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# AI Research Notes

edited by Lena Holmberg and Jan Reed

AI Research Notes carries news of AI research developments. We'd like to make it as collaborative and appreciative as we can – we know that many of you are working and thinking about the relationship between academic research and AI, and that you have news, comments and questions which we'd like you to contribute.

**In this section**

- 'Innovation through Generative Design' by Michel Avital
- Notes on Michel Avital's Paper by Diana Whitney
- Relevance for Research by Jan Reed

This month's research notes begins with a paper from Michel Avital on innovation through generative design. This is followed by a response from Diana Whitney and from Jan Reed. At first reading, Michel's paper might not seem like research, but as you read, the parallels and common interests will become clear. Generative design can be a research goal, and the approach research can take is the same as that involved in generative design. Read on, and see what you think!

Jan Reed and Lena Holmberg

**Invitation to contribute**

The next research notes column will focus on the ways in which the academic world can work with AI practitioners to develop research and questioning. It will carry a piece by Kaj Voetmann about 'the people's university' and he will extend his discussion in the following issue as well. Comments, reflections and news are warmly welcomed.

Please send suggestions and material to [jan.reed@unn.ac.uk](mailto:jan.reed@unn.ac.uk) or [lmholmberg@gmail.com](mailto:lmholmberg@gmail.com)!

## Innovation through Generative Design

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Innovation is about practical novelty. The bulk of the literature that covers the conditions conducive to innovation emphasizes the features of a work environment that promotes creativity with no regard to the desirable features of the information technology-based support systems in that context. Building on the concept of generative design, I address this void by suggesting a set of generalizable considerations for designing systems that are conducive to innovation and innovative processes. More specifically, I propose that such systems should be evocative, engaging, adaptive and open.

In general, being generative refers to having an evocative power or aptitude that can result in producing or creating something (Weick, 2007), or tapping into a source of innovation (Cook and Brown, 1999). In our context, the modifier 'generative' denotes conducive to the production of something innovative or the discovery of new and hitherto unknown design alternatives. In other words, generative design refers to the design requirements and considerations in developing artifacts such as systems, platforms, processes, procedures or instruments that augment people's natural ability to innovate.

Generative design refers to the design considerations in developing an array of artifacts of all sorts and at scopes and scales that support and enhance generative capacity – that is, the considerations in designing systems that are conducive to the ability of one or a group to produce new configurations and possibilities, to reframe the way we see and understand the world, and to challenge the normative status quo (Avital and Te'eni, 2009). People's generative capacity is a key source of innovation and, by definition, generative design aims to encapsulate the design directives that enhance and complement that human capability. This note presents four top-level design directives and takes a stab at extending them into operationalizable design features.

### **Generative Design is Evocative**

Generative design inspires people to create something unique. It evokes new thinking and enables them to translate their ideas into a new context. Information technology can help create the environment or conditions that are prone to those insights by generating and juxtaposing diverse frames not commonly associated with one another within an underlying context. Systemic features that drive evocative design enable, for example, seeing an object or situation from multiple perspectives, testing it in multiple situations, examining it at multiple degrees of granularity, and exploring multiple overlay configurations.

### **Generative Design is Engaging**

Generative design is enchanting and holds the attention of people by inducing their natural playfulness and Flow experience. Information technology can help in the creation of engaging environments or platforms that stimulate users' cognitive spontaneity and playfulness as well as their overall positive affect state, thereby encouraging further exploration, tinkering and experimentation. Systemic features that drive engaging design enable, for example, fostering the positive effect and high spirit that stimulate a state of *joie de vivre*, activating cognitive spontaneity induced by playfulness, and stirring up curiosity through intriguing challenges.

### **Generative Design is Adaptive**

Generative design is flexible and conducive to effective use by a heterogeneous set of people in their own respective environments and for various tasks within an intended scope. It can be adapted with respect to the type of users or groups it serves in diverse problem spaces. It is also simple to understand and easy for anyone to master. Information technology can help in the creation of adaptive systems or platforms that are flexible yet powerful enough to enable the generation of a continuous stream of new ideas and configurations. Systemic features that drive adaptive design enable, for example, user-induced tailoring and customization to meet situated needs, self-production of complementary extensions and features that meet new or initially unforeseen needs, automatic system-induced adaptation, and overall scalable functionality with no regard to size-related attributes.

