INTRODUCTION: ADVANCES IN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY – CONSTRUCTIVE DISCOURSE AND HUMAN ORGANIZATION

The fields of organization development and human systems change are going through a theoretical metamorphosis in which change has become much less about detection of error, analysis of chronic problem, or exclusive treatment of the deficient, the broken, and the problematic. Like the exciting shift in medicine from anti-biotics to pro-biotics or the movement in psychology from analysis of dysfunctions to examination of human strengths, the field of organization and management theory finds itself in the midst of a positive revolution in change – something that now and for many years into the future promises to elevate and extend our images of what it means to organize, what it means to transform organizations, what it means to be an organizational citizen, and what it means to be-in-the-world. Kim Cameron, Jane Dutton, and Bob Quinn (2003) have recently announced it as an “exciting new field of study in the organizational sciences” – the field of “positive organizational scholarship.”

Some of the most significant work that fuels and defines this positive wave has come from an area often simply referred to as “Ai.” In the years since the original theory for Appreciative Inquiry Into Organizational Life was articulated by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva from the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) there have been thousands of scholars, leaders, colleagues, and students involved in co-creating new concepts and practices for understanding Appreciative Inquiry, and for bringing its life-centric spirit of inquiry into organizations and communities all over the world. Major books, international conferences, journal special issues, dissertation projects, substantive web sites, and hundreds of articles have, in recent years, focused on Appreciative Inquiry (see for example, Avital, 2002; Barge & Oliver, 2003; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1999; Fry et al., 2001; Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003; http://ai.cwru.edu). As interest has mounted, Appreciative Inquiry has been singled out in arenas of scholarship as broad ranging as evolutionary thought (Hubbard, 1998), social constructionism and poststructuralist theory (Barge & Oliver, 2003; Gergen, 1990;
WHAT IS APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY?

Appreciative Inquiry is a constructive inquiry process that searches for everything that “gives life” to organizations, communities, and larger human systems when they are most alive, effective, creative and healthy in their interconnected ecology of relationships. To appreciate, quite simply, means to value and to recognize that which has value – it is a way of knowing and valuing the best in life. In the language of Positive Organizational Scholarship it means a research focus – a positive bias – seeking fresh understanding of dynamics described by words like excellence, thriving, abundance, resilience, or exceptional and life-giving (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003). In this context the word appreciate means to value those things of value – it is a mode of knowing often connected to the idea of esthetic appreciation in the arts. To appreciate also means to be grateful or thankful for – it is a way of being and maintaining a positive stance along the path of life’s journey. And not incidentally, to appreciate is to increase in value too. Combining the three – appreciation as a way of knowing, as a way of being and as an increase in value- suggests that Appreciative Inquiry is simultaneously a life-centric form of study and a constructive mode of practice. As a form of study, Appreciative Inquiry focuses on searching systematically for those capacities and processes that give life and strength and possibility to a living system; and as a constructive mode of practice, it aims at designing and crafting human organizations through a process in which valuing and creating are viewed as one, and where inquiry and change are powerfully related and understood as a seamless and integral whole. But the key to really understanding Appreciative Inquiry is to put the emphasis on the second word in the inseparable pair. While many are intrigued with the Appreciative Inquiry positive bias – toward the good, the better, the exceptional, and the possible – it is the power of inquiry we must learn more about and underscore. Inquiry is all about openness, curiosity, creative questioning; its spirit involves what Whitehead once called “the adventure of ideas.”

Inquiry can take us to the edge of the unknown and beyond – it is the prime engine of human development and boundary spanning; it involves systems of
exploration by which people make sense of their experiences in, organize their knowledge about, and relate to the world. In this sense, even the smallest and briefest inquiry is powerful precisely because it shapes human life through modalities inherent in a culture’s symbolic systems, for example, its language and discourse modes, the forms of logical and narrative explication, and the very patterns of meaning and value systems that are nurtured.

Whereas human systems move in the direction of what they most persistently, actively, and rigorously ask questions about, Appreciative Inquiry opts for a passionate and probing search into the life-generating essentials and potentials of human and social existence. It connects, quite deliberately, the means and ends of inquiry where methodology and phenomenon are increasingly made commensurate to one another. For example, if we were interested in learning about democracy we would not want to use undemocratic methods of inquiry, or, if we were interested expanding our visions for a future of joyful, inspired workplaces we would not want to limit our study to the subject of low morale; instead, Appreciative Inquiry would more expansively frame an exploration into exceptional moments of enthusiasm, passion, and excitement in organizational life, including systematic search for all the human and organizational factors serving to elevate and enable those moments.

The most anticipated in an inquiry is the unanticipated. It is not a controlled process with a preplanned outcome. Inquiry is always a journey off the beaten track, especially active inquiry that is embedded in the very medium of human systems, that is, in today’s emergent and swirling worlds of permanent disequilibrium, novelty, surprise, and internet speed. The world, quite simply, seems to change as we talk. And because of inquiry’s drive to discovery, the results of any given Appreciative Inquiry repeatedly challenge and disrupt, asking us to let go of our highest ideals and to create, in the company of others, even better ones when judged in relation to the calls and opportunities of our times. In this sense inquiry can be feisty. Secretly, the fundamentalist in all of us wants inquiry’s openness eliminated. Co-inquiry in the presence of other human beings almost always discloses views not quite like our own and is capable, therefore, of dislodging treasured certainties. When we enter inquiry’s theater we are often surprised with the ending. But then we are gifted, not with solid certainty but with something even better-- the vertigo of new vision. And this is the special paradox of Appreciative Inquiry. Inquiry into the good or the life-generating is neither comfortable nor stable, even if positive. Abraham Maslow theorized about the agonizing difficulty of acknowledging our highest potentials because of the echoes of responsibility implied in such knowledge. Plato, too, could sense it. His words are memorable: “We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark. The real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.”
So more than a method or technique, Appreciative Inquiry is perhaps best talked about as a way of living with, being with, and directly participating in the core of a human system in a way that compels each one of us to inquire into the deeper life-generating essentials and potentials of social existence. Our world, our future, and its pliant openness to new possibility is an astonishing mystery and that is why we naturally inquire. In many respects we are born to appreciate, value, and to co-create. To consciously and collaboratively inquire into the life-enhancing accounts of this mystery – searching for the true, the good, the better and the possible – this, in its most concise form, is what Appreciative Inquiry is all about.

