

Conference Paper

Slovene Management Education in the Changed World through Appreciative Inquiry

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Abstract Paper presents the study of appreciative inquiry (AI) methodology in the context of management education. Current perception of managers in Slovenia about economic situation is negative which may have a significant impact on investment and positive outlook of future business. Therefore, we propose that AI which focuses on positive aspects of doing business needs to be investigated and implemented into management education of future managers and we provide empirical evidence of thinking patterns of three generations of students at the Faculty of Economics University of Ljubljana. AI means researching what gives success to human systems when they function at their best. It represents discovery process of optimum identity and a way to the best possible future. Positive core of existing situation is chosen as the focus of AI process. AI is researching into stories that give energy for further action. Purpose of this paper is to offer an alternative approach to tackling challenges, based on analyzing the causes of previous successes. Further, we aim to offer the scientific community a new methodology that solves real business, relational or individual challenges. In the Winter semester during study years 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15 we invited our students to be in a state of inquiry about themselves, their life and their work. We asked them: What is the best future you can imagine? In a longitudinal study we have gathered 171 AI pair interviews documentations. Students' AI data was analyzed in three thematic segments: 1) favorite quotes; 2) preservation of past and present into the future and 3) vision of the future. Analysis of all three generations' AI interviews revealed emphasis in their favorite quotes on the "people" component and the need of the students to understand life and make sense of gained knowledge and experiences. They also stress the need to think about contemporary issues and gain practical experiences. Students would most like to preserve in the future their work ethics, dedication to hard work, creativity, family members around them, experiences and knowledge gained. Their visions are focused on balancing successful international careers and family lives. New ways of communication represent an important consideration for the students. They expressed their wish to be driven by intrinsic motivation and being respected in their profession. Theoretical advantages of our paper are in elaborating on AI in management education. Practical implications are in helping students to clarify their strategic goals and visions through introspection and qualitative methodology. Professors can implement and adjust the AI questionnaire based on their own developmental objectives and also based on the needs of their students. Contribution of our paper is in the field of management education and AI field.

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Strengths	Weaknesses
education („top 10 in the world“)	managerial practice
well educated workforce („top 20 in the world“)	credibility of managers
	corporate boards (61)
Opportunities	Threats
higher level of education	transfer of global corporations abroad (61; Italy, Austria etc.)
education of women (9)	aging of population – pan European problem
number of researchers (14)	
% educated population (30)	

TABLE 1: SWOT analysis of Slovene economy by IMD World Competitiveness Center. Source: Bris, A., 8th December, 2015, Global Competitiveness – case of Slovenia. Ljubljana. Slovenia, FELU.

1. Introduction

According to research done by IMD World Competitiveness Center in Lausanne (Switzerland) for the 61 global economies Slovenia is 2nd most pessimistic country in the world [3]. Most pessimistic perception of business situation in the world as a country has China, followed by Slovenia and Republic of Korea in 2nd place and Russia in 3rd place. Perception of managers in Slovenia about economic situation is negative which may have a significant impact on investment and positive outlook of future business. Therefore, we propose that appreciative inquiry (AI) which focuses on positive aspects of doing business needs to be investigated and implemented into management education of future managers and we provide empirical evidence of thinking of three generations of students at the Faculty of Economics University of Ljubljana. Strategic analysis of Slovene economy overall (Table 1) demonstrates strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats, highlighting education, infrastructure and efficiency of public administration as pillars of national competitive advantage. Leaders in learning organizations have three main distinct roles: to create a shared vision, to design an appropriate horizontal structure to help achieve the vision and to act as servant leaders ([9], p. 401).

Senior managers have a key role in the development of technology-based information systems where lack of understanding of IT, or support of alternative innovative AI are just some of the reasons why so many IT endeavors are not successful (Ewusi-Mensah in [24], p. 440). Purpose of this paper is to offer an alternative approach to tackling challenges, based on analyzing the causes of previous successes. Further, we aim to offer the scientific community a new methodology that solves real business, relational or individual issues. Contribution of our paper is in the field of management education and AI field.

