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Appreciative Inquiry as a Shadow Process

Stephen P. Fitzgerald,[1] Christine Oliver,[2] and Joan C. Hoxsey[3]

Abstract

In this article, the relationship of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) with the shadow, defined as censored emotional and/or cognitive content (Shadow), is explored via three varieties of AI-Shadow relationships: (1) AI as generating Shadow through both its "light" and the censoring effect of polarizing norms, (2) AI as an intervention into the Shadow, and (3) AI itself as a Shadow process. These varieties of AI-Shadow relationships are then illustrated through two case stories. Finally, implications for our collective AI conversation are presented.

Keywords

appreciative inquiry, shadow, emotion, cognition, norms, polarization, positive, organization development, social, construction, wholeness

As Appreciative Inquiry (AI) continues its third decade of theoretical, empirical, and practical development (marked by the 20th anniversary of Cooperrider & Srivastva's [1987] *Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life*), there are hopeful signs that richer, more complex and holistic understandings and practices of AI are emerging. Since its inception, AI has often been distinguished by polarities—positive versus negative, strengths versus deficits, life-giving versus deadening, mysteries-to-be-embraced versus problems-to-be solved. Polarities are also central to Jung's conception of the shadow (Kolodziejski, 2004, p. 3), and there is a growing recognition in the AI community of the relation of AI to the individual and collective shadows (e.g., Fitzgerald & Oliver, 2006; Johnson, 2007; Kolodziejski, 2004; Pratt, 2002).

From our experience as members of and contributors to the global AI community as researchers, practitioners, participants, and writers, we seek to deepen our collective understandings and practices. We invite you to join us in exploring a new way of conceiving of AI through the generative and provocative metaphor of AI *as a shadow process in organizational life,* one that has the potential to resolve and even transcend the unintended consequences of the polarization and bifurcation of human experience and expression in our collective AI conversation.

We begin by reflecting upon the nature of AI and the Shadow, and then introduce three varieties of AI-Shadow relationships: (1) AI as generating Shadow through both its "light" and the censoring impact of polarizing norms, (2) AI as an intervention into the Shadow, and (3) AI itself as a Shadow process. Two case stories follow that illustrate these AI-Shadow relationships. Finally, we consider implications for our collective AI conversation.

What *"IS"* AI?

Before considering the nature of the Shadow and its relationships with AI, we need to inquire briefly into "what *is* AI?" In the academic and practitioner literature, AI has been conceptualized and defined in myriad, interrelated ways. In reflecting upon these definitions, we notice that they encompass a broad range of nouns (form of action research, practice, method, approach, intervention, set of principles, metaphor, focus, philosophy, spirit, worldview) and verbs (search, discover, practice, locate, highlight, illuminate) that together constitute a gestalt of promising imagery generated through language (Barrett & Fry, 2002; Bushe, 2007; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). We also notice that as we increasingly reify AI as a noun or "thing," it becomes easy to separate it conceptually from the people who engage in and enact it (much as we often conceptualize organizations or any organizational development (OD) intervention as separate and distinct from the people who engage in and enact them). For some, this reductionistic approach leads to conceiving of AI as merely the four or five "D" Cycle (define, discover, dream, design, and destiny), which was "developed by members of the GEM Initiative in Harare, Zimbabwe" (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 42).

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The conversation around AI as a "thing" evokes questions as to how it "should" be categorized—as intervention, as method or technique, as spirit, as philosophy, as worldview and so on. It also creates the possibility of our conceiving and promoting of AI as a "disembodied miracle worker," thereby de-emphasizing the importance of "the practitioner's experience with the approach, attunement with self and others, and his or her overall physical, spiritual, mental and emotional well-being" (Fitzgerald, Murrell, & Newman, 2001, p. 19). Bushe (2007) similarly noted that, "AI does not magically overcome poor sponsorship, poor communications, insensitive facilitation or un-addressed organizational politics" (p. 1). Seeing AI as a "thing" can inadvertently move the practitioner to value the process over the people involved (e.g., Pratt, 2002). Awareness of the context and impact of our co-construction in language and meaning of AI as a "thing" that is external to the people who engage in and enact it is central to understanding aspects of its intricate relations with Shadow.

This leads us to offer a further perspective on AI as *people inquiring together into the infinite potentials and varieties of human organizing.* This perspective incorporates the centrality of the people who co-construct the conversation, the ways in which we do that, and the realities that we generate from it, both individually and collectively. It also expands our conceptions of AI to include more than AI as intervention, method, technique, philosophy, worldview, guiding metaphor, or approach, to include the multiplicity of the micro and macro conversations and inquiries occurring globally about the nature and practice of AI. Some of these conversations and inquiries are formally structured and enacted through the 4D model, but perhaps the most influential and poetic are those convened over coffee, in living rooms, offices of consultancies, academic departments, classrooms, work spaces, email and phone discussions, articles, books, presentations, trainings, and seminars. Finally, it expands our conceptions of AI to be more honoring and inclusive of other related conversations and communities that may not overtly label or conceive of themselves as "AI."

What is the "Shadow?"

The individual shadow is thought to include ". . . everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself, for instance, inferior traits of character and other incompatible tendencies" (Jung, 1968, p. 284). The shadow manifests at individual (Jung, 1968; Schimel, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, O'Mahen, & Arndt, 2000), group (Gemmill, 1986; Hede, 2007; Nitsun, 1996), and organizational levels (Bowles, 1991; Kolodziejski, 2004). It has been operationalized and empirically tested as psychological distancing (Schimel et al., 2000), and applied conceptually to organizational management, leadership, and balance, group behavior, positive

organizational behavior, AI, and resistance to change (Biberman, Whitty, & Robbins, 1999; Fitzgerald & Oliver, 2006; Gemmill, 1986; Gemmill & Oakley, 1992; Johnson, 2007; Nord & Jermier, 1994; Smith & Elmes, 2002).