Advances in Appreciative Inquiry is dedicated to bringing people and writings together to contribute to the enormous potential of positive organizational scholarship and new forms of affirmative inquiry – seeking first to give voice to all that is best in life, and then taking seriously the opportunities offered by the relational perspective of our world as an ever changing social construction. If, for example, the act of studying a human system actually changes it – via shifts in people’s language, how they relate their feelings, their imaginations and meaning-making interpretations – then, we must seriously ask: what happens when people turn their inquiries toward the study of phenomenon like the human strengths of courage; optimism and wisdom; moments of exceptional achievement; sources of collective well-being; expressions of aesthetic sensibility; the cultivation of positive emotions of hope, inspiration and joy; expressions of civic virtues like compassion, love and being of benefit to others; the discovery of liberating institutions and thriving communities; or, at a larger level of scale, the emergence of generous, prosperous, and sustainable societies?

THE SPIRIT OF THIS VOLUME

In this first volume of Advances in Appreciative Inquiry, leading scholars from diverse fields of management, sociology, psychology, education, and philosophy pursue new directions in Appreciative Inquiry theory and research as well as new intervention practices and opportunities for action. While diverse in topic and discipline — for example, Appreciative Inquiry in corporations, classroom settings, communities, networks, national and global public conversations, and others — each of the following original chapters treats the reader to a view of the Appreciative Inquiry’s revolutionary ways.

World constructions are formed in and through the ever-expanding relationships that occur from early family life to the most recent conversation. Indeed, it is through the tapestry of discourse, relationship, and meaning-making that what is taken as real and valuable for us emerges — and this, as each of this volume’s
chapters elaborate on, invites creative exploration of new and valued futures. Every chapter in this book explores the social construction of reality via the lens of discourse – where words create worlds (Cooperrider, Barrett & Srivastva, 1995). There is a tangible and distinctive message in each of the following chapters and it is a creative one: *that perhaps very soon in our new century, once the idea of the relationally constructed nature of reality finds its way into our shared public consciousness, there will be a vast liberation of human energy and transformational capacity, both as a sensibility that grounds Appreciative Inquiry theoretically and as a way of being that puts the continual creation of reality at the heart of every person’s life.*

Change, especially change in human systems, is triggered by dialogic-relational modalities of learning and discovery. It occurs in those moments when, for example, discourse on hope connects with another’s hope, when conversation into inspiration connects with another’s inspiration, when the sharing of joy combines with another’s sense of joy, and when inquiry into collective strengths allows people to unite with accounts of the “positive core” of their system’s past, present and future capacities. *The big question is why and how would hope connected to hope, or, strength connected to strength, and consequently awaken change?* This question becomes particularly interesting in light of the so many conventional theories which argue the opposite, that is, that organizational, community, and societal change is best catalyzed through dissatisfaction with the status quo and analysis of the deficient or the problematic and their related causes. As the reader will soon see, we posit and bring evidence to support a 180-degree turn in our theory of the relationship between inquiry and change.

Assuming, that the appreciable world far exceeds our normal appreciative knowing capacity, and furthermore, assuming that through our relationships we have access, at least theoretically, to an almost infinite universe of emerging capacities (of course, given the right kind of relationships or interconnectivities), what emerges are two modalities or ways of talking about and igniting positive change (see Fig. 1): (1) the *elevation* of our appreciative capacities and inquiries (the horizontal dimension); and (2) the *extension* our forms of relatedness allowing for the free and super-fluid flow from the local to the universal of valued strengths, qualities, assets and all that valued as good (the vertical dimension). Like the warp and weft in a weaving, these thematic dimensions of Appreciative Inquiry are explored directly or implicitly in every chapter in this volume, and, as pictured, these thematic dimensions thread together and help us emerge a new pattern of change (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003).

Following Fig. 1, we would like to group and lift up the papers in several ways – either through an *advancement in our capacity to appreciate* the appreciable world, or through an *extension of our relationships and capacity of relatedness*,...
which, in turn, gives us a new collective connection to all that is best in the world, from the local to the universal. These two main themes thread throughout the chapters of this volume, and in the midst of their thematic interaction a third pattern appears. Pictured on the diagonal and best understood as interdependent thrusts, the initiation of appreciative knowing and the extension of relatedness, together, set in motion several possible developmental phases of non-deficit, positive change including: an initial burst of elevation-and-extension of inquiry, then the fusion of strengths, and finally, the activation of energy. This thematic interpenetration creates an emerging framework of what we might call a theory of non-deficit transformational change.

Not unlike William James’ pioneering account of conversion – where often, in conjunction with a surprising connection to a “higher source,” sudden shifts alter a person’s life through an enormous influx of positive emotion and energy – the elevate-and-extend framework suggests that such alteration could be happening in everyday life. To clarify this point, we must ask what is it that happens when Appreciative Inquiry into collective life enables people, in collaborative conversation, to link with rich and elevated accounts of the “positive core” of their system’s past, present and future capacities.

The relationship between Appreciative Inquiry and non-deficit positive change is evident, but far from being fully realized, let alone understood. We have barely scratched the surface of this territory (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003, p. 5). Likewise, William James commented on it much earlier when he notice that we have yet to create a vocabulary, or even a good label, for this kind of change. One
term he tried out was “conversion” but he did not like the word for its religious connotations. Yet he liked the notion of positive change embedded in serious accounts of mystical experiences. Speaking in the most down-to-earth kind of way, James went on to say that what we truly need is better understanding about the kind of change that happens when things are “hot and alive within us, and where everything has to re-crystallize about it” (James, 1902, p. 162). In his view, deficit-based change (or changing only when the experience of the problematic becomes unbearable) is commonplace and relatively easy to understand, especially when charged with negative emotions. However, the domain that lags woefully behind in social scholarship is the area looking into those moments of extraordinary positive experience – and how these, too, can be cultivated to ignite “explosive” change. In James' words:

Emotional occasions, especially violent ones, are extremely potent in precipitating mental rearrangements. The sudden and explosive ways in which jealousy, guilt, fear, remorse, or anger can seize upon one are known to everybody. Hope, happiness, security, resolve, emotions characteristic of conversion, however, can be equally explosive. And emotions that come in this explosive way seldom leave things as they found them (James, 1902, pp. 163–164).

