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The Promise of Appreciative Cities

Compelling the Whole to Act

Barbara Lewis
Karen Roney



Inside this issue

Welcome to November 2013 issue of AI Practitioner

"The Promise of Appreciative Cities: Compelling the Whole to Act" is full of detailed examples where cities have applied AI: in Police, Fire, Purchasing and Transportation departments; community engagement in major regeneration initiatives and local initiatives supporting a region's long-term vision. Editors Barbara Lewis and Karen Roney, who live in the United States and have been involved in award-winning work in this area, describe how cities have embedded AI over many years and set out the promise of even greater AI use.

In the Feature Choice, Dayle O'Brien in Australia describes a change and transition theory, Four Rooms of Change, that she has found invaluable in her coaching practice. Taking a strengths-based approach to the model, she describes how people move through the Rooms and learn to love change.

In this Research Notes, Jan Reed says "Goodbye and keep going" as she feels it is time to hand over to others. We thank her for her skill and wisdom in developing the column over four years. Showcased in the

column is a study of Caravaggio's paintings using AI as the research framework.

In AI Resources we welcome a new editorial team: Matt Moehle (USA), and Roopa Nandi and Hardik Shah (India). They bring their research, academic and consulting backgrounds to develop the next phase of this column.

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Tim Slack and Suzanne Quinney, co-directors



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Diana Whitney

Diana, president of Corporation for Positive Change, founder of the Taos Institute and fellow of the World Business Academy, has co-authored thirteen books, numerous chapters and articles on AI. An internationally recognized consultant, keynote speaker and educator, her clients include global businesses, religious and interfaith organizations, education and health care systems.

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Ten Tips for Using Appreciative Inquiry for Community Planning

Over the past decade, many types of communities have used Appreciative Inquiry to create new kinds of conversations, leading to positive and powerful outcomes. AI helps community leaders address questions essential to successful participatory planning in community settings.

Using Appreciative Inquiry (AI), cities, counties, states and national communities have articulated long-term directions and created visions for their futures. They have built bridges across diverse populations, and forged innovative plans, policies and programs for a sustainable future.

These initiatives have proven AI's efficacy as a process uniquely suited to community planning. They have also expanded our sense of what it means to truly engage the whole system in a process of transformation. In situation after situation, AI has helped community leaders address a number of questions that are essential to successful participatory planning in community settings:

- How do we build leadership alignment and engage large numbers of people who live and work in the many varied subcultures and groups that constitute the community?
- How do we ensure that the whole community has the opportunity to be involved and to be heard, so that the resulting plan is truly the community's plan?
- How can our planning set the stage for inspired action and noteworthy results while building and strengthening relationships and the sense of community wholeness?

In our book, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry*¹, we showcased two award-winning, community AI initiatives. While we were writing, we engaged members of these communities in a second inquiry, to explore three questions:

¹ Excerpted with permission from Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry*, 2nd edition, Berrett-Koehler, 2010.

1. Why did the initiatives work so well?
2. What were the most important signs we did to give the initiatives long-term “traction” and to foster an appreciative culture to support them?
3. What could we have done that would have had even more impact, in terms of traction and culture?

These same people then worked with us to cluster and finalize the recommendations. The following summary document is a gift from community leaders and members to community members: advice for successfully applying AI in community settings.

The ten tips cannot substitute for a well-considered 4-D process. They are, however, guidelines to make certain that AI fits and is appropriately adapted to your community. In short, the tips can help bring out the best of your community members, helping them articulate a future that serves the greater good.

1. “Communitize” your approach.

Focus the AI process on what matters to the community. Choose a Change Agenda that is broad, compelling and consistent with your community’s overall culture and purpose.

Remember that the only right way to do AI is a way that will work for your community members. Schedule meetings and projects during “down” times, or link to existing events that are meaningful to your community. Design a variety of processes that are attractive and accessible to the many people you want and need to be involved.

2. Prepare committed champions.

“You need both the key and the gas to make a car run,” said Marietta, citizen leader of Focus on Longmont (in Colorado, USA). Take time up front to build commitment and congruence among your formal leadership (those with authority and resources: the “key”) and the day-to-day project coordinators (those who will bring the process to life: “the gas”). Cultivate multiple champions from around the organization, so that you will always have that base of support from both formal and informal leadership. Train them, so they understand both what they are doing and why, so they are comfortable discussing the process with others and getting them engaged.

