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A comparative case study of appreciative inquiries in one organization: implications for practice*

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Abstract

Eight different sites in a large, Canadian urban school district engaged in an appreciative inquiry into "what do we know about learning". Data collected over the following year indicate that four of the sites experienced transformational changes, two sites had incremental changes and two showed little or no change. This paper describes the AI intervention in detail and then explores differences in each site that may explain differences in level of change. The level of positive affect and ratings of success of the AI Summits at each site showed no meaningful relationship to change outcomes. Level of change did appear to be related to how generative the inquiries were, how well the Discovery phase was managed and the quality of Design statements that came out of the summits. Other factors exogenous to the design of the AI also appeared to play a role. These included relations between teachers and principals, credibility of local change agents, passionate and engaged leadership, and linkage to pre-existing, shared concerns. Recommendations for AI practice are given.

Keywords: Appreciative Inquiry Summit; Collective Dream; Transformation; Case Study.

Introduction

This study reports from 18 months of participant observation of multiple appreciative inquiries in separate, comparable sites of one organization. As such, it is only the second, comparative study of appreciate inquiry (the other being Richer, Ritchie & Marchionni, 2009) and allows for inferences to be drawn about the factors that influence success and failure. Eight sites in a large, urban school

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district engaged in a comprehensive appreciative inquiry (AI) process that was designed and run by the district head office. Each site used the same process, got the same training, used the same facilitators and had the same follow up resources. At the end of the study period four sites were judged to have experienced transformational changes, two had incremental changes and two showed little or no change at all. The paper attempts to understand the factors that led to success and failure at the various sites.

During the initial two months of the intervention, the author designed the AI process, facilitated the selection of the affirmative topic, provided advice to the District Management Team and trained the site teams. Thereafter the District AI team took over responsibility for managing the change process and facilitated all events, including the summits. The author was a participant observer in all district level events, including each of the site summits, and coached the District AI team and members of the District Management Team throughout the time period of the study. In addition to data from participant observation, conclusions are drawn from surveys completed by all participants of AI summits and surveys completed by District AI team members at the end of each summit and the end of the study period.

The paper provides an extensive description of the design and execution of the AI intervention and then briefly reviews the results at each site. Conclusions about what contributed to the differences in level of change are discussed and data used to make these conclusions are described. The paper concludes with a summary of lessons learned for successful AI practice.

The paper assumes the reader is familiar with AI theory (Bushe, in press; Cooperrider, Barret & Srivastva, 1995; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001) and practice (Barret & Fry, 2005; Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003) including the 4-D model. It is also assumed the reader is familiar with the AI Summit method (Ludema, Whitney, Mohr & Griffen, 2003).

The Metropolitan School District Case

The Metropolitan School District (MSD) serves over 50,000 students in grades K to 12 in a highly diverse, socially complex, urban population in Canada. Over the past 20 years relations among teachers, administrators and the provincial Ministry of Education tended to be acrimonious. At the time of this project the provincial teachers union had just engaged in a two week illegal strike for ambiguous reasons against a newly elected government seen as anti-union. The school district enjoys two separate and militant unions which also, at times, have been in conflict with each other; one for primary teachers (k-7) and one for secondary teachers (grades 8-12). The elected school board has a history of

conflict with the Provincial government over funding and direction of public education.

In 2005 a new superintendent and a new school board wanted to find a way to change the prevailing discourse within the MSD that emphasized labour discord, teacher-employer conflict, and resistance to a government that was initiating an emphasis on measuring student achievement. They wanted, instead, to emphasize collaborative learning communities and make the experience of the individual learner the centre of the discourse. The superintendent facilitated a consensus inside the "District Planning Group" (approximately 40 people representing all stakeholder groups) to involve everyone in the District in an inquiry into "what do we know about learning". Though he had no experience with appreciative inquiry (AI), the Superintendent suspected it was the right method for this inquiry. His image of AI was that of conventional action research with a positive focus. A senior District Level administrator was given responsibility for a CDN$720,000 budget, and two teachers were appointed to be AI Facilitators; the three comprised the District AI Team. All three attended one of the author's two-day courses on AI in the fall of 2005. After the course the author was asked to consult on the project. Eventually the project involved 21 schools in eight sites in the first three phases of the 4-D model between January and April 2006, including two-day AI Summits for each site. This study also followed the Destiny phase of the change process through to the end of the school year of June, 2007.

