

Appreciative Inquiry and Learning Assessment: An Embedded Evaluation Process in a Transnational Pharmaceutical Company

Bernard J. Mohr, Elizabeth Smith, Jane M. Watkins

Appreciative Inquiry and Learning Assessment: An Embedded Evaluation Process in a Transnational Pharmaceutical Company

Bernard J Mohr, Elizabeth Smith, Jane M Watkins

This paper tells the story of collaboration between SmithKline Beecham and The Synapse Group, Inc. – how we came to work together on a ground breaking project for both parties; how the project unfolded; and, the outcomes and learning both parties achieved from the experience. It concludes with an Epilogue that sets the story in the context of Appreciative Inquiry and the emerging paradigm.

PROLOGUE

During 1998, the Research and Development division of SmithKline Beecham Pharmaceuticals undertook an evaluation of a major and innovative simulation-based training programme, the SB Discovery Simulation.

This training programme had been designed to help scientific leaders and key contributors work effectively within the new drug discovery research paradigm. Over the course of three intensive days, participants worked in research teams utilising a dynamic computer model of the drug discovery process. The aim was to create a realistic learning environment in which a drug company attempts to maximise its portfolio of research efforts over a ten-year period.

At the time of this evaluation process, 480 people from SmithKline Beecham in the US and the UK had attended the programme - a critical mass of the original target population. End of course evaluations were conducted for each programme. The data collected was largely favourable, with participants reporting an increase in knowledge and understanding in a number of areas. Suggestions for improvements

were acted upon wherever appropriate, so that the programme was continuously refined during the roll-out.

The Organisation Development (OD) group, who had led the design and delivery of the Discovery Simulation in conjunction with senior Discovery research scientists, were satisfied up to a point that the simulation now worked well and consistently elicited positive responses from those who attended. However, they had made a major investment in this programme, and decided it was important to conduct an in-depth evaluation study to ascertain whether it had made a significant and lasting impact on the organisation. If such an impact could be demonstrated, they also wished to determine how to further capitalise on this investment.

To find an outside evaluator, SmithKline Beecham put out an invitation to tender (a process referred to in the US as an RFP or Request for Proposal) to several consulting groups which they knew would offer different approaches, but still with the expectation that they would conduct a reasonably traditional evaluation process where the consultants interview people in the company, compile the data and give the client a report of their findings. The usual report includes the strengths and weaknesses of the simulation and its outcomes, and recommendations from the consultants for next steps.

One of the companies that received the invitation to tender was The Synapse Group, Inc., a consulting firm based in Portland, Maine. The Synapse consultants responded

Bernard J. Mohr is a Principal with Innovation Partners International. His areas of expertise include corporate transformation, high performance/high engagement work systems and leadership for complex organizational change.

with a proposal that turned traditional evaluation thinking on its head. The proposal suggested the use of Appreciative Inquiry to conduct a "valuation process," sometimes called "Embedded Evaluation". They believed that this approach could give SB information about the strengths of the programme in ways that would create positive forward momentum - by taking the best of what had happened and using it to create a collective image of a desired future as a basis for moving the programme in the direction of its best practices.

ONE STORY - TWO VOICES

Stories contain a richness and depth of experience not typically found in more traditional reviews of past work. Because of this richness, and because stories are so central to the practice of Appreciative Inquiry, we have chosen to tell the story of this project in two voices as a way of sharing our memories with you. The consultant (**Synapse**) and the client (**SB**) initially wrote their separate stories without reference to each other. The following story has been created by interweaving pieces from these two original narratives.

Getting Started

SB: Our story, as the client, begins in June 1997, while we were still in the midst of delivering the Discovery Simulation. We had agreed we wanted to conduct an in-depth evaluation study. Ideally we wanted to have it completed by the end of the year to enable us to make timely decisions about any re-development and re-launch of the programme in 1998. A team of three of us who had been closely involved with the design and delivery of the programme formed a committee to produce an invitation to tender for the evaluation project, to interview a short list of consultants, and then to select and oversee the work of the chosen consultant.

The invitation to tender described the following aims of the evaluation study:

- (i) to assess whether the learning reported at the end of the programme had translated into changes of behaviour and improved performance back in the workplace;
- (ii) to reinforce the learnings from the programme;
- (iii) to gain insights into the most effective use of simulation technology in order to

apply best practice to the design and development of future programmes; (iv) to collect data that would help to inform decisions about further applications of the existing Discovery Simulation, and potential follow-up activities.

Synapse: *As the consultant our story begins in July of 1997 with a phone call from a colleague who was thinking outside the box. His call caught me doing some catch-up reading in the makeshift office on the second floor of our summer house. It was great to hear his voice, until he told me the purpose of his call. "Would you be interested in responding to an RFP [Request for Proposal] for an evaluation study?" he asked.*

Perhaps it was the hamburger I was still digesting but the two terms "RFP" and "Evaluation Study" gave me indigestion. While I have always found great value in jointly crafting a customized journey of learning and change with a client, the term "RFP" can all too often mean participating in a sham process designed to satisfy internal bidding regulations while all along the client has already determined who the best person is for the job. Worse yet, my experience to date with "Evaluation Studies" is best captured by a person being evaluated who said, "Look, for the last year, we have been putting our blood and guts into creating a success here – and now you come along with a mandate from upper management to tell them if what we are doing is any good? And you want our participation? Give me a break!"

So, it was with some considerable reluctance that I told my colleague, "Sure, have them send me the RFP". I was almost ready to say goodbye, when he added "Actually, I was wondering whether you might do this as an appreciative process?" This took me by surprise! How, I asked myself, could the positive perspective of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) be applied to a fundamentally critical review process and still produce "valid" results?

