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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF COMPETENCIES OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

PRACTITIONERS:

DISCOVERY

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Workforce Education and Development

by

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ABSTRACT

Since virtually no research exists on the competencies required to be a qualified appreciative inquiry (AI) practitioner, this study's purpose was to identify the competencies necessary for successful AI practice (Bushe & Marshak, 2009).

Competency studies assist in development of the practice, inform the academic departments teaching the field's newcomers, and provide scholarly contribution to the field (Rothwell, 2005; Rothwell, Sanders, & Soper, 1999). This study also sought to discern the impact of a strengths-based protocol on competency model development.

Competency studies have been developed through the deficit-based mindset of the positivist view (Garavan & McGuire, 2001) while AI, an approach to organizational change akin to organization development (OD), has developed in the interpretive philosophical paradigm, allowing for its constructionist essence (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Despite an underlying tension in coupling of these two paradigmatically disparate concepts, the exploratory qualitative study investigated what competencies might be discovered through interviews with AI practitioners and how those resulting AI practitioner competencies might compare with the OD practitioner competencies in the literature (Worley, Rothwell, & Sullivan, 2005).

Using grounded theory and thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) the data provided answers to the research questions despite a variety of limitations and began a new research area for AI and competency studies.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This chapter offers a brief introduction to the study. In section one, background on the research study is provided, with special emphasis on its double focus on competency study and appreciative inquiry. The next section explores the purpose of conducting such a study, and subsequently leads to a preamble of the study's research problem. Historical perspectives comprise the next section. The study's conceptual framework is then explicated, followed by a clarification of the research questions that drove this work. Next are offered relevant definitions, followed by a description of the study's limitations and finally, a brief summary.

Background of the Study

Ultimately, this exploratory research project sought to develop a list of competencies required for effective performance by appreciative inquiry (AI) practitioners. Competency studies and AI may seem unlikely partners in a research project. Specifically, competency work begins with the analysis of a given job through the lens of its challenges—possibly a negative, draining activity. In contrast, AI begins with the process of positive storytelling—an affirming, enriching activity. Both competency studies and AI come from a different philosophical paradigm and each

possesses its own history and foundational theories (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Garavan & McGuire, 2001). Yet this union was exactly the subject of the research explored in this study. Competency studies and AI were joined by using a variety of other concepts such as positive organizational scholarship, change, organizational change cynicism, and organization development (OD) as intermediaries.

AI has been called a more “fluid” version of OD owing to its less rigid, nonmechanical approach to organizational change (Reed, 2007, p. 34). Further, AI “is credited with having a revolutionary impact” on OD (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003, p. 228). Others have declared that AI could be the next generation of OD (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Karakas, 2009; Zaldivar, 2009) while still others have proclaimed, “appreciative inquiry is a transformational gift to the field of OD from David Cooperrider” (Watkins & Stavros, 2009, p. 1). It may seem folly to attempt to capture all the possible competencies necessary for success since AI is such a protean concept. However, when bridging the gap between AI and competency studies with other predecessor, foundational, or associated concepts, the case for connecting the two is tenable. The first intermediary that can be used to integrate competency studies and AI is positive organizational scholarship (POS) and is discussed in the next section. Following a brief section on POS, the concept of change is introduced as the second intermediary between the two main topics of this study while intermediary 3, OD, is discussed afterward.

Intermediary 1: Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS)

In the POS approach, the first intermediary in the larger picture of this research project, researchers are seeking to illuminate the ways in which “organizations can create sustained competitive advantage” by viewing the workforce through an updated and alternative worldview lens (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003, p. 10). POS “advocates the position that the desire to improve the human condition is universal and that the capacity to do so is latent in most systems” (p. 10). The traditional route in organizational sciences has been to seek out problems and dissect them until solutions could be found, in an effort to maximize profit and outperform competition (Cameron et al., 2003). Conversely, “POS is concerned primarily with the study of especially positive outcomes, processes, and attributes of organizations and their members” (p. 6). POS encompasses appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003). In this research project, the focus remained on developing a competencies list to achieve effective practice in AI, a strengths-based approach dedicated to creating competitive advantage, clearly a form of POS.

Competence as POS

White’s 1959 work “isolated a human trait he named ‘competence’ ” (White, 1959, as cited in Dubois, 1993, p. 72). Then in 1973, McClelland published his postulation that one’s intelligence may not be an adequate predictor of future success, while competence is (see also Dubois, 1993). The notion of competence has been

considered a positive organizational value predicated on effective performance (Lee, Caza, Edmondson, & Thomke, 2003). Competence is not only considered to be a positive aspect of an organization, but the possession of it helps to ensure an advantage in the marketplace (Cameron et al., 2003). To put it plainly, “organizations typically value competence” (Lee et al., 2003, p. 198). In the next section, the concept of change is introduced to continue the bridge-building between competency studies and AI.

Intermediary 2: Change and Organizational Change Cynicism

Change is in the second link incorporating competency studies and AI. Rothwell and Sullivan (2005a, p. 10) stressed that “we will experience more change the rest of our lives than has been experienced since the beginning of civilization” (see also French & Bell, 1999). To the point of this study, though, the prospect of change apparently can send organizations into a tailspin (Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Watt & Piotrowski, 2008). People are so negative about change that a new research area called organizational change cynicism is gaining momentum in organizational science circles (Watt & Piotrowski, 2008). However some, such as Cutler, suggest that this cynical tone can motivate staff to drive change, clearly in the hopes of an improved outcome (Cutler, 2000 as cited in Watt & Piotrowski, 2008). Perhaps the desired improvement could be achieved by not focusing on the cynical reaction. Bushe and Marshak (2009) asserted that “people don’t so much resist change as they resist being changed,” following Wheatley (p. 355). Regardless, constant change at the organizational level is not

disappearing (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; French & Bell, 1999; Rothwell & Sullivan, 2005a) and it would serve organizational members well if they learned to embrace or even welcome it.

To further explain why this negative topic of organizational change cynicism belongs in the introduction of this research, one must look deeper. A variety of empirical studies of organizational change cynicism have been summarized by Watt and Piotrowski (2008) in the framework of recommendations to assist organizations in alleviating or avoiding the cynicism with respect to change:

- Keep people involved in making decisions that affect them;
- Directly involve the employees in the change process itself;
- Keep employees informed of ongoing changes—when, why, how;
- Give workers more control over decision making in planning the scope and nature of their jobs;
- Underscore top management's commitment to selected courses of action; and
- Identify trusted individuals within the organization who, once convinced of the sincerity of managements' motives, can help gain the support of employees at large. (pp. 28-29)

Despite the efforts and resulting difficulties, change has become the way of life for twenty-first century organizations (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; French & Bell, 1999; Rothwell & Sullivan, 2005a). In response, numerous methods for facilitating

organizational change have emerged such as OD's critical research, action research model and its revision of the same name, the emergent AI, and a few corporation-specific models, all meant to be guided by competent leaders of change (Rothwell & Sullivan, 2005b, see pp. 40-78). A comment made by Warner Burke cited the importance and difficulty of leading change, "the toughest job is to *manage* the change process" (Burke, 1994, pp. 146-147, as cited in French & Bell, 1999, p. 129). "Change is significant to growth and survival for the organization," according to Stavros and Seiling (2009, p. 138). Organizational leaders cannot afford to ignore the necessity of change or their members' reactions to it. OD is the third thread helping to integrate competency studies and AI.

Intermediary 3: Organization Development

Wheatley (2005) contended that any process undertaken in an organization can only be strengthened if the organization asks whether the process will create "a stronger social fabric," in essence, working together to shore up the team (p. 653). Attaching the organizational culture to the change initiative seems to be the solution for not only making sustainable change, but also making it a palatable experience for the organization's members (Eisen, Cherbeneau, & Worley, 2005). "The assumptions, beliefs, values, and expectations that people embody in the work environment create and maintain the shared reality of the organization" (Eisen et al., 2005, p. 205). One such approach can help: "Organization development is an organizational improvement

strategy” (French & Bell, 1999, p. 1). French and Bell (1999) further stated that organizational change could be guided by the framework of this process, known as OD, which involves players in dialoguing, diagnosing, and designing a solution strategy, which sounds much like recommendations to avoid organizational change cynicism. It is under this umbrella of change strategy that AI appears. Coincidentally, “implementing a competency model is a change effort” for an organization (Mirabile, 1997, p. 77).

OD applies a framework to organizational change which, although flexible, does adhere to a precedential set of steps or stages (Warrick, 2006). As French and Bell asserted, the action research of OD is “a sequence of events and activities within each iteration (data collection, feedback, and taking action based on the data)” meant to facilitate change (1999, p. 131). The beliefs of Benne, one of the founders of the National Training Laboratories (NTL), capture the essence of OD and are worth sharing: “Ken repeatedly reminded us that we should not try to give our clients *the* answers to their problem du jour; rather, we should enable our clients to learn how to find their own answers for tomorrow’s problems and opportunities” (Freedman, 1996, p. 343). OD is considered a proven methodology with a large body of research touting its efficacy (Burnes, 2007; French & Bell, 1999; Sullivan, M., 2004) and the OD consultant is the guide. In its simplest form, the OD initiative is launched from the platform of deficit, asking “what is the trouble here?” or “what is not working in this situation?” in an effort to institute changes that fix a *problem* (Burnes, 2007; Sullivan, M., 2004).

Organizational members struggle with change. Perhaps a feeling of no control over the change design, either real or imagined, prompts people to resist (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003). In addition, autonomy is considered an organizational value (Lee et al., 2003). Some suggest that in today's competitive environment, organizational members in their pursuit to work independently actually limit their capabilities by refusing to share ideas and further impede change (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003). This resonates with Bagozzi's (2003) findings that the "usual effects of negative emotions are to inhibit decision making and interfere with goal achievement" (pp. 184-185) and consequently halt any progress for change. A sense of loss can often overcome an individual involved in a change initiative (Burke, 2005). As such, a perceived "possibility of loss of position or status, of inequitable treatment, or the loss of use of present competencies, or they have experienced duplicity or futile extra work in past change efforts" prompts a clear resistance to change (French & Bell, 1999, p. 271).

The advice to avoid organizational change cynicism, echoes OD basics: complete management support, an improvement goal, a collaborative dialogue of diagnosis and solution, and team-focus (Rothwell & Sredl, 2000). Given that the prospect of change seems to lead so many to the depths of despair, designating the right change leader for efforts is crucial and "the ability to manage change successfully may set leaders apart from followers" (Rothwell & Sullivan, 2005a, p. 14). Further, "practitioner efforts for continual mindfulness are a top priority in order to maintain sensitivity to the interventions needed to accomplish change" (Stavros & Seiling, 2009, p. 138). The

clarion call for success in leading change efforts has been sounded.

A Different Approach to Change: Appreciative Inquiry

In light of the time and effort of institutionalizing an organizational change (Rothwell & Sredl, 2000; French & Bell, 1999; Rothwell & Sullivan, 2005a), companies must have confidence that their choice of change leader will bode well for the success of the initiative and the morale of the staff. Some research has suggested that the leadership of the initiative can have a positive effect on a change intervention as well as the reaction of the organizational members (Watt & Piotrowski, 2008). But what if, additionally, organizations looked at their approach to organizational change by not only ensuring strong leadership of the effort, but by beginning the effort not from a basis of deficit, but from one of abundance? Such an approach, instead of a traditional approach to the one right answer, would entertain multiple options as possible (Watkins & Stavros, 2009). AI is that approach. Further, it falls under the label of POS (Karakas, 2009). As Head, Sorenson, Preston, and Yaeger (2000) contended, “AI is not a ‘tool’ like team building, grid management, or quality circles, rather it is an innovative approach to change management” (p. 227). The research gathered here has sought to examine the leadership and guidance of AI engagements from the aspect of the competencies required to be effective.

First conceptualized by Ph.D. student David Cooperrider and his advisor Suresh Srivastva, AI, simply stated, is an approach to organizational change that builds on

strengths (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). The process of OD moves in a straight line while AI proceeds cyclically (Watkins & Stavros, 2009). Attendees at an AI session quickly learn that their change effort is not going to be “business as usual” (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p. 53). Positive memories of achievement shared in the group create an energy that spurs the organization to stretch and innovate in planning, parlaying a successful past into a vision of an optimal future (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Head, R.L., 2000). Based on a variety of root philosophies, from social constructionism to the power of visualization, AI is an amalgam of many positive-oriented and strengths-based subjects (Cady & Dannemiller, 2005; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Sullivan, M., 2004; Watkins & Mohr, 2001), yet “reflects the core values of OD [organization development]” (Sorenson, Yaeger, & Nicoll, 2000, p. 3; see also Sullivan, M., 2004, p. 220). Watkins and Stavros (2009) developed a side-by-side comparison of how both an OD and an AI initiative might unfold from data collection through analysis to planning and implementation, demonstrating AI’s continued commitment to serious and results-oriented practice.

Just as OD begins with a deficit-based query, conversely, AI begins with an asset-based question akin to asking, “what is working right here?,” focusing instead on what the organization accomplishes well (Alban & Scherer, 2005, p. 96; Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000; Watkins & Stavros, 2009). The belief at work is that the simple questioning of what is wrong invites an undertone of negativity to the dialogue (Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). The AI practitioner guides groups through

an initiative that remains more “fluid” (Reed, 2007, p. 34) than stringent, but tends to take root in a holistic exploration of peak organizational experiences leveraged into a co-designed future (French & Bell, 1999; Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000).

As Eisen, Cherbeneau, and Worley (2005) contended, the culture of the organization can be and is meant to be affected each time a consultant intervenes. It has been suggested that an organization’s culture can have a potent effect on staff performance (Rothwell, Hohne, & King, 2007). The question arises then, with what type of change approach does the organization choose that will most impact the outcome and morale positively? Not surprisingly, facilitating AI for an organization could require a different set of competencies than when utilizing the traditional OD approach (Marshak, 2004).

How Can Competencies Studies Help?

AI is emergent in the world of OD initiatives despite having been in use since the 1980s (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000). A paucity of research casts doubt upon the efficacy of AI as a viable OD method (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Golembiewski, 2000, 1999; Jones, 1998; Messerschmidt, 2008). Logic may dictate that as more groups wish to engage in the AI approach (Reed, 2007) attention falls upon the competency of the practitioner. A competency study for AI practitioners can launch the first step in achieving multiple goals such as developing a roadmap for skill-building, encouraging further research into the topic and practice, and informing academic departments

wishing to prepare future scholars and practitioners (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Donaher, Russell, Scoble, & Chen, 2007; Rothwell, 2005; Rothwell, Sanders, & Soper, 1999). To trumpet the value of this emergent approach, in addition to a call for more AI success stories to be published (Golembiewski, 2000), the development of a competency study for AI practitioners can also lend credibility to the approach or the body of research (Bushe & Marshak, 2009).

How do competency studies provide credibility? The development of competency studies has had positive press (Boyatzis, 2006; Derven, 2008; Lombardi & Bourke, 2009; Mirabile, 1997; Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999), particularly with the workplace training series developed by the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD) for multiple industries (Smith, 2008). When a profession undergoes a competency study, the credibility of the profession is enhanced, according to some (Davis, Naughton, & Rothwell, 2004). ASTD, in fact, has sponsored no less than six competency model studies from 1978 to the present (Davis et al., 2004; Rothwell et al., 1999). The initial work began with Pinto and Walker's the *1978 American Society for Training and Development*, followed by McLagan's *Models for Excellence* in 1983, and *the Models for HRD Practice: The Research Report* conducted by McLagan and Subholnik in 1989 (McLagan, 1989; Rothwell, 2002; Smith, 2006). In 1996, *the ASTD Models for Human Performance Improvement: Roles, Competencies, and Outputs* were conducted by Rothwell, followed two years later by the *ASTD Models of Learning Technologies: Roles, Competencies, and Outputs* of Piskurich and Sanders (Rothwell, 2002; Smith,

2008). The *ASTD 2004 Competency Study: Mapping the Future* was the most recent and comprehensive study to explore the competencies required in the wide-ranging workplace learning field (Davis et al., 2004).

Consultants suggest that to enhance “business results organizations are utilizing competencies as the backbone of many talent and workforce management efforts, from recruiting to development and succession” (Lombardi & Bourke, 2009, p. 2). Dubois (1993) contended that employing a competency-based approach consistently and organization-wide can maximize a performance improvement program. Further, “a competency menu lists all the competencies that are important for the successful production and delivery of the entire range of an organization’s outputs” (McLagan, 1988, p. 374). Competencies can apply a unifying language to a particular job, which standardizes the communication, training, and expectations related to it (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). “They are used widely in both pre- and post-hire within Best-in-Class organizations” (Lombardi & Bourke, 2009, p. 2). Demonstrating further acceptance of competency modeling in the business world, praise for the concept has been showing up in the more mainstream practitioner-oriented media, such as the electronic newsletter, *Workforce Management*, found on dearworkforce@email.workforceonline.com (3/15/2007; 4/19/2007).

Purpose of the Study

Since to date, virtually no research exists on the skill set and talent required to be a qualified AI practitioner, this study's purpose was to identify the competencies necessary for successful AI practice (Bushe & Marshak, 2009). Not only can this knowledge assist AI practitioners in their development of the practice, but it can also inform the academic departments teaching future AI practitioners, and data from the study and its resulting competency study can be published to make a scholarly contribution to the field (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Donaher et al., 2007; Rothwell, 2005; Rothwell et al., 1999). This study provides an initial roadmap for the development of AI practitioners.

A secondary purpose was to discern the impact of this study's strengths-based approach may have on the future of competency model development, specifically the interview protocol. Another similarity discovered when bringing together competency studies and AI in this research was the criticisms that each concept has faced. Just as AI suffers from repudiation, competency modeling has weathered its share of criticism (Armitage, Brooks, Carlen, & Schulz, 2006; Teodorescu & Binder, 2004; Worley, Rothwell, & Sullivan, 2005). In 1973, McClelland, who was in the early stages of his conceptual approach to competency modeling, claimed that he was either celebrated or blamed for the new approach in psychology (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Competency studies have been developed through the deficit-based mindset of research known as the positivist view, which may create a certain tension in a learning context (Garavan &

McGuire, 2001). In general, this positivist view can be described as “a quantitative approach, in particular the dual tendency to assume that there is an objective reality independent of and beyond the human mind and the decontextualisation of the individual in the competency debate” (p. 147). The researcher provides more information on the history and method of competency studies in chapter 2.

Research Problem

Embarking upon this study was not a solution-seeking mission, per se. There is no conventional research problem beyond the dearth of previous research on the same topics. Instead, this work sought to develop a competency study for the practice of AI resulting in a foundational basis from which to build future research regarding both competency studies and AI practice. Through a series of modified critical incident interviews provided to the researcher and subsequent grounding in theory from the data through thematic analysis, a competency list was created in this work. With AI's emergence, little research exists on testing the success of the concept (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Golembiewski, 1999; Jones, 1998). Some believe still that AI is a passing fad, a little too light to tackle the hard scenes of the current global market. Detractors of the approach suggest that proof of its potential is still not known (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Golembiewski, 1999; Jones, 1998). In opposition to this suggestion, ASTD awarded originator David Cooperrider its award for prestigious distinguished contribution to the field of organizational learning in 2004 (Anonymous, 2009), effectively endorsing the

weight of AI. And although, the use of AI has proliferated (Watkins & Stavros, 2009), “for most organizations, AI is a new approach to organizational change” (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p. 51). Still, any research, such as that related here, can help to strengthen the reputation of AI and solidify its standing as a profession for serious practitioners and an approach worthy of use in building organizational success. AI, augmented with a credible list of practitioner competencies, can continue to establish a respected place among the organizational sciences. As Bushe and Marshak (2009) suggested, “articulating these skills and competencies as well as the underlying philosophical and theoretical premises will be needed to add them to textbooks, curriculums, and training programs” (p. 364). Finally, reconciling the different philosophical paradigms which gave rise to competency study and AI could have complicated the study and are examined in the following chapters.

Historical Perspectives

AI is considered emergent in the serious dialogue of OD, yet AI first emerged in 1987 (Watkins & Stavros, 2009). Preceding AI, the more mechanical, traditional OD approach grew from the 1950s work of Lewin at a time when the positivists remained strongly entrenched as the prevailing worldview, even for social scientists (Bushe & Marshak, 2009). The scientific world can arguably make a better case for the black-and-white approach involving equations, theorems, and hypothesis testing than can the malleable and inconsistent world of social interaction, but physical science offered the

only option for social science scholars to follow to that point. Organizations focused on problem-solving (Watkins & Stavros, 2009), a habit that continues today. Yet, OD was then and still is focused on tapping the collaborative wisdom of an organization (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; French & Bell, 1999; Rothwell & Sullivan, 2005b; Schein, 1995). It is thus based on perceptions—individual, group, and organizational.

During the 1980s, AI appeared at a time when there was a period of turmoil, with long-honored traditions or established mainstays breaking down, such as the historical disassembly of the Berlin Wall (Bushe & Marshak, 2009). The final decades of the twentieth century were marked by fast-moving changes (Holman & Devane, 1999 as cited in Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999; Kotter & Cohen, 2002). The Internet and proliferation of personal computers allowed the world to become smaller, at least for that part populated by the higher socio-economic strata. Communication was opening up (Wheatley, 2005). Cell phones added to the constant stream of communication. News was instantaneous and ubiquitous, with CNN Headline News and other all-news networks airing 24 hours a day.

Even the way change occurs was changing (Marshak, 2004). It was no wonder, with all of these events going on, that AI would appear (Holman & Devane, 1999 as cited in Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999; Ludema, Whitney, Mohr, & Griffin, 2003; Bennis, 2001). Bennis (2001) suggested that organizations can be mirrors of the times. Organizations needed some good news and some positive energy. Borrowing from OD's focus on collaboration, AI brought that shift into the marketplace, delving into the quest

for more and more communication (Holman & Devane, 1999 as cited in Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999) and interconnection. AI experts contend that AI aligns with “this new age of instant communication and global interdependence that so strongly impacts the way organizations need to organize and to function” (Watkins & Stavros, 2009, p. 6).

“When exchanging stories of change, hope, courage, compassion, strengths, and creativity, organizational members are observed to experience mutual appreciation and surprise, as well as, an eclipse of self-focusedness” (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003, p. 235). Plus, a constructionist leaning had gained some ground against the hard-edged approach of traditional positivists within organizational sciences (Bushe & Marshak, 2009). The tone was set for the emergence of AI and its current prominence (J.M. Stavros, personal communication, January 9, 2010).

“In the ‘formative years’” of OD, Bushe and Gibbs (1990) asserted that “prerequisites for OD competence were often described in terms of personal characteristics and traits” (p. 337). A stronger case was being made for the use of competency study in the last few decades as well, since researchers suggested that increasing globalization and a fast-paced economy make organizations work even harder to stay viable and survive. Organizations have been on a constant quest to be more efficient, to improve performance, and to increase their business (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Then, in the decade leading up to the 1990s, OD skills and techniques were trumpeted as the way to achieve success by adopting the concept of competency studies (Bushe & Gibbs, 1990). More than ten years ago, Mirabile (1997) declared that

competency modeling use had burgeoned; in fact, he said, “competency models are hot” (p. 71). Some surmise that revamping human resource development (HRD) practices in favor of a more competency-based system could have a wide-ranging positive impact on the organization (Lombardi & Bourke, 2009; Rothwell, 2005).

Companies that have adopted the use of competencies have witnessed an increase in the bottom line, according to the Aberdeen Group, thanks to the alignment of competencies with business goals and client needs (Lombardi & Bourke, 2009). In this system, all staff would know the competencies needed to optimize success.

Conceptual Framework

The predominant conceptual framework at work within this study was the competency study, augmented by AI, which also impacted the ontology and epistemology of this research. Although at least four other methods may be used in developing a job competency list (Dubois, 1993), competency studies, much like this one, typically involve data collection about members of the subject group. This activity then produces a range of material from which to parse themes. Once the complete data set emerges from the coding of interview transcripts, researchers test the veracity by sharing the list with members of the participant audience. This research study was typically based on a set of interviews previously conducted with both expert and other levels of AI practitioners. Although only involved in a handful of the interviews, the

researcher was granted permission to utilize all the transcripts to develop a competency list for AI practice.

With respect to AI's paradigmatic influence on this study, a cursory look at AI is in order. Watkins and Mohr (2001) name the concepts that germinate "the DNA of AI" (p. 36). The complex nature of AI begins with a foundation of social constructionism, the New Sciences, and the power of positive image (Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Watkins & Stavros, 2009) and other concepts. This foundation produces the following steering structure (Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Watkins & Stavros, 2009):

Five core principles

Five generic processes

Constructionist

Choose the positive as the focus of inquiry

Simultaneity

Inquire into stories of life-giving forces

Anticipatory

Locate themes that appear for further inquiry

Poetic

Create shared images for a preferred future

Positive

Innovate paths to create that future. (p. 37; p. 9)

Chapter 3 contains a deeper elucidation of the core principles and the five generic processes in the review of the AI literature. Thanks to these underlying concepts, AI is generative and never the same, but tailored to each individual initiative (Reed, 2007; Watkins & Mohr, 2001).