In her doctoral research, Kolodziejski (2004) engaged the most rigorous, complex, comprehensive exploration of the Shadow at the intra- and interpersonal, group, and organizational levels and the "untapped, trapped potential" that lies within. She describes the shadow as containing, "that which is feared and suppressed, that which is considered inappropriate and shunned, that which is unbearable to hold consciously and denied" (p. 64). Fitzgerald and Oliver (2006) summarized suppressing, shunning, and denying as "censoring." They conceive of the Shadow as censored feeling and cognition, where the term *censored* refers to any conscious or unconscious regulation of cognition and/or emotion by self and/or others where their experience and/or expression is judged to not fit with "accepted" cultural or group norms (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

Although the Shadow might be thought of as the "dark side" of people and organizations (i.e., as the polar opposite of "the light"), it actually includes the full spectrum of censored feeling and cognition, ranging from repressed strengths and capacities to fragilities and abhorrent characteristics. Thus, it includes qualities and characteristics that may be judged as being positive and/or negative by self and/or others (Kolodziejski, 2004). Also, Shadow is commonly confused with action or behavior that has a destructive effect (e.g., violence in the workplace). However, we suggest that such action and behavior may in fact be a byproduct of not integrating the Shadow, rather than the Shadow itself. Although some censure of emotion and cognition is integral to all social systems and can be contextually appropriate and useful (e.g., as mechanisms of control), it can also have detrimental consequences for the individual and the organization, particularly when its role is not recognized and included as integral to the coordination of meaning and action (Biberman et al., 1999; Bowles, 1991; Jung, 1968; McKenna, 1996; Washbush & Clements, 1999; Westheafer, 2000).

Varieties of AI-Shadow Relationships

We began our own inquiry into the relationship between AI and Shadow years ago as we struggled to reconcile cognitive dissonance between our uplifting stories, images, and experiences of AI and some disturbing cognitive and emotional experiences with AI that did not fit the lofty aspirations and claims espoused for it. We wondered whether these were anomalies reflecting an occasional brush with our personal Shadows, and/or whether something else was involved.

Until quite recently, our inquiry was focused on the potential for AI to generate and sustain Shadow as an unintended and unconscious byproduct of equating AI with the norm of

positivity, especially in the absence of reflexivity. As we deepened and broadened our exploration, however, varieties of AI-Shadow relationships began to reveal themselves. These include: (1) AI as generating Shadow, (2) AI as an intervention into Shadow, and perhaps most provocatively, (3) AI itself as a Shadow process. These relationships are discussed next.

AI as Generating Shadow

In her richly reflective, poetic, and generative exploration of transcending the polarities of light and shadow in AI, Johnson (2007) noted that the light of AI paradoxically may generate Shadow much as a theatre spotlight illuminates and shadows simultaneously.

In theatre the mood is set through artful, contextually appropriate blending of light and shadow. As Johnson suggests,

> perhaps we need to be as intentionally artful in working with and supporting the shadow as a design element—not minimizing, denying, or overcoming it—but embracing (loving), using and celebrating it. Can we cast an appreciative eye on the shadow, on resistance, hopelessness, shame, despair, anger, and grief when it emerges (p. 3)?

Shadow in this sense is seen as the opposite of light, and as comprised of what is commonly categorized as "negative" thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Yet the Shadow contains the full range of repressed emotion and cognition, including individual and collective qualities, strengths, and capacities that are feared, considered inappropriate, and/or unbearable to hold consciously and thus censored. For example, we did a series of organizational interviews in which people were asked to talk about their strengths, how their strengths were currently being used, and how they might be used in the future. Shining the light on people's strengths created an awareness of how many people in the organization were not affirmed for what they were contributing to the organization's goals. They expressed a deep sense that there were many unsung contributors who had made the company the success it is today. Focusing on the strengths had, in fact, created an awareness of the Shadowed side. The shadow may also show up in this kind of situation because people have been conditioned to believe that it is "inappropriate to brag" about their strengths, and therefore may suppress recognition and/or expression of them.

When we conceive of and equate AI exclusively with the light or the positive, we establish a polarity. Such polarities are integral to creating Shadow:

> Fundamental to Jungian psychology and to an understanding of the shadow is the notion of polarities. Jung saw the developmental work of individuals, as well as the collective, as growing the ability to tolerate natural polarities within us. In an organization, this could be exemplified by the ability of the organization and its leaders effectively to manage seemingly contradictory sets of values, such as the drive for profit and concern for people and/or the environment. (Kolodziejski, 2004, p. 3)

Similarly, in his work on the group shadow, Gemmill (1986) notes that:

> From a Gestalt perspective, the group is a never-ending sequence of polarities. Whenever a group recognizes one attribute of itself, the presence of its antithesis or polar quality is implicit. The group shadow functions as a repository for polarities that are unacceptable to group members. For example, a group may be conscious of its supportiveness but unaware of its polar opposite, hostility. Members of the group prefer to see themselves as supportive only rather than also acknowledging their hostility, which remains submerged, an aspect of group shadow. The more a group becomes aware of polarities hidden in its shadow, the less likely it is that the group will act out these polarities against another group (Polster & Polster, 1973). (p. 231)

The censoring power of polarized norms. In organizations, norms provide key mechanisms for enabling and/or constraining behavior, and for controlling felt and expressed emotion in general (e.g., Oliver, 2005; Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989). They influence not only what is relegated to the "Shadow," but also subsequent behavior connected to that material. For example, when norms exist that completely discount emotionality in organizational life (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995), or that constrain expression or display of a range of emotions (Barge & Oliver, 2003; van der Haar & Hosking, 2004), an organizational culture is created that delegitimizes dimensions of emotion, cognition, and behavior, the suppression of which, in turn, shapes organizational culture (Pearce & Cronen, 1980).

Jasso and Opp (1997) distinguish four characteristics of norms. A norm may prescribe and/or proscribe behavior, either conditionally or unconditionally, and vary in terms of its relative intensity and pervasiveness (i.e., consensus) of influence. Therefore, a norm may be highly polarized (e.g., exclusively positive or rational focus). Also, a norm may vary considerably in the degree to which it is embedded within individual, group, and organizational behavior. We refer to this as the relative "strength" of a norm. We propose that as a norm's polarity and strength increase, its potential to promote censoring of emotion, cognition, and/or behavior

also increases, thereby increasing the strength of the individual and collective Shadow.

