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Transforming Problematic Into Positive: Practice-Based Recommendations for Resolving Paradigmatic and Methodological Conflicts in Appreciative Inquiry

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Abstract

Researchers have employed Appreciative Inquiry (AI) in a variety of methodological contexts, in a variety of settings, and toward a variety of outcomes. For practitioners seeking to both identity and amplify the best of what is, AI has been a sort of multi-functional toolset, improving outcomes both small and grand. Amidst this successful history of the application of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), little attention has been given to some of the limitations or even risks of applying its practices to whatever extent and toward whichever outcomes. The models supplied by AI may prove problematic in several ways, among them: ontological realism, epistemological objectivism, the potential for axiological denial and ethical deception, the potential for methodological discord, a posture rooted in problems, blind spotting, and a neglect of the integral nature of things. This paper brings together the theoretical premises of Appreciative Inquiry methodologies, emerging considerations from transdisciplinarity and consciousness studies, and practical applications from a recent AI project, so as to construct considerations and recommendations for AI practitioners for resolving some of the methodological and paradigmatic conflicts that may arise.

Keywords

appreciative inquiry, transdisciplinarity, integral theory, four quadrant model

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Researchers have employed Appreciative Inquiry (AI) in a variety of methodological contexts, in a variety of settings, and toward a variety of outcomes. For practitioners seeking to both identity and amplify the best of what is, AI has been a sort of multi-functional toolset, improving outcomes both small and grand. Amidst this successful history of the application of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), little attention has been given to some of the limitations or even risks of applying its practices to whatever extent and toward whichever outcomes. The models supplied by AI may prove problematic in several ways, among them: ontological realism, epistemological objectivism, the potential for axiological denial and ethical deception, the potential for methodological discord, a posture rooted in problems, blind spotting, and a neglect of the integral nature of things. This paper brings together the theoretical premises of Appreciative Inquiry methodologies, emerging considerations from transdisciplinarity and consciousness studies, and practical applications from a recent AI project, so as to construct considerations and recommendations for AI practitioners for resolving some of the methodological and paradigmatic conflicts that may arise.

Keywords: appreciative inquiry, transdisciplinarity, integral theory, four quadrant model

Researchers have employed Appreciative Inquiry (AI) in a variety of methodological contexts, in a variety of settings, and toward a variety of outcomes. For practitioners seeking to both identify and amplify the best of what is, AI has been a sort of multi-functional toolset, improving outcomes both small and grand. Some projects might even be likened to small home improvement projects, with AI informing only specific methods (Appleton, 2008; Archer, 2009; Arnold, 2015; Bateman, 2011; Desautel, 2008; Doody, 2018; Gemmill, 2003; Giglio et al., 2007; Giles & Bills, 2017; Goldie et al., 2010; Griffin, 2017; Kogan, 2017; Lagerstrom, 2005; Mirisan & Onica Chipea, 2014; O'Connor, 2013; Semeniuk, 2017; Singer, 2018; Stadler & Fullagar, 2016; Taberski, 2017; Weller, 2015; Wuitschik, 2014), while others might be likened to large-scale home renovations, with AI supplying the entirety of the theoretical and methodological framework (Andrus, 2010; Calabrese & Cohen, 2013; Coleman & Wiggins, 2017; Cooperrider et al., 2005; Di Poi, 2015; Gilmour & Radford, 2007; Harris, 2009; Jacobs et al., 2013; Nyameino, 2016; Willis, 2008). Further, these projects' proverbial homes manifest in diverse locations, including large corporations, healthcare settings, schools, religious communities, nonprofits, and even government agencies. And with respect to just a few of the outcomes achieved, the literature includes: improving communication, establishing healthier workplaces, reducing bullying, strengthening leadership, and even fostering flourishing cultures (Andrus, 2010; Appleton, 2008; Archer, 2009; Arnold, 2015; Bateman, 2011; Calabrese & Cohen, 2013; Coleman & Wiggins, 2017; Cooperrider et al., 2005; Desautel,

2008; Di Poi, 2015; Doody, 2018; Gemmill, 2003; Giglio et al., 2007; Giles & Bills, 2017; Gilmour & Radford, 2007; Goldie et al., 2010; Griffin, 2017; Harris, 2009; Jacobs et al., 2013; Kogan, 2017; Lagerstrom, 2005; Mirisan & Onica Chipea, 2014; Nyameino, 2016; O'Connor, 2013; Semeniuk, 2017; Singer, 2018; Stadler & Fullagar, 2016; Taberski, 2017; Weller, 2015; Willis, 2008; Wuitschik, 2014).

