

International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry

February 2013

Volume 15 Number 1

ISBN 978-1-907549-14-4

AI Practitioner



www.aipractitioner.com/subscriptions



India and Appreciative Inquiry

Generative Connection between Ancient
Wisdom and Today's Endeavours in the Field

Neena Verma
Ronald Fry
Zeb Waturoucha



Inside this issue

Welcome to a new year for AI Practitioner!

Anne Radford, Editor in Chief



We begin the year with an issue, gratefully sponsored by Involve Consulting in France, which focuses on India and AI and continue with issues on AI communities of practice, AI in Asia and the effect of AI within cities.

In this February issue, our articles connect ancient Indian philosophies with AI practices of appreciative engagement and mindset. Through the articles, pictures and poems, our contributors invite us to witness changes with GenY employees, tribal communities and innovation in Indian industry.

In our first Feature Choice article this year, Mo McKenna focuses on the urgent need for climate change in our physical and human world environments, including our organizations and communities.

In Research Notes, we focus on the potential complications which occur when the researcher is also a manager where she is collecting data and has a stake in the project outcome.

In AI Resources, you will find key books, articles and videos connecting AI and India. This column is dedicated to Suresh Srivastva, born in India and an instrumental figure in the creation and development of Appreciative Inquiry.

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The Story of *Transcend*

Articulating an Organization's Mission, Vision and Values Using Appreciative Inquiry

ABSTRACT

Organizations are human systems built around shared energy of mission, vision and values. Here is a story of a 50 year-old organization that had never articulated its mission, vision and values but lived it in many ways within and outside. We worked with the founders, directors, associates, vendors and alumni and others to discover it and give it a form and expression through Appreciative Inquiry.

'Transcend' is the acronym for this organization's values.

What is exciting about a story on developing the mission, vision and values in a medium-sized company in India? What energizes us to tell the story? This story is exciting to us because it is not about "what we articulated" but about "how we articulated" it.

Many established organizations have articulated their mission, vision and values statements and displayed them prominently as part of the organizational collateral presented to the outside world at campuses and on annual days.

But this company was different.

This is the story of a journey that began more than 50 years ago when two brothers created a company to build self-reliance in pharmaceutical machinery for India. The brothers had a clear mission – to make India more self-reliant in pharmaceutical products, but it was never articulated. As they became more successful, the mission changed – to become a preferred partner for the pharmaceutical industry. But this was not articulated either!

The need to go beyond unstated values

The organization grew steadily and new associates experienced the mission, shared the vision of the founders and also seemed to conduct their business following a set of values. Again nothing was stated. The view was that sometimes the unstated is more powerful than what is expressed: when you state something, it is available to your intelligence; when you feel something, it touches your heart.

However, as the organization grew, more energy was required to preserve the essence – the core values and the dream of the founders – that was the life-

As the organization grew, more energy was required to preserve the core values and the dream of the founders.

giving force for the organization. Hence the need to embark on a process to mine the organization, discover the energy of mission, vision and values, and have them articulated for common understanding.

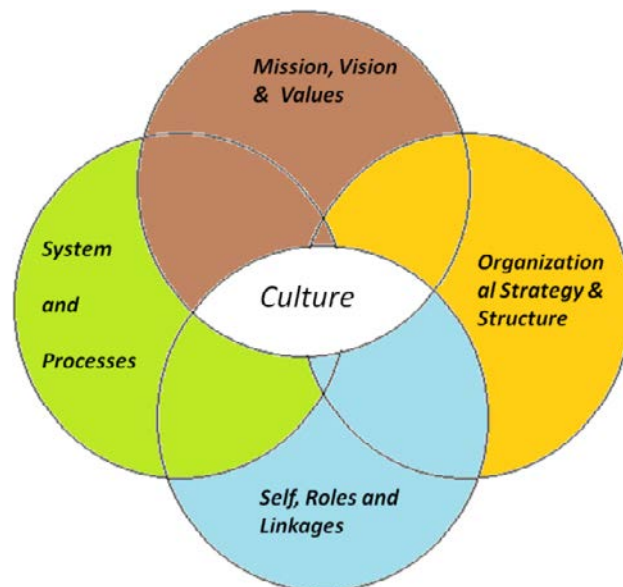
Appreciative Inquiry was chosen because it resonated with the organizational ethos in a natural way. The organization thrived on stories as a way of describing itself and its experiences. We decided to use the power of the stories since it was already embedded into the culture.

Organizational renewal and reaffirmation

When we began the inquiry to discover the mission, vision and values, we defined this process as “organizational renewal and reaffirmation”. We were clear that this was to be based on the legacy of the organization, the inherited strengths and the discovery of the new ways of being.

In order to encourage those with rational minds to sign up for this process, we used the model for organizational change and renewal in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Organization change and renewal



This diagram indicates the various dimensions of the organization renewal and reaffirmation processes in this company. While the inquiry was focused on one aspect of the holistic model, we needed to keep in mind the inter-dependencies between all the dimensions since a change in one has an impact on the others.

Storytelling

To tell a story, you need a good listener! So we started by identifying a group of eight people who wanted to listen to and in turn to gather stories! They added 17 more and eventually there were many storytellers and many listeners. These 25 people went through a one-day program on Appreciative Inquiry, including how to ask questions, how to encourage people to tell stories and how to listen. The team called themselves Project *Disha* (a Hindi word for “direction”). We called them the “story gatherers”.

