Spirituality and Appreciative Inquiry

Edited by
Duane Bidwell, Ph.D.
Katherine Rand, MPP

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Spirituality and Appreciative Inquiry
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Spirituality and Appreciative Inquiry celebrates the spiritual dimension by exploring its connections with AI theory and practice. Editors Duane Bidwell and Katherine Rand bring together articles that reflect on how spirituality, spiritual practice and AI flow together to shape the experiences of practitioners and participants. Articles highlight new practices, offer case studies and provide insight into ways of integrating spirituality and AI principles.

Kristen Crusoe, Annette Garner, Kathlynn Northrup-Snyder and Sarah Wallace describe an innovation in nursing education in the Feature Choice article “Using Motivational Interviewing in Nursing for Improved Professional Development: Moving from Appreciative Inquiry’s Dream to Destiny Phases.”

In Research Review & Notes, Ottar Ness highlights first-person perspectives in dual recovery and discusses what Appreciative Inquiry has to offer the mental health field.

We would like to thank Joep C. de Jong and JLS for sponsoring this issue.

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Spirituality and Appreciative Inquiry

This issue of AI Practitioner celebrates the spiritual dimension by exploring its connections with AI theory and practice. The articles reflect explicitly on how spirituality, spiritual practice, and AI flow together to shape the experiences of practitioners and participants and to bring transformative meaning into whatever context AI is being applied.

Helping people and organizations move into positive futures, created through relationship, has been a focus of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) since its earliest inception. In the process of implementing AI, many practitioners have noted the synergy created when people attend to possibilities and interconnections. These practitioners intuit a spiritual dimension of AI that is seldom addressed explicitly in research, writing and training. The contributors who have written the ten articles in this issue highlight new practices, offer case studies of AI practice in religious communities, and provide insight into the ways that practitioners integrate spirituality and AI principles.

What you’ll read

Three authors reflect on the resonance between AI and their own spiritualities. Jan Reed, a UK-based gerontologist, explores the parallels in her experiences with AI and her Buddhist practice, and how they enhance her work with older adults and other caregivers. Alex Reed, a psychotherapist in England, reflects on the ways that Zen Buddhism and AI shape his practice and understanding of the therapeutic relationship. And US-based consultant Diana Whitney offers insight into the role of humility, a deeply spiritual value, in AI practice with organizations.

Another three articles offer case studies at the intersection of spirituality and AI practice. Joan McArthur-Blair and Jeanie Cockell, Canadian educators, describe the “graffiti paper” assignment they have used to create “magic” in an introductory AI course. Amanda Trosten-Bloom, a US consultant, explores her use of AI to transform the future of Unitarian-Universalism on a national scale. US practitioners Ray Wells, Page S. Morahan, Erik Bus, and Jennifer Pronesti describe how the use of AI resolved conflict and established strategic priorities for the future of the Bryn Athyn Church in Pennsylvania.
Two authors propose practices that emerge from AI theory. Samuel Mahaffy, a US consultant, describes how he adds “discernment” to AI’s traditional “5D process” to bring AI effectively to church communities. Dutch consultant Hans Uijen reverses the typical AI outward orientation and proposes appreciative ways of attending to a person’s inner world – especially the inner world of the AI practitioner.

Finally, two research articles explore the intersection of spirituality and AI. Heike Aiello, a German AI consultant, and Dutch professor Hetty Zock describe how spiritual caregivers use AI principles to increase vocational awareness among healthcare providers in the Netherlands. And US pastor and scholar Vicki Hammel describes how the use of AI in congregations shapes the leadership of pastors.

**What is ‘spirituality’?**

As editors, we did not explicitly define “spirituality” for authors, but instead invited expressions that fit within a broadly existential understanding of the word. Most simply, we think of spirituality in terms of ultimate goals and values. It refers to individuals’ relationships to one another, to self and to the sacred (whatever that might be). Spirituality is concerned with the fundamental human pursuit of meaning making. When deeply engaged, spirituality promotes practices that help individuals and communities to both appreciate “what is” and to transform themselves into “what can be.” Spirituality, for us, is earthly and transcendent, particular and universal. It nurtures and realizes wholeness, community and transformation.

Thus, the articles in this issue do not define or promote one kind of spirituality. Instead, they describe spiritualities formed in and by specific contexts. These spiritualities simultaneously reflect an aspect of human diversity; describe a limited consensus about the real, the good and the valuable; provide a way of talking about awareness or knowledge of ontological realities; recommend practices or guidelines for human transformation; and detail a shared existential experience as expressed by particular people and communities.

Editing this issue of *AI Practitioner* has been a generative, joyful and compelling experience for us. We learned a lot from the authors, and we are grateful for the guidance of Anne Radford, whose careful attention to trends in AI practice led to this issue.

Enjoy!

**Duane Bidwell and Katherine Rand**

*Editors, November 2014*
This article describes an integrated model for professional development, MI AIMS, that combines Motivational Interviewing and Appreciative Inquiry.

The strengths of both MI and AI are explored within the context of shifting from the Dream phase to Destiny through behavior change in nursing training.

In healthcare professions, particularly in nursing, the transition from student to practitioner is a challenge due to the complex nature of healthcare environments. Ebright (2010) notes that research addressing the work of nursing has identified the marked complexity surrounding the delivery of care in our current healthcare environments, and has begun to understand why intended outcomes are often not achieved, even with excellent education programs and redesigned healthcare systems. From our own experience, we have learned that nursing students often describe having a lack of confidence, feeling like an imposter, and fearing failure as they begin this transition. To address this issue, a group of nursing faculty from Oregon Health Sciences University and Lane Community College piloted an integrated approach to building confidence, self-efficacy and strengths-based communication skills in a cohort of nursing students as they began their final undergraduate clinical course, the Integrative Practicum.

Integrative Practicum (IP), the capstone course for nursing students with a practice integration component, is the last opportunity to practice nursing within the student...
Educating for complexity focuses on changing contexts where capability involves the individual’s ability to solve problems. This setting provides a rich opportunity to experiment with an innovative learning model co-created by the authors, Motivational Interviewing and Appreciative Inquiry Manifesting Success (MI Alms). This model draws on the strengths of both Motivational Interviewing (MI) and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to create a strong and resilient bridge between Dream and Destiny, to manifest success. In this article, we describe the framework, methodology, content analysis and exemplars as well as possible future research directions of MI Alms.

**Framework of MI Alms**

**Behavior change to deliver in a complex adaptive system**

Complex adaptive systems thinking is an approach that challenges simple cause-and-effect assumptions, and sees healthcare and other systems as a dynamic process, where the interactions and relationships of different components simultaneously affect and are shaped by the system (2010, The Health Foundation). This environment requires nurses to bring judgment, imagination and creativity as well as theoretical, clinical and evidence-based knowledge to the care of persons in all care delivery settings. To fully participate in these systems, nurses’ education must be aimed at inculcating lifelong learning skills for sustainable professional growth and development. Educating for complexity focuses on changing contexts where capability involves the individual’s ability to solve problems – to appraise the situation as a whole, prioritize issues, and then integrate and make sense of many different sources of data to arrive at a solution (Fraser, 2001).

**Appreciative Inquiry: Amplifying the essence of MI Alms**

The value of “seeding” our conversations through asking unconditional, positive question in order to amplify the positive is what MI Alms is all about. Through the use of AI to imagine and visualize the Dream, MI to augment and sustain the positive images, and behavior theory to manifest the change, we provide our students with powerful tools for self-realization and success.

Appreciative Inquiry is both a philosophy and methodology for positive change. It is founded on the simple assumption that human systems – individuals, teams,
Through the process of inquiry and a focus on the positive, we create adaptive capacity for self-organization, emergence and creative, strengths-based approaches to change and innovation.

organizations – move in the direction of what they study, focus on and talk about regularly (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005). The essence of AI is to shift the focus from deficit-based thinking and problem-solving to positive, appreciative, strengths-based inquiry into what “gives life” to people, organizations, teams, communities when they are at their best.

AI is based on the following assumptions:

- What we are seeking already exists and our unconditionally positive questions will lead us to the answers that live within our experience and understanding.

- AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to comprehend, anticipate and heighten positive potential.

- Inquiry and change take place simultaneously. Our questions set the stage for what we discover and the data create the material out of which the future is conceived and constructed.

Through the process of inquiry and a focus on the positive, we create adaptive capacity for self-organization, emergence and creative, strengths-based approaches to change and innovation.

Motivational interviewing: The relationship philosophy’s four pillars to evoke a person’s own solutions

Motivational Interviewing is a goal-oriented counseling skill focused on increasing the individual’s own motivation for change (Miller and Rollnick, 2013). Used in a variety of settings to explore behaviors, MI continues to demonstrate positive outcomes (Lundahl et al., 2010). This communication skill moves beyond therapeutic communication and counseling (Moyers, 2014) by focusing on evoking the individual’s own solutions for a particular behavior. Successful use of this skill set requires identifying a behavioral focus to explore. The theories mentioned support the conversation by providing questions and ideas for the nurse who is exploring the behavior with the patient.

Researchers are exploring the theory of MI (Miller and Rose, 2009) and the impact of each component as it affects the whole (Miller and Rollnick, 2013). One component of MI is to accurately understand an individual’s use of the core communication skills of open-ended questions, affirmations, reflections and summaries (OARS). These skills are used consciously to enhance and explore individual motivation for changing or sustaining a behavior and, when done well, guide an individual toward change. A second component is the MI Spirit (relationship philosophy) which provides the foundation for any interaction. The four pillars of the MI Spirit – compassion, acceptance of the individual, partnership with the individual, and evocation – support AI.

Partnership with the individual

Working in collaboration or partnership with someone can be hard to do in a professional area where the preceptor or supervisor may also have power over the student.
or novice nurse. When fully partnered with someone, a trusting and safe relationship is created where positive growth can happen and creative ideas are expressed for self and for the job. Exploring individual possibilities uses the skill of evocation by asking open ended questions such as “what does this mean for you...?” and providing reflective statements that seek to mirror the feeling and meaning the “client” is speaking about. Providing an MI adherent reflection does not mean “getting it right”; it simply holds a mirror up to reflect what the “client” said in a manner that both allows them to “hear” themselves (for perhaps the first time) and allows the conversation to move forward.

Affirmation: Acceptance of the individual
A great deal of this sense of trust and safety comes from the idea of acceptance. Within MI, the concept of affirmation is part of the core communication skill, which targets skills and talents of the individual related to their options for change and builds confidence for a new skill using what an individual has done previously to guide action.

Compassion: Pursuing the welfare and best interest of the other
Miller and Rollnick (2013) define compassion as “a deliberate commitment to pursue the welfare and best interests of the other” (p. 20). When you combine this with the concept of believing in the absolute worth of each individual, their autonomy to make behavioral choices, and affirming the talents and strengths they have to address the behavioral goal, you set up an excellent potential for this person to achieve their new goal.

MI Alms: Relating, repeating and reframing situations from problems to possibilities
Donald Berwick, president and CEO of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) commonly states that “all change is not improvement but all improvement is change”. Herein lies the challenge for any sort of effort to facilitate improvement in individuals, groups, or systems: change is hard. Alan Deutshman (2007) describes how the conventional strategy of the three F’s – facts, fear, and force – do not in any way bring about meaningful or sustainable change. According to Change or Die: The Three Keys to Change (Deutshman, 2007), relating, repeating and reframing are powerful and effective ways to bring about lasting and meaningful change, as well as instilling a lifelong practice of positive, affirmative self-creation. MI Alms provides a framework and structural process that does just this: through peer-to-peer teaching and coaching, students relate to each other and to their faculty and mentors; through practice, students repeat their skills in both MI and AI; and through the focus on behaviors, unconditional positive questions and accurate understanding, they learn and become skilled in re-framing situations from deficit-based problems to affirmative, strengths-based possibilities.

MI Alms: Our process
When two of our authors, Kathlynn Northrup-Snyder and Kristen Crusoe, first began sharing their knowledge and experiences with their respective practices (MI for Kathlynn and AI for Kristen), they quickly discovered the complementary nature of these two powerful strength-based approaches to change. Both experienced nursing educators, they were well acquainted with the challenges and opportunities that
abided within the transition to practice continuum. Benner (1984), in her seminal work *Novice to Expert* described a linear process whereby the nurse begins at the novice stage and through experience attains expertise along the continuum of novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and ultimately expert. The issue with this model when viewing practice through the lens of complexity is that often, given the uncertain environments and non-linear nature of complex systems, there is not time for the novice practitioner to gain the knowledge and skills needed to practice effectively and provide safe, quality patient care. MI Alms works within the complexity framework, focusing on internal motivation and strengths that are amplified through the appreciative question. Professional and individual behaviors are explored and change is manifested through theoretical and MI concepts.

We recruited a third partner, Sarah Wallace, who was at that time working with a group of nursing students preparing for their final practicum. Sarah was also a graduate student studying the Community of Inquiry (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2001) and how dialogue and narrative support learning in complex environments. We later recruited Annette Garner who was mentoring Sarah and also familiar with this cohort of students.

**Inquiry and workshop: Imagine Success: Being a Nurse**

The methodology combined an appreciative inquiry into what it meant to be successful as a nurse using MI skills to mentor, coach and sustain their positive images of success. We sought to uncover the essential positive core among this particular cohort based on their lived experiences as student nurses.

