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The art and spirit of inquiry:  
appreciation of the shadow

# Plan

- ⦿ Present a case for the development and enrichment of AI through decoupling it from the **positivity** narrative and linking it with the **reflexivity** narrative
- ⦿ Show how polarisation creates **shadow** in communicative systems and advocate the value of inquiring into **shadow**
- ⦿ Explore implications and applications

# Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

- ◎ The claims are ‘it enables systematic discovery of what gives life to a living system when it is most alive...(strengthening) a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate and heighten **positive** potential’
  - > Cooperrider & Whitney (2000)

# What is Appreciative Inquiry?

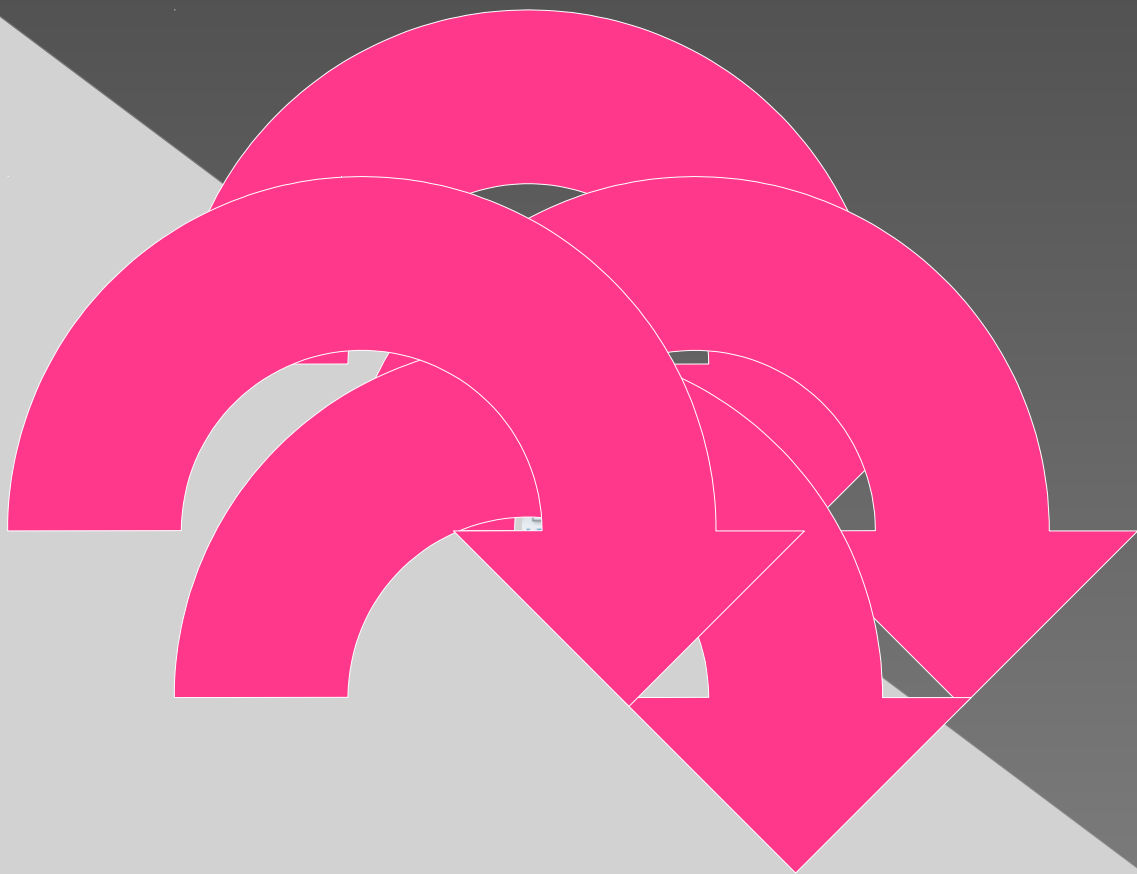
- ◎ “The most important advance in action research in the last decade”
- ◎ “A **positive** revolution in organisational change work”
  - > Cooperrider & Whitney (1999)
- ◎ ‘Positive talk’, ‘positive spirit’, ‘positive emotions’, ‘positive energy’