My practice had for the last several years been moving away from deficit based situation analyses, towards a focus on innovation through understanding and

expanding that which is working well in a system. But, I obviously hadn't yet shifted my own paradigm sufficiently to imagine the possibility of an evaluation which didn't emphasize primarily the gaps or, as we euphemistically call them, the "opportunities for improvement". And so began an incredible journey which would stretch the practice boundaries of the emerging field of Appreciative Inquiry and involve us with a willing client to explore somewhat uncharted seas. Thank goodness for colleagues who can see possibilities!

SB: As we completed the invitation to tender we realised that we were asking a lot of one consultant and indeed from a single approach to evaluation. We had a broad range of objectives, and good reasons for wanting to accomplish all of them in this study! We thought we might ultimately have to compromise on some, but we weren't ready to do so just yet and wanted to get a range of views on how much could be accomplished.

For this reason we cast a wide net in sending out the invitation to tender, deliberately selecting consultants from both the UK and the US who represented a range of contrasting approaches. The consultants we contacted included the Synapse Group, whom one of our selection team knew professionally, and had already established that they might have an interest in tendering.

Synapse: *By the time the RFP arrived in late August, the then head of the SB Pharmaceuticals R&D OD group had participated in our firm's annual summer gathering in Maine. At that meeting we had described some of the theory and research underlying Appreciative Inquiry to him and we had got to know a bit about the organisation (SB) that was to become our client. The RFP described, in traditional but extremely clear and competent form, the company's wish to evaluate the success of their computerised simulation based workshop for senior scientists. But this RFP was different in other ways. The RFP had a clarity of focus and tone of openness to innovation that was exhilarating. Clearly someone had given a lot of thought to this document! My attitude towards the whole project shifted upwards significantly.*

Intrigued with the possibility of conducting an evaluation from an appreciative perspective I also knew that what we might propose to the client not only ran counter to prevailing assumptions about good evaluation, but to my knowledge had not been done quite this way before. In fact I was worried that even the language of "appreciation" would set off warning bells in a client who was focused on "evaluation". I realised I needed help with shifting from a traditional approach to evaluation to one guided by the philosophy and principles of AI.

Fortunately, Jane Watkins, a Synapse consulting associate and a partner in our NTL sponsored workshops on AI, had recently done developmental work at Cambridge in something she called "Embedded Evaluation." I called her, explained the situation and invited her to join me in a preliminary client teleconference, with the goal being to see if the client might be interested in a "Valuation" process rather than an "Evaluation" process. To our surprise and great delight, in this very first contact with the client project team, they indicated both understanding of the drawbacks of traditional evaluation while expressing enthusiasm for an Appreciative "Embedded Evaluation" approach. The sun seemed to shine more brightly and my heart beat faster. We were starting to roll.

The clients had expressed their interest and openness, although they hadn't yet made any commitments. The ball was back in our court. We had to move from the conceptual to the practical stage. The client needed a proposal, and they needed it yesterday of course! Over the next 8 months we were to revise the original proposal three more times - in a continuing journey of partnership with our clients and a commitment to ongoing adjustment in a process which would increasingly become a forward focused intervention in its own right, rather than the backward look of a typical evaluation study. Our first proposal had six phases as shown below:

PHASE 1: INFORMATION AND PLANNING

- A. Consultants familiarise themselves with the company and the Discovery Simulation programme through written data and some key informational interviews.
- B. With SB, jointly identify a project reference group that will be our primary planning and guidance team
- C. Meet with project reference group for briefing to:
 - familiarise reference group with Appreciative Inquiry (including review of related scientific research, underlying theory , an experiential activity plus Question and Answer);
 - clarify project goals, roles, approach and key assumptions;
 - describe draft work plan and identify any obstacles or changes required.

PHASE 2: SELECT AND TRAIN SB “INTERVIEWERS”

- A. Select SB “interviewers”
- B. Train SB “interviewers”
- C. Create interview protocol customised to SB Discovery Simulation
- D. Complete stakeholder scan and assign interview responsibilities

PHASE 3: CONDUCT INTERVIEWS/COLLECT DATA

- A. SB “interviewers” conduct 8-10 interviews per person

PHASE 4: PRELIMINARY DATA ANALYSIS

- A. Compile data from interviews
- B. Identify themes

PHASE 5: IDENTIFY MAJOR LEARNINGS AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. Identify the programmes strengths, suggest areas to redesign, and develop tentative next steps
- B. Brief reference group on findings and validate preliminary recommendations for applicability in SB culture

PHASE 6: FINALIZE RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSE NEXT STEPS

- A. Define suggested next action steps (based on reference group validation of data and preliminary recommendations.)
- B. Prepare final report and present to client

SB: The initial contacts we had with the Synapse Group both intrigued and puzzled us! The Appreciative Inquiry and associated Embedded Evaluation approach was new to us all, and the detailed theoretical background provided in the RFP response was a lot to take in. However, as a group of OD and learning specialists we were enthusiastic about finding out more and potentially adding a new "tool" to our "kit bag". We also felt that in Appreciative Inquiry we might have found an approach that was broad enough to address most, if not all, of our objectives – something that was going to prove to be more than just an evaluation of the programme.

In our ensuing discussions with the consultants we began to grasp the essence of what AI is all about. The idea of looking for what is exceptional in something and seeking to do more of that rather than looking for what is wrong and fixing it ran completely counter to our classic views of evaluation – but perhaps that was the appeal, since we had already done plenty of the latter as we evolved the programme! We felt that this approach would be particularly useful in helping us to tease out the key positive elements of the simulation experience – ensuring we captured this learning for future simulation programmes in SB. It also seemed to offer a way of reinforcing and building on the learning and experience people had taken from the workshop.