We held a five-hour workshop titled *Imagine Success: Being a Nurse*. The first part of the workshop included a brief overview of AI, behavior change theory and the practice of MI, and explored which nursing practice behaviors were of high importance and low confidence. The students paired up and explored these behaviors using the theory concepts and MI skills. We then launched into a 4D Appreciative Inquiry based on the positive topic. The students and IP course faculty co-created their Dream image of success Being a Nurse, and it was from this image that their Design and Destiny descriptions emerged. MI skills were applied to their assigned activities of goal setting, reflection and peer-coaching. When we completed the workshop, students had a:

- Co-created Dream
  “We are competent, compassionate, joyful, empowered, kind, helpful, passionate, resourceful, strong connectors, advocates, reliable and thankful. We provide empathy and use balance to put pieces together and spread sunshine in a selfless, content and peaceful way that offers grace to self and others. We do this to empower our patients.”

- Design for achieving the Dream

- Destiny and Delivery plan for realizing the Dream

- An introductory knowledge of MI

- And practice in using MI to Manifest the Dream during their final practicum.

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1 Based on the 1980 Report The Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition developed for the US Air Force.
This work throughout the practicum was an iterative process. As the students explored the individual behaviors of nursing practice and their confidence to engage in each behavior, they were working within their internal strengths and understanding. They practiced their skills and used behavior theory to explore the nursing behaviors in dyads. Individuals reflected on their own nursing practice in the reflection paper, supported each other throughout the clinical practicum, and came back together as a group to reflect on the Dream statement and how they had moved toward this vision in their individual practice.

One of the more interesting core beliefs to emerge from this inquiry was the concept of grace: that they would allow themselves to be received and treated with grace by each other, their patients and preceptors, and more importantly, by themselves. This theme was apparent throughout their IP course and we will see as we explore their reflections how this idea of grace energized and sustained their learning and transformation from novice student to confident practitioner.

**After the workshop: Student process**

After the workshop, students continued to work through their Integrated Practicum following the course design and assignments and worked with patients, their preceptor, and other health care providers within their clinical experience. Sarah provided instructor feedback during routine discussion sessions and in assignments. One assignment focused on the students reflecting on their clinical experience throughout the term. Specific MI-related questions were added to allow students to practice their MI skills and explore their nursing behaviors. Feedback was provided by both Kathlynn and Sarah.

The MI questions asked about a target behavior and student responses:

- Where would you rate yourself on each of the three scales for importance, confidence and readiness related to this issue? (1 being “not at all”, 10 being “very”)
  
  » An example focusing on importance: “In Delegation, in relation to Importance, I would rate it at a 9 because I know it is highly important to keep your load manageable and work as a team. I chose a 9 rather than a 10, though, because I think that something such as Time Management is a priority and directly correlates with how much delegation will be done.”

- What types of open-ended questions would you like to hear to help you explore your goal process?
  
  » One student reflected using AI foundations to focus the question: “Your goal for competency stage 2 is to stop and use ‘AI’ to evaluate what is going right so you can move through the hurdle, what stopped you from allowing that process?”
We identified three primary themes: the Dream, a shift in personal or professional, and awareness of deficit-based thinking or ‘shadow’.

- What reflective statements might be helpful?
  » This quote demonstrates the self-reflective focus of this question as well as the typical MI reflection using a “you” statement. “You have made some changes in your thought process. How you see people deal with illness is different now.”

- What affirmations would support your forward progress?
  » In this quote the student brings in both the strength and the evidence to indicate the validity of the affirmation. “You are calm and confident in your skills. Your confidence shows in your patient care philosophy.” Similar to the reflection, MI focuses on using a “you” statement within the affirmation as it is an observation of the individual client and speaks to the strength or talent of that individual.

The finished reflection papers of this first cohort of four students were uploaded into NVivo 10 qualitative analysis software to assess for themes. Kathlynn, Kristen and Annette explored the reflection papers, discussed interpretation of themes noted and ideas on how to identify these themes. Exemplars were identified that speak to these data.

**MI Alms exemplars**
Through our content analysis of this first group’s reflections, we identified three primary themes: the Dream, a shift in personal or professional, and awareness of deficit-based thinking or “shadow”.

**Dream**
Students used words or concepts relating back to their original Dream statement, which was posted in their meeting space, as well as other AI concepts. An important element within the initial workshop, reflected within individual student papers, was the idea of grace for oneself and others.

- I used AI to uplift the other caregiver and encouraged this CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) to talk directly to the other.

- Stopping to breathe. Using AI asking myself what is working right now, and build[ing] from that using the resources around me rather than creating a higher state of distress. Use positive self-talk to get through hurdles that occur.

- Allow myself grace with positive interactions with co-workers by being thankful rather than responding with a negative response in order to deflect this type of interaction...

**Shifts in Perspective when working with patients**
Students mentioned patient care experiences that highlight some of the tools they experienced in the initial workshop. The open-ended question, for example, evokes patient thoughts and the stages of change to determine what level of priority a patient
In each student story, there is a shift from the ‘usual’ provider-directed care concepts to a patient-centered, patient-directed focus.

- Starting to use the words “my goals are” for the day and what are “your goals for the day” – in order to have a plan that both patient and I are on to progress their care.
- This week I had a patient I would have thought of as non-compliant but instead used pre-contemplation. It was not just a change in my word charting but also in how I viewed the situation. My teaching moved towards getting him into the next state of change rather than teaching him all about what he “has to do”...

**Exploring the shadow in MI and Al**

There is conversation in both the Al and MI Network of Trainers communities about the role of exploring the shadow (AI) and sustain talk (MI). From the MI perspective, sustain talk (client language related to a maintaining a “negative” behavior) may increase initially and then shift to change talk, moving toward the new behavior with further exploration (McGill et al., 2014). MI consistent engagement did not seem to influence sustain talk (McGill et al., 2014), which suggests that this may be important to explore initially to reduce resistance to the idea of defending the individual’s choice to sustain a current behavior.

One student captured this concept in their practice statement, using a reflection: *You feel uncomfortable in some of these situations but it sounds like you want to find growth in these feelings.*

In a difficult conversation, one student related: *I did use techniques from Al to help him talk about his feelings of regret in the situation.*

Another commented: *When trying out new skills ... I just clicked in my head that this was happening and attempted to do the job. I have made a conscience effort to accept positive self-statements with grace and have not in the whole week turned them around.*

One student epitomizes the spiral back to the essence of the Dream utilizing an awareness of high readiness: *My readiness is a 10 as I am already practicing and plan to continue to do so and continue to increase my comfort level. I am very ready (10) to move forward with this!*

**MI Alms: Discussion of this initial exploration of AI and MI**

**Invitation to expand to several clinical sites**

In this initial exploration of AI and MI, we found there are several areas where we could explore and expand our model. First, this sample of four students is small and limited to a single clinical site and instructor. Therefore, no generalizations can be made. However, Sarah was excited at an approach that was more positive than had been observed in prior practicum experiences. Based on the success of this pilot project, we were invited to expand with a larger cohort of 80 students and several clinical sites during Spring Term, 2014. This research is being analyzed. Additionally, we are
in dialogue with potential partners for using the MI Alms framework, including nurses in practice and supporting rehabilitation of convicts in a prison population.

MI Spirit and behavior change aligning with principles of AI

It is important to recognize that students only received an introduction to MI. The examples provided above are related to a request for the students to apply the OARS questions in a specific manner. MI is a complex set of communication and counseling skills requiring practice and guided feedback to master over time (Schwalbe, Oh and Zweben, 2014). However, it is interesting that the students saw a shift in their practice approach and in themselves by working with this initial introduction. Some of this shift is clearly aligned with the principles of AI. We would suggest MI Spirit and behavior-change theory tools also support this change in approach. Exploring confidence, readiness and importance along with the actual skills of open-ended questions, affirmations and reflections are captured here in a limited fashion, yet they support an internal dialog for each student on each goal that lends itself to problem solving. Moving through this activity for some of their goals may help to support the Dream and Design steps of AI. Additionally, understanding the concepts of behavior change appears to help the students focus on specific goals and approach the overall process of growth into a beginning nurse with more acceptance of the reality of change.

MI skills as foundational nursing practice: Future design considerations

Motivational Interviewing is an essential skillset with great potential to enhance professional nursing practice, yet in previous studies nurses have indicated barriers of time management and limited patient engagement opportunities (Cronk et al., 2012; Northrup-Snyder and Thongtananumun, 2010; Northrup-Snyder and Hall, 2012). The new MI skills the nursing students are learning are subject to missed opportunities, yet this awareness will help each grow stronger in their practice behaviors.

Motivational Interviewing is a skillset with great potential to be woven into acute care nursing practice; other issues may simply reflect missed opportunities for application that may become more conscious as MI skills become foundational with nursing practice. For example, two students described a situation involving a question of patient understanding where use of MI skills may have evoked patient preferences and capacity for making a decision. In this case, MI had not been considered. Yet, one student used an AI-possibility focus about the potential fit of MI in nursing practice: “[The patient] was emotional and crying. Looking back at the situation, I realize that it would have been a good time to use MI. ‘Tell me about how you’re feeling.’ I wish I had thought of something to say in the moment but I think that reflecting on it afterwards will help prepare me for the next situation.”

MI Alms: The whole is greater than the sum of its parts

As we reflect on our journey and what it means to each of us individually and as a team, we agree that, together, we have co-created a new pattern for learning and engagement that is rich in meaning for us and our students. This spiral tells our story:

We learned that MI Spirit and Being AI are at the heart of our work. This journey began several years ago through shared exploration and deep conversations as we explored these two powerful philosophies and methodologies for positive change. Miller
(2013) links MI to concepts of social justice through six human values expressed in MI Spirit and practice: compassion, respect for persons, justice, human potential, acceptance and collaboration. These values support the attitude and are at the heart of the MI approach, strengthening the impact of change within some of the most disenfranchised populations. Miller has observed that “…people seem to be drawn to MI because in some sense they recognize it when they meet it – not as something strange that they are encountering for the first time, but as if it were something that they have known deeply and for a long time, like an old friend” (pg. 15).

This deep recognition and activation influences the openness of the questions asked, the ability to observe the strengths and talents in anyone and state them as affirmations, and empathically listen and reflect individual meaning or feeling within a conversation. This spiraling interaction supports the skill of recognizing, evoking and summarizing change talk as it flows from within an individual’s own potential for change toward their optimal self.

Ron Fry (2008), in his eloquent forward to the Appreciative Inquiry Handbook by Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, writes that the essence of Al is that “…we can actually be in the moment we are in, working toward the change we want to realize, and that this be-ing with each other is the change happening, as we engage” (pg. IX). In both of these patterns, it is the inquiry that is at the heart of all endeavor to know, to understand, and to influence through actions grounded in a sense of affirmative possibility.
The essence of AI is that ... ‘we can actually be in the moment we are in, working toward the change we want to realize, and that this be-ing with each other is the change happening, as we engage’. Ron Fry

The second ring of our spiral connects MI open-ended questions with AI’s Simultaneity principle. Through the shared inquiry into the heart of MI and AI, we continually held the space open for our own patterns to shift. The principle of Simultaneity describes the emergence of change through the act of inquiry. By focusing on openness and positivity, emergent phenomena manifest and are transformed. We began to see what an integrated model of MI and AI would look like in terms of behaviors and outcomes.

Our next steps involved taking our own action to create something real and tangible. We co-created our own Affirmation and Positive Image – what MI Alms would look like, and this led to our Positive Action – our first pilot project. MI Alms was born.

Throughout this process, we have continually reflected upon the evolution of our dream through the student’s experience. The Poetic principle guided our inquiry. We intentionally chose to focus on the best examples of how MI and AI complemented, supported and challenged us to go beyond our own boundaries of knowledge and expertise. The Constructionist principle influenced our dialogue as we sought to balance our hopes and dreams and remain grounded in the reality of our internal and external conditions.

And finally, through engaging in MI Summary and embedding the Wholeness principle into our Summary, the realization that the whole is truly far greater than the sum of its parts was manifested again and again. Each of us brought our own unique set of experiences, perceptions and knowledge base to this exploration. As we engaged in our ongoing reflection in action through dialogue, our praxis emerged and MI Alms was born. And so, as complex systems ourselves, we spiral back to our beginning. To living MI Spirit and practicing Being AI.

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.323.7316.799


doi: 10.1177/1049731509347850

doi: 10.1037/a0016830

doi: 10.5195/mitrip.2013.32

doi: org/10.1037/a0036910


This article describes my experiences of using AI as a strategy for developing discharge process and, shortly after, beginning to learn about Buddhism. The two perspectives share aspects including three which are the topic of this article: inclusiveness, being non-research based and being non-judgmental. It is my experience that AI and Buddhism both complement and deepen each other.

In this paper I describe my first experiences of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and Buddhism. These encounters began with an AI workshop and talking to a friend about Buddhism. Although the two processes were simultaneous, connections between them became apparent only over time. Buddhist beliefs echoed and reinforced the AI perspective.

I first came across AI when working with a number of agencies developing services for older people. Participants attended a two-day workshop that began with a speaker telling a story of poor care. This was a tale of the problems arising from different hospital departments not communicating with each other, resulting in a difficult discharge experience for the speaker.

