

Costa Rica Reflection Paper

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Beginning our Costa Rican experience with Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was a welcome call to continue my personal investigation of my relationship with cynicism, problem-focused thought, and positivity. Moving all the way to focus on positive possibilities without wrestling through step-by-step and trying to resolve my habits of focusing on problems was a bit of a radical take for me, and also a nice relief. I'm glad to know better now that under some tendencies to jump to judgement I have a plentiful well of positivity. I was also surprised and happy to find that both the initial and expanded client teams were more-or-less readily willing to join in this approach.

There were a few moments that I found challenging to use an appreciative approach to assuage concerns. In initial planning with the client sponsor Ceci at P&G, I don't think I was able to clearly paint a picture of how we might frame our initial focused area of inquiry or the value of talking that through more. I think we might have been more expansive than we ended up. Later when beginning with the larger client group, my introduction of our inquiry process was met with confusion due to its unfamiliarity compared to their traditional approaches. I think this should be expected and I will remember to take time introducing this or similar approaches in order to better articulate their benefits and give people the time to bring themselves along.

The last area of my experience with our AI intervention that was the most significant for me involved the contrast between presenting to the whole group and connecting individually or to small groups. Carrying forward enjoyment from starting the school session standing up in front of the whole class, I was excited to do so again with the full client group. Reflecting immediately while the exercise was still in progress, I started noticing some things I wished I had done differently. Rather than dwelling on those things though, I found—with some prompting

from Professor Mangiofico—opportunities to use inquiry to encourage others; both the participants and my colleagues. In the end, my colleagues offered appreciation of some of my presentation styles and I took away an expanded appreciation of the power of appreciative inquiry in dialog with individuals.

This focus on individual connection as an alternative to sharing in front of the large group continued to grow for me over the rest of the session, which was some surprise to me. I had been working with an awareness that when I display my own vulnerability it creates an opportunity for others to do so too, and I assumed I would find a need and opportunity to do so in the large group. Yet in our exploration of our community over the last two full days in Costa Rica I was happy to find that many members of the cohort were ready to explore with remarkable vulnerability their own point of view and meaning with the full group; and I didn't need to volunteer myself to get other people going. This exploration was done through sharing personal stories and in dialog with others. I found myself also gaining new insight to my own sense of self in unexpected ways within trios as I tried to explain myself and answer caring questions from my colleagues. It was not playing out much like I would have imagined, but there was for myself—and in what I observed for others—a core of vulnerability and quest for deeper understanding of personal meaning and motivation that was similar to what I anticipated. People seemed moved by expressing themselves and in experiencing the expressions by others. I know I was moved when watching others express their truest self, and that in this connection to an emotional core in myself, my point of view shifted. I gained strength, fortitude, and motivation to explore more bravely my personal experience and I didn't do it alone.

Considering all that we studied during the week including complexity theory, the value of positive psychology, appreciative inquiry, data gathering and meaning making in La Carpio, and

participating in several large group interventions; I'm thrilled and surprised to come away with an understanding that a thread of personal meaning runs through all of these. Starting with using personal stories as a vector to discover meaningfulness around chosen themes of inquiry in AI, it both made sense to me and resonated with my heart that personal investigations elevating the humanity of individuals would be crucial and necessary to any organization change. I know that people can find meaning in a wide variety of work, and I've noticed this behavior in myself over the years and in a couple of my cohort members during our program. If this yearning for meaning expresses itself when people are feeling most motivated or loyal to their job, there is much to be gained if more connection to meaning can be cultivated. Lashing a change initiative to the motivations of those who will live it out is both pragmatic for achieving desired outcomes and beneficial to the people who will find more meaning in their lives as a result.

Looking back at the practicum as a whole, I find that I am walking forward viscerally knowing that change must start with dialog. This dialog can be shaped with thoughtful and appreciative questions and can search for meaning in the stories of others. While seeking to elevate the stories and uncover the meaning they hold for others, I will continue to be served by an ever-increasing awareness of my own meaning and the stories I tell myself. Meaning is what holds the power to motivate and move people. Connecting meaning within a community is a path that acknowledges the interdependence we all carry and accepts the potential latent within our human nature. This perspective—that acknowledging essential human dignity can transform the work we all do together as people—is an expression of the desires I hoped to find in my study of OD beyond what I could articulate before but that still pulled me towards this path. I'm quite satisfied by how this exploration has unfolded thus far.