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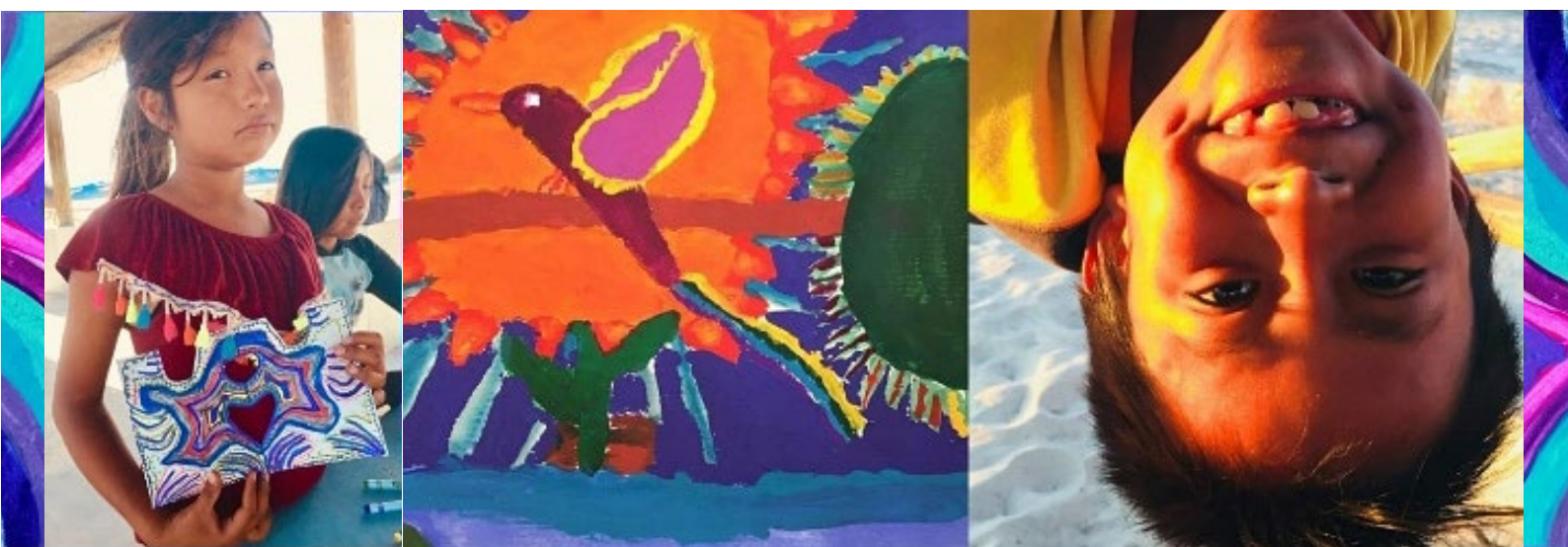
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AI Practitioner

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

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Nourish to Flourish



Nourish to Flourish brings together practitioners' voices and creative practices, and appreciative reviews of books that support strengths-based approaches to human interactions.

Voices from the Field



Keith Storace

Keith Storace is a Registered Psychologist with the Psychology Board of Australia (PsyBA) and Associate Fellow with the Australasian College of Health Service Management (ACHSM). He has designed and implemented health & wellbeing frameworks across the Community, Health, and Education sectors. Keith's current focus is developing his work on the Appreciative Dialogue (ApDi) therapy program designed to assist individuals in moving from self-doubt to inspired positive action.

In this issue of *AI Practitioner* we have three enlightening articles for Voices from the Field, each one providing a unique window into Appreciative Inquiry. Faith Addicott presents the Constructionist principle as part of her ongoing series titled 'Our Principles in Action: Appreciative Inquiry for Justice & Belonging'. We are then introduced to Vera A. Hofmann and her work, which considers the shifting narrative across business and society as it continues to move us toward a new paradigm. The third article, by Jan Driesen, examines four key factors that impact the successful application of AI throughout the organisational change process. It is my pleasure to present all three authors to our *AI Practitioner* readership.