In the rest of this opening, we begin exploring advances in Appreciative Inquiry, the opportunities raised, and the implications for organizations, communities and societies engaged in Appreciative Inquiry. The writings to follow are expansive, vibrant, and thought provoking. Conceptually, they are grouped into three areas beginning, in part one, with primary emphasis on Appreciative Inquiry and the discursive construction of reality via the “extension of relatedness.” Next, in part two, the chapters are linked to the theme of “elevation of inquiry,” demonstrating for example how we live in worlds our questions create. Here the discourse explores the elevation of consciousness through inquiry and it is instrumental in revealing and developing our positive cores. Finally, part three, expands our vocabulary of positive change connecting the “elevate-and-extend” framework with a myriad of aesthetic, technical, and dialogical ways that transformational energy is activated, amplified and sustained. Let's now look briefly at the chapters as they unfold across each of these areas.

**PART ONE: EXTENSION OF RELATEDNESS**

*Ken and Mary Gergen* and *Frank Barrett* open part one with a provocative essay on Appreciative Inquiry as a generative and transformative dialogue that invites us to move into “the ever expanding domain of relatedness.” Constructionism, as used here, is introduced as an approach to human science inquiry and practice that
replaces the individual with the relationship as the locus of knowledge. Philosophically, constructionism involves a decisive shift in Western intellectual tradition from cogito ergo sum to communicamus ergo sum. It involves a concern with the dialogic processes by which human beings, their values, and their commonsense, scientific knowledge and communities are both produced and reproduced in conversation.

One of the prominent strengths of the constructionist perspective is that it seeks to open the door to a fuller interweaving of disparate communities of meaning – and hence, the chapter’s thesis that meaning is born in the act of appreciation. No one’s words or actions, write the authors, have meaning by themselves; meaning requires “supplementation” or another’s assent, much like a handshake that requires both people to be meaningful. Appreciative interchange, therefore, is the basis of generativity in three senses: first, as a deep awareness of the complex potential for interpreting the nature and value of words or actions; second, as the affirming of meaning and value of words or actions; and, third, as adding to the meaning and value of words or actions. In appreciating others’ words and actions, say the authors, so do we increase value within our relationships.

A viable pluralism in today’s world depends on the power of appreciation, say the authors, because appreciation creates a language and a climate of interaction that embraces differences, affirms polarities, and helps creating new cultures where diverse values are heard and honored. Much needed, this chapter proposes, is a new kind of transformational dialogue capable of creating organizations in relational settings that are “polyphonic” where the different voices, like multiple melodies in polyphonic music, create a rich and complex musical totality.

Jeffery Stamps and Jessica Lipnack, two of the world’s leading network theorists, extend further the theme of relatedness. For them, the grammar of interconnectivity is the essential discipline of our age. The idea of connecting the local to the whole is no longer a dream. Now, with the click of a button, we have the potential to link each strength, best practice, or a story of possibility and all forms of knowledge. We have passed, say the authors, the point of no return in the transition from the Industrial-Bureaucratic Age to the Information-Network Age. Unlike the relative stability and homogeneity of the organizations of the past, new configurations and relational modalities are part of everyday life and are manifested in the ubiquity of networks, alliances, cross-functional teams, partnerships, lattices, ensembles, cells, temporary project structures, virtual communities, and federated support networks – almost anything but monolithic pyramids go.

The chapter Appreciative Inquiry in the Age of the Network starts with a compelling premise that Appreciative Inquiry may be related to self-organizing networked forms as problem solving-based ways of knowing were related to
command-and-control bureaucracies. Networks arise as the natural organizational outcomes of an ongoing Appreciative Inquiry process, and thus, whether explicitly recognized or not, Stamps and Lipnack argue. Appreciative Inquiry undergirds the development of successful distributed human organizations. The next leap forward in organizing depends upon a deep realization that networked organizations are webs of human relatedness, and that relationships come alive when there is an appreciative eye – where people are able to value and see the best in one another, where they can rapidly create alignments of strength, and when they are connected in liberating ways to realize valued hopes, dreams, and purposes.

Drawing on research with Royal Dutch-Shell and others, the authors give us a glimpse into the future of Appreciative Inquiry processes, methods, and opportunities in distributed networked forms. And while subtle, there is a fascinating nuance in this paper. Whereas most of the literature on Appreciative Inquiry writes about the power of appreciation in strengthening and generating relationships, there is a hint here that it may in fact be the other way around – where richer, vaster social complexity enlarges our capacity for appreciation. Indeed, in an everyday sense, we have all experienced it where extensions in emergent relationships, even if only by accident on the web, can create surprise, energizing interest, sense of awe and appreciation much like a first visit to a fascinating new culture. We “wake up” when we meet new people or groups, and such enthusiasm can be infectious. Oddly enough, the best way to cultivate our appreciative capacity – our ability to notice and connect to the appreciable world and the universe of infinite capacity all around us – may be simply to leap into and create new, extended relationships.

We are in the earliest stages of something quite large as people are consciously embedding themselves and their organizations in larger and richer webs of inter-dependence and mutual abundance. In this view, conclude Stamps and Lipnack, the emergence of Appreciative Inquiry is in the cards. One of the most promising areas of future research lies precisely at the intersection of Appreciative Inquiry and the new economy of partnerships, federated and networked organizations, digital communities, and the like.

In chapter three Michel Avital and Jessica Carlo take the previous chapter to another level exploring exactly why and how Appreciative Inquiry may be essential to inter-networked forms of extended relationships. The practical arena addressed in this chapter involves the rapidly growing domain of knowledge management. Whereas many have emphasized the information architectures, infrastructures and procedures that allow stakeholders in organizations to search multiple repositories of information this essay emphasizes the social and organizational dynamics that drive the organizational actors who create and use knowledge systems, such as, codified repositories, expert directories, and communities of practice. Although
knowledge management systems were introduced over two decades ago, it is clear there are still many unsolved challenges concerning their implementation. For example, frequent resistance to sharing information, difficulties in identifying qualified core knowledge, actors’ indifference towards organizational knowledge repositories, and continuous struggle of the systems’ sponsors to sustain a viable knowledge community.