We had two major concerns with the approach. The first was that we were working with a group of Discovery Research scientists, whose training, ways of thinking and approach to their work are exceedingly analytical and critical, which to our thinking at that time seemed antithetical to the AI approach. We were concerned that they might feel we were avoiding looking at the negative, simply seeking positive reinforcement and generally being too subjective and not rigorous enough in our approach. The second was that the proposal called for all the alumni of the Discovery Simulation (around 480) to be part of the study, participating both as interviewers as well as interviewees. This was potentially a major organisational intervention which we did not feel could be supported at that time,

and we also did not feel able to ask for any individual Discovery scientist to give more than an hour apiece to the study.

In discussion with the consultants we were able to address the second concern by scaling down the approach. Instead of having Simulation alumni conduct the interviews we agreed to assemble an evaluation team comprising the two consultants, the three members of the SB evaluation selection committee, two other SB representatives from HR and OD respectively and a former Discovery Directory who had been acting as consultant to and faculty on the programme. Between us we would interview approximately 20% of the programme participants. Thus instead of completely "outsourcing" the effort to the consultants, as we had originally intended, we made ourselves part of it (and in doing so committed a much greater amount of our time and effort), but we stopped short of increasing the resource required of the Discovery group.

We continued to grapple with the first concern. As we deepened our understanding of AI in relation to the scientific approach we came to realise the two approaches are not the antithesis of each other, since appreciating what is good does not preclude applying constructive and rigorous critique. We also came to understand how we could use interview questions about wishes for the future to surface the criticisms, but in a way that immediately turned them into recommendations that moved things forward. Nevertheless, we felt that the AI approach was likely to encounter some resistance in what was essentially a problem-solving culture – but we decided to take the risk and go with it!

Synapse: *Within a month after the first proposal and following several more transatlantic telephone calls, we had collaboratively determined the changes that would be needed in our original proposal. A couple of weeks later we had begun work. The major adaptations we made to our first proposal from our perspective included: (i) deciding to proceed without a steering committee (called project reference group in the first proposal), (ii) using the external consultants as interviewers in addition to*

using the internal project team in that role and iii) scaling the number of interviews back to about 100 from the original proposal of doing all 480 participants that had completed the training programme.

Where we had assumed the need for a steering committee composed of senior managers who would be “barrier busters” and “champions” for this project, our clients explained that this was a role better filled by their simulation “design team” – the people who had developed the content for the computerised simulation, the impact of which we were to evaluate. Although we had proposed to limit our role to the development and support of the internal SB team of scientist interviewers, our clients explained that the time of their scientists was too scarce and asked us to bolster the SB interviewer team by conducting some of the interviews ourselves. Frankly, this was a hard pill for us to swallow. Even though it meant more billable time for us as consultants (always nice), it went against our core beliefs that processes such as this are much more effective when implemented by the client system. The clients however were persuasive, and firm! We agreed to participate in the interviews – and as it turned out, we were absolutely delighted with that decision.

Scaling back from a plan to interview all 480 scientists who had participated in the simulation to a decision to interview about 100 people was also a problematic choice in our view. From an AI perspective, the likelihood of change in the client system is directly correlated with the number of people directly engaged in appreciative interviews. Naturally we wanted to interview 100% of the target population in order to maximise the impact for the client system. But, we soon realised that this would be biting off more than the client system could chew for the moment.

SB: A final change from the client's perspective was realising that we had to accept that this approach was going to take longer than we had originally scheduled for the project. We pushed our deadline back by 3 months to allow ourselves enough time for our preparation as AI interviewers and to

partner in development of the customised protocol.

PHASE 1: INFORMATION AND PLANNING

SB: The compromise project plan then unfolded. We began by providing the consultants with as much information as possible about the Discovery Simulation, and they were each able to spend some time observing part of a programme.

Our first steps also included informing the Discovery Simulation Design Team of the approach we would be taking. This was a team of senior scientists who had designed the Discovery Simulation and acted as faculty throughout the roll-out of the programme. Their main interest was in finding out the impact of the Simulation experience back in the workplace and to gather information to support and inform a second phase roll-out. They broadly supported the approach and were very interested in seeing the results, but were not ready or able to participate in the interviewing team. However, they did agree to have the interview protocol tested on them before it went out to the wider audience, which was a very valuable step in our preparation for the study. (This data was included in our overall data set, which initially seemed strange to us, as it seemed to run counter to “pure evaluation” methodology. We came to understand that in this approach, all data can be considered and contributes to the richness of the whole).

Phase II: Select and Train Interviewers from Client System

Synapse: *By mid – December we had jointly identified the small team of SB people (our “core group”) who would join us in creating the customised protocol, conducting the interviews, analysing the data and writing the final report. The group was drawn from both sides of the Atlantic since the interviewee group itself was transnational.*

SB: The next step was for the SB team to deepen its understanding of the approach. We agreed to accomplish this in two workshops, one for the US-based team and one for the UK-based team, where the consultants would share with us more of the

theoretical background to AI and their experience of its application, and give us an opportunity to explore it further, both through discussion and practical exercises. Face to face time is always at a premium and its use has to be maximised at SB!

