EVOLUTION AND TRENDS OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Dan LICHTER
Benedictine University
(United States of America)

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses appreciative inquiry (Ai) and its challenges to more prevalent problem-oriented approaches. Key theoretical underpinnings and assumptions are noted, along with a brief survey of recent (2012-2018) Ai research. The paper explores questions of appropriateness, timing, and risks of Ai intervention and how these may be mitigated by synergies with traditional OD tools. Ai critique and its lack of critique are examined including opportunities to expand Ai application using concepts from critical theory. Suggested starting points and cautions for initial forays by the organization or practitioner new to (or skeptical of) Ai application are provided. Finally, we reflect and consider future explorations of Ai.

Keywords
Appreciative inquiry - Organization development - Abilene paradox - SOAR

INTRODUCTION

This paper will adopt a mildly skeptical point of view and attempt to answer the question of how and when to attempt initial forays into appreciative inquiry (Ai) application, and how to increase the likelihood of Ai effectiveness in light of recent research. To that end, it provides a brief review and discussion of Ai with respect to enhancement of interaction between theory and practice. We will see the omnipresent links to Lewin, along with an introduction to Ai's key theoretical underpinnings. We will consider how appreciative inquiry challenges the problem-oriented approach often applied by action researchers. Principles and assumptions will be presented—ranging from social constructionism and metacognition to the importance of language.

Sorensen and Yaeger (2004) investigated the integration of classic OD instruments with the philosophy of appreciation in their work *Feedback from the Positive Question*—a paper that may well become fundamental to future investigations into appreciative inquiry by this writer—and as such provided thematic paths to explore leading toward the enhancement of the interactions between theory and practice, particularly through action-research, intervention-research, and appreciative inquiry.

We will also revisit the literature's dearth of evaluation and criticism around appreciative inquiry: aspects of Ai critique and the everpresent *lack* of Ai critique as noted by Robert Golembiewski (2000) and Thomas Head (2005) are examined, leading to concepts from critical theory and a survey of Ai research published in academic journals in recent years. Following Jerry Harvey's (1988)

Abilene paradox, we will question what 'managing agreement' might imply for Ai.

The paper will then discuss the appropriateness and timing of intervention and Ai's fit and potential synergies with traditional organization development (OD). Related applications to practice (e.g. the strengths-based SOAR strategic planning tool) will be touched upon before considering the future.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Hammond (2013) describes appreciative inquiry as "an exciting philosophy for change… AI is a thought process" (Hammond, 2013, p.3). Cummings and Worley (2015) consider Ai "a 'reformist and rebellious' form of social constructionism [that] explicitly infuses a positive value orientation into analyzing and changing organizations" (Cummings & Worley, 2015, p. 26). According to Weisbord "AI is an approach… [that] draws on the best of 'what is' and envisioning, and consequently creates what is at the heart of OD, which is perhaps best expressed by Marvin Weisbord as *the creation of productive workplaces with dignity, meaning, and community"* (Cooperrider, Sorensen, Yaeger, & Whitney, 2008, p.ix). Appreciative inquiry challenges the problem-oriented approach often applied by action researchers. Let us look for *what is working around here* instead of expending energy towards identifying the problems we are having (Hammond, 2013; Grant, 2006).

One of the best descriptions of Ai was written by Cooperrider and Whitney (2001) themselves:

> Appreciative Inquiry is about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives 'life' to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. (as cited in Yaeger, Sorensen, & Bengtsson, 2005, p.302)

KURT LEWIN

Reference to Kurt Lewin is obligatory. Concerning Ai, a key inspiration from Lewin was his belief that "inquiry itself could be used to construct a more democratic and dignified future"; his curiosity insatiable and commitment unwavering, by way of his spirit and passion for creative thinking, Lewin laid the foundations for creating and applying knowledge about groups, organizations, even entire societies towards the betterment of humankind (Cooperrider, 2008, p.370).

Cooperrider intimates that Lewin's "epistemological ambiguity" may have been purposeful in an attempt to shelter his new ideas from the logical positivist sentiments prevalent at the time of his work. While the attribution of this "metatheoretical ambiguity" as evidence of Lewin's "social sensitivity and genius" may be a stretch of wishful thinking and projection on Cooperrider's

part, the observation that theory could be used for both interpretive and creative purposes alike is worth noting (Cooperrider, 2017a, p.95).

