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Appreciative Inquiry: A Transformative Approach for Initiating Shared Leadership and Organizational Learning

Mary M. SOMERVILLE¹, Marical FARNER²

Abstract

Auraria Library leaders at the University of Colorado Denver, USA employed Appreciative Inquiry (AI) principles, processes, and practices to inclusively re-design organizational structure, social relationships, knowledge systems, and workplace aspirations. Throughout the four year period, from 2008 through 2012, intervention activities employed life generating properties which were appreciative, applicable, provocative, and collaborative. Iterative application of the 4-Cycle intervention model (discovery, dream, design, and destiny) and associated AI principles advanced shared leadership and organizational learning capacities within a revitalized workplace culture. Iterative processes of reflection, reframing, and reinterpretation now sustain ongoing and inclusive inquiry that is appreciative, applicable, provocative, and collaborative.

Keywords: Appreciative Inquiry; shared leadership; organizational learning.

Introduction

Information and knowledge organization leaders are increasingly recognizing the importance of transitioning current employees into new roles and responsibilities within redesigned Digital Age workplace environments. With that intention, the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) framework was applied to comprehensive re-invention of the Auraria Library at University of Colorado Denver, USA over a four year period commencing in 2008. Workplace examples and evaluative results suggest the efficacy of an AI approach for contemporary information and knowledge organizations which aspire to foster shared leadership and organizational learning practices.

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Digital Migration

The Auraria Library redesign initiative was fueled by the recognition that “library services in higher education will continue to be crucial to the core processes of learning, teaching, and research as long as the key library structures, processes, services, and staff roles evolve to accommodate epochal changes occurring in publishing and communications” (Wawrzaszek & Wedaman, 2008: 2). In response, libraries must actively embrace the changes in the information environment to stay relevant in the 2.0 world. Library staff members must transition from “their inherited position as the mediators of a print-focused, highly controlled environment to become collaborators in a multimedia rich, user-empowered, disintermediated free-for-all where their value will be proven only by demonstrably improving outcomes in learning, teaching, and research” (Wawrzaszek & Wedaman, 2008: 2). In so doing, they can survive in the Digital Age by inventing new ways of expressing libraries’ distinctive advantages (Liu, Liao, & Guo, 2009).

The traditional mission of academic libraries has been to select, collect, and preserve information and to facilitate access to and use of this information. This mission has largely been expressed in a print-centered world, where the book is the primary container of data and information. In a print world, local collections are vitally important: books and journals on the shelf provide the most effective access to information; they are discovered and obtained much more easily than resources held by other institutions; and the number of items owned is an appropriate measure of library value and institutional status. It follows that in this local and print-based context, libraries were revered, specialized, stable organizations with unquestioned importance on campus – in many instances, at the heart of the campus both figuratively and literally. The librarian acted as mediator to the collections of information through classification, reference, instruction, and access services. In this traditional environment, library work was, by and large, consistent and unchanging, governed by well organized professional principles and practices appropriately fulfilled through an entrenched organizational hierarchy (Wawrzaszek & Wedaman, 2008).

Into this orderly and ordered world came digitized art, music, and film; online journals and newspapers; websites and weblogs – all of which have dramatically changed expectations and experiences. Formats, creators, and publishers continue to rapidly proliferate, irrevocably altering traditional knowledge creation practices, including well established scholarly communication systems. Information is now ubiquitous and global, not specialized and local, permitting information consumers to search and find independently, eroding the need for librarians’ traditional mediation services. Instead, with knowledge production aspirations, individuals expect to seamlessly participate in information discovery, evaluation, selection, and creation. They express impatience with disaggregated services – as

reflected in libraries' traditionally separated functions of evaluating, selecting, classifying, consulting, instructing, housing, and circulating (Wawrzaszek & Wed-aman, 2008).