The key for any knowledge management system, argue Michel Avital and Jessica Carlo, is its dynamism and joint ownership and what they call “the generative co-creation and use of situated knowledge.” It is all about relationships, argue the authors, and Appreciative Inquiry helps build and sustain them in part because of the positive “best practice” focus, but more importantly because of the ownership creating power of inquiry itself. Inquiry is the “generative dance” between knowledge and knowing; and Appreciative Inquiry emphasizes the relational aspect of knowledge creation. From the micro-social context of the appreciative interview to the scaled up electronic sharing across boundaries Appreciative Inquiry makes several high potential contributions: it systematically identifies and maintains a contextually relevant catalog of capabilities; it pays attention to the underlying questions that yield the knowledge, especially the “what if” and “what now becomes possible” questions that generate new developments; it helps create a reflexive capability of being sensitive to language and its effect on the way knowledge is produced and reproduced; and finally, it unleashes the power of stories.

But what connects each of these contributions is one overarching element – engagement. People that engage in Appreciative Inquiry – where they are searching for the good and the best in the system–generates ownership, relevance, dynamic updating, the replenishment of knowledge, and the spirit of generosity necessary for community. Much like a gift economy where each person’s sharing of a gift generates reciprocal acts of gift giving, the process of Appreciative Inquiry offers a vehicle for such generous engagement. Where generous engagement is absent, there will be no community. While generosity, gift giving, and engagement are rarely talked about in the knowledge management literature, this is precisely what the new technologies are capable of nourishing. This paper, therefore, sets the stage and invites future research that will unleash the potential contribution of Appreciative Inquiry to the design and implementation of knowledge management systems.

Next, Tojo Thatchenkery builds on Hans Gadamer’s hermeneutic theory of social existence whereby “Language is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and an all-embracing form of the constitution of the world.” Not only does the interpretive scheme embedded in our language significantly influence our readiness to notice particular aspects of our situation, there is also
a great difference between two pre-judicial modes of interpretation – the critical and appreciative. It makes a great difference, proposes the author, whether we see the world primarily as a problem that needs to be repaired, or fundamentally appreciating it as a mystery to be engaged in, especially in regards to the emergent, subtle, and paradoxical aspects of relational existence.

Key to a creative advance in human systems is this special capacity, that is, the capacity to embrace the life-generating energies of paradox of every kind. This paradox embracing capacity becomes increasingly important the more globalized and extended our relationships. As we move from local connection to global connectivity a new capacity is called for. Much needed, proposes the author, is better understanding of the process of hermeneutic appreciation, which serves to heighten our capacity as human beings to embrace today's paradox of unity in diversity, or the paradox of global networking vs. local networking, and the like. When there is a stance of hermeneutic appreciation, then the bipolar nature of the paradoxical construction generates the possibilities for a multitude of interpretations within those polarities. And this, perhaps, is the secret to understanding not only the survival, but also the expansive growth of some organizations and what we have called the extension of relatedness.

In a fascinating account of the Institute for Cultural Affairs – a global organization committed to building a sustainable world, the author concludes: Hermeneutic processes are present in all types of organizations; only their degree varies. A military set up in combat situation provides few hermeneutic possibilities because the nature of the contingency requires that all actors understand and interpret the task in a relatively homogenous way. On the other hand, the mission of the Institute for Cultural Affairs – creating a paradigm shift in the way people think about the human factor in development – was increasingly opened up for fulfillment in indeterminate ways, which in turn gave rise to intense hermeneutic appreciation in the organization as it extended its relationships, its mission, and its contributions from the local to the whole of humanity.

**PART TWO: ACTIVATION AND ELEVATION OF INQUIRY**

Inquiry is fundamental and ubiquitous in the human experience. We start most life journeys with a seed question, progress and find our way by answering guiding questions, and end up reflecting on our experience with retrospective questions. Excellence and innovation of both scholars and practitioners often stem from relentless pursuit of original questions that have challenged conventional forms, sparked the imagination, and spanned the boundaries of understanding.
By its very nature, the way we ask a question has an acute effect on the answers we get. In a recent landmark study Jonathan Haidt at the University of Virginia proposed a new positive emotion that has not been described thus far by social scientists: elevation. Elevation happens when people see unexpected acts of human goodness, strength, virtue, and compassion, which in turn, his research has shown, changes people’s views about humanity, and in some cases to produce life-altering effects (Haidt, 2000). Upon close analysis of Haidt’s work, we think that the trigger of change is not simply the emotion of elevation as it is the act of inquiry. The originating catalyst is inquiry or more precisely the elevation of inquiry – even if the inquiry into acts of goodness is unexpected – it precedes, and it is a necessary condition for the change in emotional elevation. Haidt’s work is tremendously important here. Elevating questions lead to elevated observations, and elevated observations lead to elevated emotions.

The authors in part two are united in their conviction that the appreciable world is much larger that our normal appreciative capacity, and that one of our essential tasks as researchers, change-leaders, and educators, is to find ways to elevate our individual and collective capacity to value those things worth valuing. This, of course, is essential to the future development of a scholarship of the positive and, in practical terms, it can benefit any system interested in innovation and creativity. As Nietzsche once put it, “Valuing is creating: hear it ye creating ones! Valuation is itself the treasure and jewel of valued things” (in Rader, 1979).

The opening chapter in part two by Marilee Goldberg Adams, Marjorie Schiller and David Cooperrider says that elevation of inquiry, indeed our capacity to appreciate the appreciable world, vitally depends on our questions – and that we live in worlds our questions create. Like the treasure hidden in broad daylight, questions are at the heart and soul of good inquiry and change, whether one is involved in organization development, education, therapy, or societal change. If “Language is the house of Being,” as Heidegger (1971, p. 135) wrote, and if language is made up of two parts – our statements and our questions – then we must understand question asking as primary and universal in any consideration about the ways that human beings perceive, feel, think, behave, create, change, and evolve.