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

First and foremost, appreciative inquiry builds upon social constructionism as its theoretical cornerstone through the assertion that any social system constructs its own reality. Berger and Luckmann (1967) are credited with initially coining the term 'social construction' via their sociological theorizing that knowledge, concepts, and beliefs about "what is real" are developed over time by reflection between individuals as members of groups, organizations, and societies (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Ai admits to putting a 'positive spin' on the theory—indeed, one of the five major principles of Ai is that organizational behavior can be determined by movement towards the future the collective wants (Cooperrider, 2017a).

LANGUAGE

Vocabulary and language are of incontrovertible consequence to appreciative inquiry. We will later instantiate a handful of underlying assumptions critical to Ai, but for now, consider the following claim fundamental: "The language we use creates our reality." The point here is that certain word choices entail unavoidable connotations. In recent years as applied behavioral science has evolved, we have seen clinical language leak into that of business, organizations, and management. Terms like 'dysfunctional', 'burn out', or simply 'problem' are potentially loaded with negative meaning, and may begin to frame a deficit-based mindset. The emotional content of the words we use affects our thinking and action. Indeed, Cooperrider (2008) goes so far as to state that a deficit-based vocabulary can restrict vision and limit growth. Ai researchers have found that increasing the ratio of positive (e.g. hope, surprise, excitement) to negative (e.g. doubt, concern, dissatisfaction) word choices may, in fact, change the way the mind processes information and can lead to improved personal and organizational performance. Instead, we tend to train our managers to uncover problems and identify issues, thereby reinforcing a deficit mindset—that we can only improve our organizations by focusing on problems (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Hammond, 2013).

THE POSITIVE CORE

At the core of Ai is, well, the 'positive core'. The concept of the positive core is essentially the distillation of the organization's best. It is the "the beginning and the end of the inquiry" and lies at the heart of the Ai philosophy and process. The positive core is "*that which gives meaning to the organization"* and is woven throughout the "4-D Cycle" that we will discuss later in this paper. But—spoiler alert—the positive core is identified during *Discovery*, amplified during *Dream*, architected during *Design*, and implemented during *Destiny*. Or *Deliver*. Depending on one's preference for *D*s. Practically speaking, one might ask how to identify an organization's positive core—Cooperrider suggests it may be found via expression in many ways. To name a

few: organizational or individual achievements and awards; product, service, and/or operational strengths, or strengths of partners and stakeholders; unique or distinctive core competencies and capabilities; financial, information, or technical assets; and many more (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p.34-35).

Cooperrider builds upon six researched "effects"—the placebo effect, Pygmalion effect, positive effect, internal dialogue, positive imagery, and metacognitive competence—as support to the fifth principle of Ai, that of the *positive principle,* which is described later (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p.11). Without going too deeply into any, a few of these effects are worth some notice here, as positive imagery is of definitively crucial import to Ai.

PLACEBO EFFECT

The placebo effect is well-known and generally accepted as valid— a significant proportion of patients show physiological and emotional improvements in presenting symptoms due to their belief that they were receiving an effective treatment *even when said treatment was an inert substance*. This is not completely understood; nevertheless, it is sufficient for our purposes to acknowledge that suggestion and belief play a role in driving positive changes. The flipside, of course, to Ai's willingness to leverage the placebo effect is the implication that purportedly successful interventions founded on the Ai philosophy may themselves be merely the placebo effect at work. Indeed, Head (2005) observed that the positive energy generated during an Ai process may simply dissipate without effecting an ensuing sustained change of any significant magnitude (Head, 2005).

Based on the Pygmalion study—in which randomly selected students were developed into legitimate high performers based simply and solely on their teachers' misguided expectations that those students were identified as 'high-potential' and thus were treated as such—we do have a degree of confidence that cognitive capabilities are in fact influenced by projections of others' expectations. In Ai, we are anticipating an upwards spiral fed by positive energy. The Pygmalion effect does, in fact, support that members of an organization will respond positively to the deluge of positivity presented via images and words, thoughts, and ideas over the course of Ai driven interventions.