In fact, my own experience of using Appreciative Inquiry, as the entirety of a methodological framework for a qualitative research study, has demonstrated its efficacy in empowering a single team of tech workers to better understand and then lead their own transformation of their team culture. Together, participants convened through a series of progressive meetings, each focused on one aspect of Appreciative Inquiry's 4-D cycle, described below, with specific methods including paired appreciative interviews to discover the best of their existing culture, creatively constructing their dream for their future culture, co-designing provocative propositions to inspire transformation toward their dream, and finally establishing their first action plan to enact and sustain transformation. This specific project differed from traditional AI projects in several ways, in order to address some of the areas of concern noted below, described in detail in the sections that follow. The outcome of our appreciative work together revealed this team's culture as one rooted in welcoming and fostering diversity and inclusion, with respect to both individual identity, individual work, and team performance, and aspirations for fostering more of such and amplifying their outcomes together.

Amidst this successful history of the application of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), little attention has been given to some of the limitations or even risks of applying its practices to whatever extent and toward whichever outcomes, small or grand. And while the dominant discourse surrounding Organizational Theory (OT) includes a history of shifting from empirical ways of knowing toward increasingly constructivist and participatory ones, the models supplied by AI may still prove problematic in several ways, among them: ontological realism, epistemological objectivism, the potential for axiological denial and ethical deception, the potential for methodological discord, a posture rooted in problems, blind spotting, and a neglect of the integral nature of things. This theoretical treatment brings together the theoretical premises of Appreciative Inquiry methodologies, emerging considerations from transdisciplinarity and consciousness studies, and practical applications from a recent AI project, so as to construct considerations and recommendations for AI practitioners for resolving some of the methodological and paradigmatic conflicts that may arise.

Situating Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a methodology within Organizational Development (OD) that grew out of the application of social constructionism to organizational transformation. Its intentional rooting in positive assumptions stands in stark contrast to deficit assumptions or problem-focused approaches, empowering researchers with different ways of conceiving of the research process in achieving similar or perhaps even more positive outcomes (Cooperrider et al., 2008). What began as an approach first introduced by Cooperrider (1986) has since flourished into an ever-evolving collection of theory, methods, and applications by a growing community of practitioners, seeking to identify and then build upon the most life-giving aspects of any organization. AI, intentionally different from other methodologies, affords participants an opportunity to affirm and apply the power of their imagination and their capacity to determine, direct, and enact powerful cultural transformation (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

Engaging with or in Appreciative Inquiry assumes the premise that "it is the positive image that results in positive action [and that] the organization must make the affirmative decision to focus on the positive to lead the inquiry" (Cooperrider et al., 2005, p. 10).

Appreciative Inquiry sets out to co-construct such positive images through a 4-D Cycle (Discover, Dream, Design, and Deliver/Destiny), sometimes with a 5th D, Define, at the onset of inquiry. This process of co-construction may be accomplished through any variety or combination of methods, including whole-system dialogue, mass inquiry, core group inquiry, learning teams, the AI summit, and a series of progressive meetings (Ludema et al., 2003). Regardless of the process of co-construction used, qualitative data is primarily collected through the specific methods employed, with primacy given to large group discussions and affirmations provided by participants. When paired appreciative interviews are utilized in the Discover phase, for example, participants usually convene to discuss and identify their most common themes, which researchers then note and include in findings. Additional data collection and analysis can also be performed by researchers to align to specific study designs and outcomes, such as collecting notes or transcripts from pair interviews and performing coding. Similarly, researchers may find value integrating additional methods or models into the AI process, at any stage, to either enhance study design or even address theoretical concerns, such as I chose to do by incorporating Integral Theory's four quadrant model discussed below. This process of co-construction, regardless of methods or modifications, roots itself in five core principles (Cooperrider et al., 2005; Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987; Ludema et al., 2003) and five emerging principles (Center for Appreciative Inquiry, 2020).