Change Structure and Intervention Design

All eighteen secondary schools (grades 8-12), 88 elementary schools, and seven adult learning centers were invited to apply to be part of the learning inquiry in the Fall of 2005. Members of the District Management Team, the elementary and secondary school teachers' unions, and the District AI Team chose eight sites out of 20 or so applications. Three sites were a single high school and one was an adult learning centre (mainly serving adults who had not completed high school). Two were a combination of one elementary and one high school and two sites combined all three types of institutions in common geographical areas.

Connor's (1993) sponsor/change agent/target model was used to clarify roles and responsibilities for the change effort. The Associate Superintendent responsible for the site was the District Sponsor, and a principal at the site was made the Site Sponsor. Each site had one teacher who was given release time to be the site AI coordinator/change agent. To support him/her, each site created an AI site team that included administrators, teachers, students, and, in some cases, parents and school support staff.

In January 2006 all the AI site teams attended a two-day training course. During the training they were taught the philosophy of AI, the design of this inquiry, and their tasks and roles. In addition, they participated in an AI process to

develop the two Affirmative Questions that would guide every inquiry in the District. Just before noon of the second day, members of the District Planning Group came to the training and, in the midst of site teams busily creating Design Proposals for the affirmative questions, these DPC members were given a short introduction to Appreciative Inquiry. All proposals were put on the wall and explained, and then everyone (approximately 100 people) used sticky dots to indicate their preferences. Five proposals garnered the most votes and the 20 DPC members then fish bowled a decision-making meeting, led by the Superintendent, to choose the two affirmative questions. This sponsorship process was widely seen as innovative, transparent, energizing and empowering. The Superintendent later described it as a high-point in his career. The AI process got off the ground with a lot of positive energy.

The two district wide affirmative topics chosen were 1) What do educators do that create exceptional learning experiences? and 2) What choices and options offered in educational settings most enhance learning? In addition, each site was encouraged to create one or two local affirmative questions and communicate this to the District AI team who crafted the AI interview guide for each site. The interview guides followed the standard AI format of first asking respondents personal stories of peak experiences related to the topics (e.g., "Please tell me about the most exceptional learning experience an educator created for you or others, and what that educator did to make the learning experience so exceptional?). These were followed by questions about the respondent's vision of the ideal state or "dream" (e.g., What do you think are behaviors required for educators to consistently produce exceptional learning experience in students?) and concluded with the respondent's thoughts on how to design the organization to produce those kind of peak experiences (e.g., What is the best way to organize schooling to support educators producing exceptional learning experiences?).

Assuming there would be uneven levels of enthusiasm and perhaps some cynicism towards the inquiry, the intervention used a viral interviewing strategy where those interviewed were invited to interview others over a period that ranged from one to three months. It was hoped this would generate a large number of stories, create interest and enthusiasm in the AI process, and in itself begin changing the discourse towards the hoped for direction in each site. The site teams were coached to create a stakeholder map and target high status individuals in each important sub-group to interview first. Interviewees were asked for 4 or 5 stories of peak learning experiences, and the interviewer would choose the "best" one to write up later and give this to the site coordinator. Each interviewee was asked if they would be willing to interview two other people as well as attend the Summit. Approximately 3 weeks before each AI Summit (Ludema, et. al. 2003) the site team met for a series of *synergenesis* meetings, a technique for working with appreciative interview data (Bushe, 1995; 2007). At these meetings the stories were used as a catalyst for generating creative answers for each affirmative

question. The output of these synergenesis sessions was captured and a "Discovery Document" created that was circulated throughout the site. The effort put into these sessions, and the resulting quality, varied considerably.

The AI Summits

The site sponsor together with the site AI team decided on whom to invite to the Summit. With a few exceptions, summit participants had also participated in interviews. The two day summits, held in March and April, varied considerably in composition. Those with multiple schools tended to be more administrator heavy, and the ratio of teachers varied for a variety of reasons. There was always a fair percentage (approximately 20%) of students. There were a few parents and the occasional board member or union official. The District Sponsors varied in how much time they spent at the summits, though all were on hand for the final half day. The Superintendent made an inspirational speech near the beginning of each summit. Summit size averaged around 80, with some as small as 50 and some as large as 100.