As libraries are confronted by disruptive technologies and their consequences (Somerville, Gaetz, & Lee, 2010), libraries, publishers, and vendors are disrupted (Somerville, Schader, & Sack, 2012). "The structures and practices of libraries will no more withstand the technological changes we are facing than the scribal culture withstood the changes brought on by the printing press. Change will not be instantaneous, but it will be relentless" (Lewis, 2007: 419). The situation serves as a call for action for libraries: "real change requires real change. Incremental adjustments at the margins will not suffice; rather, alterations in fundamental practice will be needed" (Lewis, 2007: 420).

Organizational Context

Within this context in 2008, the Auraria Library welcomed a new Director amidst announcements of inevitable budget cuts. As a consequence, in the first twelve months, only one mission-critical position could be filled, despite twelve positions vacant due to university-incentivized retirements and voluntary resignations. At the conclusion of the Library Director's first year, a university budget reduction permanently eliminated unfilled positions, leaving only 65 employees, including 24 librarians, to serve more than 47,000 students and 2000 faculty. Four years later, following implementation of Appreciative Inquiry, the organization is flourishing despite a 30% reduction in staffing and a growing student population approaching 50,000.

The organization was typical of libraries worldwide which are struggling to adapt to a changing information landscape, disruptive new technologies, and escalating user expectations. A significant majority of the staff had been employed well over twenty years in the organization. They were hired to perform largely routine tasks involving a bounded universe of peer-reviewed publications and assorted catalogs, indexes, and abstracts. Now, however, amidst unceasing changes, staff members were required to both acquire new technology skills and also demonstrate creative problem solving. Prior to the implementation of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) interventions, employees lamented their circumstances, demonstrated risk aversion, avoided technology training, and reified 'the way things have always been done here.'

Rather than perpetuate sullen problem centered conversations, an AI approach was introduced for "engaging participants in a collective process of reframing and generating possible futures" (Hart, Conklin, & Allen, 2008, p. 634). The methodology recognizes and fortifies those things that give life (health, vitality,

excellence) to living systems, thereby valuing and honoring the past even as it bridges to the future. As this organizational example illustrates, by avoiding deficit discourse, Appreciative Inquiry ensures that vital elements of exploration and discovery stimulate insights to reveal new potentialities and possibilities which can build on earlier successes and strengths.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has the potential to take an organization beyond disenchantment with the past, confusion about the present, and concern about the future through offering alternative conceptions of knowledge, fresh discourse on human potential, and exciting directions for approaching change. Such transformation occurs through “changes in the identity of the system and qualitative changes in the state of being of that system” (Bushe & Kassam, 2005, p. 162). This is accomplished by “a positive approach to change” (Kelly, 2010, p. 163) that initiates a

“co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives ‘life’ to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. ... In AI, the arduous task of intervention gives way to the speed of imagination and innovation; ... there is discovery, dream, and design” (Cooperrider & Whitney, n.d., p. 3).

The transformative 4-Cycle intervention model associated with Appreciative Inquiry begins with discovery (appreciating what is), then moves onto dream (imagining what could be), which is followed by design (determining what should be), and then destiny (creating what will be). During the discovery process of inquiry, ‘stories’ about their best experiences are collected from system members and other stakeholders. Participants are asked about their personal experience of the ‘affirmative topic’ (the focus of the inquiry) – e.g., best work experience, best team experience, best user experience. This phase recognizes the role of narrative (stories) in organizational life –i.e., organizational reality is created and perpetuated through the stories told (Ludema, 2002).

A change in stories told can alter the inner organizational dialogue (Bushe, 2001) because usually a dominant story line (macronarrative) is used to understand the past, present, and future. As dozens of micronarratives are expressed, a new dominant story line of appreciative language and ideas can emerge (Ludema,

2002). These elements ‘from the ground’ of peak experiences and ‘from the ground up’ in the organization shift the core assumptions which employees use to make decisions and take actions (Bushe & Kassam, 2005).

These outcomes are accomplished through two sets of principles, which provide structure for renegotiating ‘sensemaking’ (Weick, 1995) and (re)creating meaning within the culture (Schein, 1991) through iterative processes of reflection, reframing, and reinterpretation (Keefe & Pesut, 2004). The first four AI principles require that:

- The inquiry begins with appreciation,
- The inquiry is applicable,
- The inquiry is provocative, and
- The inquiry is collaborative (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987).