The story gatherers developed questions to elicit responses in the form of stories.

The team called themselves Project *Disha* (a Hindi word for ‘direction’). We called them the ‘story gatherers’.

There was a buzz, because people felt listened to!

“How do we look, feel, be and act as an organization when we are at our best. Can we describe that time, the event, and the process? Tell me the story?”

Along with this question, other probing questions emerged from the respondents' sharing:

- What do you like about us as an organization? What makes you come to work everyday?
- If a genie were to grant you three wishes, what would you ask for, for our organization?

Pledging to live *TrANSSCEnD*

Stories were heard from directors, associates, clients, vendors, business partners, alumni and family members of associates. The group of 25 people met more than 450 individuals in all and heard their stories. Some of the stories were heard in person, some on phone calls, some onsite, some at the storytellers' homes. On last count, we had collected more than 450 stories!



There were personal stories of achievement, customer delight, being appreciated, being supported in difficult times, solving technical problems and many more. The enthusiasm was palpable and there was certainly a buzz created, simply because people felt listened to! The story gatherers were inundated with stories, in many languages – English, Hindi and Marathi among them!

The emergence of the mission, vision and values statement

The story gatherers went through another one-day workshop to help them thematically analyze the stories and identify the elements of the mission, vision and values. The team picked more than 200 thematic words in the first round of reading out the stories. The themes were grouped together and assigned an attribute:

Theme indicating a mission element An aspect of purpose and meaning for the organization.

Theme indicating vision element A dream or a future state for the organization.

Theme indicating values *How* something was achieved, not *what* was done.

The emergent themes were then taken to an offsite meeting of the senior management including the two brothers who had started this company. The vision, mission and value statements were crafted with love and care, to ensure they conveyed exactly what was emerging and valued by the organization. These were then presented to a larger body of associates (some 200 of them) in a day-long meeting, and at the end of the day, adopted.

'Now we need to be more of who we are already.'

The vision is rooted in stories of the past and is an extension of the successes of the organization into the future. Hence the vision was crafted like a provocative proposition: not something to be achieved one day, but to be lived every day with increasing intensity. Many of the associates and even external stakeholders shared that "there is nothing new here, this is how we have always been, except that now this has been articulated. Now we need to be more of who we are already."

TrANSSCEnD is the acronym for the collection of values that was mined from the appreciative stories:

Transparent
Aesthetics
Nurturing
Safety
Synergy
Customer centric
Empowering
Dignity

Transcend also represents the shift in the energy and the generation of new dynamism in the organization.

The cascade

The story of mission, vision and values continued with the next phase, cascading this to all of the associates in the organization. How could we make the values an integral part of our work? How could we live our vision everyday? How could we keep the organization rooted in its mission? How do we institutionalize these processes?

The story gatherers changed their role to become *margdarshak* (a Hindi word for "people showing the direction"). They began a series of engagements – town halls, small group meetings, screening of videos, dialogue, listening and interactions as means to cascade the mission, vision and values to all associates in the organization. This cascade was initiated six months ago and continues as we write this article.

The epilogue

This is a story without an end ... this story will continue as more stories are told and repeated in the organization. They show where people have lived the values and where the vision is visible for everyone to see. The process of story-telling will continue as the processes and policies of the organization are aligned with its vision and values: where the organization continues to make choices rooted in its values.

When we set the context, we spoke about the organization's change and renewal process. The story of *Transcend* is part of this larger story of change. Through stories, the head and the heart become integrated, in such a way that the experienced and the articulated mission, vision and values become more and more congruent.

We are now continuing our inquiry into other aspects of the organization – strategy and structure, systems and processes, and the roles of people. We will share with you that story one of these days!

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The International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry

February 2013

India and Appreciative Inquiry: Generative Connection between Ancient Wisdom and Today's Endeavours in the Field

Editors Neena Verma, Ronald Fry and Zeb Waturoucha explore the deep connections between Appreciative Inquiry and traditional Indian philosophies through articles, pictures and poems.



May 2013

Appreciative Inquiry and Communities of Practice

This issue, edited by Mille Duvander, Kaj Voetman and Sue James, poses the question "How can we strengthen the ways we spread and develop practices based on Appreciative Inquiry?"



August 2013

Appreciative Inquiry in Asia

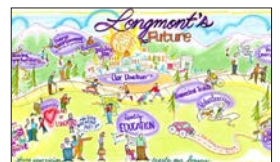
Noel Tan, editor of this issue and experienced in working in the different economies throughout Asia, will bring together examples and lessons learned from practitioners working in the emerging markets of the region. They will look at how AI is perceived, harnessed and deployed and what these experiences offer to the field of developing positive societies and organisations.



November 2013

The Promise of Appreciative Cities: Compelling the Whole to Act

Editor Barbara Lewis, specialist in participatory planning and project leader of award winning AI-based community planning projects, invites evidence of the effect of AI within cities and stories on how AI fosters compelling citywide identities and sets the stage for community action.



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Purpose of AI Practitioner

This publication is for people interested in making the world a better place using positive relational approaches to change such as Appreciative Inquiry.

The publication is distributed quarterly: February, May, August and November.

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ISSN 1741 8224

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