**Changing practice – but how?**
The workshop ended with people wanting to change practice, but not sure how to do it. Talking about this later, one person suggested that an AI workshop might give us some ideas. We agreed, and one was organised.

Here, we heard about AI, and about developing approaches that would focus on identifying achievements in practice and not just be looking at failures. Staff working with older people were accustomed to having their work devalued. AI offered an opportunity to address this imbalance.

Staff who came to our first AI workshop welcomed the opportunity to identify the value of their work. We had approached several agencies that we had worked with in the past, and asked for volunteers to take part in our study. In a sense we thought that we were inviting people who were comfortable working with researchers, but our first workshop showed that many participants were suspicious, or even hostile to us. One factor that lessened this hostility was that our research team included people from agencies campaigning and caring for older people, and older people...
themselves, including the person who had told the story of the difficult discharge she had experienced.

We started the first workshop with the initial focus of AI, the Discovery stage. This was difficult as participants needed encouragement to discover anything positive about their practice. From this we were able to move to the stage of Dreaming, expressing the features of an effective service. And from here, we could outline the Design that was entailed. The Delivery of services was carried out when participants returned to their agencies. There were changes in guidelines for discharge and involvement of a range of departments in coordinating practice.

**Breaking academic rules**
A number of points struck me about this process. First, the study was inclusive. Everyone was involved in identifying the research focus, collecting and analysing data. Second, the study broke a number of academic rules. The research was open, with no tight methodological structures, but with a flexible approach. This became evident when the study was written as a journal paper, and the reviewers’ comments demonstrated wariness and discomfort that the paper did not follow traditional research structures. Third, the study was not judgemental, in that a number of developments were identified, but their value was seen as lying in the energy and effort that had gone into the change, and not with any outcome score. Other points about the study were striking, but these were the ones that stood out for me.

This AI experience was a foundation for my involvement in Buddhism, which expanded the points I saw in this study. At first I went to a friend’s house for meditation sessions and soon began to go to retreats at a local Zen Buddhist monastery. The Buddhist practice that I began gave me some insights into AI, and my experience of AI, especially in the study I have outlined above, encouraged my interest in Buddhism. There seemed to be some areas where there was connection.

**AI and Buddhism: Resonating with each other**
I will focus my discussion around the three points summarised above, exploring where they chimed with Buddhism. These became apparent to me as I began to practice in the Zen Buddhist tradition and constantly reflect on my actions and the world around. There was no causal connection between AI and Buddhism that I could identify, just that both seemed to resonate with each other.

**Inclusiveness**
The first point, about inclusiveness, is echoed in the Buddhist idea that there are no real divisions between people and objects, that we are all one. This teaching is found in many texts, for example “three sticks standing upright and leaning against each other, and supporting each other. If one stick is taken away, the other two will fall to the ground” (example given by Thich Nhat Hanh, 1999). This resonates with the idea of an inclusive study where everything is interdependent and the world does not have to be divided into “researchers” and “the researched”. An AI study demonstrates this inclusiveness both in the way explorations can draw on the experience of everyone in the research team in all the stages of a study; and in noticing that changes in practice are dependent on changes across the system. To illustrate, some changes suggested...
There was no causal connection between AI and Buddhism that I could identify, just that both seemed to resonate with each other.

by the study were facilitated by changes in other agencies; for example quicker discharges from hospital entailed changes in ambulance services.

**Breaking academic traditions**
The second point that I identified was that the study did not fit neatly with academic traditions; it responded to events and circumstances rather than being predetermined by research design. This fits with the way that knowledge is understood in Zen – not as something that is arrived at by formal research conventions, but as direct insight into the nature of things. This does not mean that traditional research is redundant, but that it is only one, limited way of understanding. This radical change in the way we see research is echoed in Buddhist discussions of insight and understanding fostered by experiential reflection. Cleary, in *Zen and the Art of Insight*, explains that insight in Zen Buddhism arises from intuition rather than formal research.

**A non-judgemental nature**
The third point that I saw in our AI study was its non-judgemental nature. With the emphasis on appreciation, all data was seen as describing efforts to develop practice. This did not depend on ideas of “right” and “wrong”, but simply on what was happening. Suzuki, in his discussions of the key poem Sandokai, wrote, “Sights vary in quality and form, sounds vary as pleasing or harsh” (1999). The emphasis is on noticing features, not judging them. Similar ideas can be found in Suzuki’s discussions of acceptance, where things occur and are acknowledged, explored but not judged – neither condemned nor lauded. This idea is found in the Buddhist idea of precepts. Precepts are the Buddha’s recommendations for life, pointing us to conduct that nurtures and does not harm, a consideration that is also useful in thinking about AI activity. In this way actions, or outcomes, can be explored to see if they reflect Buddhist precepts. This is not necessarily a process of division into good and bad, but one of description, examining conduct and possible results, i.e., whether the AI process is helpful in the context of the study.

I feel that the teachings of Buddhism have enhanced and deepened my AI practice. The two are intertwined for me: AI leads to Buddhism and Buddhism strengthens AI. This perhaps over-simplifies the connection, but for me, this view makes sense of my experiences. The ideas of inclusiveness, moving away from formal research as a way of knowing and non-judgemental attitudes fit with my ideas of both AI and Buddhism, each enhancing the other.

This paper has been prepared with the advice of Reverend Berwyn of Throssel Hole Zen Buddhist Abbey, Northumberland UK.

**References**


This article offers some reflections on how my practice as a systemic psychotherapist has been influenced by my interests in Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and Zen Buddhism. The discussion will particularly focus on how these influences inform my thinking about the therapeutic relationship. From Zen, the idea of ‘beginner’s mind’ is helpful in enhancing appreciative curiosity within the therapist.

In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few.
Shunryu Suzuki

Encountering constructionism and AI
I trained as a systemic psychotherapist during the eighties, as a shift was beginning to occur in the field towards social constructionism. Encountering constructionism left me feeling giddy! The questions that arose for me were, Is there an external reality that is knowable outside of our constructions in language? Can we say of a person or family that they are healthy or crazy? How might a “good outcome” for therapy be “evaluated”? Engaging with these questions, I became less certain, less concerned with what I might do to try and change the people I met with, and more interested in the co-creative quality of relationships.

Later, when I discovered AI, I was particularly attracted to its emphasis on appreciativeness, which ran counter to the deficit models associated with psychiatry. AI invited me to engage in conversations with families about their hopes and dreams. Crucially, while being focused upon “the best of what is and has been” (Bushe, cited in Strong 2002, p.83), AI could also include appreciation of peoples’ struggles and their attempts to deal with social, political and personal adversities. An appreciative stance meant that therapy could not only focus on the good bits of people’s lives, but also include a compassionate interest in their experiences of hardship and failure. It is this non-dualistic conception of appreciation that I will explore in this article.

Encountering Zen
As I began to study Zen, I made some theoretical links with systemic and social constructionist ideas – such as the concepts of interconnectedness, ceaseless change and that there is no fixed self. However, Zen is firstly about practice and direct
Zen, AI and systemic psychotherapy – did start to inform one another, particularly in relation to how I approach the therapeutic relationship.

experience – about zazen or sitting meditation, and about being fully present in each passing moment. The scriptures, theology and theories, although important, are not at the centre. Indeed, it is said that Shakyamuni Buddha’s successor, Mahakashyapa, was instantly awakened at the very moment when the Buddha held up a flower (Maezumi, 2001).

I was aware that Zen as a spiritual practice necessitates application and diligence, and felt that I didn’t have sufficient experience to be able to substantively incorporate it into my therapeutic work. Gradually, however, these different aspects of my life – Zen, AI and systemic psychotherapy – did start to inform one another, particularly in relation to how I approach the therapeutic relationship.

Emptying the cup

There is a famous story in which a scholar asks the Japanese master Nan-in about the meaning of Zen (Reps, 1987). The scholar has many questions but is so filled with his own opinions that the master has no opportunity to respond. Eventually, Nan-in offers the scholar a cup of tea. When the scholar holds out his cup, Nan-in keeps pouring the tea until the cup overflows. The scholar yells out that the cup is full and no more will go in. Nan-in replies, “Yes, and so is your mind. You can’t learn Zen until you empty your cup.”

This idea of emptying the mind is resonant with discussions in systemic psychotherapy. Anderson and Goolishian (1992) famously advocated a not-knowing position, whereby the therapist is not regarded as expert in how people should live. From this perspective, the therapeutic task becomes more about listening and less about drawing upon professional knowledge to treat the client or family. Similarly, Cecchin (1987) proposed that curiosity is a key quality of the therapist: the therapist maintains endless curiosity about the different voices and perspectives in the client’s or family’s lives, avoiding becoming attached to any single account. This curiosity requires of the therapist an openness that is, temporarily at least, distanced from their own beliefs. This is not to say that this position is ethically or politically disinterested; it entails a capacity to hold back for a while, rather than jumping in too quickly.

The importance of pausing briefly to pay appreciative attention to what is taking place in the moment, rather than being driven by anxieties or goals, is illustrated in the following practice example (see also Reed, 2013). I visited a family in which Annie,¹ a fourteen-year-old girl who had been hearing voices and taking street drugs, had just been discharged from hospital. As we talked about how things had been since Annie had returned, she admitted that she was continuing to use drugs and that she had pretended to the hospital staff that the voices had gone away so she could return home.

¹ Names and other identifying features have been altered to preserve anonymity.
The mood of the meeting immediately intensified, and I began to feel anxious that the family would insist that Annie be returned to hospital. My initial impulse was to offer some kind of positive statement or solution-orientated intervention. Pausing for a moment, however, I became aware of the physical presence of Annie’s mum sitting next to me, and the gloom that had descended on her in response to what Annie had said. The direct experience of the despondency that had fallen over Annie’s mum alerted me to how trivialising it would be to move towards a more positive stance at that moment. Instead, I simply commented on how very difficult the situation felt right now. Ultimately, this appreciation of the current emotional predicament was a crucial step in finding a more hopeful position.

Beginner’s mind

A connection can be drawn between the open receptivity of a not-knowing therapeutic orientation and the “fresh, uncluttered perspective” (Bodian, 2006) of Zen beginner’s mind. Suzuki (2010) said beginner’s mind entails a capacity to be present in the moment, in sympathy with ourselves and others. With beginner’s mind we attend to each moment fully, without looking towards some future goal. Beginner’s mind is “the secret of Zen practice” (Suzuki, p. 3).

Emptying “the cup of the mind” of the ideas and intentions that fill it allows for spaciousness. To attend to what is going on right here, under our noses, with the openness and curiosity of beginner’s mind allows for an appreciative encounter with the client. In Zen, attending to the present moment, as it is, without trying to impose our own wishes, is to awaken to the reality of our life. Wishing that life is other than it is right now is to create further suffering for ourselves. Without acceptance of, or at least attention to, what is in the present moment, (people’s present experience of, and stories about, their situation), there can be no genuine appreciation.

So how can this position of accepting present reality be reconciled with AI’s focus on carrying the best of the past into the future? To understand this apparent contradiction between beginner’s mind and AI, I believe it is necessary to distinguish between explicit linguistic knowledge and implicit understanding that is outside of verbal language and associated with inter-subjective relational processes (Stern, et al., 1998). Stern and colleagues describe “moments of meeting”, in which the therapist must be present in the moment, that hold powerful potential for change and contribute a sense of connection between client and therapist.

With beginner’s mind we are naturally attuned towards this more implicit, inter-subjective level. The potential for moments of meeting is thereby enhanced, and the therapist’s interventions, (appreciative questions and so on), have greater likelihood of success, in that the client will experience these interventions as arising from an inclusive, non-dualistic appreciation for their circumstances.
Conclusion

Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) proposed that inquiry should begin with appreciation. However, Bushe (2007) argues that AI is not only about the positive; the purpose is to generate meaning rather than simply to collect positive stories which may not be enough to support lasting change. Therapist “interventions” such as appreciative questions have greater potential to be generative when informed by an attuned, attentive beginner’s mind.

References


The Gift of Humility
Appreciative Inquiry in Organizations

Appreciative Inquiry fosters humility in four ways, through:
1. The structure of one-on-one appreciative interviews;

I have three precious things which I hold fast and prize. The first is gentleness; the second is frugality; the third is humility, which keeps me from putting myself before others. Be gentle and you can be bold; be frugal and you can be liberal; avoid putting yourself before others and you can become a leader among men. Lao Tzu

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) participants and practitioners alike talk about AI with a kind of awe and reverence. They say things like, “Something happens with AI that doesn’t happen with other processes. If I follow the process it always works. I don’t know why, it just works. Appreciative Inquiry is almost magical. There is something spiritual about Appreciative Inquiry.” Comments like these have led me to wonder, what is it about AI that gives us that sense of spirituality? The purpose of this essay is to offer one consideration to explain the spiritual tone of AI: “the gift of humility”. It is an invitation to wonder with me how humility, implicit in the AI process, contributes to spiritual resonance within organizations and communities.

Appreciative Inquiry, by design, fosters humility in four important ways: first, through the structure of one-on-one appreciative interviews; second, through appreciative introductions in small groups; third, through narrative analysis and interpretive generosity; and fourth, through wonder about wholeness.