Our Principles in Action: Appreciative Inquiry for Justice and Belonging



Faith Addicott, MPA, MPOD is working to improve the intersection of work and life through innovative and human-centered process design. Her consulting work has centered on nonprofits and local government using Appreciative Inquiry and other strengths-based processes. She is a champion for inclusive workplace design.

Faith Addicott | USA



Diversity, Equity and Inclusive spaces:
Words make worlds

The Constructionist Principle

Through the way we define our shared experiences, positive or negative, we explicitly create the container for all understanding of the world.

Words make worlds. At the core of being human is our creative capacity to name the world around us, to describe it and know it through language. Through the way we define our shared experiences, positive or negative, we explicitly create the container for all understanding of the world. Because the ways that we do this are both individual and collective, both for ourselves and in agreement with our society, the impacts of these definitions give shape to our past and our future.

In this context, as we strive for a future that is more just and where all people can thrive and belong, we step into the Constructionist principle to acknowledge that our society's choices of perspective have historically negated the contributions of Black and brown people. The voices of a significant segment of people in our cultures have not been included in the creation of a world view that holds meaning for them. If our reality holds no place for people to share in the creation of the world, there is no way to have that reality include meaningful justice.

"The good news is that since we construct our reality, we have a choice to construct it the way we want it. We are active players in our life stories."¹ Developing our understanding of the Constructionist principle and using it to guide how we create processes and policies in our organizations is a powerful lever for moving us towards equitable futures. It encourages us to co-create, to engage in intentionally inclusive practices, especially when we are choosing what we want reality to be. Opening ourselves to another person's reality and lived experience, folding that reality into the creation of possibilities, is fundamental to building anti-racist practices into action.

When we take uncertainty out, it is no longer the future.
Peter Block

There is a tension for many in embracing the Constructionist principle. This power to create can be scary ... we long for certainty, for solid truths that are immutable and beyond us. But, even in physics, we are discovering that reality is infinitely changeable, shaped by our perceptions and expectations. As Peter Block says, "... when we take uncertainty out, it is no longer the future. It is the present projected forward. Nothing new can come from the desire for a predictable tomorrow."²

¹ <https://www.vermontatd.org/blog/appreciative-inquiry-and-the-constructionist-principle-give-your-brain-a-workout-by-alexandra-arnold>

² Block, Peter, *Structure of Belonging*. 2018. Berrett-Koehler Publishers

The richness of inclusive creation and truly shared ownership of the collective narrative that allows us to build towards justice.



Vera Hofmann, founder of Dare to Imagine (2020) and driven by the question "Why do we humans do what we do?" She helps individuals and organizations as facilitator and business coach to become aware of the paradigm shifts we go through. Her online program, 'Shifting Paradigms with Appreciative Inquiry', starts in October 2021.

Vera A. Hofmann | Germany

Though it may feel risky to go to groups and challenge them to re-create their organizations with a wider aperture, this is what we are called to do.

As practitioners, we are in a position to use Appreciative Inquiry to deepen and shift not just what we talk about, but also what we understand about the nature of our ongoing conversation with reality. And with each other. It is the richness of inclusive creation and truly shared ownership of the collective narrative that allows us to build towards justice.

Shifting Paradigms with Appreciative Inquiry

Recently a friend and colleague posted an [interview](#) where we talked about fear, patriarchy, money and how they might singly or in a connected way shape how we perceive reality and react to it. Listening to our conversation once more reminded me that we are indeed living in interesting times. Times that give us the chance to not only witness but actually shape and negotiate a lot of fundamentals anew.

