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Exploring Appreciative Inquiry and Its Link to Creativity

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EXPLORING APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AND ITS LINKS TO CREATIVITY

By Maren Baermann

An Abstract of a Project in Creative Studies

Submitted In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of

Master of Science

December 2006

Buffalo State College

State University of New York

Creative Studies Department

ABSTRACT OF PROJECT

EXPLORING APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AND ITS LINKS TO CREATIVITY

The purpose of this project was to gain a deeper insight into Appreciative Inquiry and to understand possible connections between this philosophy of change and creativity in general and the creative process in particular. The intention of combining a literature research with a practical application was fourfold: Firstly, this approach would provide insight into the philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and its methods and tools. Secondly, equipped with the background knowledge on creativity available to me from the creative studies program and beyond, I expected to discover some parallels and links from AI to creativity during my literature research. Thirdly, the actual application of the AI process as a novice in this field, relying on experience from the creativity area, would allow me to adapt the AI process according to my own judgment. Fourthly it would amplify my knowledge immensely to experience the whole AI process for myself.

I found various commonalities between the Appreciative Inquiry and the Creative Problem solving process, ranging from their relation to change, their person focused position and their productive, constructive tenor, to more specific similarities as e.g. both covering comparable steps in their processes, like gathering data and designing certain steps to attain a goal.

In sum for me these two processes go hand in hand very well, their strengths combine to a wholesome approach that is more productive and energetic than each of them alone. I found that I want to explore this combination in much more depth, as I saw great potential in taking a more optimistic view on creativity and using creative tools to bolster AI, one of the most effective know change methods today.

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Dates of Approval:

_____   _____
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DEDICATIONS

This project is dedicated to my parents, Susi and Wolfgang Baermann:

You supported my adventure into creativity and accompanied me on the way - I hope I can return the favor by bringing home all the wonderful things I learned here. Thank you for helping me become the person that I am and for lighting my way with your love.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my teacher Jon Michael Fox: Thank you, Mike, for guidance and generosity, for encouragement to explore this topic and for all your patience in the process.

To Dr. Mary Murdock: Mary, you might not be aware of how much you supported me during my "darkest" semester – not only by lending an occasional ear and being there for me, but also through your shining creative example. Thank you!

To Dr. John Cabra: Thanks, John, for all those enthusing discussions, in and out of class. I found your work, your knowledge and your attitude to be very inspiring.

To my friends, who made my study visit here rich, insightful and fun:

Stephanie, thank you for initiating C4 with me. Not only did I learn so much in and around those events, but I also thoroughly enjoyed working with you as a partner. And thank you for your friendship, it provided me with energy when I most needed it.

Jean Pierre and Alexander, our creative discussions were not only delighting and enlightening, but also helped to tie all those great concepts into a wholesome view. I enjoyed the many ventures into creativity, philosophy and the meaning of life with you.

Barbra, creativity and tango is just a wonderful combination. Thank you for exposing me to many new perspectives and inviting me in to your open minded world.

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1 BACKGROUND

This project is about understanding the connection between Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and creativity. The AI philosophy allows for some very constructive input into the field of creative culture and creative environment and there are many links to the creative process. From personal experience and from knowledge I have about the German economy and business world, deferring judgment is one of the toughest obstacles to overcome when searching for ways to enhance creativity. Appreciative Inquiry seems to be a very constructive and productive way to tackle this.

I would like to advance myself in this "positive perspective thinking" and learn enough about it to apply it and share it with others, whether in a consulting context or in training and facilitating. The aspects of deferring judgment and being affirmative and constructive to enable creativity bear a lot of potential in empowering people. This meshes well with my vision of helping people tap into their creative potential to make this world a better place. I believe that "creativity is freeing constructive potential" (Baermann, 2006). This entails the assumption that everybody is creative, in their own style and to their individual degree. I believe that being creative is an existential part of human nature which ensures human survival. It is creativity that helps us succeed when we are faced with the challenges of life – once upon a time maybe the saber toothed tiger, now e.g. recession or a stressful lifestyle. It also implies that creativity can be taught and fostered in individuals, as creative abilities (e.g. Davis, 2004) can be addressed in training and education. Maslow (1992) describes self-actualized people as "psychologically healthy" (p. 103) and being able to regress to a certain childlikeness, yet he considers these self-actualized people as most mature and being able to tap into rational as well as intuitive thinking. Ackoff & Vergara (1988) write that "creativity (…) is the ability to modify self-imposed constraints so as to (…) produce outcomes (…) that are more efficient or valuable" (p.87). This means enabling creativity is about accessing it and taking off the layers of stifling experiences and learning we have covered it up with and being able to regress

into the creative childlikeness. Appreciative Inquiry enables us to bypass these acquired layers and it does this by directly focusing on the positive, creative core and thereby accesses a huge empowering energy. It seems to be a direct path to a more self-actualizing perception of ourselves and the system we live in. AI is a shift in perspective that allows people to tap into the power of their successes and positive experiences. To apply it to creativity will unleash constructive potential, in people and organizations.

To maximize the learning from the literature research on Appreciative Inquiry I will apply the process to my future plans and experiment with the change of perspective and its effect on my life, my perceptions and these plans. My goal is to learn to apply the rule of deferring judgment more thoroughly and consciously, not only to work and specific problem solving, but in every day life and in interactions with others. I will strive to understand the AI perspective in depth and to practice its positive, constructive attitude. I will incorporate it in my creativity philosophy and ideally be able to weave it into my personal version of CPS.

My hope is to open a new perspective on creativity and change by looking at it through the lens of Appreciative Inquiry. The learnings will benefit me in my future job team and with my clients. I hope it inspires other scholars in the creativity field to build on the AI approach for their work and study. Ideally my project might establish an explicit connection to the AI "world".

2 METHOD / APPROACH

The goal of this project calls for an extensive literature research on the topic of Appreciative Inquiry and for experimenting with its application on a smaller scale to understand its effects. I plan to research the theory of AI in literature and in the internet, as it is a fairly new philosophy that is not overly documented in print yet. This paper will include a basic overview of the AI philosophy. I will base the connections to creativity on my studies and on literature research linking AI and some of the emerging themes that lend itself to deeper investigation. I will summarize the discovered links between AI and the creative problem solving process in this paper. Using the framework of the four P's (Rhodes, 1987) appears to be a good structure to guide the search for parallels and I will focus on investigating connections between the creative process and AI. Possible practical applications deducted from the theoretical understanding of AI and creativity, as well as insights derived from the personal work applying AI will be included as appropriate.

3　APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

3.1　The AI Philosophy

Appreciative Inquiry is a new way of looking at change: future- and ideal-oriented, focusing on what is working and what is good to enable individuals and organizations to do more of it and thereby move forward towards the best, instead of trying to reverse backwards from the problem. AI seeks to uncover, extract and do so much of the positive that the negative is supplanted. Cooperrider and Whitney (1999b) define Appreciative Inquiry as "the cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives a system 'life' when it is most effective and capable" (p. 10). They further explain that "the positive change core is one of the greatest and largely unrecognized resources in change management today" (p. 10). With this change of perspective the intention of Appreciative Inquiry is to change the world by giving more power to the positive. Based on findings in cognitive psychology, the AI philosophy argues that what people think about and focus on will shape and strengthen their judgment and theories and make them resistant to change (Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990). Following this line of thought, a problem-focused approach will strengthen and empower the problems. AI, on the other hand, seeks to tap into tacit resources and constructive energies by evoking a positive image of the ideal and by providing an affirmative context to grow towards this dream. By understanding what makes a system effective and backing it up with experiences and successes that the members of this system provide, these achievements become replicable. The method of inquiring for the best in a system substantiates the potential an organization can strive for. By asking and interviewing, the reality of the people is tuned in on the positive, shaping their perception and empowering them.

Apart from the positive effects on cognition this focus on achievements is very motivating. It energizes and empowers people. And by referring to their

experiences, AI involves and empowers individuals to take a pro-active role in creating their own future. Cooperrider and Whitney (1999a) come to the conclusion that focusing on problems means looking backwards and is thus a slow and troublesome approach. The interviews taking place in the first phase of the AI process are essential in shifting the focus of awareness. This is why the questions asked in this stage are so crucial for the success of the whole change procedure: by delving into the intended topic the existence of a desired outcome is acknowledged and strengthened. Even though AI does shape the change through the topic choice, meaning it is not aimless in its liberal and constructionist approach, it builds on a foundation of involvement and listens to the voice of the participants. In the AI process the participants are regarded as mature and responsible individuals who should and do have a say in their own future. In a way AI regards humans as the self-actualized individuals (Maslow, 1992) it enables them to become right from the onset. Even though the questions do lead into a specific domain, they are not manipulative. AI stresses the importance of staying authentic and providing room for individual input.