Appreciative interviews: A structure of humility
Humility is throwing oneself away in complete concentration on something or someone else. Madeleine L’Engle

Appreciative Inquiry is about the power of the unconditionally positive question asked in a one-on-one interview setting. People are invited to find a partner, someone they don’t know or don’t know well, someone who is different from them, and then
To put one’s self and one’s ideas aside to listen, witness and affirm another person calls forth humility.

Appreciative interviews are conversational structures of deep relational connection, resonance and humility. In the course of appreciative interviews people become enchanted with one another. They form and strengthen relational bonds. Each person gets to tell his or her story and to be heard by another person. To put one’s self and one’s ideas aside to listen, witness and affirm another person calls forth humility.

**Appreciative introductions in small groups**

*I believe that the first test of a great man is his humility. I don’t mean by humility, doubt of his power. But really great men have a curious feeling that the greatness is not of them, but through them. And they see something divine in every other man and are endlessly, foolishly, incredibly merciful.* John Ruskin

The AI process moves from one-on-one interviews into small groups where partners introduce each other and share what they learned during their interviews. We invite them to introduce their partner to the group by sharing their partner’s story, thoughts, ideas and feelings. This is a quintessential act of humility. In the Lakota tradition, when a person is being honored, he or she does not speak for his or her self. He or she prepares and offers an elaborate giveaway of gifts to the community. When the time comes he or she stands to the side while the one who has offered to speak on their behalf tells the people about the gifts and why they are being given. The one being honored listens and hears his or her story told to the community. The one being honored hears how she or he fits into the whole of the community and life. To be presented to one’s community is the honor.

In much the same way, after appreciative interviews, partners introduce each other to the community in small groups. They share what they learned about their partner and in this way they tell the community who their partner is and what their partner has to offer to the whole. One participant commented about the process, “It’s like being socially constructed right before your own eyes!” As one is introduced, so he or she becomes. When people hear their own story reflected though the kind and often energized words, gestures and tonality of their partner, and see their story accepted in the eyes of the small group members, they recognize and identify with the greatness flowing through themselves. For some, this may be the first meeting with the divinity moving through them. To speak on behalf of another person is to honor them. To have another person speak on your behalf puts your self and your ideas equal to others in the circle of life. It is a gift of humility.

**Narrative analysis and interpretive generosity**

*The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for the destruction of our race. Wonder and humility are wholesome emotions, and they do not exist side by side with a lust for destruction.* Rachel Carson

1 The Lakota are an indigenous people whose homeland is the Great Plains of North America.
Throughout an AI process, participants are invited to make meaning of what they are hearing and learning. The stories they share are qualitative data, created and made meaningful through interviews, conversations and narrative analysis. Conversations to discover the best of what is, to envision and to design the future, are all acts of collaborative interpretation.

Appreciative Inquiry is uniquely characterized by “interpretive generosity”: that is, the practice of seeking and attributing the best to stories being shared. In its fully affirmative stance, AI is a means to listen and to speak with a generously loving heart, to draw from an appreciative vocabulary of life-affirming words that, as Rachel Carson suggests, cannot exist side by side with destruction.

Recognizing the socially constructed possibility of multiple interpretations of any situation or story, AI is a framework for interpretive generosity, an invitation to create the interpretation that gives life to the people. To practice interpretive generosity is to practice humility. It requires reflective capacity, to know our own thoughts, feelings and most-preferred ideas, and a willingness to put them into the conversational stew as ingredients to simmer and nourish collective meaning-making. Humility comes not just from recognizing that I am equal among all people, but also in recognizing that my ideas, perspectives and interpretations of reality are of no more importance than others’. In the process of AI all participants’ ideas are stirred together. Through interpretative generosity the collective sense of the whole’s best self is invited, emerges, is affirmed and constructed as an energizing new reality.

Wonder about wholeness

I believe that the world was created and approved by love, that it subsists, coheres, and endures by love, and that, insofar as it is redeemable, it can be redeemed only by love. I believe that divine love, incarnate and indwelling in the world, summons the world always toward wholeness, which ultimately is reconciliation and atonement with God.

Wendell Berry

Appreciative Inquiry calls for us to wonder about wholeness. In a practical sense this means wondering about how to get the whole system in the room or into the process, wondering about and inviting the whole story by welcoming and listening to all voices. As a conceptual framework, it means wondering about and attending to what gives life to the whole of people, organizations and humanity; it means seeking to balance the triple bottom line of people, profit and planet. From a spiritual perspective it means honoring the “great mystery” as another relational presence in our lives. It means wondering about how to live, work, be in relation to the creator, God, the divine.

Through the gift of humility, AI is an invitation to step onto a spiritual path. It is an invitation to deep listening, relational resonance, interpretive generosity and an equal place in the circle of life.

To have another person speak on your behalf puts your self and your ideas equal to others in the circle of life. It is a gift of humility.
Implications for the practice of Appreciative Inquiry

While the design of AI holds spiritual potential, what makes AI spiritual is the way it is practiced. Appreciative Inquiry can be a game changer, or not. It has the potential to be the change we want to see or just another collaborative activity. It has spiritual potential as a process that gives voice, that treats people equally, and that models positive change. It is by giving time and space to the aspects of AI that foster the gift of humility that we can enhance the spiritual resonance of Appreciative Inquiry.

First, take time for meaningful appreciative interviews. They are not “feel good” icebreakers. They are at the heart of AI. They create the structure and space for people to be heard, to have their identities affirmed, and to come to life. Second, remind people that they carry their partner’s stories as sacred text. After all, it is the story of their partner’s life, and in the telling of the story their partner comes to life. Third, encourage and facilitate interpretive generosity so that what is shared in an AI process affirms life and generates positive potential for all involved. The more we invite appreciative language and the telling of stories of the good, beautiful and meaningful, the more we invite the spiritual potential of the organization or community to emerge.

Appreciative Inquiry is a process for bringing the whole system together, for helping large, diverse groups of people collaboratively create their future. In the course of the process relationships are established and nurtured. Organizations and communities benefit from increased relational respect. So too do the people who participate in AI benefit. As their ideas and stories are heard, shared and validated, people gain confidence and sense of belonging. Through the gift of humility people feel safe and come alive. They are inspired to give their best in service to their organization, community and the generations to come.
Graffiti Paper – Co-created Learning as Spiritual Space

As professors, we challenged ourselves to create something unique for a group of graduate students studying appreciative inquiry. We created the graffiti paper and invite our colleagues from around the world to use it and experiment with it as an opening to spiritual space. This article explores the creating of spiritual spaces within learning by constructing conditions and exercises that maximize the possibility of learners tapping into deep listening and their own wisdom.

We are standing in a classroom, and around us is a room full of graduate students. They are all moving in semi-silence from poster to poster, writing in response to the research abstracts of their classmates. We watch as each learner approaches the work of another learner with deep respect, silence, careful reading and appreciation for what has been created. They circle the room slowly, writing on the posters – words, thoughts, what moved them – around and around until each person has visited eighteen research abstracts.

This was the beginning of the graffiti research paper exercise, an experiment in co-created learning as a spiritual space. The graffiti research paper was one assignment in a graduate course at a Canadian university in Appreciative Inquiry attended by Masters and Doctoral students from education, higher education, urban planning and community development. This course ran over three weeks from Monday – Friday, two and a half hours per day. This article will briefly define our notions of spirituality; how we intentionally set the conditions for spirituality and Appreciative Inquiry (AI); and then delve into our experiment with the graffiti research paper.

Spirituality
We are educators, consultants and AI practitioners who define spirituality as the dimension of holistic learning where people are authentically present and interconnected with each other in the search for meaning-making – "magic". For
In creating ‘magic’, we bring our intention to set conditions that allow it to happen.

Creating the conditions
In creating “magic”, we bring our intention to set conditions that allow it to happen. With the learners in this example, we engaged in several experiences to create conditions for purposeful spirituality in the course before we launched the graffiti paper. These conditions are like having a meditation cushion. You can meditate without one but it is far more comfortable with one. Some of the experiences we use are: beginning with an inquiry into the best of ourselves and our learning experiences; setting agreements for learning together; and the use of circle practice. Each one of these processes draws AI and spirituality together to create “magic.”

Best experiences and agreements: On the first day of class, each learner selected a magazine picture that metaphorically represented “you at your best”. This exercise, as well as being a starter AI exercise, begins to bring people fully present into the classroom as they share their metaphors. They begin to see each other’s strengths and what moves them in the world. The second part of this exercise is learners, in pairs, telling stories of best learning experiences. Built on these, they co-create agreements for learning together. These AI beginning exercises open the hearts of learners to both hearing and telling stories that inquire into what is right with them as a person; what is right with them as a learner; and what they are longing for from each other in this learning experience. They begin the process of drawing learners into being present with each other so the conditions for making “magic” can begin to form.

Circle practice
We began most classes with circle practice based on Baldwin’s (1998) work. Circle practice has a few key components. The first is the physical configuration where everyone can see each other across the circle. Second, one at a time each person speaks and is deeply listened to without comment from other people. People can pass if they don’t wish to offer anything into the circle. Third, a question is asked to begin. A few of ours were:

- What are you grateful for?
- What is on your mind?
- What did you read last evening – fiction or non-fiction and how did it prompt your thinking?

The time spent in circle varies, but this is a space for people to speak about the class – sometimes their lives – and to share what is on their mind. This sharing is a spiritual practice in that it is built around speaking with intention and listening with attention,
and is linked to AI through the design of the questions and the focus on what is powerful and good.

These are just a few examples of ways to set the conditions for “magic”. We were very conscious that we were together with our learners socially constructing our experience, and we consciously brought exercises that opened doors to thinking with an open heart and mind. As the experience of learning about AI unfolded, we all brought more and more spiritual practices to the classroom each day. People began to link their graduate work to their lives and tell profound stories to the class about their work outside the learning environment, and to experiment with using AI in experiences from partner relationships to staff relationships. It was as if the study of AI linked with the conditions for “magic” to open the door to a form of spirituality where we all began to practice our best selves and inquire into how we could lift each other up to the sun.

Graffiti paper

The graffiti paper was an experiment set into these conditions, and neither of us recognized going in to it that it would be such a magical experience. In most graduate classes, papers are written individually, handed in and only read by faculty. We wanted to create something different, and asked ourselves what an AI research paper might be. The paragraphs that follow outline the steps in the graffiti paper and the experiences we had along the way with our learners.

Step One: In the third class, each of the learners brought two pages to glue onto a large piece of poster paper – a page with their magazine picture metaphor and explanation of what it meant; and a one-page abstract outlining their research paper on AI or a related topic. These were posted around the classroom. Then we all wandered the room, reading each abstract and writing on the chart paper our thoughts. Key questions guided the process:

1. What moved you about this abstract?
2. What more could s/he explore?
3. Comments/questions.

It was profound, wandering the room adding our comments and questions and watching the learners work. We did this for an hour, mostly in silence. We describe the feeling of this exercise at the beginning of this article. The intention was for all of us to surface the strengths being brought to the research and encourage inquiry into what more could be done.

Step Two: The next step in the process was for the learners to create a digital image of the graffiti poster. The assignment then was to create a link in the next section of the paper between what they originally wrote and the graffiti poster. We told learners not
We could feel the visceral commitment everyone had to each other.

to re-write their abstracts; rather, to create a bridge between their original thinking and the new ideas being offered by other learners.

**Step Three:** In the seventh class, the learners brought in their abstract, graffiti poster and the first four to six pages of their paper. They worked in triads or fours. The task was to read each paper and again graffiti up the paper with ideas, drawings, poems, questions, etc. The learners brought their intention to offer mindful feedback to their peers and to extend their trust for the views of others.

**Step Four:** Learners built another bridge between the graffiti feedback and the next sections of the research paper, and included the graffiti pages in the paper.

**Step Five:** In the eleventh class, learners brought their final draft of the research paper. Learners worked in pairs, read each other’s papers and attached a sheet to the back of the paper for their last piece of graffiti. Each piece of graffiti represented what was most compelling for the reader. This was a deep reading and reflection exercise that focused on what the research paper offered to a reader. For the most part, this exercise was done in silence. We could feel the visceral commitment everyone had to each other. This graduate course had taken them from being separate individuals to being interconnected. In that interconnected “magic”, their ability to speak on paper and represent complex ideas soared and found new places to reside.

**Step Six:** In class twelve, the learners handed in their graffiti papers with all the graffiti woven in. We reviewed them and handed them back on the last day of class.

They assigned their own final grades for the course based on the papers, team presentations and participation, and wrote rationales for their grades. We had never read such powerful rationales. Learners wrote about their journey, their fears, what they had learned and where they were taking their knowledge. They co-wrote this poem, a wonderful parting gift to us.
The Poet and the Storyteller
You burst into our lives, all colour and sparkle and whispered these words into our hearts: “words create worlds”
people create places
two working in perfect oneness
inspiring creativity and passion.
with humour and kindness
by creating safe spaces
making magic
harvesting hope
looking within
caring, sharing
making provocative propositions
Nurturing the beauty of the human spirit
TEACHING US TO LOVE RATHER THAN FEAR IT
Appreciating us
Looking for the good
Helping us change the world
Discover, Connections, Constructing, Reflection
Authentic healing & transformation

Magic
We both profoundly think that learning spaces are spiritual spaces and are places that we can intentionally create. New ideas, new learning and new possibilities make the heart and spirit sing, and it is in the co-created learning that spirituality takes its form.

