AI Practitioner

International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry

Learning and Leveraging Generative Approaches to Intercultural, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Edited by
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Inside this issue

AI **Practitioner**

Ilene Wasserman

Ilene Wasserman, president of ICW Consulting Group and senior leadership fellow at Wharton College, has been on the cutting edge of practice and research in strengths-based methodologies and relational leadership, engaging diversity, promoting equity and fostering inclusive cultures. She co-authored *Peer Coaching at Work*
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Marlene Ogawa works on collaboration-building principles of inclusive relational leadership and connectedness. Marlene strategically holds space using methodologies like Appreciative Inquiry and diversity, equity and inclusion, and transformative processes, towards activating and building individual agency towards collective systemic social change.
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Tanya Cruz Teller's organisation development work is committed to a diverse, equitable and inclusive world through building great organizations. She specialises in blended, a/synchronous online engagements that maximise inclusion, innovation and inspired action. Tanya co-authored *Thriving Women, Thriving World*.
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Learning and Leveraging Generative Approaches to Intercultural, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The commitment to meaningfully and transfomatively address intercultural, diversity, equity and inclusion issues in organizations has grown exponentially. In this issue we invited a diverse group of people to tell the stories of what they were discovering and learning from this work. The articles also reflect the diversity of journeys and hard work within organizations.

We are very excited to bring this edition to life. The genesis for this issue was seeded in our work as practitioners in the field of organization and leadership development (OD, LD) who take an appreciative approach to foster inclusive cultures and promote social justice. In the past couple of years, the commitment to meaningfully and transfomatively address intercultural, diversity, equity and inclusion (ICDEI)[1] issues in organizations has grown exponentially, in large part due to the awareness which was raised and the call to action that followed the murder of George Floyd in the USA. In the wake of this and similar tragic events, processes for intervening and training programs have been greatly sought after. Most programs have not centered on Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Our focus in this special issue is to amplify positive deviance in the OD and LD fields, to share what is possible and to ignite more of you to engage and share what you are learning.

1 Intercultural competence is a range of cognitive, affective and behavioural skills that lead to effective and appropriate communication between people of two or more cultures. Intercultural work can take place in multicultural or cross-cultural context, within national borders or around the world. Diversity is across a broad range of markers such as but not limited to: race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, gender identity, neuro and physical abilities, socioeconomic class, spiritual, nationality, citizenship, language and so many more. (For a list of 39 diversity markers in the workplace see: https://builtin.com/diversity-inclusion/types-of-diversity-in-the-workplace)

The task of AI is the quest and search for what gives life and deep meaning.
David L. Cooperrider

David Cooperider, in his April 2020 article Appreciative Inquiry in a Broken World reminds us that:

> Appreciative Inquiry is not about positive or negative. Its call is to transcend this polarity. It's not about positive or negative human experience but inquiry into life: the task of AI is the quest and search for what gives life and deep meaning – even in the midst of the tragic.

In this issue we invited a diverse group of people to tell the stories of what they were discovering and learning from this work. We asked: "How has this work transformed individuals and collectives in the system? What has been your biggest lesson and discovery about yourself?" We were inspired by the submissions we received.

We selected articles written by authors from across the globe and different backgrounds. The diversity between practitioners can be seen even in the variations of the ICDEI acronyms and terms. A reflection of the global diversity between us as editors and in the articles that you'll find is a mix of English spelling. The articles also reflect the diversity of journeys and hard work within organizations, by staff in partnership with experts, working to transform their organizations.

The heart and critical importance of the use of the self

A central tenet of our field of organization development and change is the use of self as an instrument of change.[2] In this work, the use of self is about appreciative living and inquiry, awareness and curiosity of what makes trust, power and privilege. The transformation has to be individual and internal, in relationship with those around us and with the larger systems we work in. In these articles, the heart and the critical importance of the use of self in the deep work of change at the personal, team and organizational levels are part of our journey of Discovery.

Tracey Allard writes about how AI might be a useful strategy for opening important race dialogues, then going deeper to a place where we dare to dream, design and co-conspire toward a new reality. She describes building cohesion and alignment between Black leaders, of cross-racial (cross-gender, cross-nationality, etc.) support between Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and of understanding and allyship between BIPOC and white people.

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2 McKnight, L. (2017) *OD Consultant's Use of Self in Facilitating Change: From Functionality to Mastery.*
https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2014.10806abstract

Joana Dos Santos uses AI to develop organizational values rooted in social justice and DEI at the University of Michigan, where they created the College Compact, which articulates their commitments for their interactions and relationships with one another.

