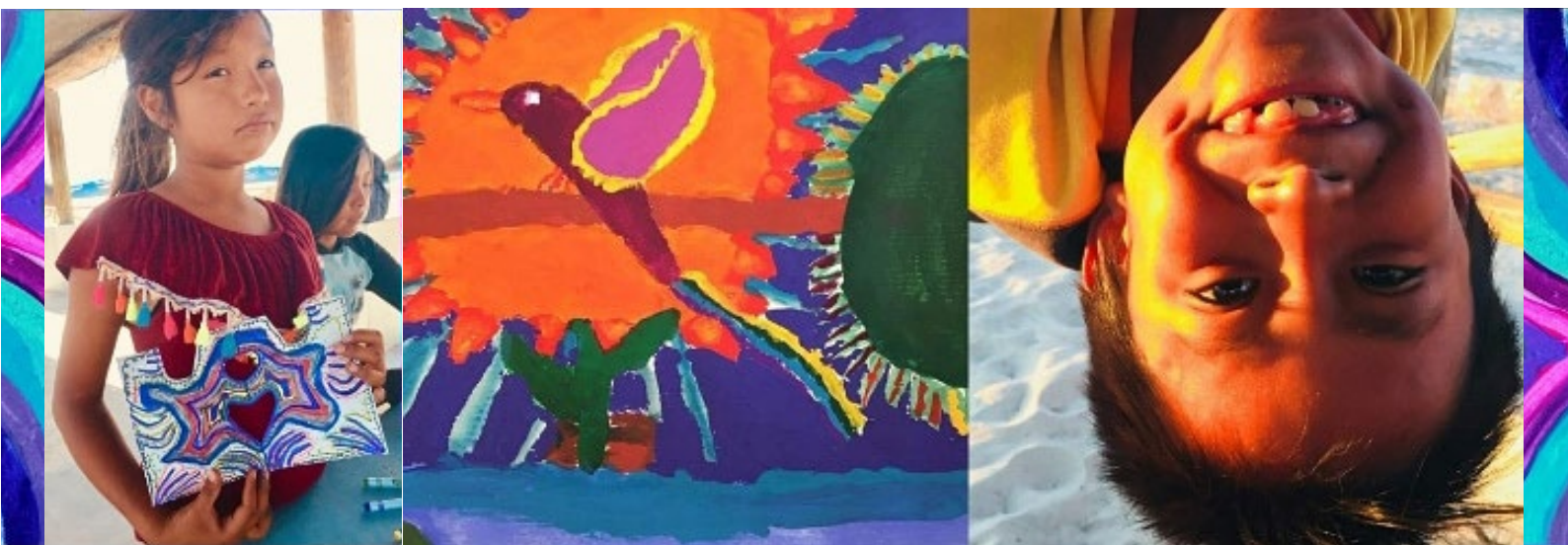
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# AI Practitioner

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## Desarrollando Equipos Apreciativos: Una Perspectiva Latinoamericana Developing Appreciative Teams: A Latin American Perspective

Edited by

**Ignacio Pavez and Federico Varona**

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### Federico Varona

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His book, "La Intervención Apreciativa" (2009), was the first on AI published in Spanish. Currently the focus of his consulting, writing and research is on the Appreciative Inquiry paradigm.

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# Developing Appreciative Teams: A Latin American Perspective

As the editors of this issue, we fully believe in the potential of the appreciative approach to create more appreciative, creative, effective, vibrant and thriving human systems in all cultures, including the Spanish-speaking cultures of Latin America and Spain. Providing content in Spanish can offer specific tools with which to generate more resilient and flourishing human and ecological systems.

We would like to begin this introductory chapter by offering our gratitude to the editorial board for supporting and promoting the first bilingual English-Spanish edition of this academic journal. As the editors of this issue, we fully believe in the potential of the appreciative approach to create more appreciative, creative, effective, vibrant and thriving human systems in all cultures, including the Spanish-speaking cultures of Latin America and Spain. The appreciative approach has been underrepresented in this part of the world in comparison with the knowledge that has been generated in North America and Europe, as shown by the dearth of interventions and publications. We are therefore pleased to contribute to the dissemination of content on the appreciative approach in Spanish.

We also believe that the appreciative approach can be of great help in addressing the challenges that Latin American countries are facing in this new century, such as poverty, inequality, political tensions, water scarcity and loss of biodiversity; these types of problems need to be supported by dialogues that allow us to co-create a better future for all of us. Providing content in Spanish not only helps to close the existing knowledge gap in our own language but can also offer specific tools with which to generate more resilient and flourishing human and ecological systems. As we write this editorial, the verses written by the Spanish poet Antonio Machado echo in our hearts and minds as a reflection of our journey with the authors. We realize that our role as practitioners of the appreciative approach is to **"make the path by walking"**; to follow the **"wakes on the horizon"** that enable us to co-create positive changes in our teams, organizations, communities and societies.