The first AI principle states that - rather than focusing on problems that need to be solved – organizational members focus on examples of the organization at its best. The second principle assumes that the outcomes of an AI have to be applicable to the circumstances in which the inquiry takes place and should result in action. The third principle acknowledges that the inquiry should create knowledge, models, and images that are compelling to employees and provoke them to action. The final principle reinforces that staff members must be part of the design and execution of the inquiry (Bushe & Kassam, 2005).

A second set of Appreciative Inquiry principles further clarifies intended outcomes and organizational significance:

- The constructivist principle,
- The principles of simultaneity,
- The poetic principle,
- The anticipatory principle, and
- The positive principle (Bushe & Kassam, 2005).

The first principle recognizes that organizations are socially co-constructed realities. Therefore, AI should engage as many members as possible in the inquiry into desirable collective futures. The principle of simultaneity is based in the belief that inquiry is intervention, that as we inquire into human systems, we change them. “The seeds of change – that is, the things people think and talk about, the things people discover and learn, and the things that inform dialogue and inspire images of the future – are implicit in the very first questions we ask” (Cooperrider & Whitney, n.d., p. 5). The poetic principle states that organizational life is expressed in the stories that people tell one another and the story of the

organization is constantly being co-authored to “refashion anticipatory reality” (Cooperrider & Whitney, n.d., p. 17). In practice, this means that the language of inquiry has important outcomes in and of itself. Therefore, in all phases of inquiry, words should enliven and inspire the best in people. Finally, the positive principle recognizes that sustainable change is fueled by positive emotional energy. “What we have found is that the more positive the question we ask in our work the more long lasting and successful the change effort. ... The major thing we do that makes the difference is to craft and seed, in better and more catalytic ways, the unconditional positive question” (Cooperrider & Whitney, n.d., p. 17).

Within this framework, the following elements can be applied to determining AI intervention success:

- Transformative change that produced qualitative shift in the state of being or nature of identity of the system (as opposed to new processes, procedures, plans, or methods applied without changing basic nature of the system),
- New knowledge (versus new processes) that led to collective creation of a new referential base (as opposed to creating consensus around a specific end),
- Generative metaphor (a persistent symbol – e.g., memory of key event) that held meaning for group members and contained within it new lenses and new possibilities for action,
- Adherence to 9 principles,
- Adherence to 4-D cycle (discovery, dream, design, and destiny),
- Collecting and sharing stories,
- Ground breaking and shifting – i.e., if the process surfaced some element of the organization for increased inspection, it is considered ‘figure’; if the process of inquiry was able to penetrate deeply enough to change or create new background assumptions on which all the actions of the organization would be based, it is considered ‘ground’, and
- Action oriented improvisation - i.e., when the goal pursued in the destiny phase is a specific tangible change agreed upon by key decision makers or a consensus of those involved, it is considered implemented, whereas an improvisation is reflected in many continuous, sometimes disparate changes that are linked to a deeper fundamental change in how the organization is perceived (Bushe & Kassam, 2005).

While all these elements and considerations are important to organizational change, focus on evoking new worlds of meaning while enabling locally initiated changes is key to substantive and sustainable organizational transformation (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). Therefore, Auraria Library leaders invested considerable energy and effort in cultivating this element.

Organizational Implementation

Organizational transformation at the Auraria Library was fortified by reliance on constructivist, simultaneity, poetic, anticipatory, and positive principles of Appreciative Inquiry which recognize that organizations reflect socially co-constructed realities. Therefore, action-oriented inquiry activities which intentionally co-create new organizational stories can enliven and inspire the best in people. In the Auraria Library example, these principles, processes, and assumptions are illustrated through a transformative 4-Cycle conversation model (Norum, 2008) that begins with discovery (appreciating what is), then moves into dream (imagining what could be), which is followed by design (determining what should be), and then destiny (creating what will be). During the discovery process, stories about best experiences were collected from organizational members. Then, through concurrent activities involving intentional redesign of an organizational environment conducive to shared leadership and organizational learning, as expressed through inclusive communication, decision making, and strategic planning systems, new workplace stories and ‘worlds of meaning’ were created.