It is also conceptually significant to discuss the paradigm in which AI arguably resides. First and foremost, what is meant by that term "paradigm"? Numerous

researchers have explored the concept of the paradigm. Collected below are just a few opinions that help to flesh out the concept:

- “The net that contains the researcher’s epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises may be termed a paradigm, or an interpretive framework.” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 33)
- “All research is interpretive; it is guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied.” (Guba, 1990, p. 105)
- “...paradigm, which we define as the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways.” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105)
- “We regard our four paradigms as being defined by very basic meta-theoretical assumptions which underwrite the frame of reference, mode of theorizing and modus operandi of the social theorists who operate within them.” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 23)
- “Following Kuhn, we use the term paradigm to refer to ‘the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and

so on, shared by members of a given (scientific)

community' [1970, p. 175]." (Evered & Louis, 1981, p. 175)

As Burrell and Morgan (1979) asserted the four paradigms are built on different meta-theoretical assumptions of the social world (p. 24). "They are mutually exclusive" and although a researcher may evolve new paradigms over time, one cannot occupy two different paradigms at once since each is all based on opposite thoughts of the others (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 25). Each paradigm is rendered as such:

The *functionalist* approach to social sciences tends to assume that the social world is composed of relatively concrete empirical artefacts and relationships which can be identified, studied and measured through approaches derived from the natural sciences {*realist, positivist, determinist, nomothetic*}. (p. 26)

Interpretive is "underwritten by the assumption that the world of human affairs is cohesive, ordered and integrated. ...problems of conflict, domination, contradiction, potentiality and change play no part in their theoretical framework" {*nominalist, anti-positivist, voluntarist, ideographic*}. (p. 31)

Radical Humanist "share a commons concern for the release of consciousness and experience from domination

by various aspects of the ideological superstructure of the social world within which men live out their lives. They seek to change the social world through a change in modes of cognition and consciousness" *{nominalist, anti-positivist, voluntarist, ideographic but wants to transcend the limits of or overthrow the existing social arrangement}*. (p. 33)

Radical Structuralists concentrate on the structural relationships within a realist world. Fundamental conflicts generate radical change through political and economic crises which then emancipate men from the prevailing social structures *{realist, positivist, determinist, nomothetic}*. (p. 34)

It is vitally important to comprehend the paradigm that drives this research inclusive of its ontology and epistemology. Specifically, citing the text of Burrell and Morgan (1979), social sciences can be driven by certain assumptions that include belief in a fundamental ontology, epistemology, human nature, and methodology. In the case of AI, the paradigm which inspires AI and its pursuit of change is interpretive (Bushe & Marshak, 2009). The interpretive paradigm relates to nominalist, anti-positivist, voluntarist, and ideographic understandings with believers seeking "to understand the world as it is" while they take part in it, obviously, subjectively (Burrell & Morgan, 1979,

p. 28). This world, and in particular the social aspects, is “cohesive, ordered, and integrated” (p. 31).

Ontology can be a very abstract concept. In the ancient Greek rendering, the modern word came from the *onta*, meaning existing things, or even truth or reality combined with *logos*, which in this interpretation means discourse or word (Liddell & Scott, 1989). Burrell and Morgan (1979) avowed that assumptions of an ontological nature “concern the very essence of the phenomena under investigation,” namely, is it extant out in the world or in someone’s mind (p. 1). The interpretive paradigm encompassing AI includes a nominalist ontology. In other words, everything external to the mind is just a series of names that people fashion to make sense of reality, according to Burrell and Morgan (1979). The language used constructs reality. In this concept, some of the fundamental philosophies underlying AI emerge, such as social constructionism. Reed (2007) spoke to this notion when she asserted that AI relates to social constructionism with:

...the emphasis on the way that people can shape their world through the way they talk and think about it. This is not to say that the world is just something we thought up, with no other dimensions, but it does point to the possibilities for change. (p. 56)

And change is what Watkins and Stavros (2009) advocated: “AI challenges us to experience reality differently” (p. 6).

From the ancient Greek, *epistamai*, meaning in essence to know how or to be assured that a thing *is* (Liddell & Scott, 1989), the modern word epistemology still focuses on knowledge and how we understand and share it (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). In the interpretive paradigm, anti-positivism governs the world. Since a positivist approach seeks patterns and rules in social reality, much like the scientific world searches for laws and constants, it would stand to reason that the opposite view belongs to the anti-positivist. Observing is not enough---one must participate to understand (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The investigator is an integral part of the research.

Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) asserted that AI operates under the socio-rationalist meta-theory of science in direct opposition to the more traditionalist approach to the science of logical empiricism or the typical problem-solving approach. "Social knowledge resides in the interactive collectivity; it is created, maintained, and put to use by the human group. Dialogue, free from constraint or distortion, is necessary to determine the "nature of things" (p. 138).

Research Questions

This study's defining question was formulated to assess whether competent performance skills, knowledge, and traits could be developed from strengths-based interviews with AI practitioners. Perhaps a comparison to the competencies required for traditional OD practice (Côté, 2004; Warrick, 2006; Worley, Rothwell, & Sullivan, 2005) could illuminate differences between actual AI practice and OD practice. What, then, are

the differences in facilitating an OD intervention as compared with facilitating AI?

Further, the outcome of the modified interview—to collect data in an AI fashion—was to be examined. Finally, can an evolved interview protocol find a place in competency model development? These research questions can provide pertinent information for this exploratory study. Thus, the questions that specifically drove this research project were:

RQ1. What competencies can be drafted based on common perceptions across interviews of AI practitioners?

RQ2. How are the competencies of OD and AI practitioners differentiated based on previous studies of OD competency and the resulting competency list from this study?

RQ3. Was the new interview protocol used for collecting data for this study effective in developing a comprehensive AI competency study?

Definitions

The following terms are defined throughout this paper. Here are brief definitions that should provide some background needed to understand their use in this study's context. In addition to the terms defined in this list, other appropriate and supporting terms are defined as needed.

- *Competence*: “White (1959) is credited with introducing the term competence to describe those personality characteristics associated with superior performance

and high motivation. Postulating a relationship between cognitive competence and motivational action tendencies, White defined competence as an ‘effective interaction (of the individual) with the environment’ and argued that there is a ‘competence motivation’ in addition to competence as ‘achieved capacity’” (Delamere le Deist & Winterton, 2005, p. 31). More to the point of this project, “job competence is an employee’s capacity to meet or exceed a job’s requirements by producing the job outputs at an expected level of quality within the constraints of the organization’s internal and external environments” (Dubois, 1993, p. 9).

- *Competency*: “An underlying characteristic of an employee which results in effective and/or superior performance in a job” (Boyatzis, 1982, pp. 20-21). Further, competency indicates “an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and or superior performance in a job or situation” (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 9) Or, competency is “a personal capability that is critical to the production of a quality output or outputs” (McLagan, 1988, p. 374).
- *Competency Model*: “A detailed behaviorally specific description of the skills and traits that employees need to be effective in a job” (Mansfield, 1996, p. 7). “A competency model is usually a narrative description of job competencies for an identifiable group...It can describe key characteristics that distinguish exemplary (best-in-class) performers from fully successful performers” (Rothwell, 2002, p.

115). A competency model is named a competency menu by McLagan (1988, p. 375).

- *Organization development (OD)*: “Planned, systematic, and educationally oriented change that is carried out for organizational improvement” (Rothwell & Sullivan, 2005, p. 1). This is further defined by Cummings and Worley as ““a system-wide application of behavioral science knowledge to the planned development, improvement, and reinforcement of the strategies, structures, and processes that lead to organization effectiveness’ ” (Rothwell & Sullivan, 2005, p. 1).
- *Appreciative Inquiry (AI)*: “In distinction to conventional action-research, the knowledge-interest of appreciative inquiry lies not so much in problem solving as in social innovation...(AI) refers to a research perspective that is uniquely intended for discovering, understanding, and fostering innovations in social-organizational arrangements and processes” (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987, p. 159). Further, AI is “a theory and practice for approaching change from a holistic framework. Based on the belief that human systems are made and imagined by those who live and work within them. AI leads systems to move toward the generative and creative images that reside in their most positive core—their values, visions, achievements, and best practices” (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. xxxi).

Significance of the Study

Since this project began with a desire to break new ground not only for developers of competency studies but for AI practitioners, the significance of this research is multi-fold. First, it examined a new look at competency studies development from a point of abundance or a strengths-based approach rather than the traditional challenge or deficit-based format of either the critical incident interview or the behavioral event interview. Logic dictates that a competency is linked to economic advantage (Boyatzis, 1982; Lombardi & Bourke, 2009), a very important point in this competitive but depressed economy. Producing a credible competency list could have economic ramifications for the AI practitioner as well as the organization undergoing the practice. Also, AI is still building its research base (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Golembiewski, 1999), so that this study not only enhances practitioner efficacy but also bolsters the scholarship relating to AI. Finally, study results may shed some light on the meshing of the foundational paradigms of competency studies and AI, namely, if the two disparate parent paradigms are to be reconciled to produce an effective outcome.

Limitations

No research is free of limitations. This study suffered from some obvious shortcomings. Limitations, however, drive the need for future research so that new iterations of a study can be posited. The lack of previous research on AI practitioner

competencies, while an impetus for this study meant that there was no baseline against which to compare the final results.

Possibly AI is too dynamic and flexible with organizational change to be constrained by competency studies. The parent philosophical paradigms may cause an incongruity between the two concepts (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Garavan & McGuire, 2001). Also, some suggest that the notion of competence or competency is diametrically opposed to the strengths aspect of AI, in that “a focus on weaknesses or deficiencies usually leads only to the development of competence” (Cameron, 2008, p. 59). It has been further surmised that those who focus on achieving competence alone may not challenge themselves beyond their comfort zones so that failure is more likely (Lee et al., 2003, p. 198). Confusion about the value of competence or competency requires fleshing out. Moreover, confusion about the distinction between competence and competency must be illuminated. These awkward matters beg the question: can AI reconcile itself with the notions of competence and competency? Whatever the outcome, the parent paradigms of competency and AI create an initial tension.

Another point of discussion is the interview protocol. Specifically, questions about how a practitioner’s espoused theory can be delineated from his or her theory-in-use were scrutinized. Espoused theory describes a stated worldview, whereas theory-in-use demonstrates an actual worldview in action. Sometimes, the two do not correspond, unbeknownst to the individual (Argyris & Schön, 1974; B. Gray, personal

communication, December, 19, 2007). A test for theory-in-use was not included in the interview guide, thereby limiting the findings.

Next, qualitative study is a subjective science and, as such, interpretation of the data is debatable. Then, such topics relating to the age of the interview data and intercoder reliability may be limitations (Boyatzis, 1998; Burla, Knierim, Barth, Liewald, Duetz, & Abel, 2008). The steps taken to enhance reliability with respect to qualitative research and any subsequent outcomes that were not desirable are discussed at length in chapter 4. A question of measuring intercoder reliability and the reasons for agreement outcomes requires further explanation in the full limitations section.

Summary

In this introductory chapter, all facets of the study needed to produce a credible competency list for AI practitioners were introduced. The researcher discussed the background and purpose of the study, as well as the research problem. The researcher touched on the research criticisms associated with competency studies as well as AI, and also the historical perspectives encompassing them. Next, the conceptual framework that underpinned the study was discussed. The research questions driving this study were introduced. In addition, it was necessary to introduce a list of terms so that the reader may better navigate the work. The researcher presented the significance of the research and concluded with a preamble of limitations to the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature for competency studies while chapter 3 reviews the

literature of AI. In chapter 4, the researcher details the methodology chosen for the study. Next, the researcher discusses the findings in chapter 5. The research concludes with a study overview, discussion of the findings, recommendations of future study, and final thoughts in chapter 6.

Chapter 2

Competency Studies Literature Review

Introduction

Competency studies and model development are investigated within this chapter. A closer look at several topics builds support for the project described here. Beginning with the notion of competence, and then of competency, discussion continues with an elucidation of competency research. This chapter culminates in a cursory history of competency studies and is finally capped off by a brief chapter summary.

What Really Is Competence?

Dictionary.com claims that “competence” is “sufficiency,” among other even less-inspired terms (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/competence>). Sampling Websters.com showed that the word means “the quality of being adequately or well qualified physically and intellectually” (<http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definition/competence>). At least the latter definition indicated “well” qualified. One may have expected more from the root, which sets the tone for a competency study given that one of the reasons to develop a competency list is to improve performance. Convention dictates that a person who is competent may simply be sufficient or adequate. Herein, the connection of competence to competency and

competency studies stands; they have a root word in common. Some researchers have suggested that “the term competence also implies incompetence” (Mirabile, 1997, p. 74). Others claim that to look for competence is simply to seek out the individual’s capacity to perform (Donaher et al., 2007). Also important to understanding the term is the following point: “There is such confusion and debate concerning the concept of ‘competence’ that it is impossible to identify or impute a coherent theory or to arrive at a definition capable of accommodating and reconciling all the different ways that the term is used” (Delamere le Deist & Winterton, 2005, p. 29). Called a “‘fuzzy concept’” by Boon and van der Klink, they define competence as “‘a useful term, bridging the gap between education and job requirements’” (2002, p. 6, as cited in Delamere le Deist & Winterton, 2005, p. 29). Competence is the baseline while competency and a competency model for the purposes of this work equate to the correct execution of a job or a behavior that is deemed effective. In addition, the value of competence has been noted as a positive aspect of an organization, providing a financial advantage in the marketplace (Cameron et al., 2003; Lee et al., 2003).

Often, competence and competency are used interchangeably in the literature as with the following. In the past, organizations relied on the qualifications of their people, but a shift has occurred in workplace learning, one which emphasizes the competence of the individual as well as the organization as a whole (Håland & Tjora, 2006). “Job competence is an employee’s capacity to meet or exceed a job’s requirements by producing the job outputs at an expected level of quality within the

constraints of the organization's internal and external environments" (Dubois, 1993, p. 9). The notion of possessing strong competencies is "central to organizational well-being" (Kochikar & Ravindra, 2007, p. 128). It has been suggested that staff competence is one of the vehicles driving the organization's competitive edge in an increasingly aggressive market (Håland & Tjora, 2006). In other words, evidence of competence can likely increase business. Marjorie Derven (2008) claimed that "concurrent with pressure to reduce costs is the requirement for companies to ensure their employees have the necessary skills, not only to compete effectively, but to ensure organizational survival. A critical way to both assess and build skills is through competency models" (p. 69).

Defining Competency

In the literature, a competency is denoted as "an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and or superior performance in a job or situation" where "criterion-reference" indicates that a competency will predict performance (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 9). According to Boyatzis (1982), "certain characteristics or abilities of the person enable him or her to demonstrate the appropriate specific actions" (p. 12). More simply, competency is "a personal capability that is critical to the production of a quality output or outputs" (McLagan, 1988, p. 374) where output is a tangible result for the organization or customer (Rothwell, 2002). Boyatzis (1982) claimed that a "person's set of competencies reflect his or her capability" (p. 23). Some lack the capability to perform because they do

not possess the capacity (Rothwell et al., 2007). Competency's aim is to forecast effective performance.

Spencer and Spencer (1993) asserted that "competencies provide a common language" (p. 347), which can unite all individuals related to a particular job and follow these individuals as they progress through roles within the organization (Lombardi & Bourke, 2009). Yet, how can organizations translate competencies into everyday understanding or daily actions that do not sound like job descriptions or tasks? McClelland ascertained that five characteristics of competencies can guide understanding of the concept (Spencer & Spencer, 1993):

1. Motives. The things a person consistently thinks about or wants that cause action. Motives 'drive, direct, and select' [McClelland, 1971] behavior toward certain actions or goals and away from others.
2. Traits. Physical characteristics and consistent responses to situations or information.
3. Self-Concept. A person's attitudes, values, or self-image.
4. Knowledge. Information a person has in specific content areas.
5. Skill. The ability to perform a certain physical or mental task.

(pp. 9-11)

These characteristic distinctions “demonstrate the way in which people behave, think, or generalize across situations” (Smith, 2008, p. 455).

The competencies which McClelland suggested are more easily developed through training are characterized as surface level (skill and knowledge), while those which are less tenable are from the core, personality-dependent, and invisible range (traits and motives) on the competencies spectrum (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Potential employers would be well-advised to select candidates already possessing this latter type of a competency if it is required, since these tend to be less teachable. As much as traits are inherent, motives would be under the individual’s locus of control while skills and knowledge are more likely dictated by the position expectations (Rothwell et al., 2007). Moreover, “a motive includes thoughts related to a particular goal state or theme” while a trait “includes thoughts and psychomotor activity related to a general category of events” (Boyatzis, 1982, p. 28). Rothwell, Hohne, and King (2007) suggested that motives explain why people do what they do and are close to impossible to adjust by an external source. The other characteristic, self-concept, can go either way on the gauge of development ease. Boyatzis (1982) included a helpful example of competency at two levels:

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Motive could manifest as performance improvement through goal achievement;
Skill is demonstrated through being able to verbalize a goal statement, action plan, budget for the goal (p. 27).

Competency scope is not always consistent either. McLagan (1988) said that “competencies may be stated as broad areas of knowledge or as relatively discrete and

specialized areas of competence or skill” but further, “a competency menu would contain a finely grained list of key skills and knowledge required for producing a job’s outcomes” (p. 374).

In addition to levels and scope of competencies, performers possess different types of competencies for a job or role. “Core competencies” are those that tend to be nontechnical in nature as well as to “cut across all activities and are essential to successful performance” (Rothwell et al., 2007, p. 18) and could be the competencies on which the organization builds its reputation (Mirabile, 1997). Certainly it would be unlikely for an individual to perfect all the competencies involved in a role since each person is unique (2007). However, it is likely that each individual could establish at least a modicum of competence in each role played in his/her job (Rothwell et al., 2007).

Competencies tend to cluster into groups of a “different domain, or arena, of human functioning,” in the words of Boyatzis (1982, p. 25). Pulling together all of the necessary skills or competencies for one particular job role or even a more generic category can be facilitated through the development of a framework, known as a competency model. This is defined as “a detailed behaviorally specific description of the skills and traits that employees need to be effective in a job” (Mansfield, 1996, p. 7). Rothwell (2002) further detailed that it stands as “a narrative description of job competencies for an identifiable group...It can describe key characteristics that distinguish exemplary (best-in-class) performers from fully successful performers” (p. 115). Plainly, “competency models seek the ideal combination of skills, knowledge,

attitude and experience” needed to execute the position in question (Håland & Tjora, 2006, p. 1002). The model, called a competency menu by McLagan (1988), may also “include behavioral indicators for each competency, which provide tangible illustrations of different levels of mastery” (p. 375). Rather than using job analysis to produce cumbersome lists of tasks and associated skill sets, organizations can instead opt for a succinct competency model that produces a more concise collection of underlying personal characteristics required to become best-in-class for whatever role is specified by the model (Mansfield, 2000).

There are two distinct types of competency models: the generic and the individual (McLagan, 1988). These are also known by the titles: single job approach or the one-size-fits-all version (Mansfield, 1996). As logic would dictate, a single job model is most specific while its counterpart affords a broader range. McLagan further stressed that an employee often evolves his or her particular position to encompass or decrease other tasks and subsequently acquires different competencies from those advocated in his/her generic job model (1988).

Tony Bingham, CEO and president of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), has been quoted in *T + D Magazine* as saying, ““a defined set of competencies is a hallmark of a true profession, and the practice of creating and supporting a competency model is a key role of a professional association”” (Davis et al., 2004, p. 28). ASTD, in fact, has sponsored no less than six competency model studies from 1978 to the present (Davis et al., 2004; McLagan, 1989; Rothwell et al., 1999;

Smith, 2008). Such a notion aligns with one of the goals of this study to lobby more credibility for the practice of AI in organizational sciences.

Benefits and Detriments of Competency Models

Natural advantages and disadvantages exist for competency models. In optimal situations, competency models would align with an organization's specific mission and goals (Lombardi & Bourke, 2009). Cohesive and consistent employee evaluations can emerge from the skills detailed in competency models (Rothwell, 2002). Further, "competency frameworks are used to identify learning needs and ensure that learning activities address within business needs" in the workplace learning-centric organizations of the US and the UK (Håland & Tjora, 2006, p. 1002). Competency models can function as a tool to enhance more effective hiring practices (Mansfield, 2000). Furthermore, competency models can also be the common denominator that helps bridge the gap between the academic and the professional worlds, so that members from each group can speak the same language (Donaher et al., 2007). Specifically, working in tandem, academic programs can self-assess to ensure that graduates possess the traits, skills, and knowledge necessary for success in the field in question, thanks to carefully planned coursework which helped to develop those competencies (Rothwell et al., 1999). In addition, Rothwell (2005) asserted that competency models can transform everyday training and development departments into human performance enhancement departments, essentially suggesting that competency studies can usher an organization

into the next dimension of their evolution. Dubois (1993) emphasized his belief that “competency models provide the adhesion or ‘glue’ that is necessary among the elements of an organization’s human resource management system” (p. 72).

However, competency models take time and money to develop (Worley et al., 2005). For small organizations without the internal resources to develop the model, an external consultancy might be required which could take even more funds (Mansfield, 2000). In light of the constant change prevalent in the business world, it stands to reason that competency studies may have an abbreviated life span. Competency lists development are rarely a one-time event if an organization is truly committed to embracing the approach. The competencies required to perform will doubtlessly evolve as the business evolves (Lombardi & Bourke, 2009). In any number of fields, competency models may only remain viable for eighteen months before a retool is required (Mansfield, 2000; Rothwell et al., 2005). The fast pace of change could make the interface between industry and associated academic program curriculum difficult to keep in step, requiring much attention from university curriculum developers (Dare & Leach, 1999). In reference to McClelland, Boyatzis (2006) pointed out that very few studies could connect the output of financial returns to competency effectiveness. Since competency studies consume large amounts of time, money, and energy, organizations that could not guarantee a return on investment might not be willing to take the risk.

Following Zemke, Dubois (1993) believed that (at the time of his publication date at least), more than ten years after Zemke, confusion about how to actually work with

an “effective and efficient competency-based performance improvement program” was present (p. 12). In an ideal situation, competency study can be easily implemented and followed, but when dealing with human beings with varying levels of understanding and initiative, a more problematic transition may result. A major critique suggests that it is absurd to think that a single set of traits can describe all masters who hold a particular position (Hollenbeck, McCall, & Silzer, 2006). Further, a competency list may illuminate the gap in an individual’s development, but does nothing to provide a guide map on how to bolster those deficiencies (Armitage et al., 2006).

Although competency research has been around for more than 35 years, the dearth of published research has not helped to enhance its reputation (Boyatzis, 2006). Competency study challenges have been thoroughly discussed by Boyatzis (2006), among others (Hollenbeck et al., 2006; Mansfield, 2000; Teodorescu & Binder, 2004; Worley et al., 2005). For instance, many of the competency modeling examples have not been published because the organizations have opted to guard their perceived competitive edge and proprietary information rather than advancing scholarship (Boyatzis, 2006). Clearly, no one can blame them for protecting their business initiatives. In some cases, those studies that have been published might beg the question of confidence in their findings (Boyatzis, 2006). Of the published findings, there could be limited confidence in the results due to questions of how to measure or assess competencies and definitions and measures of performance and/or effectiveness.

Some researchers call for the results of a competency study developed through qualitative research to be measured in terms of reproducibility, a positivist request. In order to validate a resulting competency model, outcomes of coding schemes should be constant across raters (Krippendorff, 2004; Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). In response, a variety of coefficients of reliability have been deduced, such as percent agreement advocated by Boyatzis (1998), Cohen's kappa, Scott's pi, and so forth (Arstein & Poesio, 2008; Krippendorff, 2004; Lombard et al., 2002). According to the literature, great disagreement about which measure of intercoder agreement to apply to one's study has generated much discussion (Arstein & Poesio, 2008; Krippendorff, 2004; Lombard et al., 2002). Many have called for multiple coders beyond two to provide a stronger case for true reliability (Wilson & Zeitlyn, 1995). If a study does employ more than two coders, as is often suggested (Arstein & Poesio, 2008), a debate about coefficient of agreement selection intensifies even further. One must match measure to variable level as well, since not all scores are appropriate for variables other than nominal (Boyatzis, 1998). Krippendorff (2004) explained that:

...the differences among coefficients are due to
responding to (a) different patterns in data or (b) the same
patterns but in different ways. How these functions
respond to which patterns of agreement and how their
numerical results relate to the risk of drawing false
conclusions from unreliable data-not just the numbers

they produce-must be understood before selecting one coefficient over another. (p. 412)

Percentage of agreement in which two coders are judged on their number of concurrences divided by the total possible codes (Boyatzis, 1998) is certainly the easiest measure to utilize. However, those working mainly in content analysis often discount percentage of agreement for its simplicity and single dimension (Krippendorff, 2004; see also Arstein & Poesio, 2008). Simple percentage of agreement does not take into account the existence chance concurrence (Arstein & Poesio, 2008; Krippendorff, 2004; Lombard et al., 2002) nor is it equipped to calculate a figure for more than two coders. It can be a confusing and frustrating venture for researchers, particularly those who would rather avoid statistical analysis (Boyatzis, 1998).

Much like the term competence, which has been said to suppress potential and embrace mediocrity according to some detractors (Cameron, 2008; Lee et al., 2003) a similar complaint has been lodged against the development of competencies. Some authors believe that encouraging competency development may minimize the actual development that occurs, effectively stifling any additional growth that may be waiting to emerge from an individual's particular potential (Murphy & Calway, 2008). A school of thought born from the strengths revolution detailed in chapter 3 alleges claims akin to this premise: spend effort developing only strengths, not skills that elude one's talent (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). Adhering to rigid lists of competencies has been deemed to be limiting by some authors (Delamere le Deist & Winterton, 2005).