*Proverbs and Songs (XXIX)*

*Wanderer, your footsteps are  
the road, and nothing more;  
wanderer, there is no road,  
the road is made by walking.  
By walking one makes the road,  
and upon glancing behind  
one sees the path  
that never will be trod again.  
Wanderer, there is no road –  
Only wakes upon the sea.  
Antonio Machado*

*This issue presents new  
ways of implementing the  
appreciative approach in  
contexts that have rarely  
been explored in the literature,  
generating new knowledge  
that is enriched by the Latin-  
American cultural perspective.*

**The aim of this issue**

The aim of this issue is to share with the readers of *AI Practitioner* five experiences of appreciative team development interventions carried out by Latin American practitioner/authors. We know that what might be effective – and efficient – for practising Appreciative Inquiry (AI) in one culture may not work well in another, but what has proven to function in one culture may also be effective in another. This is the importance of this issue, as it presents new ways of implementing the appreciative approach in contexts that have rarely been explored in the literature, generating new knowledge that is enriched by the Latin-American cultural perspective. This is a significant step towards strengthening the theory and practice of the appreciative approach and its development in our region.

In particular, we hope readers will find a range of proposals for building appreciative teams. That is, teams that can nurture the strengths of the group in order to fulfill its highest dreams and aspirations (Pavez & Bright, 2020). Within academic literature, this topic of study (appreciative or strengths-based teams) is underrepresented in comparison with traditional problem-solving approaches, so there is limited knowledge about the group mechanisms, processes, and/or dynamics that can be activated with an appreciative or positive view of group development. This issue, therefore, should help expand this knowledge base about the theory and practice of appreciative teams.

In each article, the author describes personal experiences in applying an appreciative approach, but also integrates elements from other theories, approaches or worldviews to draw conclusions on the new ideas they have discovered and wish to share with us. Through these accounts, we believe readers

will find concrete ideas about the elements that can promote the effectiveness of AI-based interventions (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) aimed at creating more dynamic, effective and thriving teams.

## The contents of this issue

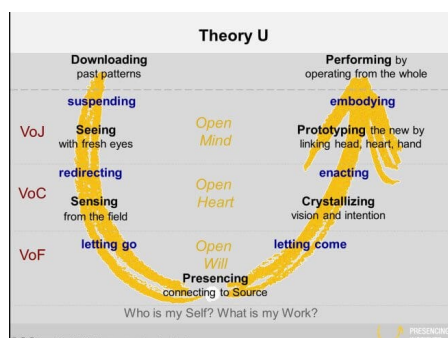
This issue is the result of a collaborative effort among the authors, with whom we could hold various (virtual) group conversations to develop an issue – with complementary approaches – that reflects the diverse range of practices that can be found in our countries. We therefore invite you to enjoy reading this issue and hope that the articles help you reflect on and enhance the practice of AI.



P. 24..

Five articles that bring together the experiences of the authors in creating or developing appreciative teams in different countries and contexts comprise this edition. The first, written by Felipe Losada and Gittith Sanchez, invites us to integrate the body through Biodanza (Toro, 2008), in order to “embody” the appreciative paradigm and give life to the language (or narrative) that is specific to this way of looking at human systems. Based on their experience and research, the authors show us that Biodanza can increase positive affect and reduce negative affect within a team, indicators that are characteristic of high-performance teams.

In the second article, Fernando Caballero calls on us to reflect on the team’s potential beyond high performance. Based on his consulting experiences in various Latin American countries, and through the story of a wonderful trip to northern India, Fernando suggests that “generativity” is more important than high performance. When a team is generative, it can recognize and appreciate the team as a unique entity, the “we”, and thus increase its ability to discover and take full advantage of its potential; creating new and more effective scenarios of functioning.



P. 68.

In the third article, Mohanad A. H. Al-Madi invites us to reflect on the challenge that leaders face when they want to help their teams embrace change and remain competitive. The aim of the author is to share how leaders and teams can use appreciative questions and dialogues to address the challenges they encounter when embracing change and thus generate the necessary motivation to be successful – together – and use their strengths towards a common goal.

In the fourth article, Juan Carlos Obrador shares his experience helping the upper management team to facilitate an organizational transformation process in a large mining company in Chile. Here, he proposes a new opening phase for the AI process by integrating components of Theory U. In this “new” first stage,

Juan Carlos suggests the importance of connecting ourselves (as a system) with the inner place from which we want to operate in order to create and sustain an effective and generative intervention.