Discovery

To surface staff passions, strengths and interests, the new Library Director conducted individual interviews with each employee to gain an appreciation for potential employee aptitudes and commitments. In contrast to the organization’s problem solving orientation, her questions included:

- What are your strengths? What is your value to the organization? How do you contribute?
- What do you appreciate most about the Auraria Library? In what ways does the Library excel?
- What are your hopes and dreams for the Library in the future? How do you see yourself contributing to these achievements?
- Recall a situation in this Library when you worked well as a member of a team. Describe the experience. What made this successful?
- Describe a leader who has influenced you. How did that person interact with you? Describe some specific instances in which you experienced his or her leadership influence (adapted from Sullivan, 2004).

The outcomes of these initial Appreciative Inquiry conversations confirmed the breadth and depth of expertise and aspiration among staff members. In particular, results corroborated employees’ collective commitment to increase Library centrality in learning, teaching, and research activities. The usage of Appreciative Inquiry also served to signal the new Director’s intention to build on positive strengths and accomplishments during organizational redesign exercises aimed at

achieving new synergies through constituting formal and informal ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger, McDermott, & Synder, 2002).

Dream

Based on AI interview results, the Director identified potential leaders (with line authority and titled Associate Directors) within the organization. She invited this group to dream with her. Extensive dialogue and reflection surfaced these workplace principles: provide training to develop Digital Age staff competencies, identify ‘in house’ staff promotion opportunities, enable decision making at the lowest appropriate level, and encourage leadership initiative throughout the organization.

The Associate Directors (ADs) then envisioned the elements of a ‘shared leadership’ workplace culture – in sharp contrast to the previous hierarchical structure and bureaucratic processes. In such an environment, communication, decision making, and planning systems would enable fluid information exchange which informed ‘bottom up’ – rather than ‘top down’ – idea generation. Response to change and adaptation to technologies would be pro-active, even anticipatory – rather than reactive. Abundant opportunities would exist for individual and collective development of skills and interests. Conversations would be supportive, trust implicit, ideas honored, learning fostered, and engagement inherent. Unconstrained by ‘deficit dialogue,’ a ‘rich picture’ of the ideal organization began to emerge through the dreaming process.

Design

External consultants then facilitated inclusive participatory processes for employees – and sometimes stakeholders too - to pursue aspects of the discovery and dream phase outcomes. Each consultant began their AI intervention with a discovery and dream phase and then slowly (in some cases as long as one year) co-created with employees a clear vision which combined the best of what is from the present, the best of what was from the past, and the ideal of what should be for the future.

Guided by Rick Lugg, R2 Consulting Partners, a comprehensive re-invention of technical services staff was initiated in 2009. Informed by an electronic resources life cycle model (Pan and Howard, 2009; Pan and Howard, 2010), the changes acknowledged electronic resources (rather than print resources) as the ‘main-stream workflow,’ embraced a team approach to manage a fluid environment, produced a formulaic ‘carrying capacity’ which limits print collection size, and anticipated cross-functional communication needs and strategies (Pan and Lugg, 2010; Pan, Bradbeer, & Jurries, 2011).

In a concurrent initiative facilitated by consultant Maureen Sullivan, Professor of Practice in the Simmons College Graduate School of Library and Information Science, a re-invention of public services staff was also initiated. Over a twelve month period, thirty employees focused on service, collections, and outreach, mindful of the best of what is from the present, the best of what was from the past, and the ideal of what should be for the future. Two years later, staff members had significantly revised responsibilities, codified in annual performance plans. Comprehensive changes in organizational assumptions now strategically integrate scholarly resources within the academic curriculum, employ new work flows for resource sharing and information delivery services, and ensure that librarian specialists addresses high level research consultation and resource development needs. This is in sharp contrast to the former assumptions that valued ‘sitting at the reference desk’ and ‘just in case’ collection development practices.