Model Development

Spencer and Spencer (1993) suggested that a “classic” competency study would take up to three months to facilitate (p. 94). For them, the first and most crucial step involves defining “performance effectiveness criteria” to guide the study; such criteria would be tangible results or reputation ratings (pp. 94-95). Step two involves a determination of whom the criterion sample is comprised of, including both superior and average performers. Six methods can be used to complete step three, data collection. These methods are behavioral event interviews, expert panels, surveys, expert system databases, job function/task analysis, or direct observation (p. 97). The data are then analyzed during step four in order to parse out competencies and differentiate between expert and average performance. Once data are analyzed, the resulting model must be validated in step five. Finally, in step six a multitude of applications based on the competency model are planned (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Without doubt, developing an effective competency model typically requires an exorbitant amount of energy in addition to a substantial time commitment (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). According to Rothwell et al. (2005), competency models can be built using a series of steps that echoes the design of Spencer and Spencer (1993):

1. Identify job outputs and standards;
2. Identify job performers to include in the study;
3. Collect data;
4. Analyze data;

5. Establish job competencies;
6. Competencies feedback review; and
7. Implement competencies. (pp. 91-92)

Dubois (1993) suggested that five methods can be utilized to create competency models including Job Competence Assessment Method (JCAM), Modified Job Competence Assessment Method, Generic Model Overlay Method, Customized Generic Model Method, and the Flexible Job Competency Model Method (p. 71). JCAM produces results based on differentiating between the exemplar and the average performer through interviews of both and other position components. The difference between this method and the Modified Job Competence Assessment is simply that the latter uses participant-written or recorded job assessments rather than the one-on-one interview. In the Generic Model Overlay approach, an organization finds a model that already exists and fits it to its particular needs. The consultant offers a generic list of competencies as a basis for customizing the necessary competencies for both the exemplary and average performance of each organizational role. Finally, a multitude of other types of job information feeds the development process in the Flexible Job Competency Model, producing behavioral indicators, quality standards, and job outputs (Dubois, 1993).

Choosing Participants for Competency Studies

With qualitative research there is no need for random and representative selection to infuse the study with generalizability (Patton, 1987). Instead, participants are chosen to capture the applicable information they possess, sometimes called purposeful or purposive sampling (Creswell, 1994; Sullivan, T.J., 2001). This group of informants can be expected to provide information-rich data (Patton, 1987). In a competency study, participants are described as a criterion sample since they meet the prerequisite study measure (Patton, 1987; Sullivan, T.J., 2001). This approach to participant selection targets the type of informant who can provide copious information and thus, inform the research questions.

Another helpful method used by researchers to find further sample participants is the action of “snowball sampling” in which an interview question poses the request for additional, appropriate subjects (Patton, 1987). During the coding process once categories are sufficiently saturated with no new information presenting itself, sampling can stop (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Ending the sampling in this way is known as theoretical sampling. Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined theoretical sampling as “sampling on the basis of emerging concepts, with the aim being to explore the dimensional range or varied conditions along which the properties of concepts vary” (p. 73).

Interviews as Data Collection

Conducting interviews seems to be the method of choice in data collection for model construction although other methods including expert panels, surveys, generic competency dictionaries, and direct observation may be used and possibly, needed as well (Mansfield, 2000; Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999). “Telling stories about one’s past experiences and events was a method of communicating emotions, transmitting cultural values, and creating a history,” explained Boyatzis (1998, p. 67). These research-producing interviews are known as the critical incident interview and should result in a list of competencies unpacked through a coding process (Boyatzis, 1982).

First framed by Flanagan, this method of interviewing asks “people to identify and describe the most critical situations they have encountered on their jobs” (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 98; see also Boyatzis, 1982). Inviting discussion of critical incidents has been a way to capture in depth details about the low points of practice (Brookfield, 1995). Not only does the researcher note the minutia of the event, but also, the interviewee’s reactions and feelings are collected. In competency study, the critical incident has evolved into a discussion of the greatest challenge or failure experienced by the interviewee and any subsequent lesson learned, but can be most equated to job task analysis (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). The steps devised by Flanagan can be summarized as follows: (1) The researcher teases out the goal of the individual’s role; (2) The researcher sets up an action plan to collect a list of specific incidents that have occurred; (3) The researcher collects the data; (4) The researcher analyses the data; (5)

The researcher presents the interpretations of the position's requirements (Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999). Clearly, the onus of explanation lies with the researcher.

The Behavioral Event Interview

The next generation interview method, built upon the critical incident, is called the Behavioral Event Interview (BEI). Designed by McClelland, this technique involves probing for personality type and cognitive style of feelings, hopes, and thoughts called "thematic apperception tests," which then merge with the critical incident approach resulting in a more holistic examination (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 98). In 1973, when McClelland was trying to make a case for using competence as a basis for testing student IQs, he described the thematic apperception test as able to differentiate levels of development for the sampled criterion behavior and ultimately then allowing for prediction of competence (McClelland, 1973). Spencer and Spencer (1993) explained that the BEI's goal is to consider the interviewee's characteristics more so than determining what he/she did to do a good job which they feel was Flanagan's goal with the critical incident.

McClelland explained, while introducing Spencer and Spencer's *Competence at Work*, that his BEI method allowed researchers to delve into what most interested them—the personal characteristics of those performers—rather than the perfection of the task (1993). These BEIs reveal any competencies required after a content analysis is performed during the competency study (Mansfield, 2000). Or in the words of Richard

Boyatzis (1982), “these events can be systematically coded for various characteristics, or ‘competencies’” (p. 41). McClelland had been working on a selection project for the U.S. State Department for junior Foreign Service Information Officers that sought to lessen occurrences of discrimination that had arisen in the previous selection process, when he and his colleagues first conceived of the BEI (Mansfield, 2000; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Thus, another benefit of a competency model is its unbiased approach to candidate selection (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Using Interviews

As with any data collection method, there are advantages and disadvantages in using interviews in a study. Charmaz (2006) listed many of the benefits of interviews:

- Go beneath the surface of the described experience(s);
- Stop to explore a statement or topic;
- Request more detail or explanation;
- Ask about the participant’s thoughts, feelings, and actions;
- Keep the participants on the subject;
- Come back to an earlier point;
- Restate the participant’s point to check for accuracy;
- Slow or quicken the pace;
- Shift the immediate topic;
- Validate the participant’s humanity, perspective, or action;

- Use observational and social skills to further the discussion; and
- Respect the participant and express appreciation for participating. (p. 26)

However, Maxwell (1992) warned that interviews in which topics were touched on briefly could lead interviewers to draw incorrect inferences and subsequently make incorrect application to untouched areas, thereby ultimately weakening internal generalizability. Yet, this question of reliability through generalizability comes from the positivist approach (Altheide & Johnson, 1998) which involves seeking to apply quantitative measures to everything in the social sciences. Instead, establishing trustworthiness in place of reliability, following Lincoln and Guba (1985), should be the premise at work in directing a qualitative study, so interview use is completely acceptable. Another possible drawback with interviews is that the interviewee may have a memory lapse which may create a biased memory (Boyatzis, 1982).

Crafting Interview Questions

These are known as exploratory interviews (Edmondson & McManus, 2007) and as such, the type of interview questions posed dictates the usefulness of the interview. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) a “good question is one that leads the researcher to answers that serve the developing theoretical formulation” (p. 76) and “take research to a productive conclusion” (p. 74). Sensitizing questions tune the researcher into what the data might be indicating. Theoretical questions can help the researcher to see process, or variation, and to make connections among concepts. Also,

questions of a practical/structural nature provide direction for sampling and help with development of the structure of the evolving theory. Based on their list of question types, “guiding” questions are those which guide the interviews, observations, and analyses of these and other documents; they change over time with the evolving theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 77-78). Spradley (1979) also provides cogent tips for detailing interview questions that get at the information sought by the researcher, such as grand tour or experience questions (p. 88). The snowball sampling question is asking the participant for his/her opinion on whom else should be contacted to participate in the study, in effect to enhance the data collection (Patton, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Competency Identification Alternatives

Originally introduced in the 1950s, one process using expert panels to develop competency lists is the Delphi method (Eisen et al., 2005). It “facilitates the structured communication of participants, often geographically dispersed, for the purpose of gathering knowledge or arriving at a consensus on a topic” (Holmes & Scaffa, 2009, p. 82). Specific questions are developed to cull out the wisdom and experiences of a group of experts in the field in question (Eisen et al., 2005). Widely used in practice, the process includes multiple rounds allowing for a built-in iterative nature. Delphi has been praised for its anonymity, time allotted for pondering one’s response, and potential for geographical diversity of participants (Walmsley, Rivett, & Osmotherly, 2009). Logic

dictates that the anonymous nature of the questionnaire rounds would help to avoid groupthink. It has also been criticized for declining participation as the rounds progress thus affecting its reliability (Holmes & Scaffa, 2009, p. 82).

There is another way to identify competencies, as well. According to Rothwell (2005) a “Rapid Results Assessment” (RRA) is a quicker approach to the step of amassing competencies when developing a competency model (p. 78). It requires a focus group of exemplary performers to brainstorm their daily work duties, responsibilities, and behaviors which are then sequenced. After the focus group, facilitators pare down the list to remove redundancy and a questionnaire is sent to participants to tease out the necessary competencies that lead to the previously generated list of behaviors (2005).

What is Coding?

The next step in the process of model development is coding. Coding is an evolving process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Further, in the words of the experts, the method is “the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (p. 101). To code is to relate one’s data to one’s ideas about the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, as cited in Boyatzis, 1998, p. 5). Twenty to 30 interviews are desired in order to “achieve detail in theory” according to Creswell (1998, p. 113).

In simple terms, the researcher sweeps through each interview line by line or even word by word, denoting applicable ideas that are materializing from the words

(Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998) have called the “line-by-line analysis” very time-consuming, but typically the “most generative” and producing the most detailed result (p. 119). “Broadly speaking, during open coding, data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences” (p. 102). Creswell (1998) explained that open coding is the phase in search of “salient categories of information” in the data (p. 150) where the investigator can also begin to place subcategories into the overarching themes in order “to dimensionalize” the data (p. 57).

Axial coding is the next phase in the coding process of “interconnecting the categories” (Creswell, 1998, p. 150). Completed after open coding has begun as well as concurrently as needed, the process produces a variety of categorical codes, axial coding is intended to focus attention on the categories of interest to the study and is thus, also known as “focused” coding (Sullivan, T.J., 2001, pp. 456-458; see also Charmaz, 2006). Conceptually, this coding employs a more limited set of codes on the entire data set. The researcher is always looking for relationships in the emerging codes. With coding the researcher is also working to saturate each category meaning that no new information is revealed regarding that particular category (Creswell, 1998, 1994). Patton (1990) explained that saturating a category brings it to conclusion, in effect, the data is exhausted of any new information.

Grouping Competencies

Competency models are organized in such a way that “clusters” of competencies are grouped together in sections of two to five competencies made up of an overall set of clusters numbering three to six per model (Kolb & Rothwell, 2002, p. 200; Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 19). Within the finished model each competency is enhanced with applicable behavioral indicators meant to fully demonstrate how one with such a competency might behave (Mansfield, 1996) or as McLagan (1988) said, these “provide tangible illustrations of different levels of mastery” (p. 375). Spencer and Spencer (1993) suggested that each competency should be supported by three to six behavioral indicators. They further explained that often, behavioral indicators can emerge directly from the words of those exemplary performers interviewed. Capturing performers’ words as behavioral indicators within the model allows for the inclusion of industry verbiage. All behavioral indicators should be listed in ascending order of “intensity or completeness of action, much like orbital electrons at lower to higher levels of energy” (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 345)!

Finally, model developers should consider utilizing some range for levels of performance for each competency which can also give to novices something to aspire (Mansfield, 1996). There is a need to differentiate the superior performance from the average operator’s and also, both of those from the poor performer’s (Boyatzis, 1982). Levels for each competency should be consistent and possibly named: “Not Demonstrated, Developing, Capable, And Outstanding” (Mansfield, 1996, p. 13).

Validating the Competency Model

Since to date, it is unknown if competency study from the standpoint of a strengths-based BEI can succeed, the following information is slightly slanted to the positivist worldview. Following Dubois (1993), three methods for model validation are available, all involving a second criterion sample of experts and average performers. The first option is to conduct the same interview from the data collection step with a different sample set and then check for “concurrent cross-validation;” the model is tested to see if it will predict the behavior of the second as it had with the first (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 105).

The second option of validation requires a set of experts and average performers to undergo a test that has been developed to measure competencies from the model. An alternative to the test would be Q-sorts or rating forms conducted by managers or knowledgeable observers of the criterion sample. Validation would ensue if the experts exceed the average performers either on the tests or rating forms and thus resulting in “concurrent construct validation” (p. 106).

Finally, the last and most preferable option is “predictive validity” improvement (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 106). This validation method is sought through training a group of sample members using the competencies which would culminate in a later assessment to check for consequential performance (1993).

Creswell (1994) detailed the pursuit of internal validity for qualitative study using the positivist approach as well. He called for triangulation through multiple data sources

such as document analysis, interviewing, and observation. Member checks where the interviewee sanctions his/her interview transcript, as well as, peer review of the entire study process, are two other aspects important to validity. Involving study participants in all stages of one's project also carries validity (Creswell, 1994). Finally, identifying the "researcher bias" is a clarification Creswell expected to verify internal validity (p. 168).

Establishing external validity is comprised of "the provision of rich, thick, detailed description" to ensure the possibility of transfer to any interested researcher's own study (Creswell, 1994, p. 165). Reliability for Creswell entails sharing all the details regarding the study focus, role of the researcher, specifics on participants' selection basis, along with study context. Next, triangulation of data collection also enforces reliability. And, data collection and analysis would be thoroughly explicated while the entire study is audited by an external expert (Creswell, 1994).

Researcher credibility is important when discussing the rigor of qualitative study (Patton, 1990). Since the investigator of qualitative research is a player in the actual research, his/her credibility is vital to the results of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Patton (1990) shares the following distortions that researchers could possibly impart upon the study outcomes:

1. Study participants' reactions to evaluator;
2. "Changes in the evaluator (the measuring instrument) during the course of the evaluation...";
3. Evaluator biases; and

4. Incompetence, lack of training or preparation on the part of the evaluator. (p. 473)

By being as transparent as possible, steps must be put in place to ensure that the readers of the study feel as though they can trust the researcher. Also, “studying as many cases is crucial, in part because researchers may become aware of their preconceptions about their topics,” according to Charmaz (2006, p. 132), and allows the researcher to look through a more objective lens.

Qualitative Reliability is Trustworthiness

The concepts of validity and reliability are not appropriate for qualitative research (Creswell, 1994) while trustworthiness is (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness of the study intensifies with the use of member checks (see also Creswell, 1998), a method highly touted by quantitative researchers as well. Also helpful, senior researchers’ expertise enhances the member checking of the study, particularly if they can boast longevity in the field (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Boyatzis (1998) emphasized concepts which can increase the consistency in qualitative study such as double coding or consistency over time through recoding for replication (See also Arstein & Poesio, 2008; Creswell & Clark, 2002; Harris, Pryor, & Adams, 1997; Krenn, Evert, & Zinsmeister, 2004; Krippendorff, 2004). In contrast, Sykes (1990) called for a comprehensive and transparent presentation of all the researcher’s

decisions and study details, called an “audit trail” instead of attempting to achieve intercoder agreement in qualitative research (Harris et al., 1997, p. 6), a directive that echoes Creswell’s (1994) enhancement of credibility. Clearly, numerous methods of establishing credibility are available, decreasing one’s need to rely on just one.

History of Competency Model Research

An exploration of existing research helps to fill in this study by establishing referential adequacy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following is a brief survey and by no means, a comprehensive study of competency research. The review should suffice for setting the tone of competency study.

Again, the first competency study occurred in the 1970s as McClelland worked to develop a fair and balanced approach for selecting junior officers for the U.S. Foreign Service (Mansfield, 2000; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). McClelland had already suspected that conventional intelligence was not an adequate predictor of performance while competence was (1973) and aptitude tests were disappointing the State Department as they searched for new recruits (Mansfield, 2000). He deemed the junior officers’ study particularly effective in the competency identification process (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). As he worked with the McBer and Company consulting team, McClelland’s groundbreaking study was framed basically as such (Mansfield, 2000; Spencer & Spencer, 1993):

- Collect data regarding the optimal performance of candidate;

- Conduct Behavioral Event Interviews;
- Apply thematic analysis to interview data; and
- Distill results into a list of competencies.

McClelland's methodology dominated the first couple of decades of competency model development since it was and is considered a rigorous research process.

Mansfield (2000) asserted that during the initial period of competency model development, their main use was dominated by selection criteria, as with McClelland's initial study, and also, staff development. McClelland's first project provides the basic model for the study herein.

In 1982, Boyatzis published his comprehensive study on management competency as it related to job performance and effectiveness over a range of organizations. As he contended, "effective performance of a job is the attainment of specific results (i.e. outcomes) required by the job through specific actions while maintaining or being consistent with policies, procedures, and conditions of the organizational environment" (Boyatzis, 1982, p. 12). Having surveyed over 2,000 people in forty-one management positions from across twelve organizations, Boyatzis found twelve management-oriented competencies surrounding six clusters. His example study was focused and comprehensive and stands as a role-model among competency studies.

In her much-cited chapter, "Flexible Job Models," McLagan (1988) made a strong case for the use of "a systems approach to job and organization design that addresses

the needs of an increasingly dynamic and open workplace” (p. 386). Her methodology for flexible job design includes the following products (1988):

1. A statement of assumptions about the current and future context within which the business must operate or jobs must be designed.
2. Output menus that specify the desired outputs from a group or function.
3. Competency menus that specify the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to produce the outputs.
4. Generic job or role models.
5. Individual job models. (p. 371)

She also discussed the work that she and her team had done in designing the ASTD competency study for professionals in training and development began in 1981. In this study she used the Delphi technique to predict future conditions facing the training and development industry (McLagan, 1988). Ultimately, after a series of Delphi panels with in excess of 500 experts and ASTD Professional Development Committee members, a list of thirty-one competencies in a generic job model for training and development emerged along with fifteen exclusive roles that fall under the umbrella of the field (McLagan, 1988). McLagan’s work is considered very important to the field. Published in 1983, this model took on the name, *Models for Excellence* and in essence, became the defining work in the field of training and development (T&D) (Rothwell, 2002)—a good example of the impact competency study can have on a particular discipline.

Competence At Work, by Spencer and Spencer, is yet another valuable work on competency study (1993). In addition to detailing the McClelland method of developing a competency study, they included a wide range of generic competency models built for industries such as sales and human services. Spencer and Spencer's (1993) chapter on "Developing a Competency Dictionary" included helpful information on the scaling of competencies for intensity, impact, complexity, effort, and "unique dimensions" (pp. 19-24). Taking the behavioral indicators available from 286 models across industries and nations they were able to synthesize a list of 360 competencies from superior to less than superior performance that became a preliminary dictionary of generic competencies (1993). Their methodology was very empirically driven as they ran a variety of statistical tests on the list of behavioral indicators. The early reliance on quantitative methods within competency study cemented its place among the positivists.

In the next section a brief survey of examples of competency studies is included to demonstrate the concept in action further and more recently. As Dubois (1993) asserts, the use of competency-based projects is growing particularly in performance improvement programs in numerous organizations. More organizational leaders are realizing that an individual's knowledge base is still important, but vital to effective performance are the competencies that put the knowledge into action (Boyatzis, 1982).

A Survey of Competency Studies

In the late 1990s, the state of Mississippi ramped up efforts to build a competency model for all educational levels of graduating nurses. Although the methodology of the development was not shared beyond revealing that builders reviewed a wide variety of existing models, the publication focused on the academic uses of the pilot model (Hewlett & Eichelberger, 1999).

Donaher, Russell, Scoble, and Chen (2007) discussed a research study for nurse managers that they conducted using the Human Capital Competencies Inventory (HCCI) to measure management competence (2007). As they reported, the state of nursing management competency remains in its infancy. The HCCI was designed as a self-assessment for new “aspiring” nurses and their study was intended to develop the instrument and test its psychometric properties (p. 278). The results of the study suggested that the HCCI was indeed valid and reliable and would support the competency model for nurse management development.

In 2006, Boyatzis ran a study of competency as it related to financial impact of senior leadership within a global consulting and professional services firm. Boyatzis utilized the typical critical incident interview methodology to distill down an initial competency model comprised of competencies and associated behavioral indicators. He also integrated survey results from the responses of 133 partners of the 204 he contacted. The survey was asking for the most necessary competencies produced from focus groups which generated a list of preferred competencies. This example

demonstrated how competency study has evolved in the last decade through the use of 360 degree feedback (Mansfield, 2000), which was used during one iteration of this competency model.

Mansfield (1996) suggested that building effective competency models requires a certain set of competencies for the builder. Although he did not run a study to determine these competencies, the list certainly sounds viable enough. The competencies included: broad experience in competency study, initiative, influence, knowledge of the organization requesting the model, results orientation, and goal-setting. Additionally, support staff for the builder were reported to need a certain skill set to be successful such as analytical ability, facilitation skill, and written communication skill.

ASTD Competency Studies

McLagan's initial work for ASTD leads to further explication of the remaining ASTD competency model stories. The first project was launched by Pinto and Walker in 1978 and focused on the development of a role model for human resource development (HRD) specialists (Rothwell, 2002). This important work included a data collection from 2,790 practitioners within the global ASTD membership, which equated to a 20 percent response rate to the mail survey (Smith, 2006). Using factor analysis, Pinto and Walker found "a total of 14 areas or common activities" from the data (Smith,

2006, p. 31). The tradition of the day was to view the trainer one dimensionally as only a trainer and not a learner (Rothwell, 2002).

McLagan's *Models for Excellence* was recast in 1987 during a study called *Competencies and Standards*, which then became known as *Models for HRD Practice* after it was published in 1989 (Rothwell, 2002, p. 21). The study set about developing roles that would be important during the 90s and so, the model took on a future-orientation (McLagan, 1989). Rothwell (2002) explained that this version of the model found HRD to have the starring role, with T&D and OD relegated to supporting roles (Smith, 2008). More importantly, OD was included in this revision of the model and OD professionals participated in one of the expert panels (Suholdnik, 1989). Further, still not enfolded the learner's role in the treatment, this iteration did begin to examine the learner's work climate as playing a part in change and learning among its thirty-five competencies (Rothwell, 2002). McLagan (1989) called for "agreement and a common language on what constitutes professional practice" (p. 59).

During the 1996 study *Models for Human Performance Improvement*, Human Performance Improvement (HPI) was defined to mean "the systematic process of discovering and analyzing important performance gaps, planning for future improvements in human performance, designing and developing cost-effective and ethically justifiable interventions to close performance gaps, implementing the interventions, and evaluating the financial and nonfinancial results" (Rothwell, 1996, as cited in Rothwell et al., 2007, p. xx). The act of competency modeling was having a

definitive affect on the industry's identity as Rothwell's team began to dialogue with an expert panel of twenty subject matter experts to develop a set of competencies (Rothwell, 2002; Smith, 2008). The resulting model contained four roles, including "change manager" (Smith, 2008, p. 449).

The next ASTD study was 1998's *Models for Learning Technologies* (Rothwell, 2002, p. 22). The study was conducted by Piskurich and Sanders with a view to the future and examined the e-learning focus for the first time (Rothwell, 2002). The methodology focused on data from an expert panel of twenty-four which produced a draft model from the literature (Smith, 2008). As technology continues to appear and evolve, affected competency models should be revamped.

In 1999, a look at McLagan's work in HRD competency modeling led to a complete remodel for the field identity (Rothwell, 2002). In response, a comprehensive competency model was built for a new rendering of the field now being called workplace learning and performance (WLP) and encompassing the concepts of HRD, T&D, and HPI (Rothwell, 2002). Rothwell, Sanders, and Soper (1999) conducted the study, *Models for Workplace Learning and Performance*, through eight phases, including three study validations with different levels of practitioners and managers (p. xiii).

Mapping the Future became the latest rendition of competencies for WLP professionals in 2004 (Rothwell & Wellins, 2004, p. 95). Initial data collecting at the annual ASTD membership conference allowed for ease of scholarship with 75 interviews of various leaders within the field in 2003 (Davis et al., 2004). Next, a survey of

practitioners to validate competencies led to a second survey on certification and focus groups with 64 thought leaders surveyed rounded out the global data collection (W.J. Rothwell, personal communication, December 29, 2009). The final product was a three-tiered visual rendering of the competency model depicting diverse roles played by WLP professionals at the top, atop areas of focus which then sat firmly on the base of competencies (Davis et al., 2004, p. 29). These areas of focus are called “areas of expertise” or AOE, a new acronym for the field (p. 31). “AOEs are the specific technical and professional skills and knowledge required for success in” WLP and “are specialized areas that build and rely upon the focused application of the foundational competencies” (p. 31).

Competency Model for Organization Development (OD) Specialist

The prospect of comparing an OD competency model with the subsequent AI competency model should not be minimized. Thankfully, a history of competency study in OD exists to which to compare (Côté, 2004; Shepard & Raia, 1981; Warrick, 2006; Worley & Feyerherm, 2003; Worley et al., 2005). Even more effective would be a comparison of vying AI studies, but, unfortunately, no other AI competency study has been conducted to date.