However, despite the omnipresence of questions in our lives, few people appreciate their inherent power and potential. This chapter is about advancing this potential. For example, think about the meeting dynamics in a company where there are two supervisors. One begins the Monday morning staff meeting with the question – “Group, I want to know: why do we still have all these problems?” and the other begins her meeting with – “Well lets get started...what’s the smallest change we could make that would have the biggest impact?” or “What is one possibility that we have never yet thought about?”
After examining the lives of geniuses like Albert Einstein, whose question “What would the universe look like if I were riding on the end of a light beam at the speed of light?” preceded the theory of relativity, the authors examine the relationship between questions asking and learning, and the ways in which the art of the question can elevate the capacity to appreciate. One of the most refreshing experiences in reading this chapter is the realization how suddenly we can become aware of how much we live in an answer-oriented, fix-it-quick world. And yet, in the clamor for answers, we overlook fresh possibilities, hidden strengths, and quiet distinctions all around us. After examining the mindsets that lead to “judger questions” and “learner questions,” the authors provide insights and examples of ways to cultivate appreciative questions, expand the spirit of inquiry through simply doing more Appreciative Inquiry, and how to make “question thinking” a more active part of our research, our change practice, and everyday living. As the poet Rilke suggested: “Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answers.”

The next chapter, “Appreciative Inquiry and the Elevation of Organizational Consciousness” by Diana Whitney, is perhaps the most daring of all the chapters. It is a beginning to a new conversation, the first that we know of, about Appreciative Inquiry and organizational consciousness. The chapter is an invitation to supplement years of successful Appreciative Inquiry practice with research into the tremendous power of Appreciative Inquiry to catalyze organizational and global transformation. The author submits that Appreciative Inquiry, through its attention to the positive core of a living human system, enriches and lifts up organizational consciousness, and thereby both transforms an organization’s relationship to global consciousness and builds its capacity to contribute positively to global well-being and sustainability. The author suggests that each phase of the Appreciative Inquiry process – Affirmative Topic Choice, Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny – creates a powerful elevation in organizational consciousness, and this higher consciousness has an almost inevitable world-benefiting, positive sum direction to it. Simply put, organizations like Nutrimental Foods and Green Mountain Coffee Roasters that are involved with Appreciative Inquiry tend to show a direction to their conscious activities – they become more socially responsible in relation to their local relations, the environment, and the global interconnected family of life. It is as if they sense not just responsibility for but feel an intimacy with the whole. And there is a big difference between these two.

After analysis of the literature related to two of organization theory’s earlier key metaphors – climate and then later culture – Whitney makes the case for a third, namely, consciousness. Drawing on Nobel physicist David Bohm’s theory of wholeness Whitney talks about organizations in a creative matrix relation to the
world, each intimately co-creating the other and, in Bohm’s words: “Thus we come to a germ of a new notion of unbroken wholeness, in which consciousness is no longer to be fundamentally separate from matter.” While defining consciousness is admittedly very difficult, there are emerging numerous accounts of characteristics of consciousness and the author examines each one of them in relation to organizations. She proposes that in concept we can talk of organizations as having consciousness, as having a subjective presence, as having creative choice that impels or directs the body in its motions, and as a kind of knowing that manifests reality. Human organizations, be they business, education, government, service, profit or non-profit oriented in nature, are likewise part of a global consciousness. When we elevate inquiry beyond normal views of fragmentation and separateness to an emphasis on oneness and wholeness, then everything changes – accounting practices begin to take into account the actual costs of long-term polluting “externals,” competitors discover the mutual benefits of cooperation, doing good is not seen as something separate from profitability, and businesses are not viewed as machine-like structures fitting neatly into the boundaries of an organizational charts, but as adaptable organisms existing in and interacting with a larger whole.

Whitney’s proposal is that elevation of inquiry – searching for the true, the good, the better, and the possible in any living system – widens our consciousness, and hence, our propensity to be of benefit. It may not be inevitable, she admits but inquiry into the good does something; it does not merely show something. Exactly what it does is fertile ground for next generation research, says the author, because “success in the future will go to those organizations that help humanity come into harmony and thrive as one global community.”

Ellen Schall and her colleagues focus on Appreciative Inquiry as the cornerstone research method in their collaboration with the Ford Foundation program: “Leadership for a Changing World.” The chapter explores methodological issues that are relevant to research endeavors in the rapidly emerging domain of positive organizational scholarship. For example, how should one approach a study of the good or positive in leadership research? What are appropriate methods for exploring the good or the positive? How can we increase the generative potential of theory building in the social sciences? And how can Appreciative Inquiry, as a research methodology, help create a new conversation about leadership in this country? With questions like these, the authors propose a creative synthesis of Appreciative Inquiry with narrative inquiry, ethnographic methods, and cooperative inquiry. The result is a relational form of research-action and action-research, where the distinction between subjects and researchers blurs as they both become simply “co-inquirers.”

Beginning with assumptions of leadership as a collective relational phenomenon, the authors argue convincingly for the application of research methods
that match the phenomenon, that is, methods that likewise extend and live the relational. In this case the authors went the whole way. The so called “subjects” of research became true co-researchers that were part of every phase of the inquiry: from creating the research questions, through helping with the narrative analysis, and up to being part of the actual write-up of the findings. At first, implementing the methodology was not easy due to role confusion and mixed expectations. But things changed. As the authors put it: “Once we were able to enact our appreciative stance, their role became much clearer to them.” In the end, the authors give us a taste of their findings and a view of leadership as re-framing. Leadership as framing and re-framing was found to involve several things: passionate belief in the humanity of the marginalized populations with which the leaders worked; active engagement in reframing how the society values the people with whom they work; approaching the often-marginalized groups as unique people with dreams and aspirations; and finally, providing the moral ground for staff and community members as a way of fostering commitment over the long term.

Leodones Yballe and Dennis O’Conner say that the elevation of inquiry transforms the entire experience of learning, and hence, “the time is ripe for pedagogy of appreciation.” This chapter is a fascinating cross pollination of the positive philosophies and visions of educators such as Dewey, Freire, Kolb, and Handy, with the vibrant and emerging organizational change ideas and processes of Appreciative Inquiry. It is a call to a pedagogical stance that is values driven, life-centric, embraces the relevance of personal experience, and is dialogical in the creation of knowledge. Building especially on Friere’s Pedagogy of Hope, Yballe and O’Conner show how the classroom can be transformed in its energy and its positive spirit. Education too often is about inert knowledge transfer, say the authors, and what they propose instead is a kind of education that exists, in William James’s contrast, not as a dull habit but an acute fever. What they propose is education alive, something that nurtures the romance and passion for learning through hands-on active inquiry, not just precision and wrote memorization.