METACOGNITION

Defined by Merriam-Webster as "awareness or analysis of one's own learning or thinking processes," metacognition can play a role in the creation of a positive future on the part of individuals and perhaps for groups as well. In particular, through the development of metacognitive skills, one may develop and refine the habitual ability to recognize successful or unsuccessful performance—positive or negative self-monitoring—and choose between the two choices for cognitive processes. Although at risk of being overly popularized, mindfulness is increasingly showing up in both popular and scholarly work of late. There is reasonable evidence that this metacognition aspect provides some of the driving force behind Ai when it appears to work.

A final and crucial perspective differentiation within Ai is its view that an organization should not be considered a problem to be solved, but rather should be seen as a mystery to be embraced. These assumptive differences lead to disparate focal points. The problem-solving focus ultimately results in a negative frame—one of running away: doing less of something that is not working well for the organization. Alternatively, via Ai's focus, the stakeholders identify what does work, and build upon that by doing more of it (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 2017a; Hammond, 2013). Instead of looking for the problems, what is wrong, or what are the causes in organizations viewed as "broken-down machines in need of fixing," we can see them as mysteries of "infinite capacity to be embraced" (Cooperrider, 2008, p.16).

PRINCIPLES

Having laid a foundation of those concepts and effects, it is now necessary to consider Ai's key principles and assumptions before introducing what is known commonly as the '4-D Cycle' of Ai and thereby make the leap from theoretical underpinnings to applicable practice. While these supporting propositions remained fundamentally the same, they did evolve from the initial groundbreaking article of 1999 to those more concisely articulated in Cooperrider's 2008 *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook* as the renditions to which we shall now attend.

Ai's *constructionist principle* states that the questions asked lead directly to any organizational change that proceeds, as those questions drive the social collective knowledge that drives the future of the organization. By getting people aligned with a central idea, they can together create the future of the organization. The *principle of simultaneity* posits that inquiry and change occur simultaneously, rather than separately and independently. In the spirit of Matthew's admonition "seek and ye shall find"—the very question(s) we ask lay the foundations for what we discover, leading to the stories from which we construct the future. Cooperrider suggests that we can view any human organization as an 'open book' according to his *poetic principle* and notes that the past, present, and future can be "endless sources of learning, inspiration, or interpretation" that we can continually revisit, reframe, and recycle to glean new knowledge. According to the *anticipatory principle*, the current behavior of an individual, group, or organization is guided by an image of the future. "Organizations exist because people share some projection about what the organization is, how it will function, what it will achieve, and what it will likely become." The *positive principle* states that positive emotions and attitudes are key drivers for momentum in change efforts, and claims that organizations are most responsive to positive thought and knowledge. Accordingly, Ai proponents endorse positive questions—the more positive, the more effective. "UP" or "unconditionally positive" questions pave the way for sustained change over time (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

From that handful of principles, we can move from theory to practice by way of establishing some assumptions based thereon.

Let us attend to (1) what we mean by assumptions and (2) why this is significant within the context of exploring Ai. Hammond (2013) defines assumptions as "the set of beliefs shared by a group that causes the group to

think and act in certain ways" and are generally neither visible nor verbalized—remaining at a subconscious if not unconscious level (Hammond, 2013, p.10). In other contexts when studying groups, one might use the term 'norms' instead of assumptions but for our purposes, this is a fine choice of word. While shared assumptions allow for a group to function together without the need to reevaluate all inputs in successive situations, it does entail a cost: the group may ignore, dismiss, or simply not see new information that does not coincide with their preexisting assumptions. Accordingly, it is crucial that we periodically step back and reevaluate the assumptions of a group or organization. Exposing and discussing assumptions is necessary to ensure relevance and validity over the long term.

For want of a better position, let us briefly clarify the viewpoint of Cooperrider and, by extension that of Ai, into a model of fundamental human needs. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of human needs is arguably the most prevalent theory surrounding the psychologies of human motivation—scientific validation notwithstanding—but for this context we can simplify to the following: "Every human being has a need to (1) have a voice and be heard, (2) be seen as essential to the group (i.e. if absent would be missed), and (3) be seen as unique and exceptional" (Hammond, 2013, p.25). This viewpoint of human needs is fundamental and embedded throughout the Ai approach.

