GENERATIVE PROCESS, GENERATIVE OUTCOME: THE TRANSFORMATIONAL POTENTIAL OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

Generativity is defined in this chapter as the creation of new images, metaphors, physical representations, and so on that have two qualities: they change how people think so that new options for decisions and/or actions become available to them, and they are compelling images that people want to act on. Research and experiences that suggest "positivity", particularly positive emotion, is not sufficient for transformational change, but that generativity is a key change lever in cases of transformational change, are reviewed. A model of different characteristics of generativity is offered and ways in which appreciative inquiry can be a generative process, increase generative capacity, and lead to generative outcomes, are discussed. Ways to increase the generativity of appreciative inquiry through generative topics, generative questions, generative conversations, and generative action are offered.

Keywords: generativity, appreciative inquiry, change management, transformational change, positive psychology

When I wrote and distributed the first version of this paper in 2007 I stated that I was unclear how important "positivity" is to the success of appreciative inquiry but that I was much clearer how important "generativity" is. I juxtaposed the positive and the generative not because there is some contradiction between them; I see them as being fairly independent characteristics of an appreciative inquiry. Rather, I did so from a fear that conceptual understanding of appreciative inquiry as a transformational change process was being lost under debates about when or where positivity was desirable. Both those who extolled the virtues of AI (e.g., Arkin, 2005; Oswick, Grant, Michelson & Wailes, 2005) and those who critiqued it (e.g., Grant & Humphries, 2006; Fineman, 2006) tended to put a great deal of attention on the so-called "focus on the positive" and very little on the generative component of AI. As I wrote back then, "One thing that concerns me about the current excitement and interest in appreciative inquiry (AI) is that many of the consultants and managers I speak with who claim to be doing AI don't seem to understand the importance of *generativity*, as an input and an outcome, of AI. Many people seem to be blinded by the "positive stuff". After years of focusing on problems, deficits and dysfunction they become entranced with "focusing on the positive" and equate this with AI…" (Bushe, 2007, p.33).

Since then, the importance of generativity to appreciative inquiry, and to all Dialogic OD processes, has become more apparent and accepted (Bushe, 2013). Numerous papers in the AI Practitioner have referred to generativity. An issue of the Journal of Corporate Citizenship focused on the generativity of different forms of stakeholder engagement (Cooperrider & Fry, 2010). The 2012 World Appreciative Inquiry Conference was subtitled "Scaling Up the Generative Power of Appreciative Inquiry". Yet there remains much to be done to understand what generativity is, the interplay of generativity and positivity in appreciative inquiry, and the processes by which AI enhances generativity.

This chapter has two parts. First, I will describe what I mean by generativity and positivity and review results of different studies that suggest generativity is required for transformational change while positivity is not in itself sufficient. The second section shifts to practice, and a description of ways to accent the generative during appreciative inquiry.
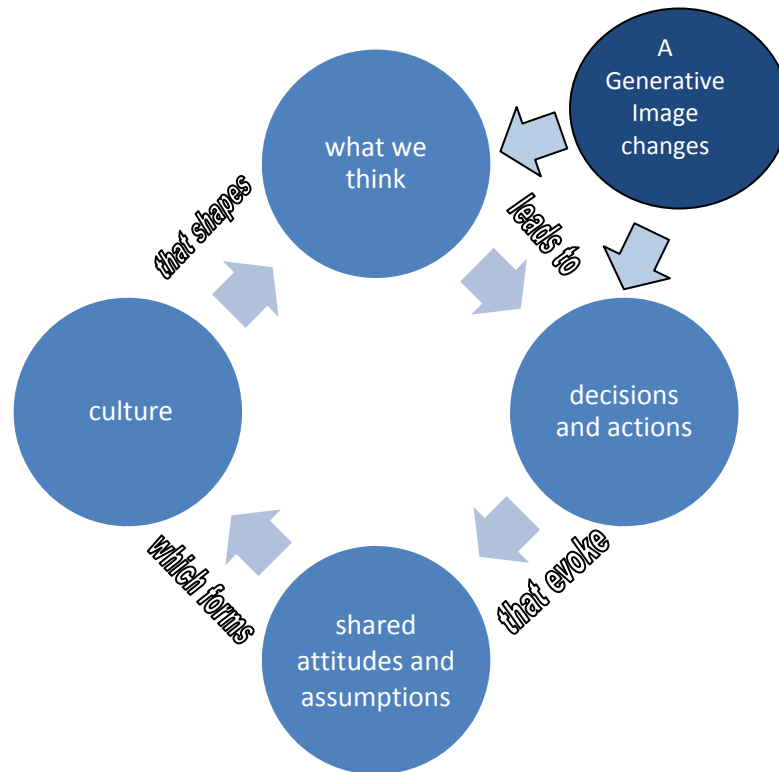
WHAT IS GENERATIVITY?

In social science there are two key ways in which the concept of generativity appears. The most referenced is Erik Erikson's (1950) generativity stage of adult development. This chapter, however, conceptualizes generativity as the processes and capacities that help people see old things in new ways. This line of thinking originated independently in the work of Kenneth Gergen (1978) and Donald Schon (1979). In Gergen's seminal paper, "Toward Generative Theory", he argued that normal scientific assumptions could not be successfully applied to studying human relationships and so achieving the scientific values of prediction and control weren't possible in social psychology. He suggested that, instead, we should aim to create a social science focused on its "generative capacity". Gergen defined this as the "…capacity to challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary social life, to foster reconsideration of that which is 'taken for granted' and thereby furnish new alternatives for social actions" (1978, p.1346).