In spite of the positive principle being only one among the five foundational principles of AI (the others being the constructionist, simultaneity, anticipatory, and poetic principles [Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000] with the wholeness, enactment, and free choice principles added by Whitney & Trosten-Bloom in 2003), it is the one that has become increasingly equated with, and exclusively critiqued in relation to, AI (e.g., Barge & Oliver, 2003; Bushe, 2007; Fitzgerald & Oliver, 2006; Golembiewski, 1998, 2000; Grant & Humphries, 2006; Oliver, 2005; Pratt, 2002; van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). For example, Fineman argues that,

[i]n exclusively favoring positive narratives, AI fails to value the opportunities for positive change that are possible from negative experiences, such as embarrassing events, periods of anger, anxiety, fear, or shame… moreover, in privileging positive talk, it fails to engage with the emotionally ambiguous circumstances of the workplace, such as when individuals feel torn between competing possibilities and differing voices (p. 275)

Similarly, Bushe and Kassam (2005) expressed concern that:

as AI attains fad status less thoughtful practitioners and managers will go about collecting stories of the positive using a 4-D model and think that is all there is to appreciative inquiry. If so, we will find many end up with the kinds of questions Golembiewski (1998) has asked, pointing out that conventional action researchers typically do ask about the positive as well as the negative, and that asking about both seems to be a fuller inquiry than just focusing on what works. (p. 177)

Pratt (2002) vividly illustrates these concerns in her case study in which she shows,

the tendency of appreciative methodology to privilege positive aspects of organizational experience. As the story unfolds, a tension between this selective focus on the positive and the apparent refusal to honor negative dimensions of lived experience seems to compromise the integrity of the AI process. The case describes the challenge of blending these two integrities. (p. 100)

It also reflects these central concerns: (a) what is deemed to be positive (and negative), (b) how is that decided, (c) who decides it, (d) who is it positive for, and (e) how do these determinations influence our AI conversations? It may not just be that the exclusion of the negative is constraining of organizational congruence, but also that the effect of imposing a normative positive discourse on AI participants may promote censoring of self and/or others, thereby generating Shadow.

Positivity has come to permeate our AI related conversation via book and chapter titles and by-lines, and in all of the constructs it is used to modify, for example, the positive principle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000), positive change (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003), positive image and action (Cooperrider, 1990), positive organization development (Cooperrider, Sorensen, Yaeger, & Whitney, 2005), positive focus of inquiry (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, Chapter 4), positive revolution in change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005), accentuating the positive (Fitzgerald, Murrell, & Miller, 2003), power of positive questions (Whitney, Cooperrider, Trosten-Bloom, & Kaplan, 2002), positive theory of change (Cooperrider, Sorensen, Whitney, & Yaeger, 2000), and so on. Thus we have "everything coming up po-si-tive." Within these volumes, a few pages are devoted to dealing with problems and "negatives," yet without guidance as to how to discern that which is positive from that which is negative, who should make that determination, and how. Furthermore, the "generative" and "that which gives life" are often presumed as and equated with "positive," which remains undefined. We do not observe any similar trumpeting or highly visible promotion of any of the other foundational principles of AI. Has the overarching *positive* really become the generative heart of AI?

The Positive versus Problem-Solving and Deficit Discourse. AI as exclusively privileging the positive has been extensively distinguished in print, training, and practice as superior to and negating of problem-solving, deficit-based analysis, "negative" emotion and discourse, and all prior (and continuing) forms of action research, critique, and mechanistic views of organization, which implies that they are negative, inferior, or bad, and therefore to be avoided (or censored) as "not AI." Problem-solving in particular has often been disparaged in our AI conversation, which reflects little or no appreciation for the wonders of the world that are largely generated through that still-prevailing paradigm. It is important to recognize that like AI, problem solving is not a disembodied paradigm, but in fact reflects the work, dedication, passion, hopes, dreams, hearts and souls of literally millions, if not billions of people globally. As Johnson (2007) observes,

When people 'resist' AI, what are they really resisting? They resist the vulnerability of separation from their most important tool and significant capability: problem solving. They resist being controlled by a methodology that appears, at least on the surface, to silence the expression of what is most important or salient from their point of view. (p. 16)

Our polarizing AI-as-positive discourse inadvertently de-values not only that problem-solving paradigm, but also implicitly the lives and work of all those who dedicated

themselves, with the best of intentions, to create better worlds, including so many of the founders of OD. In what ways does this reflect the spirit of Cooperrider and Srivastva's (1987) original definition of AI as promoting, "egalitarian dialogue leading to social-system effectiveness and integrity," defined as "a congruence between social-organizational values . . . and everyday social-organizational practices" (p. 85)? Congruence seems to be a problem in our own AI conversation when our core value of appreciation in relation to all that came before AI and that continues alongside it, including that which may not be construed by our community and/or any of us individually as "positive," is treated as negative or deficit. As Johnson (2007) reflexively observes:

> AI often continues to be defined *in contrast*, continually framed in an "either/or" dynamic. We can do appreciative inquiry OR we can do action research. We can look at the positive OR we can wallow in the negative. We can do appreciative inquiry OR we can do problem solving. We know this polarity still exists, if we are honest, when we look at how we think about and manage those uncomfortable moments when someone 'resists' our appreciative frame, or when we are most uncomfortable in our shoes as AI practitioners. (p. 18)

Weick (2003) takes this further in appreciating the assumptions underlying the prevailing norm of positivity and their relevance in the context of "vulnerable organizing" (p. 67). Within that context of high stakes, vulnerable environments such as aviation, nuclear power, and healthcare, a relentless focus on prevention of failure generates reliable production of nonevents. At first glance such a relentless preoccupation with failure prevention may appear to be a deficit orientation, yet it actually constitutes an extraordinary and life-giving form of success. Weick notes that polarized discourses of positive/negative and right/wrong may obscure the unpredictable and unknowable complexities (e.g., luck, chance, accidents, randomness) that are integral to generating unintended consequences like life-threatening error and failure. Furthermore, an action may begin full of positive intention yet lead to unintended negative outcomes. The action itself is neither positive nor negative. Therefore in the context of vulnerable organizing (and, we suggest, in the improvisational mode of Destiny, the final phase of the AI 4-D model), "building capacity for recovery" from failure and unintended detrimental consequences, and "directing a greater proportion of mindful attention to near-term details and the health of the process" rather than exclusively to the positive image of the hoped for outcomes may be construed as vitally positive.

The Censoring Impact of the 4D Model. Although reservations have been expressed about associating AI too closely with the 4D model, it appears to have become deeply embedded within our AI community as a normative, positive image of AI as a change process leading toward goals of generative theory and transformation. However, this image of the structure of the 4D process, republished extensively (e.g., Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000; Watkins & Moore, 2001; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003), may in some ways constrain the transcendent possibilities for AI that Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) initially envisioned. We notice this in our own anxious, disappointed sense of loss of potential if a group or client does not wish to engage in or carry forward one or more of the four D's, even though cognitively we may not equate AI with the 4D model. In other words, the image of the 4D model has a normative impact on our imagining of AI potentialities, so that the "full transformative potential" may not be perceived as realized unless the full cycle is enacted.