We intentionally create spiritual spaces wherever co-creating learning happens, whatever the context for our AI work. Although we haven’t used a graffiti paper in other contexts we do use circle practice, agreements, poetry, and many collaborative practices with team/group, organizational and community development. One possibility for a graffiti paper in other contexts could be writing AI interview stories, passing them around, having others in the team/group/organization respond with comments, questions, suggestions, images, poetry ... the beauty of AI is its adaptable, creative, inclusive nature, fitting so well with other processes for intentionally creating spiritual learning spaces – “magic”.

References

In early 2009, the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) – like many liberal religions – was challenged. Church membership was dwindling and finances were strained. Congregations and fellowships were operating independently, rather than resourcing and supporting one another. National administrative staff – providing programs and services to stimulate growth and enhance spiritual vitality – felt disconnected from “the people in the pews”.

Incoming president, Reverend Peter Morales, sought to stimulate new vision by giving voice to people’s deepest values. Having experienced Appreciative Inquiry as a parish minister, Morales recognized its congruence with Unitarian Universalist (UU) principles and values, and invited me to propose a process to radically engage everyday Unitarian Universalists in setting direction for the movement.

When we come together and share our most precious memories and deepest aspirations, we discover how much we have in common. Relationships are strengthened, and our motivation to pursue shared dreams rises. Our hope was that this unfolding would occur within, between and among congregations.

The result was a two-year initiative involving more than 1,000 congregations and hundreds of “unchurched” Unitarian Universalists. It was called Gathered Here: An Invitation to Discover Our Common Aspirations and Unleash the Power of our Faith.
The goals behind the goals
Unitarian Universalism’s Seven Principles:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part

Unitarian Universalists are bound to one another by shared principles, rather than dogma or doctrine. The principles themselves are “strong values and moral teachings: a guide for those who choose to join and participate in UU religious communities”. They bear a striking similarity to many of the underlying assumptions of and values embedded in Appreciative Inquiry (AI).

It was this very similarity and congruence that initially turned UUA leaders towards AI. They understood that the process would amplify and reinforce some of the best of the faith – even as it built momentum for a new future.

In addition, leaders shared some more tactical goals for the process. They wanted to set strategic direction for the UUA in a manner that would increase the vitality of local UU communities, and to strengthen relationships between the denomination’s board of trustees and staff. So in November, 2010 the two governing bodies agreed to co-sponsor an AI-based strategic planning process “solidly rooted in and responsive to our congregations’ most compelling desires for the denomination’s future”. The board also tasked me to help them engage and give voice to historically marginalized groups within the Association.

The methodology: Getting started
Morales, the board moderator (chair) and two senior staff members identified and recruited a 16-person planning team consisting of board and staff members; clergy; lay leaders; and informal leaders working with young adults, communities of color and UUs not connected to congregations or fellowships. Team members finalized the scope, selected topics, crafted questions and an interview guide, and designed an inquiry process to address the organization’s unique characteristics/challenges:

1 http://www.uua.org/beliefs/principles/
Six months into the process, the planning team recommended a radical paring down.

- Potential participants were geographically dispersed volunteers from self-governing, self-directing organizations.
- A relatively small percentage of people identifying as Unitarian Universalist were members of traditional congregations. Thousands of others were engaged through youth conferences, camps, grassroots interest groups and an international online spiritual community (Church of the Larger Fellowship).
- Communication and collaboration among congregations, fellowships and other groups were haphazard. There was no way to reach all affected parties with a single, consistent message.

**Evolving design**

The initial design involved a complex infrastructure of endorsements by UU interest groups (ministers’ association, religious educators, musicians’ network, people of color etc.), dedicated administration, senior and local facilitators, and modular materials. But it soon became evident that the complexity was a barrier to participation. Six months into the process, the planning team recommended a radical paring down. The result – a simple, straightforward, downloadable set of materials immediately took hold. These materials included one-on-one interviews, “community conversation” guides, facilitator packets and summary sheets.

The combination of simplified activities was indeed the “secret sauce” for increased participation. Promoting the design through our broad-based network of champions, we watched participation grow exponentially. But increased participation came with a cost: feedback was spotty. Organizers had no way of knowing who had completed interviews, and therefore no capacity to track down missing summary sheets. The implications of this issue are discussed in the Summary.

One-on-one interviews took place in person and via phone and video calls. An online “matching” site enabled people to find interview partners. Community Conversations were convened in intact congregations as well as at district gatherings, camps and conferences. In addition, because of the project’s stated goal of actively involving people whose voices were not often heard, a small group of facilitators created and implemented a virtual Community Conversation process. Among the communities successfully reached were geographically dispersed people of color, people with disabilities, and young adults.

The 15-month Discovery period was coming to a close shortly after the organization’s annual General Assembly, during which more than 3,000 UUs from around the nation convened for five days of business meetings, workshops and worship. In order to fully leverage this large assembly of dedicated UUs, the team launched a final “blitz” of Community Conversations, scheduled during breakout sessions. They also invited

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3 “Community Conversations” are group gatherings involving two-way interviews combined with minimal “Dreaming.” For more information, see Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, p. 248.
Because of the project’s stated goal of actively involving people whose voices were not often heard, a small group of facilitators created and implemented a virtual Community Conversation process.

people to conduct “spot” interviews using materials that were available in the exhibit hall. Anyone could conduct a 15-minute interview and return their notes, in exchange for a raffle ticket awarding credit in the UU bookstore.

Meaning-making, dreaming and implementation

To make meaning of the feedback, a small, diverse group of board, staff and lay members convened a two-day “meaning-making” session during which they read and reflected on summary sheets, tracking patterns and themes to determine the “positive core of Unitarian Universalism”. Because of the board’s commitment to hear from people “at the margins”, they then re-read summary sheets from interviews conducted with members of traditionally marginalized groups, comparing what they’d learned from these participants to what had emerged in the first round of analysis. In the end, the group identified eight positive core elements, supporting stories and a vision statement in a final report.

This report was presented to the board and senior staff. It contained powerful stories and examples of the faith at its best, along with a summary of the findings and a demographic summary of known participants. During a four-hour feedback session, board and staff participated in reflective interviews and conversations targeted at validating the findings and determining their implications.

Both the full-length report and a summary of findings – along with yet another set of reflection questions – remain available on the Gathered Here website. To this day, individuals and groups who wish to “fan the flames” of Gathered Here are invited to consider the individual, local and global implications of the UUA’s positive core and strategic vision.

Outcomes

Former project leaders describe Gathered Here as having had a profound effect on participants – and on the faith as a whole. As Linda Laskowski, former planning team member and board trustee says, “Gathered Here gave people space to think differently and acknowledge differences – but also to recognize similarities. It strengthened our sense of common purpose.”

The summary report and reflection process played a vital role in the board’s revision of the Association’s “ends” statements (goals). As such, according to Morales, it helped shape the everyday work of the staff. The stories, says Laskowski, continue to be referred to and quoted by the board and others. “It’s a body of knowledge with powerful long-term implications,” she says.

As intended, Gathered Here also strengthened relationships between various UUA bodies and congregations. “It built synergies between governors and other UUA departments and functions,” says Reverend Harlan Limpert, Chief Operating Officer for the UUA. “It is very exciting to lead right now.”
Many participating congregations and communities communicated the benefits they experienced. For example, Rev. Dr. Nate Walker, former Senior Minister and Executive Director for First Unitarian Church in Philadelphia, says Gathered Here stories influenced and were incorporated into his church’s worship, governance and evaluation. “It became part of a communications toolkit we used to train one another.”

Finally, the fateful decision to actively engage those whose voices are not often heard has continued to unfold through an ongoing initiative called “Congregations and Beyond”. When Gathered Here successfully reached out to and engaged people who were philosophically and spiritually aligned with the faith (but who did not participate in the life of a congregation or community) it planted seeds for future grassroots activities that have yet to emerge. It may even have predicted one vital way in which Unitarian Universalism will adapt to the changing nature of American culture.

Summary
In the end, organizers recognized that the outcomes they’d tracked were reported by an unknown fraction of Gathered Here participants. Indeed, based on anecdotal information, they estimated that more than a third of the people participating in Gathered Here processes did not report their findings. People met, formed relationships, unleashed new ideas and perhaps even launched projects – but never made the connection between their participation and the changes it inspired. Based on the outcomes that were tracked, however, it is fair to assume that the effect was profound.

Gathered Here was one of the more ambitious and complex initiatives ever undertaken by the UUA. Involving multiple goals and potentially thousands of participants, it engaged UUs within and beyond congregations in conversations about “what gives life to our faith”, and “our hopes, dreams and aspirations for Unitarian Universalism’s future”. A tangible manifestation of UU values – respect, interdependence and inquiry – it had a powerful impact on individuals, congregations, UU communities and the movement as a whole. Its evolving design demonstrated the importance of simplicity, for organizations seeking to reach diverse, dispersed stakeholders. In the words of one participant Gathered Here was “faith-making”.

References
The Bryn Athyn Church (BAC) in Pennsylvania is the largest New Church congregation in the world. The New Church is based on the teachings of the Bible as illuminated by Emmanuel Swedenborg, an eighteenth century theologian and scientist.

In 2010, the Bryn Athyn congregation experienced conflict around several issues, including decisions by the BAC board; growth initiatives by related church bodies; and donors perceived as attaching strings to big gifts. The community fractured when donor-driven plans for a new school building appeared to threaten the church’s thrift shop. Discontent and alienation dominated conversations.

Both lay and formal leadership thought Appreciative Inquiry (AI) offered an opportunity to reconnect the congregation through re-discovery of shared values. New Church doctrine and core AI principles are closely aligned, which the BAC board stressed when it proposed an AI process to the community:

1 http://brynathynchurch.org/
The person whose rational mind consists in truth alone, and does not at the same time consist in the good of charity, is quick to find fault ... He views everything from the standpoint of truth, and nothing from the standpoint of good. The one thing to soften his hardness is the good of charity...when good draws near and implants itself in truth the latter becomes so different that it can hardly be recognized (Swedenborg, 2013 translation).

The congruence between AI’s core principles and the spirituality of the community became an important dimension of the process. Three aspects of the process contributed to its success: an intentionally slow startup, thorough community involvement, and ongoing board commitment.
Slow and intentional startup
By intention, stakeholders were introduced slowly to the AI process. First, the church board, and then a cross-section of the community, sampled the process. A larger-scale process began several months later with broad outreach to stakeholders.

Thorough community involvement
Stakeholders included the Bryn Athyn Church, its associated preschool, elementary school and church-run thrift shop; nearby denominational headquarters; Bryn Athyn College; a denominational secondary school; church retirement community; community-driven artworks facility; and historic district including the Bryn Athyn Cathedral. Other stakeholders included people attending a variety of church services in five different locations, some outside of the immediate Bryn Athyn community, as well as people disenfranchised or disengaged from the formal church.

A design team representing all stakeholder groups worked for six months to select four affirmative topics for community-wide discovery interviews: joyful community; useful service from strengths and passion; lifelong learning; and moving forward (signaling intention to move beyond conflict). These topics resonated with doctrinal commitments to diversity, service, personal responsibility and an ongoing search for knowledge and truth. As one member said, “I was longing for the community to act on Swedenborgian principles and no longer be an organization that has a mission of healing people, but often hurts or even destroys the people within the church and community.”

AI’s formal 4D process – Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny – took place over 12 months to shift the congregation’s fractured culture by engaging as many church and community people as possible. Discovery interviews initially occurred at large group meetings (“base camps”). After the first two, participants took the initiative to extend themselves into the community with smaller, more intimate interview sessions. In six months, five base camps involved about 225 people, and one-on-one interviews involved another 225, generating 450 interviews for analysis by a volunteer “meaning-making” team.

Discovery interviews were a powerful tool for effecting culture change. “The fact that the church was willing to stop and listen, and to encourage everyone in the church to stop and listen, changed the tone of the dialogue,” assistant pastor Erik Buss said. “Once people saw that they were being heard, the intensity dropped away from the conversation, and we moved from looking at problems to looking at possibilities.” A design team member commented: “I was impressed by how positive language kept being gently used by leadership … There was a respect that was emerging, a respectful way of being and viewing. The interviews were precious privileges – connecting me to others, and others to others.”

In an unusual step, the design team insisted that base camp meetings include a “concerns conversation” in which participants could anonymously list concerns, followed by a large group conversation. Consultant Ray Wells was apprehensive. “I
had a lot of anxiety about designing and facilitating the concerns conversation. In ten years of AI work, I had been successful at discouraging groups from running down this pathway. This group had very strong feelings that concerns should come to the forefront in a public forum and be facilitated in a structured, manageable way.”

This created a key learning: the discovery process produced a high, and the concern conversation was a downer. This helped participants understand the value of an appreciative approach. One design team member said, “It was good to see the turnaround in a base camp from the strain of the concerns conversation to the positive energy of the subsequent interaction, which accentuated the difference in productivity and usefulness.”

After the base camps and community interviews, about 15 volunteers spent a month analyzing data to identify nine themes, the positive core of the church and the glue for the community and church in planning a collective future:

1. We are a community.
2. Marriage and family are where our heart is.
3. New Church education gave meaning to my life.
4. We love our New Church teachings!
5. You are valued for who you are.

The positive core of Bryn Athyn
6. Supporting people is vital.