Therefore we also built time into these same workshops to draft and pilot the interview protocol which would be used in the evaluation study. The goals for the first two day "AI Orientation Workshop" with the UK members of our core group were agreed to as follows:

By the end of this workshop, to have:

1. Clarified the difference between the AI/Embedded Evaluation approach and traditional evaluation approaches.
 - * Introduce Appreciative Inquiry
 - * Discuss the shifting paradigm
 - * Examine the theory of change that underlies this approach
 - * Explore Appreciative Inquiry principles and practices
2. Agreed on desired outcomes and critical success factors for this evaluation process - and how we will get there.
 - * Discuss the desired outcomes and critical success factors
 - * Discuss the major phases of the AI/ Embedded Evaluation approach
3. Jointly developed a customised draft interview protocol for gathering data using this approach - and have practised it.
 - * Agree importance of how we capture data and what data to record
 - * Create a draft customised interview protocol
 - * Practise AI interviewing skills
4. Jointly created a plan for collecting and analysing the evaluation data.
 - * Identify Stakeholders
 - * Agree key steps in data collection
 - * Decide how the data will be collected, organised and compiled
5. Agreed on next steps (actions, responsibilities and dates) for all of us.

Drafting the protocol was an interesting experience for us because our previous training and inclination kept taking us back to more classic evaluation questions that were at odds with the appreciative approach. We were constantly struggling to remain within the new mindset. We also wanted to add more and more questions to ensure that we got at everything we were looking for in the evaluation study objectives – with the danger that the interview protocol would become unwieldy.

Testing the protocol was even more interesting and challenging. Introducing the interview methodology and then keeping up the AI perspective throughout the interview was something we found needed practice. Dealing appropriately with negatives

without seeming to avoid the issue, and drawing out stories from people whose memories of the Simulation were several months old, were two particular challenges. However, the experience was also more rewarding than we expected. We found that mostly the test interviewees responded well to the approach (even though they commented that it was different from what they were used to), and were able to describe vivid pictures and examples. It was also enjoyable to be "allowed" to some extent to participate in the dialogue with them, rather than take the usual more aloof interviewer's stance! Finally, it was interesting to note that the questions that yielded the richest and most useful data tended to be adaptations of the generic AI questions rather than the more specific ones

we had added! By this stage we were getting really enthusiastic about the use of this approach.

Synapse: *The workshop was successful. Our participants (the UK SB interview team whom we called our ‘core group’) walked away with an enthusiasm and understanding of what we were trying to accomplish that both astonished and excited us.*

Now we needed to prepare for the second workshop in the USA – which meant some homework for the Synapse consulting team.

We needed to (i) refine a bit more the protocol that had been developed and piloted in the last few days (ii) create the detailed summary sheets to be used at the end of each interview. Additionally our

clients (the workshop participants) asked us to (iii) modify the upcoming US orientation workshop with more time being devoted to discussion of the emerging paradigm and its connection to AI theory, as well as (iv) including more time to practise the interviews using the customised protocol.

By mid January we had conducted the second version of the orientation workshop (this time in the US) and the interviewees had been contacted and scheduled. With some slight modifications to the protocol and the supporting documentation, we were ready to start the Inquiry process.

The protocol we developed is shown below:

1. Before we get to the questions about the Discovery Simulation, I’d like to know a bit about your experience here at **SmithKline Beecham** and I’d like to do it in the style of Appreciative Inquiry. Could you tell me a **story** about a time at SB when you felt particularly **excited, creative, productive**? What happened? Who was involved? What part did you play?
2. Now I’d like to ask you about your **participation in the Discovery Simulation**. Can you tell me a **story** about a **high point** when you felt excited and engaged in the course of participating in the **Discovery Simulation**? Looking back at that experience, what made it exciting? Who was involved? Describe the event in detail. Are there other high points?
Probe: What did you learn that you valued?
3. One of the purposes of the Discovery Simulation is to provide opportunities for you to learn about both the Discovery process and about your style of working with a team. The desired outcome is for you to feel that the things you experienced during the workshop are useful in your work in the organisation and in your life in general.
 - 3a. In that context, can you tell me some examples (stories) of ways that the **things you experienced** during the Simulation workshop have had a **positive impact on your work and/or the quality of your life at work**? Tell me a **story** about that. What happened? Can you tell me another story (example)?
 - 3b. As you look at this list, are there any stories that come to mind on any of these areas?
 - Your ability to champion your research effort
 - Your leadership style and skills
 - Planning/strategy of your existing research effort
 - Willingness to take risk
 - Managing in the context of the discovery portfolio
 - Ability to manage projects
 - Your membership on a project team
 - Your interaction with other departments
 - Making termination, go/no-go, phase change decisions
 - 3c. If you had **three wishes for how we leverage our investment in the Discovery Simulation** program, what would they be? (Future simulations? Things that would be helpful to you on your job in the future? Ideas for further use of this simulation? Etc.?)
4. **a** Now, I’d like to ask you a few questions about the Discovery organisation itself:
What is it that you value most about the Discovery organisation?

- 4 b.** In your opinion, what is the **core value** (driving force; essence; underlying principle; life giving force) of the **Discovery organisation**? What is it that, if it did not exist, would make the Discovery organisation totally different from how it is now?
- 4c.** The future of organisations is greatly impacted by the images we hold. Our images are often expressed in our desires and hopes for the future. In that context:

Phase III: Conduct Interviews (Collect Data)

SB: Over a six week period we conducted one-to-one interviews each lasting approximately an hour with a representative sample of Discovery Simulation participants in both the US and UK. The final data set represented information collected from 109 interviews, including those conducted during the testing phase.

We continued to develop our AI interviewing skills on the job as we carried out the interviews, sharing tips and experiences with each other as we went along. Our experience in the piloting turned out to be true of our experience in the full-scale interviewing phase – by and large the scientists interviewed were quickly engaged in the interview approach and were able to draw out rich stories of their experiences on

the Discovery Simulation, of its application back on the job, and their general experience of working in the Discovery Organisation. In this process their memories and learnings were reinforced. The interviews also yielded many creative insights and ideas for the future. Overall the experience was positive and energising for both interviewers and interviewees.