“Obviously there have been ups and downs in your career” asks a student doing Appreciative Inquiry interview with an elder from the civil rights movement, “so I would like you to reflect across the years of your life work and tell me the story of a high point moment – a time that stands out when you felt most alive in your work, most engaged, or most successful in joining with others in creating change?” It is precisely through assignments like these, propose the authors, that the classroom is transformed. Its easy to imagine it: the students returning from their inquiries and sharing with one another exceptional moments of courage, hope, and change during the height of the civil rights movement; then, after sharing the narratives (real-life stories), creating their own dreams of the future society they want – and later, even further, “teaching” one another in the form of dramas and skits that lead
to the creation of active experiments to enact their visions in their communities and homes. Through inquiry, the inexhaustible energies of the best in life enter into the classroom, and with important results: more energized and sustained interactions, increases in positive images of possibility, the nurturing of love of learning, more self-initiated exploration, and transformation in the educator role. Can you remember the first time you saw a child enchanted? Hold on to that image. This, we believe, is exactly the message of this chapter.

Karen Norum and colleagues are also about the elevation of inquiry, in this case, asking evaluation researchers to essentially drop the “e” – whereby evaluation becomes valuation. More that just a simple play on words, there is a developmentalist argument here that asks questions about the purposes of evaluation research. Isn’t the ultimate aim of evaluation, in the final analysis, to help evolve, develop, and strengthen program performance? And if this is the case, then how might one design an evaluation inquiry to maximize its creative and developmental potential?

Changing the way we measure things changes everything, and with this assumption in place, what Norum and her associates came up with a dynamic program evaluation process they label “Ap-PRAISE-al.” The essence of the approach is the formation of collaborative inquiry teams. The chapter describes an account of students and program faculty that join together to do a collective interpretation of the positive core of a program, including catalyzing dialogue on everyone’s images of the program’s next stages of development – hence the emphasis on PRAISE. In every program, write the authors, there slumber capacities for growth and development, and especially in new programs, where capacities are more visible.

Unfortunately, many evaluation programs simply miss out the generative patterns because of their correction-based inclination to disclose program failings. The result is a contribution to the bad name and defensive feeling many “evaluations” produce. The authors are quick to point out that their method does in fact deal with the “hard stuff,” but this happens in an atmosphere of positive intent and whole system partnership through a deliberate analysis of deeper, more invisible assets, strengths, achievements, potentials, and the like. The authors propose that by transforming evaluation into a valuation, capacity grows and community expands. This chapter, like others in this section, offers a seed idea that is hopefully just the beginning in a new conversation.

**PART THREE: NEW METAPHORS OF POSITIVE CHANGE**

What if we really were all connected? And what if, through a super-fluid quality of relatedness, we could actually link with the unlimited capacities and life-energies
of everyone and everything in our inter-connected worlds? Imagine, for example, Yellow/Roadway Express, one of the largest trucking companies in America: what would happen if they could instantly connect and have access to the universe of knowledge, technology, visionary thinking and elevated strengths from deep within their own system, as well as those valued capacities of Hewlett-Packard, Johnson and Johnson, Phillips, Sony, Southwest Airlines, and Merck? And what if this core of capacities could be potentized, that is, made even more relevant and powerful, through contextualization, conversational concentration and creative action? In a word, it would be a change. Not the kind of change written about in books on organizational diagnosis, problem management or intervention theory, but more like the kind written about in physics, for example, in books on fusion energy.

Part three is about the changes that happen through the elevation-of-inquiry and extension-of-relatedness that together create a broaden-and-build dynamic and can activate large amounts of energy comparable to what fusion energy accomplishes, which not incidentally, involves the difficult process of fusing two positively charged elements. Fusion is believed to be the enormous energy source that created the sun and the stars – and its main resource, hydrogen, is infinitely abundant and ecologically clean. Activating this energy is just the opposite of fission (as in the splitting of the atom). It involves something akin to what Alfred North Whitehead termed a “concrescence,” or literally a growing together. Stated in more practical organizational terms, all this is reminiscent of Peter Drucker’s comment about the task of organizational leadership, that it is the process of creating an alignment of strengths in ways that make our individual weaknesses irrelevant. Exploring the circumstances that generate and sustain such change is the common thread that connects the chapters in part three.

Leslie Sekerka and Rollin McCraty begin with a thesis on the heart of change that increases in positive emotions, like hope, inspiration, and joy, are more than indicators of well-being, but are themselves catalysts of increased well-being. Building from Maturana’s towering work on the nature of living human systems, which provides a new synthesis between biology and culture, and also between emotion and language, Sekerka and McCraty draw together exciting new research across disciplines and levels of analysis to argue that the key to understanding Appreciative Inquiry’s non-deficit mobilization of change is an understanding of how it reduces negative emotions, cultivates positive emotion, and has subsequent impact on generative language and self-organizing change. The authors argue that the way we translate and make meaning of our experience has the propensity to influence the various components of our emotional response triad, feelings, expression, and physiology.

With language serving as a cognitive interpreter and conduit for emotional experience, we create reality by a language-emotion interface. Holding the
aforementioned assumption, the authors contend that the reality of our emotional experience can be favorably altered, depending upon the nature of the dialogue we choose to socially construct in concert with others. They share from their research at the Heart-Math Institute just how quickly various techniques can cultivate the catalytic power of positive heart states. Sekerka and McCraty conclude that if a dialogue within an organization shifts to one that focuses on its “positive core” through appreciation, this shared reality in the workplace can transform individual and organizational well-being, much like the broaden-and-build theory says happens with individuals. This chapter, too, adds to our general hypothesis of positive change: elevate-and-extend generates a fusion, or a collective broadening-and-building of capacity, which in turn, leads to the activation of energy.