7. We honor people and groups we have been affected by.

8. Volunteering is rewarding!

9. Welcoming people is important.

The visions for the future were represented by painted trees created by local artist Ann Buss. Then, in the spring of 2012, about 175 community members participated in two half-day Dream Summits. The first resulted in 24 graphic visuals of the future of the BAC community. Many design team members felt the first Dream Summit was critically important:

“I think it popped the bubble of people feeling like they did not have a voice. The interviews probably had tons of impact for individuals, but for me the feedback of the message in the visual images was key,” said one team member.

“Of those who came to the first Dream Summit, there was a sense of unity, importance, being included, necessary, heard – each person could make a difference that day,” said another.

At the second Dream Summit, another graphic created by local artist Liz Kufs summarized the community’s future hopes through 14 themes that emerged from the first summit. Self-organizing groups crafted 14 aspiration statements used at an autumn Design/Destiny summit to develop specific plans. Project groups attempted to bring the aspiration statements to life; then assistant pastor Erik Buss led efforts to create specific strategies. Developing consensual plans to drive action was the most difficult part of the entire process.
Board engagement

One reason for success was the BAC board’s involvement during the 30 months. The strategic planning committee initiated the process, the entire board participated in an orientation and voted to enter the process, and members served as informal leaders, active voices, and listeners throughout. Jennifer Pronesti reflected: “I definitely underwent a personal transformation as a result of my involvement. Again and again I catch myself before I fall into negative thought processes or, sometimes after the fact, I realize that I have made assumptions about people. The training has opened doors and allowed me to get to know people in meaningful ways and have connections with, that otherwise would have taken years to form.”

A critical board decision was allowing all 14 aspirations from the Dream Summit to move forward – even an aspiration advocating for women in the ministry (currently not allowed by the General Church) and one focused on use of property not owned by the church. At a subsequent retreat, the board reviewed articles on appreciative governance (Lee, Mohr and Torres, 2011) and developed seven themes that guide ongoing strategic planning:

1. Effective pastoral leadership
2. Clear/efficient administration of congregational uses
3. Fiscal responsibility
4. Broad influence and transparency in decisions
5. Clear/transparent policy for maintenance/development of church-owned facilities and land
6. Improved relations across all Bryn Athyn institutions
7. Sustained momentum of AI process
Contributions to strategic planning

The AI process created three unequivocal outcomes that informed strategic planning: people wanted meaning through spiritual living, connection through community and trust through transparent governance. Additionally, service to others is both a strong doctrinal and community value and the congregation has a long-term interest in education. The strategic plan goals parallel these:

1. Support people in worship and spiritual living that put the Lord and the Word – which includes the Bible and Swedenborg’s Writings – at the center of our community.


3. Warmly welcome people into the life of the church and community.

4. Create opportunities for people to find joy in serving others and to feel that their spiritual needs are being met.

5. Practice transparent and effective governance that inspires trust and a clear sense of a commonly held direction.

The strategic plan is broadly accepted and perceived as a community, rather than a board, creation. Inspired by AI principles, for the past two years the BAC leadership has asked the congregation to choose strategic priorities for the coming year.

Vignettes of progress

An 18-month, volunteer-driven AI process involved 450 people, creating enormous individual and collective learning. Leah Rose, co-chair of the Design Team, had felt marginalized prior to taking a leadership role. “I learned that we probably care about our community and/or church more than we think we do, or sometimes than we feel we do,” she said. “Everyone has a story worth hearing. Being willing to listen to one another...that is where human connection happens, where energy is formed.”
Two years after the final BAC Design/Destiny summit, AI has influenced direct and indirect changes, perhaps even transformation, in the community’s culture. Specifically, there is:

- Increased trust through formal structures to facilitate transparent governance
- Increased volunteerism, community engagement and new staff support of volunteers
- Increased support and new programs for marriage, young children and the family
- Increased support and new programs for community engagement by young adults
- Collaboration with Bryn Athyn College about use of land not owned by the church
- A developing culture of listening and advocacy
- Improvement in donor relationships and fiscal management, including a balanced budget after five years of deficit spending

Although there are still things to accomplish, the place feels different: it is more inclusive, more transparent, more attentive to shared spirituality across generations, and there is more engagement from a broader number of people and a greater sense of connection via community. And when the BAC builds the community center that is the aspiration of many – or attains a gift to do so – it would be, perhaps, safe to proclaim long-term success.

References

Revitalizing the Faith Journey
Bringing Appreciative Inquiry to Church Communities

Most mainstream denominational churches today are facing a crisis. As new generations lose connection to the historic faith narratives and fewer young people find relevancy in the faith traditions of their parents and grandparents, the church has cause to question the very reason for its existence. In this article, I share my experience of how an adaptation of Appreciative Inquiry is becoming a vital instrument for faith communities to find renewed relational identities and revitalized ministries.

The unique gift of AI
There is a compelling affinity between AI and religious communities. AI “encourages story-sharing ... as a basis for imagining the most preferred future” (Watkins and Stavros, 2010, p. 161). At the same time, stories are the core of sacred texts and unfold into religious streams of practice that have inspired seekers of meaning throughout the ages. Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) suggests that our identity and that of our faith community is constructed through engagement with collective voices. “Narrators [in sacred texts] are active co-constructors of these voices” (Buitelaar, 2014, p. 147). It is my experience that faith communities step easily and organically into an AI process that acknowledges, respects and builds on the historical narratives of their faith tradition.

Adapting AI to work with faith communities
An adaptation of the AI process for work with faith-based communities, including churches, nonprofits and institutions of higher education, has been the core of my work as an AI practitioner. My adaptation is an innovation on the 5D model familiar to AI practitioners. It differs in that the first ‘D’ of my process is discernment. This step invites the community into a quiet place of heart-centered, prayerful listening around the question: “What are God and the community calling us to be and do?” Depending on the religious stream of practice, another word for divine presence may be used instead of “God”.

The question invites spirit into the appreciative process. It sets a context for turning inward while connecting with the deepest threads of faith and missional identity. The discernment step intentionally invites the preverbal. In the context of religious communities, this is the language of the unseen, of the spiritual life and the faith journey.
If faith can be described as the hope for that which is unseen, the AI process in a faith community can be understood as a way of making the unseen visible.

Faith-based organizations across religious traditions and denominational lines are receptive to this approach to AI. This includes churches, synagogues and mosques, as well as faith-focused social justice ministries, colleges and universities, and community service organizations. This AI process calls forward new voices while renewing old narratives that have sustained spiritual streams of practice through the ages.

**AI journey with a Mennonite congregation**

I provide an example of this adaptation of AI through my two-year AI journey with a Mennonite congregation. In a frontier community in eastern Montana, a one-hundred-year-old Mennonite community reflects on its past and turns to AI to discern a way forward for the next one hundred years. Their Centennial Celebration sees a church community with a divided identity. Legends of ancestors who settled this land and built the church building from wood beams carved from trees on their own land live on. This community stands apart from the mainstream culture in its commitment to leading simple lives, sharing generously with those in need and standing in opposition to military conscription.

But as the “old-timers” pass on and are buried in a wind-swept cemetery with inconspicuous or absent grave markers, a dwindling number of young parishioners struggle with what it means to be a Mennonite in their now rapidly changing world. The Mennonite Church is a Christian church in the Anabaptist tradition with an emphasis on peacemaking dating back to the 16th century (Murray, 2010). Despite these deep roots, this congregation wonders how many more years the church can continue without a renewed sense of purpose and direction.
The turn to AI to seek a shared identity and a way forward is a natural choice for this spiritual community. Storytelling is part of their fabric. Stories are woven into the intricate prayer quilts still crafted for grieving or ill members of the community. This community recounts easily stories of their ancestors and of their recent past. They recount with equal ease and claim as their own the faith narrative of the Old Testament scriptures and the journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land. In an emerging AI process woven into worship services and Sunday meetings in the Fellowship Hall, the metaphor of a journey to the Promised Land finds congruence in the journey of an organization to its positive life-giving core.

Finding relational identity through AI

A Service of Gratitude, in which congregants rise one after another to share their stories of gratitude, sets the stage for the discovery phase. AI suggests that expressions of gratitude serve to highlight interdependencies and that, through appreciation, organizations gain coherence (Anderson et al., 2001). In this congregation, AI reveals the co-construction of a present-day narrative that has deep roots and connections to a historical narrative shaped around the metaphor of a spiritual (purpose-driven) journey of a faith community.

The Service of Gratitude consists of 30 participants’ stories within a single congregational story. The 30 stories share significant similarities and characteristics. Analysis of the AI process’s narrative shows that the glue that binds these discrete stories together consists of three constituent themes: gratitude, purpose and relationality.

Gratitude: Expressions of gratitude are a way in which the participants in this AI process build cohesion and connect their present-day stories to their past. The words grateful or gratitude appear explicitly in all but four of the 30 shared stories.

Purpose: Two specific themes of purpose emerge from the process. 1) Mennonites are a people who quietly slip into homes and into the community, without calling attention to themselves, and advocate for and serve those most in need and those most vulnerable in society. 2) Mennonites are a people called to share a peace testimony in a culture that promotes violence. These two themes of purpose will co-anchor the understanding of how this organization can be the best it can be in the coming century.

Relationality: The faith journey and the AI journey of this community is a deeply relational process. Expressions of gratitude serve to highlight “relational interdependencies” (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 11). Descriptors of relationship appear explicitly in every one of the 30 stories of gratitude.

Through the AI process, the heart of this congregation’s spirituality emerges. There is a deep-seated relational identity around the Mennonite peace tradition and the sense that their calling is to be a people quietly slipping into homes and serving others.
The faith journey and the AI journey of this community is a deeply relational process.

relational identity unites the group beyond the sometimes deep differences that have historically divided members of the congregation.

The outcomes of the AI process
Two years after this AI process was launched, I gather with the leaders of the church community in the context of a regional conference for Mennonite congregations across the northwest United States and Canada. We share with the conference the subtle but powerful ways in which this faith community has been transformed by the AI process.

The expectation might be for a clear strategic plan for how this congregation will move forward and reshape its ministries. There is not one. Instead, there is a subtle change that inoculates this congregation against divisions that tear other churches apart. Other conference participants come from churches ready to split apart over divisive issues in their congregation, such as how the church speaks in relation to homosexuality and gender identification. There is agreement that such a split will not happen in this congregation, which has found deeper points of connection and agreement through the shared stories of the AI process.

Energy is bubbling up in this congregation for new ministries. There is a shared commitment to “keep the door open” to new people and new forms of liturgy. A new way of listening to each other and the community-at-large is evidence of an AI process that has become an enduring part of the congregation’s way of connecting with each other.

Conclusions
Every faith community is a storytelling [narrative] community (Exalto, p. 242). A dying faith community is rigorously controlling stories. A revivified faith community is searching for the “sacramental potential” (De Haardt, p. 211) of new and emerging stories.

In theological and religious studies, an emphasis on narrative has gained prominence over the past decades. AI has an important contribution to make to this emerging conversation. Indeed, AI practitioners can join spiritual counselors and faith leaders “to help new generations build a repertoire of potentially meaningful narratives” (Ganzevoort, 2014, p. 1). Appreciative processes that allow room for previously unheard and marginalized stories can provide a life-giving counterpoint to religious streams of practice that emphasize hegemonic stories.

The experience with this congregation affirms that AI is a “useful strategy for effecting reconciliation and helping to restore communion in ecclesial communities” (Nordenbrock, 2010, p. 143). We frequently utilize a celebratory service of communion as a way of bringing closure to such an AI process. This service integrates the rich liturgy of the faith tradition with the equally rich and contemporary voices of AI participants, who confirm that the process brings new life to tired traditions.
AI “offers the church a social technology for reinventing and revivifying itself, for being reborn to live up to its own highest aspirations” (Chaffee, 1997, p. 2). Within and beyond the context of the instituted church, AI can mimetically enhance an understanding of what it means to be earthly beings on a spiritual quest, ever in search of shared higher purpose and divine presence.

References
It feels better to appreciate than to dislike. So, what if we could learn to appreciate more?

While trying to maintain a positive outlook on life, I keep meeting stumbling blocks. How to turn them into stepping stones?

Appreciative Inquiry of the outer and inner worlds

Whereas “regular” Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is focused mostly on the outer world, inner AI is focused primarily on the inner world, the source of awareness and perception. Inner AI fundamentally enhances your capacity to love and appreciate, and is therefore a process to become more effective and joyful in the outer world.

How we look determines what we see

In AI we focus on what goes well, gives life, and what we want more of. By doing so we experience positive emotions, increased energy, new ideas, better team spirit, and so on that result in more positive outcomes. The essence of AI is to explore in an accepting and non-judgemental fashion whatever is present. In essence, everything can be inquired into appreciatively, even the worst situations. It is my experience that if I can appreciate even a “negative” feeling, it transforms into something beautiful.

To appreciate or not to appreciate, that’s the question

People who are familiar with the philosophy and concepts of AI often make it a habit to look at things or situations in an appreciative way. Yet sometimes we find ourselves judgemental, annoyed or upset. We have been triggered; we become reactive and lose the appreciative outlook. This is worth investigating, because if we can transform it, life will improve.
Sometimes we find ourselves judgemental, annoyed or upset … take some time to inquire into underlying beliefs and/or emotions.