Problem solving	Appreciative inquiry
need is felt	appreciating and valuing the best of what is
analysis of causes	envisioning what might be
analysis of solutions and action planning	dialoguing and innovating what could be
deficit based	possibility focused
an organization is a problem to be solved	an organization is mystery to be embraced

TABLE 2: Comparison of problem solving and appreciative inquiry. *Source: Seminar at the University of Ljubljana for the staff and students, [1].*

2. Theoretical Overview

“If you want to build a ship, then do not drum up men to gather wood, give orders and divide work. Rather, teach them to yearn for the far and endless sea.”

Antoine de Saint-Exupery

[15] claim that we need to possess and develop AI [8] and sense making skills in the times of constant changes and high-risk events worldwide. [16] found out that social class origin of a manager has a lasting and varying impact on firm risk taking. UN 2015 reports states that from around 350 high-risk events globally in 1980 this number has grown to almost 1000 in 2014 [23]. AI is based on Gergen’s sociorationalism ([6], p. 166) which claims that there is no empirical truth to discover “out there” in social relations. It is a philosophy that enables moving towards collective vision. It enables conversation that aims to provide a voice to the “mystery”, instead of mastery and wonder instead of problem (Srivastva et al. in [23]). AI means researching what gives success to human systems when they function at their best. It represents discovery process of optimum identity and a way to best possible future. It is a process away from I know towards I wonder. AI is different from problem solving (Table 2). [12] provides several critical views of AI. The main difference is based on the fact that we create what we focus on. The main question is: Do we want less of what we do not want or more of what we do want?

Appreciate means valuing, the act of recognizing the best in people or the environment and *in-quire* means the act of exploration or discovery. AI asks *What is working around here?* From the best of what has been what could be - the best possible future – is created. It is a collaborative and participatory system-wide approach to identifying, and enhancing the life-giving dimensions that are present when system is performing optimally in human and organizational environments. New management theories can be derived from case studies, other inductive methods and thought experiments ([4], p. 3). AI was developed in 1980s by David Cooperrider at Case Western Reserve University Weatherhead School of Management and has been used in many international organizations ever since, as well as in research projects ([13], p. 119).

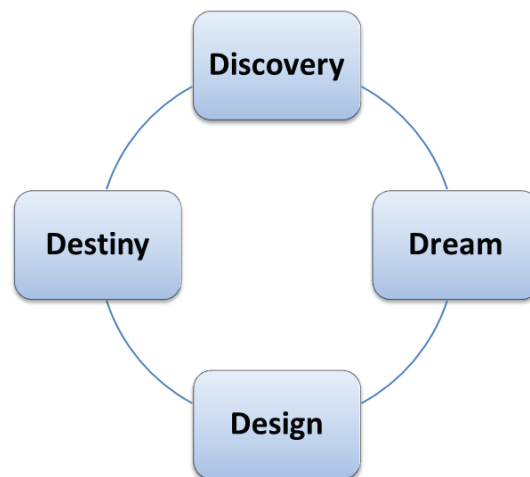


Figure 1: 4-D cycle.

2.1. Structure of Appreciative Inquiry

AI inquiry (Figure 1) is a structured process of: (1) *discovery*: appreciating the best of what is; engaging people in an inquiry about the topics we have chose to find out - positive core; (2) *dream*: envisioning what might be, building on what we know about us at our best, we dream a new vision and purpose and ways of working together and agree on it; (3) *design*: targeting the idea, looking at everything that impacts on how we do things around here, we create stretch goals that will take us towards our vision of a positive, potent future; (4) *destiny*: creating plans that meet the targets and lead to the vision, crafting the actins that will support our goals and head towards our vision and choose the ones we are most enthusiastic about to start on [1]. AI generates new ways of perceiving the world ([2], p. 36) and enhances the creative process ([17], p. 1131). AI is a transformational method of change [6], leadership skill, future thinking, philosophy, and *future-creating mental activism* ([8], p. 163). AI focuses on individual and organizational positive core [21] as a storytelling method ([22], p. 43). It is a *systems level strategy used to shift the focus away from the negative and towards the positive and is a powerful process in stimulating change by highlighting successes and strengths* (Whitney & Cooperrider in [7], p. 2).