To ensure organization wide benefit from unit and cross-unit discourse and decisions, an organizational system for managing knowledge flow was collaboratively designed with guidance from Anita Mirijamdotter, Professor of Social Informatics at Linneaus University in Sweden (Mirijamdotter, 2010; Somerville & Mirijamdotter, 2012). She worked with staff from across the organizations to identify the ideal characteristics of decision making, communication, and planning system – both physical (face-to-face) and virtual (Somerville & Howard, 2010). As a consequence, a wiki-based knowledge management system (Mirijamdotter & Somerville, 2011) was implemented to ensure easy discovery and access to data that “provides valuable evidence for increasing useful information which, when combined with human interaction, forms knowledge that gives people the wisdom to make good decisions” (Hayes & Kent, 2010: 121). Regular unit, cross functional, and library wide meetings further ensure ample dialogue and reflection to enable informed learning and shared leadership. Intense examination and improvement of ‘information practices’ (Bruce, 2008; Somerville, 2009; Lloyd, 2010; Weiner, 2011) contributed “to workplace learning by highlighting the relationship between different modalities of information, and the relationship between workplace learning and professional identity” (Lloyd & Somerville, 2006: 186).

Throughout the four year period, organizational members were engaged in the co-creation of an ideal workplace and an emergent ‘macronarrative’ which inspired appreciative language and ideas (Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990), as reflected in the ‘bottom up’ generation of a ‘new library’ metaphor. When the former description of the Library as a ‘parking lot for books’ was replaced with the phrase ‘new library,’ it became a source of desire, ideal and inspiration to employees and helped to shift core assumptions and values (Bushe & Kassam, 2005) with promising organizational renewal consequences. “I would love to see that in the new library...” became a common saying as did the converse “that wouldn’t belong in the new library.” Evaluative measures moving toward a co-created

future no longer included discourse about the way things used to be or had to be, given external constraints, and were instead focused on the way things could be and should be, given new circumstances. Furthermore, initiatives progressively adopted a “radical proposition – that active involvement and collaboration with present and potential library users is required for the evolution of a learner centred approach for co-designing libraries of the future” (Somerville & Howard, 2008: 258).

Quite naturally, the most recent AI intervention involves repurposing and re-inventing the library building. Initial dreaming activities occurred in graduate level University architectural studios. Supervised by seasoned architecture professors, students conducted independent research on the implications of changing University teaching, learning, and research trends. Unconcerned about (real or imagined) budgetary constraints, they created ambitious models and renderings depicting renovated library facilities. The students’ work was juried by local architects who critiqued how well the proposed designs met users’ requirements and expectations. Cash prizes were awarded to the top ranked designs, which were then presented to Library staff. In their presentations, students illustrated that because ‘form follows function,’ academic library buildings must be re-imagined in order to successfully adapt to a rapidly changing scholarly ecosystem (Garcia-Marco, 2011) and higher education environment.

At the culmination of some additional participatory action research projects conducted over an eighteen month period, a professional architectural firm, Humphries Poi Architects in Denver, Colorado, facilitated ‘charette’ design workshops involving library employees, campus planners, student representatives, professors, and administrators (Brown-Sica, Sobel, & Rogers, 2010; Somerville & Brown-Sica, 2011, Brown-Sica, 2012, Somerville & Howard, 2012). Renderings illustrate the new ‘design concept’ for the ‘new library’ in which former assumptions about library as book warehouse for quiet study have been replaced by a shift from ‘ownership to access’ and migration from print to electronic resources. The charette design process also surfaced new insights about library as ‘learning space’ for both staff who now occupy collaborative work areas and students who now enjoy collaborative study spaces. With the completion of Phase 1 of the renovation in early 2012, new architectural ‘forms’ have begun to inspire and enable emerging new organizational ‘functions’ predictive of exciting future opportunities for the Library and its communities.

Destiny

During the discovery, dream, and design phases, participants often expressed the desire for a progressive leadership model to ensure convergence and confluence of ideas from all levels of the organization. This reflected a change in employees’ image of the workplace, as they grew to newly appreciate the orga-

nization as “a living, dynamic system of interconnected relationships and networks of influence” (Fletcher & Käufer, 2003: 21). This shift in the conception of an organization was accompanied by a corresponding shift in the notion of leadership. Employees now recognize that, within a living system, successful leadership practices occur within a system of interdependencies at different levels within the organization (Nonaka, Toyama, & Konno, 2000; Nonaka, Toyama, & Hirata, 2008; Scharmer, 2009).