The current prevailing definition of “OD Competency” among experts is “any personal quality that contributes to successful consulting performance” where personal quality indicates “values and driving principles; areas of knowledge, including fluency

with relevant theories and models; and areas of skills and abilities, including the requisite behavioral capacity to perform certain tasks” (Worley et al., 2005, p. 136). Worley and Feyerherm (2003) asserted that the variety of competency lists that have been developed for OD practice usually have a current focus and do not apply to the future. Golembiewski (2004) joked that the only required behavior to be able to call oneself an OD professional was simply “some kind of assertive act” (p. 15). Others have called for consistent and accepted certification and recent standards and practices (Weidner, 2004) in order to avoid bubblegum machine-certified practitioners.

In 1981, Shepard and Raia experienced a similar wish for the OD field, and they believed that competency study could satisfy the need. They ran a study that had a future focus. At a time, they estimated the existence of 3,000 OD practitioners, 42% of whom they deemed “inadequately trained and supervised” (p. 90). Their expert panel called for a clear set of competencies in order that the level of practitioner competence would increase, the required education would set the practitioner on a path of learning so that his or skills would continue to evolve, and also, to inform academic curricula with the results (Shepard & Raia, 1981). Clearly, competency studies that are followed and updated provide an answer for these earlier complaints.

Not a traditional competency study like those described in the literature, a 1990 study focused on predicting “OD consulting competence” by using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator assessment (Bushe & Gibbs, 1990, p. 337). The study sample was 64 trainees in a consulting program to develop OD skills. After completing a 5-point Likert

scale “77-item consulting skills survey...developed using behavioral indicators from the Army-McBer Study” (p. 345). Study results showed positive correlations between “a preference for intuition and effective consulting” (p. 354). Additionally, they predicted a level of ego development is necessary for OD competency and it envelops the intuition.

Worley and Feyerherm (2003) developed a list of OD competencies in which they “intended to discover whether the thought leaders [they interviewed] would reinforce the importance of the traditional skills and values that would prepare OD practitioners to handle these trends or if they would identify new ones” (p. 100). Their study methodology included a participant sample of 50 men and women, a purposive sample (Creswell, 1994; Sullivan, T.J., 2001), due to their prominence, longevity, and experience in the field, literature and speaker’s circuit, with 21 ultimately answering the call to participate. The group was slanted in terms of race and gender, however with 20 white males and one white female responding; the authors viewed their sample “as representative of the OD field’s early conceptions” (p. 101).

Content analysis was conducted by two graduate students after faculty members did the interviews (Worley & Feyerherm, 2003). The codes were categorized independently by both the students and study authors and average interrater reliability was calculated producing figures of .71 and .73 for questions 1 and 3, while question 2 was more inconsistent with .62. Question 1 asked:

What are the key skills, knowledge, values, or competencies
that have made you successful?

In descending order of frequency percentage of mention, the categories for question 1 pulled from Worley and Feyerherm's data were:

- Broad education, training, experience
- Interpersonal skills
- Clear knowledge of self
- Ability to see systems
- Focusing on relevant issues
- Ability to operate within values
- Specific competences
- Luck and timing
- Exposure to the field
- Cultural experience
- Theory and practice. (p. 103)

Question 2 asked the sample:

What does the field need more of or less of in the future?

The competencies revealed from question 2 were:

- Less reliance on fads and techniques
- Collaboration within the field
- Relevant approaches to change
- Personal and group development
- Large systems focus

- Understanding of OD's value orientation
- More business knowledge
- Taking a stance
- More understanding of self as instrument
- Generating new ideas
- Action learning
- Working with power
- Global competency. (p. 104)

The final question was twofold. Question 3 asked:

What are the critical needs or issues in educating people to facilitate change in the future? What skills, knowledge, and competencies will the next generation of change practitioners require?

Finally, the categories revealed in responses to question 3 were:

- Large systems fluency
- Consulting is saying the tough stuff
- Ability to design
- Power to influence
- Business orientation
- Broad understanding
- Systems thinking

- Evaluate and research
- The necessity of practice/experience
- Self-knowledge and exploration
- Ability to deeply understand an organization
- Develop new models of change and organization
- Considering multiple viewpoints
- Ability to bring people together
- Core knowledge about the field
- Personal philosophies and values. (p. 105)

The next case is international. A practitioner from Alberta, Canada conducted a study to determine how the OD experts of the Canadian Federal Public Service would fare when formal OD training and years of experience were analyzed (Côté, 2004). After an extensive literature review, 19 OD experts or “53% of the current internal OD population in the Federal Public Service of Canada” participated in the study along with some 43 clients who had worked with the OD experts (p. 35). Six competency areas drawn from the literature underpinned 31 behavioral statements to test for proficiency. The six areas were: knowledge of OD, theory and practice in OD, design and intervention skills, influencing skills, self-awareness, values and ethics (p. 35).

Warrick’s (2005) study surveyed 90 global OD leaders and had a response rate of over 43% or 39 experts. The results were organized around a similar framework developed by Sullivan and Tannenbaum, “knowing, doing, and being” with the

additional theme added by Warrick, “thinking” (p. 179). The following is an adaptation summary of Warrick’s findings:

Fundamental Knowledge (knowing)

- Changing times, future trends
- OD, organizational transformation, organizational behavior
- Systems theory and thinking
- Organizational culture and cross-cultural dynamics
- Change theory and OD process
- How to be a change agent
- Traditional AR and AI perspective
- Fundamentals of organizational assessment, analysis and feedback
- Facilitation fundamentals
- Applying technology to OD
- T&D practices and technology
- Improvement interventions at all levels of group
- Importance of management, leadership, transformational leadership essentials
- Understanding the fundamentals of business
- The politics of change

Conceptual Skills (thinking)

- Develop your personal philosophy and ethical basis to practice OD
- Think big picture, systems view of organizations

- Learn to use a framework to visualize, design, plan, and intervene
- Stretch to innovate in adapting OD to changing situations
- Learn to think in terms of ways to accelerate change process

Consultation Skills (doing)

- Skills gaining entry, contracting, and communicating ideas, concepts, and processes
- Skills in interviewing, data collection, analysis, and feedback
- Helping, coaching, and facilitation skills
- Skills in changing and improving individual, group, and whole organization
- Skills in transforming organization
- T&D skills
- Program/project management skills
- Using OD-related technology

Personal Attributes (being)

- General passion for your role and concern for people and organization
- A high degree of self-awareness, eagerness to learn and grow and model what you teach
- A high level of genuineness, integrity, and believability
- An uplifting and humble attitude that promotes the success of others
- The courage and sense of ethics to do what is right
- Good rational/emotional balance and ability to be objective

- A strong sensitivity to the needs of individuals, groups, and organizations
- Excellent listening skills
- Ability to level, confront, and resolve conflicts
- Self-discipline, self-control, and perseverance
- A good sense of humor and ability to roll with problems
- An ability to successfully handle stress and turn difficulties into opportunities.

(pp. 180-181)

Warrick (2005) learned during his study that most of the “pioneers” participating in the study seemed to align, maybe not in verbiage, but with respect to belief about OD (p. 186).

Research begun in the 1950s by Benne at the National Training Laboratories (NTL) produced the initial skill set for OD practice competence; this list contained seven skills (Worley et al., 2005). When interviewed about the NTL’s learning culture later in life, Benne recalled “that was the excitement of it. Every time we met, or every time we had a new lab, we learned something and that’s what kept us going” (Freedman, 1996, p. 336). Sullivan and Lippitt build this first list up to twenty-five proficiencies by applying OD-oriented “change phases” such as “unfreezing,” “moving,” and “refreezing” to the study (Worley et al., 2005, p. 139). Partnering his own solid reputation with the sanction of OD fathers, Tannenbaum and Beckhard, Sullivan received a staggering ninety percent response rate when he surveyed fifty OD gurus for yet another study revision (Worley et al., 2005). Over twenty more iterations have continued to evolve the OD

competency model since then, entreating participation from the experts, some graduate students, and a variety of regional, national and international groups and associations.

One of these iterations, published in 1998, found a foundation of seven competencies (Worley & Feyerherm, 2003). These “foundation competencies” were:

- Knowledge of organizational behavior
- Individual psychology
- Group dynamics
- Management and organizational theory
- Research methods (including statistics)
- Comparative cultural perspectives
- A functional knowledge of business. (p. 100)

Additionally, “core knowledge competencies” and “core skill competencies” were discovered and rendered as such (p. 100):

Core Knowledge Competencies

Organization design, organization research, system dynamics, history of OD and change, theories and models of change. (p. 100)

Core Skill Competencies

Managing the consulting process, analysis and diagnosis, designing and choosing appropriate interventions,

facilitating and process consultation, developing client capability, and evaluating organization change. (p. 100)

The next model provides a blueprint for novice practitioners to understand what they need to practice OD effectively and also, assist practitioners and curriculum developers of OD programs with development needs. For over thirty years, author, OD expert, and consultant, Roland Sullivan has enhanced the scholarship of OD competency by sharing input that he has garnered from more than 3,500 OD practitioners (Worley et al., 2005). Thanks to the sharpening of this model through his and others' work, Sullivan has provided a benchmark of study iterations that can act as a model for this study and its future. As Worley, Rothwell, and Sullivan (2005) concluded, "the present competency list is only marginally different from other lists, suggesting a certain amount of convergent validity...the relative stability in the competency list over the past twenty-five years presents a challenge to the field to move forward" (p. 157). Given its importance, this section will detail the building of the latest version of the OD competency model.

With 141 items around fourteen clusters in the last rendition, Sullivan and his colleagues reviewed and clarified the model. They designed a questionnaire organized around an interpretation of the ARM steps where the respondents were first asked if the competency in question was "essential to success in OD today" with the possible answers of yes or no (Worley et al., 2005, p. 142). Next, the respondents selected from a scale of 1=not at all critical to 5=absolutely critical for each competency. OD

professionals were invited to participate in the on-line validation study. After 364 responses arrived, descriptive statistics and much discussion produced a list of 104 competencies around 24 clusters. Thanks to the factor analysis, the initial complicated data set was condensed and cut down into essential themes, in this case the 24 clusters. Then, the list was pared down to the following in order of importance (2005):

Table 2.1

<i>Current OD Practitioner Competencies</i>	
Self-mastery	Ability to evaluate change
Clarify data needs	Manage transition & institutionalization
Integrate theory & practice, stay current in technology	Ability to work with large systems
Participatively create good implementation plan	Understand research methods
Manage diversity	Clarify roles
Address power	Keep an open mind
Manage client ownership of change	Be comfortable with ambiguity
Manage the separation	See the whole picture
Set the conditions for positive change	Focus on relevance & flexibility
Use data to adjust for change	Be available to multiple stakeholders
Build realistic relationships	Good client choices

Clarify outcomes

Source: Worley, Sullivan, & Rothwell, 2005, pp. 147-152.

The emergent and leading OD competency selected was “self-mastery” (p. 158) but has not been constant in the renderings of the OD competencies list. Self-mastery is a personal characteristic which affords its possessor the option to present a very customized combination of theory and model for the client’s process. Critics of this skill suggest that its adoption in the OD competency model invites a return to Lewin’s “T-groups” to the practice when groups were plunged into the experience of prejudice, eventually called “sensitivity training” meant to sensitize the individual to the slight (Alban & Scherer, 2005, pp. 87-88). These controversial methods smack of the softer side of a process that was born from a more strategic, research-driven, and hard-edged impetus and thus, spurns the functionalist approach to competence (Håland & Tjora, 2006). Still other thoughts suggest that self-mastery deserves its place of prominence in the model since “customizing a change management process to the client’s situation, focusing on implementation and effectiveness, and thinking about helping the client to learn are the relevant and practical results that derive from this most personal competency” but not a blank canvas on which to prompt client therapy (Worley et al., 2005, p. 158). People skills are not inherent in everyone.

A second prevalent competency of OD practitioners, research method application, astonished the current OD audience, but has been considered valuable through all the previous renderings of OD study (Worley et al., 2005). Given the

economic pressure in a maelstrom of business failure, this competency should not surprise but instead simply reflects how “the rational and positivistic approach of statistical thinking aligns well with today’s short-term, logical, and analytic cultures in many organizations” (p. 159). Further, since some suggest that a current weakness of OD is its lack of tangible business-results (Andreissen, 2007) a strong research orientation can only improve process (see also Kotter & Cohen, 2002, for the opposing view).

Competency in change management technologies emerged as the third most important competency in the latest model iteration as one would expect. “The competencies of managing the transition, keeping information flowing, integrating theory and practice, working with large systems, and creating a good action plan all speak to the ability to implement change” (Worley et al., 2005, p. 159). This should come as no surprise and speaks to the palatability of change for an organization’s members, hopefully stifling some of the possible organizational change cynicism that may appear.

AI Competency

Largely absent from most of the published studies, AI initiatives discussed in chapter 3 are opinions or directives about what competencies the practitioner of these studies demonstrated. However, there are a few references to roles, skills, or competencies that may be helpful when facilitating an AI initiative. The limited study on

competency of AI practice prompts the questions: What skills fueled their successes? Are these skills different from those needed to be successful in the practice of more traditional OD? Bushe ascertained that as an OD consultant, it was his job to “make people aware of just how bad things really were,” yet, using the AI approach, he realized he had to focus on helping clients to use a different lens so that they might see “how good things are” and how much expertise is already present within their group (Bushe, 2000, p. 120).

Earlier in his practice of AI, Bushe (1998) felt that it was his responsibility to play the role of “wordsmith” if a client group could not articulate their generative images into what he deemed “pithy statements” (p. 49). Reed (2007) mentioned that running a 4-D, a specific framework for an AI initiative, requires an expert level of facilitation skill with pace and activity content. Recently, Bushe and Marshak (2009) stressed that consultants leading dialogic initiatives, (by which AI can be described) should not focus as much on honing such competencies as “positivist data collection and analysis methods as well as project group facilitation skills” like their OD counterparts should (p. 363). Instead, these dialogically-inclined practitioners should strengthen their “skills in establishing and facilitating dialogic containers and generative conversations” (p. 363). Although not directly a question of competency study, Philips (2004) wondered just how long it would be till some type of accreditation requirements for AI facilitators appeared, which, when or if such a mandate occurs, would need to be informed by an AI practitioner competency study.

Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) asserted that the consultant in an AI Summit would play the role of “Agent of Inquiry” (p. 19). This was detailed in four aspects:

- To view organizations as living spiritual-social systems, mysteries of creation to be nurtured and affirmed, not as mechanistic or scientific operations with problems to be solved;
- To work in the affirmative, continually seeking to discover what gives life to the organization and its members;
- To be facilitators of possibilities, hope, and inspired action;
- To continually seek ways to give the process away, to support organization members in making it their own. (p. 19)

They went one step further by sharing what the consultant should be responsible for within an AI project:

Before: Introduce AI to the organization and focus on the “business case” for AI

During: Train groups in AI, Support the Core Team, and Facilitate the Summit

After: Assist the organization to integrate AI into daily practices. (p. 20)

Clearly, the most detailed conversation of required skills for AI was posited by Watkins and Mohr (2001), who suggested at the very least, practitioners interested in AI should possess “solid skills in experiential educational methods and in [OD] theory and practice, as well as the need for in-depth knowledge of behavioral science and experience with group process” and a clear comfort level with the act of co-creating with the client since it is tantamount to AI practice (p. 48).

Since Watkins and Mohr have taught numerous workshops on AI, they were uniquely qualified to write up what they deemed a “chart, intended to provide useful guidelines for professional development of those wishing to work as facilitators and practitioners in Appreciative Inquiry,” but which can function as an ad hoc competency list (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 48). Their years of experience and knowledge of AI functioned as the data collection. They differentiated between levels of practice from novice to more-than-novice with the labels: AI Facilitator, AI Practitioner, and AI Meta-Practitioner (p. 48). “Facilitators” were described as having had training in AI from a brief, but multi-day workshop whose AI practice is a collaboration with guidance from a senior AI practitioner (p. 48). According to Watkins and Mohr, the next level of facilitation is “practitioners,” who are competent client guides capable of train-the-trainer programs, assisting with initiative topic selection and protocol, as well as, ability to co-design and then flex the plan to honor developed propositions (p. 49). “Meta-Practitioners” are “trainers of practitioners [who] can run extended in-depth professional development events for (such as those offered by Taos and NTL) AI practitioners” (p. 50). Additionally, Watkins and Mohr included “Competencies for the Role:”

Facilitator

- Co-facilitating the development of customized protocols;
- Conducting interviews;
- Co-facilitating the writing of provocative propositions; and

- Co-facilitating a variety of large-group processes for systemic/structural changes.
(p. 48)

Practitioner

- Theory and research, including:
 - Social Constructionism;
 - Image-action connection;
 - Role of language and inquiry in language creation;
 - People and organizations as mysteries to be embraced;
 - The emerging paradigm as context for AI; and
 - A wide range of AI applications
- Coaching clients in the following:
 - Identifying topics (life-giving forces) from generic interviews;
 - Crafting customized protocol AI questions;
 - Conducting interviews;
 - Identifying themes from the customized protocol interviews;
 - Writing provocative propositions (PPs);
 - Consensual validation and possibilities for expanding appreciative conversations throughout the system;
 - Innovating the sociotechnical architecture of the organization to support and help bring life to the provocative propositions;
 - Helping the system to build ongoing internal capability.

- Collaborative/AI Consulting Skills:
 - Experiential Education;
 - Model appropriate behavior and language that is consistent with AI theory;
 - Contracting/client relations/project management;
 - Integration of AI with large group/interactive methods. (p. 49)

Meta-Practitioner

- Have extensive experience in a variety of AI applications and settings;
- Be actively participating in an ongoing forum for peer consultation and development;
- Have a firm grasp of AI theory, research, and models of practice and be aware of what is going on worldwide in this field; and
- Have experience in developing and delivering workshops to train organization change agents. (p. 50)

In chapter 6, a comparison of Watkins and Mohr's competency chart and this study's resulting competency list confirms or denies its efficacy. Watkins and Mohr's list can serve as an underpinning resource for students and teachers of AI.

“To Identify and Validate Positive Change Agent Competencies of

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Practitioners”

Rothwell, Sullivan, and Stavros launched the study, *“To Identify and Validate Positive Change Agent Competencies of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Practitioners”* (still in progress) in order to seek answers to the question: what core competencies do positive change agents model? The study began with Rothwell and Sullivan, approaching Cooperrider, the initial conceptualizer of AI, with the idea of building a competency model for practitioners of AI (W.J. Rothwell, personal communication, August, 2005). With Cooperrider’s endorsement came Stavros, former student of Cooperrider, professor, author, and expert in AI, to join Sullivan and Rothwell on the senior project team. This team drafted the interview guide and determined that a unique opportunity to recast the method of developing a competency model was at hand, applying the actual AI approach to the process.

The integral appreciative interview (see Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000) became the basis for the new rendering of the interview protocol. Second to mirroring AI, and since critical incidents have been known to color the dialogue in darkness as the speaker variably relives the negative emotions of the original challenge as he/she recalls it (Brookfield, 1995), the team devised a strengths-based interview guide. This was a unique opportunity to evolve the BEI and its predecessor, the critical incident interview. This interview with its new twist is meant to usher the

data collection method to the next stage of evolution. With the innovative interview guide developed, interviewees would be asked to recount not terrific failures in their pasts (Spencer & Spencer, 1993), but instead, to recall the most uplifting successes that they had experienced in the field.

Their study is an innovative approach to competency modeling as well as an exploratory study of AI competencies, based on expert interviews. They captured the wisdom, experiences, and opinions of 29 AI practitioners as the basis for data. They provided these transcripts to this researcher.

Interview Guide

At the onset of the team's project, data were collected through exploratory interviews (Edmondson & McManus, 2005). Using interviews as a means to gather one's data is an established process and the method of choice for building competency models (Mansfield, 2000; Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999). The initial interview guide was a structured set of questions divided into two general sections. First, fifteen questions related to AI were organized under four main topics: *What AI Means to You*, *the AI Practitioner*, *AI Community of Practice*, and *the Future of AI*. These topics are an apparent mirror of all that is important to AI fundamentals. The final fourteen questions requested profile and demographic information. This interview protocol, particularly the first fifteen questions, hoped to recast critical incident interviewing or BEI in a new light. Namely, by drawing on the basic tenets of AI and more specifically, the life-giving forces

that AI seeks to discover (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999), the traditional protocol was transformed much like an AI Initiative is such a departure from traditional OD interventions (Sorenson et al., 2000).

The interview protocol included many “experience questions” of a complex nature (Spradley, 1979, p. 88). One of the task-related “grand-tour questions” (p. 88) requested that interviewees recount the story of when and how they were introduced to the concept of AI:

Tell us *the story* of when and how you first learned about Appreciative Inquiry (AI)? Who was there? What was the situation? Where were you? Can you recall what year it was?

Further emulating AI, the underlying storytelling component of AI is evident in this and other protocol questions such as:

What was your first client experience using AI?

Describe a peak experience or high point as an AI practitioner. What was exciting about this experience? What did you and others do to make it effective?

Also included were questions of what interviewees found to be intriguing about AI, as well as, exploring the practitioner’s sense of being or philosophical paradigm to determine why AI appeals to him or her, or the extent to which the interviewee identified with the AI philosophy. True to form, most responses would have contained a great deal of description of the memory, mapping out the event in rich detail. “We begin

by being open to what is happening in the studied scenes and interview statements so that we might learn about our research participants' lives" asserts Charmaz (2006, p.3). Just as the process of AI embraces the energy of storytelling of memories, this new approach to interviewing sought to reap the same rewards.

Since competency model development requires a criterion sample comprised of experts and average performers to be identified (Spencer & Spencer, 1993), two interview questions functioned to apprehend who the experts in the population would be through a nomination process known as "snowball sampling" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 281; Patton, 1987, p. 56). Criterion sampling is a "purposeful sample" method meant not to provide generalizability, but to select "information-rich cases for study in-depth" allowing for deeper evaluation of the subject at hand: AI practitioner competencies (Patton, 1987, pp. 51-52). When performance criteria are unavailable such as with the industry of AI, the question of who would qualify as an expert within the criterion sample arose. Fortunately, "nominations or ratings by bosses, peers, subordinates, and/or customers and clients can be used" to determine one's status as an expert with peer ratings presenting "high criterion validity" (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 96). With these goals in mind, the protocol also initially contained the following two questions:

Who comes to the top of your mind as the best external practitioners?

Collectively, why did you choose these people? Can you list two or three

core competencies that these external practitioners exhibit? Or, what is it you observe in them that lets you know that they embody AI?

Can you provide us a list of 10-12 people whom you believe are the best internal practitioners? (please provide position and name of organization) Collective, why did you choose these people? Can you list two or three core competencies that these people exhibit? Or, what is it you observe in them that lets you know that they embody AI?

“Critical incidents can also be a source of criterion sampling” (Patton, 1987, p. 56). It was likely that the protocol even beyond these last two questions would produce answers that would lead to more names of experts as well, such as:

What knowledge base (i.e. relevant theories, concepts, and models) do you use that most support your success as an AI practitioner?

“A good question is one that leads the researcher to answers that serve the developing theoretical formulation” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 76). The interview data would produce rich data thanks to the comprehensive protocol. The complete protocol is included in the Appendix.

Method and Analysis

Based on their contacts and experience in the industry (Spencer & Spencer, 1993), Rothwell, Sullivan, and Stavros determined the population to whom the email message was sent through AI-related listservs. In response to the human subjects

approval application (#21883), an email text was drafted which would subsequently become the guide for every initial request to solicit AI practitioners for interviewing. Embedded in the initial email invitation was a note from David Cooperrider inviting facilitators to participate in the study. The email was sent globally to about 150 practitioners requesting a reply of interest. One stipulation of study participation was experience in the field of AI of at least five years. The email script can be viewed in the Appendix. There were approximately ten interested respondents who were never interviewed due to scheduling conflicts or years of service.

Once interested AI practitioners responded, each was set up with a graduate student, all of whom had previously received a brief interview protocol training. The interview protocol training consisted of a discussion on allowing the interviewee to tell his/her story in an affirmative manner, mimicking the AI Discovery stage, as well as, a brief on the concept of the appreciative interview (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000; Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). Each graduate student then, proceeded unhindered with the interview coordination, appropriate human subjects informed consent signatures retrieval, and any other pre-interview preparation needed. Penn State graduate students conducted 29 telephone interviews from fall 2005 through fall 2006. After utilizing their audio-recordings, graduate students returned all transcripts to the interviewees for member check before submission to project member Rothwell, leading to a higher degree of trustworthiness (Creswell 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rothwell retains the audio tapes and informed consent forms for the study in a secure location.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the notions of competence, competency, and a review of competency studies were examined for understanding and nature of presenting paradigm. The use of the critical incident within research interviews was examined to include the next rendering of the process, the BEI. The history of competency study was briefly explored as well. Introduced was the parent project, *“To Identify and Validate Positive Change Agent Competencies of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Practitioners,”* which provided the transcripts for this research. This literature review prepared the reader for an examination of this study’s methodology in chapter 4. Next, however, the spotlight shifts to the concept of AI.

Chapter 3

Review of Appreciative Inquiry Literature

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature of appreciative inquiry (AI) to illuminate its many layers and demonstrate how it belongs in a different philosophical paradigm from competency studies. No discussion of AI would be complete however, without first exploring organization development (OD). AI has been called “an exciting paradigm shift for the field of organization development and change” (Ludema et al., 2003, p. 7) or even a post-modern rendering of classical OD (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Watkins & Stavros, 2009). Next, the history of AI supported by its underlying philosophies, including the Pygmalion Effect, social constructionism, the power of the positive, positive organizational scholarship (POS), and Heliotropic organizations, dominates the following section of the chapter. This segment of the work culminates in a chapter before proceeding to this study’s methodology in chapter 4.