Appreciative Inquiry's five core principles include the Constructivist Principle, the Principle of Simultaneity, the Poetic Principle, the Anticipatory Principle, and the Positive Principle (Cooperrider et al., 2005; Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987; Ludema et al., 2003). The Constructivist Principle, may be understood as ontologically foundational, asserting that our reality is both subjective and socially constructed through words (Cooperrider et al., 2005; Gergen, 2015). The Principle of Simultaneity admits into inquiry that change is both immediate and epistemologically driven by the very questions we ask. The Poetic Principle admits to inquiry a constructivist and even participatory paradigm, sharing agency between the researcher and participants to co-direct the inquiry. The Anticipatory Principle assumes that what we envision determines the direction in which our human systems move. And the Positivist Principle asserts that amplifying the positive core through positive inquiry can beget the greatest momentum and positive change (Cooperrider et al., 2005; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999).

Appreciative Inquiry's five emerging principles have arisen from both its five core principles and decades of practice. These emerging principles include the Wholeness Principle, the Enactment Principle, the Free Choice Principle, the Narrative Principle, and the Awareness Principle. The Wholeness Principle addresses those we choose to involve in the inquiry and the collective capacities for change and resulting outcomes, asserting that bringing more stakeholders together in larger groups begets the greatest creativity and capacity overall. The Enactment Principle assumes that the most effective change occurs when practitioners embody and experience the change they want to see more broadly. The Free Choice Principle asserts that participants are more committed and perform more effectively when they experience the freedom to choose what they engage with and how they engage with it. The Narrative Principle admits personal stories as a prime transformative factor in Appreciative Inquiry in that constructing stories, both present and future, empower participants to then live into them. And the Awareness Principle admits reflexivity into inquiry on both the part of researchers and participants, asking all to practice cycles of action and reflection to surface and understand underlying assumptions throughout (Center for Appreciative Inquiry, 2020).

These principles, both core and emerging, provide practitioners with a set of valuable directives guiding the inquiry process: "words create worlds," "inquiry creates change," "we can choose what we study," "image inspires action," "positive questions lead to positive change," "wholeness brings out the best," "acting 'as-if' is self-fulfilling," "free choice

liberates power," "stories are transformative," and "be aware of underlying assumptions" (Center for Appreciative Inquiry, 2020, para. 1–12). These principles and corresponding directives have been shown effective for almost innumerable organizational research studies in a variety of settings in helping participants identify and build upon their positive core. One potential risk, however, in a relentless privileging of and focusing on the positive is that real phenomena and experiences deemed as problematic, marginalizing, oppressive, or even abusive may be cast aside. A single participant's negative experiences, for example, might be unintentionally cast aside in favor of the shared positive core. Alternatively, intentional consideration of such upfront, by researchers, may yield even greater positive outcomes, and more just ones at that. It may be that some practitioners can successfully employ the Awareness Principle in identifying and admitting such phenomena, and it may be that some practitioners can successfully employ reframing in an organic way, so as to co-construct a positive core and resulting images inclusive of addressing such experiences or concerns. What I believe will help advance both the theory and practice of Appreciative Inquiry is a specific investigation into areas of concern and practice-based recommendations for adapting AI in current and future studies.