**Generative Design is Open**

Generative design accentuates permeable boundaries and transparency that promote cross-fertilization and exchange of any kind. Information technology can help in the creation of open systems or platforms that provide connectivity, enable transparency, allow information sharing, and encourage dialogue with no regard to institutionally or culturally imposed boundaries. Systemic features that drive open design enable, for example, free and unrestricted access to information, communication among all stakeholders, and the easy integration of third-party extensions by independent boundary-spanners. In summary, systems that are conducive to innovative processes should be evocative, engaging, adaptive and open. These design requirements and a few possible operationalizations thereof are summarized in Table 1.

Design is about the shaping of alternative configurations or forward-looking courses of action. Although this note may seem to be focused on information technology-based innovation, the above design directives are applicable to many design activities. For example, it can be applied, at least in part, to the design of work environments, think tanks, social movements, marketing channels, work processes, organizational development interventions, or research instruments.

Moreover, generative design resonates deeply with Appreciative Inquiry and can provide a firm foundation for its design phase.

Not all design must be generative. However, generative design is particularly relevant for promoting innovation – it has the potential to evoke a capacity for rejuvenation, a capacity to produce infinite possibilities or configurations, a capacity to challenge the status quo and think out-of-the-box, a capacity to reconstruct social reality and consequent action, and a capacity to revitalize our epistemic stance. Generative design can help ordinary people to achieve extraordinary results.

Table 1: Generative Design Directives and their Respective Features

Generative Design Directive	Design Feature	Description
The system should be		
Evocative	Visualization	Enables searching for new insightful points of view and seeing an object or process from multiple perspectives
	Simulation	Enables testing an object or a process or part thereof in multiple situations
	Abstraction	Enables examining objects or processes at multiple degrees of granularity
	Integration	Enables aligning exclusive yet related domains, objects, or processes in multiple overlay configurations that provide insight about interoperability

Engaging	Entertainment	Induces a high spirit, humor, a state of 'joie de vivre' and overall positive effect
	Playfulness	Stimulates cognitive spontaneity induced by play that encourages further exploration and tinkering
	Challenge	Induces curiosity, raises intriguing questions, and sets sensible challenges within grasp
	Appeal	Provides an esthetically pleasing interface and overall appealing interaction
Adaptive	Customization	Enables user-induced adaptation via tailorable facilities and customization tools
	Extendability	Enables producing new and useful extensions, or fine-tuning existing features via an extensible architecture
	Automation	Enables system-induced adaptation based on anticipated needs and in response to external stimuli or dynamic patterns
	Scale Free	Provides scalable functionality with virtually no regard to number of users, number of transactions, or other size-related attributes via extendable architecture
Open	Open access	Provides anyone interested with free and unrestricted access to information
	Communication	Promotes dialogue and sharing of multiple points of view across boundaries
	Peer-Production	Encourages anyone willing and able to develop and share new extensions or fine-tune existing features through open development standards

### Acknowledgement

This essay is part of a larger body of work that has been developed with Dov Te'eni and Wietske van Osch. For further information and related papers, see <http://avital.feb.uva.nl/papers.html>

### References

Avital, M. and Te'eni, D. (2009) 'From Generative Fit to Generative Capacity: Exploring an Emerging Dimension of Information Systems Design and Task Performance,' *Information Systems Journal*, 19(4), pp. 345-367.

Cook, S.D.N. and Brown, J.S. (1999) 'Bridging Epistemologies: The Generative Dance Between Organizational Knowledge and Organizational Knowing,' *Organization Science*, (10) 4, pp. 381-400.

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## Notes on Michel Avital's Paper

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In 'Innovation Through Generative Design', Michel Avital has taken on one of the most important issues facing organizations today – how to engender innovation for social good. He begins with a definition of innovation that is provocative in its simplicity. The idea of practical novelty prompts an immediate yes and then the question, 'practical in whose eyes?' Throughout the paper Avital refers to people in the design process yet does not address the issue of participation directly. I believe that generative design can be as Avital says – evocative, adaptive, engaging and open – only if it is also participatory. In this way the innovations that emerge, the practical novelty that comes forth, will be practical and meaningful to those people participating in the process.

Openness is important and yet, as we see in many situations, it does not ensure access. Participation as another aspect of generative design would call for conscious inclusion of all stakeholders: all relevant and interested parties. It would hold designers accountable for involving users in the design process. It would create a needed balance of power and partnership among designers and users.