Schon described generativity as "…nothing less than how we come to see things in new ways" (1979, p.138). Schon argued that how problems are addressed is powerfully influenced by the metaphors and frames used to describe them. "From all this, it follows that problem setting matters. The ways in which we set social problems determine both the kinds of purposes and values we seek to realize, and the directions in which we seek solutions. Contrary to the problem-solving perspective, problems are not given, nor are they reducible to arbitrary choices which lie beyond inquiry. We set problems through the stories we tell – stories whose problem-setting potency derives at least in some cases from generative metaphors." (1979, p. 150). In early writing appreciative inquiry was described as a form of inquiry that would acknowledge the impact of generative metaphor (Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990). Rather than trying to explain the past, appreciative inquiry would be a method for the generative creation of new ideas, perceptions, metaphors, images, and theories that furnished better alternatives for organizational actions (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

In organization development (OD) practice, I think generativity occurs when a group of people discover, create and/or are presented with an image that allows them to experience their work and organization differently. It doesn't have to be new

to the world, just to this group. It doesn't even have to be an image no one in the group ever had before – but it does have to be one that has not been considered widely. It has to be "new". A generative image allows people see the world anew, identify new options, formulate new strategies, even reform their identity. The most generative images influence our feelings and motivations as well as our thoughts. People want to take new decisions and actions because of how attractive that image is. The way in which I think a generative image promotes change in organizations is shown in Figure 1 (from Bushe, 2013).

FIGURE 1: HOW GENERATIVITY CHANGES ORGANIZATIONS

implication of this model is that the culture change process unleashed by appreciative inquiry does not so much occur from working on proposals or executing plans, but from changes in the everyday of day to day thinking and acting.

The iconic example of a generative image is "sustainable development". Prior to the emergence of that phrase in 1987, there was no common ground between environmentalists and business leaders. They had nothing to say to each other. Soon after it emerged, business leaders and environmentalists discovered common ground they had not been able to see before. Suddenly, business and governments were inviting environmentalists to join with them in assessing the sustainability of their products, services and processes. Thousands of innovations in products, processes, social policies and relationships have been spurred by a phrase

A generative image influences both how people think and the decisions and actions they take. Over time, as people notice themselves and each other making different decisions and taking different actions, a new normative order arises of shared assumptions. In this way, the culture is changed, which in turn influences what people think. One

with no widely accepted definition. Indeed, it is probably this very ambiguity that sustains its generative potency. More than 25 years later "sustainable development" continues to generate new ways of thinking and acting.

The generativity of an OD effort can be considered in a number of ways. This chapter considers three, and how they relate to each other.
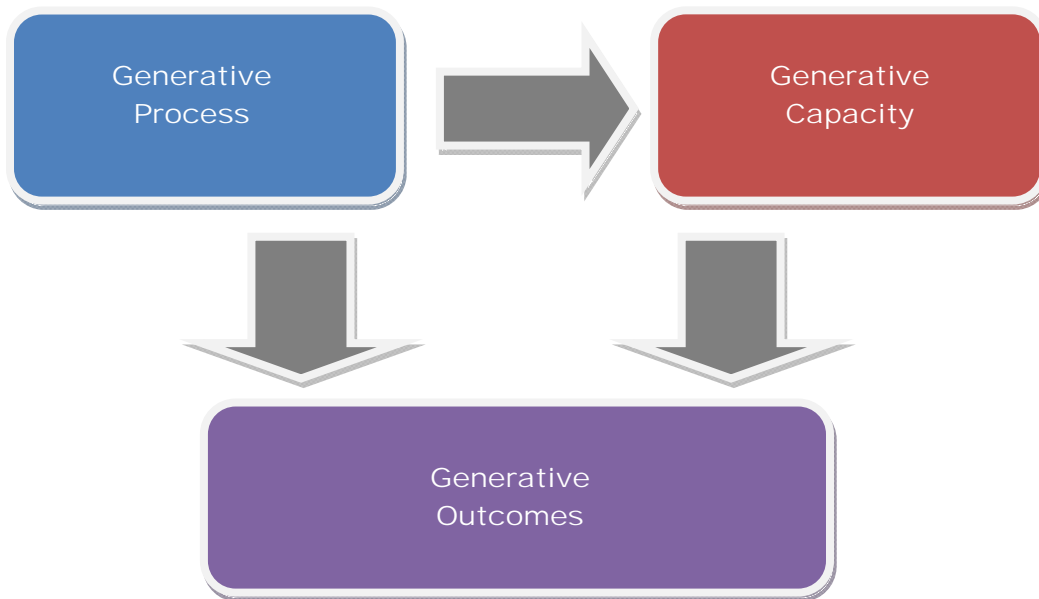
One is to look at how many new decisions and actions are spawned by the ideas, proposals, and relationships created by the change process (generative outcomes). Another is the extent to which individuals are primed to produce generative outcomes; how well does the change process encourage people to step outside routines, habitual modes of thinking and the known (generative capacity)? We can also look at the extent to which an approach increases generative capacity and/or produces generative outcomes (generative process). As figure 2 shows, a generative process is one which produces generative capacity in people and relationships and produces generative outcomes. Generative capacity, in turn, increases the probability of generative outcomes.

FIGURE 2: FACETS OF GENERATIVITY

This model suggests that appreciative inquiry (itself, a generative image) is a generative process when a) it increases the willingness and ability of people, individually and collectively, to reconsider that which they take for granted and open up to new possibilities (generative capacity) and b) produces one or more new ideas that compel people to act in new ways that are beneficial to them and others (generative outcomes). The compelling nature of the idea shows up in a number of ways: it keeps being talked about, shifts the discourse, and results in new sense-making which in turn results in new actions.