**Experience of the outer world is a reflection of the inner world**

A first step is to distinguish between what goes on outside and inside of you. Outer occurrences may be the trigger, but inside feelings or narratives are the cause of the reaction. Outer events may be someone cutting you off in traffic, someone not responding to you the way you expected, or a computer malfunctioning. I find the smallest things may set me off (trigger me). First you blame the other: the computer, or whatever other cause is outside of yourself. And there may be good reason to do so. But that is not the real reason you become upset. The real reason lies within. The real reason may be that you felt marginalized, you felt not heard, you felt dumb or not good enough. But that is an unconscious feeling or belief, and you project that feeling or belief outward onto whatever triggered you.

1) **Take a few moments and think back to (a) situation(s) where you were triggered.**

• What was it that triggered you (outside you)?
• What was it that caused it (inside you)?

Next inquire into what is underneath the initial feeling when you are triggered. The initial feeling may be anger, or sadness, or whatever. But what’s underneath that? And can you inquire into that appreciatively? Can you accept what is happening, or do you resort to coping, such as:

• Blaming the other
• Feeling sorry for yourself because this is happening to you
• Asking yourself why this has to happen to you
• Wondering how long this feeling is going to last
• Fearing the feeling, and therefore feeling fear rather than the feeling itself
• Resisting the feeling and finding distraction from it (for instance one of the above)
• Finding distraction in addictions: eating, games, sex, shopping, drinking, watching TV, work, or any other activity to avoid feeling your feeling

Underneath the feeling you may find beliefs such as “I don’t feel taken seriously”, “I’m not worth it”, “I can’t meet that expectation”, or feelings such as loneliness, despair, being stuck.

It may take some time and reflection before you find what is underneath. There are many exercises or practices available that can help you in this inquiry. Many spiritual teachers point in the same direction, as can be seen in the table on page 56.

2) **Take some time to inquire into underlying beliefs and/or emotions.**

When you’ve identified the internal trigger in step 1, try to find out what is underneath. What belief, and/or what emotion (feelings) are (at the) core?
Once you've found what is underneath, it has been my experience that if you can fully experience the feeling and see it for what it is, it transforms. If you can appreciate what is happening, this in itself is a blissful experience. The practices mentioned above each have a specific angle, but in essence they make you realize how you create your own experience, for good or bad.

3) Allow the underlying emotion to be experienced. Welcome it. Embrace it lovingly, as if it were a little baby.
This step may not be easy to do. It is something that can happen, but you cannot make it happen, in my experience. Some people ask grace, God or a higher self for help. All you can do is have the intent of wanting to experience what is there, and then let go. Let it happen.

4) Be open to what emerges.
You may experience emotions, see images, get new insights, or whatever. It may happen instantaneously, or it may take seconds, minutes, hours, days or weeks. Shifts happen. Being open to what emerges means you have no preconceived ideas or expectations. If you are waiting for something grand to happen, that means you are not fully open. It is a pitfall to expect anything specific or to expect change. Just be open and welcome anything that emerges, and see it as it is.

**Inner and outer world: being vs. doing**
In the outer world, we set goals, perform action and accomplish results. The inner world is about being: being aware, not doing. It is seeing what you are, what is there, and experiencing that. There is no goal.

The cycle of inner AI is about being open, seeing without judgement. It is about not reacting automatically, suspending judgement, suspending resistance, and letting go of fear. Or, in positive terms: becoming aware of the choice of responses, inquiring appreciatively into what is there and what is underneath, and welcoming that wholeheartedly. It is about being open to what emerges.

**4D cycle of inner Ai**
Inner Appreciative Inquiry goes through stages, coincidently also a 4D cycle:

1. Discover what triggered you. What was the trigger (outside of you); what caused it (inside of you)?
2. Delve into your feelings. Find out what emotions or unmet needs and desires are underneath.
3. Deepen the feeling / Divine intervention. Relinquish control, ask for grace, God, your Source or higher power to provide an answer, a shift, or an insight and let go.
Be open and welcome anything that emerges, and see it as it is.

4. *Deliverance*. The answer delivers you from the mistaken belief that caused you to become reactive. Joy comes when the negative emotion is discharged and the disillusion is complete.

These steps will only work if you are inquisitive and appreciative of all you find. It is my experience that prior successes with this approach build courage and enthusiasm for subsequent sessions.

**Why inner AI?**

A good reason to do inner AI is that we have unconscious beliefs that hinder us. They form the patterns through which we perceive reality that make us react to situations as we do. These unconscious beliefs often originate from traumatic childhood experiences. Since these beliefs and underlying emotions are unconscious, they are hard to get a grip on. Rather, they appear to have a grip on us! If we investigate deeper, we may find the underlying, unmet needs and accompanying emotions. If we can appreciate these emotions and see what is happening in our consciousness, the old traumas dissolve and the capacity to love and appreciate increases. So, facing and appreciating our demons, grief, fear and anger in the inner world, we liberate and develop ourselves and become more effective and joyful in the outer world.

**Table: various approaches of experiencing the inner world**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Essence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Journey (Brandon Bays)</td>
<td>Guided meditations (with scripts) to help you find, experience and transform old trauma or dysfunctional beliefs</td>
<td>Feel the emotions. Don’t resist. This leads to dissolution and transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Work (Byron Katie)</td>
<td>Four questions that help you realize dysfunctional beliefs and related feelings and learn to appreciate/love what is</td>
<td>See how you construct your own experience. Once you see (and feel) that, it will change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness (Jon Kabat-Zinn, Thich Nhat Hanh and others)</td>
<td>Various (guided) meditations or exercises that help you become aware and liberated of ingrained patterns, and experience life in a non-judgemental way</td>
<td>Become aware of ingrained patterns that make you react automatically and become open and non-judgemental, and free to choose your actions and emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avatar (Harry Palmer)</td>
<td>Various exercises that help you to direct consciousness, dissolve hindering beliefs, experience what is there and ultimately be the (purified) source of your creation</td>
<td>Fully experience feelings in order for them to dissolve and purify consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eckart Tolle</td>
<td>No method; just be with what is</td>
<td>Be and see (don’t judge)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Management experts argue that tapping into spirituality at work benefits not only individual employees, but also the systems around them. But interventions and conversations that touch this realm are not regularly part of the workplace. How can organisations create a work environment that supports employees to connect with and consequently operate from their intrinsic motivation, which is how we personally understand spirituality?

To answer this question, we used AI methodology to identify and understand the ways that spiritual caregivers in Dutch hospitals help employees "make deep connections with the core of what gives life to a human system" (Zandee and Cooperrider 2008, 194).

**Spiritual caregivers**

Spiritual caregivers hold a historically established position in healthcare institutions (Smeets 2006, Haart 2007, Doolaard 2009), the armed forces, the police and penitentiary institutions. Caring for the staff of such institutions has been a part of the spiritual caregiver’s function for more than 30 years (Professional Standard for Spiritual Caregivers in Care, 2005).

In the Netherlands, spiritual caregivers integrate care for hospital staff into their work in a variety of ways, including giving ethical advice, participating and/or facilitating moral deliberation, and providing training in the domain of meaning, ethics, worldview and religion. However, their involvement with staff goes further than ethical training, as evidenced by our study of seven spiritual caregivers in six Dutch medical facilities.
To clarify how spiritual caregivers facilitate environments that encourage spirituality and intrinsic motivation, we asked them to “locate a story that illustrates when you had the feeling you were making a difference to (a) staff member(s) with regard to their intrinsic motivation”.

Two stories in particular illustrate how spiritual caregivers help create an environment that accesses and encourages intrinsic motivation to benefit their institutions.

University Hospital-Utrecht – ‘Fireside talks’
A spiritual caregiver at University Hospital-Utrecht told us about the institutional practice of “fireside talks”, an initiative that creates space for employees to reconnect with their passions and commitments in relation to their work. The spiritual caregiver said:

This initiative started in 2010 with a group of employees who were concerned about the human side of our hospital. The common question was “How can we react to the increasing focus on functionality in our work?” The members of this diverse think tank started talking about their personal passion at work, and before long the idea was born to start a series of “fireside talks”.

To date, hundreds of employees have participated in meetings of 8–12 persons lasting one and a half hours each, “from coffee-lady to manager”. The meetings take place in the hospital’s boardroom, with a fireplace projected on the wall. The meetings are opened by reframing the situation: “Imagine you are in the lobby of a nice hotel in a far-away country; we all have met there by chance, and discovered that we happen to work for the same employer: our hospital. Now lean back, relax and have something to drink.” The participants subsequently talk about their personal “fire,” higher passion, and feelings and hopes regarding their work. Afterwards, they are asked to give the name of one co-worker who would be interested in joining the next fireside talk. This word-of-mouth “fire” has been spreading for years now.

The strength of these meetings is that there are no decisions, no minutes, no agenda. People often report afterwards that they feel inspired and re-connected to their passion. The setting is “totally unusual”; people are used to functional meetings, especially in the boardroom. We also link to the diversity of the hospital organisation: the meetings are open to everybody (10,000 employees). This initiative is backed by the directors: they allow us to use the boardroom.

UMC St. Radboud Hospital-Nijmegen – ‘Safeguarding the human dimension’
At a religiously affiliated hospital in Nijmegen, a spiritual caregiver reflected on the reflective dimension that is intrinsic to the department’s work:

We bring another dimension into our hospital, just because we “are there”. We try to make the dimension of “deep compassion” and “appreciation” visible, be it in personal contact, teaching or ethical deliberation. This goes beyond questions...
In addition to mere content transfer, we create space in our (teaching) module on ethics in the training for doctors to process their own experiences of death and dying.

such as “When should we stop respirating the patient?” We represent values like love, meaning and appreciation.

In all we do, we try to enforce this dimension; for example, in consciously paying compliments to nurses, doctors and managers. In addition to mere content transfer, we create space in our (teaching) module on ethics in the training for doctors to process their own experiences of death and dying. Nine out of ten participants cry. Another small example is that we greet people with their name, like, “Hello Hans”, instead of the common “hoi”. Small things like these change the atmosphere. We end meetings, for example, with asking, “What gives you pleasure in your work?” and “What gives you displeasure?”

Categorising ‘life-giving factors’: Analysis of spiritual caregivers’ activities

The activities and interventions identified through the stories of spiritual caregivers can be clustered into three levels of intervention (cf. Smeets 2006):

• Micro-level: Activities directly with individual staff (e.g. spiritual and emotional support of an employee who is experiencing bullying);

• Meso-level: Activities regarding the department and inter-departmental activities; (e.g. facilitation of inter-collegial consultations of first-line staff as a neutral facilitator);

• Macro-level: Activities regarding the organisation (e.g. co-crafting the core values of the organisation).

For each level we first distilled the “life-giving factors” (Cooperrider et. al. 2005) of the interventions. These are key elements that spiritual caregivers say contribute to the success of their interventions. Then we associated a role with each intervention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authentic contact</td>
<td>Prevents employee absence</td>
<td>Coach, spiritual worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection and inter-collegial consultation</td>
<td>Fosters informed professionalism</td>
<td>Facilitator, coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking up a pastoral role</td>
<td>Gives space to life events, which allows them to be processed so that they don’t create systemic hindrances or blockages</td>
<td>Spiritual worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of employee’s religious and spiritual values and beliefs</td>
<td>Sense of belonging and direction among employees</td>
<td>Representative (i.e., presence in the organisation; being a symbol) Spiritual worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating group-space and time for reflection</td>
<td>Renewed energy and focus</td>
<td>Facilitator</td>
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</table>
Interventions are characterised by different roles, which attain different effects. The choice of roles varies among the interviewees, and not all interviewees take up all roles. A common pattern, however, is that the preferred interventions are often small (micro-practices, such as authentic contact), slow (the effect might take years) and implicit (doing research, representing). The spiritual caregiver seems to be an expert in slowing down the pace and creating space for employees to connect with themselves and their passions, i.e., their intrinsic motivation. The interventions seem to allow employees to connect with a part in themselves that generates positive action. The majority of stories conclude that as a result of the intervention people are able to execute their function more effectively and report feeling more “connected”.

**Conclusion**

Our small sample suggests that the spiritual caregiver may function as an expert in the field of discovery and appreciation of the life-giving core of human beings. Interventions such as: presence (Baart 2008); authentic contact; reflection and consultation; creating bridges; recognising a person’s spiritual dimension; creating time and space; displaying expertise and conducting research are likely to allow spiritual caregivers to enhance the intrinsic motivation of employees. Further research on the conditions, the effects and the methods of spiritual caregivers is necessary.

AI practitioners might find the preferred practices of spiritual caregivers recognisable to some degree, such as the focus on story-telling and appreciation of “what is”. At the same time, spiritual caregivers use a distinctly different repertoire than AI practitioners. They commonly abstain from result-driven practices, but stimulate change through micro-practices such as being present as a representative of the spiritual dimension of life and creating time and space for employees. These interventions can seem unassuming at first; it is interesting that spiritual caregivers primarily use small, slow, implicit interventions. This insight might be inspiration for AI practitioners to reconsider the impact of micro-practices if the goal is to connect to intrinsic motivation.
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Appreciative Inquiry and the Beloved Community

Power of Stories, Witnessing, Intuition and Language in Shaping Pastoral Leadership

This article derives from a qualitative study that seeks to make a significant contribution to the field of pastoral leadership. Currently, no studies link AI and the development of pastoral leadership, or the impact AI has on pastors and their leadership, or the Beloved Communities which they serve. The research questions were: ‘Does the AI process foster the development of pastoral leaders, and the Beloved Community?’ and ‘If so how does it occur?’