Looking into this a bit more deeply, the 4D model appears to reflect a goal-oriented structure. As a pluralistic social-construction endeavor, the AI conversation embodies a socially cooperative spirit. Argyle (1991) argued that cooperation has been defined too narrowly, and that the shared group goals aspect ". . . provides a partial account of only one kind of cooperation" (p.16). He offers this expanded definition: "Cooperation: acting together, in a coordinated way at work, leisure, or in social relationships, in the pursuit of shared goals, the enjoyment of joint activity, or simply furthering the relationship" (p.16). Goal theory falls under the first category, but it does not account for the other two. Goal theory is a function of a Western, rational, economic view of human interaction. It fails as a model for close personal relationships because people are often motivated by their concern for the welfare of their partner, and for the relationship itself. One of the key strengths of AI is that it holds the potential for the integration of shared goals with shared activities and relationships.

The increasingly embedded image of the 4D model as "appreciative process" may inadvertently lead us to censor the idea and possibility of engaging in AI for the transcendent motivation of being present to the activity itself—for example, simply experiencing ourselves immersed in and fully awake to the "positive core" of our community, without a need to further, better, improve, or transform it, or to amplify, increase, or build on our "positive core." This is what we do in celebration together, in dancing, and in music. This is what some may dismiss as the proverbial "group hug," without appreciating the generative, nourishing, restorative wellspring that experience can be. Such a deep, collectively generated and held experience *is* transformative in that it involves "qualitative changes in the state of being of that system," even if it does not necessarily also mean "changes in the identity of a system" (Bushe & Kassam, 2005, p. 162). However, community members' sense of their

community's identity *may* be strengthened and even changed simply by being immersed in and present to the "positive core" of that community.

In our anxiousness to show results, to demonstrate the value of AI, avoid being seen as merely "group huggers," and especially, to conform to the normative expectations associated with the dominance of rationality (discussed below), the image of the 4D process may reassure us that there is an end goal, and silently urge us onward in situations where goal-orientation beyond the transcendence of being present to community, and/or of engaging together in dreaming, is not appropriate or generative. In the past, the embedded 4D model has also led to images and discussion of lack of strength of AI in terms of the Discovery and Destiny phases (e.g., Golembiewski, 1998). If we urge design according to the normative structure of the 4Ds in all situations, whether consciously or unconsciously, we may not recognize and/or inadvertently devalue the transformative effect of experiential immersion in the nurturance of the community of relationships, of the fundamentally positive core of community.

To be clear, we are not suggesting that the 4D model be abandoned, or some other model substituted for it. From our perspective, all models share this paradox of simultaneously enabling and constraining possibility. Instead, we join with many others in inviting our AI community to engage in our collective AI conversations and practices reflexively (Fitzgerald & Oliver, 2006; Grant & Humphries, 2006; Myer, Donovan, & Fitzgerald, 2007; Oliver, 2005; van der Haar & Hosking, 2004).

We are also not suggesting that the 4D model is the soul and substance of generating Shadow in relation to AI. To the extent that it (or normative definitions of the positive) becomes reified as "the way," it may censure experimentation and novel approaches, and in our experience has done both, even in some AI based organizations that espouse a commitment to learning and innovation. Learning and innovation are embraced insofar as they are generated through the 4D process and not perceived as threatening to it or to our conceptions of AI.

For example, during a planning meeting for an AI summit in an organization whose culture was largely developed through AI, the lead author:

> heard rumblings from several [organizational] veterans about having to do AI again, and respectfully voiced the concerns that I had heard in our planning meeting (which those individuals authorized me to do on their behalf). I sensed some fear in them (which I had myself) about publicly questioning this nearly sacrosanct process that had played such a vital role in the very life of the [organization], making its existence – and our planning meeting - possible. The group [and

facilitators] listened with respect, and shortly thereafter broke for lunch.

> When we returned from lunch the outline for the entire summit was sketched on the wall according to the [4D] phases of AI process. . . . There was no acknowledgment of or reference to the concerns voiced just prior to our break. I was taken aback, but did not raise the concerns at that point or again, and neither did anyone else. . . . And in spite of other concerns voiced by key convenors in the planning meeting, topics wound up being scheduled into the AI [4D] design based on the very good intentions of those few people with the most formal and informal power (in my estimation).

Similarly, Pratt (2002) came to realize that as an AI practitioner she "often felt more loyal to process than people" (p. 120), and that "a requirement that negative experiences, as significant dimensions of human experience, be suppressed or denied or framed in 'appreciative terms' clearly privileged the process of AI over people" (p. 117). Pratt's realization helped her grow her ability to tolerate the polarities inherent within her own conceptions of "positive-negative" and "people-process." She described the former polarity as "a contest of integrities; a tension between the intentional, selective focus on the positive as a guiding principle of AI and the honoring of lived experience that includes both positive and negative dimensions" (p. 117). This insight led her to modify her intervention design and effectively manage these seemingly contradictory sets of values without sacrificing her "sense of integrity as it relates to 'being' in an appreciative space with another" (p. 115). By sharing her own process with participants, she also helped them grow their capacity to embrace these polarities without sacrificing the integrity of their lived experience.

In sum, in the first of three potential AI relationships with the Shadow, AI generates Shadow either through the "light" that it brings to the focal topics, and/or through the censoring impact of polarized norms (especially positivity and the 4D model) that many have come to equate with AI. Two additional forms of AI-Shadow relationships are explored next.