HOW IS GENERATIVITY RELATED TO THE POSITIVE?

Cooperrider's (1990) early theorizing emphasized the power of positive images to generate and direct action. Cooperrider & Whitney (2001) introduced the "positive principle" mainly from the point of view of the utility of positive affect for building and sustaining momentum for change. Cooperrider and Sekerka (2006) assert that inquiry into what people appreciate strengthens their relationships and increases positive emotions. They argue that elevation of positive emotions is a first and vital step in the change process. They point to research like Isen's (2000) and Fredrickson's (2001, 2006) that found people experiencing positive feelings are more flexible, creative, integrative, open to information and efficient in their thinking. They are more resilient and able to cope with occasional adversity, have an increased preference for variety, and accept a broader array of behavioral options.

In the past decade, ever more research supports the proposition that people experiencing more positive emotions, and positive mind-sets, have a greater generative capacity (Achor, 2010). While this is an important argument in favour of the view that the positive supports generativity, clearly it is possible to be generative without being appreciative or positive. Many of the examples of generative theory Gergen (1978) alludes to, like the

theories of Freud or Marx, did not come from "looking at the positive". And, as a number of recent critiques have pointed out (e.g., Fitzgerald, Oliver & Hoaxey, 2010; Johnson, 2013), it is possible to be appreciative without engendering "positive" emotions.

I was recently confronted by this while working with the Dalai Lama's Center for Peace and Education's "Compassionate Communities" project in Vancouver. Looking for ways to promote their mission of "educating the heart of children", we partnered with a local community agency (Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House) to launch an appreciative inquiry we hoped would increase parent's interest in developing compassion and emotional intelligence in their children. The constraints of dual income families in a lower socio-economic neighbourhood, where many people are immigrants and speak limited English, mitigated against a summit type design. Instead, we launched a discovery phase by training parent volunteers to run "compassion circles". We gave them an interview script and asked them to invite 4 or 5 neighbours to meet for two hours to share stories, discuss what they learned from those stories, and send their notes on their learnings back to us.

The key questions were "Think of the time in your childhood when someone said or did something that had the greatest impact on your ability to be compassionate, cooperative and/or confident", and "Think of the time when you had the greatest impact on developing the compassion, cooperation and/or confidence of a young person." We were not prepared for what happened next. Some of these circles were run at Frog Hollow, where staff was present to listen as refugees and immigrants from war torn and despotic countries told tales from their childhoods so harrowing that staff became concerned, for a time, about the moral and ethical implications of asking people to remember them. In many cases, talking about these stories did not engender anything we would normally associate with "positive emotions". Outside counseling services were sought for some participants staff believed required them. Yet the inquiry was stunningly generative. At the outset, neighbourhood house staff thought getting a couple of hundred participants was an ambitious goal. Within 6 months over a thousand people had participated in circles, and the process had gone viral, with people the staff knew nothing about submitting the results of their discovery circles. As we moved into Dream and Design, the process was so consuming in its impact

that all the programs at Frog Hollow became caught up in it, and staff resources became overwhelmed by it. Eventually they had to withdraw participation because they could not fund the demands the inquiry was creating and continue to do their other work. A few years later, though the inquiry was aborted in mid stride, it is clear that it had a profound, positive impact on Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House. The impact on the community is less clear.

This story invites us to think more deeply about what appreciation means, and how it is related to positive images and emotions. Does inquiring appreciatively always mean a focus on "the best of"? At the AI World Conference in 2013 Ron Fry and I asked about 600 participants to imagine we were doing an inquiry into "what makes a great conference" and asked them to consider which of the following two discovery type questions they thought would generate more new ideas and insights:

A) Tell me about your most positive, high point experience at the conference (when you felt happiest, proudest, most inspired, alive, joyful)
-or-
B) Tell me about the most provocative experience you had at the conference – when you felt most challenged (perhaps your thinking was upended, your values were confronted, your ideas were challenged, your emotions were provoked, or your choices were questioned by you).

The broad consensus was that question B would create a more generative inquiry. I think some people have reduced appreciative inquiry to a simplistic formula based on the assumption that if we ask people to talk about their "best of" stories something useful will happen. One published study of consultant perceptions of appreciative inquiry versus action research (Egan & Lancaster, 2005) didn't mention generativity once but discussed positivity in great detail. When they listed the "strengths" of AI as seen by the consultants, however, many were about its generative nature (e.g. provides individuals with opportunities to access new possibilities). My experience and research lead me to believe that simply a focus on the positive, without a focus on the generative, will likely not produce much change at all. I believe this may explain instances of "AI failure" that one hears about but rarely reads about (Newman & Fitzgerald,

2001, and Grant & Humphries, 2006, being rare exceptions).