Summit design evolved a little over the first three summits and remained stable from fourth on. Summits were held away from the school sites at large halls. All Summit participants were asked to read the Discovery Documents before attending. The affirmative topic for each summit was chosen by each site, and the Dream and Design phases during the summit were focused on it. Some examples of local affirmative topics were "Strengthening student engagement in learning within our community", "Collaborating to Create Confident Math Learners" and "Illuminating Our School Practices and Culture". Upon entering the hall, people began by milling about and describing what most excited them about their experience during the Discovery phase. They were then deliberately seated at tables to maximize a diversity of views. Discussion about what was learned during the Discovery Phase in relation to the affirmative topic occurred in the small groups and then in the large group. About an hour before lunch, participants were taken into the Dream phase using guided imagination to see their school at its best three years hence. At the same small group tables they described their individual dreams, and the groups pulled out common themes from their members. Over lunch these groups devised skits to act out the common elements of their dream for the rest of the participants. After the skits were presented, the large group discussed the main themes coming out of the skits. These were captured and consolidated into 10-14 dream themes. Participants were invited to choose one theme to work on, and each small group was given art materials to produce a visual image that captured their part of the collective dream. These were assembled on a large sheet of paper along a wall (up to 20 feet long and 4 feet wide), with an aboriginal "dream catcher" drawn in the centre. Describing each part and assembling the "Collective Dream" ended the first day.

Afterwards, the District AI team met with the site team to devise the "organizing model" that would be used for Design. This was the 8 to 12 categories that captured all the key elements required for a design appropriate to the affirmative topic. For example, one site that combined all 3 types of institutions had the affirmative topic "Site Collaboration to Enrich Success through Relationships and Engagement". Their organizing model included grade 7/8 transition, secondary/adult transition, education partnerships; physical facilities, school schedules and organization; diversity of programming and instruction; community/parent engagement, connections and partnerships; experiential learning; and celebrating varieties of success.

After a quick check in, the second day began with the site team laying out the organizing model, explaining their rationale for it, and adjusting it according to comments from participants. Participants were then asked to go to the element of the organizing model they wanted to build a design statement for. Design statements were described using the metaphor of blueprints for building a house: each design statement described, in as much detail as possible and in the present tense, what a room looks like in the ideal house. The first drafts of Design Statements were posted and participants were given post-it notes and asked to provide feedback. The teams reviewed the feedback and then rewrote their Design Statements and all of them were then read out.

The Destiny phase commenced at the Summit by describing improvisational Destiny style used in this AI (Bushe, 2010; Bushe & Kassam, 2005), contrasting that with the typical implementation style of change. Participants were asked to go to the Design Statement they wanted to contribute to making a reality. The resulting groups were asked to discuss and note what needed to happen for each design to come into being, and then each person was given 5X7" cards and asked to write down what they were personally willing to do to make something happen. A "Roadmap to the Future" was taped to a wall and people attached their 5X7" cards at the point in time where they aimed to complete their commitments. Participants milled around and read the cards on the roadmap. The Summit ended with the variety of sponsors in the room (usually 3-5) each describing their experience of the summit and what they were personally committing to do in the coming months. The expectation was that the Dream Mural would be taken back to the school and put on display and that the Roadmap would be typed up and distributed.

Destiny

Different sites used different processes to communicate the results of the summit and engage others who had not attended. District AI staff kept in close touch with Site Teams and each site team was asked to prepare a plan and submit a budget for the changes they wanted to make, with they each did by June of 06.

When the school year ended in June, all activity stopped as is customary in this school district. At the end of the following September a large meeting was held with representatives of all the sites and the District Management Team at which hopes, dreams and plans emanating from the previous spring's activities were discussed. Site teams were asked to prepare detailed plans and budgets and these were submitted by November. The District Sponsors in consultation with the District AI Team decided on what plans to fund and how much to fund. In January and again in May of 2007 half-day events were held where participants from the various sites came together to describe the actions they had taken at their local sites, celebrate achievements and make plans for the future. Concurrently, the District AI team was engaged in a new district wide appreciative inquiry focused on a particular sub-population of students.

Change Outcomes

The data used to assess the level of change in each of the sites is shown in Table 1. These include all the documents the sites prepared from the spring of 2006 to summer 2007 as well as interviews with site personnel and the individual assessment of the District AI Team members. The conclusions provided here were fed back to the MSD in a report the following fall. While the sites were described anonymously in the report it was easy for anyone knowledgeable about the AI process to identify how each site was judged. No one challenged the assessment.