Organization Development (OD)

As a Jewish man, escaping to the US as Fascism spread through his homeland of Germany, Kurt Lewin was intimately drawn to conflict resolution believing that circumstances could be improved with group learning and collective participation in formulating a solution (Burnes, 2007). Lewin was compelled to develop a methodology that would not only effect change for improvement within the system, but also, to

conceptualize theory in the process (Bushe, 2000). His concept became known as action research, and was specifically comprised of “the interweaving of laboratory experiment, systematic research in the field, and client service” according to Miriam Lewin Papanek (1973, p. 317).

Action research was marked by a positivist leaning. Lewin focused “on the need to bridge the gap between science and the realm of practical affairs. Science, he said, should be used to inform and educate social practice, and subsequent action then would inform science,” the concept of action research was born (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987, p. 150). Further, “Lewin himself said it’s easier often to change an individual through changing the group than to focus on the individual directly” recalled Benne who had worked closely with him at the NTL (Freedman, 1996, p. 339). Schein (1995) posited that action research can have two discrete motivations or renderings: “Action research as defined by researchers involves the client in the data gathering but is driven by the researcher's agenda. Action research as defined by the clinician involves the helper consultant in the client's inquiry process and the process is driven by the client's needs” (p. 19). With these distinctions, action research can be applied both positivistically as in Schein’s first description, as well as nonpositivistically, in his second depiction. In the next generation, Bushe (1998) asserted that “action research should begin with appreciation, should be applicable, should be provocative, and should be collaborative” (p. 1). This aligns closely with the tenets of AI.

Kurt Lewin (1951) laid the groundwork for the concept OD back in the fifties when he began studying change and human behavior. His goal was to understand how a variety of factors could influence change whether it was brought about by force, or, through appealing to one's interests (Lewin, 1951). Lewin's realization about the latter lit the spark for OD to take hold, as groups began trying this less painful approach to change. As such, OD is collaboration between members of an organization as they discuss potential solutions to some problem with which the organization is struggling (French & Bell, 1999). "The classical OD approach to action research as a data-based change method presumes the existence of an objective, discernible reality that can be investigated or researched to produce valid data and information to influence change" (Bushe & Marshak, 2009, p. 350).

An OD initiative launches from a problem platform, involves a large number of member participants, and seeks change to improve the situation while having a long term cultural effect on the entire member organization (Rothwell & Sredl, 2000; French & Bell, 1999) but original OD intellectuals meant for the process to establish "a better and more positive understanding of the dynamics of change involving people and organizations" (Greiner & Cummings, 2004, p. 374). Ultimately, OD seeks to develop healthy and sustainable organizations by tapping the internal human potential to answer the systemic questions within (Andreissen, 2007).

One particular model, which facilitates an OD intervention, came to be known as the Action Research Model (ARM) comprised of no less than eight steps and can often

cycle back to require repeating of certain steps (Rothwell & Sullivan, 2005b). ARM is “a framework for diagnosing, implementing, and evaluating a change process” (Egan & Lancaster, 2005, p. 35) where a facilitator guides the process for the organization. The steps in the typically accepted order are: Entry, Start-Up, Assessment and Feedback, Action Planning, Intervention, Evaluation, Adoption, and Separation (Rothwell & Sullivan, 2005b). For purposes here, the most important aspect of ARM to remember in relation to AI is that OD models such as ARM are predicated on a deficit- or problem-oriented foundation, which is completely understandable given the prevailing “positivist premises” of that time when the process was conceptualized (Bushe & Marshak, 2009). See Figure 3.1 for visual of the ARM process.

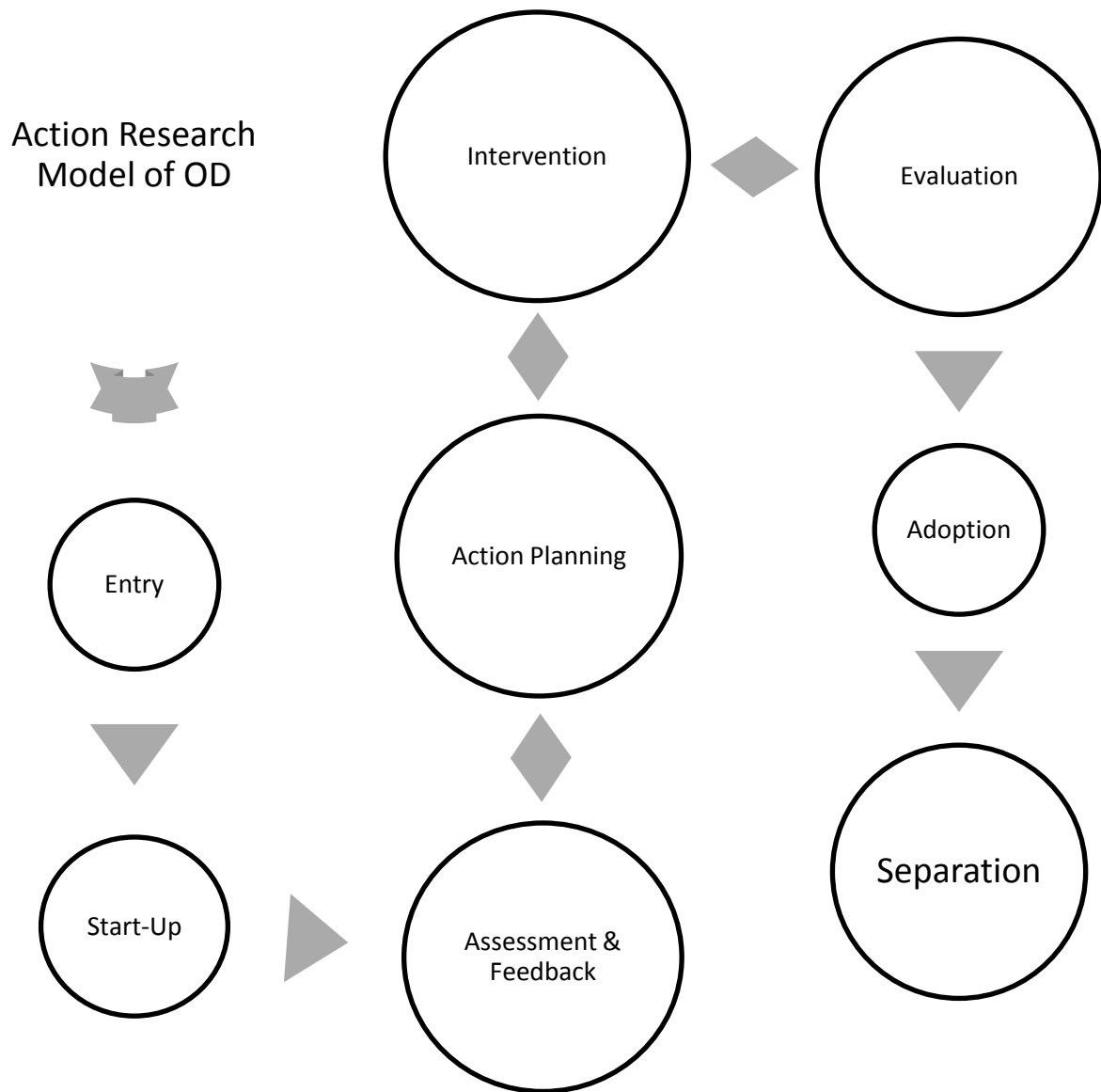


Figure 3.1: Action Research Model adapted from W.J. Rothwell, personal communication, spring, 2003.

It has been suggested recently that OD practice can follow two different courses; the first is traditional OD methodology while the second takes a step away from conventional OD practice to retain an “OD orientation” with its typical rigor without the

strict process (Zaldivar, 2008, p. 8). Bushe and Marshak (2009) called these two distinctions of OD, diagnostic and dialogic for the classic and the new rendering respectively, akin to Schein's (1995) researcher-driven or client-driven action research. Although some would argue that OD, particularly ARM, and AI share similarities and goals: to effect change and to develop new theory, others have different thoughts about how alike the two are and about whether they might mesh somehow for the greater good (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Cady & Caster, 2000; Egan & Lancaster, 2005; Golembiewski, 1999).

Founders of both approaches certainly believed that "interventions should contribute to and be guided by theory and theory-building" and to that end could be integrated to further maximize each concept's strengths (Egan & Lancaster, 2005, p. 47). It has been posited that perhaps, OD is suffering from a "midlife crisis" of sorts where it has departed from its earlier bridging of "theory-based research and practice" (Andreissen, 2007, pp. 89, 90). Worse yet, others have suggested that the "death knell of OD," or more specifically, classical OD, may have been sounded (Bushe & Marshak, 2009, p. 364) while Weidner (2004) believes that OD is afflicted with an identity crisis. In effect, OD has been both strengthened and yet, weakened by its recent adoption of more humanistic leanings in Weidner's view (2004). Further, AI has been called the "post-modern" version of OD in the sense "that OD is evolving from a classical positivist practice, where one objective reality is assumed to exist to a post-modern approach which acknowledges multiple realities" (Bushe & Marshak, 2007 as cited in Zaldivar,

2008, p. 9; see also Watkins & Stavros, 2009). The assertion has been made that OD “is still evolving in different directions” (Karakas, 2009, p. 11). After AI is explicated, a section on combining AI with ARM will follow.

Appreciative Inquiry-Beginnings

The story has no doubt been recounted numerous times, but it is still as compelling, a hallmark of revolutions. In 1980, a young Ph.D. student named David Cooperrider was working on an OD initiative with his advisor, Suresh Srivastva and some others from Case Western Reserve University in northeast Ohio (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). They were collecting staff feedback at a world-renowned hospital, the Cleveland Clinic (Reed, 2007; Alban & Scherer, 2005; Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). As was recalled later, the traditional deficit-based OD approach, “sucked the energy for change right out of the system” (Ludema et al., 2003, p. 6; see also Alban & Scherer, 2005; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). Rather remarkably though, Cooperrider noticed that when organization members discussed the positive aspects of the organization and memories of success, energy increased exponentially (McLean, Davis, Baker, & Anguita, 2005; Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000). When the topic turned to what the organization excels in, energy and enthusiasm built and members suddenly opened up to new possibilities (McLean et al., 2005; Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000). Cooperrider discussed his observations with Srivastva; his excitement for these unexpected findings prompted Srivastva to ask Cooperrider to focus on the observations

of positive energy instead of problems (Watkins & Stavros, 2009). This catalytic observation became the germination of AI.

Since that time AI has become so many different things (Reed, 2007). Watkins and Cooperrider (2000) declared that “it is a habit of mind, heart, and imagination that searches for the success, the life-giving force, the incidence of joy” (p. 6). For many it has become their worldview, a philosophy, their way of living: “As such, it is both a philosophy and a worldview, with particular principles and assumptions and a structured set of core processes and practices for engaging people in identifying and co-creating an organization’s future” (Coghlan, Presskill, & Catsambas, 2003, p. 6 as cited in Reed, 2007, p. 25). In other applications, it is a model or a means for change (Rothwell & Sullivan, 2005b). It is always “free-flowing” (Reed, 2007, p. 17) and collaborative and constantly, in search of the light (Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1990). AI is generative in the sense that it invokes those involved “to shift how they think about things and opens [them] up [to] new possibilities” (Bushe, 2009, p.1).

The Roots of Appreciative Inquiry

“Appreciative Inquiry is not new,” with respect to its basic concepts which have endured for years, explained Watkins and Cooperrider (2000, p. 9). Sir Geoffrey Vickers presented antecedent work during the fifties and sixties. Additionally, he believed that focusing on the positive within a situation would lead one to create that which is appreciated (Murrell, 1999). Bob Williams, in his critique of Whitney and Trosten-

Bloom's *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry* asserted that AI's predecessors included "Harrison's Open Space" concept and Peter Senge's "Fifth Discipline" as well (Williams, 2004, p. 359).

Schweitzer's philosophy of the reverence for life, detailed in his book of the same name (1966/1969) is entrenched in the core value of AI: life-giving energy. Moreover, Schweitzer believed that as one went about an inquiry into his or her environment, he or she would discover life through that simple act of asking questions (1966/1969). Clearly, the act of inquiry is integral to AI for the same reason: inquiry provides energy and life (Ludema et al., 2003). And with the act of inquiry comes change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). Cooperrider was drawn to the writings of Schweitzer (Philips, 2004).

Further, AI draws its identity from a combination of theories, mainly the New Sciences and social constructionism (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). Both sets of theories are much larger than can be covered here but a summation is in order to elucidate AI in addition to a variety of other concepts. Moreover, aspects of these New Sciences such as "quantum physics, chaos theory, and complexity science" can assist organizations in thinking about change in new ways (Marshak, 2004, p. 17).

The New Sciences

The New Sciences describe quantum physics, as well as chaos, complexity, and string theories (Marshak, 2004; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). These suppositions embody

concepts which are a complete departure from the traditional, positivist view that all hypotheses can be verified in some quantifiable manner (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For more than four centuries, Newtonian thought prescribed the world. All science was linear and apprehendable like space, mass, particles, etc. In other words, only objects that were tangible or could be seen were true. Never did the idea of relationships between the parts come into play. All parts of the universe worked together to create the whole, but, remained distinctly separate pieces (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). In essence, all things can be reduced to their absolute parts in the Newtonian worldview.

The New Sciences deliberation commenced with a surprising find. In the earlier twentieth century an ongoing debate pitted the accepted view of Newtonian Science against the innovative discovery by Niels Bohr that particles separated by an expanse can still have some type of coherent connection (Naik, 2009; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). His opponent was none other than Albert Einstein who claimed that any communication between the two particles was utterly impossible because it would require travel rate beyond the speed of light. Bohr had discovered that the speed would only be needed if the particles were two separate entities as Newtonian science would dictate. But they were not; they were connected despite the distance between the two. This assertion was nothing less than paradigm-shifting! Suddenly, the possibility that everything could be connected in a holistic fashion was defensible. It is a “wholeness” approach to organizations as human systems which benefit and grow by (Watkins & Stavros, 2009):

- Getting all parts of a system involved in imagining their preferred future;

- Getting all voices in the system into the conversation; and
- Recognizing that an organization is a “whole” and all parts are interrelated/entangled. (pp. 7-8)

This quantum connection feeds the concept of AI, anchoring its assumption that all organizational members are linked. In other words, when applying New Sciences-esque concepts to systems of organizations, ground-breaking suggestions of how people work together can emerge.

The Pygmalion Effect

The ancient Roman poet, Ovid, told a myth about Pygmalion, a sculptor who created a beautiful marble statue of the perfect woman since he could not find her among the living. The young sculptor had a disdain for real women, but in his loneliness and solitude he somehow fell in love with his gorgeous creation. The soft-hearted goddess of love, Venus, took pity on Pygmalion and brought his statue, which he called Galatea, to life. What he, the creator, had designed became reality (Hamilton, 1942). Social psychologists use this quaint myth as a symbol for the power that one in a mentoring-type of relationship can have when steering another’s development, called the Pygmalion Studies or Effect (Reed, 2007; Watkins & Mohr, 2001).

In social psychology, schemas are the mental frameworks which help people to organize and use social information based on their past experiences (Baron, Byrne, & Branscombe, 2005). Once a person has one particular experience, he or she knows what

to expect should they repeat the experience. This premise is germane to the discussion in view of the so-called self-fulfilling prophesy (Reed, 2007) or the “self-confirming nature of schemas” (Baron et al., 2005, p. 44) related to the Pygmalion Effect. Expectations appear to beget outcomes.

In the sixties, two researchers, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), fueled by the civil rights movement that was embroiling the nation in a dialogue about race, decided to study whether or not belief systems, i.e. schemas, predetermined the way teachers would treat minority students. They questioned if such treatment could result in minority students falling behind academically at an elementary school in San Francisco (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). They conducted IQ tests at the Oak School and then, unbeknownst to the teachers, students selected at random were identified as having academically superior potential, or “bloomers” on the verge of intellectual breakthrough (Baron et al., 2005, p. 45). After eight months, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) returned to retest the group only to discover that these bloomers or “spurters” had indeed lived up to their teachers’ expectations and outpaced their classmates (p. 70).

Subsequent study suggested that the teachers had given more attention and nurturing to the group of alleged bloomers. Ultimately, these “teachers acted in ways that benefitted the students they expected to bloom, and, as a result, these youngsters really did excel” (Baron et al., 2005, p. 45; see also Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). The labels applied turned out to be prophetic (Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000). Conversely, the negative identities placed on the other randomly selected students resulted in such

damage to their self-concepts that studies had to be suspended (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). Further research has revealed that people often bring about events in a self-confirming manner. This behavior has been determined to be unconscious and thus, almost beyond one's control (Chen & Bargh, 1997). Words can have immense power to create reality.

More specifically, it has been suggested that for female students the effects of the Pygmalion notion works against them as students, in that they are frequently, but unconsciously, discounted or overlooked by instructors because of preconceived sexism (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Other studies have suggested too that in psychotherapy, the therapist's belief about the patient can have a marked impact on the outcome (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). The creation of reality can have a powerfully negative impact.

Social Constructionism

As people interact, they are arguably, constructing their understanding of the world or environment. In the mindset of the social constructionist, people create their realities through their words and language (Bushe, 2000). "In a social constructionist perspective, reality is understood as being socially constructed, through human interaction" (Leirvik, 2005, p. 416). The fathers of social constructionism from their seminal work, *A Social Construction of Reality*, declared (Berger & Luckmann, 1966):

The language used in everyday life continuously provides me with the necessary objectifications and posits the order within which these make sense and within which everyday life has meaning for me. I live in a place that is geographically designated; I employ tools, from can openers to sports cars, which are designated in the technical vocabulary of my society; I live within a web of human relationships, from my chess club to the United States of America, which are also ordered by means of vocabulary. In this manner language marks the coordinates of my life in society and fills that life with meaningful objects. (p. 22)

In essence, the concept of social constructionism is to view existentialism from an ultimate team approach of the group and not the individual. Cooperrider and Whitney (2000) expounded: "Philosophically it involves a decisive shift in western intellectual tradition from *cogito ergo sum*, to *communicamus ergo sum* and in practice constructionism replaces absolutist claims or the final word with the never ending collaborative quest to understand and construct options for better living" (pp. 17-18). Further, Guba and Lincoln (1994) explained:

Realities are apprehensible in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially

based, local and specific in nature (although elements are often shared among many individuals and even across cultures), and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions. Constructions are not more or less 'true,' in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated. Constructions are alterable, as their associated 'realities.' (pp. 110-111)

Social constructionism as it informs the underlying philosophy of AI can best be summed up in the words of two AI experts, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) who wrote:

Social constructionism posits that human communication is the central process that creates, maintains, and transforms realities. Initially introduced by sociologists Berger and Luckmann in their classic work, *Social Construction of Reality*, it is more recently developed by the founders of the Taos Institute: Ken Gergen, Mary Gergen, Diana Whitney, David Cooperrider, Suresh Srivastva, Sheila McNamee, and Harlene Anderson. This tradition serves as the theoretical foundation for appreciative interviews, many Appreciative Inquiry small

group activities, and the notion that bringing all the stakeholders together is essential to constructive organization change. (pp. 51-52)

To approach change within a human system without honoring that notion that the members create reality would be counterintuitive to AI (Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000). Further, it is the social discourse that induces or counters action.

Mindfulness and Positive Thinking

What happens often when a person envisions themselves in a future circumstance? Frequently, his/her vision comes true. If one says, “I don’t want to spill this on myself” the next thing that he/she realizes is that it just happened, a messy spill (Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000). This “inner dialogue functions as an inner dialectic between positive and negative adaptive statements. One’s guiding imagery is presumably an outcome of such an inner dialectic” (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 2). Cooperrider examined the world of medicine to draw upon evidence of the mind-body connection as it relates to healing (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). This can be likened to the self-fulfilling prophesy discussed earlier with an added visualization component. Drury (2001) explained that “visualization works because the mind accepts beliefs as being real” (p. 19). Harvard professor and social psychologist, Ellen J. Langer dubbed this concept “mindfulness-a term that most researchers use in the context of meditation, but by which Langer means is paying attention: consciously looking for what is new and

different, and questioning preconceived ideas” (Ruark, 2010, January 3, ¶ 6). Stavros and Seiling (2009) summarized Langer’s 1997 (p. 111) work on the mindfulness concept through the notion that each individual will:

1. View a situation from several perspectives,
2. See information presented in the situation as novel,
3. Attend to the context in which we are perceiving the information, and eventually
4. Create new categories through which this information may be understood. (p. 137)

Langer’s research has included some amazing findings with physical health such as an upcoming series of eye exam studies which have found that patients who go into the appointment expecting to see better than past visits, will (Ruark, 2010).

In the last few years, a book called *The Secret* written by Rhonda Byrne (2006) has swept across the literary landscape and become a best seller in the mainstream society. The premise of her thoughts, those of her collection of experts, and the shared true stories is that people invite what they think about into their lives. They manifest their thoughts. Strikingly, the principles of this movement sounded like the premises of AI, namely mindfulness. Albeit from the world of pop culture, the fervor for the book and any associated media, i.e. a DVD, audio recordings, websites, etc. has been difficult to miss when either watching news shows or reading current periodicals. Although, most pop culture tends not to stand up to academic rigor, the inclusion of *The Secret*

here is testament to the proliferation of ideas that may sound like academic ones but are translated to the masses.

Popular author, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale has been writing about the power of positive thinking as well, for many years. He says, “Change your ‘image’ of yourself; see yourself well, of course observing and practicing all the rules of health, and you will tend to be that which you visualize and practice” (Peale, 1987, p. 443; see also Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000). Byrne and Peale have managed to make digestible for the masses an important concept that fuels AI, the power of the positive image and positive thinking. However, this is not simply the Pollyanna world of positive affirmations, but more of a focus on being “non-negative” according to positive psychologist, Martin Seligman (2006, p. 221). The mindset at play is viewing the world through a glass-is-half-full mentality instead of catastrophizing any unforeseen events (Seligman, 2006).

Positive Psychology

Barbara Fredrickson (2001) said that the goal of “positive psychology is to understand and foster the factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to flourish” (p. 218). Seligman elucidated the observation that psychology as a discipline has chosen to focus on how individuals are flawed or broken (Cameron et al., 2003). Seeing what one has through the lens of abundance trumps the prevailing approach to pine for what is missing. Seligman began the positive psychology movement and has shown that an optimistic approach gives one an advantage in health, mood, mental

state, and accomplishments (Seligman, 2006). Markova and Holland (2005) explained that the focus of positive psychology “is on strengths and building the best in life” (p. 30). Moreover, Seligman is adamant to accentuate the difference between positive thinking and positive psychology. Namely, Seligman (2002) deemed positive thinking “an armchair activity” while he claimed that positive psychology is a discipline underpinned by empirical research (p. 288). Plainly, positive psychology is marked by academic rigor while positive thinking in its simplest terms can be called pop culture ritual.

Positive psychology has led to the offshoot research of the role of positive emotions. Fredrickson and Losada (2005) identify positive feelings as “amusement, awe, compassion, contentment, gratitude, hope, interest, joy, love, pride, and sexual desire” (p. 683). Experiencing emotion has a marked effect on the human body’s health, specifically, negative emotions release stress hormones and cholesterol throughout the body while the heart pumps harder and blood pressure rises (Shimoff, 2008). Conversely, when one feels positive emotions, blood pressure smoothes out, immune response is boosted, and cognition increases (Cameron, 2008; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Shimoff, 2008). Fredrickson’s (2001) research has suggested that the presence of positive emotions broadens “the scopes of attention, cognition, and action and that they build physical, intellectual, and social resources (p. 220). Her theory is called the Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001). Her premise suggests that “positive emotions are essential elements of optimal functioning” (p. 224). More to the point, one could assume that positive emotions in a workplace might lead to happier, more

effective employees and subsequently, a more creative and successful business model (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Positive psychology and positive emotion study belong under the aegis of POS.

Positive Organizational Scholarship

In the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle surmised that all that is done, every pursuit, should be for the aim of that which is good and nothing else (Bk. 1 Ch. 1.1, 1091, trans. 1947). “By focusing on the generative dynamics of human organizing, POS provides an expanded view of how organizations can create sustained competitive advantage” (Cameron et al., 2003, p. 10). Traditional organizational sciences tend to emphasize study of the negative aspects of the business whereas POS searches instead for the positive aspects of an organization which have been previously overlooked or subverted (Caza & Caza, 2008) essentially, “what represents and approaches the best of the human condition” (Cameron et al., 2003, p. 4).

Staunch traditionalists believe that the only way to work with organizations is to employ the positivist approach embracing a problem focus while POS might be considered too light for such business (Caza & Caza, 2008). Yet, experts have been very clear to stress the rigorous scholarship of POS (Caza & Caza, 2008). The ultimate goal of POS is “to increase the breadth of phenomena being described and explained in organizational studies by expanding the kinds of variables being examined and by developing richer theories of the dynamics of positivity” (Cameron et al., 2003, p. 369).

According to POS scholar, Cameron (2008), “reinforcing the positive would be the normal prescription for unleashing positive change” (p. 9). The seminal publication on POS published 23 studies in an edited volume by Cameron et al. (2003). There will be a new edited volume in early 2011 published by Oxford University with over 60 studies (J.M. Stavros, personal communication, January 26, 2010).