What do I mean by that? I believe that we stand at the cusp of a new paradigm. A time where the way we do business, how we live and work together in communities and our society, as well as, how we a) see and recognize and b) take the needs and boundaries of our home planet into account is changing rapidly and fundamentally. That conclusion in itself is nothing new. You probably have heard the term paradigm shift before. Maybe you are even tired of buzz words like these. I challenge and invite you, however, to bear with me and these words for a little longer. Usually when words like that re-appear over and over and create ripple-effects it is worth looking a little closer: what do we actually mean when using the term paradigm shift? What does the concept and its parts have to do with you and me? How are the developments that are described with that term connected with the things that you and I do, like Appreciative Inquiry (AI), personal development, facilitation of group processes and change in organizations?

When we look up paradigm shift, we find different definitions. A Wikipedia search gives us an interesting one from Thomas Kuhn. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*³ he writes: "Paradigm shifts arise when the dominant paradigm under

³ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th ed. (originally published 1952). University of Chicago Press, 2012, p. 54.

These developments can be best accompanied and supported by creating awareness and increasing the capacity for change.

which normal science operates is rendered incompatible with new phenomena, facilitating the adoption of a new theory or paradigm.” And even though he explicitly puts this definition in the context of science, it highlights the parallels to what we see happening around us in different spheres. Whether we look at our global money system with the rise of alternative currencies and blockchain technology, the dissolving of traditional hierarchies and the connected challenges around how we live and work together (just dropping in the keywords of diversity, equity and inclusion, also discussed by Faith Addicott in her series on AI and Justice in this column) both in organizations and larger societies, we’ll find plenty of major shifts happening in parallel.

Having conducted research for about a decade, I would summarize the following major developments under the umbrella term “paradigm shift”:

- Moving from centralized to decentralized power
- Appreciating diversity in and around us
- Shifting from a fear- to a purpose-, trust- or even love-based economy
- Shifts in value creation and its recognition in times of artificial intelligence
- Planetary thinking in decisions that we make as consumers, policy makers and in business

That’s a mouth full. There are many articles and books written about each of the bullet points above, so I won’t go into detail. Furthermore, this is not a journal on future research. So, you might wonder what it has to do with you, me and AI. A lot, I would say. I argue that any of these developments can be best accompanied and supported by creating awareness and increasing the capacity for change in the respective system(s). And we as AI practitioners have an enormously powerful tool at hand that will help our fellow human beings both understand what’s going on to co-create the developments and, most importantly, accept responsibility and accountability for the role that each of us plays in these developments.

AI practitioners have an enormously powerful tool that will help our fellow human beings understand what’s going on to co-create the developments and accept responsibility and accountability.

Again, I couldn’t possibly capture all of these developments and how we can relate AI to them in detail within this article. What I can do, however, is pick one central realization that is, in my opinion, at the heart of the paradigm shift. If we manage to get our head and heart around it, we might have an entry point for all other developments. What central development am I referring to? The one about shifting from a fear- to a love-based economy.

Creative thinking and the creation process that follows functions better when we are in 'flow'.

What I mean is not that I see (or want) us all to be hugging and kissing each other in the near or far future. I also think that there will still be competition and other troubles between us humans and our businesses. What I mean by a love- (or trust-) based economy is that we both realize for ourselves and then for others that work and value-creation don't have to be suffering per se and that there's enough for all of us. That we don't have to secure our existence, but that our existence is (for many) already secured.

What I came to understand is that many of us consciously or subconsciously assume that money (or any other compensation) is only earned if we suffer in the process of value creation⁴ (Taranczewski). Many assume that if we don't threaten ourselves or others, we become lazy. So we operate from fear. But we know from research that creative thinking and the creation process that follows functions better when we are in 'flow': we use our talents in a task in a way that brings joy. We know as well that people both function best in organizations and are more open to change in psychologically safe environments.⁵

So how do you help your clients to create safe spaces where they can gently transition from a fear-based culture to a culture and environment of trust and care for each other, where they can do what they love to do? How do we create safe environments that invite us to overcome our fears and step into a value-creation process based on love? We make sure, both for ourselves when we are creating products and services, and for our clients that we are operating from a "conscious space". What do I mean? In my view, it is a space where we understand where our fears come from, accept them without judgement or projection, and transform them into self-awareness, understanding and loving acceptance.

