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Creating a Healthy Workplace Culture Using an Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle

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This study describes the second year of an ongoing partnership between an urban drug court (UDC) and a research university with very high research activity. The purpose of the second year of our study was to engage an appreciative inquiry (AI) Learning Team in all stages of the AI 4-D Cycle to discover the positive core of their work history and work relationships to create a healthy UDC workplace culture. Nine purposively selected participants were engaged in all four stages of the AI 4-D Cycle. There were four findings. Participants (a) developed a strong sense of personal and collective empowerment; (b) created a compelling vision for healthy workplace culture; (c) created a blueprint to achieve their vision of a healthy workplace culture; and (d) generated important action steps to implement a healthy workplace culture. The application to practice of using an AI 4-D Cycle provides managers in both private and public organizations with strategies to create healthy workplace cultures. *Organization Management Journal*, 10: 196–207, 2013. doi: 10.1080/15416518.2013.831706

Keywords appreciative inquiry; AI Learning Team; organizational culture; partnerships; positive core

Organizations often display what can be thought of as “learning disabilities” that undermine performance and are extremely resistant to change (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Schein, 1996). Argyris (1999) identified such organizational learning disabilities as “Model I behaviors,” representing governing values, actions, and organizational defensive routines. At the heart of an organization’s learning disabilities is the failure of members to recognize the dysfunction associated with Model I behaviors. Issues raised for discussion often are squelched, in effect becoming “undiscussable.” In fact, if the undiscussable nature of these issues itself is raised, that discussion is also squelched, resulting in discussion of undiscussables

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also becoming undiscussable. Such Model I behaviors are commonplace in organizations, often leading to negatively reinforcing loops that spin at ever faster rates, and of which members are largely unaware (Forrester, 1971; Senge et al., 2000). Managers, especially new managers, need strategies that allow them to facilitate the breaking of negatively reinforcing loops, substituting positively reinforcing loops in their place.

One way for a manager to move others from Model I behavior is to create an alternative culture based on “Model II behavior”—grounded in having accurate information, using the accurate information to make wise decisions, and with vigorous monitoring of the actions stemming from decisions to identify mistakes and make corrections (Argyris, 1995). The challenge, according to Argyris (1999), is to help individuals learn a new set of skills and a new set of governing values.

It is our contention that appreciative inquiry (AI) is a counterintuitive process that facilitates the replacement of negative reinforcing loops with positive, optimistic loops, resulting in the identification of new values and associated positive actions. AI is an action-research methodology that fosters a collaborative and participative inquiry focused on the discovery of what works, leading to innovation and sustainable higher levels of organizational function and growth (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). In this article, we provide a case study of the counterintuitive process of AI and its application in a public-sector organization.

Model I behavior, characterized by defensive routines, is an apt description for a large urban drug court (UDC) where a new manager requested assistance to change the culture of the organization. The new UDC manager faced low levels of staff morale and nonexistent cooperation among members of the various agencies working with the UDC. The manager believed the low staff morale and lack of staff cooperation contributed to the poor record of success with UDC’s clients in the court’s mandated treatment programs. The manager painted a picture of an organization where its members refused to collaborate, viewed their clients as hopeless, felt overwhelmed, and viewed their

work as “treading water” until “something better came along.” More importantly, these perceptions and behaviors appeared to be part of the normal working conditions at the UDC. These types of perceptions, and the negative conversations they drove, seemed to continuously reinforce each other and eliminate the possibility of other, more constructive ways to address the challenges facing the UDC (Argyris, 2002; Stark, 2004). The new manager at the UDC described the symptoms of negative reinforcing loops she experienced in her first weeks on the job. The greater her effort to slow the negative loops, the greater was the resistance she felt. When we met with her, she asked, “How can I create a positive work environment when no one wants to work here?” The UDC manager’s question essentially suggested Model I values and actions of UDC members and her desire to move toward a Model II based organization.

The manager’s question and our belief in the appreciative inquiry process led to the creation of a partnership between UDC and a research-oriented university. The research team representing the university included a professor and two doctoral students. The partnership, completing its second year, sought to create a positive organizational climate through the application of AI to facilitate the movement from Model I behavior to Model II behavior. Since AI is based on the premise that an organization changes in the direction in which the organization’s members make inquiries, we believed that UDC members’ Model I behavior could be changed by the types of questions they were asking, thus guiding them to Model II behavior. In Model II behavior, we believed, UDC members would begin to discover and appreciate what is best and good in their organization and use these discoveries to build a new future for the UDC. See Figure 1 for a timeline of the 2-year partnership.

This article specifically focuses on the activity and outcomes during the second year of the partnership. We describe (a) the narrative of the AI 4-D Cycle; (b) the shift among UDC participants from deficit thinking to possibility thinking; and (c) the change in UDC’s culture during the second year of the partnership. To enhance full understanding of our focal research, we first present our theoretical framework, followed by background information on UDC and its first year of activity with the university.

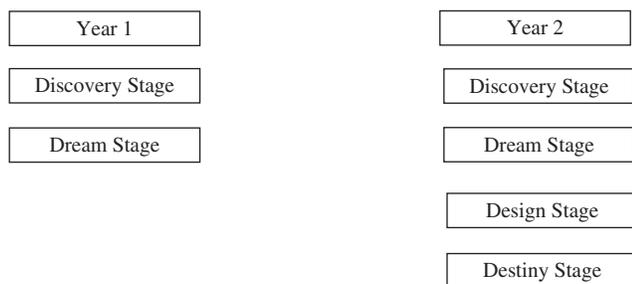


FIG. 1. Timeline for UDC 2-year participation in the appreciative inquiry 4-D Cycle. *Note.* The timeline represents UDC’s two-year participation in the appreciative inquiry 4-D Cycle. Year 1: discovery stage and dream stage; year 2: discovery stage, dream stage, design stage, and destiny stage.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Appreciative inquiry is a form of action research and is commonly used by AI researchers as both a theoretical research perspective and methodology. It involves participation of the researcher and those with whom the researcher is working while seeking to improve important issues of practice by integrating theory and practice informed by reflection (Reason & McArdle, 2007). As AI researchers, we acted as both participants and observers. We reframed problems that participants brought to the AI process into opportunities or, in AI semantics, affirmative challenges to facilitate the cooperative and collaborative discovery of an organization’s positive core (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Weick & Quinn, 1999).

