

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 and 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.

One of the key global topics at this time in human history is about the Covid-19 pandemic that for almost two years has held our attention and challenged us to think differently. It has shifted the narrative from being predominantly focussed on the future to the here-and-now experience of how we are coping as a global community. Melisa Yildiz explains how Appreciative Inquiry can be applied for organisational changes as we figure our way through the pandemic. Faith Addicott in collaboration with Stacey Randle continues the series titled: "Our Principles in Action: Appreciative Inquiry for Justice & Belonging" with an exploration of the Narrative principle. I am delighted to introduce our voices from the field for this issue of *AI Practitioner*.

Our Principles in Action: Appreciative Inquiry for Justice and Belonging

The Narrative Principle

Faith Addicott | USA



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.

Stacey Randle | USA



Stacey Randle, MPOD is a human resources professional passionate about creating workplaces focused on helping people grow and learn. She is also an advocate for ensuring equity and justice in every aspect of her private and professional life.

Head into any kindergarten class (pre-pandemic) and you would see otherwise notoriously active five-year olds sitting quietly around their teacher. They are quiet, still, concentrating on every word the teacher reads to them. Felicity's grandmother could never be disturbed on weekdays between eleven in the morning and noon. No phone calls, no conversations. She was focused on her favorite soap opera, *The Young and the Restless*. No interruptions were allowed during this time.

What do these situations have in common? They show how a story can stop us in our tracks, disrupt habits, or transform our daily lives. Stories are impactful. Stories connect people. Stories can bring about change.

This is the essence of the Narrative principle. Like the principles already discussed (Anticipatory, Constructionist), the Narrative principle acknowledges that "The past, present and future are not separate stages, but rather beginnings, middles and endings of a story in progress. Organizations and human systems are stories-in-progress."¹ In the equity and justice space, the Narrative principle is a particularly powerful tool, ensuring that the organizational, human story is one that includes all voices.

Applying the Narrative principle gives marginalized people an opportunity to tell their stories.

We need this principle because the truth is that most of the time, marginalized people do not feel heard in the places where they live and work. Their stories are not the stories in the brochures, their experience unreflected in language or messaging. They are often discounted or minimized, pushed far from the center of the collective tale. Applying the Narrative principle gives marginalized people an opportunity to tell their stories.

This opens space for the lives of those historically silenced to occupy the center of the narrative; too often the conversation around equity and justice does not

¹ Ron Fry, <https://wholebeinginstitute.com/power-one-power-many/>

The most important part of communication isn't talking. It's listening.

focus on those impacted most, instead centering the feelings/experiences of the majority. Through the wider lens that is created when more people have a place in our shared storytelling, we can move towards real change. Peter Forbes sums up stories very well, saying that “Stories create community, enable us to see through the eyes of other people, and open us to the claims of others.”² When we can see the truth in those claims, we can give the voices of those who have suffered under inequity the power to make a different world.

There is a deeper truth in this principle as well. Stories require a teller – and someone to hear the tale. The most important part of communication isn't talking. It's listening. As practitioners, we must focus on listening, on allowing ourselves to be transformed by the stories we hear. Deep learning and opportunities to create change lie in this listening space. If we want to create a more equitable and just society, then the someone who hears must be us. All of us.

Application of Appreciative Inquiry for Organizational Changes During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Melisa Yildiz | Turkey



Melisa Yildiz is a researcher in the Netherlands (Maastricht University) and in Belgium (Hasselt University) working in the domain of Service Innovation & Management, with an engineering background. She is an experienced soft skills trainer, having delivered hundreds of hours of training sessions in the areas of leadership, emotional intelligence, and organizational skills and personal development.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had the world under its influence since early 2020 and forced many organizations to go through transformational changes and adapt to the circumstances that have emerged because of it. It is well established that Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a successful approach and change management modality for organizational development (OD). With its set of principles and implementation practices, it involves all the stakeholders of an organization, enabling them to self-determine their change and navigate through the change process. However, the literature in this field lacks information explaining whether/how it holds up when applied during a crisis. There is a gap to be filled with the discovery of the answers to the question “How can AI help organizations go through transformational changes during the Covid-19 pandemic?” To approach this gap, this study has examined:

1. “Which features of AI can be particularly useful in a time of a crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic?”

² Peter Forbes, <https://peterforbes.org/whole-people-whole-leaders>

2. “How can AI implementation processes (e.g., 4D cycle) be modified to meet the current situation of the world during a crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic?”
3. “Are there any organizational factors that can facilitate the implementation of AI during crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic?”