The questions direct the attention of the participants and serve as guides to uncovering the potential slumbering in the organization. By focusing on the feeling of aliveness and the experience of energy in the interview questions, AI seems to tap into an intuitive level of knowledge. Taking these results and turning them into a desired outcome, describing an ideal, appears to be the energizing momentum of Appreciative Inquiry. As for the mind perceptions and imagination are barely distinguishable (Wenger, 1992), constructive images shape the interpretation of reality (Bushe, 1998). The focus of attention has the effect of a self-fulfilling prophecy (Myers, 1999), which in AI leads to achieving the ideal envisioned with successes of the past.

Appreciative Inquiry is a tool that grows change from within. It lets people develop with the change; be actively involved and be part of it. In today's time change is a constant, and if we don't deal with change, it deals with us. Taking a proactive approach allows us to influence the world we are living in. AI gives

people a say in shaping their future, provides them with tools to take control and be empowered. This type of change is accepted by the system, and not rejected like an implant, because it fits the organization. AI ensures this natural fit through one of its basic principles: the positive core (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2005). This positive core is the distilled essence of what gives energy, what gives life to an organization, the foundation of available capabilities and potentials. People are motivated by working with the assets they themselves have uncovered as the positive core. This involvement brings along the advantage of less downtime for the system, as there is no artificial learning time necessary: people understand what is going on because they participated in creating the path towards the future state. The energy from collaboration provides more effectiveness and quicker wins. The appreciative environment fosters learning and stimulates the natural capacity of people to grow with the challenge. The flexibility of the AI process allows for adjustments along the way, should they be necessary.

Appreciative Inquiry is a creative change tool that fosters a creative environment through the affirmative perspective and the focus on existing assets in the organization.

3.2 The AI Process

According to Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros (2005) healthy organizations thrive on three factors: continuity, novelty and transition. They describe continuity as understanding and appreciation of the positive core of a system. The AI process evolves around this positive core, a principle that determines any AI intervention. Discovering and defining this positive core is the fundamental ground on which Appreciative Inquiry builds, and it is triggered by affirmative topic choice, the initial step even before entering the first stage of discovery. Seeking novelty means allowing to challenge the status quo, creating a learning environment and searching for opportunities to grow towards an inspirational goal. Transition assures the change from the past to the future, defining a common script as a basis for those involved and a common vision to achieve.

The Appreciative Inquiry process follows a natural flow of establishing what achievements and best practices are available as resources to build the ideal future on. It does not necessarily have to be run through in a stringent or linear form, but rather allows for loops and revisiting of past stages as needed. Many authors do agree, however, that beginning the process in the discovery stage, and more specifically that initiating AI with interviews, is essential for the success of the whole methodology (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2005).

3.2.1 Discovery

This stage constitutes the adventure of exploring what empowering resources there already are. Discovery is the stage of appreciating, finding the "best of what is" by asking "What gives life?" (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2005, p. 85). This links smoothly to the aforementioned definition of creativity as the "ability to modify self-imposed constraints" (Ackoff & Vergara, 1988), when these constraints are understood as limiting views and destructive focus on insufficiencies acquired from a tradition of problem solving. Uncovering the underlying good, i.e. the positive change core (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999b) is then tapping into the generative power of aliveness by changing the perspective.

The most important tool in this stage is the appreciative interview. With carefully chosen and phrased questions that aim to unearth the amazing potential that enabled past successes, the interviewees are turned into active agents in the change process. The questions ask for real experiences, seeking moments of aliveness and empowerment, thereby establishing a realistic foundation for the envisioned future. If the dream is grounded in successes from the past, this renders it as achievable. Letting the interviewees re-experience their feelings of effectiveness and energy in the interviews provides a motivation for them to strive towards the dream. The interviews also create a safe ground for getting in touch with the affective, intuitive aspect of success and change in general. Specifically asking for an emotional evaluation of a past experience demonstrates the appreciation of these humane aspects in organizational life.

The discovery of unknown resources turns the interviews into an adventure both for the interviewer and interviewee. Both are exploring unmapped territory, as the process is open-ended. This generates momentum and creates energy and motivation to move forward. The involvement of individuals gets them aboard, and the experience of discovering something new demonstrates that AI is effective. The appreciative approach makes it safe to try it and contribute further.

3.2.2 Dream

The dream stage is the imaginative stage where people are encouraged to dream, envision and paint an ideal situation. What makes this stage so creative, is that it entails envisaging something that is not yet existing. This includes filling gaps between the pieces discovered in the previous stage and extrapolating the possibilities from these stories. Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros (2005) refer to this as envisioning, i.e. to "imagine what the world is calling for" by asking "What might be?" (p. 111).

People are asked to dream by building off their stories shared in the discovery stage. The natural tendency of humans to envision an ideal is tapped, and AI supports this process by enabling participants to shed constraining habits of negativity, which is, as Ackoff and Vergara suggest (1988) an effective way to be more creative. The motor in this process step is the prospect of achieving this ideal, which is triggered by the experiences from the discovery stage. Painting a picture of an ideal future state helps to make details come alive. It enables picturing a way to reach this goal, which facilitates the following design stage. This constructive and optimistic approach assists in overcoming challenges before they even occur and motivates participants, pulling them towards the dream. Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros (2005) refer to this as the heliotropic character of organizations, meaning that like heliotropic plants, who follow the sun in their orientation, organizations will head towards an appealing and inspiring image of the future and grow towards it.

3.2.3 Design

Here people are asked to translate their dreams into feasible actions and processes. Participants co-construct the infrastructure of the future by designing provocative propositions or possibility propositions (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2005) that determine what the ideal would be like by asking "How can it be?" (p. 141).

By first choosing which elements are important to be incorporated in the design stage, the topics for the propositions are established. Breaking down the whole aliveness experience and the resulting dream into smaller parts helps understanding and internalizing the dream. It helps to make the dream concrete, extracting it from a more vague picture. A big dream may otherwise seem too big to tackle, the whole process of getting there unmanageable. This risks failure and frustration. Also, leaving things in the raw state they were in the dream stage would not inspire action and would increase the frustration, since people would know what is possible but weren't enabled to do anything about it.

The next step involves identifying which ingredients make up the chosen elements in the specific context. This involves a lot of dialogue to allow for all participants to dig deeper and scrutinize the condiments that constitute the elements. It is important to rely on the experience and expertise of the participants and to refer back to the results from the discovery and dream stage. This stage produces a lot of energy towards achieving the provocative propositions that are now written. Those statements should be affirmative, be well grounded in the positive core and provide a stretch.

3.2.4 Destiny

Destiny asks "What will be?" (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2005, p. 175) and seeks to create an organization that can make the dream live on, making the change sustainable. The main requirement to ensure the implementation of the dream is to create a system that can improvise, i.e. is self-organizing. The

necessary learning culture for this capability is at the same time a creative culture:

> Such learning focuses instead on imagining possibilities and on generating new ways of looking at the world. Innovation requires willingness to think "outside the box." It involves an appreciative approach, an ability to see radical possibilities, and a willingness to go beyond the boundaries of problems. (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2005, p. 180)

Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros (2005) describe improvisational organizations as systems set up to sustain the dream. For the authors the destiny is embedding AI principles and the process into the system, enabling the organization to re-conjure the power of the methodology constantly. According to them an organization requires four strengths to improvise: affirmative, expansive, generative and collaborative competence. Affirmative competence means relying on the existing strengths and building off of discovered assets. This strategy of focusing on strengths as opposed to weaknesses is recommended in personal development, as well (e.g. Buckingham & Clifton, 2001), and seems effective in building a strong basis. In a similar vein, Cabra (2004) points out that "obsessing over weaknesses arouses defensiveness and leads to burnout." (p. 83). Cooperrider et al. (2005) explain expansive competence as the ability to stretch and go beyond the existing. The energizing inspiration for this comes from the dream stage. The generative competence boils down to allowing people to be productive and to participate in progress, which motivates and increases effectiveness. Creating forums for interaction and for ongoing communication enables collaborative competence, allowing people to work towards the vision together.

The ultimate goal is not a rigid destination, but rather a learning, improvising and appreciative organization. It's a system where aliveness is established, yet it is still mobile and adaptable. The positive core is ubiquitous and provides energy

and empowerment. As humans are creatures of habit, it is necessary to sustain the change momentum to avoid old habits creeping back into the organizational life. The competencies ensure that everyone stays aboard and that the aliveness of the organization is verified continuously. Would Appreciative Inquiry stop before the destiny stage, the cultivated energy would be lost. Destiny is ensuring the dream is kept alive and the momentum created in the initiative is used to establish a stable yet flexible state. The fulfilled potential creates motivation, enabling the organization to grow towards new dreams and new futures.