Table 1

Data Used to Make Assessments about Level of Change

- Site planning documents June 2006
- All sites meeting September 2006
- Site Destiny Planner, November 2006
- All sites meeting January 2007
- Site update and budget request February 2007
- District AI Team members' assessments March 2007
- Interviews with school personnel March 2007

A site was classified as having experienced a transformational change if there had been a clear, compelling change in the normative routines of teachers in the site and the changes were seen as discontinuous – that is, they were not changes that had been simmering before the AI process began. By contrast, those with incremental change were sites where any observed changes were consistent with change processes already in action. Good things came of the AI Summits but they

weren't changes to normative routines nor were they discontinuous. A site was classified as no change if there was little or no change that could be attributed to the Summit or AI process.

Hereafter the sites are referred to by number with the identifying letter T for transformational, I for incremental and N for no change.

Transformational sites

TC1 was a high school/elementary school located next to each other in a poorer neighbourhood. While the elementary school fed into the high school there was very little interaction between students or teachers. The student population of the high school had been in slow decline. One result of the inquiry was a marked jump in student engagement spurred by the experience of student engagement in the inquiry. Both schools initiated activities to encourage student leadership at all grade levels (not just amongst senior students) and initiated inter-school activities where students provided leadership. The elementary school's early foray into new instructional technologies was amplified by it becoming a test bed for new technologies and high school teachers became interested, for the first time, in some of these. As a result, senior elementary students who were highly proficient in these new technologies became advisors to the high school teachers. Meanwhile high school students became involved in mentoring and tutoring elementary school pupils. Both schools engaged in an outreach program to a large ethnic community that had historically been uninvolved in the schools that was experienced as highly successful and led to full time presence of members of that community in the schools as "elders". The transformation in student engagement is so noticeable that, for the first time in memory, parents from more affluent parts of the city inquire about transferring their students to this high school.

TC2 was a high school in another poor and ethnically diverse part of the city that had a proud history but was in slow decline. Two transformational changes were noticeable. One was a plan to completely revise the structure and operation of grade 8 and 9, the grades where the most students drop out, that would increase student retention and success. The other was a "fight for enrolment", a set of activities by teachers and students to reach out to elementary students to encourage them to attend the school. Previously the school community had been resigned to decline but he AI process appeared to inject new life and vitality and a number of innovative projects aimed at making the school more attractive to new students ensued.

TC3 saw a transformation in the level of collaboration amongst teachers in different disciplines leading to new cross-disciplinary course offerings, informal mentoring of new teachers, new collaboration between teachers and support staff

and creation of never before published guidelines for content and assessment of certain subjects from grade 8 to 10. In addition, a number of teachers who had been resisting using technology for instruction, including web based courses and in class technologies, began collaborating on their use.

TC4 saw a breakthrough in relations between the high school and the 5 elementary schools that feed into it. Prior to the AI, teachers and administrators at the different schools had never talked to each other and, mirroring the culture at MSD, elementary and secondary teachers tended to have negative images of each other. The Inquiry focused on increasing the success of students in the transition from elementary to high school and as a result led to a series of meetings among teachers in all the schools coordinating curriculum and text book selection. What was most striking about this was that the change in inter-school relations persisted into the following year even though every person who had actually participated in the AI Summit had been transferred somewhere else. The high school also experienced a transformation in the level of student engagement and in recognition amongst teachers of the importance of personal relationships to student success. Processes were created to improve relationships between teachers and students as well as processes to make it safer for students to learn from each other. For example, student forums were held every 6 weeks where students generated and dialogued around AI type questions.

Incremental and No Change Sites

IC1 was a single high school that had some success with increasing cross curricular activities, social responsibility efforts amongst students and gaining funding for a "green project", but the school had been pursuing all of these activities prior to the AI. IC2 was a multi-school site that some increase in the level of collaboration of the adult learning centre in their catchment area and a number of small projects aimed at community partnerships. But IC2 already had a reputation for being ahead of others in the level of collaboration among schools and level of community partnerships. NC1 was a high school/elementary school combination where the AI had no discernable impact on the high school and perhaps some incremental effects on the elementary school. NC 2 was a single high school were there were negative descriptions of the AI effort, mostly to do with it being a waste of time and resources.

