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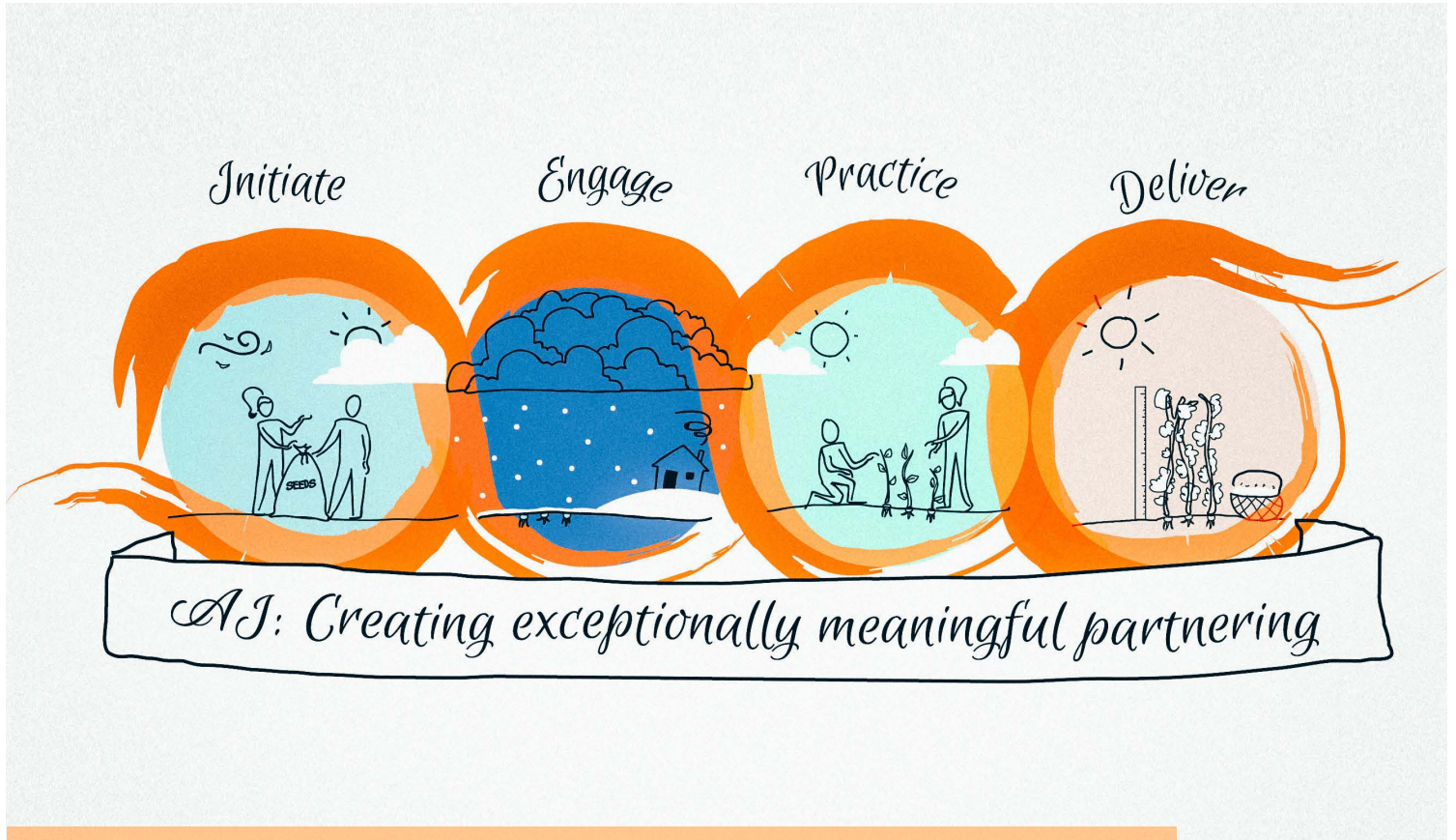
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Consultants & Clients Co-authoring Sustainable Results in Organisations and Communities

Edited by

Ralph Weickel

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Consultants & Clients Co-authoring Sustainable Results in Organisations and Communities

Inside this issue

Welcome to August 2015 issue of AI Practitioner

Consultants & Clients Co-authoring Sustainable Results in Organisations and Communities reflects the creative and new ways practitioners are delivering results while leveraging strengths and engaging the whole system. The articles show how clients are using the principles, processes and methodology of Appreciative Inquiry in rapidly changing environments.