4 AI LINKS TO CREATIVITY

Appreciative Inquiry and creativity have many natural links and complement each other in a most productive way when seeking constructive change. AI seeks to break one of our society's most prevalent patterns, problem orientation. Creative processes often have the explicit goal to solve problems, and use questioning patterns as a tool to achieve this. Being creative commonly involves having a tolerance for ambiguity, which is also necessary when asking open ended questions in an AI interview and allowing an organization to change towards a previously unknown destiny. The only direction provided by AI is to search out the positive, the aliveness and the available assets. This is creative and constructive in itself, but also very conducive to creative thought, as it provides a safe and inspiring environment that bypasses critical and judgmental tendencies. The energy springing from being involved in shaping the future is intrinsically motivating, which boosts creativity (Amabile, 1988) and gives people a healthy sense of control, which in turn increases motivation even more (Seligman, 1991).

Change and creativity are closely linked, as implementing creative ideas automatically leads to changes. Also, imposed change often involves coming up with ideas on how to deal with it most effectively. Appreciative Inquiry is a change methodology. It supports bringing something new and useful into being. A climate conducive to change is often also conducive to creativity. AI produces an affirmative, constructive climate that facilitates creativity and change.

4.1 Creativity – Not "Amendity"

Since creativity is such a positive force that can create something completely new from nothing, the focus on problems does not feel appropriate. To create means to bring forth something that wasn't there before, not to amend a fault. Yet creativity, as it is applied outside of art is often associated with problems, since creative thinking is such a useful asset in dealing with problems. To address this, what I perceive as an antagonism, I decided to search for options to merge the benefits of the creative problem solving process and Appreciative Inquiry.

Applying AI principles to CPS and reducing the problem focus in the latter and adopting a positive language should result in a more constructive approach to deliberate and innovative creativity. I believe the strong problem focus in non-artistic creativity stems from a defensive attitude creativity scholars thought they had to adopt to prove the usefulness of creativity. Applying creativity to complex situations was described as solving problems, not as creating opportunities. Our upbringing makes us believe that if we can't immediately grasp it, it is a problem. Our lack of tolerance for ambiguity teaches us to immediately solve things, decide them, and move on. If we cannot deliver this, we learn that we have a problem. To understand complex situations and to conjure solutions for them involves creative thinking, thus this skill is easily associated with problems.

4.2 Process Links

The AI process focuses on the positive, taking people from discovering the best to dreaming how this might ideally be, then designing ways for it to be turned into this dream and finally the destiny, i.e. how to implement it and make it last. This can be linked to the CPS process described by Puccio, Murdock and Mance (2006). They consider the process to be consisting of six steps and an executive step:

- Assessing the situation

1. Exploring the vision

2. Formulating the challenge

3. Exploring ideas

4. Formulating solutions

5. Exploring acceptance

6. Formulating a plan

The reoccuring divergent and convergent phases exist in AI as well, even though they are not as explicit. Where specific tools aid the diverging in CPS, this is

achieved by creating an affirmative atmosphere during the AI process and by inspiring people to search for their most appealing assets. The converging tools in the CPS process find their analogon in intuitive choice for the most alive aspects in AI. I believe that assessing the situation corresponds to the continuous affirmative attitude in the AI process, seeking to understand the organization at all times. Exploring the vision is paralleled in searching for the right questions to ask in the discovery phase, and formulating the challenge is similar to matching these questions to the current need of the organization. A successful discovery depends on a creative and affirmative choice of questions and on a creative and open atmosphere during the interviews. One of the differences in AI and CPS is that, in the former, the consultant or facilitator assumes responsibility for the content. The underlying assumption is that any intervention will influence a system and that the choice of questions for the interviews determines the outcome of the AI process (Cooperrider & Whitney, n.d.). The results derived from these interviews constitute a creative perspective in themselves: novel and useful insights are generated. Conducting the interviews can be interpreted as the first round of exploring ideas, the dream stage with its strong emphasis on imagination and stretching towards a compelling vision as the second. Dreaming is pure ideation, imagining an ideal and picturing an optimal future state. It means stretching the mind towards an appealing vision. It involves deferring judgment as well as ignoring past limitations, yet it sheds the reputation of being completely crazy and wild, as all dreams are built on and triggered by true experiences uncovered in the discovery stage. The ideation process in CPS appears to have a quicker pace than the thorough dreaming stage in AI. Formulating the positive core equals the formulating solutions in CPS. In AI the continuous focus on collaboration and involvement of all stakeholders serves as a constant source for creating acceptance. In the design stage, the translation of the dream into processes and infrastructure that will enable its implementation, ensures its adaptation to the circumstances, an important success factor. The vision is converted into viable guidelines and provocative propositions. Destiny prepares the system for a sustainable change, enabling a learning culture and

institutionalizing Appreciative Inquiry. This parallels the step of formulating a plan, yet the underlying mentality differs: AI seeks to not squelch constructive energies with rigid plans, but seeks to establish a creative culture and an improvising organization. Watkins and Mohr (2001) refer to this last stage of creating the future as the innovation stage and write that it serves to "find innovative ways to create that future" (p. 47).

4.3 Divergent and Convergent Principles

The CPS principles described in this section are all based on the ones laid out in Creative Leadership (Puccio, Murdock & Mance, 2006). The links to Appreciative Inquiry are naturally not all proportionate or linear, yet they provide a strong network of associations between the two approaches that points towards a beneficial possibility to blend them.

4.3.1 Defer Judgment

To defer judgment is one of the fundamental principles of ideation, and its goal to create a positive, encouraging atmosphere and to save evaluation for later is equivalent to the basic assumption of AI that you are allowed to dream "unrealistically" and then see where this dream takes you. According to Puccio, Murdock and Mance (2006) "deferring judgment requires the ability to suspend disbelief and to entertain the potential value of each and every alternative" (p. 63) which mirrors the affirmative position AI assumes throughout the whole process. This rule is important to provide a safe environment that allows to stretch beyond the known. In AI this especially comes into play in the dream stage, when it is important to expand from the positive core to an inspiring and compelling vision. AI also assumes an open stance when asking for experiences that reflect aliveness, in contrast to predefined categories that might confine the answers given in the interviews. This allows people to answer from their heart and to rely on their intuitive choice of experiences that they share in discovery. In this way, deferring judgment in AI contributes to generating positive energy and motivation. It also ensures participation and alignment.

4.3.2 Go for Quantity

This principle is finds its analogy in AI in the approach to involve as many people as possible to get the most positive outcome and to include all the energy there is. Like in CPS, it provides a larger data basis to choose from, which enables defining a powerful and representative positive core. Having a large basis brings in many different perspectives on the same "aliveness" aspects and it ensures that the true "gems" are discovered. Furthermore, it is motivating by providing a perception of productivity, and the involvement of many people facilitates acceptance. As the generation of many ideas fuels up the ideation process, the discovery of many resources and powerful assets in an organization creates momentum and energy towards the change.

4.3.3 Make Connections

The interactive nature of the interviews and the sharing of the results in larger groups encourages that people learn from each others' positive accounts, and include others' AI input into the wholesome dream. Participants feel inspired to contribute their version of a similar experience and can latch on to the value or underlying asset when choosing the positive core. Being able to relate to the stories or some aspects of them is very motivating, this channels constructive energy around the most alive stories. Using the positive core and bridging it into the dream state connects past experiences as a foundation to the envisioned future.

4.3.4 Seek Novelty

This principle describes the notion to not "only entertain all possibilities, no matter how outlandish they may appear (…), but to actively go after them" (Puccio, Murdock & Mance, 2006, p. 68). It seeks to really try to stretch the mind and to go beyond what was there before. In encourages a change of perspective, breaking the paradigm and striving for originality. For AI this might be translated into seeing what was unusual in an experience described in an interview. It seeks to uncover what made an alive moment stand out. And it supports bold dreams,

original ideas for the future, reaching for the best. The dream stage is about extrapolating existing ideas and resources and thereby going beyond the existing, limiting box. One difference in application of this principle might be that AI lacks the silliness factor – even though humor and playfulness are encouraged. This might be an adaptation that, if done with care, could boost the dream stage of AI into a new level of constructive audacity. The principle of seeking novelty as a call for action in the AI process invites to dig deep and be persistent to uncover the best in the organization and the stories.

4.3.5 Apply Affirmative Judgment

Defined as "using effective critical thinking as opposed to faultfinding" (Puccio, Murdock & Mance, 2006, p. 72) this rule may well be the most obvious link to Appreciative Inquiry. As AI is all about being affirmative, seeing the positive and pointing out what works, which strongly contrasts the widespread approach of problem focus and judgmental thinking. In AI the strongest and most inspirational stories survive, which means the solution is based on the stories with the strongest impact or appeal. To me this is a deliberate application of Darwinism (Wikipedia, 2006, ¶ 1), which led me to the idea of creative Darwinism, since it is a natural selection into the positive core and a formulation of the destiny according to the "fittest" or most alive experiences. Yet, in AI this selection is not as harsh as it would be in the wilderness. The converging of stories and assets into a positive core happens in a constructive manner, building safety and trust among the participants and focusing on dialogue and collaboration.