With that pivotal supposition laid bare, consider this summarized set of assumptions proposed by Hammond (2013) that capacitates some basic premises of Ai:

- At some point, in any organization, something works—or worked.
- "What we focus on becomes our reality."
- "Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities."
- "The act of asking questions of an organization influences it in some way."
- "People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry parts of the past (the known)."
- "If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past."
- "It is important to value differences."
- The language one uses creates one's reality.

Those assumptions are crucial to acknowledge and embrace, in order to establish a common starting point to establish comfort with this positive approach to organizational change. Organization change can be perceived as difficult for a number of reasons. One is that the idea of change makes people uncomfortable—we must, to some extent, recognize and accept that 'something' is sub-optimal. We are afraid that we are doing something wrong, and that wrongness may suggest that we do not belong (Hammond, 2013). In contrast, however, if we look back at experiences in the past that felt positive, and seemingly had positive results, we ask participants in an appreciative inquiry intervention to revisit ground already covered successfully—simply to repeat previous success in a comfortable way. Thus, we avoid the negative framing of a deficit, of a problem or failure that must be remediated. Let's look at the part that makes us personally, or our peers, or our superiors, or our subordinates, or our clients—really any of our stakeholders 'happy.'

THE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY 4-D CYCLE

Built upon the various theoretical frameworks, principles, and assumptions introduced thus far, Ai's '4-D Cycle' is the method or process used by an individual, group, or organization to identify its positive core and create a shared positive future around it. The 4-D cycle is comprised of *Discovery, Dream, Design,* and *Destiny*. Alternative names have also been used, and in some cases, practitioners add a 5th *D*.

The *Discovery* phase involves answering the question of "what gives life to the organization." It is in this phase that we discover the best of what is as the 'positive core' described earlier. We launch our inquiry. Alternatively, one might consider this to be the appreciating step. It is worth noting that in recently proposed enhancements to Ai appear to focus in this phase (see Bushe & Paranjpey, 2015; Ridley-Duff & Duncan, 2015).

Dream—or 'envisioning'—explores "what might be?". Here, we imagine what the world is calling for that the organization and its members may aspire to provide. We establish our vision and the results associated therewith (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

The *Design* addresses "How can it be?" and is the step during which we begin constructing our future. We determine the ideal and how we can architect it into our collective positive reality. This phase results in 'provocative' statements and propositions about how the future will look that are challenging and innovative (Hammond, 2013).

Destiny - "What will be?" This phase is about implementation, execution, and especially preparation for sustaining our change. In some cases, this phase is referred to as *Deliver* which gives a further sense of the intent at this stage. Here, ultimately, is the actual expression of the positive core (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

Grant (2006) relays a less alliterative, more neutrally worded set of processes: *Appreciating, Envisioning, Dialoguing,* and *Innovating,* as well as a 4-I model*: Initiate, Inquire, Imagine, Innovate* (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Watkins & Mohr, 2001, as cited in Grant & Humphries, 2006). A 5-D version is in use in some renditions of Ai. Hammond (2013), for example, splits the initiating activities into 'Define' and 'Discover' (Hammond, 2013). It is clear that these alternatives reflect fundamentally the same process, but there is certainly value in considering the alternative language in use, as we have seen that Ai places a great deal of importance on our choice of vocabulary.

POLLYANNA

Cooperrider (2018) suggests that if a strong undercurrent of negativity exists in an Ai workshop, let the participants vent for a time to get it out of their system. Then interject, stating, in effect, that while we could certainly continue to go down that route all day, we might be better off looking for alternatives and see what we find (Cooperrider, personal communication, October 17, 2018). Hammond (2013) suggests using particularly selected questions for the naysaying interviewee akin to "what if a miracle occurred - what would things look like then?" and offers other suggestions shared from the AI Listserv: "If things were working at their best what would be happening?"; "If the team were

working at its best, what would they be doing and how would they be working with one another?" (Hammond, 2013, pp.30 & 50).

