Nourish to Flourish

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

Voices from the Field

Keith Storace | Australia

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In a world rapidly evolving with life-changing technologies it's easy to be apprehensive about the future, especially when contemplating the integration of artificial intelligence into our lives and workspaces. However, there is potential for a remarkable synergy between artificial intelligence and Human Flourishing that holds immense promise. Sasha Farley, our Voice from the Field in this issue of AI Practitioner, highlights how Appreciative Inquiry (AI) emerges as a powerful tool in this journey, allowing us to purposefully reimagine these new technologies that can assist in fostering a sense of flourishing and fulfilment. It's my pleasure to present Sasha's timely, insightful, and impactful work to our AI Practitioner readership.

Sasha Farley | Puerto Rico

Sasha Farley (She/Her) MSOD, is the founder and CEO of Sasha Farley Consulting where she uses Appreciative Inquiry and other techniques with her clients to reimagine how they work to create opportunities for flourishing and fulfillment. She also co-hosts the Transformation Horizon podcast, which highlights stories using Organization Development to make positive societal impacts.
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How can emergent technologies help support human flourishing?

When thinking about what the future will look like in relation to how we work and what work will mean to us, two concepts keep coming up in my mind: artificial intelligence and human flourishing. On the surface, these seem like competing concepts, but the more I think about their interconnection, the more I see the potential for

artificial intelligence and other new technology tools to actually support our ability to realize human flourishing.

We live in a fast-changing world, where many of us have experienced significant changes in how we work and interact throughout our lives. I only need to think back to the introduction of computers into our work/school life and the impact of social media on how we connect and market businesses to see concrete examples of the consequential impact of new technology. As these technologies integrated into our lives, we faced the same widespread fear and uncertainty that we are experiencing now in response to artificial intelligence and the fully virtual workplace.

Reframe and reimagine

If we can recognize the cycles that exist for the human experience within technology evolutions, we can reframe feelings of uncertainty and fear into hope and opportunities. For me, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) emerges as one of the best tools for organization development (OD) practitioners to facilitate this perspective shift. The use of AI techniques can support clients to purposefully reimagine the ways these new technologies can be integrated, not in an extractive way, but to instead create a sense of flourishing and fulfilment.

There is a positive side of feeling overwhelmed that AI approaches can leverage.

How can AI help us achieve this? The challenges coming our way as a result of artificial intelligence and virtual work tools is massive and can easily lead us and our clients to feel overwhelmed, to focus too much on the problems and blockers. But there is a positive side of feeling overwhelmed that AI approaches can leverage to create positive energy. Frequently, when groups experience overwhelm, they let go of preconceived notions and open up to new possibilities. This openness to new ideas can be cultivated through identifying a common, energizing goal to work towards – an "inspiring image" in AI terms.

A life full of meaning

A potential inspiring image that keeps coming to mind for me that can encourage openness to new ideas amidst overwhelm is the idea of human flourishing. Human flourishing is the concept of living a life full of meaning, connection and enjoyment, with support for us to realize our human capacities and strengths, a life that holds intrinsic value in having a sense of purpose outside of ourselves.

The PERMA model by Dr Martin Seligman (2013) captures five key aspects that collectively help define human flourishing:

- **Positive emotion**: Experiencing more positive emotions (happy, hope, interest, joy, love, compassion, pride, amusement, gratitude, etc.) about the past, present and future.

- **Engagement**: Fully using your skills, strengths and attention for a challenging and rewarding task.

- **Relationships**: Having strong connections to others where you feel supported, loved and valued.

- **Meaning**: Feeling a sense of meaning and purpose derived from belonging to or supporting something bigger than oneself.

- **Accomplishment/Achievement**: Working towards and reaching goals.

There is a shift occurring, largely driven by workers themselves, to start fostering and building structures and resources that recognize people as whole human beings. So the pursuit of enabling human flourishing within organizations can act as a powerful, inspiring image to help focus the openness to new ideas that can stem from feeling overwhelmed by new technological changes.