In AI there is a stronger emphasis on this principle than in CPS. In Appreciative Inquiry the notion of being affirmative is omnipresent, even beyond the actual process, whereas in CPS the whole initiation of the process happens through focusing on problem. Being affirmative is what turns AI into such a powerful change tool.

4.3.6 Keep Novelty Alive

The interview questions in AI seek to uncover only the top experiences, the most alive moments of the organization, the team or the individual. Not every AI story might be as inspiring as others, but taking the time to peel out the "gem" in each account and the essence of each interview result can turn even the fainter experiences into shiny little stars. This means to stay alert during the whole process of AI to not miss a turn or a neglected aspect that might provide a new perspective or resource for the dream. It is important to avoid doing what we are used to and to avoid leaning towards comfortable solutions, just because they seem familiar. If novelty is kept alive, the free-wheeling during the divergence phases can truly pay off. The whole process is based on uncovering and amplifying the unusual. It seeks to find the most intriguing core and build a dream on it. In CPS wild ideas often have to be tuned down to fit reality. In AI, novelty is founded in real experiences and it is generated by extrapolating them. By observing where the energy flows, facets of stories can be channeled and combined to powerful components for the vision. In AI improving an idea might resemble more to aggregating similar experiences and assembling them to a more wholesome vision. Here the focus is more on an intuitive convergence, pulled and guided by the energy of stories. Salvaging the novel aspects from individuals' experiences is like distilling the essence out of the stories to brew a potent and survivable destiny.

4.3.7 Check Your Objectives

This principle is geared towards ensuring the usefulness of ideas. In CPS it is fulfilled by checking ideas against criteria to determine which will be best in achieving the goal. This principle might find its AI equivalent in the perpetual screening for aliveness and empowerment. What brings out the best, what enables the most amazing achievements, when is the effectiveness self-amplifying? These are the criteria for the whole Appreciative Inquiry process and they are applied by intuition. It is considered important to involve everyone and to practice the talk (e.g. seeking collaboration only works if people are involved) and

it is encouraged to make sure the process actually matches the goal. Checking the positive goal is important when choosing the questions. As in CPS it is crucial to not be mislead by destructive habits, to not be blinded by assumptions and to avoid snap judgments. The foundational objectives in AI are true for different initiatives and they have a similar focus. Some more specific objectives for the design stage are derived from the dreaming, yet they are not explicitly defined. They evolve and are not especially generated like in CPS. The reoccurring control is whether the momentum and inspiration is still there. If it is, then the AI process is still on track.

4.3.8 Stay Focused

To separate the wheat from the chaff, it is important to sift through the ideas, reflect on them and analyze them. This principle points towards the relevance of deliberate evaluation and refining of ideas. Concentrating on a solution involves a powerful intuitive selection, which should be balanced by a rational examination and strengthening of the idea of choice. "Intuition is like the metal detector: it helps us zero in on possible solutions. Critical analysis is like the digging technique used to eventually unearth the hidden treasure" (Puccio, Murdock & Mance, 2006, p. 79).

This rule is found in the choice of question and in the tone for the interviews and workshops. Especially as questions shape the reality it is important to be deliberate about the direction the reality is shaped in. Underlying assumptions might lead the questions into a pessimistic direction. The delicacy of the energetic momentum that is building from the positive focus has to be acknowledged. It pays off to heed the fragility of a safe environment when converging and selecting, as it is the foundation for trust in the process and the system. Positive stories and outputs can work their magic beyond the intervention, even if they are not included in the destiny, as long as the trusting atmosphere is conserved. Staying focused serves to ensure the intervention is going in the right direction, and being deliberate serves as a guide for the

interviewer to follow the constructive energy, but to maintain a high level of authentic appreciation throughout the different stages of AI.

4.3.9 The Wildcard Principle: Allow for Incubation

Incubation has long since been a part of the creative process – sometimes mentioned more explicitly, sometimes implied. Puccio, Murdock and Mance (2006) cite several examples where the effect of letting the mind rest and disengage from the problem or issue at hand proved to be very productive and effective. They also state that a certain amount of domain relevant knowledge has to be available for the mind to engage into productive creation of ideas. Without this knowledge no amount of incubation will be productive for diverging or converging.

AI has incubation implicitly interwoven into its process: the necessary knowledge is created during the interviews and shared to form a common positive core. From this, the dreaming and designing feeds, with time gaps between the two stages to let the mind wonder and let its intuition work.

5 SELF APPLICATION / EXPERIENCE

As the end of my studies are approaching, a topic that has been on my mind a lot has been my future professionally, but also my personal future. I decided to apply the AI process to the exploration of my future and to changing towards a life that incorporates creativity more.

5.1 Applying the Process

Initially I studied AI and the process and sought to understand the essence of each of the four stages as well as its underlying philosophy. The deliberately vague goal was to gain a positive outlook on my future, to enhance my self-perception and create a safe mental exploring environment. I put the emphasis on sincerely deferring judgment, avoiding any critical thought and putting the focus on developing an inspiring vision. I sought to design an energetic dream, which would compel me to act towards reaching it.

To do this I decided to warm up to the AI process by approaching it in my morning pages, a tool suggested by Julia Cameron (2000), which I was practicing rather irregularly before beginning my project. Further, I would work through each of the four stages, applying the diverging and converging concept suggested for the creative problem solving process, as well as the corresponding principles (e.g. Puccio, Murdock & Mance, 2006). Where it seemed useful, I would apply tools borrowed from the CPS process, and where appropriate seek to adapt them to the AI philosophy.

5.1.1 Morning Pages

To become familiar with the process I started writing morning pages (Cameron, 2000) more intensely. I wrote about the general ideas of AI and tried using them to influence my self-image positively. I played around with the parameters in each stage to see how they would fit and feel. I focused on letting my thoughts flow and trying to truly let the AI process be my guide. The purpose of writing was to get in touch with my intuitive side and to break out of old patterns.

First, when doing the morning pages, it was hard to focus on the positive. I realized that even though I consider myself an affirmative thinker and fairly adept in metacognitive processes, I had many depreciative thought patterns going on in my mind. Therefore, I perceived the purging aspect of the morning pages as very helpful in getting rid of debris accumulated not only over time in my life, but also to free myself from clutter dumped on me by current every day challenges and stress factors. The morning pages had a cleansing and opening effect on me. I felt they were a smooth re-calibration to neutral grounds, providing a receptive foundation for the AI process application.

Getting accustomed to the AI process and giving myself a pre-run phase to try it on helped me get a better understanding of the process in practice. I was able to see which steps happened at what point, and became more comfortable with the philosophy. This turned out to be a good measure to avoid too much process thinking during the actual application. On the other hand I was also tuned in to some of the effects of AI, which made it easier to observe them in the actual application.

Writing the morning pages (Cameron, 2000) assisted me in honing in on the topic of my creative future for the AI change. I decided to continue the use of the morning pages to provide an ongoing outlet for thoughts, and an uncensored space to note observations and contemplations.

5.1.2 Brainstorming Questions

Equipped with the general idea of using the AI process to define my future vision and mobilize myself to change towards it, I started to generate many questions, which I would choose from for the discovery stage. I wanted to provide quantity to ensure quality and felt I had to intentionally stretch to warrant that the *right* questions were included. As I did not want to determine criteria for the choice of the *right* questions before this brainstorming, I challenged myself to think very broadly. AI literature emphasizes strongly, how important the questions are for the success of the whole AI method.

As Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros (2005) wrote "One of the most impactful things a change agent or OD practitioner does is to articulate questions." (p. 8). I set myself the goal of 30 questions and then reviewed them and expanded further on questions that caught my attention. I dug deeper and tried to phrase the questions differently, to see whether that changed the perspective or the weighting of the question.

I was glad that I had stretched further than initially planned, because not only did I have many questions to choose from, I also felt certain that I had not missed any important aspects. This divergent exercise additionally gave me a better overview of my topic.

5.1.3 Highlighting

To choose from these numerous questions, I started marking those that stood out to me. In hindsight I can say that the implicit criteria might have been curiosity and just my gut feeling that the questions were heading in the right direction. I joined several questions to form the compound to work with. The result was a rather general question that included several sub-aspects which I wanted to explicitly explore.