An organization’s positive core is represented in the organization’s gestalt of strengths and past successes: the wisdom, stories, achievements, high-point experiences, and unexplored capabilities within an organization (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Once participants, individually or collectively, discover the positive core, they develop newfound confidence and engage in generative conversations designed to renew their organization and create innovative plans for a sustainable future (Whitney & Schau, 1998; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

Appreciative inquiry follows a long theoretical and research tradition related to change, optimism, organizational learning, positive psychology, and humanistic psychology advocating that an organization has the potential to become more than it is at any given moment (Argyris, 1999; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Lewin, 1951; Maslow, 1968). Initially, many large organizations, public and private, used AI to generate new, dynamic visions for their organizations. AI, as a change methodology, takes on multiple formats depending on the goals of the inquiry. These formats range from the AI Summit, where groups range from 30 to 30,000 people, to AI Learning Teams comprised of small groups of people with a common focus who engage in the AI 4-D Cycle. The Imagine Chicago AI project illustrates how neighborhoods and their schools might become more vibrant (Browne, 2004). The U.S. Navy, World Council of Churches, BBC, World Vision, and Nepal all applied the AI methodology to foster large-scale collaborative action (Calabrese, Zepeda, et al., 2007; Cooperrider et al., 2008). Although its genesis was as a large-group collaborative change process, it has grown in popularity and is emerging as a theoretical research perspective.

Appreciative inquiry continues to expand as a research theoretical perspective as well as a change methodology in public organizational settings such as K–12 school settings, as well as in higher education (Bloom & Archer-Martin, 2002; Calabrese, Zepeda, et al., 2007; Hall, 2008). In traditional educational venues, AI has emerged as a growing research methodology. It has been used in low-performing, urban high schools (Calabrese, 2006; Ihejirika, 2000); with classroom teachers (Adamson, Samuels, & Wiloughby, 2002; Calabrese, San Martin, Glasgow, & Friesen, 2008; Doveston, 2007); in youth engagement in community-based projects (Morsillo & Fisher, 2007); in improving the preparation of

school administrators through global collaboration (Calabrese, Roberts, et al., 2008); in advising and coaching at-risk students (San Martin & Calabrese, 2011; Truschel, 2007); in evaluating the strengths of a unique special education program, the Circle of Friends (Calabrese, Patterson, et al., 2008); in evaluating student achievement based on the No Child Left Behind Accountability Act (Freitas, 2006); and in improving student retention in a university setting (Hall, 2008).

Appreciative inquiry empirical research, seeking to understand, describe, or examine the work of drug courts or work associated with drug courts, was framed through theoretical research perspectives to shape our research questions. We found AI applied as a theoretical research perspective to describe female drug offenders' positive perceptions of their drug court experiences (Fischer, Geiger, & Hughes, 2007; Roberts & Wolfer, 2011). It was also used to identify ways drug courts can improve community support (Hiller et al., 2010) and improve services to clients (Maar et al., 2009). We did not discover empirical research describing AI action research *interventions* in drug court settings.

We built on this emerging field by contributing our experience of facilitating all four stages of an AI 4-D Cycle with the UDC. The AI 4-D Cycle (see Figures 2–6, shown later) is designed to facilitate broad-based, democratic dialogue leading to new knowledge, innovative designs, and a positive vision of an imagined future that motivates participants to act “as if” the future were in the present (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). AI is comprised of four distinct stages: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. Much like a pyramid, each stage supports the subsequent stages. For the purposes of this study, we used the AI Learning Team form of engagement—a small group of people with a common focus who engage in the AI 4-D Cycle (Ludema, Whitney, Mohr, & Griffin, 2003).

AI through the AI 4-D Cycle promotes high levels of participation. These high levels of participation contribute to a deeper sense of community among participants.

A community is a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision-making, and who share certain practices that both define the community and are nurtured by it. Such a community is not quickly formed. It almost always has a history and so is also a community of memory, defined in part by its past and its memory of the past. (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985, p. 333)

From the onset, we believed UDC's participation in the AI 4-D Cycle had the potential for creating new working relationships, building a strong sense of bridging social capital, and generating excitement among participants of what was possible for them to accomplish in their work at the UDC.

BACKGROUND OF THE URBAN COMMUNITY DRUG COURT

The UDC is a publicly funded organization considered the last-chance alternative for court-referred, long-term substance

abusers. The UDC is an amalgamation of cooperating social and government agencies coordinated by its manager and supervised by a court magistrate. The UDC manager and court magistrate have limited oversight over interagency personnel and rely on goodwill. These agencies represent government prosecutors, public defenders, social workers, and counselors. Participants represented professionals drawn from these agencies, as well as the UDC manager and court magistrate.

The UDC uses multiple educational, social, and psychological strategies through counseling, education, and court-mandated attendance in self-help programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous to work with clients to learn to become functioning members of society who lead productive and sober lives. The following narrative presents the theoretical framework, methodology, and findings from the data we collected during the four stages of the AI 4-D Cycle.