Happy, fulfilled and supported workers can better tap into their creativity.

Only in recent decades, however, have organizations begun to recognize that happy, fulfilled and supported workers can better tap into their creativity to drive innovation. And organizations have only just begun to truly recognize that innovation that comes from within the company is crucial for maintaining a competitive advantage in the fast-changing world we live in. Given this more recent emergence, leaders are still being pressured to support the more traditional views of business that prioritize increasing productivity and efficiency above all else. So we frequently see leaders who are trying to reconcile these seemingly competing approaches to success.

Productivity + creativity?

A decrease in need to spend time on repetitive tasks can provide more time to allow people to tap into their more creative potential.

One eye-opening moment for me was when I stepped back and looked at the possible uses of artificial intelligence and virtual work tools through the lens of these duelling desires of productivity and creativity within organizations. While there are many examples of organizations using these tools to replace workers or increase drain on workers, both tools have the potential, when thoughtfully incorporated into work cultures and organizations, to free workers from mundane, repetitive tasks and purposeless interactions. This decrease in need to spend time on repetitive tasks can in turn provide more time to allow people to tap into their more creative potential.

Recent early-stage research shows that when workforces are freed from the pressure of constantly needing to produce more, faster, they perform better and are happier in their work. So the opportunity for realizing human flourishing becomes more possible when organizations can purposefully plan and use these technologies to remove the burden on workers to execute the tasks more efficiently handled by computers.

A perspective shift
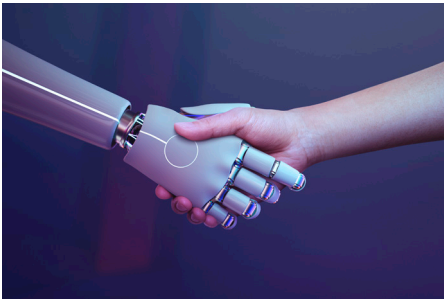
If we can help leaders focus discussions and energy around how to use artificial intelligence and virtual work tools to remove the burden and drain experienced by workers, we can help make these same technologies into tools to help support people's ability to have the time and space necessary to think creatively and do tasks that bring meaning and fulfilment. OD practitioners using AI are uniquely positioned to help leaders make this perspective shift and help them realize that they can receive the benefits of increased efficiency and production through the use of emergent technologies, while also better leveraging their human talent for open, innovative and creative pursuits.

One way of steering these discussions is pairing AI's impactful questions with the inspiring image of supporting human flourishing in the workplace. For example, we can use the PERMA model to develop impactful questions to guide discovery and design efforts, such as

PERMA

Positive emotion

Engagement

Relationships

Meaning

Accomplishment

- **Positive emotion**: What activities that we do make us feel the best about our work? What tasks do we do that drain our energy and cause frustration? How can we best use technology to increase our ability to do activities that make us feel good and decrease the need to do tasks that drain us?

- **Engagement**: How can we better organize ourselves and leverage technology to provide more time and space for people to find their flow and best contribute their strengths?

- **Relationships**: How can we create opportunities for people to connect with each other in the amount of time and timing that they want? When have you used technology to connect deeply with others?

- **Meaning**: What positive impact do we bring for our customers? How can we use technology to allow us to focus our work in these areas while still delivering our products/services?

- **Accomplishment/Achievement**: How do we successfully integrate emergent technology into our teams without sacrificing feeling fulfilled and energized by our work? How can we best track our success around technology integration in both productivity and connection?

We can help leaders shift their perspectives.

By using these types of exploratory questions, AI can help identify possible practices that can be integrated into organizations' structures and processes to help shape the design and integration of these new technologies. In this way, we can help leaders shift their perspectives and drive their organizations forward through the uncertainty of the upcoming technology transformation by providing tools for them to purposefully shape their own futures.

In addition, by using our unique skills as OD and AI practitioners, we can help make incremental and transformational progress towards reshaping systems and cultures to support human flourishing instead of focusing entirely on productivity and efficiency.

REFERENCE

Seligman, M. E. (2013). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being.* Atria Paperback.