2.2. Elements of the process

There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.

Albert Einstein

[14] state that communication practices of decision makers both enable and constrain how people manage the risks and uncertainty of their judgements. *Emphasis is placed on learning about and understanding human expertise through a process of inquiry rather than trying to implement a process that extracts, elicits, acquires or mines human*

AI basic assumptions
In every organization there is something that functions well.
Looking for what works well is more motivating than searching for what does not function well.
What we focus on becomes our reality.
The act of asking questions begins the change.
Organizations move toward what they ask about or focus on.
We have more confidence and comfort to set towards a destination if we remember parts of the past.
We need to remember past successes.
The words we use to anticipate and describe reality, build it.

TABLE 3: Hammond's AI basic assumptions. Source: [15]

expertise [24]. AI works by focusing the attention of an individual/organisation on its most positive potential – its positive core – and unleashing the energy of the positive core for transformation and sustainable success. Positive core of existing situation is chosen as the focus of AI process. AI is researching into stories that give energy for further action. Location of themes that appear in the stories and selection of topics for further inquiry is conducted during the process. Then AI process enables the setting of trust and mutual understanding ([10], p. 787) for sharing images about a preferred future and finding innovative ways to create that future [1].

2.3. Principles of appreciative inquiry

The methods we use determine what we will find.

David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva

AI has several basic assumptions (Table 3). AI also has several principles [1]: (1) the questions we ask determine what we will find; (2) words create worlds; (3) stories shape, identify and expand imagination; (4) holistic is better; (5) inquiry is intervention. Words have the power to inspire or discourage where negative words weaken us, and positive words strengthen us. There is always something positive in every situation, organization or individual we can focus on. There are multiple realities and reality is created in the moment. The moment we approach people with certain questions influences them in some way. [19] claim that employee voice in a sense that people have a chance to express their wishes and concerns can have very positive effects on employee behavior. People also have more comfort and preference to journey towards the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known). However, when we carry forward parts of the past, they should be what is best about the past.

3. Appreciative Inquiry at the Management Course

At Management course we aim to teach students about management process, however we also wish to develop their management skills and we use AI as a method of managing their studies. During our time in the Winter semester during study years 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15 we invited our students to be in a state of inquiry about themselves, their life and their work. We asked them: What is the best future you can imagine? On this discovery endeavors, questions, stories and dialogue about strengths, successes, values, hopes and dreams are in themselves transformational [1]. In a longitudinal study we have gathered 171 AI pair interviews documentations.

3.1. Method

“When we seek to discover the best in others, we somehow bring out the best in ourselves.”

William Arthur Ward

AI methodology is adaptable and flexible in its implementation ([13], p. 123). One-on-one appreciative interviews gave students experience of AI and impacted on mutual sense making ([5], p. 268). Pairs were asked to ask each other about personal positive experiences in studying and share past successes. Students shared experiences and began to socialize with their colleagues in the first semester of first year undergraduate studies at Faculty of Economics University of Ljubljana. *“The core of AI is the process of pairing with another person to ask each other carefully crafted appreciative, affirmative questions. Questions are crafted in advance to ensure that each person has an opportunity to share a story of personal success and to see the other in a positive light. [...] This cooperative attitude fosters creativity and innovation between individuals and encourages new partnerships and alliances”* ([13], p. 122). AI pair interview required from students to identify the positive and potential contribution of every individual in order to begin to live a new strength based story about who they are and what they wish to be and achieve ([13], p. 120). Students were instructed to perform AI pair interviews and follow ground rules ([15], p. 107): (1) be an attentive listener; (2) avoid evaluation and criticism; (3) focus on data and idea generation; (3) create notes, memos, comments, ideas; and (4) place other issues and ideas into “parking lot” for later consideration. We examined parts of students’ histories that they believed should be maintained, their vision of the future and ways how their aspirations could be achieved ([11], p. 364).

3.2. Data analysis and interpretation

Students’ AI data was analyzed in three thematic segments: 1) favorite quotes; 2) preservation of past and present into the future and 3) vision of the future.