Background to Year 2

In the first year of our partnership, the UDC's new manager sought to ameliorate the effects of the high-stress environment associated with the UDC and improve staff morale and staff cooperation. The participants were government prosecutors, public defenders, social workers, and counselors. The participants are loosely associated with the UDC. For example, the government prosecutors from the district attorney's office and the social workers from the county social work office are assigned, as part of their roles, to the UDC.

To address the UDC manager's concerns, we facilitated the Discovery Stage and Dream Stage of the AI 4-D Cycle with the goal to raise UDC participants' morale by creating a positive environment and providing opportunities to collectively imagine a positive future vision as a way to improve collaboration. At the onset, participants viewed themselves as overwhelmed, victims of external forces over which they held no power or influence. The following participants' quotes from the first year of the partnership provide a glimpse of their initial views of work and the people they served:

“It's all about money—we don't have enough to do what we need to do!”

“We just don't have the resources to be successful.”

“Treatment only works if someone is open to the treatment. I get frustrated with relapse rates.”

“How can they put drugs before their kids? Try wrapping your head around why someone would make these choices.”

Participants' language indicated they believed they were the victims of bureaucratic indifference. They also suggested their clients were unwilling to end substance dependence. They spoke of feeling stuck, unable to change jobs, and being miserable in their work. They were frustrated with lack of internal or external cooperation and lack of support from the UDC administration.

At the completion of the first year of AI collaborative activities, participants indicated the positive effects of our work with the UDC. They felt optimistic and had a renewed sense of hope. Their participation in the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle facilitated their discovery of previous successful work experiences.

The new UDC manager and participants believed they were moving in a positive direction. As one participant concluded, “It’s my commitment to make a difference in the lives of my clients. I have the ability to form relationships with them. My closest associates believe I’m sincere, hardworking. I never give up.” After our first year of AI collaborative activities, the UDC invited us to extend the partnership for a second year.

Year 2 Study

The purpose of year 2 of our partnership was to engage UDC participants, an AI Learning Team, in all stages of the AI 4-D Cycle to discover the positive core of their work history and work relationships to create a healthy UDC workplace culture. From the onset, this purpose was the underlying premise of the partnership. Culture has several definitions. For the purposes of this study, we chose to use the definition proposed by Schein (1997): “A culture is a set of basic tacit assumptions about how the world is and ought to be that is shared by a set of people and determines their perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and to some degree their overt behavior.” Applying this definition of culture to the study aligns with the social constructionist epistemology that underlies AI.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study took place on the university’s main campus in a private and secure location. Our study addressed the following research questions:

1. How does a participant’s positive core experience in the UDC workplace contribute to the development of an empowering vision for the future?
2. How does participating in a full AI 4-D Cycle contribute to a cultural shift within the UDC in creating a healthy UDC workplace culture?

Participants were engaged in the four stages of the AI 4-D Cycle (see Figure 2): Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny.

1. The Discovery Stage (see Figure 3) engaged participants in participatory AI activities. They shared high-point UDC experiences by brainstorming strengths and values in combination with storytelling, and identified the UDC’s actual narrative as well as a desired narrative by focusing on positive experiences, optimistic possibilities, and a desired future.

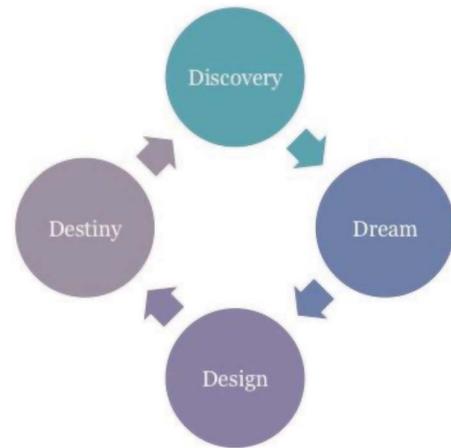


FIG. 2. The AI 4-D Cycle.

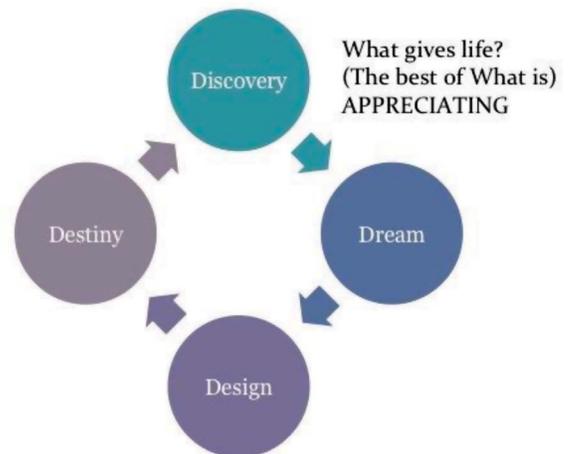


FIG. 3. The Discovery Stage.

2. The Dream Stage (see Figure 4) engaged participants in the collaborative and generative development of an imagined and desired future based on the foundational work in identifying a shared positive core generated in the Discovery Stage.
3. The Design Stage (see Figure 5) engaged participants in the development of a blueprint for creating a healthy workplace culture.
4. The Destiny Stage (see Figure 6) engaged participants in the creation of a structure to implement an action plan. Participants made personal commitments to implement the plan within 24 hours of the final day of the study, as well as establish an ad hoc steering committee to sustain future momentum.