In the next chapter, Ned Powley explores one of the most powerful Appreciative Inquiry applications for change called the “AI Organizational Summit” methodology, and he builds a fascinating analysis drawing on anthropological theories on rites, rituals, and ceremonies. In particular, the author weaves together Victor Turner’s concepts of liminality to bring fresh understanding to a whole scale organizational change. This chapter argues that the Appreciative Inquiry Summit produces positive organizational change precisely because of its inherent ritual nature.

The Appreciative Inquiry Summit described at Roadway Express involved a whole system strategic planning meeting, not just with the top ten executives of the company, but also with over 300 truck drivers, dock workers, senior executives, teamsters, managers and customers coming together across all boundaries to co-create their business plan. The Appreciative Inquiry Summit is not difficult, argues the author. Yet, its success requires a great deal of belief in collective human capacity and a desire to challenge conventional patterns of planning that continue to fragment and isolate us from one another. As the author attests, the Appreciative Inquiry Summit – bringing 100s of people together interactively for three to four days – requires at least a little dose of courage. Yet it is powerful. It creates a liminal space. “Appreciative Inquiry is an organizational change process” submits the author, that is “grounded in ritual patterns and characteristics, which are linked through the ritual moments of liminality: reduction of culture to core factors, dramatization of myths and sacred stories through ritual performances, and recombination of futuristic aspirations.” In particular, change happens in four underlying areas: the internal dialogue of the culture, the sense of communitas, the forging of commitment, and the tendency toward longitudinal repetition. Nonetheless, says the author, most important is the liminal experience, the moment of passage where people and cultures are “in-betwixt and between” and are neither here nor there; they are between states. The people at an Appreciative Inquiry Summit, observes the author, stay “in it,” and they do not run away from
this fertile ambiguity. This chapter helps one realizing that we, as a field, may have seriously underestimated the role of ritual space, public celebration, rites of passage, the role of collective emotion, and the like as it relates to positive change in human systems.

Peter Sorenson and Therese Yeager in the next chapter examine the roots of the field of organization development and acknowledge that the field’s deficit-theory of change may have reached its limits – it “works” but we can do better, they argue, especially if there can be a new synergy and integration between organizational development’s long tradition of “survey guided development” and the exciting directions offered by Appreciative Inquiry.

Both Appreciative Inquiry and the survey-guided development approaches have a common shared commitment to the Lewinian call to Action Research. They share a commitment to a democratic and data-driven form of inquiry, and feedback as a way to generate change in human systems. But then they part company and their theories of change appear at odds. Early Survey Feedback work is associated with the work of Rensis Likert and the Institute for Survey Research at the University of Michigan. Likert’s work is probably best remembered for the four systems of management and the profile of organization characteristics. The profile of organization characteristics served as an important introduction to discrepancy-based change – the use of deficit-base differences between the actual and the ideal organization (as described by respondents) as a catalyst for change. The authors propose a new hybrid that takes the strengths of the previous methods but lets go of the deficit-change theory, thereby creating a new kind of Appreciative Inquiry/Survey Feedback, which in their words “is uniquely capable of productive outcomes.”

The most fascinating part of this chapter has to do with an unexpected finding in the authors’ cross-cultural assessment of organizations using the Organizational Culture Index (OCI) in a hybrid AI/Survey Feedback format. In essence, they discovered that when using the OCI diagnostically (to identify and analyze the gaps between current and ideal practices) they find a great deal of variation between respondents. In contrast, when just focusing on the future and asking only for visions of the ideal states, as one might expect, less variation and more common ground appear – and this, the discovery of a common ground, is seen as an enabling factor in effective organizational change. Finally, the authors administered the OCI in a whole new way in which they first asked people to begin by reflecting historically on a “high point” moment in their organizational experience, and then with that experience in mind, to take the OCI survey in relation to that experience. Now, when inquiry into the high point experience was the anchor, the similarities in OCI patterns across respondents were astonishing.
INTRODUCTION

To put it concisely, gap analysis does not produce much common ground, however when people are asked to share their visions of the ideal future more common ground emerges; and even more common ground is generated when people are asked to inquire into the best in their histories, their high point moments of being most effective, alive, engaged, and so on. The implications of this simple discovery are enormous. It challenges, with precision, fundamental practices of organizational development and what it conventionally teaches. It raises questions about the deliberate use of history in organization and community change; about the ordering of various types of questions; about the power of a people’s relationship to their history and their relationship to their future; about how to bring forth resources from the past in order to bring a group together; and about the validity of various measurement instruments and popular benchmarks. The third way, as the authors put it, is to combine inquiry into organizational history as positive possibility, and to combine that with the best the field knows about future visioning.

Nick Nissely, in the following chapter, argues that the key to the future of Appreciative Inquiry is its “aesthetic” potential. In attempting to make sense of their challenges, organizations have become overly reliant on rational-analytical competencies, numeric criteria and formulae, compartmentalizing problems, and standard operating procedures. Rational-analytical competencies are obviously valuable, but, insufficient by themselves, without what the author labels aesthetic competencies. Not only do more aesthetic modes connect and carry forward the emotions for change, but the whole context of communications is in dramatic flux. The world is in the midst of an image revolution, argues the author. Pictures, stories, metaphors, and visual arts animate the language of the New Economy. The palette of communication options is expanding enormously, transforming the way people think. Thus, he submits for today’s creative leadership a new kind of literacy is required: a literacy of images.

Among the proposals to advance Appreciative Inquiry the author suggests building artistic bridges for communication via “analogically mediated inquiry” including the use of drawing, sculpture, drama, visual art, music and poetry. The author draws on a fascinating set of literatures to describe a three-stage process, or model, that explains how mediated dialogue works: (a) it surfaces constructed meaning by attaching significance to an object; (b) it displays the object by placing it in a center of a public dialogue; and then (c) it deepens an inquiry into various meanings.

The author articulates two main benefits associated with the value of an organization’s engaging with the process of artful creation. First, in the context of organizational learning, it appears we all limit our potential to inquire into organizational life if we only consider propositional knowing. Presentational forms of
knowing, for example, artful creations, allow us to “see what we’re thinking” and to inquire into that knowing. Simply put, artful creations (i.e. presentational knowing) and logic (i.e. propositional knowing) provide different ways of expressing ourselves. Thus, offering a richer way of knowing organizational life. Second, given the growing complexity of organizational life, we must seek ways that allow us to make sense of that growth and expansion. A work of art is a good way to condense, or even to visually model, the underlying complex reality. Moreover, aesthetic representation of past, present and future capacities of a human system can potentize the positive core as an energizing source of transformation. In all, this chapter speaks to our core and makes one feel the excitement. The literatures are creative. The possibilities are enormous. And the code of change is changing.