AI as an Intervention Into the Shadow

Given that the Shadow consists of positive as well as negative qualities, and that in many organizations strengths and capacities have been relegated to the Shadow by the dominance of problem-solving, the conventional AI into positive strengths and capacities may often serve as *an intervention into the individual and collective Shadow,* although it has not heretofore been recognized as such. For example,

what is most artistic or creative in people, especially around their positive potential, is often imprisoned in their shadow. Many of us have had little support for exploring these aspects of our nature. These urges are sometimes 'under wraps.' So the process of coming into contact with potent images or root metaphors (Pepper, 1942) can be extremely powerful and affirming—and difficult. (Johnson, 2007, p. 15)

Similarly, Kolodziejski (2004) noted that AI:

holds significant promise for aiding those who are working with shadow dynamics at the organizational level. . . . an appreciative inquiry process helps an organization identify its untapped potential and enables the organization to reap the benefits of that potential. . . Because AI is an affirming and *nonjudgmental approach*, it is less likely to arouse an organization's defenses during the process of diagnosis. It's opportunity-finding nature draws out what is suppressed in shadow. The undesirable and underdeveloped aspects are encouraged to show themselves during an AI. There is an encouragement to look behind the symptom for underlying prospects. (pp. 179-180, emphasis added)

When AI is equated with the norm of positivity, however, it calls participants to discern and judge stories and contributions as either positive or negative, thereby diminishing the strength of nonjudgment that Kolodziejski highlights in the potential for AI in working with Shadow. It is also possible to intentionally inquire appreciatively into the Shadow in individual and organizational life (as in the case stories below). Sometimes this can be as simple as asking the question

what concerns and reservations do you have, and what do you need to address those concerns? When have you had similar concerns and reservations, and how did you deal with them successfully? What story is behind these doubts and reservations and how they were handled?

The Shadow is associated with defensive functioning, and Kolodziejski (2004) offers straightforward questions to help identify such functioning, for example,

what topics are the most challenging to discuss frankly or openly around here? Why is that? What issues are the hardest for the organization to take responsibility for, to own versus avoid, and why? What are this organization's 'sacred cows,' and why? (pp. 184-185)

When treated as an intentional intervention into the Shadow, AI work supports the whole organization or community in recognizing, expressing, and valuing its Shadowed strengths and capacities, frailties and vulnerabilities. Such work "allows us to reclaim parts of ourselves that bring us into wholeness" (Kolodziejski, 2004, p. 16). We believe that this is the heart of AI work at its most effective.

In sum, the tremendous liberation of collective energy in many AI interventions may have more to do with reclaiming long neglected and/or silenced aspects of individual and organizational life (i.e., Shadow) rather than focusing on the positive per se. This recognition can open new vistas of possibility for our AI conversations, research, and practice.

AI as a Shadow Process

In addition to AI-Shadow relationships in which our AI conversation inadvertently generates Shadow and/or serves as an intended or unintended intervention into Shadow, when considered against the broader socio-cultural landscape, AI-as-inquiry-into-the-positive may itself be seen *as a Shadow process*. The largely American tendency to equate AI exclusively with the positive may itself be an expression of a broad, socio-cultural Shadow. For example, Fitzgerald and Oliver (2006) set forth the historically polarized relationship of rationality and emotionality, and the censorship of the latter by the former (which has been typically associated with irrationality) in organizational discourse. This is, in our view, intimately tied to rationality being culturally and historically ascribed to men, masculinity, and management, and emotion to "the weaker sex," femininity, and family.

Bushe (2007) expressed concern that even after years of doing AI, some clients don't understand what is most fundamental about AI; they "seem to get blinded by the 'positive stuff.' After years of focusing on problems and deficits and dysfunction they get entranced with 'focusing on the positive' and equate this with AI" (p. 1). How can we blame our clients when perhaps, dear Brutus, the fault is within ourselves, within the pervasive trumpeting within our own community of the overarching message of the positive in relation to AI? What might lead people, including us, to "get blinded by the positive stuff?"

Cultural contexts for positivity. To gain perspective on that question, it is helpful to consider this phenomenon within the context of the larger social discourses within which it is immersed. For example, Fineman (2006) suggests that,

positivity's growing fashionability in the United States is a cultural product of a country that enshrined the right to happiness in its 1776 Declaration of Independence. Elsewhere, such as in Europe, organizational researchers have so far been less attracted to the positive discourse. (p. 308)

Similarly, in her fascinating exploration of the culture of emotions in the United States, social historian Kotchemidova (2005) traces the evolution of the feeling of *cheerfulness* in the United States from the 18th through the 20th centuries; she argues that it grew to become the primary American emotional norm of the 20th century (p. 6). Overall, Kotchemidova shows how the American middle class drove the establishment of the societal norm of cheerfulness at home and at work by "engaging the lower classes through the job market, social expectations and structural constraints" (p. 13). Thus Americans in particular may be culturally predisposed to "accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative, and don't mess with Mister In-Between" (Johnny Mercer and Harold Arlen). Yet how might this relate to our conceptions of the pervasive escalation of deficit discourse?

Ludema (2000, drawing upon Gergen, 1994) "shows how growth in deficit vocabularies of mental illness have served to compound rather than alleviate individual and societal suffering" (p. 444), and attributes the source to the "debilitating effects of critical and deconstructive social science" (p. 444). Kotchemidova (2005) offers a complementary but alternative explanation. In her chronicling of the social evolution of cheerfulness as *the dominant emotion* in the United States, she suggests that,

> since cheerfulness is inversely related to depression, a cultural norm of cheerfulness might have repercussions on the general cultural attitude to depression. Transcultural psychiatry has found that the concept of depression is not well-known in the experience and lexicon of non-Western people… Hence, the same physical condition may be linguistically marked or unmarked, conceptually elaborated and problematized to various degrees. (p. 24)

It is intriguing to note that the rise of deficit vocabularies of mental illness that Gergen (1994) and Ludema (2000) identify coincides in the U.S. with the increasingly embedded norm of cheerfulness in American culture. Indeed, "with the spread of cheerfulness fears of depression have increased, amounting to a sizeable drug- and psychotherapeutic industry." (Kotchemidova, p. 25)

It is also interesting, and we feel significant, to note that most of those who have expressed concerns about the American cultural and/or AI norms of positivity and cheerfulness do so from an international and/or diverse cultural vantage point (e.g., Bushe, 2007; Fineman, 2006; Fitzgerald & Oliver, 2006; Grant & Humphries, 2006; Kotchemidova, 2005; Oliver, 2005; Pratt, 2002; van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). Like Fineman, Kotchemidova observes that, "'the pursuit of happiness' is not a concept in any of the European constitutions" (p. 25). This uniquely American expectation "makes feelings of sadness and despair more pathological in this culture than anywhere else" (p. 25). Thus, the rise of deficit vocabularies of mental illness discourse that Gergen and Ludema describe might also be seen as reflecting the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consequences of the censoring impact of the deeply embedded American cultural norm of perpetual, pervasive cheerfulness. This further raises an interesting and important question about unexplored and unintended consequences of the "power of positive image." When and how might the "light" of such a generative image also cast shadows and draw into sharper relief that which appears to be inconsistent with the image, possibly even casting it as deficient or pathological?