I believe, as Avital states, that while his 'note may seem to be focused on information based innovation, the ... design directives are applicable to many design activities.' In my experience successful organization innovation is generative to the extent that it is evocative, adaptive, open and participatory. All work is done in relationship, all meaning is made in relationship and all innovation emerges from relationship.

From a social constructionist perspective, it is possible to understand Avital's design directives as the qualities of relationship and participation necessary to foster innovation. In doing so we can understand more fully, as Avital suggests, how ordinary people achieve extraordinary results.

## Relevance for Research

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Michel Avital's essay on Generative Design and Diana Whitney's response to it have messages for AI research, about the way that this can be designed and done. When we look at Avital's essay we read that Generative Design will 'augment people's natural ability to innovate'. This is a useful message to consider: that research should enhance what is already there – and that being appreciative is a way to do this.

Avital also argues that Generative Design should be 'evocative, engaging, adaptive and open.' This can apply to developments in a range of activities, including research, so it is worth thinking through how these elements might play out here. Firstly the idea of being 'evocative' is an unfamiliar one in the research world, but looking at Avital's description, the idea of evoking new ways of thinking fits in well with the aims of research, which can often do this by contributing to theory.

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# AI Resources New

## edited by Jackie Stavros and Dawn Dole

AI Resources features the rediscovery of classic AI resources and discovery of new resources. They will include list serves, books, journal articles, book chapters, DVDs, websites, blogs, podcasts, etc ... all in one place, helping you with your consulting practice, internal work, teaching, training and extending your knowledge base.

### In this section

- AI List Serve – The first of its kind!
- AI Commons
- The second edition of *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry* by Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom

Our first issue starts with two classic and most-used electronic resources, the AI List Serve and AI Commons. There is also a review of the new Second Edition of *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry – A Practical Guide to Positive Change* by Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom. Congratulations Diana and Amanda!

We have learned that a frequently asked question at AI trainings and workshops, and even a recent question on the AI list serve is: 'what's a good book to learn more about AI?' The August 2010 issue will include a list of classic and new books on AI. If you have a favorite one that you would like included, please send an email to Jackie or Dawn before June 1st, 2010. Please include the title, author(s), year published, publisher, and ISBN (and if possible, an image of the book's cover in a JPEG or TIF file). Please provide a succinct overview of the book and 'why and how' this book is a helpful resource for learning more about AI.

## The AI List Serve – the first of its kind!

The AI List Serve was launched June 14, 1997 with a message from Sue Hammond, author of the *Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*, inviting 24 individuals to join in an ongoing discussion of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) with goals of developing best practice and enriching our collective understanding of the theoretical foundations of AI practice. In 1997, the internet was fairly new, an online conversation was an experiment, the list serve software was new, and there was very little practitioner literature on AI. There was a great deal of interest in learning who was writing and doing what in the field. The list serve's



Jack Brittain has moderated AI List Serve from the beginning.

intent was to provide this conversation in real time. Jack Brittain offered to take on the AI List Serve project and made a key decision to keep it 'moderated' and open to all across the world. In 1999 the list had 257 subscribers. When Jack moved to the University of Utah to become Dean of Business, the list serve was moved to the business school's servers where it operates today.

As of March 26, 2010, it has 2,095 subscribers and there have been 11,909 posts with an average of 100 posts per month. It is difficult to say exactly how many subscribers are in the US because so many people have accounts with the large internet services, but it is possible to identify the global reach of the AI List by examining the country extensions on addresses that do not use the large internet services.

The largest concentrations of subscribers outside the US are in the primarily English-speaking countries of Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. There are a significant number of European subscribers with representatives from Germany, France, Ireland, Switzerland, Russia, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Austria, Greece and Portugal. Asian subscribers include Singapore, China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, Nepal, India, Taiwan, the Philippines and Japan. Non-continental subscribers can be found in Mauritius, Aruba, Bermuda and American Samoa; African subscribers can be found in South Africa, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Uganda; and Latin American subscribers are in Mexico, Costa Rica, Argentina, Brazil, Guatemala and Chile. The only Middle Eastern country with subscribers is Israel. In all, AI subscribers represent 39 countries on six continents (none in Antarctica as far as is known). The list has connected practitioners all over the globe and been a catalyst for organizing group meetings in Europe, the US, Australia, Singapore and most recently in Nepal.