5.1.4 Appreciative Ladder

I noticed, however, that still felt a slight insecurity about the question being on target. To explore the question space some more, and to make sure I was searching on the right level of abstraction, I decided to adapt a combination of the ladder of abstraction (Isaksen, Dorval & Treffinger, 2000) and the "Why? What's stopping you?" tool (Miller, Verhar & Firestien, 2001). Instead of asking what was hindering me, I asked what was enabling or helping me. This seemed like a more appropriate mindset for Appreciative Inquiry.

First, I rose on the abstraction level. I did this for the general question and for the sub-questions in my compound question. Then for each compound, I asked myself what was enabling me. I expanded the answers by asking what else was

enabling me, before going on a deeper level by asking what the support for this answer was.

I gained a lot of confidence about the initial phrasing of my question. Even though I did end up adding some aspects, this assurance was the most valuable result of this exercise. I felt like I was enabling myself to focus on the *right* questions by enabling my gut feeling to hone in on the real essence taking a step back by abstracting.

5.1.5 Alive Stories

In the usual AI process, the discovery happens in interviews. The questions are posed to several individuals and their responses are used to define the positive core. The remarkable effect of the interviews stems from the answers in storytelling format. As I went through the process on my own, I decided to expand by writing down several stories as answers to the questions. The important step for me was to allow myself to "brag" and praise myself. I found it remarkable that the stories that I wrote down did actually capture the essence, they felt like very compact examples for my traits. I went over several different stories in my mind, going back in time to stretch. I chose to write down those that "still felt good" and whose memories had energy in them. It occurred to me that this was a positive form of judgment, as I did some selection. Thus, this step involves some convergence, even though it is a divergent exercise. The writing of the stories itself had some elements of convergence, as well, as I focused on describing the positive essence and what I considered enriching or "alive" in them.

The next step was to extract all the resources I could from the stories. I believe it is important to stretch in this step, as we are not used to listing our talents or merits. It's easy to overlook skills, as we take it for granted when we do something with ease. But the assets we don't sweat are the important resources that enable us to achieve unknown heights. For this reason I repeated the process of analyzing each story for potentials of mine. I asked myself "what might

be all the skills / abilities / knowledge that helped me do this?". I assume it would be easier to have a second person to cross check for skills. It has a self-image boosting effect to list even the little things, the abilities that don't seem special at all.

While writing the stories and elaborating on them, more details came to my mind. It was good to write them down and be able to add more to them. When I analyzed them, sometimes even more details surfaced. These details were very important to me in embellishing the main message and emphasizing what the whole story actually revolved around. They made it easier to re-live the feelings from the story, which was very energizing. It felt inspiring to remember how something worked out well and turned into a success, and to observe how I learned things and to see my improvement. It was reassuring at the same time to know that these stories could be repeated. The listing of the positive traits raised my self-image. It was fascinating how many abilities I could come up with that had helped me through the different stories. Some of them were quite basic, but I listed them anyway, just for the motivating effect. And the comprehensive listing provided some clues for trends or clusters of abilities, skills and resources.

5.1.6 Intuitive Choice of Positive Core

An important characteristic of the Appreciative Inquiry philosophy is that the discovery centers on experiences of aliveness. This characteristic is difficult to grasp on a purely rational level, which is why I decided to let my intuition and my gut feeling decide, which of the resources on the list derived from the stories were important to me. I went over the list of resources several times, asking myself whether a certain trait, ability or skill felt like they were an essential part of me. I checked whether I felt proud and energetic about this point and if it readily came to mind as an important component of the situation when I thought of my story.

It was very motivating to let go of the acquired voice of "this is what you should choose" or "one has to value this resource". I was letting myself trust the affective

side, in congruency with the topic, which ironically made it easier to justify this approach to decision making on a rational level. As a result I, again, experienced a huge boost in confidence. I found that I could say to myself that I liked the person I was reading about: I liked my core. It seemed like a great resource well inside of me, which was a very energizing feeling. This was a good foundation to build onto.

5.1.7 ICE for Metaphors

This second converging step in defining the positive core involves finding a metaphor that represents the essence of it. Cooperrider and Whitney (n.d.) emphasize the importance of symbols for understanding and knowledge of an organization. To understand my positive core more thoroughly it seemed useful to tap into its symbolism with the help of metaphors. I decided to use Image Connection Excursion (ICE), a tool slightly adapted from Visual Connections (Miller, Verhar & Firestien, 2001, p. 36-37). ICE seemed appropriate to apply to a visual context, working on finding a representative image for the positive core and tapping into my tacit knowledge of my resources. Furthermore it is a tool that promotes freewheeling, as it calls for artificial connections between images and a problem statement (see appendix for ICE worksheet). This stretch seemed useful to come up with some metaphor ideas that were beyond the mainstream.

I picked three images that were appealing, and wrote down four associations for each. In the problem statement I included all the resources that I wanted to be represented in the metaphor. Finally I made the artificial connections between the associations and the problem statement and ended up with 14 possible metaphors. I checked for what felt good, immediately expanding on the metaphors that I liked. I narrowed down the options and then verified if the resources I had listed in the positive core were sufficiently represented in the metaphor. I worked on the metaphor to include some aspects and de-emphasize others. Finally, I narrowed the choices down to two metaphors, which I let "simmer" for a night to see which one would feel better the next day.

The result was a really positive metaphor that not only summarized the positive core, but took it to a different level by focusing on the essence. It communicated some implicit meanings that would have been very difficult to formulate in precise words and it centered the energy around one easy to grasp picture. It helped to transport what I felt good about in a single image. This positive stretch almost seemed a bit too crazy, yet it was intriguing and motivating. I enjoyed toying with the metaphor, and came up with more aspects and valuable resources that were "hidden" in it. It gave me a good vision of what I am and a compelling idea of what I want to be more of.

5.1.8 Dreaming with Imagestreaming

Doing the dreaming individually seemed like a challenging task. To facilitate it, I chose to apply imagestreaming (Wenger, 1992). It appeared to be a good help for guiding me towards an intuitive vision, tapping into underused resources of the visual mind. Imagestreaming also serves as a tool to train creativity by animating the optic abilities of the mind.

For this exercise it is necessary to work with a partner, at least in the initial trials. My partner for this exercise monitored my visual attention cues. I let my inner eye look around without specific instruction at first, simply describing anything that I saw in as much detail as possible. It was interesting to just follow my visual impressions without any obvious purpose or rational direction. I noted that the speed of the images exceeded my capacity to describe, and that some of the transitions were not easy to interpret right away. I also noticed that the visual attention cues seemed to correlate with emotionally charged objects or tangents of the subjects I was describing.

After this initial warm-up to practice imagestreaming and to allow my exercise partner to get used to my visual attention cues, he directed me towards more specific topics. He asked me what my dreams were, how I saw myself living my positive core metaphor and asked about my hopes for the future. The pictures I saw in my mind were very energetic and strong and colorful. They were not

necessarily clear in their detail, especially as some of them came at high speed and then seemed to move on and transform, but they were powerful and persuasive. Several of the images were rather fuzzy, yet communicated the essence of certain components of my dreams. The pictures that represented a happy family life or success for me, were loaded with strong emotions and with very precise feelings, how reaching this aspect of the vision would feel. Other pictures were visually more detailed, but not as potent in their affective component, as e.g. an image I had of my future home.

5.1.9 Dream Writing

Keeping the images from the previous exercise in mind, I turned to writing down my dreams in more detail to form an inspiring vision statement for myself. My writing exercises from the morning pages had proven to be very helpful, which is why I wanted to extend the benefits of handwriting to contemplating my vision. I applied the technique of "letting it flow", as I termed the approach to write quickly and without much rational thought, to make explicit what sometimes is implicit, but not obvious to me. The writing helped me to get a clearer picture in my head, to decorate the gaps and to fill in the vague parts of my vision and make it more precise. Yet the attitude of the morning pages, that whatever I was writing was not etched in stone, but just some notes, made it easier to experiment with some ideas while putting them on paper. It gave me confidence into this process, that writing the morning pages worked for me. This was a good way to write plenty, which gave me a lot of substance to choose from, still letting my intuitive side speak.

What astonished me about the results of this writing exercise was the precision with which I was able to pin down my dreams. I found that I had quite a clear picture of what I wanted to achieve or reach in the different areas of my life. The biggest surprise was the conception of how I could interweave my personal and my professional life. This also provided the most inspiration, as the question of how I might manage that had been lingering in the back of my head for quite some time.

5.1.10   Vision Image

After writing about my vision, I decided it would enrich my vision statement if I defined the essence of it by drawing an image of it. I sought to get a better grasp of it by working with it some more and uncovering new layers and perspectives. As a center piece for the vision image I chose to use the metaphor, then supplemented the elements of my vision statement that intrigued me. The whole image turned out to be a jing-jang composition, representing the underlying balance of success and personal fulfillment that I am seeking. This made sense to me, and some things became even more "realistic". Especially the challenge of balancing family and career, which worked in the picture by contributing the creativity to my family and by getting energy from having a family for my career. Looking at the picture was motivated and encouraging, it provided inspiring drive towards my vision.

