

Beyond Discovery and Dream: Unleashing Change through the Design Phase of an AI Intervention

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**“First we shape
our structure
and then our
structures
shape us”
- Winston
Churchill**

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The design phase of AI is a time for the creation of new forms, new containers, new practices and even new directions which embrace and are infused by the positive core, unearthed in Discovery and imagined in our Dream.

*“Where the rubber meets the road”,
“Where we shift from the soft to the
hard stuff in organizations”, “it’s where
we build in sustainability”– These are
ways that people talk about design.
These are challenging words. They are
words which call forth and even demand
the spirit of invention and pioneering
action, so long dormant in many
organizations. As David Cooperrider
observes:*

*“What is becoming increasingly clear to
me is that if people do great work with
Discovery and Dream, then rarely, if
ever, do the older command and control
structures of eras past serve the org; the
new dreams always seem to have
outgrown the structures and
systems.....When inspired by a great
dream we have yet to find an
organization that did not feel compelled
to DESIGN something very new and
very necessary.”*

In this issue of the AI practitioner, we seek to share with you the state of the art thinking about the what, how, when, and why of the Design phase – the work of weaving the meanings or implications of the Dream into the fabric of organizing. It is not our intention to prescribe

“correct” activities for designing social architectures, nor do we have any thought of suggesting there is one best way to organize. Rather, we want to expand the range of processes by which people can co-create the circumstances (i.e. the social architecture, the dialogical spaces and the individual acts) that allow, enable and encourage the fullest expression of the Dream in a sustainable way.

The view of design we want to share with you is one of an idea in motion. We think of design as both a process and a product. As a verb ... “to design” ... Is to invent, to innovate, to conceive and to make choices — about the purpose, principles, roles, processes, practices, structures, conversations and actions which will house, support and give life to the organization’s dream.. As a noun, “The Organization Design” ... is the set of choices we have made about the above.

We see design as a living, continuous process of meaning making in which we all participate through our use of language, through the way we frame the challenges and possibilities of organizational life and through the expressions of our beliefs and priorities via our behaviors, systems, structures and processes. We do not take the view that the job is done once our systems, roles and processes have been re-designed but, like a work of art, the meaning that these threads of

organizational fabric carry is mediated through how they are interpreted. In addition to the structural aspects of organizational design we also think of the cultural messages carried by our behaviour as a key dimension of design.

Although we see the practice of appreciative design as an evolving process, we are clear that, whatever choices are made by members of the organization – about how work is organized and how people are brought together to do that work – these choices are significant. The old adage that “all organizations are perfectly designed to obtain the results currently being produced” has been repeated many ways – as for example by Dee Hock, founder of Visa International when he says:

“Most people spend 50% of their time not just doing their job but fighting their own institutional bureaucracies.”

What concerns us from an Appreciative Inquiry perspective is the underpinning question to Dee’s statement – which might well be *“what forms of human organizing give life to our dreams and what processes can we share with our clients to engage them in their own discovery of the forms of organizing most appropriate for them”*

Consider the following story. It had been some 13 years since Bob (the plant’s former HR manager) and Bernard (as the external consultant) had partnered with the core group charged with envisioning and implementing a high performance greenfield plant “where people could be their best” and where overall performance exceeded every other plant in the system. In its early years the plant had set performance records in areas of safety, quality, productivity, attendance and other measures of employee quality of working life. But during the intervening

years the plant had lost its initial leadership team and suffered two changes of ownership. Frankly, knowing how few organizations have sustained revolutionary cultures and performance, even when managers and corporate ownership stayed the same it was with some trepidation, Bernard asked Bob *“how is the plant doing and what has become of the self-organizing culture we had implemented?”*, Bob’s answer nearly made Bernard fall off his chair. “Bernard” said Bob, *“the plant is doing so well that the new corporate owners have said they want all future general managers to come out of this plant.”*. Bob went on, *“If there is any one thing, that has allowed us not just to sustain the cultural innovations of 13 years ago, but to evolve them, its clearly the power of the design we all developed and implemented 13 years ago”*.

Such is the power of Design in bringing to life a dream and supporting the conversations needed to evolve it. Design draws on the power of our dreams to inform the co-construction of overall design principles and then engages the people actually doing the work of the organization in inventing new “social architectures”. Social architectures that unleash the energy of the dream, serve as an organizational fabric within which work is accomplished and where people experience dignity, meaning and community. From new and innovative combinations of individual tasks, to radical rethinking of work flows, technologies, measures and goals for monitoring performance, to the governance and decision making processes which assure vibrant internal integration and simultaneous connection of the organization to environmental opportunities – these are the conversations of the design phase of Appreciative Inquiry.

What You Will Find In this Issue

The first case, by Amanda Trosten Bloom, *“Evolving Approaches to Design at Hunter Douglas Window Fashions Division”*, describes the multi-year transformation at Hunter Douglas, with each year bringing a new focus for design as the company cycles again and again through the AI process – each time building on what has been accomplished in the prior year.

The next case, by Jim Ludema and Gina Hinrichs *“Values-based Organization Design: The Case of John Deere Harvester Works”*, looks at what can be achieved when the focus of change is organizational redesign but it has to happen in five days!

The third article is *“Hope and Confidence by Design: How Systems Thinking Enhances Success of the Design Phase of an AI Initiative”*, by Steve Nyland. This article highlights how the complementary nature of a Systems Thinking approach can inform and bring to life the design phase – enhancing the “flow” and “glow” of an AI initiative.

The contribution from Stephen Fitzgerald, Jill Nemiro, Ron Fry and Ken Murrell provokes us into thinking about design as deserving consideration throughout the whole process of an intervention and reminds us that this is particularly the case as we embark on a project. Steve and colleagues describe the development and use of a Collaborative Capacity Framework for enriching and deepening dialogue.

In an article by Keith Cox, *“Culture Design through Appreciative Inquiry”*, Keith outlines the process of design which ignited culture change at SecureComm, a small family-owned business. Included in the case are the specific possibility statements, the design

architecture model, results achieved, and his learnings and reflections of applying AI to culture design.

Ilene Wasserman describes her work with Green Mountain Coffee in which she used Appreciative Inquiry as an innovative way of achieving a radical redesign of key organizational business processes.

Surely one of the most intriguing cases is the story (*“The Experience Of Participative Design At Nutrimental”*, by João Bordignon) of the design activities undertaken at Nutrimental. This compelling description raises important questions about what can happen when an organization in which AI philosophy is deeply embedded attempts to utilize a powerful, but philosophically divergent method for the design phase. And at the same time, it stands as a testament to an organization which reflects back on its experience not to judge but to identify what there is of worth which can be brought forward.

Lastly, Diana Whitney and Jim Ludema in their essay *“The Promise of the Appreciative Organization”*, delve into the questions of “what does it mean to create an Appreciative Organization” and “what would that look like” and “how might we go about designing such an organization?”

We trust that you the reader will find the ideas in these articles engaging. Our hope is that they represent an expansion of both our thinking and practice in this fascinating work. Please include us in your thoughts and discussions pertaining to this exciting evolution of the field of Appreciative Inquiry.

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