The Light

Most life seems to be drawn to light. Even two miles below sea level scientists have introduced land dwellers to sea life which creates its own light. Carl Jung said, “As far as we can discern the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in darkness of mere being” (www.quoteland.com). This concept of turning to the light is known as heliotropism in the plant world (dictionary.reference.com). One has only to hike through the woods for evidence that saplings will extend just enough to find life-giving sunshine to survive despite a thick canopy of taller trees (Goldberg, 2001). Johnson and Leavitt (2001) likened human organizations to sunflowers which stretch toward the sun. Srivastva and Cooperrider (1990) contended that organizations can also be Heliotropic in that they have a tendency to grow in a positive direction. This Heliotropism is “the preferred condition” in human systems (Cameron, 2008a, p. 9). Light is energy whether discussing the natural world or the social world. This underlying philosophy informs AI’s focus on all that is positive, life-giving, and enlightened.

The Strengths Revolution

“We believe there is a human desire to gain a deeper understanding of one another’s strengths (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003, p. 229). Once again, borrowing from the world of mainstream culture, a strengths movement is causing quite a fervor in popular media. And certainly, this focus on strengths is not a new approach, but one that reaches back into antiquity. Plato’s *Republic* focused on the requirement for utopia that all citizens should work in roles that embrace their strengths or innate talents (Pt. 2, Bk. 2, 394e, 441e, 370b, c, trans. 1955). This strengths-focus trend is entrenched in the serious scholarship of a Cambridge graduate who held the role of senior researcher of the Gallup Organization for almost two decades (www.marcusbuckingham.com).

Marcus Buckingham, now a motivational speaker and consultant focusing on strengths as a means to succeed has been leading this charge as evidenced by four of his books achieving best seller status: *First, Break All the Rules*, co-authored with Curt Coffman (1999); *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, co-authored with Donald O. Clifton (2001); *The One Thing You Need to Know* (2005); and, *Go Put Your Strengths to Work* (2007) (www.marcusbuckingham.com; www.oprah.com). The general message of the strengths revolution is that people should circumvent their identified weaknesses in favor of emphasizing their strengths instead, and then, parlay those strengths into fulfilling futures. Further, Buckingham was the keynote speaker at the 2007 International Conference on Appreciative Inquiry, illuminating the pivotal role of

identifying strengths within the AI approach

(appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/intro/conference.cfm).

Cameron (2008) also claimed that “a focus on strengths can lead to excellence and positively deviant performance” (p. 59). Research has shown that building on people’s strengths can produce greater results than spending time correcting their weaknesses (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Clifton & Harter, 2003; Rath & Conchie, 2009). This is also characterized in SOAR framework that was created from the AI paradigm under the label of POS to focus on strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results to create positive strategy and strategic plans to help organization’s perform (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009).

AI’s Core

When an AI engagement is occurring five fundamental principles are at work, all drawing from the philosophies shared here. These “Five Core Principles of AI” are summarized by Watkins and Mohr for ease of understanding (2001, pp. 37-39; see also Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999, pp. 25-27). The *Constructionist Principle* in short, maintains that knowledge about and destiny of an organization are both intertwined (Reed 2007; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). It reinforces whatever an employee believes about a situation from his or her point of view (Watkins & Stavros, 2009). The *Principle of Simultaneity* affirms that change is prompted by the intervention of inquiry (Reed 2007; Watkins & Mohr, 2001); “inquiry is intervention” (Watkins & Stavros, 2009, p. 10). “The

most important resources we have for generating constructive organization change or improvements are our collective imagination and our discourse about the future” (Watkins & Stavros, 2009, p. 11). An idea that projection of collective imagination can create the future is called the *Anticipatory Principle* (Reed 2007; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). The *Poetic Principle* contends that the human factor of an organization is responsible for interpreting its perception (Reed 2007; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). Organizational members decide from what perspective they will tell their stories (Watkins & Stavros, 2009). And finally, the notion that positive questions prompt effective and sustainable change efforts is termed the *Positive Principle* (Reed 2007; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). Further, the rapport and bonding that occurs with AI builds the “momentum for change” that can sustain the organizational members long after the AI event (Cooperrider et al., 2008, pp. 9-10).

The keystone of AI is its appreciative interview (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000; Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). Typically the starting off point for most AI projects, the appreciative interview begins to build the positive energy that AI hopes will permeate the initiative through its search for “what gives life to an organization, department, or community when at its best” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999, p. 11). Whitney and Cooperrider (2000) proclaimed that the appreciative interview “sets the stage for a full voice meeting” where all participants have an equal chance to share and be heard, validating each story as valuable (p. 20). The typical components of the appreciative interview are the optimal occurrence or the best ever experience, followed by an

exploration of interviewee values, and then, core value(s) of the interviewee's organization are discussed, concluding in the interviewee's three wishes for the industry or organization (Philips, 2004).

To sum, AI is the seeking of strengths, abundance, and appreciation within an individual, a team, or an organization. AI honors the life-giving energy that members naturally provide to the parent group. Once the strengths of the past are identified, the future can be planned by maximizing those strengths into an action plan. Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) declare that utilizing AI is like embarking on an "adventure" (pp. 7, 28), a new journey into the positive memories and strengths of an organization which uses the exploration to launch an optimal future. The goal of AI is transformational change marked by "evidence of a qualitative shift in the state of being or identity of the system" (Bushe & Kassam, 2005, p. 170).

AI in Process-The 4-D Cycle

To suggest that AI can be a process is more than marginally divergent given its rather free flowing nature (Reed, 2007). Nonetheless, Cady and Caster (2000) honed in on the main reason models are developed when they asserted that "models help to simplify the world and guide collaborative efforts" while providing the "foundation upon which more sophisticated thinking can be built" (p. 89). Through the years numerous models have been developed to assist practitioners in facilitating an effective AI. The

most widely known is the 4-D Cycle (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 43; see also Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999, p. 11). The 4-D is comprised of four steps navigated as such:

DISCOVERY or “Appreciating That Which Gives Life” (p. 43)

which comprises the initial stage when a group is led to share memories of the organization’s peak performances where life-giving energy takes over and leads the organization to immense heights of excellence, innovation, and creativity.

DREAM or “Envisioning Impact” (p. 44) is the phase comprising possibilities, contemplations, and conversations anchored in those optimal memories within the organization.

DESIGN or “Co-constructing the Future” (p. 44) seeks out the “social architecture” that will provide the infrastructure of the shared future vision of what the organization can become.

DELIVER or “Sustaining the Change” (p. 45) eventually becomes the Destiny stage in some initiatives, but functions as the on-going roll out of the change.

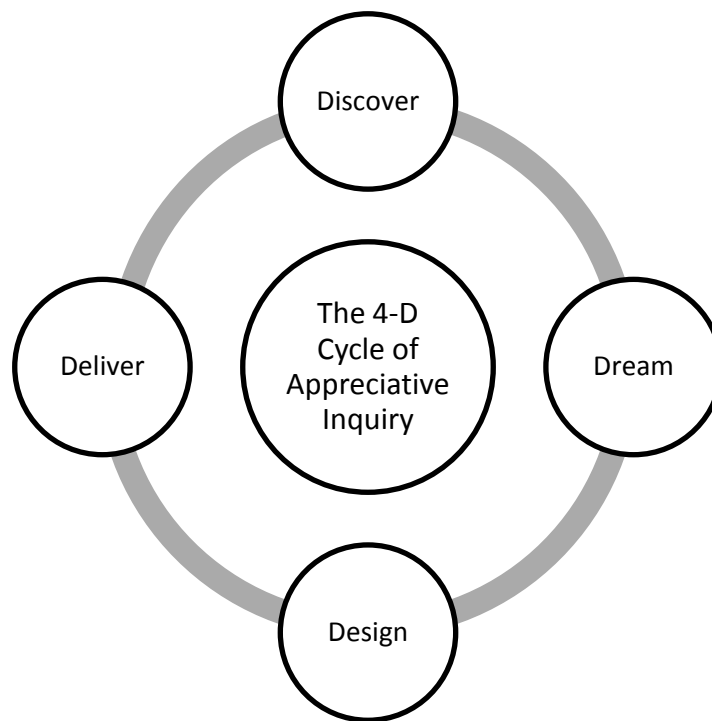


Figure 3.2: The 4-D Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry adapted from Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 43.

The second model of great reputation is the Four-I Model of Mohr and Jacobsgaard (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 46). Summarized succinctly by Rothwell and Sullivan (2005) as follows:

INITIATE: Begin the change effort.

INQUIRE: Solicit opinions and perceptions about what is going right.

IMAGINE: Summarize and feed back key themes and then create new ideas about new visions of the future that could leverage strengths.

INNOVATE: Involve many people in discussions about ways to leverage strengths and realize key visions. (p. 53)

Again, since applying a model may diminish the underpinning spontaneity of the AI's energy, it may be more appropriate to always ensure that the five main processes are elicited in any initiative (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). These are referred to as:

The Five Generic Processes of AI

Choose the positive as the focus of inquiry;

Inquire into stories of life-giving forces;

Locate the themes that appear in the stories and select topics for further inquiry;

Create shared images for a preferred future; and

Find innovative ways to create that future. (p. 39)

As one proceeds through an AI initiative, confirming that these directives are in place, in conjunction with the five core principles, pays homage to the ultimate goals of the AI philosophy (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). Having delved lightly into the nature of AI and what has informed it, to suggest that no AI effort would be the same is no surprise (Reed, 2007). Moreover, it is not such a stretch to see how conforming an AI event to some stringent set of rules or steps might impinge upon its organic and holistic nature (2007).

In more recent years, AI practice has continued to proliferate into other areas. From the world of Student Affairs, Elleven (2007) copied the assumptions inherent to AI

of Sue Annis Hammond, but credits Walker and Carr-Stewart. These eight assumptions are as follows:

- In every society, organization or group something works.
- What we focus on becomes our reality.
- Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities.
- The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way.
- People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
- If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what are best about the past.
- It is important to value differences.
- The language we use creates our reality. (¶ 9)

As more groups pick up on the use of AI, muddying of the credit waters is inevitable.

What is important is that other groups and industries have caught on to the innovation of AI are eager to promote the concept to colleagues (Elleven, 2007).

The AI Summit Method

In addition to the propagation of AI, the application of AI has inevitably evolved (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000). One example of this is the concept of the AI Summit

which combines the positive change philosophy of AI with the OD methodology of large scale change intervention such as whole-system change or Open Space (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000). In general, the engagement can be described as “a large group of people participate simultaneously in a two to four day AI 4-D process” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 32). By 2003, among those that had already transpired, summit attendance could range from 30 to 1000 participants (Ludema et al., 2003). The AI Summit, a moniker coined by Cooperrider and Whitney in 1995 during a global religious event (the United Religions Initiative) is considered to be an innovation (Ludema et al., 2003; Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000). The events are marked by the common features of convening the entire group, always looking toward the future, sharing and listening to reach a point of commonality, and shared self-managing groups (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Ludema et al., 2003). Trosten-Bloom asserted that AI Summits require a generous amount of front-loaded train-the-trainer programs to not only prepare the advisory team, but to create a mood of enthusiasm along with a passion for AI (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). Further, the event benefits from a very stratified Advisory Team to include diversity of “shift, race, gender, function,” and supervisory level (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 180). The typical four-day summit dedicates a day to each dimension of the 4-D cycle, but “planning for an AI Summit is a highly creative effort” (Ludema et al., 2003, p. 91).

Combining AI and ARM

ARM and often by association, OD in general has suffered from a pejorative coloring of its problem-basis and additionally, the lack of emphasis on a continuing interaction between consultant and client once the Feedback phase has transpired (Cady & Caster, 2000). Critics have also suggested that ARM can be an unwieldy and intimidating model (Cady & Caster, 2000). Lewin died suddenly before he could fully explicate his intended use for the model, all of its steps, and how or why he expanded his original five-step rendition (Burnes, 2007; Cady & Caster, 2000). Moreover, Cady and Caster have suggested that “AR[M] is best served when used as a process in which to systematize O.D. interventions” meaning that practitioners become derailed with the concept when they attempt to insert popular OD interventions such as teambuilding or coaching (p. 82). Additionally, “a Delphi study found participants believed that the future of OD should include shifting practice to a more appreciative approach away from the problem-solving angle of historical OD interventions” (Eisen et al., 2005, p. 197).

In response to these judgments of ARM, Cady and Caster (2000) have posited a combination model which takes arguably, the best of AI and the best of ARM to create a pumped up OD model known as DIET. DIET stands for a four-step model comprised of diagnose-intervene-evaluate-transfer. As expected, pundits of AI oppose any such coupling on the grounds that the marriage extricates AI’s true nature predicated on life-giving energy of organizations from the process and subverts its positive discovery

component (Egan & Lancaster, 2005). However, the rise of the AI Summit methodology has been suggested to be the “integration of AI with other OD approaches” combining the whole systems intervention with the positive application of AI (Sorenson et al., 2000, p. 4; Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000). If this combination or some other version of it were to take hold, the new model would require a different iteration of a competency study for practice.

Concluding Thoughts of This Section

AI can be linked organically to the development of competency study thanks to a shared connection. A similarity discovered when bringing together competency study and AI in this research is that each concept has faced criticisms. Just as AI suffers from repudiation (Golembiewski, 2000, 1999; Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000), competency modeling has weathered its share of criticism (Armitage et al., 2006; Teodorescu & Binder, 2004; Worley et al., 2005). In 1973, McClelland, who was in the early stages of his conceptual approach to competency modeling, claimed that he was either celebrated or blamed for the new approach in psychology (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). But additionally, both AI and competency study seek out and affirm the potential within an individual or organization. Boyatzis called competency identification “the key that unlocks the door to individuals in realizing their maximum potential, developing ethical organizational systems, and providing maximum growth opportunities for personnel”

(1982, p. 259). The quote works too if he were describing AI. Making a case for uniting the two disparate concepts is becoming an easier vision. The two can work in tandem.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to define and illuminate AI and clarify its philosophical paradigm which is different from competency study's paradigm. This extensive chapter examined the literature on AI from its history and underlying philosophies to its success stories, but not before first briefly reviewing action research, OD and one popular OD model, ARM. AI has been dubbed "an exciting paradigm shift for the field of organization development and change" (Ludema et al., 2003, p. 7) or a post-modern version of traditional OD (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Watkins & Stavros, 2009). The next chapter delves into the study's methodology.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter investigates the inner workings of the project's research method; it focuses on the qualitative methodology of the study. Methodology is defined as "a way of thinking about and studying social reality" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 4). The use of qualitative or quantitative research is discussed. The process of qualitative methodology is introduced to explain grounded theory and thematic analysis. The data analysis portion of the chapter includes a section on coding interviews, followed by a section on the clarification of trustworthiness as the equivalent of credibility in qualitative research. This chapter ends with a discussion of the study limitations and a brief summary.

Restatement of Purpose of the Study

To date, virtually no research exists on the skill set and talent required to be a qualified performer in appreciative inquiry (AI) and its 4-D methodology. Therefore, this study's purpose was to identify the competencies necessary to exemplify AI practice. Not only can this knowledge assist practitioners of AI in their development and application of the practice, but it can also inform those academic departments offering

instruction to future practitioners of AI. Further, data from the study and its resulting competency study can be published to add scholarship to the field (Donaher et al., 2007; Rothwell, 2005; Rothwell et al., 1999). The main reason for embarking upon this exploratory study was to provide an initial roadmap for the development of AI practitioners.

A secondary purpose for this study was to assess the impact that the strengths-based interview protocol might have on the future of developing competency models, in light of an evolved approach developed by Rothwell, Sullivan, and Stavros. Competency model building has been developed through the deficit-based mindset of research (Garavan & McGuire, 2001). Perhaps in future editions of current models, researchers may choose to revamp their studies to include an assets-based approach within the interview protocol rather than the traditional deficit-based experience, thereby viewing through an appreciative lens. Results from this research may be helpful to positive organizational scholarship (POS).

Restatement of Study Research Questions

The research questions driving this study mainly sought to identify a list of competencies for effective AI practice as these could be pulled from the data. Since it has been suggested that the competencies necessary for AI would diverge from those necessary for organization development (OD) practice (Marshak, 2004), the goal was that any resulting list from this study could be compared to the OD competency studies.

Finally, with the next generation interview approach to competency studies in place, this research project hoped to determine the effect, if any, on competency study. The specific questions for this study were:

RQ1. What competencies can be drafted based on common perceptions across interviews of AI practitioners?

RQ2. How are the competencies of OD and AI practitioners differentiated based on previous studies of OD competency and the resulting competency list from this study?

RQ3. Was the new interview protocol used for collecting data for this study effective in developing a comprehensive AI competency study?

Project Organization

This study was comprised of steps beginning with receiving the transcripts that would function as the data set for the project. In the next step, after reading all the transcripts at least once, the researcher began to open code in an effort to establish preliminary themes and the start of a coding scheme or codebook (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Afterward, the researcher coded axially and iteratively continued the open coding as needed. This step was meant to find more specific details in the data which would lead to the clustering of codes under specific categories related to the research questions. Then, to establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the researcher asked three credible peer coders to code four of the

interviews using the categories reduced from earlier steps to inform their work. They were given the four categories along with the transcripts and instructed to code the four interviews openly and axially as they saw fit, while keeping in mind the ultimate goal of developing a competency list for an effective AI practitioner. Figure 4.1 summarizes the main steps of the study.

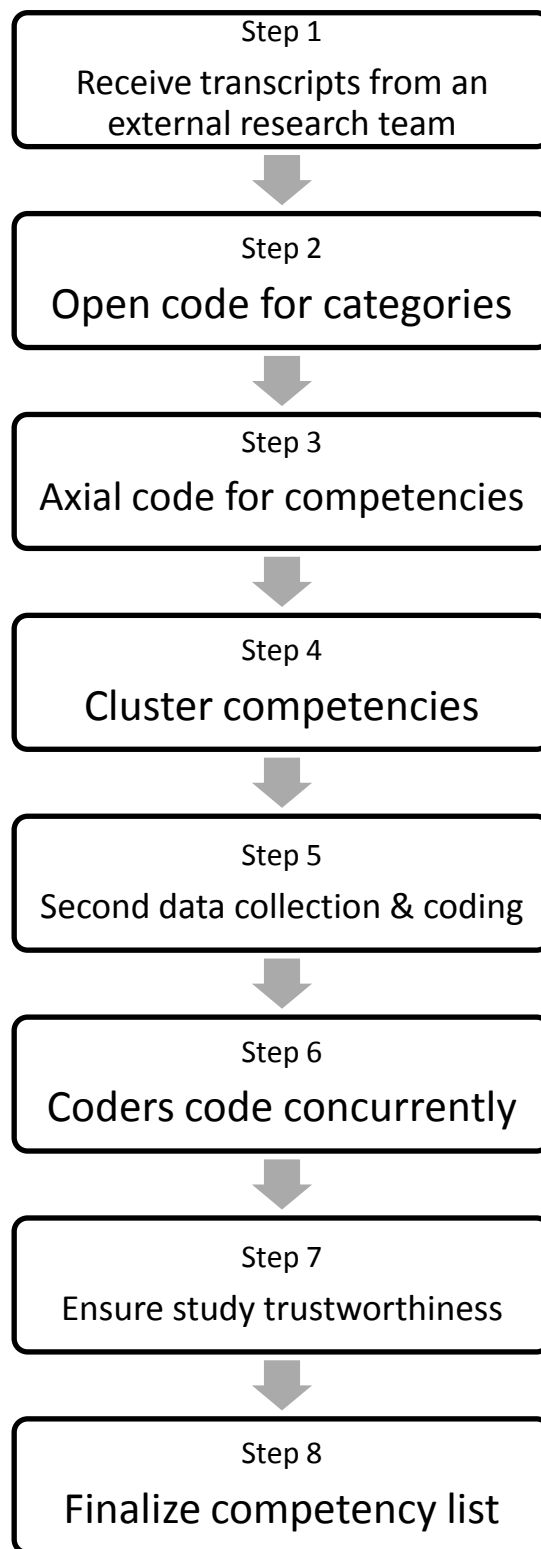


Figure 4.1: Project Flow

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

Section Introduction

Before unpacking the entire study, a few research points need to be explicated. Reviewing the particulars of qualitative methodology provides justification for this study's design. A deeper view into grounded theory, the process of coding, and thematic analysis also helps the reader to understand how the study proceeded.

Electing to Utilize a Qualitative Methodology

As Creswell (1994) and others explained, the qualitative approach is a departure from positivist leanings that have commanded research for decades. Further, Creswell (1994) asserted that the paradigm underpinning qualitative methodology is known by numerous names, including "constructivist," "naturalistic," "interpretive," "postpositivist," and "postmodern" (p. 4). Quantitative statistics allow for tangible measure exemplified by the objectivity of numbers and *a priori* assumptions through deduction, while qualitative study calls for inductive reasoning to produce the multiple realities of the participants involved (Creswell, 1994; Patton, 1987). Research questions develop and evolve during a qualitative study while quantitative studies must begin with a clearly defined research question and a support set of hypotheses. "In a qualitative research project, issues emerge, grow and die. In quantitative research, as an issue becomes more refined or important, a parallel or subsequent study is started" (Stake,

1995, p. 21). Qualitative method has been discounted by the prevailing quantitative intelligentsia as being too soft to offer any substantive results (Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

However, the design of a study dictates what methodology should be selected based on the type of research questions that the researcher is asking (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). “Research design is the plan, structure, and strategy of investigation conceived so as to obtain answers to research questions and to control variance” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 221). Research that proceeds without any prior suppositions should adopt a qualitative format (Edmondson & McManus, 2005). This approach is also considered naturalistic inquiry in that the researcher refrains from influencing or controlling the data in any way (Patton, 1987) and should be subject to purely qualitative rules of reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Also important, many scholars agree that there are multitudes of ways to proceed in doing a qualitative study correctly (Boyatzis, 1998; Creswell, 1994).

Researchers who endorse only quantitative methodology often believe that qualitative methods are weak (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that qualitative researchers will doubtlessly become accustomed to hearing that their studies are “undisciplined” (p. 289). Strauss and Corbin (1998) pointed out that for some quantitative scholars, qualitative research is no better than “journalistic accounts” (p. 28). For this reason, qualitative researchers must typically take a proactive tack and explain very clearly how the research should be considered

rigorous using the language of the quantitative experts (Boyatzis, 1998). This tension between the two schools of thought has kept qualitative researchers busy justifying their methods for decades (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). As Brewer and Hunter (1989) asserted, “If we accept that generating theories empirically is not a substitute for empirical verification, then building theories without immediate regard for testing poses no special logical problems” (p. 61).

Trustworthiness Revisited

The concepts of validity and reliability are not appropriate for qualitative research (Creswell, 1994). Instead, *trustworthiness* is measured in qualitative research (Creswell, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By ensuring that “credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” claims are strong, a study’s procedures can be deemed trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 328). Credibility of the study intensifies with the use of “prolonged engagement, persistent observation, or triangulation of sources, methods, and investigators” as well as “referential adequacy” (p. 328). Patton (1987) noted however, that “triangulation is seldom a straight forward process in analysis” (p. 161), so researchers must be clear and exercise caution. Fernandez (2004) asserted that using grounded theory inherently provides triangulation since it “facilitates achieving conceptualizations based in multiple perspectives and data sources” after Glaser and Glaser and Strauss (p. 83).

A study's credibility may be enhanced further with the use of peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checks also (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; see also Creswell, 1998). Additionally helpful was the senior researchers' expertise, which enhances the member checking of the study, particularly given their long time participation in the fields of competency study and AI with respect to this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Revealing the background of the researcher satisfies the explication of the researcher's role to keep procedures transparent (Creswell, 1994).

The transferability concept mimics external validity in quantitative research and can be achieved only by "thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Sharing all the details of the study is important; examples of this could include the role of the researcher as mentioned, the participant selection process, and triangulation through other data sources (Creswell, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Conducting an audit trail on the study can also overcome dependability as well as confirmability issues. In addition, confirmability can be taken on directly with the use of triangulation or reflexive journaling.

Next, the concept of double coding where one or more coders code a sample of the data can increase the consistency in qualitative study (Boyatzis, 1998). Double coding is known by other names as well such as intercoder reliability or intercoder agreement (Burla et al., 2004; Krippendorff, 2004; Lacy & Riffe, 1996). In addition,

consistency over time can increase the credibility of the study should the researcher duplicate coding after a time lapse and find similar results (Boyatzis, 1998).

Selecting a Study Sample

In qualitative study, sample representativeness is not applicable (Patton, 1987). Purposive sampling in theory provides data-rich information because the researcher has specifically chosen the group in question based on member knowledge (Creswell, 1994; Patton, 1987; Sullivan, T.J., 2001). This criterion sampling works well in competency study. This study's criterion sample was comprised of practitioners in the field of AI, many of whom had been working in AI since the early days of the concept. It was determined by the larger study team of Sullivan, Rothwell, and Stavros that certain practitioners they knew would definitely be invited based on their wisdom and longevity in the field. Names of potential participants were also suggested by Cooperrider for those same reasons.

Choosing Grounded Theory

As experts have contended, the research question drives the method which in this study meant grounded theory was chosen (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; see also Braun & Clarke, 2006). Charmaz (2006) explained, "grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to

construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves...data form the foundation of our theory and our analysis of these data generates the concepts we construct" (p. 2).

Further, "Theory may be generated initially from the data, or if existing (grounded) theories seem appropriate to the area of investigation, then these may be elaborated and modified as incoming data are meticulously played against them" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 273). It is this "matching of theory against data" which "must be rigorously carried out" (p. 273) to ground theory. The theory is iteratively developed as the research progresses, creating a constant interaction between data collection and analysis. This method also creates "a close fit with the data, usefulness, conceptual density, durability over time, modifiability, and explanatory power" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 6).

