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INTERGENERATIONAL

"Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much."
-Helen Keller



Intergenerational Appreciative Inquiry in Conversation and in Action

Edited by

Marge Schiller
Matthew Moehle
Peter Whitehouse

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Intergenerational Appreciative Inquiry in Conversation and in Action

Inside this issue

Welcome to May 2015 issue of AI Practitioner

Intergenerational Appreciative Inquiry in Conversation and in Action celebrates the diversity and generativity of intergenerational conversations. Business, education and communities show what they can achieve by reaching out and connecting with different age groups. They share their successful methods to 'go between in order to create the beyond'.

In her Feature Choice, Jacqueline Wong develops a model for engaged governance

in reviewing the momentous citizen engagement process in Singapore that involved 660 dialogues, 47,000 who met in face-to-face meetings and 4,000 more who engaged online.

In Research Review & Notes, Gail Simon at the University of Bedfordshire in the UK highlights cases on collaborative or reflexive inquiry from social services.

AI Resources includes a variety of resources related to intergenerational efforts that celebrate diversity.

We would like to thank Appreciating People for sponsoring this issue.

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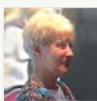
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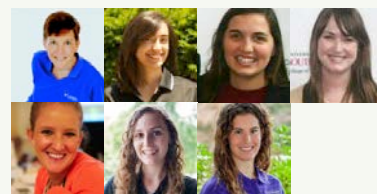


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Dr Gail Simon

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Appreciative Inquiry Research Review & Notes

This RR&N has reports on the place of AI as a form of collaborative or reflexive inquiry from staff and alumni from our doctoral and M-level programmes at the University of Bedfordshire, UK. Two cases are from a nursing home and a children's disability organisation in Denmark; one is from a UK local authority on enabling reparatory thinking in social work; and there are appreciative insights on inter-generational hate.

Appreciative Inquiry as Organisational Research Culture

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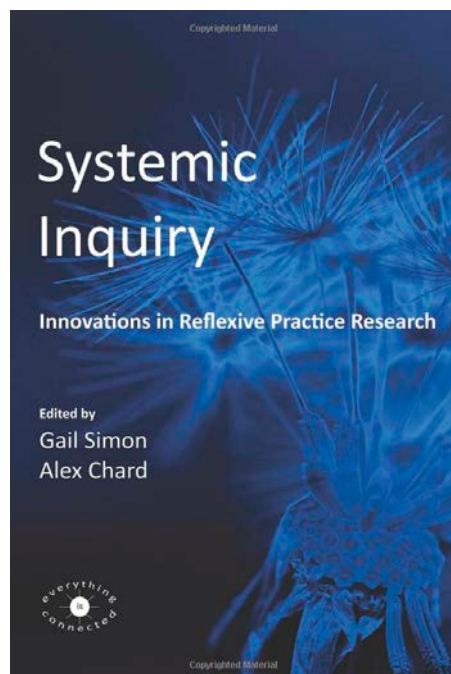
Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is useful in organisations to enable an organisational research culture, where employees use appreciative and generative principles continually to research questions important to quality, success, teamwork and collaboration in an organisation.

The following cases from Denmark show an appreciative organisational research culture developed using two levels simultaneously:

1. At the individual level Employees use appreciative and generative principles to research their own practice. The consultant takes on the role of teacher, introducing employees to appreciative skills such as appreciative questioning and positive reframing, to design generative research processes.
2. At the organisational level Employees create environments for co-research, creating a cultural sense-making process, with the consultant as a facilitator and role model. This level strengthens shared meaning and research culture.

Case 1: A nursing home

In one nursing home, employees were trained in appreciative skills such as appreciative questioning (4D model) and positive reframing over three half-day sessions. Employees designed action research processes for their own practice. Some researched quality improvement for particular residents, e.g. life quality for particular residents with dementia. Others researched quality improvement in team



processes and organisational processes, e.g. continuity between shifts or team meetings. To map the effect on the organisational culture, quantitative data was collected looking at three questions:

- To what degree can I manage a disagreement with residents and/or relatives?
- To what degree can I manage a disagreement with colleagues?
- To what degree can I intervene in a positive way, when colleagues disagree?

Each question was mapped each training day on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 6 (mastery). Fifty-one employees participated. On average, responses to question A show an improvement from 3.94 to 4.67 (an increase of 0.73). Responses to question B improved from 4.05 to 4.69 (0.63). Responses to question C improved from 3.82 to 4.31 (0.49). Leaders evaluated this as significant improvement.

Case 2: A children's disability organisation

Employees in a children's disability organisation (approximately 80) trained in appreciative research skills at a two-day seminar. Additionally, eight employees (two from each section) met with section leaders and the superintendent for four half-days to continue the training and extend research initiatives. Further, the leaders had separate training sessions to take on roles sustaining the new culture. The process spanned ten months.

Some employees researched quality improvement for particular children, e.g. increased learning for children with autism. Others researched quality improvement in team processes and organisational processes, e.g. quality in team meetings.

To map the effect on the organisational culture three types of data were collected:

1. Savings: Two million kroner (approximately £200,000 pounds) was saved.
2. Reduction in sick leave: Reduction from an average of 12.05% to 2.20% – a reduction of 81%.
3. Impact on employees and language: Employee interviews showed the impact of appreciative organisational research practice on the following aspects of organisational culture:

“The project has made employees significantly happier... significantly happier.”