This is a report on research results of an inquiry into the impact of the Appreciative Inquiry process on pastoral leaders, its capacity to foster the Beloved Community and how that impact occurs.

I am at heart and by calling a preacher. As an ordained pastor, for the past twenty-eight years I have walked with congregations as they dreamed about what is possible, and created the path forward to their visions of the future. Our successes in these endeavors were, like irregular heartbeats, hit and miss. As a pastor, I know about theology, spirituality and faith, but I had zero training in the finer points of reading financial statements, structural problems in old church buildings, what color the pew cushions ought to be, or how to lead a congregation from point A to point B.

Dreaming dreams and seeing visions

I discovered on my own that leadership techniques had limited results. Then I was introduced to Appreciative Inquiry (AI). I had never heard of AI or given the notion of change resulting from inquiry much thought, but as a Christian pastor, I fancied the idea of appreciation. I was not looking for corporate processes for strategic planning, but for something that could help congregations “…dream New dreams, and…see new visions.”

Appreciative Inquiry provides me with a unique framework for the gospel, and from my perspective it is in concert with the values of Christian life and spiritual practices. The relational, egalitarian and inclusive nature of the AI process fits with my understanding of Christian teachings, and the more I use AI in the parish setting, the more creative the Beloved Community becomes in its mission.¹

¹ The Beloved Community is a contemporary name for “kingdom of God”, a reality where justice, compassion and reconciliation lead to redemption.
My experiences created curiosity to know if other pastoral leaders were applying AI in their ministry, and if so, what they experienced in their personal lives, pastoral leadership, and in their relations and teaching in the Beloved Community. There are currently no research reports on AI and pastoral leadership, and I wanted to make a contribution to both fields, as well as lay the groundwork for future research. The study of pastoral leaders and the impact of AI on them and the congregations they served became the topic of inquiry for my Ph.D. research.

Ten pastoral leaders, representing rich and diverse backgrounds and denominational faith practices, took part in an inquiry about their experiences using and/or adapting the AI process in their ministries. These leaders resided in different parts of the country, represent eight denominations, (Humanist and Christian), and included women religious, interim and transitional ministers, settled pastors, men and women, gay and straight. Many had taken part in workshops and seminars specifically designed to teach the AI process, several had taken part in an AI intervention, and one had read about AI in her previous work as a psychotherapist, and then entwined AI into her practice of ministry.

**Hungry for meaning**
Pastoral leaders in this study were looking for a technique that would develop their leadership skills for strategic planning, and for growing their churches. It turns out they were hungry for meaning and a new relationship with themselves, their ministries, and the Beloved Communities which they served. None of these pastors expected that AI would impact them as it has, but all reported a profound and lasting impact by AI on their pastoral leadership, their ability to transform the Beloved Community, and their personal and spiritual lives.

The research focused on pastoral leadership, but there are some Christian terms that are useful for this article. For example: “Spirit” meaning life force; “spiritual” defined as transcendent, or meta-physical; and “spirituality” being the practice of living based on one’s values, beliefs and/or faith. The women and men in this study reported that their use of Appreciative Inquiry:

- Revitalized language and creativity
- Engendered an appreciative reverence for others
- Increased connections for meaningful community
- Added new energy to growing a stronger faith
- Contributed to a profound sense of worship and the Holy
- Provided a process for transformation
- Renewed communal life
- Opened up creative potential in themselves and the Beloved Community
The data suggest the impacts of Appreciative Inquiry occur broadly through: the transformative power of stories, witnessing, intuition and language.

- Gave the joy of discovery
- Gave an experience of the power of vibrant and reverential language
- Inspired trust in the community and God's Spirit to provide answers
- Gave a process for envisioning the future
- Created a seedbed for the power of the Christian faith
- Created the opportunity for unity of purpose and heart
- Pulsed with the power of spiritual light, and
- Empowered inclusive and egalitarian relationships that usher the community into the space of communion

After using AI, these pastors experienced a profound connection and relationship with God through their prayer life, a new relationship with Jesus (among the Christian respondents) through their study of scripture, and a more vibrant experience of the Holy. In addition they discovered language that engaged their congregations in new conversations, deepening connections and relationships, in creating visions of the future, and new dreams and possibilities for the particular Beloved Community they served. Each experienced AI as aligning and resonating with their personal and Christian values and beliefs. In terms of spirituality, these impacts have heightened the ability of pastoral leaders to live from their faith, and lead with newfound passion.

The data suggest the impacts of Appreciative Inquiry identified above occur broadly through: the transformative power of stories, witnessing, intuition and language.

**Transformative stories**

The discovery phase of AI begins with a question, and participants in this research shared that appreciative questions unleash the power of the stories. Sharing their own story, and hearing the stories of their partners, created a transformation in all parts of their lives, and in the relationships they enjoy as leaders of the Beloved Community. The interview process built trust, opened up their memories of what is life giving, and connected them to ideas and past experiences that reminded them of their own strengths, joys and possibilities. They were connected to the other with a sense of trust, and a feeling that they were safe.

**Intuition**

Pastoral leaders experience AI as intuitive, intrinsic and spiritual. They use such words as: healing, Spirit, connection, discernment, inspiration and hope when describing what they see emerging in their pastoral leadership practices, as well as in the Beloved Community. Pastoral leaders experience AI as transforming their spiritual lives. AI reveals qualities of soul that nourish their personal and communal lives in ways that enrich their relationships both in and beyond the Beloved Community.
Witnessing
A witnessing stance relates directly to the theme of spirituality. Witnessing is the co-creative process of listening and being heard. A witness sees or hears something spoken, and having heard it, can give a firsthand account of the event. In the Christian tradition this is often also named testifying. Witnessing is being part of the interview process as one whose task it is to listen to the stories, experiences and words of the other, and then testifying that those stories were heard, by retelling them in their own words. Pastoral leaders reported that both listening, and being listened to is holy work.

The process was described as a time of “communion” and an opportunity to value and honor the other. There is a sense of how precious the sharing is: free from judgment, humbling and powerful. It is as one pastoral leader described about “laying down your life”, putting aside everything to listen with holy intent. In the discovery phase of the AI process, the persons paired together each acted as a witness to the other’s story. Pastoral leaders reported that the discovery phase of AI holds the turning point, or transformational moment for him or her, and for those engaged in the process.

Language
Pastoral leaders in the study shared that AI had a profound effect on their use of language. Choosing and using language with a sense of powerful purpose, freed them and their congregations to focus on the future by dreaming new dreams, naming new realities and creating visions of the future that are positive and powerful. There is a uniting effect from Appreciative Inquiry that binds congregations in holy and common purpose, and points them together toward the future they are creating.

Pastoral leaders said that appreciative language – the words that speak of gratitude, possibility and the theological virtues of faith, hope and love, words that are visionary, positive and focused on the future – encourage the Spirit to manifest and be present. There is a moment of wonder and awe when people feel deep in their bones that the words they use, and the place they focus their life energy on, can change lives for the better.

Conclusion
Pastoral leaders asked about the impact of AI on their leadership skills tend to respond with the language in which they are immersed, but stories, witnessing and language imbued with new meaning are all common to every appreciative inquiry. These pastoral leaders talked about the profound shifts they experienced, and about how inspired and revitalized they felt. Every appreciative inquiry seems to have the potential to open space for life-changing results in the lives of everyone engaged in the inquiry. These changes in turn change the worlds in which they live and work.
Facilitators and barriers in dual recovery

In 2008, Davidson and colleagues proposed the term "dual recovery". It is not the person with co-occurring mental health and substance use problems who presents a challenge to the system of care; rather, it is the person who confronts the challenges of having to live with and recover from both mental health and substance use problems. They further suggested that the role of the system in this situation is to support the person's own efforts to manage and recover from these co-occurring problems, a shift in perspective from viewing people with co-morbid conditions as "double trouble", to supporting them in pursuing "dual recovery". A recovery orientation in mental health and addiction care thus involves considering recovery as a personal process (e.g., Deegan, 1988) and a social process (Borg, Karlsson and Stenhammer, 2013).

Recovery in mental health and addiction is viewed as a process that takes place within and by the individual. This means that the aim of the recovery process is defined at the personal level and the central actor in the recovery process is the person him- or herself (Davidson, 2003). A deep understanding and respect for the person's own thoughts, experiences, resources, competencies and points of view in their recovery process is emphasized (Topor et al., 2011). Klingemann and Carter-Sobell (2007) also discussed "natural recovery": when recovery occurs without the use of treatment or support. We see natural recovery as part of the unique personal journey in which people can still struggle with life situations.

The recovery process is also viewed as social in nature (Borg and Davidson, 2007). This means there are many contextual aspects that are central parts of the recovery processes, such as helpful relationships, supporting environments, services and systems of care (Topor et al., 2011).

1 Ness, Borg and Davidson, 2014
Facilitators of dual recovery: Meaningful everyday life
People in dual recovery highlighted the importance of having a meaningful everyday life. Examples were having work and meaningful activities such as playing sports, visiting friends and filling days with interesting pursuits.

Participants said that participating in meaningful activities and in working life helps focus on everyday life, giving an opportunity for a more stable life and the sense of being an empowered citizen. They were contributing positively to society, particularly through greater attention to the needs of others. In addition, they had valued social roles and experienced being a productive member of society. Being active in one’s everyday life was reported as a factor that could enhance a sense of well-being, particularly by the development of everyday life routines.

Focus on strengths and future orientation
People said that focusing on strengths and being oriented to the future was important for their recovery. They said that, at some point, recovery included the change process of experiencing that their struggles (and past) had been difficult and painful. However, this enabled them to begin to move ahead rather than remain stuck with their problems. This then, helped their capacity for growth and transformation – which they described as recognizing in themselves the possibility of change, the hope that change is possible, and then making dogged efforts to bring about such change.

Participants also reported that focusing on their strengths (for example, retaining their sense of humour about their situations and experiences, being “positive” and “taking one day at a time”) facilitated their recovery. Maintaining a positive outlook created expressions of hope and gratitude in their recovery. Focusing on strengths also helped people in dual recovery make plans for the future, recognize improvement and build on those successes.

Re-establishing social life and supportive relationships
Re-establishing a social life was very important in their recovery process, in overcoming loneliness and boredom, and having the sense of being a productive citizen. Participants reported that it was important for them in their recovery to be surrounded by caring others. They recognized the importance of taking responsibility for themselves and others, as well as having an adequate support system from non-professional sources (i.e., natural supports). These included peers, family, friends, and also providers. Being surrounded by them increases the likelihood of feeling understood. Also, having good relationships entails being loved and accepted as they are, as a human being, having people in their lives that believe in them (even if and when they don’t believe in themselves).

Conclusions
Based on what people in dual recovery report from their own perspective, we can see that AI offers both ways to organise services, and a way for practitioners to orientate their work with people. Facilitators involved in dual recovery are concerned with meaningful everyday life, focusing on strengths and re-establishing good supportive relationships.
I would suggest that AI is used in training in community mental health care and in recovery-oriented practices. In this way we can transform services from problem-orientated diagnosis into more hopeful practices and around the person’s own resources and network.

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About the February 2015 Issue

Appreciation and Generative Dialogues: Reflections and Appreciative Inquiry Practices from Ibero-America

This special issue about AI’s contributions from Ibero-America (Latin America, Puerto Rico and Spain) presents recent theoretical developments and experiences of working in very diverse settings.

Ibero-America has been a fertile ground for Appreciative Inquiry. Teams, groups, people and networks – including the Latin American Network of Appreciative Inquiry (www.redindagacionapreciativa.com) and the Productive Dialogues Network (www.dialogosproductivos.net) – have embraced AI’s ideas, principles and methodologies, and have been developing and adapting them to the particular characteristics of our countries.

Although Ibero-America is one of today’s largest and most cohesive linguistic regions in the world, our history is really a story of multiple encounters (and clashes!) between cultures. The “mestiza” society is the result of these forces coming together, a blending of traditions and cultural perspectives searching for meaning and a sense of shared identity within the diversity from which we emerged.

This dialogue stands as a metaphor for what is our continent, as well as a hopeful invitation to reconnect with our core life.
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We are particularly interested in the sustainability of AI in organizations and how it facilitates our journey to connect to who we truly are. We have a special interest in what we call ‘The Soul of the Appreciative Leader’. Find out more about our approach to facilitating change and innovation by watching a film interview with Joep at http://vimeo.com/105648641.

Joep C. de Jong is its Director and Founder and also associate of the TAOS Institute, member of the AIP Advisoryboard and member of the council of IDEIA.

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PO Box 448
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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.

AI Practitioner Editor/Publisher
The editor-in-chief and publisher is Anne Radford. She is based in London and can be reached at editor@aipractitioner.com

The postal address for the publication is:
303 Bankside Lofts, 65 Hopton Street,
Telephone: +44 (0)20 7633 9630
ISSN 1741 8224

Shelagh Aitken is the issue editor for AI Practitioner.
shelagh@editorproofreader.co.uk

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