Utilizing grounded theory keeps the researcher on track and focusing only on the data (2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) asserted that grounded theory seeks "patterns in the data, but are theoretically bounded," meaning that theory is the ultimate goal (p. 80). More plainly, the researcher looks for patterns in the data (Charmaz, 2006) which help tease out the theory ready to emerge. Strauss and Corbin (1998) advised, though, that "not every object, event, happening, or person fits a pattern completely" (p. 118).

AI is a topic about which more research of any type is needed (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Golembiewski, 2000, 1999; Jones, 1998; Messerschmidt, 2008). Resulting suppositions from any of this research would be what is known as a "nascent theory," since little prior research has been published (Edmondson &

McManus, 2005, p. 12). When it is unknown what the data would reveal upfront, utilizing inductive theory development through grounded theory makes the most appropriate sense (Edmondson & McManus, 2005), specifically with the use of thematic analysis. As experts have contended, the research question drives the method, which in a qualitative study indicates that grounded theory is a wise choice (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Grounded theory allows the data to produce the theory instead of the researcher forcing notions and previous theories upon the data (Charmaz, 2006). In this study, there were no previous theories to force. Following these assertions, the researcher coded the 29 completed interview transcripts by spring 2007, based on the grounded theory methodology of Strauss and Corbin (1998) along with that of Charmaz (2006) and the thematic analysis of Boyatzis (1998). Also, the researcher later recoded the interviews to ensure trustworthiness in her process (Boyatzis, 1998).

Coding

Open coding is a “dynamic and fluid” process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). Themes emerge from the data as the researcher examines the data closely, attempting to parse out information that responds to the research interests. No more than 30 interviews usually provide adequate detail (Creswell, 1998). Once the researcher has open coded to reveal themes, he or she returns to further organize the codes by drawing possible connections among themes or categories. Often this step is called axial

coding (p. 150). It focuses the researcher on the categories of interest to the study. As more data emerge to suggest that nothing new is coming out, the category is found to be saturated (Creswell, 1998, 1994). All the while, the researcher is comparing, contrasting, connecting, and interpreting the data.

Folger, Hewes, and Poole (1984) reminded researchers that coding and interpretation are analogous. Coders should be able to identify a unit of text, which requires further interpretation, and place it into the context of the research if it belongs. Charmaz (2006) shared a “code for coding” that breaks the process down into easy steps:

1. Remain open
2. Stay close to the data
3. Keep your codes simple and precise
4. Construct short codes
5. Preserve actions
6. Compare data with data
7. Move quickly through data. (p. 49)

Patton (1990), following Guba, apprised researchers of convergence, or the aspect of fitting the categories together into a taxonomy system for data, often a challenging process. Also difficult can be the concept of divergence, which challenges the researcher to build patterns from the data which can be accomplished through

“extension,” “bridging,” or “surfacing” (Guba, 1978, as cited in Patton, 1990, p. 404) into other subjects.

Constant Comparative Method

Using alternative verbiage, the constant comparative method of Glaser and Strauss (1967) is another depiction of the act of coding. This constant comparative method can be summarized by the following steps:

1. Compare incidents applicable to each category
2. Integrate categories and their properties
3. Delimit the theory
4. Write the theory. (p. 105)

This method is more systematic in its theory generation and cannot be used for provisional testing and discovering theory; it is concerned with many hypotheses synthesized at different levels of generality (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). One can pick out the positivist leanings of Glaser and Strauss’s method with mention of the hypothesis and testing.

Thematic Analysis

Thomas Sullivan (2001) suggested that coding is sometimes called thematic analysis. Thematic analysis acts more like a technique that can be used in any qualitative

analysis than a full methodology (Boyatzis, 1998). Braun and Clarke (2006) argued that thematic analysis should be declared a full-fledged methodology as well as a “foundational method of qualitative analysis” (p. 102). Regardless of its station, thematic analysis is a process firmly positioned in the constructionist paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2006) but yet, it is widely accepted by quantitative experts as an acceptable approach to providing reliability for those entrenched in the positivist mindset (Boyatzis, 1998). Echoing Miller and Crabtree (1992), Boyatzis pointed out that in some circles, thematic analysis is known as “qualitative positivism” (Miller & Crabtree, 1992 as cited in Boyatzis, 1998, p. xiii).

There is no one prescribed way to perform thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boyatzis, 1998), but the definitions found in the literature have similarities.

Thematic analysis may be defined in the following ways:

- “It is a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis” (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 4).
- “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79).
- Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information. The encoding requires an explicit ‘code.’ This may be a list of themes; a complex model with themes,

indicators, and qualifications that are causally related; or something in between these two forms (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4).

Sullivan (2001) reported that thematic analysis is really just another name for categorizing data within a qualitative study. In essence, to find the important aspect of the data which relates to the aim of the research emerges as the main goal of thematic analysis. Further terms of import as they relate to thematic analysis must be defined as well for fuller understanding:

Theme—“captures something important about the data in relation to research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). An example of theme from this study’s data is the emerging idea of living the principles of AI not just in one’s practice, but in everyday interactions.

Inductive thematic analysis—the themes connect strongly to the data (Patton, 1990); most like grounded theory, no prior literature review is conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006); “data-driven” (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 4). Despite the differences between OD and AI, the data in this study demonstrated that effective practitioners of AI will need a strong foundation of OD knowledge and practice.

Theoretical thematic analysis—themes are sought based on predetermined research interest or question; “analyst-driven” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

Prior to this study, the researcher knew that personal competencies inevitably are shown to be necessary to effective performance in virtually all studies at some level (McLagan, 1988; Rothwell et al., 2004). During the initial open coding, the researcher looked for personal competencies and the data produced them. *Semantic* theme, also called “*manifest level*” by Boyatzis (1998, p. 4) —“themes are identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data, and the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84); themes are “directly observable in the information” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). An example of one semantic theme from this study’s is the necessity of listening in effective AI practice.

Latent theme or level—“underlying the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4); “goes beyond the semantic context of the data, and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations-and ideologies-that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84); finding the latent themes in the data aligns more with the constructionist paradigm (p. 85). A latent theme in this data is the appearance of risk-taking or acting with courage as a competency necessary to effective practice. Although no one actually used those words, it became apparent in stories of leaving conventional and highly successful consulting firms to practice AI or the pitching of the concept to a very positivistic client.

Unit of analysis—“the entity on which the interpretation of the study will focus”

(Boyatzis, 1998, p. 62). For this study it was the 29 interviews.

Unit of coding—“the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or

information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the

phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63). Throughout this study, units of coding

spanned from entire paragraphs to one word.

Data Management Systems

With respect to the arduous task of coding, utilizing software systems such as NVIVO 2 (next generation of NUD-IST) can assist in processing the large amounts of data involved in interviewing, allows for easy access to theme searches, and offers a diagramming component (Creswell, 1998, 1994). Subsequent editions of NVIVO have been published since 2002 with NVIVO 8 the most recent (www.qsrinternational.com). Alternatively, of course, researchers can still use a nontechnical approach with colored pens, pencils, or highlighters to differentiate thematic codes within hard copy transcripts (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This research followed both methods at various times in order to manage the large amount of textual data or to be able to code without the necessity of a computer, respectively.

This Study

Study Design

This was an exploratory qualitative study. Data collection relied on structured interviews with AI practitioners with a minimum of five years of experience. The researcher received access to the data set of interview transcriptions. Then, grounded theory through thematic analysis proceeded. Once interviews were coded by the researcher and appropriate measures of rigor were employed or intensified, a list of categories and competencies for effective AI practitioners was distilled.

Study Sample Participants

Through theoretical sampling (Creswell, 1998), the participants were chosen by virtue of their reply to an initial email invitation sent to AI-related listservs, since participants from this group were believed to have the understanding needed to provide information-rich data (Patton, 1987). Based on their contacts and experience in the industry (Spencer & Spencer, 1993), Rothwell, Sullivan, and Stavros determined the population to whom the email message. The team, as well as Cooperrider, also handpicked a list of veteran and expert AI practitioners to whom to send the invitations. The email was sent globally to about 150 practitioners, requesting a reply of interest. The only prerequisite was that a responding practitioner needed a minimum of five years of experience in the field of AI, information which they self-reported. Some

interviewees provided other names for potential contact through the snowball sampling-oriented questions (Patton, 1987).

Ultimately, 31 participants comprised the total sample. Seven interviewees were males. Many respondents reported prior work in OD before becoming acquainted with AI. Work experiences proved to be varied. Business sector of position was varied as well with a mix of external and internal consultants, business owners, academics, nonprofit members, government staff, and authors. Ten of the responding practitioners reported having ten or more years of experience in AI, effectively part of the first generation of AI practice. In general, the data from this veteran group were very rich.

Level of education and also nature of their academic degrees provided interesting and varied perspectives. At least 12 of the 31 total interviewees had doctoral level degrees. Eleven of the participants had MBAs while 16 had earned some other type of master's degree and five had more than one master's-level degree. Academic disciplines ranged from engineering to theatre to theology to the more expected organizational sciences. At least four of the participants had earned some type of nondegree diploma or certificate as well. Formal education is clearly something that the group embraces.

Data Collection

Collecting transcriptions of research interviews is a common practice in qualitative research (Mansfield, 2000; Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999). This study began

when the researcher was given access to 29 transcripts of interviews with AI practitioners by the authors of the as-yet unpublished *“To Identify and Validate Positive Change Agent Competencies of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Practitioners,”* by Rothwell, Sullivan, and Stavros. Accordingly, the data collection of the study was completed through the action of a parent study unto which this research may eventually be enfolded. To review, once the practitioner replied his/her interest to participate, a Penn State graduate student who had been trained in the interview protocol responded to set up the interview and collect the necessary informed consent materials from the practitioner. All the interviews were conducted over the phone and audio-recorded for ease of later transcribing. Each finished transcription was returned to the practitioner for sanction in order to ensure trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finished transcripts were then given to the researcher by Rothwell, Sullivan, and Stavros.

Study Iteration

After pulling the categories from the data, Dr. Barbara Gray of Penn State’s Smeal College of Business assisted the researcher in sharpening the interview protocol to explore any questions that surfaced during the initial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). More substantive evidence about what a successful AI initiative really means was requested. Further, a more definite picture of what it means to be an effective practitioner of AI according to the interviewees was missing. In response, an experiment

with the protocol ensued where a few questions were added or edited. The researcher hoped to answer some of the questions which had arisen during the initial coding process. A second data collection followed, capturing data from Stavros (Parent Research Team) and another practitioner nominated by her through snowball sampling (Patton, 1987). Both interviews transpired in the same manner as the earlier ones.

Protocol Part Two

Although the researcher left the team's initial protocol largely intact, other questions were added in an effort to get at what the researcher was seeking after the first coding process. The new questions were:

How do you define what makes an AI successful?

{What skills do you use to best help your clients?} Why do you think these particular skills are most beneficial to a successful AI (engagement)?

When you first began using AI, what skills required more time for you to master and what skills came easily to you?

What should I have asked you about building AI competency (that I did not)? Or, is there anything else about AI competency that you would like to suggest to me (at this time)?

This first question, although straightforward, was intended to reveal the ways in which practitioners assessed initiatives a success. The second question sought to uncover a deeper understanding of the competencies it takes to succeed, hopefully indicative of more theory-in-use of the practitioner. In an attempt to collect possible data should developmental level of competency become the next phase of this study at some point in the future. This final question allowed the interviewee to provide any other stories they thought were applicable (Spencer & Spencer, 1993) to the study. Additionally, a question of this nature was meant to invoke for the interviewee a feeling of being an expert (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). These new questions still honored the basic appreciative premise of the next generation interview guide while allowing the researcher to examine questions that emerged from the data through the initial coding and subsequently, drilling down to more competency information.

Interviews Round Two

Stavros was interviewed and audio-recorded over the telephone by the researcher after returning the necessary informed consent paperwork. Stavros sanctioned the written transcript through the member-check (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher then repeated the process with the practitioner nominated by Stavros. Next, these two interviews were coded manually. The new questions did fulfill the desire to have a clearer view of what the practitioners see as successful practice in that data confirmed earlier findings. Also, skills and traits remained fairly

consistent with initial themes and competencies, confirming the saturation evoked by the earlier round of interview coding (Charmaz, 2006). In essence, the protocol experiment failed to provide any new information, but it allowed the researcher to experience the complexity of crafting protocol questions.

Data Analysis

As an emergent concept, AI is a topic about which more research of any type is needed (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Golembiewski, 2000, 1999; Jones, 1998; Messerschmidt, 2008). Accordingly, with the development of a competency list for AI practitioners, it was unknown what the data would reveal upfront. Therefore, utilizing inductive theory development through grounded theory made perfect sense (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory allows the data to produce the theory instead of the researcher forcing notions and previous theories upon the data (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz (2006) advocated a more evolved version of grounded theory that fits into the interpretive paradigm rather than the positivist paradigm embraced by Strauss and Corbin. Following these assertions, the researcher coded the 29 completed interview transcripts by spring 2007, based on a hybrid grounded theory methodology of Strauss, Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2006) mixed with the thematic analysis of Boyatzis (1998).

The first 29 interviews were coded by the researcher for categories and competencies of AI practitioners. Utilizing NVIVO 2 software (Creswell, 1998) helped the

researcher to simplify the cumbersome process of distilling the data. Each transcript was imported into the NVIVO 2 program (and later into NVIVO 8 with the removal of the previous release). Reading each interview for details allowed any point that connoted a theme or code to come forward and be placed in the appropriate node (code) list. The following example shows a few paragraphs of the actual coding process pulled from four separate interviews. The bolded areas demonstrate how the program denoted the units of coding once coded by the researcher, but units are not differentiated by category through the use of color as they would be in the software program itself. The open codes (nodes) revealed the reasons that the practitioner thought that he/she was good at AI while the final example related to the competencies witnessed in the experts:

Participant 1: "Well, I think it's the complexity of who I am; **it's the whole of who I am which is a deeply spiritual person, a person who's very systemic, I can see how things work and see leverages for change and very large systems. My absolute deep belief and experience-based knowing that language matters. My** field of study is communication, it has been and at **the heart of who I am is an essential understanding that part of how things manifest into the world is through language that we may have an idea or a sense and then we think it in words, we say it in words, we express it through language in relation to other people and it becomes manifest.** And so the constructionist

perspective is very much at the heart of who I am, so the spiritual, the constructionist, the systemic...I like business, I like trade, I like human exchange, it's always sort of perplexed me why I'm so intrigued by it, but I am and it contributes to my being good because I'm intrigued with the business, I'm intrigued with the industries that my clients are in and that curiosity helps me as well as my deep appreciation of what they are doing. I also believe that a part of my core as a consultant is that I can envision a better world, **I do envision a better world and so that everything I do in relation to this image and vision of a better world, I have something that I am guiding everyone towards in whatever I'm doing and in a world where there's just deeper human respect and dignity and contact to relationships and connection to God, fun at work and that work is an important part of life but it is not the definer of life."**

"Probably, pretty simply, is that **I can model it. That's the most important thing, it's the feedback that I get from people that when they are in my presence, they feel it that I live very congruent, that doesn't mean that I don't have my bad days, but**

I believe in it, I model it at all levels, personally, relationally, and organizationally.”

Practitioner 2: “I’d add, obviously, one of them is **continuously learning myself, and continuously reading the literature that’s coming out in the field of AI and in the field of OD and the field of strategy of leadership and management** because as a **practitioner** that’s one of the most valuable things you can do is to help people in organizations connect with leading-edge knowledge that they don’t have the time to go out and get for themselves, so that’s important. I think also **establishing a trusting relationship with the clients, especially the senior leaders because it is very lonely at the top often** and if they’ve got somebody who they can turn to and know that they’re not just trying to sell a business or knows they’re not just trying to work their own agenda, someone who is really trustworthy and can be trusted to bring his or her best everyday and I guess, in my case, bring my best everyday to help them accomplish the goals they want to accomplish, that’s also a strength that I bring: being that trusted advisor.”

Participant 3: **“Questions, probably the skill of asking questions.”**

Participant 4: “I’d like to speak more to the folks that are closer in

my circle on that, one of the things that's interesting, this is only a partial answer so I'll come back with the full answer in a moment.

One of the things that is interesting and intriguing to me is all of my business partners **have very strong spiritual practice and I don't think that's coincidental, I think it has something to do with their living of this process, but what makes me in my observing of them know that they embody AI, they are affirming of the people around them, they're generous, they tend to bring out the best in the people around them and I watch them using this inside of themselves to work out things that they need to work out along the way."**

An example of axial versus open coding was demonstrated when one practitioner talked about the deficit-based consulting he had been doing for many years before discovering AI. The example is representative of coding through bold-face print:

"...it felt like it was good work, but it was hard and emotionally draining work for, for myself and for everybody and I was actually at the time **thinking of opening a chocolate store."**

The unit of coding was placed into the personal category since it described the practitioner's beliefs about his practice and his pursuit of happiness and depicted his deflated or searching state of mind at his time of AI discovery.

Also, following Burla et al. (2008), three credible peer coders volunteered to also examine the data for codes, specifically, coding four randomly selected interview transcripts in an effort to establish trustworthiness (Boyatzis, 1998). The peer coders were considered credible after Patton (1990), since each had successfully matriculated through a graduate course on qualitative research as well as a course on AI. They received instructions regarding the process from the researcher, including the four categories to code for, as well as permission to create any new categories if they felt warranted. They were told that if new categories were coded they should justify the need for the addition to the original category list and how the new category would help to answer the project's research questions (E.P. Yoder, personal communication, May 12, 2009).

Coding Scheme

As discussed, even in an inductive study, a codebook or coding scheme can be shared with peer coders to guide them in their own process (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) while still allowing them the option of suggesting another category option (E.P. Yoder, personal communication, May 12, 2009). Defining the categories was informed by successful competency studies in the literature after initial coding. Also, following McLagan (1988), "five categories of competencies to be useful in menu development...of inter- and intrapersonal, and cognitive processes," as well as "broad business/industry knowledge and specialist knowledge" informed this codebook (p.

374). From this guidance the researcher chose four applicable categories parsed from the data through the open and axial coding process:

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTISE (Appreciative Inquiry): "The specific technical and professional skills and knowledge areas required for success" in appreciative inquiry practice predicated on application of AI principles, philosophy, or process (Davis et al., 2004, p. 31).

BUSINESS ACUMEN: "Competencies associated with the understanding of organizations as systems and of the processes, decision criteria, issues" relating to business functioning (Rothwell et al., 1999, p. 67).

INTERPERSONAL: "Competencies associated with the understanding and application of methods that produce effective interactions of people and groups" (Rothwell et al., 1999, p. 67).

PERSONAL COMPETENCIES: Competencies associated with the individual's "attributes or characteristics" (Armitage et al., 2006, p. 43), "thought patterns, mindsets," or "self-esteem" (Dubois & Rothwell, 2004, pp. [3-4]) characterized by expressed feelings or demonstrated reactions.

The former two are examples of McLagan's (1988) "knowledge categories" (p. 374). The last two categories were based on her "skill or capability categories" (p. 374). The researcher coded for both semantic and latent themes and codes within the data using personal interpretation to uncover the latter. An example of a semantic theme from this data is:

- “...she really knows how to think about this stuff and think large scale....”

The resulting code from this particular example is big picture thinker, which falls under the strategic perspective code in the AI subject matter expertise category. An example of a latent code from this data is:

- “...there’s a lot of people out there reading the *Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry* out there and then going off like they can do it. And they read it as a concept but they don’t really have it....”

The resulting code from this chunk of data demonstrated the practitioner’s belief that AI is not just another technique for use whenever the consultant needs something novel. Instead, the researcher’s interpretation was to see the commitment to the ideals of AI in the AI subject matter expertise category. After synthesizing all the resulting codes, the researcher produced a final and finely-grained list of competencies in category clusters (introduced in chapter 5).

Method Results

This study’s coding process began once the 29 interviews were received by the researcher beginning in 2006. After reading each interview for content, each was coded using the computer. Reading each interview for details allowed any point that connoted a theme or code to come forward and be placed in the appropriate node (code) list. Open coding of the initial 29 interviews produced the first thematic categories and a total 762 open codes/nodes:

- skills used by successful practitioners
- reasons you succeed at AI
- why I'm good at AI
- strengths of successful practitioners
- theories used by successful practitioners
- new theories added by interviewee
- what AI did for me
- selling AI
- future research wishes
- training in AI
- successful practitioners as named by interviewee (took the form of a memo)

Quickly, the themes began to appear to the researcher categorically. During continued open coding and axial coding, the researcher combined redundant or overlapping themes to pare down the list of themes that would ultimately answer the research questions.

The emergent codes produced fifty-five behaviors, skills, or traits, using Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz' (2006) methods combined with thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Superfluous terms were of course combined within the list of items such as "coaching," "nurturing," and "supportive." Next, the items were organized into related categories. Four main categories were distilled:

“Fundamentals (of AI);” “Personal;” “Interpersonal;” and, “Business and Management.”

At first look, competencies seemed obvious to the researcher. The original list of codes from axial coding was then combined as needed:

Articulate	Asking thoughtful questions
Attention	Authentic/Sincere
Belief in the process	Big Picture Thinker/ Strategic Perspective
Business Sense	Calmness/Patient
Centered/Balanced	Coaching/Nurturing/ Supportive
Commitment to Continuous Learning	Conflict Resolution
Connections of trust	Consulting skills
Critical thinking	Curious
Deep understanding of the process	Dependable
Design/ Planning	Desire to Help
Detailed	Embody AI/ Lives AI
Emotional Intelligence	Engaged
Engages	Enthusiastic/Energetic
Experienced	
Facilitation/ Guiding/ Quick on feet to respond to the client’s process	
Fearlessness	Framing & Reframing
Good at teaching the concepts & process	Hard working
Honesty	Humane/Caring

Humility/No Ego	Humor
Integrity	Interesting people
Intuitive	Knowledgeable/Competent/Credible
Leadership	Listening
Makes Positive Impact	Nice
Openness/Nonjudgmental	Organization Development Skills
Organized	Other-centered
Passionate	Playful
Positive	Practical
Professional	Synthesizes/Simplifies large amounts of info
Tenacious	

Next, the list was divided into the categories which made the best sense to the researcher:

Fundamentals of AI:

Embody AI	Big Picture Thinker/Strategic Perspective
Deep Understanding of the AI Process	Belief in the AI Process

Interpersonal:

Listening	Openness/Nonjudgmental
Coaching/Nurturing/Supportive	Good at Teaching the Process
Establishing Connections of Trust	Engages
Other-centered	Humane/Caring

Makes Positive Impact

Articulate

Desire to Help

Intuitive

Leadership

Personal:

Knowledge/Competent/Credible

Experienced

Positive

Tenacious

Authentic/Sincere

Detailed

Integrity

Passionate

Playful

Enthusiastic/Energetic

Humility/No Ego

Humor

Nice

Calm/Patient

Commitment to Continuous Learning

Engaged

Fearlessness

Interesting People

Professional

Centered/Balanced

Curious

Dependable

Emotional Intelligence

Hardworking

Honesty

Organized

Business & Management:

Facilitation

Framing & Reframing

Asking Thoughtful Questions

Design/Planning

Business sense

OD Skill

Practical

Consulting Skill

Synthesizing/Simplifying Large Amounts of Info

Once again, the results presented here in this chapter were product of the original and first attempt at coding the data by the researcher which was completed in early 2007.

Rigor Constructs Applied to This Study

Qualitative research should not be subject to the conventional measures of quantitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Nonetheless, in an effort to demonstrate the rigor applied to this study a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures were assessed.

After twenty years of management, training, and development experience in the workforce, the researcher was well prepared to undertake a study of this import, scope, and magnitude. “The researcher’s role” (Creswell, 1994, p. 147) has been not only to use the experiences gained in a qualitative research methods course to inform this study, but also to rely on seven years of investigating AI in graduate school. In 2003, the researcher was invited by Gail Hurley, then Assistant Vice President of Auxiliary and Business Services at Penn State University, to act as the historian for an AI summit that was launching in Student Affairs to change the path and reputation of the school’s sorority and fraternity system. The initiative was named *Penn State Greek Pride: A Return To Glory*. One of the facilitators of this initiative was eventually interviewed for this study.

The researcher's interest in AI was enough to convince the larger study's research team to allow her access to the data set of transcriptions which were then coded by the researcher. In addition to providing the protocol training during data collection, the researcher handled all the communication with Penn State's Office of Research Protections, eventually securing IRB approval for this case (IRB #21883). The researcher's role and background are shared here in order to demonstrate openness, transparency, and credibility.