Areas of Concern for Appreciative Inquiry Practitioners

The broader discipline of Organizational Theory is in the midst of a longstanding shift. Kurt Lewin was among the earliest to bring together theory, research, and practice toward a paradigm that would later be called Action Research, a paradigm in which participants share in creating knowledge toward organizational transformation (Bargal, 2012). Bargal asserts that Lewin's earlier theoretical contributions are in fact a primary motivation for the social and behavioral sciences to have shifted to invest in areas such as organizational change. And while these shifts may orient the broader discipline toward increasingly critical, constructivist, and appreciative means, the very methods available, specifically Appreciative Inquiry, may still present challenges (and opportunities!) to continue the evolution of the practice. Through my own experience and practice with Appreciative Inquiry, six areas of concern emerge for practitioners to be mindful of as they construct and execute their inquiries: ontological realism, epistemological objectivism, the potential for axiological denial and ethical deception, the potential for methodological discord, a posture rooted in problems, blind spotting, and a neglect of the integral nature of things.

I first came upon these concerns as I crafted an Appreciative Inquiry project seeking to empower a single team at a tech company with the means to understand and then build upon the best of their team culture. As I situated this inquiry within the existing literature addressing tech company culture broadly, I discovered a bit of a contested narrative, one where many companies assert flourishing and advantageous cultures (Benioff & Adler, 2009; Bock, 2015; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Levy, 2011; Nadella, 2017), and one where many workers present marginalizing and even oppressive experiences with those same cultures (Chang, 2018; Cohen, 2017; Galloway, 2017; Kvamme, 2000; Lyons, 2016; Martinez, 2016; Rifkin, 1996, 2009, 2011; Rushkoff, 2016). The most immediate risk of applying Appreciative Inquiry to this contested narrative was that it might identify and amplify the positive, but in doing so further marginalize or even silence the negative. One core concern, then, as I developed this Appreciative Inquiry project, was how I might design the project in such a way as to privilege both the core of the methodology while also welcoming whatever the participants' collective experiences with their culture might be. What I decided to do was to engage in a reflexive design process, where I could investigate emerging areas of concern and seek to address these collective areas in a novel study design where participants could be introduced early and

reminded often of practicing inclusion and reframing of negative experiences throughout AI's 4-D cycle.

Ontological Realism

Organizational Theory supplies, in the case of organizational culture, several disciplinary models for study that ontologically may admit a historical realism but may be more likely to admit a naive realism. Underlying assumptions as to culture, from the dominant discipline, treat both it and the organization itself as something apprehensible, albeit with some potential to direct inquiry toward critical ends, albeit with a potentially imperfect result. For the project I proposed to flourish, the appreciative models employed had to permit social construction in both how participants know their team culture and in how the very methods are designed. What was needed was a model that adopted and evidenced an ontological relativism, situating the knowledge produced within its socially constructed contexts. In this respect, participants were supplied with, but not constrained by, definitions of culture and encouraged to construct and reify their own definition.

Epistemological Objectivism

These same existing OT models evidence an epistemological objectivism, despite the broader shifts toward more critical and even participatory epistemologies, assuming at least some degree of absolute truth, when what must be evidenced are more transactional epistemologies. An Appreciative Inquiry project, then, ought to fashion a space whereby participants can experience the kinds of ends Lewin advocates for, where what we know is created rather than discovered, and where the participants themselves champion that creation. To address this concern, participants were permitted to create and explain throughout the project, as they did by explaining concepts such as inclusion and diversity, describing specifically what concepts meant to and for them and their team.

Potential for Axiological Denial and Ethical Deception

The next risk follows closely on the heels of the first two, because without a transactional epistemology and relative ontology grounding the study, an Appreciative Inquiry project would risk imposing researchers' agendas upon the participants or risk excluding values altogether, informed or otherwise. A project, then, must permit participants the reflexive opportunity to include their values and co-construct both direction and outcomes in order to beget the kind of positive future that is most inclusive of the values its participants want to live out, to whatever degree they may be the most transformative and also the most liberatory. And so each of our large group discussions included prompting to admit and discuss participants' values, both individual and shared, with such discussions adding to the energy and impetus fueling each subsequent part of AI's 4-D cycle.