5.1.11   Provocative Proposition

The translation of the dream into reality happens in the design stage of the AI process.

The first step in this is writing a provocative proposition (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2005). To ensure that I covered everything I had dreamt up in the previous stage, I chose to strive for quantity in this step as well. This would give me several different phrasings of the same aspect to pick from and it would uncover nuances, which would ensure that the intuitive choice as some material to work with.

To write the different parts of this mission statement I asked myself what I would do to reach my vision. I tried to phrase these actions in present tense and reminded myself to phrase everything positively. To lay out the process of getting to my vision I imagined a journey towards it and wrote down the components I had to cover. I borrowed the idea-phrase from Creativity Unbound (Miller, Verhar & Firestien, 2001) "What I see myself doing is…" (p.63) to formulate the different steps.

As a result I ended up with some very precise descriptions of I wanted to be like. Some described single actions that would enable moving towards the vision, some were reoccuring behaviors that I would practice and incorporate into my life as habits. Writing down explicit activities made the whole vision more realistic to me, because it rendered the idea more "do-able".

5.1.12　　　Mission – Design – Incubation

I consider what is described as defining a purpose (Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, Cherney & Fry, 2004) or writing provocative propositions (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2005) in the AI process to be writing a mission statement, a precise formulation of the value added that a team or organization will provide to its clientele. Transferring that to my personal vision, this would mean it had to communicate what I wanted to contribute, what I would do to make my vision come true. To ensure that I focused on what was really important to me, I inserted an incubation phase (Torrance & Safter, 1999) at this stage, so that the thoughts and results from the previous work could settle and sort themselves in my mind. Letting my unconscious do its job seemed like a constructive approach to giving my mission ideas space to grow, shift and take shape.

To explicitly give myself time for this incubation (Torrance & Safter, 1999), I let the results sit on my working table for two days. Additionally I went to the Albright Knox Gallery to let my mind wander and be inspired by creative products. I took notes in the museum, albeit not focusing on my issue, and then related them back to my mission statement later.

This proved to be a very productive process for me: when returning to my mission statement I was able to make some quick decisions about what parts intrigued me, and which did not. I nonetheless found that I had too many points mentioned in it, so I decided to divide the segments into domains and sub-points. These gave me a pretty clear map of what to do. The advantage of having several sub-points supporting each domain was that these aspects provided some good hints on how to enact the domain.

5.1.13   Revisit Vision

The last step gave me the impression that even though I was doing well on laying out what I wanted to reach and what to do to get there, I was shifting up and down between different levels and not distinguishing well between vision, mission and what would be my next step: strategy. To assure myself I was on track I decided to introduce a loop in the process and revisit my work from defining my vision. I wanted to develop a better sense of where I was in the process and compared the results from the mission stage to the vision statement. I read the vision as well as re-inspected the vision drawing, then read the mission statement. I reminded myself of my different interpretations of vision, mission and strategy: the vision being the dream, the ideal I wanted to end up in. The mission I defined as the actions, behaviors and outcomes that would get me there, whereas the strategy would be defined in specific actions, that would guide me, with a closer tie to the time component.

I ended up being assured that I was on the right track. I had to shift some of my thoughts and writings back and forth between my vision and my mission statement, but I kept them all. I decided to translate some of the statements into guidelines for my strategy definition, just copying them for the moment to work with them when I reached that stage. I was intrigued to see that all my thoughts and ideas wove in well together. I worked through the results one more time, this time noting all the experiences of what had worked before and past successes that supported my vision and mission statements. It turned into a very solid foundation to work from, which gave me a lot of confidence.

5.1.14   Scrying Scribbles

The next step in the AI process, defining guidelines for achieving the dream, serves to making the dreams sustainable. The purpose is to establish a system that will securely embed the results of the design phase. To address this rather rational procedure in a fashion that allowed my intuition to contribute, I decided to diverge with a playful and creative method I had learned at Creative Problem solving Institute (Jon Pearson, personal communications, June 29, 2006). I

adapted the tool slightly and named it Scrying Scribbles, as it works well to eliminate inhibitions concerning drawing, yet still lets people tap into their visual and artistic intuition by interpreting the scribbles afterwards.

I drew 12 scribbles on a blank piece of paper, then titled them and then interpreted the titles and scribbles into guidelines, linking them back to my purpose statements. I also wrote up other guidelines when I thought of them, letting my mind be inspired to come up with whatever it thought was important. At this stage I did not crosscheck whether my ideas supported my vision, I focused on diverging. I figured I should match up the guidelines with my vision statement in an ensuing step.

This exercise was very stimulating in producing many guidelines. Some seemed outside the range of what my focus had been on before. This reassured me that I was covering the subject from all necessary perspectives. I felt confident that I didn't have any blind spots to worry about.

5.1.15   Guidelines: Clustering and PCA

To determine the relevancy of the guidelines for the vision, I clustered them in preparation for an adaptation of the paired comparison analysis (Isaksen, Dorval & Treffinger, 2000) that I wanted to conduct. I chose the PCA, as the priorities of the guidelines was not obvious to me at first sight, so e.g. a card sort (Miller, Verhar & Firestien) would not have been helpful. I wanted to sense what felt more important to me, hear what resonated, and make my underlying priorities come out. The clustering helped me in reducing the many guidelines I had come up with to some core statements. This served to simplify the implementation stage of my vision, as it is easier to consistently work with a few guidelines than being overwhelmed by a multitude of rules and principles along the way.

I grouped the guidelines that covered similar elements together, then decided on a representative theme or title for each cluster. As the intention of the PCA was not to chose among the different options, but to discover my intuitive priority, I did not emphasize the parallel and distinct criteria, as is recommended for the PCA

(Isaksen, Dorval & Treffinger, 2000). Also, I compared the clusters by comparing the cluster titles, without assigning the relative importance value that is suggested in the original version. These adaptations seemed appropriate to avoid too much cognitive focus in the process. The result would be a simple ranking for which I could determine whether I felt it represented my true priorities.

I was not surprised to find my values ranking as my highest priority to serve as a guideline. They cover a large part of my definition of self and are thus a very important determinant for my vision. I know that the guideline referring to my values was on a disproportionately high level in comparison to some of the other guideline clusters, an imbalance I chose to accept when avoiding the parallel criterion. I nonetheless felt this was better than artificially splitting up this guideline, that I was comfortable with the way it was, into single values that were more parallel to some of the other guidelines. It gave me the feeling of a crosscheck to find this guideline ranking as first priority after the comparison; the way it should. I was surprised, however, to find that the guideline which I had titled "pampering my artist" resulted as my second highest priority. When trying to understand this, I realized that a lot of this might be due to how letting my creativity grow and develop would be an enabler for implementing my vision and mission. After this insight the high ranking made sense to me. It was interesting to see the ranking on paper, and it felt very constructive and helpful to have some guidelines that would be useful in helping me stay on track towards my mission, and ultimately, my vision.

5.1.16 Re-evolution

As a final step in the Appreciative Inquiry process I decided to apply what I refer to as Re-evolution. This is an approach that I very loosely base on Covey's (1990) principle of keeping the end in mind. It involves imagining a future state, the goal of a project or in this case the dream, and then imagining what was necessary and helpful in getting there. The essential point is to start with the end in mind and then trace the evolution of this state backwards step by step. The advantage of this kind of "planning" is that it takes the focus off of too specific

dates, differentiating it from project planning. Yet, this technique allows to determine and imagine all the things necessary to enable the goal. It helps in coming up with specific tasks.

I began by envisioning my vision as having occurred, and then imagining the successes I would describe to someone, as if I was remembering how I got there. I focused on the thread, the consequences and sequences, what had made the last step possible, and then the one before. I re-used the method of trying to paint a detailed word picture, as in imagestreaming, albeit this time it was in writing. I tried to get into the vision by imagining emotions and actions as well as rational ingredients for each success.

This process resulted in several very practical habits to develop, which were in keeping with my guidelines and would result in achieving my mission. As my mission is what I can contribute to reaching my vision, these habits will constitute my tools for working towards my vision.