Easier said than done, I know. But there are ways to do that. I'm quite sure that many of you have plenty in your (coaching) repertoire. However, for those who still would like to learn one more, let me share with you one of my favourites that takes you, in its speediest version, only fifteen minutes.

1. When the dreadful emotion catches you, take a break and acknowledge the fact that you are in fear: anger, frustration, procrastination, you name it. This already takes courage. So, congratulations if you made that first step!
2. Take a piece of paper and a pen. You have to pin that feeling down on paper with handwriting, otherwise your mind will find a thousand ways

⁴ N. Taranczewski, *CU*money*. <https://www.conscious-u.com/cumoney/>

⁵ A. C. Edmondson, *The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth*, (John Wiley & Sons, 2018).

to let you tiptoe around it, just for you to avoid feeling what you need to feel. Why does your mind do that? Our minds are usually afraid of feelings – at least unpleasant ones – and want to protect us from being overwhelmed. Thank your mind and send it on a mini-vacation.

3. Set the timer for ten minutes. Write everything down going on inside you, without further ruminations. Be especially curious around the feelings that you find. Give these feelings a name. Then ask yourself:

- Where is that feeling localized in my body? (The neck? The legs?)
- How big is it? (A tiny cramp in the chest or filling the whole torso?)
- Does it move?
- What temperature or color does it have?
- Is there a picture or metaphor that would describe it well?
- You want to ask your body questions that allow it to go beyond the first reaction of fight, flight, freeze or fawn.

Where in your life did you first encounter that feeling?

4. And now the breakthrough question: where in your life did you first encounter that feeling? Our body has an incredible memory and stores relevant information, so it recognizes the feeling again.⁶ When we ask our body gently to guide us back to the situation when we first encountered the feeling, it will in most cases do that for us, if it feels safe enough.

This is usually the moment when I start to cry. After that contact-making with the wisdom of my body, building up the understanding and trust, my body feels safe enough to go back to and work through traumas that have kept me in the same thought-feeling-loop for years. And for me that process very often goes hand in hand with tears. The more I do these kinds of exercises, the more I get in touch with traumas that I did not even experience myself. I have the notion that it's the generations, and – in my case often the women – before me who entrust me with the healing of their traumas. My body allows me to get in touch with the bruised, terrified, tortured ancestors to sooth their pain, to comfort them, so they can share their hidden wisdom with me.

⁶ B. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma*, (Penguin UK, 2014).

In order to make that transition from a fear- to a love-based way of being and working, we have to individually and collectively heal the traumas that we have been carrying around for generations.

5. The last step is sitting with the emotion and gently holding yourself in that situation. Writing everything down helps me a lot. Or reaching out to a trusted person who can help me create comfort again and make sense of what I just experienced. It's here where the healing takes place. It's here where our level of awareness increases drastically, where the understanding both for ourselves and the way others (re)act in similar situations grows. It's here where compassion and collective consciousness rises. It's here where we make the shift from a fear to a care-, trust-, purpose-, love-driven culture.

Sound a bit touchy-feely or woo-woo? Yes.

Sounds a bit scary? Yes, to the mind it does.

Does it work? In my experience it does. But find out for yourself.

I am more and more convinced that in order to make that transition from a fear- to a love-based way of being and working, we have to individually and collectively heal the traumas that we have been carrying around for generations. We need to reconnect with and then work from outside of that space where the soft and sensitive parts of our psyche can operate best – a place of safety, enough-ness and trust. There is where we, as facilitators, play a key role. We are invited to embrace and work through our own mess first. And then to hold those around us in a loving and fear-free way so they can dissolve their traumas for themselves.