It follows that the highly interdependent nature of organizational learning through ‘shared leadership’ (Pearce & Conger, 2003) requires transformation of the organizational practices, structures, and relationships typically found in traditional workplaces (Sullivan, 1991; Hayes & Sullivan, 2003; Somerville, 2009). Therefore, in the Auraria Library, “shared leadership refers to a team property whereby leadership is distributed among team members rather than focused on a single designated leader” (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007: 1217). This approach recognizes that “as higher education and academic libraries continue to function in an environment of fast paced change, ... organizations cannot wait for leadership decisions to be pushed up to the top for action” (Cawthorne, 2010: 156).

The shared leadership conception is also explicitly expressed through a representative Shared Leadership Team comprised of both supervisors and non-supervisors which coordinate Appreciative Inquiry-generated initiatives such as these:

- redesign of functional units through iterative appreciative inquiry processes to identify ‘the best person for the job,’ which included transfers for persons indicating interest and ability for other types of work (Pan & Howard, 2009; Pan & Howard, 2010),
- redesign of the organizational structure to create a new Shared Leadership Team and Library committee structure that ensures information exchange and knowledge creation through dialogue and reflection (Somerville & Howard, 2010),
- new design of communications, decision making, and planning systems with virtual and face-to-face (f2f) components that ensures easy information access and contextualizing dialogue experiences (Mirijamdotter, 2010; Mirijamdotter & Somerville, 2011; Somerville & Mirijamdotter, 2012),
- new professional and staff performance plans illustrating new roles and responsibilities which value holistic and interconnected work relationships and integrated work flows and collaborative processes (Somerville & Mirijamdotter, 2012),
- new ‘design concept’ for renovated library facility, which embodies new means of expressing traditional professional values and expertise through technology-enabled collaborative learning spaces for both students and staff (Somerville & Brown-Sica, 2011), and

- new marketing messages and branding approaches which advance a 'new library' image in organizational collaterals, web-based environments, and face-to-face interactions, fortified by inclusive, participatory Appreciative Inquiry research processes which model an emergent 'dreamer/explorer' generative metaphor (Somerville & Howard, 2012).

Additionally, as new staff members are recruited, Appreciative Inquiry interview questions ensure ready contributors to this vibrant workplace culture. In a recent search for web master, candidates were asked:

- Describe your ideal work environment. What do you contribute? How do you interact?
- Think of a high point in your experience of leading elsewhere. How was it life-giving?
- Recall an ideal supervisor. How did s/he interact well with you and your co-workers?
- Describe a time when you were most alive (involved, engaged, excited) in your work.
- What do you value deeply? How are those values reflected in your best work outcomes?

'On boarding' experiences for orienting newly hired staff provide explicit explanations of the positive Appreciative Inquiry philosophy and practices which now permeate evidence-based organizational decision making. Ongoing AI action 'research for change' (Reed, 2007) continues to inform ways of generating and gathering information which honor variations in experiences among campus constituencies. In turn, inclusive systems for reflection and dialogue value diversity in perspectives among library 'action researchers' who improve their professional practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010) as they appreciatively interpret findings and present insights, thereby modeling the inquiry and exploration that they seek to inspire and enable in others.

Organizational Learning

These AI interventions have incrementally constructed an information-centered, action-oriented, and outcomes-focused workplace environment. Pervasive shared leadership competencies include newly applying traditional library science expertise to achieve heightened outcomes demonstrating collaboration, collegiality, and organizational effectiveness (Kaerst-Brown, Nicholson, von Dran, & Stanton, 2004). Perpetual workplace learning (and relearning) is fueled and enabled by

applying professional expertise in asking good questions, selecting authoritative sources, creating relevant interpretations, organizing emerging insights, and communicating ideas to inform, educate, and influence. A commitment to action ensures that while workplace inquiry serves to explore, engage, and extend relationships among people and ideas, initiatives also simultaneously bring about improvements in situations while learning from the process of deriving the change. Workplace culture therefore supports ongoing interplay of action, observation, and evaluation to enable and animate nimble responsiveness and organizational learning aimed at ever-deepening insight and performance.