Potential for Methodological Discord

As an Appreciative Inquiry project design progresses, then, the previous points, if unaddressed, lend to the possibility of methodological discord. The methods discussed previously are, for all participants, hermeneutical and dialectical in nature, but may not be truly participatory in that they may potentially restrict the kinds of knowledge participants construct; they may, in fact, be maligned to researchers' agendas or hypotheses. A diligent attention to reflexivity and validity throughout is needed to help ensure the methods designed are both

efficacious and truly participatory, in order to ensure reliability of the findings with respect to the participants involved. And so, I adapted my own reflexive processes to include checking for my own influence on the emerging processes and knowledge creation, choosing at times to step out of the room, for example, resulting in a perceived increase in participant-led discussion and direction.

A Posture Rooted in Problems

OT has a long history of an ontology rooted in both realism and a perpetual focus on finding and fixing problems, which its existing models serve to diagnose and resolve. Appreciative Inquiry presents an alternative rooted in the positive and in perpetually finding and building upon the best of what is. The risk, though, is that in shifting to focus only on the positive, Appreciative Inquiry may ignore problems entirely, problems which the methodology might resist and problems which may be of real concern to participants. Thus, we are left with a shifting dominant discipline and a methodological alternative, but no deliberate means for researchers to negotiate a complex space between problems and positivity. Thus, both designing and executing an Appreciative Inquiry project with both attention to and methodologically means of admitting and addressing problems, likely through processes such as reframing, may provide one efficacious means of remediating such a problem-rooted posture. And so, in the aforementioned study, participants were regularly presented with and reminded about reframing tools, so as to both welcome and reframe the problematic into impetus for positive transformation.

Blind Spotting

Amidst this complex space between postures rooted in problems and those rooted in positivity lies the great risk of appreciative methodologies blindspotting real problems in their privileging of the positive. These methodologies often direct participants to focus on and build upon what they deem their most positive phenomena, and as the breadth of literature shows, quite successfully. Rarely asked, if ever, are what experiences or phenomena might have been pushed aside or excluded in the relentless building upon the best. Careful facilitation may reduce this risk, but the practice still lacks deliberate reframing or reflexive practices in study design, despite broader disciplinary shifts valuing such. Again, deliberate design and execution may provide a remediating effect, as I chose to do as noted above by including specific tools and reminders of such throughout.

Neglect of the Integral Nature of Things

The complexity that exists between problems and positivity is but one manifestation of complexity in the appreciative study of organizations and the people that comprise them. Existing models in OT might often assume that organizations are something somehow separate from those people that comprise them, remaining rooted in not only problems but in perspectives integral theorists might describe as rooted in the exterior. I would assert that even if or when models examine inherently intrinsic characteristics such as values or behaviors, they struggle to admit the interrelationships among them and often construct knowledge of them from still an external perspective. What would be more appropriate, then, would be infusing more integral ways of knowing into appreciative methodologies, inclusive of both the interior and exterior of both the individual and the collective, something which OT's existing models simply rarely do. To remediate this risk in the aforementioned study, I chose to incorporate

Integral Theory's four quadrant model into specific methods in order to solicit knowledge more inclusive of this integral nature.

Transdisciplinary and Consciousness Perspectives for Appreciative Methodologies

I maintain that Appreciative Inquiry holds the promise for truly positive transformative outcomes for both researchers and participants. And in light of the areas of concern described above, I advocate strongly for infusing transdisciplinary and consciousness-based perspectives into the design of such projects, to successfully address these areas of concern and evolve appreciative methodologies in ways that both permit the positive outcomes they promise while also welcoming broader, more participatory, and more integral ways of knowing. Further, my own practice with such infusions demonstrates their efficacy toward these ends.