The conclusions were drawn by following a qualitative research methodology and interviewing eight well-respected scholars and practitioners in this field whose work has contributed to organizations and to literature about AI over decades. This was a diverse group with members from four different countries: Canada, United States, South Africa and Belgium, with differences in expertise that brought richness to the findings. No controversial data was arose from the study; all were unanimous in relation to the benefits of using AI for organizational change in times of crisis.

The findings show that when it comes to which features of AI can be of assistance in times like this, the name of the practice speaks for itself: “Appreciation” means to acknowledge the reality and complexity of the world’s situation and in doing so, contrary to what has been assumed in some literature, not labeling experiences as “good” or “bad” by focusing on one side or another. When it comes to “Inquiry”, it is about asking generative questions which invite people to reflect on their experiences. During the current crisis, the questions took a shift because the context required that in order to stay relevant.

To help organizations navigate through the uncertainty of a crisis, AI uses change questions that focus on the smallest incremental changes that are in the circle of influence with the current circumstances. Examples can be “what can we do better this week?” or “what have we achieved since yesterday?” In crises, a big challenge for all organizations is to navigate through the world’s uncertainty.

AI invites us to have a growth and curiosity mindset to perceive successes and failures as learning experiences.

AI enables that by perceiving crises as an opportunity for development in crisis contexts as much as in more predictable times. So, AI invites us to have a growth and curiosity mindset to perceive successes and failures as learning experiences. Having such a mindset amid uncertainty allows focus on incremental changes that can both influence and control at the same time. Influence and control are empowered by one of the most prominent and distinctive features of AI: strengths-based and generative probing to channel what is powerful within the organization’s context.

Another aspect that the findings shed light on is the more practical side, the implementation process of AI (e.g., 4D cycle). The findings show that the processes of AI don’t need to change, and the models essentially hold. However,

[T]he role of the facilitator ... is to fully acknowledge the impact of the crisis on the group.

regardless of whether it is applied during a crisis or not, the process is always modified based on the context and the needs of the group. Therefore, the goal of all the steps is to include every voice in the system. This makes the entire process meaningful for everyone as the organization becomes infused with innovation that results from the collaboration.

To do that, AI uses interviews and storytelling methods where each participant is asked to share their perspective and bring personal agency. Through these exercises, the organization can undertake a self-discovery of its values and understand the ways in which it can use them to navigate through the crisis. So, it is necessary to make sure that the group spends enough time on this. Therefore, another crucial element is the role of the facilitator, which is to fully acknowledge the impact of the crisis on the group. A pitfall is that some facilitators see the steps of process as linear checkboxes and follow them strictly regardless of the group's needs. However, especially in crises, the facilitator should be flexible with the process, be able to modify it based on the needs of the group and the context, and overall be ready to diverge with the group. Since the facilitator should try to establish the same quality of relatedness in crises times, the role becomes paramount.

Finally, the last set of findings in this study tackles the question "What if there are some organizational factors that can be used to facilitate the process?" First, the internal mindset of an organization and the leadership's approach play a crucial role in the effectiveness of the process. An organization first needs to be aware of the mindset it carries, and if it happens that this mindset doesn't align with what they want to achieve, they need to have the agility to change it. One other factor that is intrinsically linked with AI is effective communication. For example, the Social Constructionist principle and storytelling exercises in the implementation process help build organizational trust by using the basics of effective communication exercises naturally. Therefore, effective communication is both a part of the process and its outcome, since the process invites the organization to use these practices in the long run afterwards.

AI uses and engenders high levels of trust during crises by its inclusive nature.

Another factor that was found to be correlated with AI is organizational trust. AI uses and engenders high levels of trust during crises by its inclusive nature, beyond hierarchical barriers, which creates a sense of shared meaning. With the support of leadership, as with the other factors, trust is also encouraged during and after the process. The last factor, which has one of the strongest links to AI, is organizational resilience. Everything aforementioned works toward developing resilience because AI leads organizations to perceive crisis as a learning experience and to enhance adaptability with its practices.

Application of AI for Organizational Changes during Covid-19

Melisa Yildiz

A metaphor can summarize the main takeaways: AI is like a piece of art: with a changing context (like the current pandemic crisis) the frame changes. But the artwork inside stays the same. This means that the AI principles, features and processes still hold when applied during a crisis. All that is needed to adapt is to look at all aspects from a context (the frame) to make the practice relevant. For that, the work of the facilitator (the artist) becomes paramount. The results build on existing evidence that AI helps navigate through change and crisis, like a compass pointing at the opportunity masked by the crisis. For all those reasons, AI is an excellent method to consult and even meant for times like this.

The contribution of this study is that it supports the necessary nuances of AI practices to be implemented in times of crisis, which offers highly relevant implications for practice from first-hand experience. There is a consensus that there will be a mix-up of virtual and in-person practices. A further study can examine the reasons for and in which practical ways online and in-person practices can be interlaced.