# The meaning of appreciation for conventional AI

- ◎ “the act of recognising the best in people and the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes and potentials; perceiving those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems”
  - > Whitney & Trosten-Bloom (2003)

# 'Conventional' AI

- ⦿ A process for engaging people in learning, planning and innovation
- ⦿ A system learning about itself through a focus on its best practices
- ⦿ Emphasises the positive
- ⦿ Typically employs the 4D cycle



# The best of 'conventional' AI

- ⦿ A dynamic structure for development
- ⦿ A dialogue with distinct boundaries around each phase, connected to next phase
- ⦿ **Constructive, learning and future** emphases
- ⦿ It can facilitate increased **energy, spirit, enthusiasm and engagement**
- ⦿ It can facilitate equalising of **voice**
- ⦿ It can build **new conversations and relationships**
- ⦿ It can be a useful step in a bigger process



# However the conventional conception of AI denigrates ...

- ⦿ Problem solving
- ⦿ Critique
- ⦿ Evaluation
- ⦿ The expression of **negative** emotions such as anger, sadness, disappointment, protest.

# Conventional guidance on what to do with negatives?

- ⦿ Postpone (“come back to later”)
- ⦿ Listen (“this may mean muddling through some negativity”)
- ⦿ Redirect (“guide the person back to the positive”)
  - > Watkins & Moore (2001)

# Fails to take account of ...

- ⦿ Full diversity of voices in the workplace and in ourselves
- ⦿ Variety of inter and intrapersonal stakeholders' interests
- ⦿ Unconscious influence
- ⦿ The complexity of processes of meaning making: the most difficult times can be times of systemic learning and growth

# Critique

- Appreciation and critique are polarised and treated as equalling **positive** and **negative**
- Positive/negative defined normatively
- Danger of stifling and censoring voices of disquiet, dissent, injustice and anything perceived as 'negative'
- Danger of creating the behaviours intended to be avoided when the **shadow** of the 'negative' goes underground

# Meaning of Shadow?

- ⊙ Any feeling or cognition censored by self or others, whether consciously or unconsciously, where its expression is considered to not fit with 'accepted' individual, cultural or group norms
- ⊙ Proposal: the **shadow** can negatively influence systemic behaviour when its role is not recognized, included and valued as information about the system's functioning
- ⊙ A collective **shadow** can thus influence from 'underground' and AI might inadvertently construct a paradox, in certain conditions, contributing to unwanted norms, emotions, cognitions and behaviours
  - > Fitzgerald & Oliver (2010)

# ential AI paradox

Culture: conflict, inequity, incongruity

Relationship: dissonant, competitive

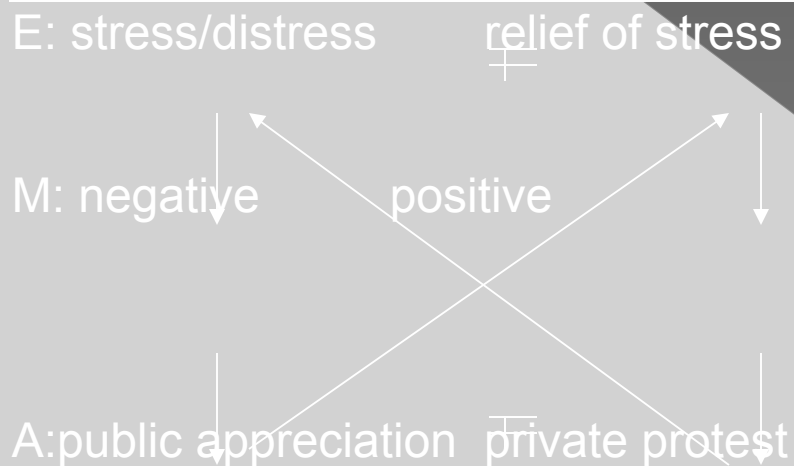
Identity: I must be appreciative

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E: stress/distress      relief of stress