For example, about fifteen years ago I spent a day with a group of construction managers telling stories of their best experiences of leadership. It was one of worst interventions I've ever run. It followed the letter but not, I now believe, the essence of AI. In response to their first ever employee opinion survey some senior managers decided they needed to better train managers in leadership. I spent one day with the head of HR and a C-suite member devising this attempt to identify a common leadership model. We did Discovery, Dream and Design in one day with all 50 managers in the organization. It was a conventional design. We began by having them pair up to tell stories of the best leader they had ever seen. Pairs met in fours to share stories and insights. Insights were extracted to create provocative propositions about leadership. Our hope was that including all the managers in a positive conversation about leadership would result in a shared model of leadership for the organization. As I look back on it now, I see that I did not pay enough attention to what would be required for this activity to be generative. These men (and they were virtually all men) had never thought much about leadership and didn't have much in the way of personal stories of inspiring leadership. The "best of" stories that were selected in small groups to be told to the whole group were pathetic. The CEO displayed a somewhat interested demeanour through the first two thirds of the day and less interest thereafter – symbiotically influenced by and influencing the slowly declining energy as the day wore on. Nothing generative emerged to power the rest of the process and it painfully ground on – I don't even remember how it ended. Simply focusing on the positive and telling stories of it does not guarantee a successful intervention!

There is a strand of writing in the AI and OD literature that tends to describe AI as action research with a positive focus. My early writings are guilty of describing AI this way (Bushe & Coetzer, 1995) and it still shows up in contemporary descriptions (e.g., Watkins & Stravros, 2009). OD textbooks are particularly prone to this but I've come to see AI as quite different from action research. I've come to see it as a variant of a set of "Dialogic Organization Development" approaches (Bushe & Marshak, 2009) that are based on a completely different logic of change from standard OD, where the emergence of a generative image is one of three underlying change levers (Bushe &
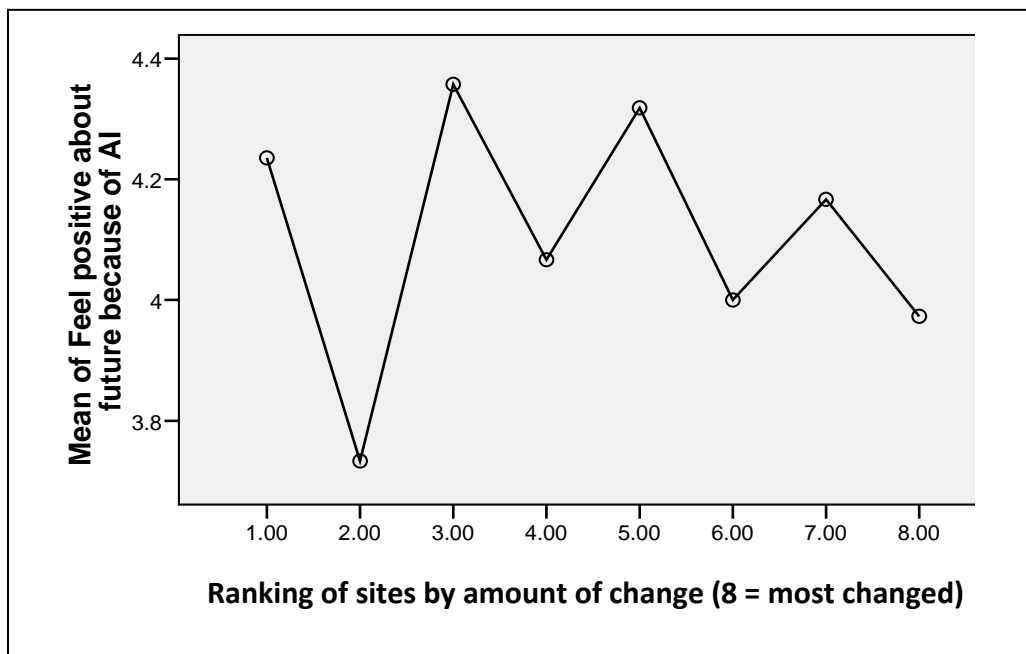
Marshak, in press; Marshak & Bushe, 2013). Critiques of AI as being too exclusive in its focus on the positive, repressing or oppressing the "negative", are often based on this same, poorly constructed understanding (e.g., Grant & Humphries, 2006; Fineman, 2006). Where the focus on the positive becomes a real problem, as these and other critiques imply, is where appreciative inquiry is used as a way to avoid the leader's or change agent's anxiety, while making an attempt at organization development. These managers say "lets stay focused on the positive" as a way to avoid facing some fear – a fear of what might be said, a fear of not being able to manage the fall out, and a fear of being emotionally hijacked are all common. When used in this way AI does become a label for a new form of repression, one more process where some voices are silenced. But critics who equate this with AI make a straw man out of AI or are critiquing poor applications of it.

Many successful cases of AI describe the importance of new ideas generated by the inquiry. For example, the US Navy case (Powley, Fry, Barrett, & Bright, 2004) describes between 60 and 70 new ideas emerging from AI summits. Perhaps the most generative ideas that emerge from AI are "generative metaphors". All metaphors can be generative to the extent that they guide and frame how people think, often unconsciously. But when an AI uses or creates a "generative metaphor" in the sense of Barrett & Cooperrider (1990), it is often a powerful juxtaposition of words that opens up new avenues for thinking and acting. In some earlier work I described how generative metaphors, like "trust costs less" could emerge from using AI in stuck teams that helped them become unstuck (Bushe, 1988). An analysis of 20 AI cases (Bushe & Kassam, 2005) found that all the cases of transformational change showed evidence of generative metaphors while only 8% of the non-transformational ones had them. We also found that cases of transformational AI had two things that distinguished them from non-transformational cases: 1) a focus on changing how people think instead of what people do, and 2) a focus on supporting self-organizing change processes that flow from new ideas rather than leading implementation of centrally or consensually agreed upon changes. Both of these have to do with what I am calling generativity.