The AI 4-D Cycle was conducted over four consecutive Fridays from 9 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. We facilitated a different stage of the AI 4-D Cycle during each of the four Fridays. AI methods commonly reflect traditional qualitative

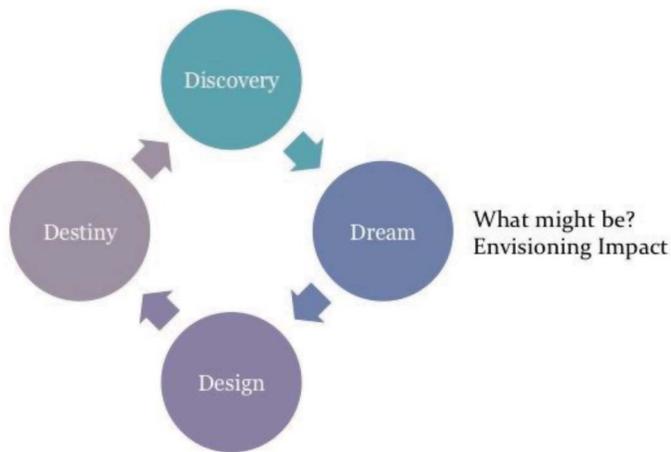


FIG. 4. The Dream Stage.

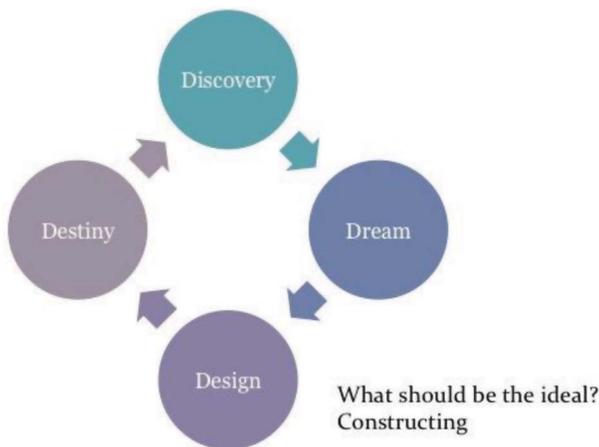


FIG. 5. The Design Stage.

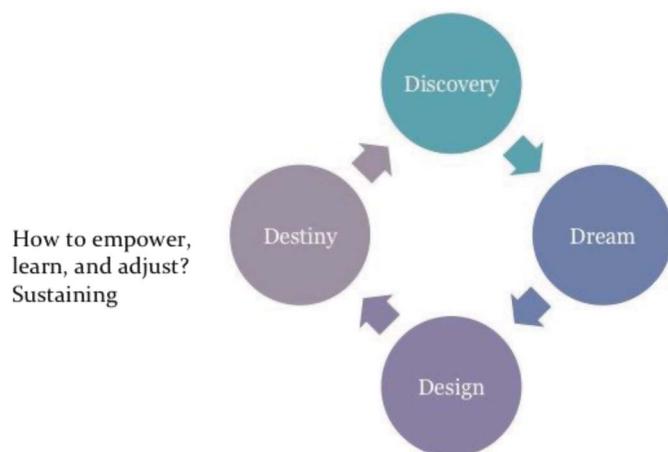


FIG. 6. The Destiny Stage.

discussions (a type of focus group), and small-group work resulting in participant-generated documents.

Throughout this institutional review board (IRB)-approved study, we used AI protocols, maintained a deep and rich set of field notes that became an important data source, and continuously member-checked the data with participants. AI protocols include storytelling that guides participants to appreciative action. The protocols we used are those commonly associated with the AI 4-D Cycle and readily available on the Appreciative Inquiry Commons (<http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu>). In the Discovery Stage, for example, the following protocol sought to identify participant high-point experiences at the UDC:

Think of a high-point experience with the UDC when you felt excited, engaged, and alive.

- What made it a great experience?
- When and where did it occur?
- Who was there?
- What was happening?
- What was the outcome of the experience?

We documented the progressive change among the UDC learning team each week in the form of a digital story we created from our data that included photos, video, field notes, and participant-generated documents. The digital story served as a form of member checking for participant feedback.

DATA SOURCES

The UDC manager purposively selected nine participants from a pool of 70 service providers associated with the UDC. A purposive sample is a nonrepresentative subset of a larger population. Its composition serves a specific purpose, such as working with (a) mid-level and (b) technologically skilled managers with three or more years of experience (Giacomini & Cook, 2000). In this example, the researcher recruited participants from the pool of mid-level managers who met the two criteria: technologically skilled, with three or more years of experience.

In our study, purposive sampling required three specific criteria: (a) at least one representative from each of the major service provider groups, (b) ongoing involvement with the UDC, and (c) a commitment to fully participate in all stages of the AI 4-D Cycle. The nine participants were considered core members of the UDC and included the UDC magistrate, the UDC manager, two prosecutors, one public defender, two social workers, and two counselors.

Data were collected from numerous participant-generated documents developed throughout all stages of the AI 4-D Cycle. These data were in the form of newspaper documents, videos, field notes, individual participant and group-generated documents, and digital recordings (audio, pictures, and video). The multiple sources of data allowed us to triangulate the data to test the consistency of our findings. Triangulation is a qualitative process testing the consistency of findings harvested through

research methods. The AI methods associated with the AI 4-D Cycle were paired semistructured interviews, whole-group

different methods and sources of data, including field notes, artifacts, and transcripts (Trochim, 2006).

Data were analyzed using several software programs: Atlas.ti is qualitative analysis software package that facilitates open and axial coding (Calabrese, Hummel, & San Martin, 2007; Kerlin, 2002). We also used Tropes, a semantic classification, keyword extraction, linguistic and qualitative analysis program. Both software programs serve as a quotation retrieval process based on codes, memos, and other forms of organization. The themes generated from this process were aggregated to generate our findings.

We performed the data analysis as a systematic search for meaning. We organized our data and used software tools to look for patterns, themes, and relationships so we could make sense of what occurred (Cupples, 2010).

FINDINGS

The AI 4-D Cycle

We present the findings in the form of the narrative of UDC participant involvement in each of the four stages of the AI 4-D Cycle. The findings follow the operating AI assumption that inquiry and change occur simultaneously (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Throughout each of the four stages, inquiry and change occurred simultaneously, leading to new beliefs, attitudes, and confidence.