Synapse: Many of the interviewees commented on the unanticipated positiveness of the interview experience. Most of the interviews ran beyond the allotted time. Less than 2% of the interviewee population reported any negative experience of the interviews. As each interview was completed our core group members sat down and filled in the interview summary sheet shown below; the sheets were then e-mailed to the consultants.

Interview Summary Sheet - SB Discovery Simulation Evaluation

Interviewee name: _____ Department: _____
 Years experience in SB: _____ Current roles in SB: _____
 Past Roles in SB: _____ Date/Location of Simulation Attended: _____
 Was person a “DMC” or “Team Member” or “other” (specify) in simulation?
 Interview Location (US/UK?) _____
 Interviewer Name: _____ Date of this interview: _____

-
- 1. Stories**
 - a. What was the most compelling story (or stories) that came out of this interview that describe the experience of the workshop?
 - b. What was the most compelling story (or stories) that describe how the learnings are being applied?
 - 2. Learnings** What were other learnings/applications reported in this interview?
 - 3. Wishes**
 - a. What were the three wishes for the Discovery Simulation?
 - B What were the three wishes for the Discovery Organisation?
 - 4. Values**
 - a. What did the individual value in the Discovery Organisation?
 - b. What was the core value for the Discovery Organisation?
 - 5. Quotes** What were the most quotable quotes that came out of the interview?
 What questions do these relate to?

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| 6. Implications | What did you learn through this interview that will make a difference in how you/SB plans and manages other training designs? |
| 7. Other | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Other interesting things you heard in this interview. b. Anything else you want to say? |

Synapse: *Now came the part that we were to love the least – collating the data electronically. As the summaries (containing wonderful stories and quotes) from each interview arrived by e-mail, the two Synapse consultants assembled them in several files – one file contained all the summary sheet data from all the interviews, the other file contained all the responses assembled by question. Although editing was limited to deletion of repeated words and spelling correction, this process seemed to take forever. The hours became days and the days became nights as we decoded e-mail attachments and moved the data into the correct files. Finally, we had it all in a highly readable format.*

**Phase IV: Preliminary Data Analysis
....And
Phase V: Identify Major Learnings
and Preliminary Recommendations**

SB: The next step was to process the data, pull out the themes, and take a first pass at drafting the evaluation report. The consultants had recommended that we take two two-day workshops to do this, but as we are always trying to do more with less, we had decided we would do it in one!

Synapse: *With some anxiety about compressing 4 days of work into two, we designed the next workshop which we had titled the “report writing” workshop. This time the whole core group, all the members from both sides of the Atlantic, convened in the UK offices. By now we had developed, with the client, a Draft Table of Contents for the final report – shown below:*

I. INTRODUCTION and EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- A. Introduction to this Report
- B. Executive Summary Of Findings--What The Data Says About:
 - i. When the Transfer of Learnings is at its best....
 - ii, When the Discovery Simulation is at its Best....
 - iii. When the Discovery Organisation is at its best.....
- C. Executive Summary of Conclusions-- Ideas About What Could Be
- D. Executive Summary of Recommendations

II. THE DISCOVERY SIMULATION

- A. Background, Purpose, Goals, Implementation

III. THE EVALUATION PROCESS

- A. Embedded Evaluation: Description and Rationale for a Different Evaluation Philosophy
- B. What we did, when, with whom and why

IV. FINDINGS - What the Data Says About When Things Are At Their Best and Wishes for Change

- A. Introduction to this Chapter
- B. The Transfer of Learnings - themes and supporting data
- C. Use of Simulation Technology in the Discovery Organisation – themes & supporting data
- D. The Discovery Organisation - themes and supporting data

V. CONCLUSIONS - Ideas About What Could Be

- A. Introduction to this Chapter
- B. Provocative Propositions for the Transfer Of Simulation Learnings To The Workplace
- C. Provocative Propositions for the Discovery Simulation
- D. Provocative Propositions for the Discovery Organisation

VI. IMPLICATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE DATA

- A. Introduction to this Chapter
- B. For The Use Of The Current Simulation
- C. For The Use Of Simulations As A Training Technology
- D. For The Discovery Division (*Including Possible Future Uses Of AI*)

Along with this draft Table of Contents, the inputs to the report writing workshop were the Interview Summary Sheets (as they had been emailed to us), the aggregated data collated by question, and each team member’s own individual interview notes.

Using these inputs, we worked as a team to pull together all data necessary to outline the findings and conclusions chapters of the final report, which included our provocative propositions – statements of the image for the future of the enterprise. Additionally, we wanted to get agreement on how data would actually be used, and ideas for formatting of the data into various reports. With this in mind, we worked for two days following the agenda shown below.

DAY ONE

- Goals and agenda
- Debrief of our interviewing experiences
- Review of what the final report will contain (i.e. -suggested Table of Contents)
- Each person shares what stood out for them from their own interview data
- Read the data (each of us reads a new set of 11 summary sheets and scans the aggregated/collated data file)
- Pull out themes re:
 - the Discovery Organisation
 - the Discovery Simulation and learnings from it
 - the transfer of learnings
- Write initial draft of Provocative Propositions (PP’s)
 - “When things are at their best”
 - in the Discovery Organisation
 - in the Discovery Simulation
 - in the transfer of learnings

DAY TWO

- Review/modify provocative propositions
- For each PP, identify themes within the PP and for each theme, list illustrative supporting data
 - i.e. - quotes/stories
- Data check - have we missed anything important
- For each PP, develop “implications and recommendations”
- Agree on how data will be used and ideas for formatting of the data
- Agree on next steps
- Debrief our workshop and closure

SB: The quantity of data was somewhat daunting but the consultants structured the workshop into phases that helped us to work through it. I was still concerned that we were not doing it full justice, but with hindsight I think we did pull out the majority of the most important themes and examples. We sorted the findings under the topic headings "The Transfer of Learnings", "The Use of Simulation Technology" and "The Discovery Organisation". Under each topic we identified a number of key themes which we articulated in a short paragraph, and we assembled a quantity of supporting examples under each theme.