In that process of being okay with and learning from the mess, of allowing for and re-integrating the polarities in us, the rough and the beautiful emotions, the purity and the dirt, in short: allowing our whole being to be there – as the Wholeness principle of AI suggests – we can stop projecting our own pain and fears on others. That's where the paradigm shifts. From acting and re-acting out of fear and trauma towards decision and actions we take from a place of trust, care, purpose and love.

I wish you and me all the courage and trust we need to make the transition from fear to trust, purpose and love happen.



Jan Driesen works as Operations Manager for Knaek Promotions in Belgium where he is responsible for all commercial and promotional activities together with his team of Belgian city managers. He holds a bachelor's degree in Marketing. Jan is an experienced trainer in hospitality, coaching, leadership and management.

Jan Driesen | Belgium

Four Factors to Use Appreciative Inquiry During Organisational Change Processes Successfully

Have you ever wondered what makes an AI process successful? I did, which is why the main question of my master's thesis for the Master of Management program at the Hasselt University in Belgium was: "How can Appreciative Inquiry be successfully used to facilitate organisational change from the perspective of the change facilitator?". A literature study provided me with the proper insights and curiosity to pursue a more pragmatic approach. I held ten in-depth interviews with seasoned AI practitioners that provided me with an abundance of knowledge to construct the conclusion to be read in my paper. I found that the success of an AI process depends on four factors:

1. Your influence on the process as a facilitating AI practitioner.
2. The influence of the participating organisation on the process.
3. The connection, trust and involvement between all parties.
4. The architecture of the process.

In my interviews, I focused on the role and perspectives of the interviewees as an AI facilitator.

Personality layers of an AI Practitioner

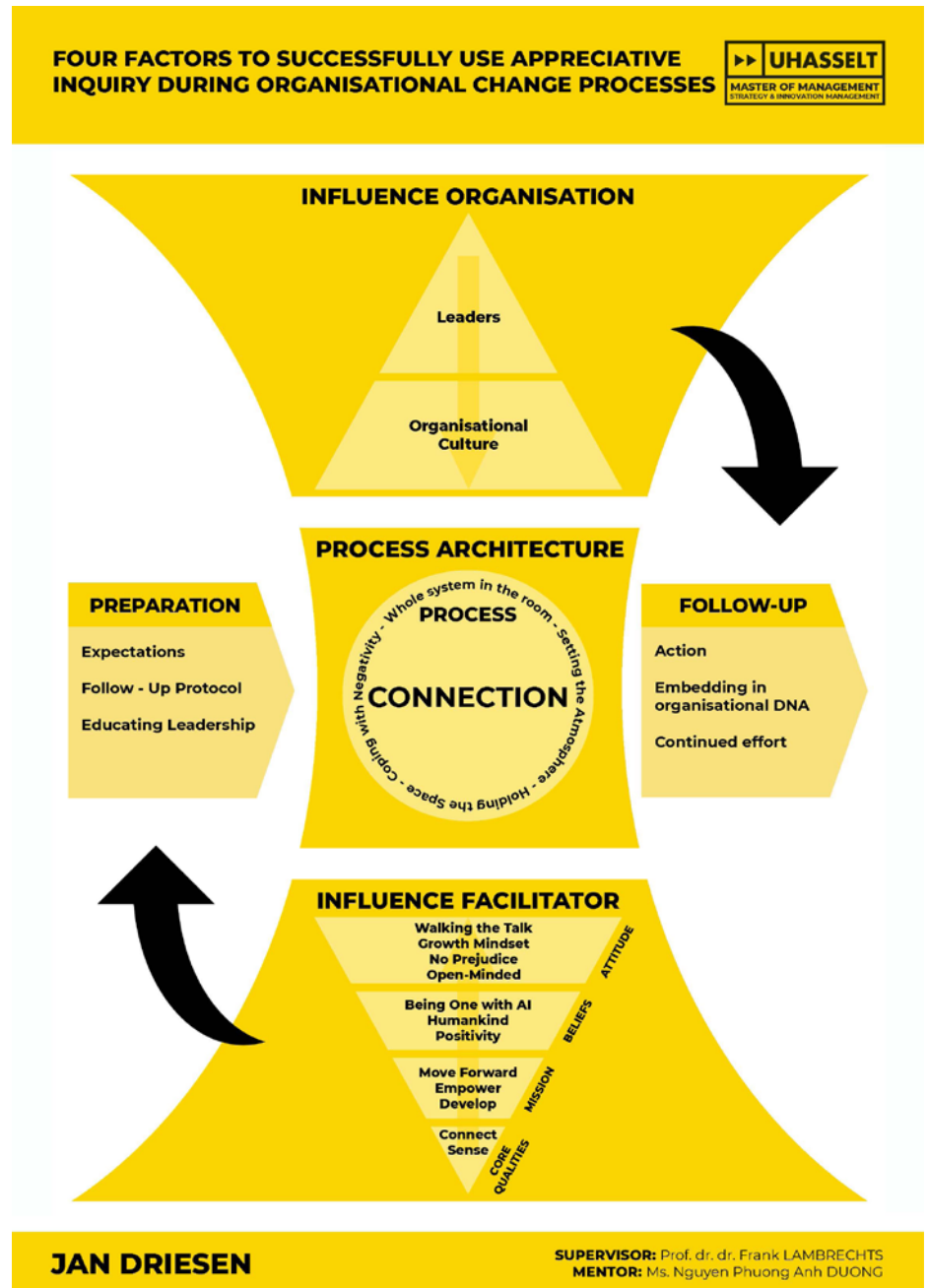
As the facilitator always brings her/himself into the process, her/his influence comes in various shapes, referring to personal elements that reflect into the several phases and parts of an AI process. Inspired by Korthagen's⁷ (2014) "onion model", I grouped my research findings into several personality layers for a successful AI facilitator. Fundamental to the onion model is the notion that several layers play a role within a person's being which influences their