Both Transdisciplinarity and Consciousness Studies offer promising new work capable of addressing some of the aforementioned challenges that may arise from strictly disciplinary approaches to Appreciative Inquiry projects. While an interdisciplinary approach of simply bringing disciplines together may hold some promise, a transdisciplinary approach holds even greater promise by investigating the very margins disciplinary boundaries may create. Montuori (2013), in his extensive attention to Edgar Marin's intellectual journey, reminds us that transdisciplinary work must be both restorative and investigative, both bringing back what might be cut out and helping us understand the incompleteness of such efforts… that transdisciplinary approaches must also articulate knowledge in the moment and be reflective of both researchers' biases and participants' situated contexts. In this way, a transdisciplinary orientation informs every aspect of the research, as Montuori (2012) tells us:

> Transdisciplinarity is not, in this view, either a research method or simply a way of doing research that utilizes a number of different disciplines. It is an altogether different way of thinking about knowledge, knowledge production, and inquiry. The emergence of transdisciplinarity itself offers a wonderful opportunity for inquiry into our own fundamental assumptions about knowledge, knowledge production, and inquiry. (para. 9)

Montuori calls this kind of scholarship that of creative integration, which serves to inform Appreciative Inquiry projects at all levels. Orienting oneself in this fashion may permit researchers to employ appreciative methodologies in ways and with revised tools that liberate their epistemologies to achieve the most positive outcomes promised while averting some of the potential challenges noted above.

Toward informing Appreciative Inquiry's specific methods and tools, this transdisciplinary posture invites creative integration from other disciplines, which I embrace from the area of Consciousness Studies. With my recent project, I drew first from Laloux's (2014) transdisciplinary and consciousness-based model for organizations and organizational culture. Laloux asks: "Could it be that our current worldview limits the way we think about organizations? Could we invent a more powerful, more soulful, more meaningful way to work together, if only we change our belief system?" (Laloux, 2014, p. 2). He further posits that "organizations as we know them today are simply the expression of our current worldview, our current stage of development" (p. 15), and he proceeds to construct a model for knowing organizations, historically, in the context of how we come to understand stages of consciousness, describing five historical categories and their respective names, worldviews, cognitive development, needs, and moral development. From this model, the recent emergence of what Laloux called Teal organizations embody integral consciousness, the highest known stage of human consciousness, which allows us to understand organizations as a kind of living

system, rather than something detached or divorced, and as a kind of organization that admits the complexity and interdependence of the people comprising them. These kinds of organizations tend to evidence more self-management and less of the strict organizational structures; they evidence a complex wholeness without the need for universal agreement, permitting the people comprising them to bring more of their whole selves and allowing the organization then to embody a sense of life, soul, and purpose.

When researchers employing appreciative methodologies begin to view organizations and their people in this way, powerful considerations emerge to inform a transdisciplinary orientation toward the research. Laloux, for example, draws heavily from Wilbur's (2005) integral theory to inform his own epistemology, an approach which I also embraced in the design of my own project. He draws specifically from integral theory's four quadrant model in the construction of knowledge in a more complex, complete, and integral fashion. This four quadrant model asks us to construct knowledge from four perspectives: the interior, the exterior, the individual, and the collective. This model plots these perspectives along two axes to construct its quadrants: the interior and the individual—the "I" quadrant, the interior and the collective—the "we" quadrant, the exterior and the individual—the "it" quadrant, and the exterior and the collective—the "its" quadrant.

Figure 1
Four quadrant model

The "I" Space *The interior of the individual* Includes all of the subjective thoughts, feelings, emotions, ideas, visions, and experiences a co-research might have as they introspect	The "It" Space *The exterior of the individual* Includes all of the "objective" or "scientific" facts and data about a co-researcher's in their organization -- what they say, how they dress, what they write, what they do and their behaviors
The "We" Space *The interior of the collective* Includes all of the intersubjective shared values, semantics, norms, ethics, and understandings that any group has -- its "cultures" and "subcultures"	The "Its" Space *The exterior of the collective* Includes all of the interobjective systems, processes, syntax, rules, external relationships techno-economic modes, ecological systems, social practices, and so on

Note. Adapted from Ken Wilbur's introduction to Laloux's *Reinventing Organizations* (Laloux, 2014, p. xiv-xv)

It may be worth noting that epistemologies informed by such a model cannot construct new knowledge that is, in and of itself, entirely whole or authoritatively complete; rather, such a model may permit a more whole or more complete construction than previous strictly disciplinary models permit. The four quadrant model is, I believe, one additional useful tool for Appreciative Inquiry projects, and one which I hope will continue to be joined by many more. Infusing this model into these kinds of projects may permit researchers to conceive of and foster the creation of knowledge very differently and in ways that empower participants to construct more complete knowledge about a topic, across all quadrants, and in ways that both help address the potential problems noted earlier and aptly enable the kinds of positive outcomes appreciative methodologies seek.