Sharon Thompson-Tan describes the importance of the use of self in change initiatives, a mindful approach that engages the authenticity and credibility of the change team and does so with love and appreciation.

Jeanie Cockell and *Joan McArthur-Blair* write about a process that guides people to understand how privilege or lack thereof influences the work we do and how we do it. Through their own reflection and self-disclosure as two lesbian women, they model deep humility and a deep willingness to understand the critical importance of looking at one's own biases, and to navigate the tragedy privilege imposes on so many in this world.

Inner work

Our view is that we need to do our inner work in order to do the sometimes-not-so-easy ICDEI work in the world. This inner work involves both recognizing the trauma of what has been and what is, and bringing about hope and possibilities about what could be, in real time. The only way meaningful transformation happens is if we focus on the self, others around us and the larger collective towards collaborative action as highlighted in these articles:

Eunice Aquilina writes about an approach that guides women to re-author their inherited relationship to power, shifting from the dominant narrative of "power over" to "power with". This approach allows not only individual women to step into their power, but organizations and wider society to harness their wisdom. Her approach is action-research, which could in turn bring about a ripple of cultural change in organizations, one conversation at a time.

Saiyyidah Zaidi addresses how we can curate real psychological safety to be able to convene and participate in the vital, complex and nuanced discussions in the arena of diversity and inclusion. Using facilitative practices, vulnerability is unlocked, truths are shared, and a deep sense of belonging and understanding is cultivated. This article demonstrates how the use of AI approaches in diversity and inclusivity education and training is critical for enabling and empowering difficult conversations to take place.

Mercedes Martin and *Ilene Wasserman* offer a narrative arc to look at "sustainable equity" for organizations working with leaders to create a "sustainable mindset" by taking a deep dive into how their social identity and lived

experience influence their leadership style. This exploration allows for a closer examination of how mindset, behaviors and attitudes can facilitate or impede sustainable, equitable and inclusive leadership practices within an organization. A combination of effective executive coaching, customized assessment tools and immersive learning experiences moves leaders beyond awareness-raising and motivates them to shift their perspective and mindset, while engaging in behaviors and strategies that promote sustainability, equity and inclusion.

Florence Delacour Le Petit writes about how appreciative questions were used to address a need for gender diversity at top management level in the French banking industry. AI principles were used in the development of a transformational change process in a managers' group. This process led to the development of a new program supporting a pathway for sustainable gender diversity.

Chris Altmikus, *Melanie McGovern* and *Martin Proksch* offer a team-based approach to nurturing a true sense of belonging through diversity, equity and inclusion. They write about a learning process that uses a facilitated itinerary of self and collective discovery that develops a shared understanding while collectively building a better way of working.

Read the article by Chris Altmikus, Melanie McGovern and Martin Proksch on page 56

Healthy relational power

Organization development and change involve people. Those elevating the complexities of ICDEI especially are most impactful when they are in healthy relationships with each other. This relational power is articulated in many of the articles. Two articles, written in collaboration between consultant and client, tell stories of creating trust in institutions and organizations, and impacting organization systems and processes in real time:

Tracy Brala, Kristy Traylor, *Ilene Wasserman* and *Jeff Branch* share the design and facilitation of an AI approach to engaging the whole organization in looking at DEI in a systemic way – one that goes beyond the internal boundaries of the organization and examines its relationships with its stakeholders and its history.

Read the article by Matt Bittner et al. on page 66

Matt Bittner, *Beth Gibson*, *Lindsey Godwin*, *Jenifer Johnson*, *Molly McGuigan*, *Maurio Powell*, *Charlene Solomon*, *Cindy Stull*, *Angel Walker* and *Olivia Zerapio*'s internal-external collaboration details Dealer Tire's journey to create a multi-stakeholder, virtual AI-dialogue process called "Conversations on Inclusive Leadership". This process aimed to both create clarity about what inclusion meant to Dealer Tire and identify specific actionable ideas to strengthen inclusion throughout the organization. Their article details their approach

and offers insights for other organizations interested in approaching inclusion work through an appreciative, dialogic, whole-system process.