David Cooperrider and Lindsey Godwin highlight what we have learned about

non-deficit, life-centric and full-spectrum strengths-powered change in the Feature Choice article, "Elevation-and-Change: An Eight-Step Platform for Leading P.O.S.I.T.I.V.E. Change".

In Research Review & Notes, Ron Fry at Case Western Reserve University in the United States summarises recent research on the generative power of the Appreciative Inquiry Discovery phase.

AI Resources focuses on resources to help practitioners improve the impact of AI processes and research studies that empirically highlight the impact of AI processes.

We would like to thank Corporation for Positive Change for sponsoring this issue.

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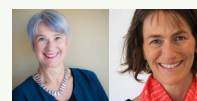
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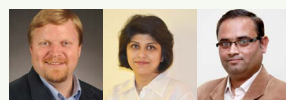


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Building on her four decades of experience at four Alberta colleges and universities, Sharon Carry has been the president and CEO at Bow Valley College since 1997. In 2014, Sharon was invested in the Alberta Order of Excellence, the highest honour the province can bestow on a citizen.

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Photo courtesy the Alberta Order of Excellence



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Partnerships that Matter – Results that Count

Colleges and Consultants Lifting Up Higher Education in Canada

The authors of this article weave a story of renewal, engagement and results that reflect how the notions of Appreciative Inquiry have lifted up the work of two institutions, from planning, to staff, to boardroom, as they have reached out to the future of higher education.

In this article the four authors describe the power of the partnership between the colleges and the consultants; the ways in which Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has been woven into these two Canadian colleges; and the results that have been seen within the institutions.

Two of the authors are consultants: Joan McArthur-Blair and Jeanie Cockell, Co-presidents, Cockell McArthur-Blair Consulting. They work with institutions of all types to foster institutional futures. Their work is mostly with higher education clients who are seeking to engage the people inside their institutions in the co-leadership of the institution's future. Two authors are presidents of colleges in Canada, Sharon Carry and Denise Henning, Sharon is at Bow Valley College (BVC) and Denise is at Medicine Hat College (MHC). They have worked with Joan and Jeanie to bring Appreciative Inquiry inside their institutions and create generative change.

The power of the partnership

Appreciative Inquiry is relational and socially constructed, and so were the beginnings of these partnerships between the consultants and the institutions. Responses

'I wrote furiously on a paper napkin, the only thing at hand, and outlined how an AI approach to strategic planning might be done.'
Joan

to requests for proposals and the formal contracting and vetting were all part of building these strong client–consultant relationships but the beginnings were about conversation and imagining a possible path forward.

Interestingly, both of these partnerships started as random conversations. The partnership with Bow Valley College began at a conference where Joan and Sharon found themselves sitting side by side. Sharon mentioned the Bow Valley College upcoming strategic-planning process and Joan drew out an AI model for planning on a napkin and a partnership that has spanned four and a half years was born. Sharon has said that some of the very best ideas come from brainstorming ideas with someone else, and there was a straightforward trajectory to where we are today from that back-of-the-napkin conversation.

At another conference table, in another city, Joan met Denise Henning when they were both college presidents and they talked about difference, diversity and leadership. This conversation bonded them and they began to have regular conversations on the nature of leadership. Years later when Joan became a consultant, Denise brought her and Jeanie to first one institution and then to another to jump start the use of AI. Denise states that for her, one of the powerful pieces of the partnership was that it allowed her as a leader to step back and be part of the change conversation, and let Joan and Jeanie be in the forefront facilitating the process.

AI Tool The power of partnership: each member uplifts the work of the others

The power of partnership is that each member uplifts the work of the others, expanding to include the voices of so many people who all have something to offer in co-creating their institutional future. Essential to the transformative impact of AI is presidential commitment for the institution to appreciate what is and inquire into what might be. Below we look at the stories of Bow Valley College and of Medicine Hat College. Bow Valley College has been on its journey with Appreciative Inquiry for several years; Medicine Hat College began theirs in 2014. We couldn't include every aspect of how AI is being used within the institutions so we have focused on a few highlights and results the colleges have seen.



Bow Valley College—AI at the core of the institution

This story begins with Vision 2020, the new strategic plan for the college. Bow Valley College wanted to talk to the people inside the institution, in Calgary and in the region about what kind of college Bow Valley could and should be by the year 2020. They chose Appreciative Inquiry as the process to create the new plan, and in doing so launched an AI journey that is still evolving and growing.