If Kotchemidova (2005) is right, what are the broader cultural implications for our AI community of promoting yet more positivity and equating positivity with AI? This may also help explain how and why Bushe's (2007) clients, like many of us, have so eagerly succumbed to the familiar and comfortable lure of "unconditional" positivity. It blinds us to the polarizing discourse that violates our own wholeness principle, as well as to the censoring behavior that the norm of positivity leads us to enact, thereby promoting the Shadow.

The field of OD and the shadow of death. Closer to the OD home of AI, the rising prominence of AI since the late 1990s coincides with a conversation in the OD world as to the identity/identities and future(s) of OD as a field, succinctly expressed in what Cox (2005) refers to as the "Power of the Question: Is OD Dead?" This state of transformative angst is also reflected in the Statement of the Editorial Board of the Jossey-Bass "Practicing OD" series in its forward to one of the best-selling books on AI (Watkins & Moore, 2001) in which they explore the question, "Is the OD Profession at a Crossroads?" Perhaps a key issue here is the absence of reflection upon the need to honor the anxiety, sadness, and sense of loss that may be associated with the significant transition in terms of whether and how the field will continue beyond its founding generation.

Cox (2005) puts the field "on the couch" and implicitly suggests shadow dynamics in diagnosing OD with an "inferiority complex." His prescription for developing a vision for the field may reflect a generational need for our wise elders to shine a light forward, yet our typically American focus on AI visions of positive futures can help us individually and/or collectively avoid having to be present to the difficult feelings associated with impending death and transition, particularly of our founding generation—our teachers, mentors, shamans, and guides. We are not discounting the importance of vision for legacy, transition, completion, etc. in the face of death and transition, but rather encouraging recognition and inclusion of the full spectrum of human experience and emotion. Cooperrider (2007) has recently called for research into "the tragic," given that we know very little about the tragic and its implication for the practice of AI.

AI as an instrument of domination. van der Haar and Hosking (2004) suggest that "the positive injunction could itself be experienced as an imposition and as an attempt to construct S[ubject]-O[bject] or 'dominance relations'… such an injunction could hinder the openness of the process and therefore the realities that can be 'made'" (pp. 1025-1026). Similarly, Golembiewski refers to AI as "discouraging inquiry" (2000, p. 55) and "studied disregard" (1998, p. 9).

Although equalizing power in organizational life and promoting egalitarian values (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) are central to our AI conversation, when we harness it to an exclusive, nonreflexive focus on the positive, it can unwittingly become a shadow process, obscuring the promotion of the positive as being in the service of sustaining organizational power structures. For example, we had experience with one global nonprofit that had embraced AI-as-inquiry-into-the-positive as integral to its culture. The gathering of stories of the positive from its non-U.S. members justified the claims of the organization as being global, and its funding was based in large part on that claim. Thus the "gold" of members' positive stories were actively "mined" and converted in the U.S. nonprofit market to financial resources, but these resources went primarily to sustaining a few salaried American personnel in one of the most expensive cities in the United States. This continued in spite of the urging of many members in the United States and abroad to explore relocation of the office and personnel and more equitable distribution of limited resources. Those who provided the stories and the work that went into generating the experiences associated with those stories received little support or benefit for their work or stories. Yet the design of meetings and conversations initiated by the salaried staff and their designees invariably focused on eliciting stories of peak positive experiences of members' work in relation to the global organization. In this way we perceived the mining of stories of the positive as a form of postmodern colonialism. This illustrates the potential for stories of the positive to reify existing power structures, in spite of the best conscious intentions of those who hold the center of such structures.

Similarly, we were invited on short notice to design and facilitate an AI-as-positive-inquiry based strategic planning retreat for the board and senior management of a large nonprofit organization. Inclusion of the management team in the board retreat was unprecedented and advocated by the ED, which we encouraged and endorsed in keeping with the AI wholeness principle. We were interviewed and selected by a planning committee that consisted of the ED, two newer board members, and two senior managers. It was not possible at that point to broaden inclusion of additional stakeholders since the retreat was to be held in two weeks and budget and reservations had already been set.

The organization faced a unionization move by a major group of its workers and the board had a separate meeting during the retreat to address that issue. At the end of the retreat, the ED said that the retreat had exceeded her expectations. The camaraderie and energy liberated were palpable, yet in retrospect it appeared that her decision to use AI and include senior management in the retreat served to censure attention that might otherwise have been directed by the board toward deeply held concerns they had about her performance. Following the retreat, the board postponed its subsequent AI oriented sessions, the unionization drive succeeded, and the board embarked on a path that led to the ED's replacement six months later.

A change in leadership is often integral to organizational transformation, and in this case the strong positive light of the inquiry may have generated an image of the possibility of the organization that strengthened the board members' interrelationships (according to one board member) and their resolve to make a difficult decision. We were not privy to the board's conversations beyond the retreat, so ours is a speculative, generous, and self-affirming interpretation. However, key here is the realization that AI had been contracted, designed, and employed—whether intentionally or unintentionally—as a diversionary tactic (a Shadow process) that may have ironically backfired on the ED to the benefit of the system overall.

In the previous sections we explored three varieties of AI-Shadow relationships: AI as generating Shadow, as intervention into Shadow, and as a Shadow process itself. Next we share our reflections on two case stories from our work that illustrate various facets of these relationships.

Case Story 1: Recognizing and Appreciatively Inquiring Into the Shadow

We were engaged to work with an agency whose director was very interested in creating a positive environment. The agency exemplifies best practice in terms of innovation and forward thinking, and it seemed unthinkable to consider that anything other than the most positive, generative dynamics were going on. Furthermore, the director seemed to embody the spirit and ideals of AI. After several conversations we agreed to begin with leadership training for mid-level management using AI as the first step in a larger process. Mid level managers were gathered to discuss the potential training.

At this point we experienced a palpable Shadow. Participants seemed too quiet, mostly assenting to whatever the director said. She often intervened to correct their language, thereby discounting their input. Furthermore, her corrections almost always related to how they needed to see things from the positive view, which suggested an attempt to implement a highly polarized norm, and a conception of AI as furthering that aim. We observed a lot of nonverbal communication among participants in response: clearing of throats, some

rolling of eyes, people turning in their seats away from the director or us.