David Jamieson (2018) agrees that it's wonderful to dive into positive aspects of an organization and agrees with the social constructionist aspects. He has witnessed both the creation of energy for a group during Ai efforts and the draining of a group's energy when addressing problems. Jamieson does, however, point out that, at least at times, we must include some negatives during diagnosis. Furthermore, he suggests that Ai cannot work when an organization is focused on pain points. If an organization is 'down' or 'depressed' due to external factors, Ai *may* be applicable—and it is very difficult to use if members are 'mad' at their own organization (Jamieson, personal communication, November 17, 2018). Consider that Ai is not necessarily ignoring problems—rather that it is shifting focus to search for positives as opposed to negatives (Moore, 2013). With this in mind, might an Ai intervention attempt provide a way to climb up from 'rock bottom' morale? I.e. if nothing else is working, we can give up and start over again looking for that one thing that worked.

While some advocates may purport that Ai is universally applicable, let us consider scenarios that may undermine that claim. After pointing out that "the only universal management truth is that there are no universal management truths," Head (2005) presents some contingency based propositions of traits that may inhibit or facilitate an Ai approach. Potential factors stem from the nature of employees, the nature of an organization (See later discussion of Robert Cooke's Organizational Culture Inventory instrument.), and the nature of the facilitator. There is an implied either/or to these anteceding traits (e.g. active versus passive employees; low trust versus high trust organizational culture; facilitator's ability to keep things positive and promote Ai's credibility) but treating them as a continuum would likely prove more useful in efforts to prepare an organization to increase readiness for Ai (Head, 2005, p.402). We will revisit Head's contingencies later in the context of integration of Ai with traditional OD methods.

Environmental factors may also pose a challenge to an Ai intervention. In today's world of regulatory and compliance requirements, an organization may not have a positive precedent to refer to. In one study "AI sessions got deferred because there was no process for discussing externally imposed system imperatives within AI" (Habermas, 1987 as cited in Ridley-Duff & Duncan, 2015, p.1582). Thus, supplementation or integration with other change methods may be in order.

A final circumstance to consider regarding the potential inappropriateness of Ai follows Jerry Harvey's (1988) Abilene paradox. In this writer's view, the biggest risk stemming from Ai is the likelihood of embarking upon a misguided course of action because organization members may be overly hesitant to go against the grain during a mandatorily positive activity. Indeed, Golembiewski (2000) states it succinctly: "Even raising the possibility of Abilene seems out-of-bounds for AI… successfully diagnosing Abilene would presumably be a 'negative'" (Golembiewski, 2000, p.395). We must consider that 'managing agreement' could be of inordinate significance when we are explicitly avoiding negativity, conflict, and criticism.

CRITIQUE

Exploration of apparent paradox frequently leads to progress by way of relieving tension between theories. Another postmodernist approach to organization development is that of critical theory, which attempts to seek out imbalances in and abuses of power, to reveal underpinnings of ideologies, and to emancipate individuals from those controlling forces. Like Ai, critical theory is built upon social constructionist theories and considers language to be supremely important. The warning of critical theorists to Ai is that favoring 'happy desires' over 'unhappy actualities' may lead to maintaining extant control structures (Ridley-Duff & Duncan, 2015). By design, Ai is purposefully and narrowly focused on positivity. Whereas, clearly, there is negativity inherent in the critical theory approach that would, at first glance, appear in opposition to Ai. However, we may reconsider the question of "what's good?" by expanding the definition of 'appreciation' to include "to know, to be conscious of". Thus, through critical theory, we have the opportunity to reveal further useful insight into Ai and its potential application (Grant & Humphries, 2006). Intuitively, one might consider the popular cliche "no pain, no gain" and recognize that a positive outcome, i.e. organization learning or improvement, may require unpleasant, dare we say negative, experiences to get to the positive core. Building on that broader definition of appreciation, and arguably revisiting the generativity—not positivity—of the early days of Ai, we turn to critical appreciative processes (CAPs).

CAPs, at their simplest, extend the *Discovery* phase of Ai with critical inquiry—asking "what is?" and "what might have been?" before asking "what gives life?" and seeking the positive core. Ridley-Duff and Duncan (2015) found that this adjustment enabled the organization to address external, environmentally-driven forces that could not be otherwise accommodated by Ai techniques (Ridley-Duff & Duncan, 2015).

Another seemingly effective modification to *Discovery* is 'synergenesis,' a technique developed by Bushe, which also claims to increase generativity. The synergenesis approach entails individuals writing one another's peak experience stories in the first-person narrative and using those written artifacts to fuel further discussion. There is evidence that this approach led to greater generativity—i.e. more new ideas—than conventional Ai (Bushe & Paranjpey, 2015).