Vision 2020 started with a core group, including Sharon Carry and Joan McArthur-Blair, tasked with putting all the pieces together to create a strategic plan that would take the institution forward. The group envisioned creating a strategic plan for the organization by talking to the people who would be impacted on a daily basis by that plan. Summits were held that included learners, faculty, staff, business, industry, community and government. The largest was called "One Day in May" and included 1500 internal college employees and students. The process went on to

One Day in May, Vision 2020: Taking Bow Valley College into a positive future



'The consultants loved us, walked hand-in-hand with us, but it was Bow Valley College's outcome...' Sharon

engage another 500 people from community, industry and government. From these engagements a new strategic plan was put in place. Vision 2020 became a key case study in the chapter on AI summits in Joan and Jeanie's book, *Appreciative Inquiry in Higher Education: A Transformative Force*.

What began as using AI as a strategic-planning process has gone on to be a larger part of Bow Valley College's day-to-day way of interacting. Sharon states that she uses the principles of AI in many different ways. It was like dropping a pebble in water with the rings of influence rippling outward.

Over time, Bow Valley College brought Joan and Jeanie to do introductory AI training, Advanced Appreciative Inquiry Facilitator Training, and Joan created a leadership development workshop using an AI framework. It has been very helpful to have so many people inside the college trained. Bow Valley College has a history of social justice, and the organization spun around a focus on assets, but AI added an elegance to that. AI is the right fit. The sharpened understanding of AI has helped Bow Valley College continue to behave in a way that is concurrent with Vision 2020 and our core social justice beliefs.

Bow Valley College also used AI with the board of governors. The board is composed of business people who have been exposed to other types of planning processes and

'Both of these partnerships were powerful because of the AI training focus which left a powerful legacy of AI inside the institutions. In the beginning we were the experts and toward the end there were experts in AI at every level inside these institutions.' Jeanie

the college took a risk to use Appreciate Inquiry. The board flourished through using this process and has returned to it each year as their framework for board retreats.

The results from using Appreciative Inquiry are ongoing and, of course, AI is not the only enabler of success. Highlights of a few successes:

1. Bow Valley College facilitates AI for other institutions to assist them in meeting their goals.
2. Being a partner is a core concept of using AI and one example of this is we now have co-branded library cards with the public library.
3. Bow Valley College created the idea of "learning navigator" which involves pairing up anyone inside the institution with a learner and the navigator mentors them along the way. Anyone can be a navigator and now other institutions are picking up the idea.
4. Accountability is integrated right back to the strategic plan. The organization has been religious about how to report on this, not just simplistic measures but asking the big questions about where the institution is going.
5. First Nations, Inuit and Metis enrollment has increased 85% since One Day in May because one of the ideas from the engagement process was to focus on the diversity advantage. The city asked the college to do the July Powwow and nearly 80,000 people came.
6. People infect new employees with the ideas of Vision 2020 and build their own personal goals around it.
7. Program and course pathways, and dual credit both inside and outside the institution.
8. In our 50th year, building on our expertise in inclusive engagement, we are again asking our communities where Bow Valley College could go in the next 50 years.
9. People step up and are open to working as "real leaders" tackling the big questions.

The Medicine Hat story – AI transformation in action

The Medicine Hat story is in its beginning stages and yet it is travelling at lightning speed. Denise Henning began her presidency at Medicine Hat College in 2014, bringing to the organization a value base of utilizing strengths to build and transform. Her foremost plan of action was to, as quickly as possible, build a mass of leadership within the organization to move the cultural environment to a strengths-based, future-ready institution operating with a high level of trust and a shared leadership administration.



**MEDICINE HAT
COLLEGE**

'As a new president, the first year is pivotal for taking an institution into its next phase of growth and development.' Denise

AI Tool SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) model.

The college was ready for a new strategic plan: 80% of the board of governors was changing and there was some restructuring of the institution needed. Denise, having used AI in her presidency at her previous college, already knew she wanted to bring that focus to Medicine Hat College.

The first priority was to cultivate a strong appreciative leadership team. As Denise states: "A great senior team is passionate about higher education and its power to change lives. As senior leaders, they own the responsibility for role modeling and demonstrating an appreciative value base."

Simultaneously to the development of the executive team, was the unique progression of the strategic planning. An open invitation to the college community to participate on the Strategic Planning Council resulted in a council of over 50 people. On Denise's second day as president, the Strategic Planning Council engaged in their first two-day AI training with Joan and Jeanie. In that session, they designed their processes and working committees for developing Medicine Hat College's new strategic plan. The council decided to use a SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) model approach. Additionally, they chose to utilize a ground-up design that would elicit input from the communities, industries, business, public school, social organizations, chamber, faculty, staff, students and administration. It quickly became apparent that the work at the senior team level and the strategic-planning council began to walk the journey at the same time toward being a highly effective, creative and inclusive team that actualized and became the core or mass needed to move an appreciate environment or culture forward.