We hoped that when the AI process was underway this dynamic would change but felt uncomfortable, and began to sense that compliance was becoming a substitute for participation. There was an uneasy feeling that the director would mandate AI if necessary and thus render it an instrument of domination.

Excited about the project, we were tempted to hope that when staff understood AI this resistance would be overcome. "Ignore it and it will go away," as we had come to believe through our participation in the global AI conversation. Upon reflection we became aware of the seductive potential for discounting and thus inadvertently censoring our own uneasy feelings and concerns in pursuit of a hopeful ideal. We wondered, "*how can we really 'do' AI here if people do not feel free to express themselves openly?"*

Participants seemed to be implicitly saying, "we are going along with this because that is what we do in this agency. The boss is brilliant and we follow her lead." To be fair, that mentality, if it exists, brought this agency a long way; they are very successful in what they do. We also considered whether this hierarchical deference might actually be a strength. However, we could not get over the feeling that these people were experiencing a kind of oppression, a kind of "group think" that was holding them in place. This attitude could ultimately sabotage any efforts we made to facilitate an inquiry into the organization's many positives if we could not find a way to engage folks with this organizational Shadow.

Often the Shadow first expresses itself through uncomfortable feelings and awareness. As facilitators, we are learning to first recognize and include our own discomfort, rather than to ignore or discount it, as integral to authentic appreciation. In doing so, we value it and the information and contributions that it may offer to us. We then find a way to express it, sometimes in confidence to a "shadow" consultant [sic] we have engaged, to a co-facilitator, to our client, or to everyone present. We engage this choice reflexively to the extent we are able.

In this case, upon further reflection it seemed that we had to provide an opportunity for expression of Shadow content through legitimizing dissent. This led to a simple, intentional inquiry into the Shadow content that we sensed. We asked, "what concerns do you have about what we are planning or about AI in general?"

The question was met with silence at first. Finally one person confessed, "well, I don't know about this strengths stuff. It is really difficult to apply in the day to day operations of this agency." All the while she was speaking she was eyeing the director; gauging the director's reaction to her "disagreeing." There were several others who followed her lead and spoke. In the end we had a frank dialogue and

worked together to create some strategies to address these concerns. The awareness of the Shadow and the willingness to intentionally include it in our conversation went a long way in creating a deeper and richer response to the work of the day.

After this initial meeting, we reflected on what kind of questions could further facilitate the resolution of the appreciative paradox we had temporarily experienced. These included: (a) when do you feel the freest to offer opposing opinions, (b) when do you feel most included in the agency's overall goal setting, (c) what are your best experiences of speaking up, and (d) what is the best thing your full and authentic participation in this inquiry will lead to?

Case Story 2: AI as an Inadvertent Intervention Into the Shadow in a Community of Monks

During work with a community of monks in the United Kingdom, we designed an AI process to explore how a decision could and should be made about a change in the location of the monastery. Through this process, we hoped to connect the community's religious "calling" to discernment about the decision. Exercises facilitating connection between an organization's values and its decision-making are characteristic of conventional AI intervention. At the beginning of this appreciative-as-positive process, we noticed an unhelpful pattern developing whereby certain voices did not open up even though they were being invited to. A consequence of this was that some community members expressed a feeling in their working groups that important things were not being said and the potential of the dialog thereby undermined.

In the feedback from groups, a complaint was made in public forum that some voices were not being listened to. These voices seemed to be being encouraged through the "equalizing" exercise, yet this complaint was made. Through exploration of the issue with the community, we realized that the exercise as designed had neglected to pay sufficient attention to the norms in the culture about which voices in the group were privileged, with "priest" voices treated as more authoritative than "lay" voices. Censorship occurred in the community through subtle and collusive marginalization of lay participation and concurrent idealizing of the authority of the clergy, enabling some participants to avoid responsibility and others to take (too much) responsibility. This implicit norm showed itself most profoundly in the community's articulation of its "calling" and promoted angry feelings of exclusion, "us and them" thinking, and withdrawal behavior from some "lay" voices, which reinforced the norm of division. Thus we found that our best intentions for the exploration of the positive energy of the community's calling inadvertently stirred the demons of the community's

Shadow. Censoring in the community through tacit discounting of lay input with concurrent idealizing of clergy input and participation had resulted in festering Shadow content that was illuminated by the "light" of the positively oriented AI questions.

It is a characteristic assumption of AI that structured appreciative exercises have an equalizing effect on participants' voices with "power discrepancies minimized" (Elliot, 1999, p. 10). In this case, we were naïve in that assumption, and the process as originally designed was insufficiently attentive to the complexity of collective and individual norms. Thus our assumptions of equality and positivity inadvertently constrained (censored) a "full enough" expression of community interests through our neglect of contextual information.

We then attempted to address this pattern by purposefully calling attention to it and facilitating a process of recognition, inclusion, expression and making sense of this previously Shadowed material. We constructed a new exercise that directly addressed the consequences for all when a decision would be made that some did not want. This intervention framed and valued the pattern as something that the community could work with and take responsibility for. Thus, the community learned that it was their responsibility to notice and imagine the consequences of some voices "winning" over others.

The discussion occurred in groups of three. In each group, one participant volunteered to serve as a "steward" to ensure that: (a) the interests of the whole community were met through the discussion, (b) personal agendas did not block or sidetrack the discussion (which would have enacted censoring of some voices), and (c) strong expressions of emotion and (what became known as) "hobby horses" were valued and inquired into. This discussion about the consequences of a decision being made that some might not want was fed back by each group and then the stewards had a discussion amongst themselves in front of other community members about what they had observed and experienced while carrying out their task.

The intervention placed all members in the same position with care for the individual who does not get what he wants, rather than in an "us and them" dynamic. The role of the steward helped structure responsibility for and negotiation of "community" voice in an attempt to transcend the "us and them" cultural norm. This reflects a different approach to the AI "wholeness principle" that "leads participants to focus on higher ground rather than common ground" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 70). The positions of care for the other and accountability to the whole represented such higher ground in this case, and direct reflection on the pattern enabled the community to reach it.