Day 1—Discovery Stage: 9:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m

We engaged participants in a prescribed set of AI data-generating activities focusing on positive aspects of the UDC. We opened the day by welcoming participants with researcher and participant introductions and provided a brief explanation of AI and the 4-D Cycle process and protocols; then we began the Discovery Stage. We asked participants to remember a time when they felt they were successful in their work at the UDC. We asked participants to interview each other to identify a personal high-point experience in the UDC workplace. Then we asked the participant interviewer to share the story of the participant they interviewed. This served two purposes: (a) It required listening on the part of the interviewer, and (b) it provided a context where the participants being interviewed felt their experience was validated.

Participants began to identify strengths discovered in their shared stories. We summarized their strengths on large newsprint so participants could easily read the individual strengths. After all participants shared their strengths, the whole group reached agreement on collective strengths that corresponded with their high-point experiences at the UDC. We continued to use the newsprint to list the collective strengths. Table 1 reflects the whole group's collective strengths. Through the shared stories, members rediscovered personal and collective strengths.

TABLE 1
UDC collective strengths

We are capable of delivering what we promise.
We work as a team.
We don't give up!
We believe our caseworkers model behavior.
We help each other when needed.
We trust each other.
We find common agreement.
We always listen to each other and our clients.

Participants identified a set of commonly shared values embedded in their strengths. Their values reflected selflessness, acceptance, caring, compassion, and giving. One participant stated, "At the end of the day we all come to a consensus on how to handle a particular case. This involves teamwork. We have a pretty good base." Above all, participants, as a collective group, felt they manifested values of honesty, integrity, and authenticity. As the UDC manager stated, "We are a family and care about each other."

We concluded the Discovery Stage by reinforcing participant AI comments and conversations as a way of shaping a positive workplace culture related to their involvement in the Discovery Stage. We also used this time to review all recorded data from the day's activities and member-checked with participants to verify the accuracy of the data. The discovery process built the foundation for Day 2, the Dream Stage.

The Weeks Between Stages of the AI 4-D Cycle

During the weeks between stages 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the AI 4-D Cycle, we reviewed field notes, participant-generated documents, and digital recordings. Our review was important on multiple levels. It allowed us to (a) modify forthcoming protocols based on the participants' progress; (b) member check among ourselves to determine the validity of our field notes, observations, and personal conclusions; and (c) extract "participant wisdom" from the rich source of data generated during the previous week by participants. Moreover, once we completed our review of the stage, and reviewed our field notes, we created a digital story of the stage by highlighting the participants' progress.

The digital story told the participants' narratives and metaphors through a short 5-minute multimedia movie that combined participant photographs taken throughout the stage with added music and text. The digital story captured the participants' high-point experiences and achievements. We also included data representing participant, small-group, and whole-group contributions. In addition to the digital story, we compiled a PowerPoint presentation where we linked a participant's picture with "participant wisdom" from the rich source of data generated during the previous week.

Day 2—Dream Stage: 9:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m

We welcomed participants and provided appreciative feedback from the Discovery Stage. We then presented the digital story that captured the previous week's high-point experiences and the PowerPoint presentation of their wisdom quotes and data representing each participant's contribution to the Discovery Stage.

The participants' nonverbal communication during the two presentations reinforced our belief that a deep personal and collective change was occurring with each step of the AI 4-D Cycle. The participants were learning forward, nodding affirmatively, and smiling. They appeared eager to participate in Day 2 activities and discussions.

We viewed the use of the digital story and wisdom quotes as complementary to the traditional AI 4-D Cycle protocols. The digital story and wisdom quotes opened the participants' memory banks from the previous week, reinforcing their capacity to create a positive organizational climate.

We applied similar methods in our previous AI fieldwork. This study contributed to our previous AI fieldwork demonstrating the efficacy of these methods to increase participant self-confidence, build group cohesion, and create group confidence to move toward a positive vision of participants' collective future.

These complementary methods provided a fertile environment for the application of Dream Stage protocols. One participant stated, "It doesn't matter what happened yesterday, today is a new day. I think that what I'm best at . . . leaving things; . . . it's a new day, so what's going on today." Another participant recalled speaking to his wife about the Discovery session: "I told my wife that I loved to get to know everybody better . . . That started my week off great."

Once the digital story was viewed, member-checked, and discussed, we initiated the Dream Stage. The Dream Stage is comprised of a prescribed set of data-generating AI activities that ask participants to dream—without limitations or restrictions—to create a powerful image of what they believed the UDC could become at its best. We agreed with MacCormack (in Denning, 2009):

All firms have good ideas floating around inside them, and in the broader ecosystem in which they operate. The good firms are the ones who seek to collect those ideas, organize them, synthesize them, and make decisions based upon them.

We discovered from our previous AI fieldwork that asking and answering positive questions assists participants in creating a powerful image of what they believed their organization could become when at its best without limitations. During the Dream Stage, participants addressed two questions:

1. What would we look like if we could dramatically change how we work together?
2. How can we become open to new, real possibilities?

When participants began to dream, they set aside perceptions of how they currently worked and began to consider how they would like their work to be in a desired future.

They began by identifying an imagined and desired future; they formed their images of how they could work in the form of metaphors. We divided the participants into three groups. We then asked each group to use the large newsprint paper we provided to draw their metaphor. Each group created a metaphor in the form of a drawing representing what they believed to be possible for the UDC. We asked each group to present their metaphor to the whole group and to share how the metaphor represents their image of a desired future for the UDC.