We also spent time working on a Provocative Proposition for each topic. Despite our ever deepening understanding of AI, we had difficulty with the concept of Provocative Propositions, and struggled with how they were going to be useful to us! One insight that helped in mapping this across to SB culture and methodology was to make

links with our classic SB problem solving approach of *Current Situation, Future Desired Target and Proposals*. Provocative Propositions are akin to Targets, although much more powerful, visionary and evocative in their language. We did succeed in drafting three powerful propositions which were not much altered after the workshop.

Synapse: *These were long days and we knew by the end of the first day that we should have done this in two workshops. The amount of emotional energy that was in the data was simply too much to process in one cut at it. But we made great headway and by end of the second day we had done enough so that the consultants along with a subset of the core group were able to generate a draft report for review by the whole core group via a lengthy teleconference.*

SB: One area that I felt we had not fully addressed in the workshop was the wishes data. Although we had incorporated this into the Provocative Propositions and it had been in our general thinking as we developed the themes, we had not systematically categorised the data, and we knew this would be important in our presentation to the heads of the Discovery organisation. We had still to develop the recommendations, and had just the beginnings of the draft report. We had indeed needed the second two-day workshop!

Therefore, to supplement the workshop, a couple of weeks later we held an extended team teleconference to do some more work with the wishes and the recommendations, and this took us another big step further.

The teleconference itself was designed to take into account that participants were in five different locations – in Portland, Maine, Washington DC, suburban Philadelphia, and in Redhill and Harlow, England. We used part of our time for whole group discussions and part of the time for geographically based “breakout tasks” – during which the line was kept open.

Synapse: *This worked like a charm. People reported enjoying the opportunity to work in small groups and have some whole group*

discussions at the same time – all without leaving their home offices.

Phase VI: Finalise Recommendations and Write The Report

SB: Over the next few weeks we continued to work with the data in ones and twos off-line, with periodic input and review by the rest of the group via e-mail and telephone – refining the themes, choosing the best stories and examples, processing the wishes data and the interviewers' reflections and ensuring all was incorporated. We also worked up some initial recommendations for next steps. The consultants took the first pass at a working draft of the evaluation report and then passed it to us in SB for modification and final production in an appropriate format.

We identified a number of audiences which needed different types of data, and we developed individual versions of the report for each audience, somewhat in parallel. This was our time to struggle. The process of producing these final reports felt onerous and time-consuming and hard to bring to closure. The consultants assured us that the AI process was intended to be iterative, that it should build and grow and continue to involve more and more people and that it was therefore in the nature of AI that there wasn't really an "end point". However, we agreed that for the purposes of the evaluation study we needed to have certain milestones which marked the closure of the study itself and the final detailed report was one of these.

The Discovery Simulation Design Team was our first audience. Drawing on the detailed data and the topics and themes generated from the two-day workshop, we drafted a summary report which we shared with the team in an extended teleconference. They broadly accepted the findings, although the style of the report caused them to check with us that we had fully represented the more critical comments. They then moved on to help us prioritise and refine the recommendations.

The second audience was the Discovery leadership group, represented by committees based in the US and the UK. For this group

we pulled the key points from the report into a presentation, including a few representative quotes from the more vivid stories collected. The committees were very open to the findings presented. As the key decision making group, they provided further input to our recommendations, and then gave their enthusiastic support to the next phase.

For the most senior leadership group in Discovery we produced a very short high level briefing document, but this barely needed to be used, since they were already fully in tune with the feelings and decisions of the two committees.

The reports described above included both the simulation specific data and the more general organisational data, but the recommendations concentrated on the simulation side, since this was the brief of the evaluation study. However, we felt that the organisational data was worthy of separate consideration by the Discovery leaders and therefore we created a separate report that drew out just the organisational data with some commentary, but stopped short of making actual recommendations since this was outside our remit. This report was presented to the senior Discovery leaders only.

Finally, we had committed to report back to all participants in the evaluation study. This process was delayed until all recommendations had firmed up and the next stage was fully agreed and underway, so that we had something substantive to report in terms of outcomes. The participant report comprised a version of the original summary report plus an update on next steps.

When the detailed report was eventually completed its primary function had evolved to serving as a reference and source document for the evaluation study.

The various shorter reports and extracts took on the format and feel of traditional SB documents, but I believe that the flavour of the AI approach still came through - particularly in the richness of the summary findings and recommendations.

OUTCOMES OF THE EVALUATION STUDY

From SB's perspective there have been positive outcomes of the evaluation study at a number of levels. Firstly, the AI approach did indeed enable us to address all of our key objectives as follows:

1. We were able to assess and demonstrate the degree and nature of the impact of the Discovery Simulation on people's experience and behaviour back in the workplace, in a vivid and powerful way, as illustrated by the following sample quotes:

"I have noticed greater participation in ongoing studies by some of my people. One person came to me and said, 'How or where can I apply my technology to make a greater impact on the organisation?' She has since been talking to many more people than she did before."

"Understanding the wider context has given me a different perspective on termination decisions. I realise now that for the greater good it may be right for me to propose terminating my work, even though it is in an early phase. Before I would never have done so."

"My awareness of the overall process has given me a better feeling of what others contribute and this makes me feel better about my own contribution, how I am a worthwhile member because I have a better sense of the community."

"It was a bit like doing rehearsals. Now I have greater confidence in what I'm doing. I feel assurance about my own decisions. Now I ask more confidently in real life."