6 CONCLUSION

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is about asking people when they were alive in their organization or in their life and taking these experiences, condensing them into the essence of their meaning and then seeking to do more of that. To do this, AI uses the tool of appreciative interviews to uncover the positive core, which it uses as a foundation to dream up an ideal future. This future is then designed and embedded in a wholesome destiny to make it sustainable. The approach to creating a vision about an ideal state, the dreaming, has a lot to do with creativity. My revelation, though, is that this essence, the energy in the experiences, the material that builds the vision or dream is nothing else but core values. It's what drives us and makes us work and. In sum this would be the link I have been searching in creativity. I believe creativity is good in itself, but that is hard to "prove" – as bad people can be creative as well. But as I believe that being constructively creative is more fulfilling than the destructive version, and according to self-actualization theories that would mean that constructive creativity is lifting us on the Maslow hierarchy of fulfillment. Now, if the essence found in the discovery phase and applied in the dream phase is composed of successfully tried out resources, the achievements that are built on our core values, if our aliveness, the energy in those moments when things work to their optimum, is the result of feeding our values, then there is the proof that creativity in itself is positive, and more powerful when based on values and done for the greater good.

Since AI is a change process, and change means doing something new and hoping it is useful, it can be derived that change is a consequence of being creative. AI is based on values, on the positive core, the core values people are passionate about, because their fulfillment made them feel alive before, which is why they want to re-attain that. This passionate energy comes from tapping into the core, from glimpsing self-actualization, and is a compelling goal, an attractive vision, an ideal painted with imagination and creativity. To achieve this vision and

to live this ideal, this dream, is creating a dream future. Creativity is the means to achieve the vision painted creatively by tapping into the aliveness in AI.

Overall the Appreciative Inquiry process is very appealing. The positive approach makes it enjoyable to work on change, and initiating it by focusing on successes provides a powerful vantage point. It was interesting, however, how difficult it was for me to truly focus on the positive and let go of the habit of negativity. It seems our society puts a lot of effort into pinpointing the problem, exposing deficiencies and teaching us to be critical. Witnessing on myself how potent this change of perspective towards appreciation of the success is, enthused me even more about the principles of deferring judgment and being affirmative in the creative process. To me this attitude of fostering and nourishing resources and achievements advanced to the highest value in enabling creativity.

Once this energy was unplugged, it seemed to be flowing incessantly. It was a lot of fun to think positively and constructively and to not have to worry about critique. Interestingly enough I did not seem to have to worry about being realistic. This tuning down into practical and do-able steps happened automatically, yet without the usual loss of energy caused by critical, over analytical planning.

I found AI to be very conducive to modifying self-imposed constraints (Ackhoff & Vergara, 1988), which I believe is what creativity is about. This is one of the reasons I consider the AI philosophy and creativity so closely related: they complement each other in a most productive way. Appreciative Inquiry in its constructive manner of approaching available achievements and resources seems to enable more creativity, functioning as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Myers, 1999) in this domain. Furthermore, creativity and the act of dreaming and imagining an ideal future outcome interact very well and have an animating effect on each other.

When adapting the tools and methods I knew from the creative process to Appreciative Inquiry, I perceived them as becoming more powerful. It seemed to

work well to put them to a slightly different use. I believe applying these adaptations in CPS would give more room for growth and intuition in the process. On the other hand I felt that the tools had a similar effect on the AI process; adding more creativity and intuition to it.

The AI approach was very motivating and inspiring for me. I perceived it as very energizing and encouraging. The message hidden in the AI method is that dreams are possible, that we have the material to make them come true hidden in our past success experiences. This is very encouraging. It triggered a lot of daydreaming in me. I drew two conclusions from this: 1. I should consider to allow myself more constructive daydreaming, as long as I made conscious use of it's energizing power. 2. I should develop the habit of relying on my positive resources, my positive core. I felt elated that I could reach so high.

The strength of AI is that it does not ask for rational explanations but seeks to discover situations characterized by a powerful positive feeling. It thereby founds on intuition as it is asking for dreams and metaphors. This emphasis on intuition provides face validity of the process for me and explains, why it is so powerful: it taps into otherwise unused or underused resources. AI is a framework that provides a safe environment to sense the answers, rely on intuition, apply incubation and to let the subconscious work. To me the whole philosophy is based on what many creativity techniques seek to achieve at some point: letting the wisest regions of our mind do the work.

The topic of AI drew me to in. First from a very rational point of view, then the more I let myself dive into it, the more emotional, intuitive, wholesome it became. There are so few opportunities in our western society to dream openly, to feel productive when being uncritical and to voice and work with our intuition. The magic of AI is rationally explaining why allowing the irrational is productive to enable fruitful and creative change.

7 TAKING IT FURTHER

7.1 Out of Scope

When adapting some of the CPS tools to the AI context I realized it would be helpful to translate all the CPS vocabulary into the constructive language of AI. This might include referring to CPS as COS, Creative Opportunity Seeking, in future, to circumvent the problem focus. The principle of deferring judgment might be expanded and the results of this could be researched.

It might be interesting to look at the effect of the AI question style on CPS and creativity in general. And what consequence does AI have on well-being? Are there similar links as between creativity and self-actualization?

There may be ways to tauten the process I applied, even though the pace felt right when I ran through it. For other contexts is might be a little long and involve too many loops and repetitions. Cabra (2004) states that there are situations where a sense of urgency may lead a group to rather focus on an issue to solve than delve into the depth of an AI question.

7.1.1 AI and the Creative Person

AI is totally person focused, basing every change on the dreams and needs of the individual and then combining all the individual energies results in a bigger whole than the sum of its parts. Linking these aspects to the creative person might be an interesting endeavor, exploring the effects on motivation as well as interactions with personality and individual history. Does AI really increase the intrinsic motivation of people by inspiring them towards a vision?

7.1.1.1 AI and Optimism

On an individual level AI allows an optimistic perspective, encouraging individuals to strive for the best and providing an environment to grow and self-actualize in. So what effect does Appreciative Inquiry have on self-actualization and

creativity? What effect does self-actualization have on AI and the effectivity of the process?

In the attribution theory Seligman (1991) explains why the way we explain events influences our outlook on life. When focusing on positive things like AI suggests to us, we explain our lives positively. This gives us a feeling of control, countering learned helplessness. When we are allowed to expand our thoughts by the feeling that we are empowered and in charge, this reinforces us in taking the risk of thinking outside the paradigm, thinking creatively. Creativity gives us control as well, as it lets us shape our environment. So this reinforces our optimistic outlook and may be linked to selfactualization. Furthermore it inspires a creativity that is inclined towards the positive, optimistic and value based side. In what ways does AI influence the perception of control or rather the dilution of learned helplessness (Seligmann,1991)? What effect does empowering individuals have on their creativity? In what ways does optimism influence creativity? What might be the effect of thinking optimistically about the future have on willingness to change and on tolerance of ambiguity? How does the focus on values and a positive core influence the effectiveness of individuals and systems?

How does AI influence how we attribute past events?

7.1.1.2 Intuition

Intuition is often considered as a snap-shot impression concerning a present situation based on a complex conglomerate of past (often subconscious) experiences. It cannot always be justified or explained, yet the hunch gained from intuitive insight is often very accurate. AI is a guide to access this hunch, these intuitions, by asking people to browse the snap-shot impressions (e.g. when did you feel alive) and then helping individuals understand the components making this experience so exceptional (e.g. Why did you feel alive?). It would be interesting to determine how to enhance the effectiveness of tapping into the intuition during the AI process. How can the intuitive aspect of AI be amplified to inspire even more? How can acknowledging intuitive wisdom in AI foster

creativity? What connection is there between intuition and shedding limiting judgmental habits? How does nourishing intuition boost motivation?

7.1.1.3 Self Actualization

Self actualization is one of the results an individual experiences from being creative. It can be described as the ability to express and fulfill a need for a higher good, shaping one's world (Maslow, 1992). AI provides a platform for that by letting the individual focus on the positive, fulfilled part of things and through this sense of achievement providing more energy to move into this direction. How does AI establish this platform and how can it be extended beyond the intervention? In what ways does striving for the greater good, the dream in AI, increase self-actualization? What effect does this have on creativity? How does AI and looking at the bigger picture relate to creativity? How does the focus on a positive core influence self-actualization and creativity?

7.1.1.4 Motivation

Tapping into past "life giving experiences" lets people connect to their vision on a deep level, which results in strong intrinsic motivation which in turn raises creative output. (Amabile, 1988). Setting goals is motivating, and making them achievable even more so (as it results in a rewarding attaining of the goal). AI sets an inspiring goal, as the vision is based on experiences, which makes it "realistic".

How come creativity and AI are both strong contributors to motivation? What generates the energy driving people towards the dream? What effect does this motivation have on creativity? How does the productivity and positive focus of AI affect motivation? How does concentrating on aliveness and values influence motivation? What effect does intrinsic motivation have on the success probability of AI interventions? Do inspiration and motivation from the dreaming and designing stages help overcome challenges in the destiny stage?