The metaphors spoke of hope, collaboration, and growth. We displayed each group's newsprint as a visual for the whole group. Figures 7, 8, and 9 show each group's metaphor. Group 1

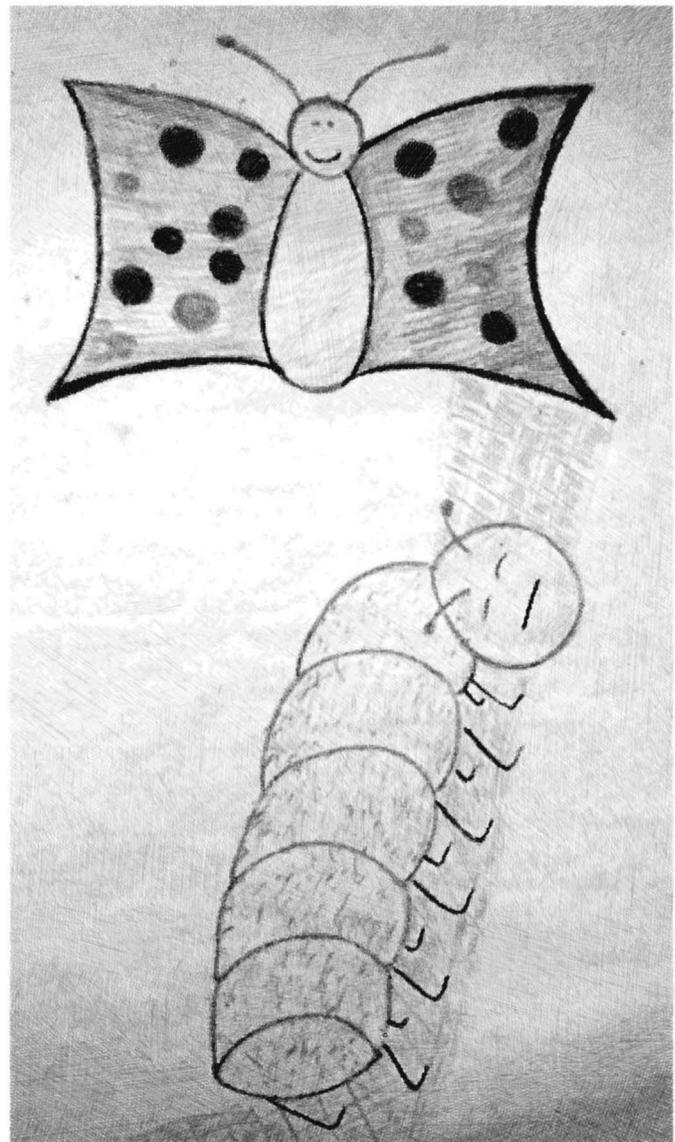


FIG. 7. Butterfly metaphor.

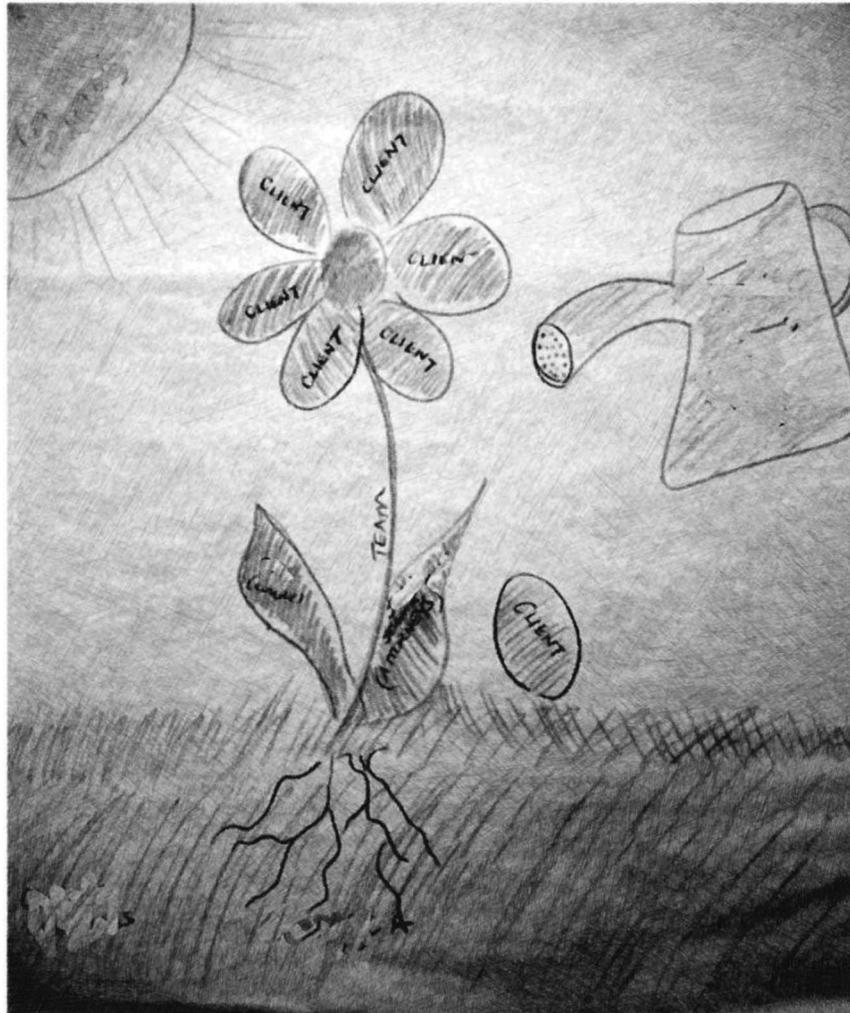


FIG. 8. Growing and nurturing plants metaphor.

(Figure 7) used the image of a butterfly's metamorphosis where their client was a caterpillar and turned into a beautiful butterfly. Group 2 (Figure 8) used images of plants being watered and growing into beautiful flowers indicating their clients' growth at the UDC. Group 3 (Figure 9) used a metaphor of a suspension bridge symbolizing the UDC's mission as a bridge between "what is" and "what is possible."