“The appreciative language creates a culture where children's resources and potentials are what is most important.”

These cases show that AI can be used to create an organisational research culture which can potentially impact organisational circumstances, such as levels of competence, economy, sick leave and employee understanding of organisational culture.

This leads to the recommendation that AI-practitioners can and should create further case studies about the impact of appreciative and generative principles on organisational culture using both quantitative and qualitative data.

Utilising Appreciative Inquiry: Avoiding Blame and Enabling Reparatory Thinking in Social Work Organisational Consultancy

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In 2009, the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) developed a systemic approach to case reviews that they argue “provides the opportunity to study the whole system, learning not just of flaws but also about what is working well” (Fish, Munro and Bairstow, 2009, 2). The SCIE model and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) are both concerned with organisational and individual functioning, and the relationship between the two. Both are structured to address good practice, as well as identifying what went wrong in a particular case.

I was invited to undertake a case review by a local authority (LA) in England because of the dramatic breakdown of a Special Guardian Order placement. A court had made the order, supported by the LA, so a three-year-old child could be placed with a relative. Within the year the child had been rejected by his new family, sustained injuries and was emotionally troubled. I was asked to examine the decision-making processes. The LA’s interest was about positive learning from this case review, rather than negative blaming. The SCIE and AI approaches used together foregrounded the importance of identifying what worked well, creating safe space to consider what went wrong and why.

One of the striking features was the determination of the professionals involved to do the best for the child in question. It was therefore of particular interest to consider why their good intentions had not come to fruition. Another feature of this case was the good practice that I came across, reading the related LA and court papers as well as through the 22 interviews I conducted.

The SCIE and AI approaches enabled:

- A child-focussed, collaborative, rigorous and relationally based and focussed case review
- Strengths and limitations of professional and organisational practice to be explored
- Themes to be identified impacting on decision making and social work practice
- Interacting factors to be noted that led to the SGO placement breaking down, rather than a single cause

- Findings from the specific case to be considered by the LA to improve SGO practice, in order to secure permanence for children
- The case review process itself to be a reparatory experience; individuals within a safe interview space talking together, examining the minutia of the relational dynamics that led to decisions being made in the way they were.

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Inter-Generational Hate: An Appreciative Perspective. A Reflection on Some Insights from Barge and Oliver (2003)

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I facilitate a psychotherapy group in which one new group member reported that she did not feel like making an effort to engage with other group members. Other group members expressed how they found it impossible to reach her. In a 1:1 session soon after, she described to me how she felt hatred towards others...She went on ... 'I am hate'. I felt a surge of sadness as I experienced in the room an image of the child who had learnt that the way to emotionally survive in her family was to take on the mantle of hate, rather than face the hatred of her mother. I told her of my split emotional experience (feeling cut off and feeling sad) and shared this image of the vulnerable child with her The group member cried as she thought back to a more innocent time of struggle and the emotional dynamics that characterized her family life.

This description represents the observations, imaginings and actions of a psychotherapist, noting her own emotional responses and sharing her experience purposefully with a psychotherapy group member. It does not represent a typical "AI" response: hate, a "negative" emotion is inquired into. Perhaps inquiry into love in that moment would have created a discontinuity, reinforcing feelings of desolation and an experience of relational disconnection. The inquiry here was reflexive in nature, appreciative of the complexity of emotional communication and mindful of the ethical and practical consequences for identity and relationship of engaging with the other, using Reflexive Inquiry as a contextualization of appreciation (Oliver, 2005).

Barge and Oliver (2003), in line with a social constructionist world view, advocate that the meaning of appreciation is contested, complex, local and emergent... “individuals need to pay attention to the unique meanings constituted in the intersection of discourses during particular conversational moments” (p. 16). They advocate contextualising AI work with an appreciative spirit, committed to holding the complexity of meaning and resisting the temptation to polarise through constructing categories of “positive” and “negative”. They propose an appreciative spirit that comprises three abilities:

1. *An appreciation of the life enhancing* This involves the facilitation of purposeful movement forward for an individual or group, not exclusively linked to questions about high points or what works well, but also the exploration of vulnerability, distress, critique and even complaint. AI here requires situated discernment within a conversation, sensitive to the multiplicity of contexts shaping and being shaped by the conversation.

2. *An appreciation of the connection between spirit and technique* This highlights the value of coherence between approach, method and technique, and resists decontextualised use of tools such as the 4D model.

3. *An appreciation of the value of reflexivity* This emphasises how reflexivity, a sensitivity to what you bring to and create in a discourse, helps connect people to what matters to them and others, and to what part they may be playing in their own and others’ futures, through the forms of talk they engage in.

In the example above, the life-enhancing moment for the group member was that she was enabled (temporarily) to bring together her feelings of hate with feelings of pain and sadness, humanising herself and the other in the process. The situated intervention of the psychotherapist was formed from a sense that the split between love and hate was destructive and needed to be brought together for forward movement to occur. She used her own reflexive emotional response in the service of development of the individual and of the relationship.

“Conversation shapes the form of rationality, the type of power relationships, the identities of individuals and collectivities, and the types of emotions that are experienced...” (Barge and Oliver, 2003, p. 3). What follows from this is a moral obligation to coordinate conversations productively, embracing and not discounting “negative” expressions of emotion. The research work of Oliver and Fitzgerald takes this investigation further and explores the potential consequences of “shadowing” the negative.

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