Fundamental to the onion model is the notion that several layers play a role within a person's being which influences their behaviour.

7 F. A. J. Korthagen, Promoting Core Reflection in Teacher Education: Deepening professional growth. In L. Orland-Barak & C. J. Craig (Eds), *International Teacher Education: Promising Pedagogies (Part A)*, 73–89. (Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2014).

behaviour. By changing the original order of the layers, I was able to reflect more accurately the influence of these layers on the AI practitioner.

Success factors for AI in an organisational change process



The layers of the model are:

1. Core qualities
2. Mission

3. Beliefs
4. Attitude
5. Role
6. Competencies and
7. Environment.

Core qualities reveal what you're made of and are the foundation for a strong mission.

At your very centre, you find the **(1) core qualities** that reveal what you are made of. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and everyone has their qualities. However, successful AI practitioners tend to have a natural tendency to connect (with) people and sense what a process and its participants need at any given moment. These core qualities are the foundation for a strong **(2) mission**. As an AI practitioner, your mission, your reason to work from an AI stance is about moving forward together. It is about feeling energized and empowered, about seeing new opportunities, even if things don't go well. It is about helping each other learn and develop, becoming stronger and better at what you do. The pivotal difference is in the way it happens. Whereas traditional goal-oriented approaches might end in similar results, Appreciative Inquiry does it in a way through which people grow closer to each other and their goals, a large part of sustaining the desired outcome. AI enables you to use your qualities as leverage for organisational change by giving you language and method. This is why you chose to work from Appreciative Inquiry, because it does make a difference.

It is said that you become what you believe. Successful AI practitioners believe that everyone has their individuality and should be true to their own **(3) beliefs**. However, as a successful AI practitioner, you have a strong belief in humankind, you are convinced that there is always something positive and that you should appreciate whatever comes up. The good, the bad, the uncertain – all of it. Even more important, the chances of an AI process wielding a successful outcome increases substantially when the process facilitator fundamentally agrees with and believes in the philosophy behind Appreciative Inquiry. As Cooperrider and Srivastva⁸ indicated many times in their first paper on AI (1987), the successful AI practitioner does not see AI as a tool or a method, but as a way of life. A successful AI practitioner embodies the AI philosophy to at least some extent, some more than others.