Life's wisdom	Concrete experiences and findings
<i>"Life is set of small everyday choices that all have impact on the quality of life."</i>	<i>"During this few weeks when I was managing my team I learned more than during any class in my life."</i>
<i>"Don't cry to give up, cry to keep going!" Eric Thomas</i>	<i>"When I passed three months in Costa Rica, I was involved in a completely different way of living and I learned to take not everything too serious and to estimate the little things in life and I tried to sustain these experiences through changing my point of view when I came back to Germany."</i>
<i>"Every one of us has advantages, the problem is, some people never learn what their advantages are."</i>	<i>"Never be too big to ask questions, never know too much to learn something new."</i>
<i>"Only when you leave the comfort zone, you can improve and see how far you can get."</i>	<i>"I changed country where I study and it affected my studies and life in general. I got advantages from this change because it became more independent and had to deal with all problems by myself."</i>
<i>"Never give up. No matter how deep you fall you can still get up."</i>	<i>"Every change in life presents something positive and something negative."</i>

TABLE 4: Proof quotations of favorite quotes in the study year 2012/2013.

3.2.1. Appreciative inquiry in study year 2012/13

In study year 2012/13 52 AI interview data was analyzed. In the thematic segment of favorite quotes students shared life's wisdom and concrete experience and findings (table 4).

In the thematic segment of preservation from the past and present into the future students expressed preserving personal abilities, gained knowledge and way of life (table 5). Proof quotes expressed personal characteristics (PC), study environment (SE) and broad perspective (BP) of global issues.

In the thematic segment of the vision of the future students expressed either their vision of personal life or world perspective. Management students' expressed desire to become managers, entrepreneurs or consultants, mainly. An emerging theme was also importance of work-life balance.

3.2.2. Appreciative inquiry in study year 2013/14

In study year 2013/14 50 AI interview data was analyzed. In the thematic segment of favorite quotes students shared life's wisdom and concrete experience and findings

Proof quotes on preserving personal abilities, gained knowledge and way of life
<i>practical work with theory (SE)</i>
<i>international environment (SE)</i>
<i>well-structured way of working, to continue being open-minded and to sustain her creativity (SE)</i>
<i>people’s will to survive and make things better (GP)</i>
<i>combination of academic knowledge and experiences (SE)</i>
<i>creativity & Innovation (SE)</i>
<i>ability to persists through difficult situations (PC)</i>
<i>remember to give herself a break during busy times (PC)</i>
<i>team works/projects and homework where our own ideas ad thoughts can be freely expressed (SE)</i>
<i>ability to interact with each other directly, and not only through cell phones, computers and maybe even holograms in the future (GP)</i>
<i>trend of being environmentally friendly, and focusing on sustainability (GP)</i>
<i>ability to imagine and think (PC)</i>
<i>stay reliable, and keep her persistence in trying until she gets it right (PC)</i>
<i>sociable, proactive person who can be competitive in the field of business (PC)</i>
<i>ability to adapt to changes in life (PC)</i>

TABLE 5: Proof quotations about preserving personal abilities, gained knowledge and way of life in the study year 2012/2013.

(table 6). It is clearly demonstrated that students feel the need to share with their colleagues their own gained findings and experiences more than conventionally spread wisdom.

In the thematic segment of preservation from the past and present into the future students expressed preserving personal abilities, gained knowledge and way of life (table 7). Proof quotes expressed personal characteristics (PC), study environment (SE) and broad perspective (BP) of global issues.

In the thematic segment of the vision of the future students expressed either their vision of personal life or world perspective. Management students’ expressed desire to become entrepreneurs, managers, and consultants, mainly. An emerging theme was also importance of work-life balance and international business experiences.

3.2.3. Appreciative inquiry in study year 2014/15

In study year 2014/15 69 AI interview data was analyzed. In the thematic segment of favorite quotes students shared life’s wisdom and concrete experience and findings (table 8).