While much research and literature on Appreciative Inquiry has focused either on Appreciative Inquiry as a way of developing generative theory or as an intervention, none has explored the sustainability of change that is initiated by an appreciative intervention. Throughout the literature about organizational change, one continues to find the question: “How is a change sustained?” This topic is the focus of the chapter by Mike Mantel and James Ludema that have studied the Appreciative Inquiry process at World Vision, one of the largest and most respected relief and development organizations world.

They developed a fusion-related theory about how “conversational convergence” leads to sustainable positive change over time. Their theory was built based on a massive data set from four sources collected over a nine-year period from 1992 to 2001, as follows: (1) semi-structured interviews with 197 people connected to the World Vision initiatives; (2) over 10,000 pages of historical documents such as memos, letters, faxes, emails, concept papers, strategy documents, meeting minutes, magazine and newspaper articles, and promotional brochures; (3) notes from a series of large-group Appreciative Inquiry summit meetings held with World Vision over the period of the study; and (4) participant observation and field notes. Data analysis using communication mapping techniques suggested that the “corporate conversation” went through a series of phases over time, and that these conversational phases served as harbingers of decisions and actions to come.

While developing the conversational maps, the authors began to see the organization as streams of conversations that rise and fall, grow together and diminish. The authors discovered that once awareness of the conversational streams was developed, appreciative change could be maintained by intentionally and positively influencing those streams. Sustaining change at World Vision required an unrelenting commitment to: (1) shaping the conversation; (2) engaging in appreciative leadership; and (3) applying appreciative principles to organization design.
These mutually reinforcing elements are used by the authors to generate a theory of sustainability. This paper goes far beyond the demonstration of Appreciative Inquiry’s sustainability. While this study reminds us that organizations are made and imagined in our conversations, it also illustrates the agony and the ecstasy of it all. The chapter enriches our vocabulary of constructionist change. It provides a series of penetrating questions for future research. And for the practitioner it provides what could become an indispensable checklist for the conversational activation of the energy for change.

Judy Rodgers applies Appreciative Inquiry as the modality for public conversations at the national and global levels. The idea of using public forums to create understanding, consider new possibilities, and arrive at consensus is as old as civilization itself. However, the recent explosion in the use of public dialogue has created renewed interest in the possibilities it poses for creating real social innovation. The World Bank and the Archbishop of Canterbury have turned to public dialogue in an unlikely partnership to bring the international development community and the faith community together to share learning. Barnet Pearce and Kim Pearce have documented their use of dialogue in the civic affairs of Cupertino, California. The Public Conversation Project in Boston, Massachusetts, convened leaders on both sides of the abortion debate for six years. The list of public dialogue initiatives is a long one ranging from the Arts and Civic Dialogue project of Anna Devere Smith to the worldwide Appreciative Inquiry into Business as an Agent of World Benefit convened by the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University. The dialogue modality is exciting from an Appreciative Inquiry perspective, says the author. The public dialogue presents an opportunity to convene those with a stake in a particular issue in a process of mutual co-construction of a genuinely new way of looking at the subject. But when public dialogues start by looking at the history of problems and challenges, they miss this opportunity – and they become unsustainable.

To vivify the potentials and challenges of an Appreciative Inquiry approach to public dialogue, the author describes a worldwide conversation with a system whose approaches to world issues are notoriously deficit focused and increasingly formulaic, the media. “Images and Voices of Hope: A Question of Choice” has become a rapidly expanding public dialogue among media professionals, journalists and artists that considers the question, “What does it mean for media to be agents of world benefit?” By 2003 Images and Voices of Hope dialogues have opened in over 20 cities around the world from New Delhi to New York City. Simply telling this story would be exciting enough, but the author goes beyond narration to share an emerging theory of Appreciative Inquiry and public dialogue. The author submits that a public dialogue at its best is an attempt to intervene in the drift of public discourse towards fractiousness and stalemate, and to turn it in an entirely new direction.
The key to creating this shift is to light the fire of generativity, to engage the public imagination, the spirit of community, and a feeling of generosity. There are five conditions, Rodgers proposes, for such dialogue: (a) intention; (b) questions that guide a search for the positive; (c) whole system; (d) relational space; and (e) reflection. Though many of these elements are becoming familiar, we still need to develop better understanding of the practice of reflection, in this case, literally sitting periodically in silence with one another, as a whole community. Apparently, in view of the current scholarship, it just doesn’t seem to be so relevant in a world that is focused on speed, on activity, and on the power of words.

But the intensity of dialogue in public conversation – times where the momentum of entrenched positions takes over, where people seem more puzzled and frustrated than ever before about the failure of conferences and programs to address the problems of the world, when the rush of conversations and lack of listening sows the seeds of the increasingly critical – it is precisely at those times that a space of silence can transform everything. While there is an impression that during silence nothing is happening, the author’s experience demonstrates just the opposite; times of collective silence are enormously creative and magical. They interrupt our automatic patterns of thought and action; they bring our runaway conversations, especially the wasteful ones, into new perspective and priority; people come back to the dialogues more capable of listening and often with fresh questions and a renewed spirit of inquiry; words that emerge afterward seem more comfortable and able to communicate a mutual respect and shared understanding; people have the space for reflecting on what their individual contribution might be, what they have in common, and what is possible – indeed so much is happening that one questions why this simple concept is not built into every one of our public conversations. It is an area ripe for research.

Silence is, says the author, the pre-language we have always turned to as human beings in special moments of reflection and respect; and it provides access to deeper wells of resources when we need them the most. Silence elevates-and-extends. It broadens-and-builds. It connects. It sustains. The author is convinced that silence is essential to good inquiry, that slowing the tempo enlarges our sensitivities to one another and our capacity to appreciate and prize, and that silence will prove vital to the larger issues that lay ahead for the world.

It is also a great way to close this introduction to volume one of Advances in Appreciative Inquiry.

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