INITIAL INTERVENTION

How might one identify the right time for a first time Ai intervention? What conditions in the organization might provide antecedents for success? How much does fit between intervenor and the organization impact effectiveness? Especially for a newer practitioner or one with less experience with the Ai approach, a reasonably healthy organization appeals as the vehicle for an Ai maiden voyage. In a toxic environment, it may be exceedingly difficult for an inexperienced consultant to turn the tide from negative to positive. Instead, riding a preexisting wave of positivity—or in the least leveraging an established fount thereof—would provide for a helpful momentum. Alternatively, an established leader or consultant might consider a first time Ai intervention attempt as a baptism of fire in an organization facing issues or

challenges in certain conditions— namely, the opportunity for a turnaround when a significant contingent of individuals have clear and plentiful memories of "good times" to share and build from as a reset point.

For an onboarding/integration effort - new leadership might use an Ai workshop to get a positive team building start. One could build momentum and buy-in that way, then use a different toolset (deficit-based) at a later date once positive momentum has been created. Moore et al (2013) provide some simple suggestions for adopting 'Appreciative Leadership,' derived from Ai, with which practitioners would be well served to experiment: Give employees opportunities to feel that their ideas and suggestions are heard; identify which leadership behaviors appear to be the most motivating and leverage them to instill and increase confidence in the workforce; and especially, call out the things that are working well, label them 'best practices,' and reward their use to develop 'positive realities' (Moore, Cangemi, & Ingram, 2013, p.49).

In what this writer believes to be a rather underappreciated article—based on a mere 8 published citations (as reported by Google Scholar, November 27, 2018)—Sorensen and Yaeger (2004) proposed an intriguing approach towards integrating Ai with classic OD action research and 'survey guided development.' Lewin's action research was intended to generate data and create knowledge while concurrently attempting to discover and attempt solutions to organizational and social problems. While there is a deficit orientation in the process, including potentially negative language such as 'problem identification' and 'diagnosis,' the cyclical nature of organizational change and learning are not necessarily incommensurate with the 4-D cycle of Ai.

Survey Feedback is a specific form of action research and also sits at the core of OD. Sorensen and Yaeger present Nadler's (1977) model of Survey Feedback as a good fit with Ai due to its phased approach which can also align with that of Ai, and its particular focus on creation and dissemination of energy in the organization. They select Robert Cooke's well-known survey instrument of the Organizational Culture Inventory as has been used extensively by the field at large and the authors themselves. This mixture of Ai concepts with traditional OD approaches was applied in a small number of illustrative cases and showed the way towards data-driven Ai, ways to 'wed' the 'upstart' Ai paradigm with that of traditional OD, and, most importantly, the potential for effective evaluation (Sorensen & Yaeger, 2004). Further exploration into the concepts introduced in that chapter is long overdue.

Researchers and practitioners alike would be well served to consider the application and associated study of more traditional OD approaches to change in an attempt to address contingent inhibiting factors to Ai discussed earlier. A particular OD method that would dovetail nicely with Head's contingent propositions is Lewin's force field analysis—after collecting qualitative data, perhaps from survey data or interviews, the practitioner would develop a list of the inhibiting or facilitating forces, rank them in order of priority or strength, and address them accordingly (Cummings & Worley, 2015). While a deeper presentation of force field analysis or related approaches is outside of the scope of this paper, there is no shortfall of literature on such topics.

SOAR

A potential candidate for an organization's first foray into the Ai philosophy may be a simple strategic planning exercise. Ubiquitously taught in business schools, a traditional tool of strategic planning is known as SWOT—the acronym of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Explicitly influenced by the philosophy surrounding Ai, a strengths-based strategy planning tool known as SOAR—for Strengths Opportunities Aspirations Results—was developed by Stavros and Hinrichs (2009). SWOT is willing to invest time considering the negative weaknesses and threats components, thereby leaving less time to work on the strengths and opportunities. On the other hand, SOAR aspires to avoid the potential reduction in positive forward momentum that may be associated with those negative components. Stavros and Hinrichs report that building on people's strengths produces results better than spending time on correcting weaknesses, based on Gallup descriptions that workers have fifty percent higher productivity in an organization focused on strengths instead of weaknesses. The key point, here, is that SWOT analysis can be draining of energy—people get stuck in the exploration of weaknesses and threats and enter a downward spiral of negative energy (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009, p.12). The framing of weaknesses and threats as merely more opportunities is an intriguing prospect. Success in applying SOAR for planning may pave the way for further positive inquiry.

PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

Below is a brief summary of actionable recommendations and suggestions for "getting one's feet wet" with Ai:

1. Conduct a strategic planning session using SOAR to get a taste of positivity.
2. Evaluate Head's contingencies in the target organization and consider if any preparatory interventions may increase the effectiveness of an Ai endeavor.
3. Consider CAP, simply by way of asking 'what is?' and 'what might have been?' during the *Discovery* phase.
4. Consider including 'synergenesis' during *Discovery* to increase the generation of new ideas.
5. Carefully 'manage agreement' to avoid taking a trip to Abilene.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Nearly 15 years have passed since Yaeger, Sorensen, and Bengtsson (2005) put forth their *Assessment of the State of Appreciative Inquiry*. Perhaps an updated assessment similar to that literature search is in order. In that review, 468 sources were examined—the resulting chronology clearly demonstrated an increase in popularity (Yaeger, Sorensen, & Bengtsson, 2005, p.305). A search for appreciative inquiry in the key academic and practitioner journals of the OD field (Carrico, n.d.; Tenkasi, 2018, p.2) between 2012-2018 resulted in 14 articles—two per year on average—not as many articles as one might have expected in light of the purportedly widespread appreciation of the Ai approach. They did, however, run the gamut in domains (e.g. healthcare, academia,

military, religious organizations, and software development, etc.) and covered a global scope including the United States and India (Bushe & Paranjpey, 2015; Cooperrider, 2017b; Gabriel, Teasley, Walker, Schraeder, & Jordan, 2016; Glovis, Cole, & Stavros, 2014; Grieten et al., 2018; McCormack, 2012; Moore et al., 2013; Ranganathan, 2018; Rao, 2014; Ridley-Duff, & Duncan, 2015; Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018; Verleysen, Lambrechts, & Van Acker, 2015; Wheeler, 2016; Williams & Haizlip, 2013).

For the most part, those recent publications represent more of the same and suggest that Ai is alive and well and still a subject worth studying and a practice worth applying. It is notable, however, is that we continue to see the lack of criticism decried by Golembiewski and Head over these past decades. After conceding that "we know AI works," Head (2005) points out that only quantitative research can provide guidance as to why it works or "When does it work?" (Head, 2005, p.402). While a small number of quantitative studies have emerged in the last few years (e.g. Bushe & Paranjpey, 2015; Verleysen, Lambrechts, & Van Acker, 2015; Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018), the majority continue to be qualitative in nature. We are, perhaps, on the right track as evidenced by the cross-pollination with critical critical theory to beget critical appreciative process—other integrative opportunities for study have been suggested above. Perhaps now is the time for 'Critical Synergenesis?'

CONCLUSION

While initially skeptical—and perhaps at times even slightly annoyed—about Ai as the 'be all, end all' solution to organization development, hearing it straight from the mouth of David Cooperrider at Benedictine University's renowned lecture series in Fall 2018 did, in fact, initiate change in this writer's perspective. Casting any 'Pollyanna' remarks aside, Cooperrider's sincerity was clear and genuine. Perhaps due to his unique involvement and hands-on participation as a driving force of the 'positive revolution' from day one, there is no air about him of religious fervor or 'drinking the kool-aid.' For Cooperrider, it is real, experiential, and firsthand in a manner incomparable to most others. In some way, this may suggest lending more credence to others who have also experienced or witnessed first-hand successful Ai interventions.

This writer hopes to have found and shared some ways to begin exploring Ai in practice, even for a skeptic, and ask for the reader to make a few further considerations. Consider that by preparing an otherwise 'Ai-unready' organization with classic OD change methods, we may still make Ai work. Consider that the unlikely marriage of positive Ai with negative critical theory can lead to innovation and an even more positive 'positive core.' Consider, lastly, that in all likelihood we will soon see artificial intelligence 'AI' intersecting with appreciative inquiry 'Ai.' And, perhaps frighteningly, vice versa. Research opportunities abound.