These metaphors captured the dreams of the UDC participants. When they reported their metaphors, we heard their confident belief in creating a different and more powerful reality from what they were experiencing. The UDC manager said, "We save lives." A formerly reticent participant stated, "I was skeptical. I no longer am." And another participant added, "This is a calling. You put your heart and soul into it." With their newfound confidence, we began referring to them as *Mission Possible*. Participants nodded and smiled in agreement with their new title.

We concluded the Dream Stage by continuing to reinforce participant AI comments and conversations as a way of shaping

a positive workplace culture related to their involvement in the Dream Stage, especially their metaphors. Our experience taught us that these symbolic images would add to the generative conversation participants would have with each other in the week between the Dream Stage and the Design Stage. Their metaphors became a starting point for creating a concrete blueprint in the Design Stage, the third stage of the AI 4-D Cycle.

Day 3—Design Stage: 9:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m

We began the Design Stage by presenting the digital story that captured the previous week's high-point experiences and the PowerPoint presentation of their wisdom quotes and data representing each participant's contribution to the Dream Stage. We started the Design Stage activities at a macro level by sharing visual images of great human achievements, the building of the Hoover Dam, the landing on the moon, and the maintenance of an international space station. We showed visual



FIG. 9. Smile and suspension bridge.

images of people who were still dreaming of the *impossible and improbable*. The visual images included people fighting cancer, HIV, and Parkinson's disease and people committed to social justice causes. We said, "Why Not You!"

The AI activities for the Design Stage focused on (a) the essential work of the UDC; (b) how participants see their work happening under the best of conditions; and (c) the creation of the *provocative proposition* that served as the blueprint for the Destiny Stage.

Participants defined their essential work as client centered. As a group, they agreed everything they do has one central purpose, assisting clients in their struggle with addiction so the clients become accountable and responsible people, and contributing members to society. Their essential work included advocacy, accountability, relationship building, client guidance, creating conditions for positive change, and making sure clients take advantage of every possible service.

Once participants identified their essential work, they were prepared to construct their *provocative proposition*. AI uses the term *provocative proposition* as a design statement. We explained that a provocative proposition links the best of "what is now" with the best of "what might be in the future." The provocative proposition has five properties: (a) It must be innovative and revolutionary; (b) it is grounded in what you do well and is technologically feasible to be put in place today; (c) it is desired and if fully actualized the group would want it; (d) it is affirmative and bold; and (e) it is stated in the present tense (Ludema et al., 2003). In effect, the *provocative proposition* is a mission statement aligning the future and present. It is at once a compelling vision of a desired future, yet written in the present tense, creating a change in how participants think, act, and speak about their work. We then ask participants to create their provocative proposition. We wanted participants to begin to use the language of the present moment so they would

identify new behaviors and actions that made the provocative proposition a reality.

The UDC participants constructed the following provocative proposition:

We are a team of professionals and collaborating agencies. We hold clients and partnering agencies accountable for their actions and behavior. We demand a climate of honesty, trust, and respect. We build empowering relationships that create positive change and provide guidance. We inspire people to change their lives. We advocate for our clients. We achieve permanence for children's lives.

The UDC magistrate was excited with the possibilities provided by the provocative proposition. She said, "We'd be living the dream! It takes everything we value and brings it together as one."

Day 4—Destiny: 9:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m

We began the Destiny Stage by presenting the digital story that captured the previous week's high-point experiences and the PowerPoint presentation of their wisdom quotes and data representing each participant's contribution to the Design Stage. The Destiny Stage is the culmination of the AI 4-D Cycle process, where the shared vision becomes reality. We sought to anchor the final day's work in the successes of the previous three weeks. Our perspective of the AI 4-D Cycle, especially when it is conducted over a 4-week or longer period, is that dramatic changes in perspectives and beliefs occur. We witnessed the evolution in participant collaboration, respect, and growth of social capital.

We encouraged participants to identify and share their experience and opinions of the previous 3 weeks of AI 4-D Cycle process. One participant stated, "This has made us a stronger team and sensitive to others' feelings about what needs to be changed." This sentiment was echoed by another participant: "We can do whatever it takes, the glass is half full, not half empty, and there are no boundaries."

Another participant took a deep breath, smiled at her colleagues and said, "I didn't realize at what level everyone was committed. Part of it was me not having the right perspective." These comments reflect the overwhelming sentiment among participants. They were brimming with confidence, respect for each other, and a belief that together they could transform the UDC.

It was time to take their energy and confidence and translate it into action. In our experience from previous AI fieldwork, we learned that sustaining the cumulative work of the past 3 weeks required participants to construct the scaffolding for implementing, monitoring, and sustaining future progress.

We also knew from our past experience in facilitating the AI 4-D Cycle that when participants (a) agree to a monitoring and accountability structure that meets on a regular basis and (b) make a public commitment to take an action step directed toward implementing the provocative proposition, a positive

momentum shift takes place. We applied a technique we successfully used in previous research. We asked participants to publicly commit to a single action they would take within 24 hours to further the UDC's provocative proposition.

Asking participants to make a public commitment is a risk. As facilitators, we sat in silence watching the participants stare at the table, doodle, and fidget. Making a public commitment translates the "feeling good" nature of the AI process into immediate and sustained action. We waited for nearly 2 minutes before anyone spoke. Out of the sustained period of silence, one participant looked up and said in a strong voice, "I will e-mail judges and administrators who can help us [with our plans]." Another participant followed, "I will call the university school of dentistry to get free services for our clients." And, then another stated, "I will make UDC clients my priority." One by one, each participant made a public commitment to action. Each of their commitments reflected a change in priorities. The change in priorities was an important attitudinal shift among UDC participants.