⁸ Cooperrider, D. and Srivastva, S. (1987). Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life. *Research in Organizational Change and Development*, 1, 129-169, (Bingley, UK: Emerald, 1987).

Your attitude puts you in the right role.

If your core qualities reveal what you are made of, your AI mission drives what you believe and your beliefs dictate how you behave, then how exactly should an AI practitioner behave? As a successful AI practitioner, your **(4) attitude** reflects that you are open-minded and without prejudice. You strive to live the AI philosophy by appreciating whatever comes up, you adopt a student mindset and are aware that you still have a lot to learn. You set the right example for others to follow by walking the talk. As the success of an AI process is not so much about what you do but how you do it, your attitude is not to be underestimated. Your attitude is what puts you in the right **(5) role**, the role of a guide who shows an alternative way to reach goals while increasing enthusiasm, trust, connection and organisational culture. You act as a coach who puts the power into the hands of the people and helps them create something of their own, giving them a feeling of ownership and accomplishment.

The last element within the control of the AI practitioner is the element of **(6) competency**, which is not that important to the process, contrary to what many believe. People are more than just their competencies, which can be learned by anyone and do not necessarily entail success. As a successful facilitator, you owe your success more to your mindset and attitude, explained above, than to your competence. However, it is advisable to understand the foundations of AI and know about the 4D, 5D or 5D+ cycle and the principles of AI, as this enables you to implement it more effectively and freely while becoming more aware of the process, which ultimately has a positive impact on the success of the process.

Lastly, the outer layer reflects on the **(7) environment** in which this reflection has taken place. In an AI personality framework, the environment consists of everything happening during the Appreciative Inquiry process.

Other success factors

In my research, I paid attention to three other factors for successful AI processes besides the personality layers of an AI practitioner:

1. The influence of the participating organisation.
2. The quality of the connection between the parties involved.
3. The overall architecture of the process.

If the participating organisation does not allow it, the process never gets started.

Regardless of the impact you have on the process, regardless of the various aspects you have to consider, if the participating organisation does not allow it, the process never gets started. At the beginning of every process, it is crucial

to get the leadership of the participating organisation on board with what is about to happen, as they set the culture that reigns within. The culture is what undergoes the true change, which makes preparing the leaders of that culture essential for the outcome. To facilitate true, lasting change, the organisation must want it: they must be open to participate, and willing to change. To a certain extent, they must be willing to adopt an AI attitude, especially during the process.

The interconnection between all the parties involved is the foundation upon which the process is built.

Secondly, for you and the participants to exercise your influence for the better of the process, a mutual connection is imperative. The interconnection between all the parties involved is the foundation upon which the process is built. This connection is constructed through genuine conversations about valuable stories and experiences. For these conversations to take place, the element of mutual trust is vital. The participants must feel like they can trust you and each other, just as you have to feel like you can trust the participants and, in some cases, your fellow facilitators. The element of trust goes even further, it is also about your confidence in your own being and abilities. Maybe even more important, it is about trusting the process. This interconnectedness and mutual trust result in involvement from all sides. Every person in the room feels part of the same reality that combines your individual perspectives and melts them to form a bigger picture of the ideal outcome.

The AI process never really stops with a multi-stakeholder event like an AI summit.

Lastly, having a solid process architecture is a key success factor for facilitating AI-based organisational change. This architecture includes a design phase with preparation, the actual approach and facilitation of the process, and a follow-up protocol, which is crucial for the realisation of the ideas and dreams that have come out of the process. The AI process never really stops with a multi-stakeholder event like an AI summit. In some cases, the facilitation of the change process continues to run for months, or even longer. In others, the change engine is so fuelled right after the summit that self-managed change happens quickly..

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