"The simulation has brought about a closer integration between Clinical Pharmacology and Discovery. Several Clinical Pharmacologists have attended, and they now come along to [a particular management meeting], and listen to and participate in discussions about Discovery. Now we have input on a whole lot of things we never had before."

2. For the people who participated in the study it provided a means of reinforcing and building on the learning they had achieved as a result of the simulation – so in a very real way it provided a follow-up to the workshop for this group.
3. We gathered valuable information regarding what makes simulations effective and engaging as a learning methodology, which will be harnessed in the design and delivery of future simulations within SB.
4. We gathered a mass of convincing and enthusiastic support for continuing with the use of simulations in general, and the further development and delivery of the Discovery Simulation in particular. We also gained key insights into how to modify the programme both to increase its effectiveness and make it accessible to a wider audience.

We were able to use our findings and recommendations to dialogue with the Discovery leadership regarding the relative benefits of investing in programmes like these (versus straight scientific training and individual skills development). As a result we have top level support and commitment to go ahead with the re-design, development and delivery of the Discovery Simulation in a variety of new formats. Indeed, this is already underway and will form a significant part of the new R&D business process curriculum over the next 2-3 years.

In addition we collected powerful organisational data, which is available to the Discovery organisation as a potential platform for significant further change. However, perhaps most importantly we have found out that people fundamentally like working within the Discovery organisation, and maybe we can find ways to better tap in to this huge source of potential energy.

We have also discovered that this approach is not only acceptable to, but in most cases positively welcomed by Discovery scientists, contrary to our original misgivings! We succeeded perhaps because of the pragmatic and cultural adjustments we made along the way, but this means that we

can consider further organisational interventions utilising the AI approach. We can carry forward the type of modifications we made, or maybe we can take a few more risks next time.

For ourselves we have learnt a new methodology that we have found is applicable to a variety of projects and activities at work, and we have begun tentatively to try out the concepts in other arenas, such as developing competency profiles and teambuilding.

We have also challenged our thinking in relation to how learning becomes embedded in an organisation. In future learning interventions we would like to explore the contextual issues further, and consider how to make the environment more conducive to transferring and supporting learning back on the job.

Finally, on a personal basis we have found an approach that may help us to turn around our thinking patterns and move forward in a new way.

LEARNINGS AND REAFFIRMATIONS FROM THIS CASE

Some months after the final report had been distributed and when its recommendations were well underway to being implemented, the external consultants (Bernard Mohr and Jane Watkins) sat down with the SB Project Manager (Elizabeth Smith) for the purpose of asking "in retrospect, what did we learn from this work together?" As we discussed what we had learned we realised that what was a reaffirmation of an existing belief for one of us might be a new learning for another. For ease of reporting, we show both the reaffirmation and the learning in a combined list below.

AI does work for evaluation purposes, particularly at level 3 of the Kirkpatrick model (i.e. identifying behavioural changes) and also works as an organisational intervention.* The biggest question we had when starting this project was whether Appreciative Inquiry would allow us to answer, to the clients' satisfaction, the fundamental organisational concerns of "how well is this Simulation going and is it a good investment for the

corporation?” In the foregoing Outcomes section of this paper, we indicate that not only were these traditional evaluation questions effectively met with this approach but the corporation benefited from both the learning reinforcement that occurred and the richness of data which would not have been captured in a normal evaluation process. We believe this is due not only to the flexible nature of the AI approach but also is an outcome of the joint partnership style of working between consultants and clients – a style of working that is part and parcel of good Appreciative Inquiry. We also learned that things which from a traditional evaluation process might be considered impure, (e.g.- the use of leading questions; the use of data from the pilot; the use of people who have a vested interest in the outcome as interviewers/data collectors) are not only OK but are actually helpful within an Embedded Evaluation/AI process.

Joint partnership between consultant and client generates a synergy not present when the consultants and clients relate to each other in a more traditional manner (e.g. the consultant as expert or vendor). Since a fundamental premise of Appreciative inquiry is that we construct our reality in every interaction and conversation, the roles and expectations we agree to as clients and consultants are extremely important to the outcomes we then produce. By agreeing to avoid the more traditional consulting roles of either vendor/trainer or expert data gatherer and analyst, the clients and consultant were freed up to work collaboratively and adaptively. The consultants were able to participate as interviewers which allowed them to contribute more to the data compilation activities. Both the consultants' experience of the AI interviews and the client/project teams' experience was so positive that the energy both parties received from the experience made working together even easier, enabling the consultants to become more part of the team with the clients, and being seen as having similar stake in the learning and outcomes. This in turn made much more possible the ongoing adaptation of the theory and process to the local conditions, which we see as key to enabling innovative applications of Appreciative Inquiry.

When consultants share the theory and research base of AI with the client system, the joint partnership between them is further enabled. Making assumptions about what clients will or will not be comfortable with can lead to unnecessary constraints on the project. Consultants, imagining their clients to be extremely task focussed (as we did), may bring a limiting assumption about how much their clients want to know about the conceptual underpinnings of the approach that is being used. This can create an insidious dependency on their clients' part, which is in direct opposition to the goal of joint partnership. Although it may be an artefact of working in a culture where intellectual understanding is highly valued, the external consultants were surprised by the clients' request for more in-depth knowledge about AI. When the consultants responded positively to this, the clients were further enabled as full partners. With greater knowledge of the principles and less conceptual dependence on the consultants, the clients could contribute creative ideas about how to overcome organisational constraints.