Life's wisdom	Concrete experiences and findings
<i>"Try new things, do not be afraid, you do not know what you are capable of..."</i>	<i>"Life is like economy fluctuation."</i>
<i>"Success is not final, failure is not fatal."</i>	<i>"The biggest change was leaving my home to go to study. The most exciting thing was living on my own. I've learned to cook, started cleaning and did stuff my mom would do for me at home."</i>
<i>"Expect problems and eat them for breakfast!"</i>	<i>"I am always trying to be positive and optimistic and I never give up. I push myself to the limits, and I am almost never satisfied with what I have done- if I know that I am capable of doing better, than I want more."</i>
	<i>"I try to be as responsible as possible, because a lot of things depend on me. I constantly want to improve and be the best student I can."</i>
	<i>"I feel pride when I see results of my own endeavors."</i>
	<i>"To be successful, you have to have your heart in your business and your business in your heart."</i>
	<i>"I find study of economics to be like the alphabet in primary school - It's vital to everyday life."</i>
	<i>"The most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world is, nothing but, education."</i>

TABLE 6: Proof quotations of favorite quotes in the study year 2013/2014.

In the thematic segment of preservation from the past and present into the future students expressed preserving personal abilities, gained knowledge and way of life (table 9). Proof quotes expressed personal characteristics (PC), study environment (SE) and broad perspective (BP) of global issues. It is evident that students mostly think about their own advancement as they are enrolled in higher education institution and wish to develop themselves.

In the thematic segment of the vision of the future students expressed either their vision of personal life or world perspective. Management students' expressed desire to become managers, entrepreneurs or consultants, mainly. An emerging theme was also importance of work-life balance and possibility of better jobs abroad. Students anticipate a lot more challenges for them in the future, therefore they emphasize the need to believe in themselves and be aware that there are always ups and downs in one's life which we should learn how to manage them.

Proof quotes on preserving personal abilities, gained knowledge and way of life

<i>hard work, decisiveness, humor and cooperation (PC)</i>
<i>passion for work, to remain full of energy and to share this energy around with others (PC)</i>
<i>hunger for success (PC)</i>
<i>open to new ideas and also to people who come from different cultures and backgrounds (PC)</i>
<i>organizational skills in order to manage personal life as well (PC)</i>
<i>hardworking and team-compatible (PC)</i>
<i>keep humility and sympathy between people and never lose touch with nature (PC)</i>
<i>family, friend, partner (PC)</i>
<i>work ethics (PC)</i>
<i>responsibility, self-confidence and liberty (PC)</i>
<i>attitude "never give up" (PC)</i>
<i>common sense, optimism and knowledge (PC)</i>
<i>usage of renewable energy sources (BP)</i>
<i>consideration for nature (BP)</i>
<i>written media (BP)</i>
<i>clean potable water (BP)</i>

TABLE 7: Proof quotations on preserving personal abilities, gained knowledge and way of life in the study year 2013/2014.

3.2.4. Appreciative inquiry interpretation

"The real act of discovery consists not in finding new lands but seeing with new eyes."

Marcel Proust

AI promoted resilience and contributed to professional identity formation in a safe environment (Butani & Plant, 2016). Research expresses concern about the *"decline in empathy among learners"* (Neumann et al. in [7], p. 2) and also *"association between lower empathy and burnout"* (Brazeau et al. in [7], p. 2). AI *"promoted professional identity formation of students, facilitated students reflective capacity and encouraged a positive outlook towards person's environment"* ([7], p. 6).

Analysis of 2012/13 AI interviews revealed emphasis in their favorite quotes on the "people" component and the need of the students to understand life and make sense of gained knowledge and experiences. Students would most like to preserve in the future their creativity, hard work, family members around them, experiences and knowledge gained. The vision of the students is most clear in their expectation of the transfer into a working environment, where their wish is to be successful and be part of a larger social entity – company. New ways of communication represent an important consideration for the students, enabling them staying in touch, being aware of things happening around the world and being able to express themselves.