Space for young voices

We also created space for submissions from institutions that engage young people. Two articles focus specifically on working with teens and young adults to engage their voices and, in the process, build their confidence and sense of agency. While these articles are not about organization development, we chose to include them because we value and acknowledge the importance of the voices and engagement of young people.
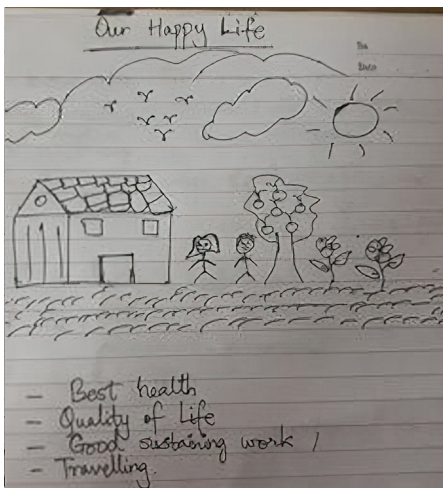
Read the article by Adam Sharpe et al. on page 75

Adam Sharpe, *Sadip Raj Pandey*, *Leizl Agad* and *Avini Dixit* tell the story of a six-week AI-based learning journey that catalyzed nineteen online and in-person youth-led activities in partnership with over twenty-six local community groups to protect the Bagmati River in Nepal. The authors pose the question: in an age where trust in public institutions is at an all-time low, particularly among youth, how can we empower them to participate in development policies and practices to reach their fullest potential, maximizing their contribution to a better future for all?

Guillaume Laurie writes about the "Learning Community Program" designed to increase inclusion in higher education at a business school in France using Appreciative Inquiry. This program welcomes students in the first year of their master's program, particularly targeting people from different countries or backgrounds (engineers for example) who are not always sure they deserve to be in the program because of imposter syndrome, lack of self-esteem or lack of self-confidence.

These articles describe the specific intention of the institution or program to expose students to AI in the context of ICDEI. The hope is that these institutions ground future leaders and employees in the competencies of appreciative living, and in being advocates for intercultural and diverse workplaces they will enter. The invitation is for institutions to create experiences for students which they can then model transformative futures within their studies, and ultimately their workspaces.

Embodying the transformation we want to see

This issue speaks to the structural inequality and injustice that exists and needs to be dismantled, while imagining with hope, energy and interconnectedness. This is the invitation to AI in the midst of the tragic. All of us Dream of living appreciatively, of living in a world that is intercultural, diverse, equitable and

inclusive. We have to embody, model and practice the transformation we are working to see in the world.

All the articles combined highlight relational power that manifests from our inner wisdom, learning and knowing and the external expression of compassion, kindness and love. If we are being and doing so, we can more easily influence and transform the organizations we are working in, our relationships with colleagues or clients we work with, the students we serve, the institutions that teach and guide us, the communities we live in, and the planet we preserve. Designing for this creates our Destiny.

As editors, our invitation to you is to be on a somatic journey, noticing both healing in action and healing of the self, while recharging, reigniting or energizing what the work is for you. As practitioners, both those new to the field of ICDEI and those who have years of experience, let's continue together to learn with each other, changing the world as we do the work. That is our Destiny in action.
Ilene Wasserman, Marlene Ogawa and Tanya Cruz Teller
November 2022

A note from the Managing Editor

I would like to add a short note explaining the layout of this issue, which differs slightly from the one readers may expect: this topic was so rich, with so many and such diverse responses that we decided to forgo the Feature Choice, Research Review & Notes and Appreciative Resources articles this time to let the varied and diverse voices speak up and be heard.
Shelagh Aitken
Managing Editor, AI Practitioner

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The David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry is the global Center of Excellence in Appreciative Inquiry and strengths-based organizational management. Situated in the Robert P. Stiller School of Business at Champlain College, the Center:

- Provides cutting-edge educational offerings in AI and Positive Organizational Development,

- Provides AI-related organizational consultancy services to organizations,

- Serves as a scholarship incubator that advances the theory and practice of AI across all organizational sectors around the world.

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Kessels & Smit, The Learning Company is an international group of consultants, coaches and facilitators with a passion for learning and development. From their bases in The Netherlands, Belgium, South Africa and Germany they support individuals, organisations and communities around the world to strive for solutions that build individual growth, sustainable organisational development, and social change. They carry The Learning Company as their name because:

- Learning is at the heart of what they do: they aim to create and facilitate powerful learning processes.

- The professionals from Kessels & Smit want to be good company to each other and to people they work with: they believe the best solutions are developed in partnerships.

- They strive to be a learning organisation, constantly renewing their work processes, structures and approaches. The company is their "laboratory", where they experiment and find answers for learning and development and organisational questions.

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