And in the fifth article, Arnoldo Cisternas tells the story of how an indigenous rural school in southern Chile discovered and built a set of strengths to liberate learning and foster the integral development of its children. Arnoldo also tells us how the appreciative approach can help overcome the “cultural anomie” in which indigenous peoples live when they connect with the Western world.

Finally, based on her vast experience of teaching and implementing AI in different Spanish-speaking countries, Miriam Subirana offers a comprehensive perspective on the opportunities and challenges for using the appreciative approach in Latin America.

### Our view of the articles

*The authors gratify us with the wealth and power of the figurative language they employ to narrate and analyze their experiences.*

From our perspective, this issue has three interesting characteristics. The first is the diversity of the experiences of team development shared by the authors (in sports, mining, restaurant, school, and travels), showing the versatility of the appreciative approach to be implemented in different contexts. Second, the authors have included diverse theoretical perspectives that have helped them enhance and improve the effectiveness of their appreciative interventions. For example, the Biodanza System and the measurement of affect, the Two-Dimensional Model (productivity and positivity) of “Teams Unleashed”, Theory U, and Merton’s theory of cultural anomie. And third, the authors gratify us with the wealth and power of the figurative language they employ to narrate and analyze their experiences, using metaphors such as dance and the game of mirrors.

This general view, however, is enhanced by profound and innovative developments aimed at enriching the practice of AI. The first is to consider the body as an integral part of the appreciative experience (Losada & Sánchez). This perspective extends the traditional focus on language and narratives to propose that the appreciative approach can be “embodied” through experiences that connect us with others through music, sight, touch and dance. As Felipe and Gittith suggest, we believe the embodiment of appreciation can significantly complement the appreciative experience in individuals, teams and organizations.

The second important contribution is the possibility of adding a new initial phase to the AI process. In this stage, called “Intending” (Juan Carlos Obrador), the facilitating team, the client and all those who are going to take part in the



*'The success of our actions  
as change-makers does not  
depend on what we do or  
how we do it, but on the inner  
place from which we operate.'*  
Scharmer and Kaufer

intervention, become aware of – and connect to – the state of mind in which they wish to operate to garner the full potential of the process (including the “I” and the “we” in both their internal and external dimensions). This idea is based on one assumption of Theory U: “The quality of results produced by any system depends on the quality of awareness from which people in the system operate. The success of our actions as change-makers does not depend on what we do or how we do it, but on the inner place from which we operate” (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013).

Felipe and Gittith, as well as Fernando, point out the need to measure the effectiveness and efficacy of appreciative team interventions. Felipe and Gittith describe the use of the PANAS test (Watson et al., 1988) to measure the effect of appreciative interventions on the emotionality of a group, while Fernando uses the measurements of productivity and positivity developed by Sandahl and Phillips (2019). As William Thomson Kelvin stated, “What is not defined cannot be measured. What is not measured cannot be improved. What is not improved is always degraded.” Therefore, these articles remind us not to neglect assessment as an integral part of our interventions.

### Closing words

Finally, we would like to express our profound admiration and gratitude to the authors of the articles, Felipe, Gittith, Fernando, Mohanad, Juan Carlos, Arnoldo and Miriam. Accompanying them in choosing the themes, content and also writing the articles has been a whirlwind of emotions and creativity. By working together and operating with an appreciative state of mind, we transformed the challenges we encountered along the way into opportunities to create new and transformative knowledge. We would also like to express our gratitude to all of those who made the AI Practitioner possible, especially Shelagh, for supporting us throughout the process and giving us the opportunity to publish this first English-Spanish bilingual issue.

Our gratitude goes hand in hand with our commitment to continue walking together to “make the path as we go.” In order to achieve this, we suggest is necessary to consider three steps. The first is to raise awareness of the theory that underpins the appreciative approach. For this purpose, it is essential to increase the number of resources in Spanish so that people in our region can access the body of knowledge that has been developed over the course of three decades, nurtured by rigorous research on the practice of AI in a wide variety of human systems and contexts (individuals, couples, teams, organizations, communities, states and cities).

*The second step is to become, as a Spanish-speaking community, not only practitioners of the appreciative approach but also creators of new knowledge.*

The second step is to become, as a Spanish-speaking community, not only practitioners of the appreciative approach but also creators of new knowledge. To achieve this, we must strengthen education and research in the region, ideally by opening up forums for multicultural and interdisciplinary collaboration with the major centers of global knowledge, such as Case Western Reserve University and the Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry at Champlain College.

Finally, the third step is to write and publish this new knowledge using a language (narrative as well as descriptive) that can stimulate new emotions and insights about the potential of the appreciative approach for living fuller lives and creating more effective and thriving human systems.

We invite you to enjoy reading this issue and hope that the articles offer you a space to reflect and strengthen the practice of appreciative interventions.

**Ignacio Pavez and Federico Varona**  
**September, 2021**

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