Transformation of Appreciative Methodologies in Practice

For researchers considering an application of integral theory's four quadrant model to Appreciative Inquiry projects, I suggest a bricolage of the model throughout the methodology's 4-D cycle and resulting methods and tools. With my recent project, I incorporated formal instruction and discussion of the model at the project's onset and employed the model in the design of specific methods. In our first discussion, and after careful reflection, I shared with the participants my own epistemological perspectives and biases, and invited open discussion using simple language and questions, such as "how do we 'know' what we 'know,'" "who gets to decide what is considered 'knowledge' or 'truth,'" and "what have your experiences been with research." While a few remarked finding the discussion a bit esoteric at first, all ultimately remarked positively on a research project that permitted them to know in whatever ways made sense personally, while working toward what "they know" collectively. I believe this early initial discussion was largely responsible for setting the ongoing tone of our sharing of power and authority throughout the project and in reifying its ultimate direction and outcomes.

Very specifically, I employed the four quadrant model at each stage of the project, which itself was organized as a series of progressive meetings, each addressing one of the 4-D's: Discover, Dream, Design, and Deliver/Destiny. One primary method of our Discover session was the Paired Appreciative Interview, a common AI method in the Discover phase that pairs participants together to solicit and share their most positive and powerful experiences about a topic. I designed each question specific to the project's defined goal of helping this team of participants understand the very best of their current team culture. With each question, I chose to include sub-questions specific to each of integral theory's four quadrants, which permitted many nuanced perspectives to emerge. For example, core to the paired appreciative interview was soliciting participants' best or most powerful and positive cultural experiences. I crafted the first question and sub-questions this way:

> **BEST EXPERIENCE:** Tell me about a time when you participated in what you would call your more powerful positive cultural experience -- a time when you felt your "way of living" on your team was perhaps its most inspiring, engaging, energizing, challenging, and exciting for you and/or others. This need not be restricted to *just* you and your teammates and may involve other members of your organization as well.
>
> > *The "I" Space*
> > What were your thoughts, feelings/emotions, ideas, visions, etc.?
> >
> > *The "IT" Space*
> > What did you and others say and write? What actions did you and others take? What behaviors were demonstrated and by whom?
> >
> > *The "WE" Space*
> > Can you identify and tell me about any of the shared values, norms, ethics or sorts of understanding that seem exemplified in this experience?
> >
> > *The "ITS" Space*
> > What sorts of team or company systems, processes, rules, modes, broader social practices, etc., can you identify in this experience? What part or role did they play in your experience?

This same intentional integration of the four quadrant model also informed subsequent group discussion and the core methods of our subsequent sessions together. In session one, for example, as the group came together to discuss their paired interviews and then collectively identify and emphasize themes, they did so inclusive of the four quadrants even then, remarking, for example, about how the theme of inclusion included aspects of both individual and collective thoughts and behaviors. In session two, our Dream session, as another example, I guided participants to engage in open creative practices to envision their best possible future culture, reminding them initially about the four quadrants they might draw upon, and so they constructed and presented a visual artifact, thinking through and articulating individual thoughts, feelings and emotions, individual practices and behaviors, collective values and shared understandings, and broader organizational systems, rules, and practices needed. And in sessions three and four, our Design and Delivery/Destiny sessions, this integral epistemology again informed both our methods and the participants' ultimate provocative proposition and first bold initiative.