M: negative      positive

A: public appreciation      private protest



# Injunctions to censor if appreciation = positivity

- ◉ Injunctions (explicit or implicit) shape censoring defences:
  - > Polarisation (splitting)
  - > Suppression or repression (denial)
  - > Disowning (projection)
  - > Idealisation (not seeing the complexity of an object but only seeing its favourable qualities)

# Substitute **reflexive** for **positive** narrative

- ⦿ Developing awareness of the contribution of individuals or groups to the larger system of organizational (part)narratives, emotions, meanings and behaviours of which we are a part
- ⦿ Recognition that polarisation stimulates **shadow**
- ⦿ **Shadow** is recognised, valued as meaningful, included, expressed, made sense of






# Incorporating the Shadow

- ◉ Recognising
- ◉ Including
- ◉ Expressing
- ◉ Valuing
- ◉ Understanding

# A system haunted by Shadows

- ◉ Anglican monastery haunted by the Shadows of guilt, failure and betrayal in the context of sacking (B) 5 years earlier
- ◉ Significant work done to facilitate inclusion and responsibility for Shadow
- ◉ Culminating in an encounter between the woman and the community

# Recognising, including, valuing, processing, understanding ...

-  The community and B wanted to acknowledge what had happened and bring 'closure' to the conflict
-  No-one had felt able to 'talk things through' either before the sacking or after
-  The monks felt guilt that they had not met with B since the sacking, feeling they had rejected her, and wanted healing for themselves and her

# reflexive preparation incorporating

How

- What would be a successful outcome and what could count as closure?
- How might you take responsibility for the ways you talk about each other?
- How might you position yourselves so that this process is constructive?
- What might be difficult but important to raise?
- What do you want recognised, understood and valued in dialogue with B?
- What are your concerns about the meeting?
- What might you notice if the meeting




# Interview with B in front of Community

- What are your aims for the meeting?
- What could bring closure, recognition, understanding?
- What is your understanding of what happened and why it happened?
- What was your part in that?
- What are the areas of regret and hurt?
- How have you been able to move on?
- What has helped you to move on?

# Questions for community to consider during interview

- At what points did you feel empathy and/or distance from the story?
- What do you recognise and value?
- Has anything important not been addressed?
- How do you feel moved to respond?
- B then responded to the same questions after hearing the community speak
- Then the consultants reflected

# Reflections of consultants

-  Key hypothesis: confusion of identity and relationship between employee and family member
-  Shadows of betrayal, rejection, guilt
-  The exercise helped all parties to listen and speak with respect for what they were creating, with reflexivity to their own responses, holding Shadows in the room

# Recognising ...

- ◉ the possibility of Shadow material
- ◉ an invitation to take up reflexive responsibility for the 'full' range of experience of members of the system
- ◉ Situated, critical, reflexive choices about what to include and exclude in an inquiry, imagining the consequences of doing either



# Including ...

- ⦿ A choice to treat Shadowed material as relevant and meaningful
- ⦿ what is meaningful is negotiated in relation to the purposes of the inquiry not prejudged according to norms of polarisation
- ⦿ Struggle becomes more transparent

# Expressing ...

- ◎ Requires:
  - > a legitimising and safe enough container
  - > allocation of roles, structures and responsibilities so expression becomes possible e.g. legitimise discussion about difficulties, struggles, dilemmas, fragilities, tensions
  - > explore learning from those experiences and the best ways of moving forward

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# Valuing ...

- ◉ The response of the listener determines the meaning of expression
- ◉ Communicated through the possibilities created for expression and the consequences of expression
- ◉ Expand what is valued by including the full range of human experience as legitimate focus

# Understanding ...

- ⦿ Facilitator needs to position contributions as having potential for sense making
- ⦿ Facilitating inquiry into the system of cultural, relational and identity narratives that shape meaning and action
- ⦿ Free from dichotomised censoring

# Summary

- ◎ The art and spirit of AI involves:
  - > Appreciating and inquiring into the complexity of human experience
  - > Not making pre-judgements about the positive and the negative
  - > Facilitating reflexivity for self and others
  - > Attention to unconscious and conscious narratives and patterns of communication