

Track Workshop Title:

**Reimagining decent work through engaged scholarship:
dynamics and boundaries of *inclusive* relationality**

Summary:

‘Decent Work’ is part of a United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal and psychological construct associated with ‘good’ employment conditions (e.g. stability, security, fair pay, social protection, equality of opportunity and treatment for all). Despite a 30-year history, minority ethnic students and graduates remain some of the most excluded from employment. This session draws from a major study in Vietnam which positions Appreciative Inquiry as a form of engaged scholarship where minority ethnic groups collaborated with influential policy-makers, employers, and university seniors, to re-vision Decent Work and the pathways towards it. The session provides an experiential experiment which invites participants to imagine the application of the approach in their own context and reflect on the implications of the extant power structures and differentials in their own sociocultural settings. The frameworks and strategies for inclusion that emerged in Vietnam are shared as prompts to inspire dialogue around inclusive relationalities in engaged scholarship.

Track:

30. Sustainable and Responsible Business

Word count (excluding tables and references):

1665 words (excluding tables and references).

Reimagining decent work through engaged scholarship: dynamics and boundaries of inclusive relationality

Topic

Inclusive growth is enshrined in United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 8, indicating its position as a global challenge and close links to alleviating poverty (Thompson & Dahling, 2019). 'Decent Work' is an aspiration which forms part of this goal as well as a psychological construct associated with 'good' employment conditions (e.g. stability, security, fair pay, social protection, equality of opportunity and treatment for all) (Duffy, Kim, Allan, & Prieto, 2020). Despite a 30-year history, minority ethnic students and graduates remain some of the most excluded from employment, even in some of the fastest growing economies in Asian countries (McKay, Mussida, & Veruete, 2018) such as Vietnam (World Bank, 2019). Indeed, the rise of the precarious work and the 'working poor' remains a growing issue in developed countries like the UK and the US (Kalleberg, 2018; Thomas & Turnbull, 2018).

Cooperation and collaboration are often proposed as pathways to sustainable transitions (including but not exclusively in the area of Decent Work) because they connect previously disconnected resources and knowledge sets (Leal Filho, Wall, Barbir, Nagle Alverio, Pimenta Dinis, & Ramirez, 2022). Collaborations in the context of Decent Work, however, have proven to be difficult. This is partly because of wider international trade policies impacting the availability of highly skilled work at a national level (e.g. Thomas & Turnbull, 2018), the highly geographically localised nature of employability and employment decisions (Massey, 1995; Herod, 2001; Benbow & Hora, 2018), and the implications of highly variable local implementation of employment and educational policies (in the case of Vietnam) (Van Vu, Tran, Van Nguyen, & Lim, 2018).

This session draws from a major British Academy research project in Vietnam which positioned Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1987, Cooperrider 2017) as a form of engaged scholarship (Boyer, 1996; Van de Ven, 2007) where minority ethnic groups collaborated with influential policy-makers, employers, and university seniors, to re-vision Decent Work and the pathways towards it. In our adaptation of Appreciative Inquiry, we adopted questions such as: 'What working well in terms of our students/graduates getting and keeping Decent Work?' (*Discovery*), 'What would be the ideal here?' (*Dream*), and 'What's needs to change to work towards the ideal?' (*Design/Destiny*). Although such questions created a scaffolding for the relationalities afforded by the form of engaged scholarship adopted, we also recognised that such relationalities were heavily bounded by the sociocultural dynamics of hierarchies within the context because of major power differentials between some of the most privileged in society (policy makers from the resource rich urban centres and institutions) and some of the most marginalised in society (minority ethnic young people from rural and mountainous areas) – two groups that would not normally collaborate in such ways. As such, we developed a framework of adaptations to intentionally shift the power dynamics in the activity, including for example, the introduction of a Youth Advisory Panel who advised the work of the academic team, showcased and validated different cultural customs and traditions, and provided multiple opportunities for the young people to develop confidence and skills in collaboration.

The immediate results of using Appreciative Inquiry in the context of Decent Work in Vietnam seem promising, as the young people have reported changes to their aspirations for work, increased confidence and self-efficacy, and new behaviours relating to networking and

finding opportunities. Some of the young people are also starting new jobs and new ventures with the policy makers and employers involved. In terms of its impact on policy-makers, employers, and higher education leaders, the approach has resulted in policy change, revolving around the increasing connectedness of disparate policy practitioners and interventions that focus on empowerment specifically in relation to employability.