Between January 2006 and March 2007, while consulting to a metropolitan school district, I was able to study eight sites undertaking appreciative inquiries into learning. Different sites ranged from

single high schools to a complete "families of schools" (a high school, adult learning centre and feeder elementary schools). A research grant allowed for multiple streams of quantitative, informed observer and survey data to be collected and analyzed in an attempt to understand what affected the degree of change observed in the different sites (Bushe, 2010). After one year, half of the sites (4) showed transformational outcomes. Another quarter of the sites (2) showed positive incremental changes – doing more of the same changes underway before the inquiry. Two sites showed no impact, though one of the schools in one of those sites did have positive incremental change.

FIGURE 3: AVERAGE SCORES ON POSITIVITY OF AI BY DEGREE OF CHANGE IN 8 SITES

was within a narrow band of 4 to 4.4 out of 5 in all but one school. This was true of all measures – people rated the AI experience and their feelings very positively. But as you can see, the school that experienced the most change had the second lowest positivity score while the school that experienced the least change had the third highest.

The lack of relationship between positivity and degree of change raises issues about the role of positivity in AI outcomes. Because most people expressed very positive feelings about the summits and the AI process in general, the study could support the position that positivity is necessary but not sufficient for change. I can't test that with this data. What I can explore, however, is the importance of generativity. There's evidence that generativity does significantly differentiate degree of change. At each site Discovery Documents were created at the end of the Discovery Phase by the site coordinating teams to capture key learnings and

Ranking of sites by amount of change (8 = most changed)

There was no relationship between how "positive" the participants rated their experience of AI, the AI summit, nor how positively they felt afterwards, with the degree of change at their site. On post summit surveys from 224 school staff who were at one of the summits, all 10 items related to positivity correlated from .08 to -.08 with degree of change. A representative example is given in Figure 3. The average response to the item "At this stage, I feel positive about the future because of my participation in the Appreciative Inquiry process"

were distributed before the summits. One of the few survey items that does correlate significantly with degree of change is "The stories contained in the Discovery Documents helped me to see our school/centre from new perspectives" – clearly a measure of generativity. This finding is consistent with ratings informed observers made during and after the summits, where the correlations are much stronger. The quality of the Discovery Documents and the insights that emerged were both strongly correlated with degree of change.

When the genesis of the changes that occurred at the four transformed sites (described in more detail in Bushe 2010) are traced they all appear to have started in one of two places – either as ideas that were generated during the Discovery phase or ideas that emerged during the Design phase. By contrast, the incremental change sites tended to have the strongest scores on positivity, but lacked much in the way of provocative ideas. These two sites, one a high school and another, a family of schools, were sites where most people were happy with the way things were. Whatever occurred as a result of the AI was just an extension of processes and programs already in place. One of the findings from this study, not surprising to students of organizational change, is that in each of the transformational sites there were widely acknowledged problems or concerns that the AI helped them to address. This raises perhaps another clichéd misunderstanding about AI – that it ignores problems and focuses on strengths. Change sponsors and the organizational members involved in AI are naturally going to be concerned with problems or why put all the effort in the first place? As Tom White, the president of GTE, said about their appreciative inquiry process, "We can't ignore problems – we just need to approach them from the other side" (1996, p.474). I think it appropriate to say that AI is just as concerned with responding to problems as any other change process, but that it does so through generativity rather than problem-solving. AI is interested in changing the "deficit discourse" to a more affirmative one, but again that does not preclude being concerned with problems. It just requires that we deal with them differently.

PROMOTING GENERATIVITY IN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

One of the propositions I've made in the past is that AI seems to work differently with pre-identity and post-identity groups (Bushe, 2002), a hypothesis seemingly confirmed in two published cases (Newman & Fitzgerald, 2001; Powley et al, 2004). Doing appreciative inquiry with participants who don't feel a strong sense of common belonging or concern for the group is different, I think, than doing one where most people have a common sense of belonging. AI can be transformational with pre-identity groups by creating a stronger sense of identity and membership with the group. In such groups the so called AI "core questions" (e.g., tell me about your peak experience in this organization), or any other questions that focus on group identity, who or what "we" want to be, can be generative during the Discovery phase. In post-identity groups, on the other hand, people experience such inquiries as relatively unproductive naval gazing. People are already identified with the group and their interest is in increasing the group's efficacy and meeting the group's needs. With such groups the inquiry needs to focus not on who we are but what we do and how we do it. These inquiries often need to include stakeholders from outside the group to be generative.

This distinction between pre-identity and post-identity seems to me to be critical in designing a generative appreciative inquiry and I will refer back to this as I explore ways of making AI generative. In the remainder of this paper I will explore four areas of opportunity for increasing the generativity of AI: generative topics, generative questions, generative conversations and generative action.

Generative Topics

One thing I think distinguishes successful AI practitioners from the less successful is their ability to craft generative images at the very outset of their AI engagements. While a number of writers emphasize the importance of defining the right affirmative topic, there has not been a lot of guidance on how to do that. I suggest more attention be paid to the potency that a generative image, as the affirmative topic, can have. Take as examples, the Avon of Mexico case (Schiller, 2002) and the British Airways case (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). In Avon of Mexico, the inquiry was into "the nature of exceptional inter-gender working relationships". I would argue that simply the phrase "exceptional inter-gender work relationship" was itself a generative image, used in a context where it had not been thought of before. Even today, how many people have thought about that, let alone in the 1990's when most of the discourse about gender at work consisted of issues of harassment and glass ceilings? Assuming that, at this time in Avon of Mexico, men and women formed distinct identity groups without much sense of common identity, such an inquiry would be into a pre-identity group. By asking about the nature of a desirable common identity (a great inter-gender working relationship) it illustrates the nature of a generative, pre-identity, affirmative topic. It focuses within the group/organization/community itself on what it

wants to be. And you will notice that this very successful example of an appreciative inquiry only included members of Avon of Mexico.