Life's wisdom	Concrete experiences and findings
<i>"Motivation is the key to success."</i>	<i>"What keeps me going is the curiosity, the need to know, and to find the answers. Put these in a pot, and you get determination, and determination leads to answers. And having the key material will help you be prepared should you be faced with a problem related to it."</i>
<i>"Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's ending."</i>	<i>"A goal without a plan is just a wish."</i>
<i>"Don't be tired be inspired."</i>	<i>"The harder you try the better are your results."</i>
<i>"The best way helping you is by helping others."</i>	<i>"It is often easier than what you thought at first!"</i>
<i>"In the end we only regret the chances that we didn't take."</i>	<i>"Having a degree seems like the only way to be important."</i>
	<i>"I started my own business project right after high school and this was a sensitive change in my life. I started being more responsible, disciplined and well-organized. Basically I didn't have any other choice if I wanted to achieve something."</i>

TABLE 8: Proof quotations of favorite quotes in the study year 2014/2015.

Analysis of 2013/14 AI interviews revealed emphasis in their favorite quotes on "people" component", meaning that relationships are very important to students. They also stress the need to think about contemporary issues and gain practical experiences. Students would like to preserve work ethics and dedication to hard work. The vision of the future is fuzzy; however they express concern for world affairs and wish to progress.

Analysis of 2014/15 AI interviews revealed emphasis in their favorite quotes on the need to be empowered, independent and proactive. They expressed their wish to be driven by intrinsic motivation and respected in their profession. Students would most like to preserve their "drive", be it personal values, desire to succeed, or prove something to themselves and their parents. The visions of the generation and focused on balancing successful international careers and family lives.

Proof quotes on preserving personal abilities, gained knowledge and way of life
<i>honesty (PC)</i>
<i>motivation (PC)</i>
<i>information availability (BP)</i>
<i>brainstorming, working in teams, and working on projects related to business (SE)</i>
<i>acquired knowledge (PC)</i>
<i>innovating focus (BP)</i>
<i>work ethics (PC)</i>
<i>relationship with people, mostly relationship with family and close friends (PC)</i>
<i>punctuality, determination and studying thoroughly (SE)</i>
<i>reliability, enthusiasm for new trends (PC)</i>
<i>critical thinking (PC)</i>
<i>open mind, optimism, self-confidence (PC)</i>
<i>rhetorical skills, language knowledge and self-confidence (PC)</i>
<i>will for development (PC)</i>

TABLE 9: Proof quotations on preserving personal abilities, gained knowledge and way of life in the study year 2014/2015.

4. Conclusion

AI provides alternative outlook to the traditional strategic thinking and planning process [13]. It establishes a way of being as a useful philosophy, a methodology, and a set of tools [15].

Theoretical advantages of our paper are in elaborating on AI in management education as the prevailing literature stems from nursing education, whereas managers also have a prevailing “nurturing” role of their employees and local communities that is often neglected in the search of short-term profits and orientation on constant growth, only. AI states that results can be achieved in a more humane and productive ways. Practical implications of this paper are in the presentation of a longitudinal study of management students’ AI methodology. AI helped students to clarify their strategic goals and visions through introspection and qualitative methodology [18]. Management professors can implement and adjust the AI questionnaire based on their own developmental objectives and also based on the needs of their students. As we discussed at our Management course about setting managerial strategic goals for the organization, we found out that thinking about multinationals is often too far away and too abstract to the reality of a 19-year olds, therefore we approached the learning objective of understanding strategic planning through personal management and setting a 10-year vision together with a co-student in a safe developmental environment of our course through AI.

Limitations are present in a narrow sample of one course data. It would be interesting to do a further study also at different faculties and compare the readiness to share developmental goals and aspirations of students of different faculties. Possible applications are in several organizational contexts. One most recommended usage is at yearly interviews of pedagogues. AI can be applied in all organizational contexts, adjusted versions are specially recommended for top managerial levels when setting strategic goals. Further research among managers is recommended, as well as symbiotic relationship of students of management and managers as role models. The following questions are welcomed in any profession ([20], p. 163): "1) Describe the most energizing moment, a real "high" from your professional life. What made it possible?; 2) Without being humble, describe what you value most about yourself and your profession. If you are new to the profession, what attracted you to it?; 3) Describe how you stay professionally affirmed, renewed, energized, enthusiastic, inspired?; 4) Describe your three concrete wishes for the future of your profession."

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