We argue that the adaptations made were necessary to expand the relationalities and alter the dynamics in the interactions for an inclusive approach to engaged scholarship as expressed through Appreciative Inquiry. However, we also recognise that the adaptations required to enable an inclusive approach might differ by sociocultural context even within the same region of a country because of the highly geographically localised nature of employability and employment decisions (Massey, 1995; Herod, 2001; Benbow & Hora, 2018).

The session provides an experiential experiment which invites participants to imagine the application of the approach in their own context and reflect on the implications of the extant power structures and differentials in their own sociocultural settings. The frameworks and strategies for inclusion that emerged in Vietnam are shared as prompts to inspire dialogue around inclusive relationalities across different forms of engaged scholarship, across any Sustainable Development Goals, or indeed, addressing a complex mix of them with a diverse range of stakeholders (Leal Filho et al, 2022).

Interest

We expect that this session will be of interest because it addresses a number of increasingly important issues in business and management knowledge ecosystem: (1) social issues and inclusion in research as well as teaching and learning, (2) Decent Work as a global challenge including in developed countries like the US and UK, and (3) the rise of the engaged scholarship model in business schools. The workshop provides both intellectual and practical engagement in the topic.

Appreciative Inquiry has developmental roots in the fields of Organisational Psychology, Human Resource Management, and Organisational Transformation Change and Development, so it is expected that this session would attract interest from these areas. However, given the rise of Decent Work, inclusion, and engaged scholarship, we also expect participants from other disciplinary sub-fields such as Sustainable and Responsible Business, Critical Management Studies, Organisation Studies, Gender in Management, Knowledge and Learning, Inter-Organizational Collaboration: Partnerships, Alliances and Networks, and Research Methodology.

Design

The design of the session involves (1) a high-level overview of how Appreciative Inquiry was applied as a form of engaged scholarship in the context of re-visioning Decent Work with high-power differential participants, and (2) experiential and reflective activities which enable participants to imagine their own application of Appreciative Inquiry and possible inclusion needs and issues in their own localised contexts. The session will be delivered synchronously to imitate how the methodological approach is used in practice to enable disparate stakeholders to engage in the process.

The session will be delivered in a synchronous virtual-only format in 90 minutes. We could facilitate up to 40 participants (with 5 facilitators each facilitating intimate dialogue in break-out groups of up to 8), however, a more realistic group size from our experience of workshops at BAM might be 15-20.

The session will be hosted by the lead presenter with support of the facilitators, but the content of the session and dialogue in the breakout groups will be driven by the participants. The mechanisms by which this will happen and how everyone attending will be involved are outlined below and in the indicative schedule.

We expect that the workshop will stimulate intellectual and practical engagement with (1) Appreciative Inquiry as a form of engaged scholarship (through the stages of Discovery-Dream-Design-Destiny) and (2) A framework of adaptations to engaged scholarship approaches which facilitate deeply inclusive approaches. Attendees will explore how they might apply the ideas and tools in their own engaged practice in the following ways:

- Experiencing an Appreciative Inquiry cycle in relation to Decent Work for students and graduates.
- Reflecting on and identifying which specific parts of their curricula might benefit from co-created approaches to engaged scholarship.
- Reflecting on and identifying which specific topics might be co-created
- Reflecting on and sharing the wider issues or marginalization that they focus on in their local environment and what might need to be in place to support their inclusion and participation in co-creation and Appreciative Inquiry methods.

The indicative schedule is as follows:

Indicative timings*	Indicative topic / activity*	Resources
5 mins	Introductions and welcome	Main group
10 mins	Overview of Appreciative Inquiry as an engaged scholarship methodology and the inclusive challenges in the context of high-power differentials – using our case study as a prompt for exploring promising practices.	Presentation
20 mins	Experiential activity in small breakout groups, to share ideas in relation to each stage of the Appreciative Inquiry process, imagining interactions between individuals with high power differentials: Discovery: <i>‘What working well in terms of our students/graduates getting and keeping Decent Work?’</i> Dream: <i>‘What would be the ideal here?’</i> Design/Destiny: <i>‘What’s needs to change to work towards the ideal?’</i>	Online breakout rooms (number determined by expected number of participants)
10 mins	Sharing experiences, curiosities, and emerging insights from the process so far.	Main group
5 min	Reflective comfort break (optional based on the needs of the group)	-
10 mins	Overview of the inclusion framework and strategies used in our own case study as prompts for dialogue	Presentation

15 mins	Experiential reflections around participants' contexts and identifying specific opportunities to apply new ideas generated.	Main group
15 mins	Sharing experiences, curiosities, and emerging insights from inclusive adjustments	Main group

* Indicative based on the needs and emergent curiosities of the group.

References

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