Now contrast this with British Airways. In response to the proposal that they study "recovery" (how long it takes to get a passenger's lost bag back to them), a long standing source of pain, discussion, and problem-solving, Whitney suggested they focus on what they want more of and helped the group develop the affirmative topic of "exceptional customer arrival experiences" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Again, in this group at this time, this was a generative image. The organization had never asked people to think about what that was. Simply asking the question probably led people to think differently on the job, and the inquiry generated new, better ways of handling recovery. Notice how this is a good example of a generative, post-identity, affirmative topic. It does not focus on who the group is or what the group wants to be. Instead it focuses on how the group can be more effective at accomplishing its purpose. And in this case, the inquiry included people from outside the organization, like customers.

I think one way in which AI consultants provide value is in their ability to craft generative images at the very outset of an AI before any inquiry has taken place. I think beginning an AI with a generative image greatly increases the chances of producing generative outcomes. For an affirmative topic to be generative it has to:

1. capture the core issue those sponsoring the inquiry are interested in,
2. match the identity state of the group in which it is being used,
3. frame the focus of the inquiry in a way few people have considered before, and
4. capture the interest and energy of those people who will need to be engaged in the inquiry for it to be successful.

Generative Questions

A hallmark of appreciative inquiry is the nature of the questions asked. Asking people to recollect their most positive memories or positive stories as a way to build relationships and discover the collective wisdom has a number of utilities I won't discuss here. What I do want to pay attention to is the generative nature of the questions. When I look at examples of lackluster appreciative inquiries, I can almost always see the genesis of failure in the quality of the questions formulated. Most people

doing AI begin by having people focus on some personal peak experience. That's good, but it is not enough. I have found that generativity of questions is increased the more they have the following four qualities (Bushe, 2007):

1. They are surprising. They are questions that people haven't discussed or thought about before. They are questions that cause people to reflect and think. This in itself increases the generative potential of the question.

2. They touch people's heart and spirit. The questions take people back to memories that are personally meaningful and have deep emotion attached to them. They take people to memories that touch their spirit – what most matters to them. This is generative for a couple of reasons. 1) It's what really matters to people, so things that get discovered are more likely to be meaningful and therefore impact meaning-making. 2) It surfaces a great deal of energy, which will be required for generative action.

3. Talking about and listening to these stories will build relationships. As a result of the conversations these questions engender, people will feel closer to each other. They will think they have revealed something important about themselves and learned something important about the other person. A greater sense of vulnerability and trust will be engendered by asking and answering these questions. There are many indirect effects from this on generativity, but the direct one is increased generative capacity through increased open mindedness, and a greater willingness to publicly dream that is more likely when people feel safe and affirmed.

4. The questions force us to look at reality a little differently, either because of how they ask us to think or because of who we are listening to. Sometimes reality can be reframed by the way a question is asked. Sometimes reality gets reframed because the person we are listening to is telling us something very different from our stereotypes or assumptions. The linkage to generativity is obvious.

This is a tough set of criteria – it is hard to come up with questions that meet all four standards but well worth trying. Every time I have been satisfied that my questions meet all four, I have been satisfied with the Discovery phase they were used in. In addition, when, where and how people interview each other can increase or decrease the generativity of the interview process. For example, I believe that having a handful of people do all the interviews reduces the generativity of the Discovery Phase. It

generates a lot more interest, engagement, excitement, relationship building and on-going conversations when more people are involved in interviewing as well as being interviewed. Getting the stories of marginalized members of the system can sometimes be the most generative thing you can do. This allows the really new ideas, which always exist at the margins of social systems, voice. As I noted above, sometimes it's during the collection and discussion of stories that new ideas and images enter the organization's narrative (Bushe, 2001; Ludema, 2002) and this is one place where AI's transformational potential seems to emanate from. Widespread engagement with generative questions is also more disruptive, a key part of the emergent change process that I will describe in more detail further on.

A reminder that the state of identity of the group needs to be assessed before constructing generative questions. For a pre-identity group, questions that identify what is most valued by members, and dreams for the group, are the ones to ask. For post-identity groups, questions in support of the group's efficacy in achieving its purpose, asked of both members and stakeholders, are more likely to be generative.

Generative Conversations

I think there are many ways to increase or support the generativity of the Discovery, Dream and Design phases left to be discovered. I don't think it requires an unflinching focus on the positive. Ron Fry (2007) describes this very well in a recent working paper. If someone wants to talk about what they don't like in their organization, telling them "no, we can't talk about that, this is an appreciative inquiry" is an act of repression and likely to turn people off. What a traditional or problem-solving inquiry is likely to do is to ask them to elaborate on what they don't like and fully explore what they don't like and why they don't like it – what we might normally think of as responsible, value free, curiosity driven inquiry. But it wouldn't be very generative. We'd know lots about the person and their discontent but not be much farther in generating a better future.