From the beginning, the AI List was about the ongoing conversation focused on AI practice. The AI List Serve has welcomed newcomers with an incredible generosity and remains a place where experienced practitioners can test out designs knowing they are going to get thoughtful responses from seasoned colleagues. Since the List Serve is moderated, only postings in some way related to AI practice, including postings announcing training seminars, conferences and new publications are posted.

Keeping the conversation focused on AI has created a living-learning community to extend and elevate the theory and practice of AI. The AI List is mirrored on the AI Commons, which provides one archiving source, and the AI List Serve also has a postings archive that can be accessed at <http://ailist.business.utah.edu> (no www). Interested subscribers can join the list on the AI List website.

We want to provide a special thank you to Jack Brittain for his tremendous work in keeping the AI List Serve alive. Jack has moderated every message since 1997 and this is an appreciative contribution!

Some recent insights from people who use AI List Serve:

'When I first started on the Appreciative path the AI List Serve was very helpful in getting ideas on how to implement the appreciative strategies.' Rob Voyle, Psy.D. Director, Clergy Leadership Institute For Coaching and Training in Appreciative Inquiry

'The various threads from the List Serve are like mosaic pieces to a large, wonderful picture.' Mary Jo Greil

## The List Server



'Amidst all the information I let flow into my world, I value this list as one of the few jewels.' Marti Roach

'Regarding some feedback on what this List Serve means to me: amidst all the information I let flow into my world, I value this list as one of the few jewels. The robust exploration of AI has helped me learn and apply AI in my work.' Marti Roach, Center for Strategic Facilitation, New Zealand

'The various threads from the listserv are like mosaic pieces to a large, wonderful picture. The listserv has been a wonderful source of enriching my understanding of AI ... especially because I am in a locality where I am about the only person that is providing AI services.' Mary Jo Greil

'I've only been on the list for a short time, and it is a source of inspiration for me to the many positives that can exist in my world. Based in New Zealand there are few opportunities to attend events in person, and few practitioners for bouncing thoughts with. The list serves to keep me thinking and personally growing, and I'm really appreciative of that.' John Clark, Heartstone Limited

'AI has been something of a personal journey for me that has developed my own understanding or organizational behavior, management and leadership. Conversations via the list have helped clarify some of those thoughts and appropriately question others. My perspective is that those manufacturing organizations with a strong bias toward an appreciative approach to their business will be those that are sustainable and successful in the long term.' Roger Davies, Operations Manager, Global Plastics Industry

## AI Commons Web Portal – A Resource for the World

[appreciativeinquiry.case.edu](http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu)

The AI Commons website is a worldwide portal devoted to the fullest sharing of academic resources and practical tools on Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and the rapidly growing discipline of positive change. This site is a resource about AI for leaders of change, scholars, students and business managers. It is hosted by Case Western Reserve University's Weatherhead School of Management. The website was launched in 2001. In 2009 there were over 460,000 visitors to the site.

### The Vision and Mission for the AI Commons

In the years since the original theory and vision for AI, there have been thousands of people involved in co-creating new concepts and practices for

doing AI in organizations all over the world. The website is filled with stories, cases, tools, examples, dissertations, articles and more. The AI Commons provides a wealth of AI resources which are being developed by scholars and practitioners. We invite you to submit your training designs, project proposals, AI models, power point slides, interview guides, AI summit designs, provocative propositions, audio and video clips, photo and artwork. The AI Commons serves as a conduit to connect and magnify these resources marked by a spirit of generosity. This grows exponentially. We encourage you to draw from this site and connect it to others. Share – your tools, stories, new models, links to other domains of positive change theory and practice, and discoveries.

### How to Submit to the AI Commons

We invite you to submit and share your work on the AI Commons and with the larger AI Community. Go to this page: <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/join/easySubmit.cfm> and select an item from the list, click on it and complete the information requested in the template. It will take less than five minutes to upload your document.

There is a growing need for AI resources in languages from around the world. We would be honored to have your assistance with this section of the website. As you work with AI and create materials in your native language please consider sharing them with the AI community through the AI Commons. You can submit your translated AI materials by clicking the link below. At this link you will see the materials that are currently on the AI Commons in languages from around the world: <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/research/multilingual.cfm>.

We greatly appreciate your generosity and believe that what you offer to the world through your own AI and positive change work truly benefits everyone. Through the AI Commons, we draw upon the existing practices of promise across the globe, to thrive and lift the hopeful visions of the future world for positive change. Thank you for your contributions!