We felt the UDC participants' work in the AI 4-D Cycle resulted in three important outcomes:

1. Participants created a compelling vision for a sustainable, healthy UDC workplace culture.
2. Participants created a provocative proposition that described a collaborative and healthy UDC workplace culture.
3. Participants generated action steps to implement a healthy UDC workplace culture.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of Year 2 of our study was to engage an AI Learning Team in all stages of the AI 4-D Cycle to discover the positive core of their work history and work relationships to create a healthy UDC workplace culture. UDC participants discovered a positive core of hidden strengths, values, and history of success (discovery) to create a powerful vision (dream) for the UDC, blueprint (design) for action, and a series of action steps (destiny) to bring their vision to reality. Participants recognized the critical nature of their work to make a difference in the lives of substance abusers. Our work with the UDC empowered participants to capitalize on their calling to become transformative change agents, changing the UDC's culture and providing a powerful vision for generative growth into the future.

We witnessed progressive change in participants throughout the AI 4-D Cycle. These changes were recorded in our data collection throughout the four days. They were reflected in the evolving positive language and nonverbal communication used by participants, and an embracing of a personal and collective empowerment they took to their roles. Their shift in attitude was experienced in the new way they viewed their roles and working relationships with each other. They no longer saw their work as something they felt compelled to do; they saw it as a calling. Moreover, participants moved beyond their sense of calling to take action toward putting their new felt empowerment into motion.

Participants identified commonly shared values: patience, acceptance, honesty, caring, authenticity, generosity, and integrity. They described how they would collaborate, act as caring professionals, and increase the levels of respect for each other and their clients—all of which they never discussed before their participation in the AI 4-D Cycle process. Underlying this conversation was a mutual sense of trust and spirit of perseverance.

On Day 4 of the AI 4-D Cycle, participants exhibited a passion to take their work and the work of the UDC to the next level. Their passion was evidenced in their public commitment to action within 24 hours. They left the AI 4-D Cycle process believing they had created a healthy workplace culture.

These nine participants were the core members of the UDC. Seven of the nine came to the UDC representing external agencies. Only the UDC manager and magistrate were full-time members of the UDC. As Schein (1995) suggests, the use of small groups as parallel systems creates the psychological safety to try new concepts and ideas allowing the concepts and ideas time to take root and spread. This was the case with the UDC. Consequently, the individuals' participation in the AI 4-D Cycle and commitment to action germinated the seeds for a healthy workplace culture, causing it to spread throughout the UDC. The decision to collaboratively work toward a new and empowered future came through the gradual attitudinal shift that occurred during the four stages of the AI 4-D Cycle.

Six Months After the Conclusion of the AI 4-D Cycle

Six months after Day 4 of the AI 4-D Cycle, the UDC manager provided anecdotal evidence of the sustainability of our AI work by identifying initiatives generated by the UDC's involvement in the AI 4-D Cycle through conversations and e-mail:

1. Positive changes in staff attitudes.
2. The UDC team members rediscovered a sense of calling for their work.
3. The UDC staff meets regularly and stays accountable to each other for furthering the provocative proposition.
4. The UDC staff stays focused on goals.
5. The creation of a UDC advisory board.
6. The UDC doubled the number of graduates from its drug and alcohol treatment program, reuniting a greater number of families who were separated due to substance abuse.

The evidence provided by the UDC manager was anecdotal and not part of the initially designed study. Although there was anecdotal evidence that the UDC benefited from participation in the AI 4-D Cycle at the 6-month interval, the initial study design was limited because it did not include the formal collection of poststudy data. Future AI researchers may want to consider research designs that include data collection at several intervals after the conclusion of the AI 4-D Cycle.

Application to Practice

Our study provides specific applications of AI to practice when using the AI 4-D Cycle. One practical insight we gained was the importance of positive, reinforcing feedback we gave to participants at the start of the Dream, Design, and Destiny stages. Our practice of positive reinforcement at the start of each new session is not typically part of the AI 4-D Cycle as practiced by many AI practitioners. This practice advances how participant perceptions can stay focused on the positive aspects of their ongoing contributions in AI 4-D Cycle settings. We used this strategy in two ways: One, we created a digital story from the digital data, participant-generated documents, and our field notes. We played it for the participants at the beginning of the Dream, Design, and Destiny stages. The digital story emphasized individual and group contributions, as well as group progress. Two, we identified textual data from our field notes that we could attribute directly to individual participants. We took snippets of text we called “wisdom” and placed it into PowerPoint presentations. Each slide contained a snippet of wisdom and the participant’s picture. We discovered that this simple action of sharing participant contributions instilled greater confidence and desire to become more deeply involved in the process as we progressed through the AI 4-D Cycle.

Managers can apply an AI 4-D Cycle to shift members from Model I behaviors to Model II behaviors, leading to changes in member attitude similar to those we witnessed with the UDC. The shift symbolizes a willingness to broaden inclusion; in the case of the AI 4-D Cycle, it generates a deep and broad sense of mutual respect generated by the discovery of personal and collective strengths early in the process through the Discovery Stage.

The AI process’s unique design provides managers with a means of generating among members high levels of trust and respect that contribute to more meaningful cooperation. Trust is an important factor in the sustainability of collaborative groups (Johnston, Hicks, Ning, & Auer, 2011). The importance of building trust may be a requisite for the creation of sustainable teams (De Jong & Elfring, 2010). The building of trust in teams supports a generative sense of social capital among members (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001). As social capital grows, reciprocity among members grows in direct proportion to the growing levels of social capital (Sanders & Lowney, 2006). AI and social capital interact simultaneously in the high-trust environment created by the AI 4-D Cycle process. In our work with the UDC, we witnessed the enormous potential for managers to establish a culture of trust and collaboration based on respect.

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