

1 Introduction

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a transformational organization change process. People experiencing an AI inspire each other to leverage their most powerful collective stories in order to dream and design a new affirmative future. In the process of truly hearing each other's hopes and dreams, people create community — they discover affinity, build relationships, and develop common language with those who were previously only colleagues in the most formal sense. AI at its best generates an energy that causes people to change rapidly and positively in relation to each other and in doing so their organizations and communities are transformed to the extent that they are never again the same.

Now, what if, in conjunction with telling stories about encounters with excellence and while sharing aspirations, people could also experience excellence and make their dreams come alive, in real time? What if the AI process could shift from thinking to doing, from the cerebral domain to the kinesthetic, from storytelling to experiencing — where dreams from the imagination about working well together immediately manifest into physical experience?

Imagine an AI into the topic of “how exemplary leadership happens” where company leaders practice living their Provocative Propositions (those powerful affirmative statements that inspire a group toward its ideal future) in a compressed time micro-world

— a complex outdoor orienteering course. Or, imagine an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software installation process spearheaded by two heavily siloed departments (Finance & Information Technology Services). While holding each other’s safety ropes, team members scale a 50-foot scaffolding structure to cross-train each other in their subject matter areas, creating a horizontal process that connects and leads the organization toward achieving a common collaborative goal. Or, using a different kind of experience, imagine an Appreciative Inquiry into the topic of “inspirational leadership” where the leadership potential of an organization’s key executives is activated by a community service challenge, specifically feeding and clothing 2,000 people in 24 hours.

Imagine there are moments during these experiences when everyone “gets it,” the synergy flows and collective dreams come to life. How would such “group peak experiences” enable an organization’s ability to create and accelerate sustainable and systemic change?

We deeply believe in the power of Experiential Learning (EL), a formalized process for reflecting on experience in order to extract meaningful learning and to develop tacit knowledge. By sharing and learning from common experience, people attain the high levels of rapport, empathy, trust and mutual understanding necessary to risk and embrace change together. When integrated into each stage of an Appreciative Inquiry, Experiential Learning supports and illuminates the AI process, making each phase “come alive” for all stakeholders.

Why read this book

Experience AI: A Practitioner's Guide To Integrating Appreciative Inquiry With Experiential Learning is valuable for anyone engaged in an individual, team or organizational change process. It is written with the intent of starting a conversation around the power and efficacy of embedding Experiential Learning models, tools and techniques into Appreciative Inquiry — in order to accelerate positive change, motivate teams and individuals, generate buy-in and engage people at all levels. If you believe that

accelerating learning and change cycle times is just as important as reducing product cycle times, you should read this book.

About Us

Our corporate consulting practice, Executive Edge, Inc. was founded in 1989, and is rooted in the fields of experiential, classroom and wilderness education, expeditioning, international business and organization development. Throughout the years, we have kept one foot in the natural world, which has helped us to become better consultants. Our combined life experiences (and observation of human interactions in wild places) have helped us to see natural patterns and rhythms in organizations, and to create learning experiences that are fundamentally different from most corporate learning programs.

Unique Components

The following is a brief overview of several unique components of this integrated process. These components will be explored and applied to the client scenarios throughout the book.

Self-Facilitated Team Learning™

Over the years, through study and a good bit of trial and error, we have discovered several components that heighten the impact of EL for the adult learner. *These learnings help to successfully merge EL with AI.* The most significant of these is what we call Self-Facilitated Team Learning, a process that guides group learning while placing the responsibility for facilitation almost entirely into the hands of the participants. Groups learn how to facilitate a process for extracting meaningful learning from experience while reaching toward the goal of continuous improvement. Not only do they move from a state of dependence to independence (from the external facilitator). Through self-facilitation they develop a sense of interdependence within their team or participant group. The external facilitator is thus freed to elevate learning to another level.

Due to its learner-centered focus, Self-Facilitated Team Learning is especially effective in compressed time situations (in which learning cycle times are drastically cut).

Continuous Learning Cycle™

The Continuous Learning Cycle is the heart of Self-Facilitated Team Learning. This model enables a group or team to extract meaningful learning from experience and immediately apply it using an action, reflection, analysis, strategy and application process. (See model on page 14.)

Team Learning Journals™

Participants guide their learning by using a detailed “learning map” called the Team Learning Journal. Team Learning Journals contain everything the participants need to conduct their own activities and facilitate their own learning processes — activity frontloading, scenarios, rules and reflective debrief tools. Self-facilitating groups use Team Learning Journals to help manage their time, call their own process breaks (“time-out” from the task for the group to reevaluate strategy, group dynamics etc.), prioritize the value of each activity, and conduct their own debriefs.

Integrated Program Flow

One of the most important concepts introduced in this book explains the way in which program flow makes for a truly integrated approach. An integrated AI/EL process flows as a traditional AI would — participants travel the 4-D Cycle (developed by David Cooperrider and colleagues at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, OH). Integrated into the flow with the 4-D Cycle are two other processes: The Relationship Continuum™ (a model for relationship development, see chart on page 29) and The Continuous Learning Cycle (a model for extracting meaningful learning from experience). The interplay of all three processes is the key to creating powerful, accelerated learning experiences.

A Look At What’s Ahead

In **Chapter Two: Telling the Tale and Living It** dives more deeply into AI and EL, looking at the effectiveness of integrating

EL into each stage of the AI 4-D cycle: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. **Chapters Three through Six** introduce four client stories that highlight how the integrated experiential components maximize learning.

- **Chapter Three:** Discovery — The NYC Leadership Challenge
- **Chapter Four:** Dream — A Call to Collaborative Action
- **Chapter Five:** Design — Exemplary Team Leadership
- **Chapter Six:** Destiny — Project Success

Chapter Seven: Self-Facilitated Team Learning — Reinventing Experiential Learning and Re-defining the Facilitator’s Role looks at our metamorphosis as Experiential Learning consultants, and gives a more detailed look at current shifts in the field of Experiential Learning. **Chapter Eight:** The Beginning reviews how Experiential Learning supports basic AI principles, and summarizes the main concepts discussed throughout the book. There is also a Glossary of Terms in the back of the book that defines unfamiliar or unique words and phrases.

Throughout this Focus Book, we invite you to explore the possibilities for integrating Experiential Learning into the Appreciative Inquiry process. It is our hope that you will see how Experiential Learning contributes to the flow toward mutual understanding that is necessary for people, organizations and communities to discover and live their destiny.