For additional information or assistance with submitting contact Dawn Dole, Knowledge Manager of the AI Commons, email [aicommons@case.edu](mailto:aicommons@case.edu).

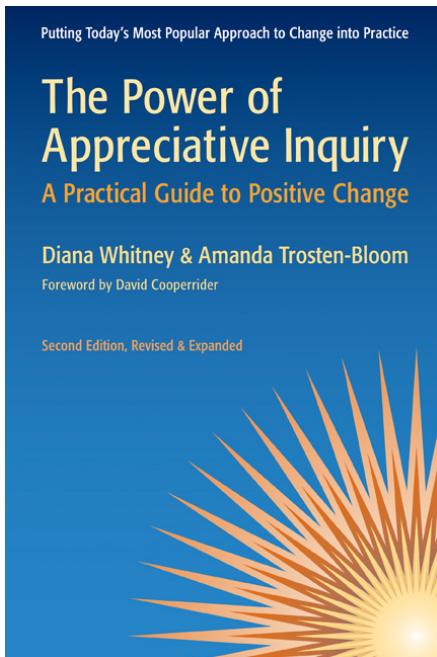
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## The Power of Appreciative Inquiry - the second edition

The first edition of *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry* by Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, which sold over 22,000 copies and was translated into five languages, was one of the most practical books on AI. We asked Diana and Amanda, 'Why did you decide to write a second edition?' Their response was:

'For years we heard what a difference *The Power of AI* was making in our field. The rich stories – particularly the Hunter Douglas Window Fashions Division case, woven throughout – made the book both inspiring and accessible. The step-by-step descriptions in the '4D' chapters helped clarify the practice of Appreciative Inquiry – even for less-experienced practitioners. And the closing chapter, 'Why Appreciative Inquiry Works,' helped ground the practice even further with new qualitative research.

'When our publisher approached us about writing a second edition, their primary interest was in re-stimulating momentum for the book, and making it available electronically to address the needs of a changing marketplace. But once we



responded to Berrett-Koehler's request, it became clear that we and our readers had a great chance, here, to pick up where we left off and learn more about this emerging field that *The Power of AI* has helped make mainstream in creating and sustaining positive change.

'Before we began writing, (in the spirit of AI), we conducted a public inquiry to find out what people loved in the first book, and what they imagined for a second edition. People responded with the following:

- The Dream, Design and Destiny chapters need more meat.
- The applicability of the approach with communities could be fleshed out.
- How do organizations sustain the appreciative momentum, over time?
- Need newer stories and more tools.
- Finally, people wanted to know ... 'what happened to Hunter Douglas?'

'We chose to write a second edition to answer these questions and more – and to share many of the new stories and tools.'

The second edition includes new tools and information about AI that has been woven into each chapter. There are two new sections on sustaining AI and applying AI to community planning. To ensure this new book would have the most up-to-date information,

Diana and Amanda organized focus groups with people who had participated in award-winning AI initiatives that had resulted in long-term positive change, in a manner similar to the research done for the first edition. They have made a great book even better and provided an update on how Hunter Douglas is sustaining success with AI. This book is a collaboration of their decades of work in this field. You will find this book useful and inspiring to bring out the best in yourself, and the people and organizations that you manage and lead.

### **Bucks for Bestsellers**

For those of you who already have the first edition but want to read the second, Diana and Amanda are offering a special rebate program that they're calling 'Bucks for Bestsellers'.

Between now and June 15, mail your original *Power of AI*, along with your name and e-mail address, to: Corporation for Positive Change, 7398 South Zephyr Way, Littleton, CO 80128 USA

CPC will donate your book to a charity and send you the code entitling you a 30% discount for the second edition, if purchased through Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Alternatively, if you prefer to donate to a local charity, e-mail or fax the donation receipt – [office@positivechange.org](mailto:office@positivechange.org) or (001) 303.978.9543 – and CPC will still send you the discount code.

Remember the June 15 deadline ...

# International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry

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# IAPG Contacts and AI Practitioner Subscription Information



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## Purpose of AI Practitioner

This publication is for people interested in making the world a better place using positive relational approaches to change such as Appreciative Inquiry.

The publication is distributed quarterly: February, May, August and November.

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ISSN 1741 8224

AI Practitioner © 2003-2010 Anne Radford