Over the next months, Joan and Jeanie were brought in to provide opportunities for further AI facilitator training and executive team development. The college invested in professional development for anyone who wanted to become familiar with AI. This investment directly correlated to these people finding ways of engaging their respective areas and colleagues in AI.

Another development was the creation of an AI course. This idea, prompted by a new MHC employee assigned to moving the teaching and learning to an integrated-learning environment, incorporated AI theory with short video vignettes to help anyone explore AI for their own use.

The permeation of AI led to this course becoming an integral part of the onboarding process for all new staff members, resulting in a clear standard of operation and cultural values for MHC. Advertisements for positions and interviewing processes were changed to focus on using an appreciative framework. Clearly AI as an organizational culture and environment was possible, and became the college's way of thinking.

One powerful way that new thinking was demonstrated was preparing for College Day. College Day was a day set aside for all employees of MHC to get together for setting a tone for the upcoming academic year and to see other colleagues in a

College Day: 350 out of 500 employees attended, an all-time record attendance



‘Sometimes bringing in a consultant accelerates the organization forward at rocket speed.’ Denise

more casual environment. It had been reported that the College Days in the past had been poorly attended and more of a ‘talking head’ event rather than a renewal and energizing activity. The planning committee thought this was an exciting opportunity to introduce all college employees to AI and to use the SOAR model to gather information for the strategic plan. Attendance was well over 350 out of almost 500 full and part-time employees. Never had that happened before in the history of College Day. The day was great, the process was fun, every person engaged and the response was overwhelmingly positive. This highly successful AI summit was designed and facilitated by a team trained in AI by Joan and Jeanie – the AI facilitating torch had been successfully passed on.

The college is now bringing the strategic plan to life; there is a more proactive stance using AI organizationally to develop an outcomes-based environment that builds from the strategic plan.

‘Our conference session was described as inspiring, motivating and illustrative of the power of the concepts of AI. The work we are doing at Medicine Hat College is on the leading edge of using AI to help transform educational institutions into being future-ready.’ Denise

Denise and colleagues presented “A College in Transition: Appreciative Inquiry as a Transformative Force” at the 2015 Appreciative Education Conference.

Medicine Hat is early in its journey with AI but is beginning to see results. A few are:

1. Using an appreciative approach to develop outcomes and key performance indicators
2. Redefining our assessment process for all employees to an appreciative assessment process

'I am most rewarded in my work with clients when they not only use the tools of AI but also take AI into a daily practice of leadership and being.' Jeanie

'One of the most rewarding things about being a consultant is that you get to lift up the dreams of other people, organizations and groups.' Joan

3. Medicine Hat College has received a grant to research Medicine Hat College's program review and integrated teaching and learning using an AI framework

4. Experts in appreciative advising are coming to train people at Medicine Hat College to enhance the way the college will work with learners.

Joan and Jeanie's story – An appreciative practice

Joan and Jeanie have many years of working in and with higher education institutions and are passionate about how these institutions transform learners' lives and their communities. Working in partnership with BVC and MHC are two very powerful examples of the extraordinary impact of AI. At both colleges, people applied Joan and Jeanie's book, *Appreciative Inquiry in Higher Education: A Transformative Force*, to leading, teaching, facilitating, planning, team building... People engaged fully in Joan and Jeanie's facilitations and AI-facilitation training events and went out to facilitate their own AI events, adding their creative ideas and processes. Joan and Jeanie were inspired by the wisdom and skills that surfaced to positively transform BVC and MHC.

In their work as consultants, Joan and Jeanie develop these types of partnerships over and over again with clients in higher education. Each one of these partnerships is unique and fosters collegial friendships, new tools to use in AI work, powerful outcomes and lasting legacies. Consultants don't get to stay and see every idea unfold, but AI is about results. Its power lies in the engagement of the very people who can and will lift up the future of an institution and in the co-created design of that future. In every engagement, Joan and Jeanie strive to leave within the organization the skills and philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry so that it is always there to be practiced, innovated upon and used again and again.

And in closing

The power of partnership is that each person in the experience leaves with new strength, new skill and commitment to the possibility of generative futures. Partnerships are about deep dialogue that envisions what might be, then using all available resources to make that vision happen. The stories of partnership told here are ongoing and continue to unfold. They have involved many men and women who are committed to the practice of Appreciative Inquiry and its power to uplift the work of an institution. As Denise states: "AI allowed me to build on my strengths and an appreciation of people and has given me more tools in my tool box to assist people to be at their best." And as Sharon states: "We are a different place because we did this."

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