REFERENCES

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1967). The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge. New York: Anchor.

Bushe, G. R., & Paranjpey, N. (2015). Comparing the Generativity of Problem Solving and Appreciative Inquiry: A Field Experiment. The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 51(3), 309–335.

Carrico, K. (n.d.). Research guides: Organization development research Guide: Top 25 leadership journals. Retrieved November 3, 2018, from http://researchguides.ben.edu/organization-development

Cooperrider, D. L., Sorensen, P. F., Jr., Yaeger, T. F., & Whitney, D. (Eds.). (2005). Appreciative inquiry: Foundations in positive organization development. Champaign IL: Stipes Publishing LLC.

Cooperrider, D., Whitney, D., & Stavros, J. (2008). The appreciative inquiry handbook: For leaders of change (2nd edition). Brunswick, Ohio: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Cooperrider, D., Cooperrider, D., & Srivastva, S. (2017a). The gift of new eyes: Personal reflections after 30 years of appreciative inquiry in organizational life. In A. B. (Rami) Shani & D. A. Noumair (Eds.), *Research in Organizational Change & Development* (Vol. 25, pp. 81–142). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Cooperrider, D. (2017b). The quest for a flourishing earth is the most significant OD opportunity of the 21st century: How macro OD can be the most powerful form of micro OD. *OD Practitioner*, 49(3), 42–51.

Cummings, T., Worley, C. (2015). Organization development and change (10th ed.). Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning.

Definition of METACOGNITION. (n.d.). Retrieved November 25, 2018, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metacognition

Golembiewski, R. T. (2000). Three perspectives on appreciative inquiry. In D. L. Cooperrider, P. F. Sorensen, Jr., T.F. Yaeger, & D. Whitney (Eds.), *Appreciative inquiry: Foundations in positive organization development* (pp. 393-400). Champaign IL: Stipes Publishing LLC.

Grant, S., & Humphries, M. (2006). Critical evaluation of appreciative inquiry: Bridging an apparent paradox. *Action Research*, *4*(4), 401–418.

Hammond, S. A. (2013). The thin book of appreciative inquiry (3rd edition). Thin Book Publishing.

Head, T. (2005). A contingency approach to appreciative inquiry: A first small step. In D. L. Cooperrider, P. F. Sorensen, Jr., T.F. Yaeger, & D. Whitney (Eds.), *Appreciative inquiry: Foundations in positive organization development* (pp. 401-413). Champaign IL: Stipes Publishing LLC.

Moore, M. L., Cangemi, J. P., & Ingram, J. (2013). Appreciative leadership and opportunity - Centric approaches to organization success. *Organization Development Journal*, 31(2), 48–53.

Reed, L. (1992). What's good (The thesis). On *Magic and loss* [Audio CD]. Warner Bros.

Shaw, G. B. (1916). Pygmalion. New York: Brentano.

Sorensen, P., Yaeger, T. (2004). Feedback from the positive question – The integration of appreciative inquiry with survey feedback: From

corporate to global cultures. In D. Cooperrider and M. Avital (Ed.) *Advances in Appreciative Inquiry*, London: Elsevier Press.

Stavros, J. M., & Hinrichs, G. (2009). The thin book of SOAR: Building strengths-based strategy. (S. A. Hammond, Ed.) (1st edition). Bend, OR: Thin Book Publishing.

Tenkasi, R. (2018). Qual 1 - Assignment instructions 2018 - Cohort 12. Retrieved from the Benedictine University Desire2Learn site ben.desire2learn.com.

Van Quaquebeke, N., & Felps, W. (2018). Respectful inquiry: A motivational account of leading through asking questions and listening. *Academy of Management Review*, 43(1), 5–27.

Verleysen, B., Lambrechts, F., & Van Acker, F. (2015). Building Psychological Capital With Appreciative Inquiry: Investigating the Mediating Role of Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction. The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 51(1), 10–35.

Yaeger, T., Sorensen, P. Bengtsson, U. (2005). Assessment of the state of appreciative inquiry: Past, present, and future. In R. Woodman and W. Pasmore, *Research in Organizational Change and Development*. Vol. 15, 297-319. London: Elsevier Ltd.