“Consultant, innovate thyself.” Before the client can receive innovative assistance, innovation must be present in the worldview of the consultant. Consultants often focus on the need for opening up the thinking patterns of their clients without considering the same need on their part. As mentioned in our story, had it not been for a colleague's “out-of-the box” thinking about the possibility of applying Appreciative Inquiry to an evaluation project, we might never have had this wonderful experience! We again learned that innovations, to anyone's thinking, (in this case the consultants thinking), are likely to come from an outside source, from someone not wearing the existing blinders of the moment.

The “four generic” AI questions (i.e. peak experience, personal values, core life-giving factor and wishes for the future) were the ones that produced the richest data, and it takes time to digest all that data. Although we incorporated into the final protocol all of the traditional evaluation questions from the original RFP, the client consistently experienced the responses to the four (slightly modified) generic AI questions to

be the most valuable in terms of the overall goals of the evaluation. The richness of the data gained from the four generic questions allows many more questions to be answered than might be answerable with a more traditional quantitative model of evaluation. We do, however, want to point out that since the data generated are in a qualitative/narrative form, the amount of time to digest the volume of data is significant.

The organisational data collected was very rich – a bounty that was not fully anticipated at the start of the project. In addition to data focusing on the simulation itself, we accumulated a lot of data about how the back home environment could be modified to more effectively support the back-on-the-job application of simulation participants' learning. SB management trusted their internal HR/OD group to conduct this evaluation without a senior level steering committee and that trust was valued by the project team. In retrospect, we realise that by accepting that trust we also accepted the implicit boundary definitions of the project which implicitly limited the outcomes to the goal of identifying improvements in the use of simulation technology at SB. A broader definition at the start might have created pathways for more immediate use of the rich organisation level data that the interviews generated. Ways to make this data useful to the organisation continue to be explored.

As we chatted about our lists we realised once again the power of client/consultant partnership. That which constituted innovation for the consultants was reaffirmation (but not necessarily an innovation) for the client. One case in point was the inclusion of the consultants as part of the interview team. From the consultant perspective this was "innovative" insofar as "normal" AI practice suggests the importance of limiting the active role of the consultant in the interviewing/data collection in order to minimise consultant dependency. From the clients perspective their belief in the validity of using external resources for data collection was reaffirmed. Another example was the clients' "learning" that a joint partnership between consultant and client generates a synergy not present when the consultants and clients relate to

each other in a more traditional manner (e.g. the consultant as expert or vendor). This was not a new learning for the consultants but a reaffirmation of their deeply held beliefs. As we shared with each other what we had learned, what we saw as innovations and that which we felt was reaffirmed for us, we recognised once more the centrality of our partnership model in allowing the consultant and client to build a common experience, a shared language with which to make decisions and conduct work.

EPILOGUE

This story so far describes the use of Appreciative Inquiry to evaluate a training programme within SmithKline Beecham. It should be clear from the narrative that there is no set way to "apply" AI as an organisational intervention in the classic Organisation Development (OD) sense. Instead, Appreciative Inquiry is a way of seeing and being in the world. It is based on the belief that we can create what we imagine when we open our minds and our social processes to the widest possible dialogue among the largest number of people who are involved and invested in our enterprise. Appreciative Inquiry applied becomes an empowering and life-affirming way of living in all human systems.

Created by Dr. David Cooperrider and his colleagues at the School of Organisational Behaviour, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, the appreciative approach to inquiry has become a major innovation in the field of Organisation Development. It has been used to transform a wide range of traditional organisational change processes – strategic planning, team building, restructuring, valuing diversity, almost any and every kind of method for facilitating organisation change.

A basic tenet of AI as a process for organisational change is that the intervention into any human system is fateful and that the system will move in the direction of the first questions that are asked. In other words, if we inquire into what went wrong, the image will be of the organisation as a problem and the energy of the system will go toward trying to fix what is wrong. Alternatively, if the first questions focus the system on its

most creative and life-giving moments, the system will look toward its successes and create images of a positive future congruent with the positive energy that is generated.

The underlying assumption of Appreciative Inquiry is that “organisations are solutions to be embraced.” As human systems designed to be creative and innovative, organisations, in the view of AI, are full of solutions. It is their diversity, multiplicity and forward movement that need to be highlighted and built upon.

As a way of being in the world, Appreciative Inquiry is grounded in Social Constructionist thought, a worldview that asserts that we use language and knowledge to create the world as we know and understand it.

For many centuries we have believed that the world was knowable and predictable. We thought that we could believe only what we could see or prove in some objective fashion. We embraced the proof methods of pure science as though they applied to human behaviour, which led us to think of our social organisations as machines. If we embrace the Social Constructionist view of the world, we begin to understand that language is not a way to understand the world; it is the power of language and the relational use of it that actually creates the world. In other words, we see what we believe. To understand how and why AI works, one must understand and embrace these beliefs about how the world works.

This shift in how we understand the world leads us to an entirely new way of thinking about our social organisations. We begin to see that our organisations are not predictable machines, but rather human constructions that are moulded and changed by the images that human beings have of them.

In its practice, Appreciative Inquiry is the art of discovering and valuing those factors that give life to an organisation or community or group. In its most practical construction, Appreciative Inquiry is a form of organisational study that selectively seeks to locate, highlight and illuminate the life-giving forces of the organisation. When we inquire into the things in our organisations that are life giving, we begin to understand that we can choose to focus on those qualities. Through asking others to join in our inquiry, we can have a considerable impact on the image of our organisation and, ultimately, on the way it functions.

And so it was with the “valuation” process of the Discovery Simulation training programme within SmithKline Beecham. The focus was on what worked well; what had positive impact on the participants; what positive impact carried into the organisation. Not only did the data reflect a generative and creative picture of the Simulation itself, it also told a powerful story of the pride, loyalty and commitment that the people of SmithKline Beecham feel for their company.

Reprints of this article are permitted provided that the author's name and contact information are clearly listed on each page.