Explanations for Differences in Levels of Change

The Influence of Pre-Summit Activities

Because research funding was obtained only in February 2006 data collection only began at the summits. Therefore the only data on pre-summit activities are interviewee's memories and a series of judgments about the state of each site before the summits made by informed observers, (the 3 AI District Team members and two research assistants who observed the summits) after each summit. As listed in Table 2, the other data used to compare the change process in each site included a 65 item survey completed by all participants at the end of each summit, a 22 item survey on each site completed by District AI Team members in May 2006, observations at the January 2007 all sites meeting along with the planning documents they submitted in February 2007 along with all the informal interviews conducted over the course of the project (Some of the raw data discussed below is available in Bushe, 2007b).

Table 2

Data Used to Compare Change Process Among Sites

- 9 item observer ratings at each summit
- 65 item post summit participant survey
- 22 item District AI Team member survey May 2006
- District AI Team member descriptions June 2006
- All sites meeting September 2006
- All sites meeting January 2007
- Site update and budget request February 2007
- Interviews with school personnel March 2006 - May 2007

A consistent theme from the interviews and the little relevant survey data was that the quality and management of the Discovery phase seems to have made some difference to the degree of change at the sites. On the pre-summit observation forms the impact of the Discovery phase on support for the inquiry, and the quality of the Discovery Documents, were both correlated with degree of change. Summit participants were asked the degree to which the Discovery phase created anticipation for the summit. The no change sites were significantly lower (3.58) than the incremental (3.94) and transformational sites (3.87). The post inquiry District AI Team survey items on Discovery all showed significant differences among sites with the no change sites significantly lower on all items. For example on the item "Discovery went smoothly" the no change sites averaged 2 (out of 5) while the incremental sites averaged 4.75 and the transformational sites

4.44. The pattern was that the incremental sites were highest on how positive Discovery was while the transformational sites scored highest onhow generative Discovery was. The consistent pattern amongst different sources of data strongly suggests that the quality of the Discovery process, particularly the quality of new insights generated, influence the degree of change or foreshadow it.

The story-telling process used during Discovery was widely credited as being powerful and impactful. For example, the summit survey item "I did not find the sharing of stories helpful" was significantly higher in no change sites (2.13) compared to incremental (1.83) or transformational (1.86) sites. This suggests that how well the story telling process was managed influenced the degree of change and/or it foreshadowed the rest of the effort.

According to the participant survey, understanding the purpose of the summit, and the purpose of AI prior to the summit, was significantly higher in the transformational sites than in the other two, and significantly higher in the incremental sites from the no change sites. These are the only summit participant survey items with significant differences that correlate in the expected direction with the degree of change. This shows that transformational sites did the best job of either communicating how AI works and/or engaging the summit attendees prior to the summit, while no change sites did the worst.

All of this suggests that the quality of the Discovery phase may be an important determinant of how transformational the entire inquiry is. Interestingly, all the sites with transformational impacts had appreciative topics that were specifically focused on students and learning. Only one of the no change sites had such a topic. All the rest of the sites had topics with either a vague, broad focus or focused on other ideals.

The Influence of the Summit

The 65 item summit participant survey collected after each summit did a good job of predicting the no change sites from the incremental change sites. On many of the variables tested, the incremental sites scored significantly higher than the no change sites. However this survey did not produce results in the expected direction. On most measures, the transformational sites scored the same as the no change sites with curvilinear results on all scales but the one in the previous paragraph. Clearly, the incremental sites were the ones where participants were most satisfied with all aspects of the appreciative inquiry while participants at transformational sites responded quite similarly to the no change site respondents.

There were three scales where the transformational sites scored significantly higher than the no change sites: discovery created excitement, boldness of design statements, designs are actionable. However, on all measures there wasn't that much difference between any of the sites. Overall, the summit experience of all sites was positive. For example, the average response of all participants to the

item "I am confident that good things are going to happen as a result of this Summit" was 4.24 (out of 5). Similarly, the average response to the item "I am excited by all of the potential and opportunity that I see to make positive changes" was 4.26.

Surveys on the summits completed by the District AI Team however, have more findings in the expected direction. Nine of the 29 items showed significant differences ($p < 1.0$) in the expected direction and on most items the no change sites scored lowest. Looking at the pattern of responses suggests two things. 1) The extent to which Design statements were grounded in the group's dreams and widely supported was related to degree of change – the more that happened at the Summit the more transformational the outcome. 2) The willingness of people to speak their minds and the creativity and excitement people expressed toward the design statements was significantly associated with level of change.