Or we could ask them what is missing, what they want more of, what their image of what the organization ought to be is that is creating this gap between what they want and what they see. This kind of inquiry is much more likely to be generative. Out of it can come new ideas and images that point us toward a better collective future. I think it unwise

to try and banish discussion of what people don't like during appreciative inquiry; especially if they have a lot of emotional charge around it. Instead, let's try to be thoughtful in how we make a space for inquiry into hurt, anger, injustice, despair - doing that in a way that contributes to the group's ability to understand, and bring into being, its collective aspirations. Often, when we don't acknowledge and create a productive space for "negative" feelings, they show up in ways that aren't helpful, a point made forcefully by Fitzgerald, Oliver & Hoxsey (2010). There are ways to do that which are much more productive (see Pamela Johnson's article in this volume for some wonderful examples)

We need to think about how to design the interview process, about what happens with the stories, and how a collective inquiry into the affirmative topic takes place generatively. Synergenesis (first described as synergalysis – Bushe, 1995) has proven to be a generative way to stimulate Discovery during an appreciative inquiry. In a recent field study, Paranjpey (2013) compared the outputs of six different groups making suggestions for a corporate program, on different measure of generativity. Two groups used a problem-solving process, two groups did conventional AI Discovery (paired interviews followed by small group discussion) and two groups used the synergenesis process. On the 3 different generativity measures the synergenesis groups scored higher, and the problem-solving groups scored lower, than the conventional AI groups.

Synergenesis requires a small group, a small set of rich stories written up in the first person from appreciative interviews, and a central question the group is trying to answer. The purpose of the group is to generate new ideas to answer that question. The stories are there to create a collective experience that catalyzes that conversation. It is very simple. Everyone in the group reads the same story together. Then they discuss what images and ideas the story provoked in them, related to the focal question. They are not trying to analyze the story or look for themes in the stories. They are simply trying to capture and list as many ideas for how to answer the question as possible. Some of those ideas won't be in the stories at all, they will emerge from the discussion. When the conversation runs out of steam, the group moves on to read another story. The group continues to do this until reading more stories does not create any more new ideas. Not only does synergenesis help to generate new ideas, it can generate a shift in the ongoing

organizational narrative as people leave the synergenesis session influenced by the stories they've read and the conversation they've had. This is another place where the transformative potential of AI arises. The ongoing narrative is altered by new images and ideas and sometimes important new relationships are built among the people who participate. According to Bushe & Marshak (in press) this is the second key change lever for successful Dialogic OD, shifts in organizational discourse and narrative, and it is central to AI theory (Cooperrider, Barrett & Srivastva, 1995).

We need to think about how to maximize the generativity of the dream phase and use that to power a highly generative design phase. The purpose of the dream phase is to surface the values and aspirations that enliven the system. A generative dream phase will help people uncover values and aspirations they might not have been aware of. Lately I am developing the opinion that a generative dream phase increases the opportunities for differentiation and divergence. I used to think the purpose was to illustrate the similarities in what people dream - a way to find common ground and the will to collaborate. I still think that can be useful, and perhaps necessary, but I now think of the Dream Phase also as the opportunity for individuals to say what they really feel and want. A generative dream phase will encourage people to stand for what is most dear and deeply held, which will have the effect of increasing the differentiation amongst members. I have come to believe that it is through the experience of many voices speaking to what they individually really care about, being heard and not being shamed for their differences, that real community is built. According to Holman (2010), increased differentiation, after disturbance, is a key part of emergent change processes. The result of that differentiation, essential to transformational change, is that a more complex, well adapted coherence can emerge.

The Design phase, on the other hand, is where some convergence is required. It is about the social architecture that will actualize those values and aspirations. Cooperrider originally called the output of Design "provocative propositions" because he was trying to maximize generativity. Things that are provocative are, by definition, generative – they provoke/generate thinking and action. A generative design phase will produce a blueprint for a house so beautiful, and so functional, people will be excited to build it and move in. How do we ensure the will to act on design proposals without long, laborious meetings where a search for consensus saps energy and generativity from the group? We need better ideas about how to avoid the paralysis of consensus seeking while still creating conditions that will support individuals and groups taking action on widely understood and sanctioned ideas.

Working with emergent change processes and improvisational action is one solution. When Appreciative Inquiry is used for "complex" decision situations, situations where cause-effect relations are not known in advance, and can only be identified in retrospect (Snowden & Boone, 2007), then application of emergent change models seems most appropriate. In these situations Snowden & Boone (2007) advise against the normal analyze and choose problem-solving style of decision-making and instead advocate trying out small experiments (probes) to see what the impacts are and then chose those that do the best job. Following this logic, a generative design phase will not entail some kind of assessment or winnowing down of proposals to a few chosen ones. Just the opposite, it will encourage multiple proposals that individuals and groups are encouraged to act on without leaders trying to pick winners. I think a generative design phase will result in a large number of motivated people acting on self-generated "probes" that are consistent with the intent of the inquiry.

Generative Action

In the 2005 meta-case analysis, we found 11 of the 13 non-transformational cases designed the Destiny or "action phase" using traditional change management: Get either consensually or centrally agreed upon goals – or in these cases, design statements. Set up action teams. Try to implement something. But in 6 of 7 transformational cases they didn't use action teams or try to manage implementation from the top. Instead they adopted an "improvisational approach" to the action phase (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). The specifics varied from case to case but in every case new ideas emerged that were widely accepted and authorities' sanctioned people to do whatever made sense to them to move the organization toward its dreams and designs. Rather than trying to implement something, leaders looked for where people were innovating and helped them along when they could. This approach seemed far more generative – much more change occurred much more quickly. The same approach was used in the Metropolitan School

District where 50% of the change efforts led to transformational outcomes.