Employing this intentional design, both at the study's onset and throughout the sessions and methods, resulted in a data corpus inclusive of all four quadrants of integral theory's four quadrant model, and perhaps more importantly, in a collective knowledge of this teams present and future culture that was both more complete and more complex than a strictly disciplinary approach alone would have permitted. With this design, participants were able to admit personal experiences and perspectives that, instead of being blindly rooted in the positive, included experiences they deemed negative or harmful to culture, with one participant sharing a powerful experience of idea theft by a previous colleague. Further, these participants were also able to engage in a sort of natural reframing during their discussions, where they admitted and welcomed the breadth of experiences presented, both positive and negative, and then constructed together a vision for their best possible future culture that both builds upon the best of what is without marginalizing or blindspotting what they deemed negative or harmful. In fact, this team was able to reframe previous negative or harmful experiences and construct a vision of their future culture that would, when enacted, create a culture with less propensity for such negative or harmful experiences, if not eliminate them entirely. For this team, what emerged prominently throughout the project was a focus on diversity and inclusion specifically, both in aspects of personal identity and in aspects of ways of working together and with work outcomes.

Without this intentional design, I believe the project may have fallen victim to some of the problems presented earlier, which again include: ontological realism, epistemological objectivism, the potential for axiological denial and ethical deception, the potential for methodological discord, a posture rooted in problems, blind spotting, and a neglect of the integral nature of things. Beginning with and sustaining a transdisciplinary posture throughout permitted me, as the researcher, and the community of participants to anchor into an ontological relativism and transactional epistemologies, into a shared agreement that together, their experiences and words would create our world and what we know, together, present and future. This posture also permitted us to fashion together an ever-evolving space where both individual and collective values were welcomed and generative throughout the research process, and a space where my own values and biases were disclosed, welcomed, and negotiated in such a way as to minimize their influence and impact on our work together. This space permitted a complexity, where agreement was worked toward but never required, and one where all experiences, positive and negative, were able to inform the work through each stage, a space where experiences deemed as "problems" were welcomed and reframed, instead of neglected, deemphasized, or cast aside. And finally, infusion of integral theory's four quadrant model served well to solicit and construct a collective knowledge evidencing more of the real, complex, integrated nature of organizations and the people that comprise them.

Future Recommendations for Appreciative Inquiry Practitioners

This leads me to three primary recommendations for researchers employing appreciative methodologies. First, it may serve researchers well to explore and embrace a transdisciplinary posture and practice throughout the research process. Doing so is both liberatory and transformative for both the researcher and the practice. It permits, as Montuori calls it, a creative integration where researchers are empowered to both bring together and investigate the boundaries among existing disciplines and creatively construct novel rationales, strategies, and designs for Appreciative Inquiry projects. And while many AI projects have adapted specific methods or even infused outside models, such as Chapman (2011) has done with aspect of Positive Psychology, I believe even more promise awaits those selecting a truly transdisciplinary approach throughout. Next, and in the spirit of transdisciplinary approaches to research, I would advocate strongly for drawing from the area of Consciousness Studies, among others, because it invites a gorgeous intentional consideration of the evolving ways we experience our worlds, both interior and exterior, and supplies theories or models for constructing new knowledge in increasingly complex ways. My own work infusing integral theory's four quadrant model into appreciative methodologies demonstrates great efficacy in both addressing potential problems and constructing more integral knowledge throughout. The four quadrant model is but one small part of the emerging and evolving integral theory, with much greater promise available for interested researchers. My final recommendation is an ongoing call for community among Appreciative Inquiry practitioners. Those new to or curious about the methodology may find many rewarding tools and trainings through bodies such as The Center for Appreciative Inquiry and publications such as *AI Practitioner*, and those familiar with or seeking a deeper exploration may find many additional trainings and applications from the same. And it is always the hope that all practitioners will continue to enrich the field by sharing their projects and outcomes. Appreciative Inquiry remains a rich, transformative, and ever-evolving practice, and its potential only grows exponentially and rewardingly when practitioners continue to commune and share their experiences and outcomes, both theoretical and practical.

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