Overall the data suggest that participant attitudes toward their summit experience are not a good guide to the level of change that can be expected from an appreciative inquiry, at least when they are highly positive. While the no change sites did tend to score a little lower on various measures, incremental change sites tended to score a little higher, thus resulting in a curvilinear relationship with degree of change. Informed observer ratings were a better predictor of the impact of the summits than participant ratings but even those showed only a few significant differences. What consistently showed up as differentiating the sites in the expected direction was the generativity of the design phase.

The Influence of Change Management Variables

In addition to variables specific to appreciative inquiry, the study tracked some variables that are consistently associated with the success of change processes. The findings described below are based on observations and interviews with various district and site personnel. Confirming results from the surveys are noted as well.

Sponsorship (leadership from district management)

Variations in district sponsorship had no consistent influence on impact.

Site Leadership (school administrators)

The level of engagement and passion of the principals in each site was a fairly strong predictor of change. Data from the pre-summit observation forms show a clear pattern of correlation between level of school sponsorship before the summit and degree of change. Additionally, ratings of site sponsorship by the District AI Team showed transformational sites with much higher quality local sponsorship than the other sites. Findings from interviews tend to confirm this pattern. However, it should be noted that two of the transformational sites had new principals

in September 2006 and were still able, on the basis of other leadership in the system, to move forward.

It is also probably significant that both no change sites had strained relationships between the principals and a significant number of staff before the AI began. None of the other sites had this problem.

Right system and participants in the change process

According to the District AI Team ratings, sites with no change were significantly worse at including the right people in the inquiry or the summit given the focus chosen for the inquiry.

Quality of internal change agents (site coordinators, active site committee members)

There was some relationship between the skills, effectiveness and credibility of internal change agents and level of change. The no change sites clearly lacked highly credible and/or committed change agents. However, there was not a perfect relationship here as one of the transformational sites had a site coordinator who was widely seen as lacking credibility.

Level of current "pain" (degree of shared concern in the site prior to the AI)

Sites where there were no identified "problems" that the AI was attempting to solve either had no change or incremental change. When there were obvious, unresolved conflicts in the system not addressed by the AI there was no change. It is probably significant that the two sites with the highest levels of morale and pride prior to the AI were the two that experienced only incremental changes. At both sites there weren't any discernable concerns inside their schools (things are great as they are); any concerns were with District or Governmental policies. Sites that experienced transformational changes, however, were those where the AI was connected to real, shared concerns within the schools and helped to "solve problems" that were meaningful to participants.

Degree of effort to integrate outcomes of summit back into sites

By and large, the more effort leaders put into integrating the results of the summit back into their schools, the more change observed.

Other Observations Worth Noting

The appreciative inquiry was successful at increasing student engagement and empowerment where increasing student empowerment was a priority for school administrators. One of the six "findings" from the learning inquiry was that learning is often tied to level of student engagement. The AI process created a lot of opportunity for student engagement and leadership that quickly rippled out if nourished.

The appreciative inquiry was also successful at building relationships between groups that participated together in it. Only one multi-school site did not experience significant gains in inter-school collaboration. In that site the focus of the inquiry seemed to increase the sense of difference between the high school and the elementary school. In the other sites, the focus of the inquiry supported the emergence of a common identity for all participants. This finding is consistent with the pre-identity, post-identity hypothesis about the effects of appreciative inquiry (Bushe, 2001). In sites where participants came from a variety of groups that did not identify with each others, the transformational effects came from developing a common identity. In those sites were participants already indentified with each other, changes were directed entirely toward the effectiveness of the schools.

It was noted by District Management Team members that the appreciative inquiry increased distributed leadership in most of the sites. How leadership emerged and influenced the impact of the AI varied greatly, however. It's hard to discern any patterns. In two transformational cases passionate administrators were central to the change though both sites had strong informal leaders too. In a third it was completely a grass roots affair – the initiating principal left in the midst of the process. In a fourth case it was a combination of administrators and informal leadership that drove the change. In the incremental cases both have effective administrators steering the process with non-administrative leaders championing specific projects. What did seem to happen in all change sites, however, was that more junior teachers emerged as informal leaders during the process. This was noted as unusual as leadership in schools in this district tends to be tied to seniority.