Why this is a more generative approach to the Destiny or "Deployment" (Cooperrider's new label, 2012) is explained by Homan's (2010, 2013) adaptation of the scientific research on complex adaptive systems to organization development. She councils us to embrace "nature's way of change" and work with the complexity, disruption and messiness that emergent change processes entail. Instead of restraining and resisting disturbance, welcome and use disturbance in a creative dance with order. Instead of focusing on outcomes, focus on intentions and hold outcomes lightly. Instead of following the plan, follow the energy.

I have found that if the first 3 D's are generative, and people are encouraged to take personal action, people will step forward to champion proposals the come out of the Design phase. As in every participative change process, they are often the younger employees who have more energy and hope and are willing to put in some effort. Because they are younger and less experienced they usually have less informal influence and so another transformative potential of AI is to empower a new wave of informal leadership throughout the system.

Here is my current recipe for a generative Destiny/Deployment phase.

1) Ensure that sponsor's/leaders understand, from the beginning, that the purpose of the appreciative inquiry is to generate multiple probes, that they will not be in a position to pick winners but instead need to see all of these as experiments to "track and fan" (Bushe & Pitman, 1991; Bushe, 2009). Plans for how this phase will be run and resourced should be part of the planning process from the beginning. Leaders and consultants need to imagine, from the start, the kinds of resources and support likely to be needed by small groups pursuing useful change activities (e.g., money, meeting space, equipment, time) and already have budgeted for it. There should be a plan for how small changes initiated by individuals and groups will be tracked and how momentum will be sustained. These include use of webpages to showcase innovations, celebratory events, and short videos documenting actions and results everyone wants to encourage.

2) Ensure there is a clear, collective agreement on what you are trying to accomplish (your intentions) even if there are many different ideas for how you will accomplish it. This is one reason why the AI Summit (Ludema, Whitney, Mohr & Griffen, 2003) has emerged as the most popular form of engagement for AI. If the task is to ensure widespread understanding of the probes that come out of Design, and generate initial energy and momentum, this is a great form of engagement. Some people have questioned, however, whether it is the best for sustained change in organizations, particularly when a shift in discourse and narratives is the intended change lever (e.g. Vanstone & Dalbiez, 2008). Whether using a summit design, or something spread out over longer periods of time, I think you want the people, who will have to BE the change, as aware and engaged in the AI process as possible.

Transformation requires a collapse of coherence, a belief that what we are doing or how we are doing it is no longer tenable. In bio-chemistry, when a variable is pushed to the point where the system is no longer viable, the system either falls apart of re-organizes at a new level of complexity. Harnessing this emergent change process invites us to think about increasing the odds of a group of people reorganizing at a higher level of complexity. To encourage a leap to greater complexity, work to ensure images and narratives that emerge from Discovery, Dream and Design spread and become widely shared. Strengthen networks to productively absorb and direct released energy. The better the communication and relationships among stakeholders, the more likely a challenged system will reorganize at a higher level of complexity.

3) Ensure that people believe they are authorized to take action based on the proposals that came out of Design. Ensure they understand they don't need permission to act. They shouldn't wait around for some committee or plan – none is being created by the leaders. They, however, are free to create any groups or plans they think are in alignment with what you are trying to accomplish. Leaders should clarify what is out of bounds and then get out of the way

4) Get commitments from as many people as possible to take some kind of initial action. This can be done through some kind of ritualized event, after the Design statements have been finalized, where improvisational destiny is explained and individuals each make some kind of public declaration of something they will each do in service of Design

proposals. Salancik (1978) argues that commitment gets created when people take actions that are voluntary, visible, and relatively irreversible and those are good things to think about when constructing events to launch the Destiny phase.

The generativity of Destiny/Deployment has been enhanced in some cases by using AI in an iterative way – making the lessons and outcomes of one AI the focus of inquiry for the next AI. Say an initial inquiry into customer satisfaction (only useful with a post-identity group) reveals that a key element is the relationships customers develop with sales personnel. During Destiny another AI could be launched to look at the nature of highly satisfying customer relationships, and so on, creating an ongoing stream of new ideas, new conversations and new possibilities.

However, there are some questions surfacing about how long such a process can remain generative. If you believe, as I do, that any process that promotes transformation in an organization has to be counter-cultural to the organization in which it is used, it raises the question of whether AI might lose its potency in organizations that have used it successfully for a period of time. I've heard anecdotes about groups becoming inured to AI and resistant to it from overuse, but no research on it. It may be that AI is particularly generative in organizations where there is little expression of appreciation or focus on the positive (Bright, 2009) and that in organizations with a strongly appreciative culture, AI is less transformational.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I've attempted to bring generativity back into the center of discourse about the transformational change potential of appreciative inquiry. As I define it, appreciative inquiry is a generative process when it produces generative images – that is ideas, metaphors, visual representations – that have two effects. One, they allow people to think differently about something in a way that opens up new possibilities for making decisions and/or taking action. Secondly, the image is attractive to people; they want to act in the new ways opened up for consideration. AI may also increase the generative capacity of individuals and relationships, making it more likely they will produce generative images.

While generativity is one of three change levers underlying Dialogic OD processes (the other two being changes in narratives and discourse, and promoting emergent change (Bushe & Marshak, in press) it has a special resonance with Appreciative Inquiry because AI was founded as a more generative method of organizational research. I propose that the power of appreciative inquiry, one of the few methods that can actually lead to "planned" transformational change, is more likely when the positive is used in the service of the generative. Yet, as I think I've illustrated throughout this chapter, generativity, narrative and emergence interact with each other during an appreciative inquiry in mutually supportive, synergistic ways to promote planned, transformational change.

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