Over time and with practice, visioning together has developed rich workplace context within which individuals and teams generate organizational insights and focus energies. For instance, staff members now understand the organization as comprised of communities where knowledge, identity, and learning are situated. This conception acknowledges the social context of learning - i.e., that knowledge is acquired and understood through action, interaction, and sharing with others. It follows that building knowledge production capability within the organization relies on development and implementation of appropriate, flexible organizational environments that foster robust exchange relationships and effective collaborations (von Kough, Ichijo, & Nonaka, 2000).

This organizational learning framework integrates notions of communities of practice (Wenger 1998, 2000) and theories on knowledge creation (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka, Toyama, & Hirata, 2008) within a framework for information-centered learning (Bruce, 2008; Somerville & Howard, 2010; Bruce, Hughes, & Somerville, 2012; Somerville & Mirijamdotter, 2012). It assumes that organizational capacity is fueled by information encounters experienced within ever expanding workplace contexts. Toward that end, workplace redesign purposefully fosters contextualizing information interactions to advance knowledge sharing and further community building.

At the Auraria Library, 'organization' now refers to a purposeful social interaction system which recognizes that collective information and knowledge capabilities develop through workplace socialization processes. From this viewpoint, ongoing AI projects aim to further the sustainable social interactions which, through organizational systems catalyzed by dialogue and reflection, enable investigation and negotiation of the interests, judgments, and decisions through which people learn interdependently. 'Culture' is therefore understood as a shared basis of appreciation and action developed through communication expressed through increasingly effective collaborative professional informative practices. Success indicators acknowledge that a primary source of value creation lies in social relationships which are oftentimes informal, that build learning communities and foster knowledge production to catalyze reflective insights and unsolved curiosities into continuous learning activities.

Concluding Reflections

Four years into the library redesign initiative, there is widespread recognition that the Library has evolved its structures, processes, and relationships to accommodate (and anticipate) migration from a print to an electronic information universe which continues to dynamically transform as disruptive technologies, scholarly practices, and business models change. To enable transformative learning – including the capacity to use information to learn in every changing circumstances, Library members have comprehensively re-invented their assumptions about service, place, interactions, and resources. In so doing, Auraria Library employees have adopted a learning organization conception “where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (Senge, 1990: 3). A robust shared leadership conception catalyzes and enables ideas, inquiries, and interactions which serve to co-design and co-create new organizational realities through perpetual learning.

AI generated outcomes are realized through application of two sets of Appreciative Inquiry principles. Firstly, inquiry is appreciative, applicable, provocative, and collaborative. Outcome generation observes the constructivist principle – which recognizes that organizations advance socially co-constructed realities, the simultaneity principle – which acknowledges that the process of examining human systems changes them, the poetic and anticipatory principles – which observes that organizational life is expressed in co-authored stories which can ‘refashion anticipatory reality,’ and the positive principle – which values the power of positive emotional energy to improve situations.

Auraria Library outcomes suggest that Appreciative Inquiry philosophy grounded in dialogue and reflection based practices can stimulate organizational innovation orchestrated through shared leadership principles. A vibrant generative metaphor – in this instance, an explorer-dreamer ‘brand’ for the new library - can ignite and inspire common vision of a collectively desired future (Srivastva & Barrett, 1988). Additionally, most employees now actively seek ongoing learning opportunities, leaving only a small number of staff who, for reasons of aptitude or attitude, remain resistant to change.

As Auraria Library interventions evidence, “for the innovative, adventurous and resilient, the horizons are exciting indeed” (Gergen, 1982: 271), especially when Appreciative Inquiry is paired with strong leadership and learning practices. Then organizational capacity can increasingly involve wider circles of consultation, cooperation, and collaboration that anticipate accelerating future demands for nimble responsiveness and perpetual learning.

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