There is evidence that the Appreciative Inquiry process had transformational effects beyond the sites themselves. First of all, the inquiry resulted in a new model of the core elements that effect student learning that has become the basis for District and school plans. There are numerous instances of the District, and individual schools throughout the District, taking an appreciative approach to issues. One of the most transformational is in the engagement of teachers in school planning processes. Prior to the Appreciative Inquiry, the teachers' unions in this district were opposed to the school planning process and in most schools teachers did not participate. Subsequently, many schools adopted appreciative approaches to school planning and the union has endorsed teacher participation in those processes. But an analysis of the impact of AI on the District as a whole is beyond the scope of this paper.

Summary of Insights about AI Practice

The level of positive affect generated by the inquiry was not a predictor of the level of change. In all sites, and particularly post-identity ones, the generation of new, compelling ideas was central to the change process. This supports recent arguments that it is generativity, and not "positivity", that is central to the AI change process (Bright, Powley, Fry & Barrett, 2010: Bushe, 2007; 2010). Appreciative Inquiry was originally designed in response to Gergen's (1978; 1982) call for more generative theorizing in social science. Gergen defined generativity 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*).* Bushe (2007) argues that "AI can be generative in a number of ways. It is the quest for new ideas, images, theories and models that liberate our collective aspirations, alter the social construction of reality and, in the process, make available decisions and actions that were not available or did not occur to us before. When successful, AI generates spontaneous, unsupervised, individual, group and organizational action toward a better future" (Bushe, 2007, p.30). While the "positive" has captivated commentary on AI it seems that it may not be what is actually central to AI's capacity for planned, transformational change. Since all sites showed high levels of positive affect at the completion of the summits, it might be that positive affect is a necessary but not sufficient condition for transformational change. That proposition cannot be tested with these data.

During the Discovery Phase, the viral interviewing strategy accomplished the three objectives (generate a large number of stories, create interest and enthusiasm in the AI process, and begin changing the discourse in the sites) where it was competently executed. Consistent with AI theory (Barrett & Fry, 2005; Ludema, 2002) the stories were extremely powerful in capturing people's attention and in generating positive dialogue among and between various stakeholders. The synergenesis process (Bushe, 2007) was a hi-point learning experience for most of those who participated in it and was responsible for many of the ideas that later proved to be transformational. These findings are consistent with Vanstone & Dalbiez's (2008) proposal that the Discovery phase should be prolonged and designed to maximize the impact of the AI long before a Summit takes place.

During the summit it was possible to create a climate that led to positive, energized, design statements without beginning a summit with appreciative interviews. That was probably done by using a playful mix of art and theatre during the Dream phase – it is fun, builds bridges, and helps create a climate that supports the rest of the AI process. A 2 day summit was rushed, but it was just enough time

to kick start or amplify collective change processes at the 6 change sites. The two-step Design Phase process resulted in quality, detailed, and provocative design statements and some of these were also sources of transformational ideas. Utilizing an "improvisation" as opposed to "implementation" Destiny phase during the summit (Bushe, 2010; Bushe & Kassam, 2005), and encouraging individual action, was highly energizing for both followers and leaders. However, consistent with other experiences many of the design statements and commitments to action faded with time (Powley, Fry, Barrett & Bright, 2004; Vanstone & Dabaiez, 2008).

The study highlights that many of the normal organization development processes required for successful change are required for appreciative inquiry as well. AI does not magically overcome poor leadership, communication failures, and unresolved conflicts. To be transformational, the AI process required passionate, committed leadership from people with credibility in the schools. Encouraging the use of ODR's Sponsor-Change Agent-Target model (Connor, 1993), and helping the internal change agents to build good sponsorship at both the District and site levels, helped ensure critical acts of leadership occurred in the right place at the right time. A lack of appropriate or committed sponsorship was related to a lack of change.

Finally it is important to note that the inquiry needed to address some problem, issue or concern that was widely shared for transformational change to occur. Perhaps the strongest reason the incremental sites did not experience transformational change was because stakeholders were pretty happy with their leaders and with their schools. By contrast, at each of the transformational sites there were widely acknowledged "problems" that the AI addressed. The results suggest that it is inaccurate to say that AI is not concerned with solving problems. If problems aren't solved, how much energy will organizational leaders and members really have to put into the change process? Instead, it suggests that AI is transformational when it addresses problems that are important to organizational members not through problem-solving, but through generativity.

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