3. Be purposefully and radically inclusive.

From the very beginning, invite generational, socioeconomic and cultural diversity into everything, from project leadership to advisors to process participants. Intentionally bring sub-communities and subcultures together in the process. And be sure to offer a wide range of ways for people to participate, to accommodate different work schedules, lifestyles, interests, languages and needs.

4. Fan the affirmative flame.

Never underestimate the power of the positive. It engages people's hearts and sustains their energy. Share the positive stories you collect over and over and over. Keep bringing people back to community strengths and successes. Appreciate and recognize people's efforts as well as results, especially the efforts of the regulars and those who keep the momentum for change alive.

5. Keep reaching out with information and opportunities.

With communities of hundreds, or even thousands of people, never stop reaching out. Communicate everything. Keep experimenting with different ways of imparting information, always focusing on "what it means" and "what's in it for everyone." Create many, many, many different ways and forums for people to participate. Follow up with people who participate, and keep them informed. Engage the local media and create video, still and written records of key events. Circulate them far and wide. Keep the process front-and-center for as long as possible.

6. Plan for continuity and transitions.

Before you start the process, ask, "If we were gone tomorrow, how would this continue?" Then organize your appreciative inquiry around the answer. From the beginning, seek out and engage the people who have responsibility for the desired outcomes. Consider in advance what systems, structures and funding mechanisms will be needed for the plan to be carried out and lead to positive results. Establish checkpoints in both the planning and the implementation phases. Regularly take inventory of achievements. Celebrate and publicize them.

7. Invest the time, enjoy the return.

Without question, whole- system community planning using AI is time intensive. It takes more time than you think; yet over and over again, community members say it was worth what it took. After three years of leadership with the aging services planning process, Michele Waite reflected, "I had no idea how time-consuming this initiative would be; but still, I wouldn't have changed a thing." The more people you engage, the more time it takes. But the investment of time and energy in appreciative interviews and in having community members share stories and make meaning of their own data yields unimaginable benefits. When people hear the stories from their community, they learn who they are and they see what they can become – personally and as a community.

8. Be open to what emerges.

It is impossible to predict all the twists and turns you will encounter using AI as a large-scale community-planning process. We have had more people show up than the room could hold. We have had naysayers ask for the microphone. We have had local media show up in support, and we have had it show up to question a process. Some of these events are challenges to overcome, but most are extraordinary expressions of community support and caring activism, calling forth the need to adapt and innovate. So be open and responsive to the new directions and opportunities that emerge along the way – and the people who bring them. You too may

All that matters is born of relatedness.

be surprised and in awe of the many gifted people who will work ceaselessly and in surprising ways for a better future in their communities.

9. Provide ongoing education and training in AI.

Thorough training in AI for project leaders and champions helps them make good choices as they design and lead their planning processes. The need for education does not stop there, however. Ongoing education and training is a key success factor for AI-based community planning. The more people who learn about AI, the better the change process will go. Consider offering educational opportunities tailored to community leaders as well as to various member groups. Throughout the planning process, new people will join, and they can also benefit from training. And once the plan is complete, community members will need new and different tools to maintain positive forward movement.

10. Make Appreciative Inquiry a daily practice.

AI-based planning begins a process of community transformation that will continue only as long as it is nurtured. Continue to ask yourselves, "How can we apply this to the everyday life of our community?" Carmen Ramirez from Longmont, Colorado said it well: "When we do as much inside our departments and organizations as we have done outside in the broader community, we'll finally reap the whole benefit that Appreciative Inquiry has to offer."

AI is a powerful process for meaningful community planning and development. Its unconditionally positive stance is an easy invitation to people who might not otherwise engage or share their ideas and opinions. Its strengths-based approach energizes people and builds community confidence in bold futures. In public communities, AI expands and uplifts the voices of the public and of people in formal leadership roles, as well as those whose voices more often go unheard. It fosters openness to learning, a willingness to meet "the other," and a capacity to create life-affirming ways of going forward together.

As you think about your community and its potential use of AI, we encourage you to start small. Find a community issue, project or goal that requires widespread engagement and input and use it as your ground for learning. Review this article – or perhaps even the book from which it is excerpted – with your project in mind. Invite other concerned community members to join you in your experiment. Now you have your core team and are ready to go. Remember, all that matters is born of relatedness. Use AI to build and strengthen relationships in your community, and the results will unfold with ease.

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Purpose of AI Practitioner

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