In both of these preceding stories, our reflexive awareness of uncomfortable feelings within participants and/or

ourselves led to recognition of inadvertent inquiry into the Shadow prompted by our equating AI with inquiry into the positive. Rather than dismiss this awareness and adhere to the normative positive and/or 4D prescription, we used it to intentionally invite and facilitate inquiry into the Shadow content, which had beneficial impact for the respective organizational communities. In our view, this is the heart of authentic appreciation.

Implications for our AI Conversation

The implications for our AI conversation are exciting and far-reaching. Researchers and practitioners can explore the possibilities inherent in the image of AI as a Shadow process, and also as an intentional inquiry into the Shadow in organizational life. Liberated from the constraints of equating AI with normative conceptions of positivity and/or the 4-D process, innovative, pluralistic, appreciative designs and processes may increasingly flourish as reflexive awareness becomes integral to AI and all organizational change work.

Publishers and editors can ensure a healthy balance of "positive" and "negative" (Frederickson & Losada, 2005) stories and perspectives in volumes and special issues on AI and positive change work. They can also create forums for learning not only from largely mono-vocal, consultant and/or researcher authored cases of AI success, but also from AI cases that explore unintended, undesired consequences and incorporate pluralistic perspectives and voices, including those that the authors might perceive as negative or critical (e.g., Johnson, 2007; Pratt, 2002). Similarly, Johnson (2007) and Kolodziejski (2004) call for creating opportunities for dialogue about and exploration of the relations between AI and the Shadow.

Educators who offer AI courses and training for students and organizational leaders and members can similarly design a healthy balance into their curricula, not only by incorporating and balancing inherent polarities, but also by offering guidance and training in reflexive awareness as integral to AI design and facilitation. Invite trainees to befriend and become acquainted with their own personal Shadows so as to support them in being better able to create a safe space for the constructive emergence of individual and collective Shadows through their AI work. Foster reflexive awareness of the behavioral mechanisms that promote inclusion versus censoring. Explore innovative approaches to process design that transcend the now ubiquitous 4-D model, and explore the constraining as well as the enabling capacities of that model. Inquire into the richness and complexities of interrelationships among all of the AI principles.

Similarly, practitioners can create a greater awareness of all of the AI principles, and of the Wholeness and Freedom principles in particular. Welcome the whole person—not only the parts that we may see as "positive"—and allow

people the freedom to choose whether and how they will participate; this is fundamental to nurturing authentic and full appreciation. Realize that polarities promote censorship and thereby Shadow, and be aware that we always have choice points about what we include and exclude. Be intentionally appreciative of the Shadow within ourselves and others and of its potential value to and relationships with AI. Remember that people are always more important than the process, no matter how brilliant the design might be—listen intently and reflexively. Understand that empathy for the whole person—not only that which we construe as positive—is an important element of relationship. Do not abandon the ideal of the positive but expand our conceptions of it to include and value participants' lived experience, including what we learn from our painful or difficult experiences.

AI inherently involves risk. In his seminal reflexive work on the relation of AI to the material of the unconscious, Elliott (1999) advises that:

> Those who imagine that appreciative inquiry is by definition a pain-free, contented chewing of the organizational cud of recalled best practice need to bear in mind that any attempt at depth learning within an organizational setting is likely to exact its own psychic price. There is no such thing as a free crunch. For that reason, embarking on appreciative inquiry is a risk. . . . That risk is raised to a higher power if the group as a whole is dealing with emotions and unconscious material that may be deeply unsettling, even when raised within an appreciative mode of operation. . . The real risk. . . is that the participants in the process play safe and do not touch the kind of emotional material that is actually playing havoc with the organization's health and effectiveness. . . .Which is the greatest risk: (1) going on as we are?; (2) initiating a problem-focused process?; (3) initiating an appreciative inquiry, knowing that it obliges us to face stuff we would rather avoid? (pp. 85-86)

In closing, our highest hope for this work is that reflexive awareness of AI-Shadow relationships comes to permeate our AI conversation and community, and that this in turn creates the space to appreciate and embrace all that is human. Perhaps in the end, holistic appreciation is the most significant part of AI, not appreciation as positive, but rather as honoring.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Bios

Stephen P. Fitzgerald serves as director of Faculty Training and as a coordinating associate professor of Business Administration at TUI University. His research interests include the construction and impact of social norms, positive organizational behavior and change, the role of the "shadow" in positive organizational behavior and appreciative inquiry (AI), complex collaboration, the impact of hospital culture on patient safety, the impact of individual differences on receptivity toward and experience of AI, and LGBT issues in the workplace. He has published books on decision making and organizational models (Capstone Publishing, UK), numerous book chapters, journal articles, and conference proceedings, and coedited a special issue of the AI Practitioner. He co-designed and facilitated the first AI Summit for the Healthcare Industry, implementation of AI in countywide public involvement processes for the healthy development of children ages 0-5, and strengths based strategic planning and change processes in a nationally recognized non-profit healthcare organization, the HR division of a federal government agency, and large county public service agencies.

Christine Oliver is Consultant Family Therapist at St Bartholemew's Hospital, London and an independent organisational consultant working to facilitate individual and organisational change. She is also Senior Tutor on the MSc in Systemic Psychotherapy, Kensington Consultation Centre, London. She provides systemic leadership and management training and consultancy for public, private and not for profit organisations locally and globally. A primary interest is in consultancy methodologies for structuring dialogue to engender reflexive practice in the work place. She has contributed to the development of theory and practice of Appreciative Inquiry through the article, Barge, J. K. & Oliver, C. (2003) Working with appreciation in managerial practice. *Academy of Management Review, 28*, 124-142. Her recent books are: *Reflexive Inquiry*, published by Karnac, London (2005) and *Complexity, Relationships and Strange Loops*, published by the MHA Institute, Canada (2003).

Joan C. Hoxsey has over 35 years of experience working with a wide variety of not for profit organizations including governmental and private social service agencies. She is currently the Principal of, Relationship Resources LLC and a co-owner of AI Consulting. Relationship Resources LLC serves the not for profit agencies in the tri-state area of Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky in program planning and resource development. She holds a Master of the Science of Education from Youngstown State University (Ohio) and a Doctor of Ministry degree from the Graduate Theological Foundation (Notre Dame, Indiana). Clients include Ohio Department of Health, Ohio Department of Education, Veterans Administration Hospital, Cincinnati Ohio, Hamilton County Family and Children Services, and many other nonprofit organizations.