7.1.1.5 Passion

Passion, which can be described as an emotional and energetic conviction of a subject, bridges impediments of any sort by supplying more energy towards a goal. It may be comparable to the diverging stage in creative thought, as it does not involve judgment, yet it is focused on a goal. It has an intuitive component, as it is not rational analytical but rather emotional conceptual. Passion is driven towards a vision, towards an imagined outcome that is deemed attractive by the individual. Passion has some similarities to motivation. How does AI invoke passion? What influence does passion have on AI? What connection is there between appreciation and passion? How does AI appreciate peoples' passion? What is the relationship between passion and creativity? What effect does dreaming have on passion? How does passion ensure the sustainability of a vision?

7.1.2 AI and the Creative Press

Since the whole AI process is busy with people, and their interactions in all stages, this approach automatically creates an appreciative press, where individuals feel safe. This paves the way for a creative learning culture. How exactly does AI influence the climate? What effect does the positive focus have on the creative climate? How does eliminating allocation of fault or blame influence creativity? In what ways does the affirmative approach of AI influence the change and innovation environment of a system? How does the appreciation of people as mature individuals influence the climate? What effect will an empowering and encouraging environment have on the success of a change intervention?

AI can help create the creative climate by using the AI process to tease out past experiences of success in the different creative climate dimensions. Also, AI itself fosters many of the dimensions described as conducive to a creative climate (Ekvall, 1996). How will a creative climate influence the audaciousness of the

dream? How does AI influence the communication of ideas, experiences and values?

The positive approach lets go of accusing people of mistakes and making someone responsible for problems that have occurred. How does AI influence the dimension of trust and openness? What are the effects for the change intervention? How does trust relate to the interviews and the sharing of stories?

The appreciative attitude in AI encourages people to voice their ideas along with their experiences, and the past contributions of individuals shows that their power to contribute should be valued. How does the dimension of idea-support relate to the success of an AI intervention? In what ways does AI encourage idea-support? What effect does idea-support have on the vividness of the vision?

Even though the topic choice is very deliberate in AI, the interviewing encourages the "leap of faith". The perceived risk of "aiming high" is also encouraged in AI. If the energy is good, AI supports taking constructive risks. How does this influence the creative climate in an organization? What effect does AI have on peoples' risk taking attitudes? What effect does risk taking have on the habit of focusing on problems?

The imaginative aspect of the dream stage in AI encourages a playful approach to building a vision. Even though this is not equivalent to a playful and humorous climate, the positive approach of AI tends to increase the playfulness by allowing relaxed interactions without fear of problem attribution. What effect does AI have on the dimension of playfulness and humor? Where does the curiosity encouraged in the AI process fit into the creative climate? How do the inspiration and aliveness generated in the AI process and the playfulness dimension relate?

The energy brought forth through activating positive experiences of when the organization or team was most alive and productive creates a dynamic that permeates into other areas or topics outside the AI application as well. How does the energy from AI influence the creative climate in an organization? What are the parallels in the lively creative environment and the experiences of aliveness

from AI? How does involving people by asking them for their contribution to the positive core influence their activity level? How do dynamism and liveliness influence the boldness of the dream?

One of the basic components of freedom, the interaction and the exchange of information, is immanent to the AI process in form of the interviews. The involvement of all levels, with its distribution of "responsibility" to everyone by inviting them to contribute their experiences, lets decisions emerge without a "top down imposition". How does this focus on communication in AI influence the creative climate? What are the effects of the dimension of freedom on AI? In what ways does the affirmative approach of AI build a foundation for freedom? How does the empowerment from AI influence the dimension of freedom? What effect does this freedom have on provoking a bold dream? In what ways is the freedom a necessary component of the destiny?

By encouraging the appreciation of differences in teams and by valuing everybody's input, AI diffuses a lot of potential for conflict through fostering understanding. What effect does AI have on potential sources of conflict? How does reducing conflict influence AI? In what ways does generating a compelling vision influence conflict? Where are the links between open communication, as fostered in AI, and diluting conflict? What influence does the appreciation of differences have on conflict?

AI encourages everybody's input and viewpoint and serves as a means to open a forum for contributing these. This in turn encourages constructive debate and exchange of ideas and opinions and viewpoints. How does this affect the creative climate? How does the climate dimension of debate relate to AI? What effect does appreciation have on the productivity of debates?

The AI process in itself foresees idea-time, defined as design time and dream time. This will not substitute idea-time outside of AI, but encourage a habit of and a rationale for exploring and elaborating. How do the design and dream stages creative climate? What are the effects of idea-time on the success of change

interventions? In what ways does idea-time encourage dreaming? What are the effects of appreciation on the dimension of idea-time? How does idea-time influence the impact of inspiration generated in AI? What does idea-time contribute to the success of the different AI stages? How does AI influence the attitude towards idea-time?

AI provides a very constructive challenge: striving to fulfill a dream, aiming for achieving a vision based on input from the individuals involved. How does the challenge generated in AI contribute to the motivation and joy of people? How does AI develop an inspiring challenge? What effect on creativity does this AI challenge have? How does the challenge from AI initiate action and the desire to change and contribute? What effect does it have that the AI challenge is based on experiences? How does the vivid vision turn into an inspiring challenge?

7.1.3 AI and the Creative Product

One of the most praised results of AI is a constructive change in the direction of a shared vision: the product is innovation, creativity and change. This helps any organization keep up with current market challenges, customer needs and imposed changes from the environment. It would be interesting to compare the outcome of a change intervention using the CPS process versus AI. How does CPS produce momentum and change? What effects does AI have on the creative product? How does the appreciative approach affect creative products in general? What effect does the choice of process have on motivation? Which change process is more sustainable, CPS or AI? How does AI achieve constructive change? What effect does the problem focus of CPS have on the creative outcome? How do the high involvement and strong inspiration in AI have on the acceptance of change?

7.1.4 Core Values

Asking for the essence of an organization, AI ultimately leads back to core values. The criterion for the converging is thus interwoven with asking for a deeper meaning. Fullan (2001) describes the moral purpose as a fundamental

ingredient to successful leadership. This leads to wondering how core values influence creativity? What links are there between the positive core and the power of imagination? How does the foundation of what really drives us influence our ability to shape the future? What are the effects of the positive core on our willingness to change? Collins (2001)writes that for productive and successful change it is paramount to know what to keep. How will the uncovering of core values influence our ability to move towards a compelling vision? What are the effects of defining a positive core on the ability of an organization to embrace diversity? How does aliveness link to core values? What effect does the positive core have on intrinsic motivation? How does this influence creativity? What do values have to do with creativity? How do core values relate to self actualization? How does AI tie values to creativity? In what ways does focusing on the positive and on experiences of being alive influence the direction of our creative powers?

7.2 Possible Applications

Appreciative Inquiry lends itself to many applications and subject areas. From my personal experience I learned that it does work in an individual context, even though I would assume the momentum created in group settings is stronger. AI can be used in defining and creating a vision. It can be advantageous in a coaching context to help the client change perspective and shed negative critical habits. Considering CPS it can establish a more constructive mindset and it can provide the positive atmosphere needed for Dialogue or WorldCafé. Appreciative Inquiry can enhance the productive energy of any meeting and any interaction. It is a whole new way of perceiving our world and living and shaping it.

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APPENDIX

ICE Worksheet

I-C-E worksheet

To get new input on your problem, now let's actually WONDER away from it – do a little IMAGE CONNECTION EXCURSION. It will give you new perspectives, associations and ideas to inspire you.

To do this, first take the kaleidoscope and look through this for a couple of seconds. Relax.

Then please look at the image of a dream holiday island. Imagine yourself being there. What is it like? What can you smell? Do you hear the sounds of the waves? What else do you hear? Are there people there with you? What are you doing?

Now pick one of the IMAGE CONNECTION cards and take a good look at it. What do you notice? What are your impressions, thoughts and reactions to this picture? Write down four associations. (Remember to apply the Diverging Rules displayed on the poster) Don't worry about the connections yet – we'll do those afterwards.

Image #1

Your associations with the image	Connections to the problem statement
a) _____	a) _____
b) _____	b) _____
c) _____	c) _____
d) _____	d) _____

Pick another IMAGE CONNECTION card and repeat the process. Get into the image, then write down four things that come to your mind.
Image #2

Your associations with the image	Connections to the problem statement
a) _____	a) _____
b) _____	b) _____
c) _____	c) _____
d) _____	d) _____

Pick a third IMAGE CONNECTION card and note four associations.

Image #3

Your associations with the image	Connections to the problem statement
a) _____	a) _____
b) _____	b) _____
c) _____	c) _____
d) _____	d) _____

Now write down your problem statement

_____

_____

And now go back to each of the associations you listed above and make a connection to the challenge. Record them in the lines next to the association.

Adapted from
Miller, B., Verhar, J. & Firestien, R. (2001). *Creativity unbound. An introduction to creative process.* Williamsville, NY: Innovation Resources.

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