By ensuring that "credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability" claims are strong, a study's procedures can be deemed trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 328). First, the use of member checks, referential adequacy as well as the oversight of the study by experts in competency study, AI, and methodology responded to directives of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Creswell's (1994) call for internal validity known as trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry. After Fernandez (2004), the use of grounded theory provided triangulation in this study and further amplified the credibility and confirmability. A case might be made for the use of triangulation by comparing to data in the literature from OD competency studies as well as a variety of suggested competencies for AI efficacy from prominent AI authors. Further, although it was only for a semester in 2007, the study was peer-reviewed by colleagues in the researcher's qualitative research methods course who made suggestions for improving the coding scheme explication and process. With Creswell's (1994) call for internal validity, the researcher identifies a bias that presented itself during the study in the

limitations section. Credibility of the researcher and peer coders was intensified since each had taken graduate courses in qualitative research methods and also, AI (Patton, 1990). The researcher additionally attempted to provide Creswell's (1994) "rich, thick, detailed description" in each stage of the study in pursuit of external validity along with a full explication of study details, including the basis of participant selection, to ensure reliability of an audit trail (p. 165; see also Sykes, 1990). Charmaz (2006) called for the study of multiple cases; this study ultimately investigated 31 interviews (see also Creswell, 1998). As Boyatzis (1998) called for consistency in thematic analysis, this study employed the use of double coding through the work of three peer coders. Further, the researcher employed the test-retest approach to establish additional consistency over time (Boyatzis, 1998).

The researcher chose to recode all interviews again to ensure that the coding process was sound in addition to using a random sample for the test-retest check of agreement. This iteration of coding prompted a recasting of the category names which became: "Subject Matter Expertise (AI)," "Business Acumen," "Interpersonal," and "Personal." Moreover, an overhaul of the rendering of the competencies precipitated from the second attempt at coding all the interview transcripts. Asking three other coders to substantiate the emergent categories and codes affected the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in the sense that the researcher was willing to test the coding scheme in this way. In the end, four coders coded the same four interviews amounting to more than Lacy and Riffe's (1996) sample recommendation of 10% of the

data. This activity provided an attempt at converging the codes and categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and therefore, avoiding the limitation of NOT attempting to achieve intercoder reliability. However, according to acceptable results of intercoder reliability in the literature, the study did not achieve agreement.

Low results in reliability coefficients can occur due to a few reasons. The easy answer to a low result is that the coder(s) may suffer from fatigue (Folger et al., 1984). Another explanation is that the coder is simply wrong (Arstein & Poesio, 2008). It has also been posed that further inconsistency can result because “coders’ understanding of the categories and coding rates may change subtly over time” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 5). This decline, known as “drift,” may be lessened if coders receive more frequent communication and feedback from study leaders (Folger et al., 1984, p. 131). Formative study, such as this one, can tolerate lower levels of agreement and still be considered acceptable in some cases (Morley, 2009). If none of those reasons can explain the low rate of agreement, then the fault probably lies with the explication of the coding scheme (Krippendorff, 2004).

A question of applying quantitative measures at all to a qualitative study has been raised not just in this study, but certainly throughout the years in numerous projects. Some have pondered the applicability of intercoder agreement to naturalistic inquiry (Harris et al., 1997). Since positivist worldview assumes an unchanging, one-answer-only approach to research, the notion of replication in study is a logical one, while for an interpretive paradigm it may seem contrastingly problematic given

qualitative flexibility and interpretation (Burla et al., 2008; Harris et al., 1997). Burla et al. (2008) contended that intercoder reliability should not be applied to qualitative study. Following Bogdan and Biklen's 1992 work, Harris, Pryor, and Adams asserted that intercoder agreement is out of place in qualitative study and therefore needless (1997), opting instead for the wholly transparent reporting practice of Sykes, where all minutia from analysis, decisions, and thought processes are published with the results (1990) which this study satisfies. Moreover, Lincoln and Guba (1985) also touted the inherent benefit of differing interpretations proffered by qualitative researchers viewing the same event, each induction colored by the individual's personal knowledge and experiences (see also Harris et al., 1997). Although some qualitative researchers may not embrace the concept of this more positivistic procedure of interrater reliability, it is, nonetheless, necessary to satisfy the expectations and follow the widely-accepted process. And since it is necessary, there is also debate about communication between peer coders. Krippendorff called for three requirements for reproducibility with observed agreement measures (Arstein & Poesio, 2008).

- It must employ an exhaustively formulated, clear, and usable coding scheme together with step-by-step instructions on how to use it.
- It must use clearly specified criteria concerning the choice of coders (so that others may use such criteria to reproduce the data).
- It must ensure that the coders that generate the data used to measure reproducibility work independently of each other. (p. 574)

Krippendorff believed that violating the last directive negates the outcome of the study, “asking coders to discuss their judgments with each other and reach their decisions by majority vote, or to consult with each other when problems not foreseen in the coding instructions arise (p. 575). Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed stepwise replication as a method of establishing reliability but question its efficacy. Since natural inquiry is “emergent,” divergence between two separate entities independently investigating the same data, making stepwise replication “a ‘dubious’ procedure” (p. 317).

It is this researcher’s contention that the reason for the low agreement outcome within this study was due to inadequate training and communication with the peer coders. Neurendorf (2002) reminded researchers that a coder’s experience and training are vital to establishing reliable agreement. Some call for untested coders while others advocate the use of expert coders depending on the context (Arstein & Poesio, 2008). A comprehensive peer debriefing has been advocated and it would have been the obvious route to increased agreement among coders (Harris et al., 1997, pp. 23-24).

Communication before and during peer coding was limited and inconsistent. After peer coding, the agreement index was calculated, but it was not enough for an acceptable rating. The peer coders satisfied the prerequisites enforced by the researcher, but the outcome did not provide intercoder reliability. Sykes (1990) argued for reliance on an open audit trail completely, over the use of intercoder reliability indices and their positivist leanings.

Since the peer coding did not produce agreement coefficients that would satisfy conventional expectations for reliability, the researcher employed another approach in establishing reliability meant to capture “consistency over time” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 148). This alternative is known by a variety of names including “test-retest reliability” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 148), “intraobserver, intrainterviewer, intrarecorder, intra-analyst reliability” (Harris et al., 1997, p. 5; see also Goodwin & Goodwin, 1984), or diachronic reliability (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Test-retest ascertains consistency and thus, reliability in the researcher’s data analysis procedures (Harris et al., 1997). When results were compared from the researcher’s coding of three randomly selected interviews more than one year apart, the percentage of agreement was much higher at 73%, adding confidence in the original coding procedure while also confirming that the researcher’s basic schema for latent coding remained somewhat constant over time (Boyatzis, 1998; Lombard et al., 2002 see p. 2). Disagreement arose between each rendering in part due to the finer-grained and more attuned process of the researcher who by the second round had evolved in the process of coding. In other words, the second attempt produced far more specific codes than the more open initial attempt.

Nevertheless, Arstein and Poesio (2008) contended that a decision about a study’s value should not be solely judged on agreement of peer coders. Furthermore, from the literature of POS, the value of creating new knowledge through what is referred to as “experimentation” in that discipline, recognizes the significance no matter the result “for which outcomes are uncertain, and where critical sources of information

are nonexistent or unavailable” (Bagozzi, 2003, p. 199). This study’s rigorous action should be the final factor in any discussion about trustworthiness.

Limitations

As with most research, this study is certainly marked by limitations. Historically, competency study and AI sit in different philosophical paradigms. The integration of competency study and AI within this research was helped slightly by the bridging intermediary concepts introduced earlier:

- POS includes AI which is a next generation OD;
- Both OD and AI are applied to change efforts;
- People resist change unless the effort can overcome the resistance, which AI has been shown to do;
- Competency study is a change effort; and
- Some refer to competence, the underlying concept of competency, as a positive organizational value and thus, a part of POS.

There are connections. The integration of competency studies and AI is not a seamless one, however, because of their different underpinning paradigms. With the next generation interview protocol that produced the transcripts given to the researcher, the tension of trying to reconcile disparate epistemologies was lessened. This was a beginning.

The initial interview guide did not distinguish between practitioners' espoused theory and theory-in-use which could have been helpful in delineating between the two (B. Gray, personal communication, December, 19, 2007). In order to unpack this concern, it would help the reader to know that Argyris and Schön asserted that people follow theories of action which lead them to behave with others in such a way as to be most effective (Argyris, 1996). There are two types of theories of action: espoused and theory-in-use. It is the driving impetus of one aspect of theories-in-use, named Model I to "be in control," "minimize losing and maximize winning," to "suppress negative feelings," and to "act rationally" (Argyris, 1996, p. 398). Espoused theory captures the claim of one's worldview while actual theory-in-use indicates the message that their actions suggest might be their worldview (Argyris & Schön, 1974; B. Gray, personal communication, December, 19, 2007). Further, this often unrealized disconnect between ideal and actual reaction could affect the resulting competency menu. Cause for question arises if a master AI practitioner is observed negating his/her espoused theory while at practice of AI. In his discourse of management competencies, Boyatzis (1982) explained, "even if a person can describe a personal model, or theory, of management, it is not clear that this is the model that he or she uses day-to-day in functioning" (p. 2). One can assert a particular philosophy, but following it on a daily basis may not always happen (Boyatzis, 1982). The worry then was that no built-in test with a theory of action was at play when the practitioners answered during the interviews. Perhaps a future study iteration of the resulting competency list could

include observation of successful AI practitioners in practice to test whether the individual's purported espoused theory matches his/her theory-in-use.

The next limitation was due to the researcher's timing in investigation and analysis. Rather than heeding the warning offered by Strauss and Corbin (1998), as a novice, the researcher allowed the majority of interviews to transpire before beginning the analysis of the data and so became "overwhelmed by the sheer amount of analytic information" once the investigation actually proceeded (p. 207). Further, the bulk of the interviews transpired using the original interview guide developed initially, which as Strauss and Corbin (1998) reprimanded, "is precisely what we discourage because further data collection should be guided by analysis" (p. 295). The researcher did not modify the protocol as coding ensued, thus not encouraging new data or questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) until the final two interviews. Namely, as Stake pointed out, "the best research questions evolve during the study" (1995, p. 33). In retrospect, there is value in his assertion that the researcher accepts.

Some have suggested that conducting interviews over the phone could become a limitation for research studies (Boyatzis, 1998). Since it was unreasonable to expect that practitioners could be interviewed in person given their geographical diversity, the absence of opportunity to collect nonverbal body language as another avenue of information to code may hamper the results somewhat (Wilson & Zeitlyn, 1995). Further, the researcher is aware of at least one instance in which the interviewee was

attempting to drive while being interviewed, which hampered the mobile phone's reception along with her concentration on the interview.

Some might suggest that the age of the data could discount the study. However, the researcher contends that later interviews offered no new information, allowing for the continuing use of even the oldest interviews. Further, the researcher's methodology advisor did not take issue with the age of the data (E.P. Yoder, personal communication, January 19, 2009). This age of the data is in direct relation to the exorbitant amount of time it takes to conduct a qualitative study (Boyatzis, 1998).

Coding is an arduous task. Boyatzis (1998) affirmed that due to the overwhelming amount of data facing the researcher, particularly in the early stages of coding, it is common to become easily fatigued by the process. Fatigue can lead to drift (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009) and the possibility that the coder misses some nuance in the data. As such, this was a limitation for the researcher.

As Cunliffe (2003) asserted, the researcher must realize that self-reflexivity would illuminate the effect that his or her views and assumptions have on the construction of the theory (see also Creswell, 1998). Unrealized previously, the researcher held a strong view that the practice of AI hinged on the practitioner having a rather committed spirituality. Ironically enough, when studying the interpretive paradigm scholarship, the researcher realized that the beliefs of this worldview included an emphasis on the spiritual nature of the social world. This initial lack of realization that the researcher believed strongly in a connection between practitioner spirituality and

optimal performance may have colored an early understanding of the interviews personally conducted by the researcher. Perhaps, the researcher was constructing a meaning for particular interviewees which they did not intend to impart due to these *a priori* assumptions. In revealing the bias, the researcher hoped to lessen the affects as a study limitation (Creswell, 1994) in any follow up renditions that arise.

The study was not able to establish a high level of intercoder agreement. The researcher trained the peer coders minimally, opting instead to allow the peers to inform the study with their own interpretations in the vein of true naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and owing to the course work performed by the coders. Additionally, the researcher believed that the definitions of the categories were fairly straightforward and did not include example codes pulled from the data to instruct them. The researcher was wrong. This was a limitation of the study in that reliable intercoder agreement was not reached per the standards cited in the literature.

Lastly, one category emerged from the data that differentiates effective AI performers from practice in any other change management fields—the *Subject Matter Expertise (Appreciative Inquiry)* category. The non-AI practitioners who read this study may have a difficult time understanding this concept, which was alternatively inherent to many of the AI practitioners interviewed in this study. In other words, if one is unfamiliar with the practice of AI, or perhaps disagreed with the philosophical paradigm of AI, how would one understand the nuance of *being AI*? The researcher was at a loss. Further research could certainly shed some light on this dilemma, perhaps exploring

other fields where one's worldview or philosophy drives his or her effectiveness such as religious-inspired roles or political pursuits.

Despite the limitations of this study, instruction is clear. Transferability is available in the sense that another researcher could learn from the shortcomings noted here and not duplicate the path completely. Scholarship does not have to succeed without flaw in order to facilitate learning.

Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on the qualitative methodology of the study. Once the purpose of the study was restated, the project organization was established. A justification of qualitative research was discussed. The process of qualitative methodology was introduced next, including selection sample; an explanation of grounded theory, a section on coding, as well as thematic analysis followed. Details of this study were then introduced including study participant selection and response, data collection, interview protocol for a second data collection, and data analysis. Thoughts on the study's trustworthiness were shared. A variety of limitations were suggested that compel further research. The next chapter reveals the study's results.

Chapter 5

Findings

Introduction

This project began an exploration into the necessary competencies for effective practice of appreciative inquiry (AI) practitioners. First, a look at the participants who responded to the study invitation is warranted, to demonstrate the type of wisdom and experience informing this exploratory study and then, the findings are discussed. The chapter ends with a summary.

Findings

Since grounded theory is really about finding patterns in the data, the researcher discovered that the criterion sample had a clear, albeit expansive view of THE effective AI practitioner. Before the final categorizing of the data, the researcher asked, “how can this data inform on what an effective practitioner of AI really does to be successful and credible? And are these resulting competencies going to converge or diverge with OD?” The data spoke for itself. The memos written throughout the coding process were crucial to analyzing the data. These memos were critical in helping the researcher to ascertain the direction in which to navigate during the first steps of analysis.

Memos

As often happens during open coding, a few ideas emerged from the data that were saved as memos for consideration afterward (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). “Memos provide ways to compare data, to explore ideas about the codes, and to direct further data-gathering” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 12). The most striking memo in this study held a thought regarding an apparent preponderance of a certain notion of *being AI*. This peculiar code, being AI, became an “In Vivo” code, meaning as Glaser and Strauss intended that the phrase captures the essence of the informant’s meaning and can stand alone as inherently meaningful (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 105; see also Charmaz, 2006, p. 55). One interviewee in particular captured the sentiment when responding to what the intrigue of AI is all about:

- “How absolutely, unquestionably successful it is...it works. It just simply works, **if people really get appreciative inquiry and can get it in their bones, it’s not something you can just do in your mind, you have to truly be it, you have to live it.**”

A second memo encapsulated the idea that skills preceded strengths and thus, the two codes may have some sequential correlation. This possibility was not explored during this study but would have added another dimension to the outcome. Larger category designations began to emerge; those were captured in a third memo. These would eventually be named: “fundamental” (to AI), “personal,” “interpersonal,” and “business and management.” After the second coding the category designations evolved

into: “subject matter expertise (appreciative inquiry),” “business acumen,” “interpersonal,” and “personal.”

Yet another memo contained a notion that would become a dangerous pitfall for the researcher, had it not been discovered. Three prominent practitioners whose interviews were coded early on each made some reference to *spirituality*. A connection between spirituality and successful AI practice seemed an almost natural fit, but in truth seeing it in the data when it was not really there became a biased distraction. Fortunately, the bias presented itself in time to rectify any mistakes in coding. The researcher returned to relying only on what was present in the data and not *a priori* assumptions (Charmaz, 2006). If spirituality appeared, it was coded but it had to be an overt mention to be coded. Numerous practitioners professed spirituality during their interviews, but again this did not turn out to be the suggested cause of their efficacy. An example of an overt mention of spirituality discovered after the realization of researcher bias was:

- **“For me, AI is in many ways a spiritual process. For me, it’s an expression of my profoundest values around connections with people, around valuing their input and ideas, around empowering people and helping them realize their strengths and personal responsibility.”**

An undertone of searching or experiencing malaise or discomfort at the time of AI introduction became a memo. An example of coding that led the researcher to write this memo was:

- “I think it was 1991; it might have been ’92. I’m not sure. But it was in around 1991-92, and **I was at a, what I would call, a dark night of my soul in terms of my consulting practice.**”

Many of the practitioners at the time of AI introduction were working as traditional OD consultants or at least in a deficit-oriented approach to consulting.

An obvious similarity began to take shape as skills were collected that led the researcher to think that the OD competencies identified in the literature were going to be foundational for AI competencies. An example of this thinking was:

- “they’ve got the sort of **base-line competencies of being really great OD consultants and they bring that to appreciative inquiry....**”

Many of the interviewed AI practitioners seemed to dislike the notion of applying a competency study to a concept as expansive as AI, especially if those practitioners appeared to embody the philosophy behind it. A code from the data described this:

- “...one big wish that I would have is that the competency model be a reflection of appreciative inquiry so that it is **open to multiple strengths of people who do AI in multiple, different ways**, that it’s inquiry-based, so that it’s continually asking questions about when you or when we are at our best around being AI practitioners, what does that look like and then, **let people discover the answers on their own...** , [let’s avoid] **everybody’s got to fit into those ‘twenty-two characteristics’ ...for me**

that kind of violates the spirit of appreciative inquiry, to say that we have found and defined THE twenty-two competencies and there's no more to learn, number one, and that everybody has to fit into those competencies or they're not competent...so, I'd want it to maintain the inquiry-based approach, to **maintain a belief in the best of every person.**"

The researcher wondered if purist AI practitioners believed that one was born either with the necessary competencies to facilitate AI effectively, or one was not born with these gifts. In contrast, when the interviewed AI practitioner appeared to view AI simply as another tool, the prospect of a competencies list for AI practice excited them. These responding AI practitioners sometimes had been practicing AI for a short time or did not mention the overt exclamations of being or living AI as a worldview. One example of this approach was:

- "I think there is less 'how to' or tools to develop competency in supporting the lives of facilitators, trainers... There is quite a bit, I see...some books on how to do the AI summit, but that **assumes the person is totally immersed in AI** and the summit is the ideal and end goal. **I'd like to see something around what practitioners do and how they can be more competent in what they do by including AI on the practical basis.**"

Finally, the last memo was a growing list of the experts' names as they were mentioned. This list confirmed the inclusion of experts within the criterion sample as expected (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Names of experts also were shared who either did not respond to participate in this study or were perhaps inadvertently missed in the invitation lists.

After the initial round of interview data analysis concluded, it was clear that the researcher would be interested in acquiring additional data. The two subsequent interviews proceeded in fall 2007 and then January 2008. The retooled interview protocol as described in chapter 4 was used. The resulting data confirmed previous saturation results.

The Resulting Competencies

The 36 competencies that emerged from the data during the second attempt at coding were closely aligned with the initial coding results. During this recheck coding, however, the researcher combined ideas differently resulting in fewer competency topics. The four main code categories were: *PERSONAL*, *INTERPERSONAL*, *BUSINESS ACUMEN*, and *SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTISE (Appreciative Inquiry)*. The following sections delineate the different categories of codes based on the researcher's interpretation of where each separate code belonged.

PERSONAL Competencies of AI Practitioners

The category of personal competencies was saturated. This category appeared in many of the competency studies discussed in this work. As witnessed in Table 5.1, the final list of personal competencies of AI practitioners is more succinct than personal competencies pulled from the data during the original coding. The findings indicate that people who possess a variety of these personal competencies could become effective AI practitioners:

- Open mind
- Critical thinking lifelong learner, driven by curiosity
- Courageous and willing to take risks to varying degrees
- Comfortable with ambiguity
- Hopeful and optimistic, seeks the light
- Self aware and self confident
- Dynamic leadership balanced with reflective thoughtfulness, humility, and no ego
- Innovative and creative
- Quick and good at improvising
- High ideals comprised of integrity, authenticity, sincerity, and honesty
- Strategic thinker with a thorough, organized follow through
- Appropriate sense of humor or playful, joyful and exuberant

These characteristics, according to the data, could have been underpinned by spirituality and/or a quest for knowledge and self improvement. Examples of these underpinning notions were:

Participant 1: “One of the things that is interesting and intriguing to me is **all of my business partners have very strong spiritual practice and I don’t think that’s coincidental, I think it has something to do with their living of this process....**”

Participant 2: “You know some of the best practitioners in the country are the people who are very positive, affirming, **spiritual styles about them. And there is a lot of spirituality in this work.**”

Table 5.1

Personal Competencies of AI Practitioners

	First Coding Attempt	Second Coding Attempt
Knowledge/Competent/ Credible	Experienced	Open mind
Positive	Tenacious	Critical thinking lifelong learner, driven by curiosity
Authentic/Sincere	Detailed	Courageous and willing to take risks to varying degrees

Integrity	Passionate	Comfortable with ambiguity
Playful	Enthusiastic/ Energetic	Hopeful and optimistic, seeks the light
Humility/No Ego	Humor	Self aware and self confident
Nice	Calm/Patient	Dynamic leadership balanced with reflective thoughtfulness, humility, and no ego
Commitment to Continuous Learning	Engaged	Innovative and creative
Fearlessness	Interesting People	Quick and good at improvising
Professional	Centered/ Balanced	High ideals comprised of integrity, authenticity, sincerity, and honesty
Curious	Dependable	Strategic thinker with a thorough, organized follow through
Emotional Intelligence	Organized	Appropriate sense of humor or playful, joyful and exuberant
Honesty		

To further define the personal competencies, the following demonstrates a selection of units of coding for the final competencies list levied by this project to inform AI practice. Personal competencies are demonstrated by more than one example. It

should be noted, however, that the numbering of each example does not indicate that the same practitioner gave responses each time the number repeated. The actual codes are bolded:

Competency: Open mind

Participant 1: "I had no idea what appreciative inquiry was about but, you know, I think responded like a number of other people did which was, **well this sounds interesting and you know we can always use a new tool for our tool kit. So, I agreed to go** to the workshop...."

Participant 2: "One of the magical things about AI is **everybody's openness from David on down and they take it and experiment with it. I think what's so common in consulting is that you sort of carve out your own little niche and you say 'you've got to do it this way and don't you dare change a thing!'** So I think AI is refreshing in that way."

Participant 3: "**and a willingness to try different things.**"

Competency: Critical thinking lifelong learner, driven by curiosity

Participant 1: "Ah, another thing is, kind of **lifelong learner**/theory-guided practice/competence to allow others to take risks, so for me one thing that I try to do is **to really stay on top of a whole range of things....**"

Participant 2: “I think what impresses me about all of these folks is their **commitment to constant learning....**”

Participant 3: “I would say that she truly possesses a great skill in terms of **her critical thinking** and strategic perspective.”

Participant 4: “I think I have **intellectual curiosity....**”

Participant 5: “I think a core competency for all of these people is **openness to on-going learning. The on-going learning, the knowing that it’s all about learning,** and helping other people get that that’s what it’s all about.”

Participant 6: “Appreciative inquiry practitioners who embody this are people who combine an open heart and **an intense curiosity** and a kind of focus on what is best and most life giving in any situation. They tend to be people who are **not judgmental but are very discerning.**”

Competency: Courageous and willing to take risks to varying degrees

Participant 1: “and [I] said, ‘Well Honey, I think I’m ready **to leave [X] Consulting...**I can do any kind of work I want to do using Appreciative Inquiry. I can do Leadership Development, Team Building, Strategic Planning, any of the things that I really enjoy

doing, I think I could use this approach or philosophy and so this gives me a kind of a basis for **setting up my own practice.**”

Participant 2: “I guess another one would be a sort of fearlessness or an enthusiasm for building better futures **jumping into it with both feet even if it feels like it’s over your head**, to just really go for building something new, trying something new.”

Competency: Comfortable with ambiguity

Participant 1: “...the **ability to deal with the uncertainty and the messiness of qualitative narrative data.**”

Participant 2: “The other part of me that underpins my success is the **comfort with ambiguity and emergence.**”

Participant 3: “...**that we don’t have the answers, that we’re continuously creating, and what we’re going to create in the next moment or what we’re going to create in the next hour or what we’re going to create in the next day or the next ten years has not been created yet, and so we can’t have all the answers and it really does have to be a continuous process of inquiry and asking questions and trying to find out new stuff and discover new stuff and create new ideas.**”

Competency: Hopeful and optimistic, seeks the light

Participant 1: “...**a ferocious commitment to and belief in the power of the positive** because it's always very easy for client systems to fall back on old ways of thinking and doing things especially when things get tough in the middle of a change initiative and there's a lot of uncertainty and they're not sure where it's going to end up, it's easy for people to revert back to the old ways of doing things, so really just staying the course and **believing the positive approach is important....**”

Participant 2: “And so I guess it goes back to being inquisitive. And I think you have to be a very **positive** professional because clients can be in despair a lot....”

Participant 3: “I think there are some people that naturally gravitate toward this work. **Who are positive and affirmative and affirming and who basically who have...the glass is almost full.**”

Participant 4: “**I am an optimist.**”

Competency: Self aware and self confident

Participant 1: “Ok, I think that **I truly know myself and have a full awareness that I operate from my core values set, so when you're really aware of who you are, your values, where you're**

going, you have your own vision and then, what your purpose is everyday that you can be very conscious that you're in alignment with the person at work, or your department or your organization."

Participant 2: "**Self-awareness and self-confidence**... Being able to recognize that and realize that if something's not working I've just asked a question that's not quite as good as it could be. So finding another question and not taking it personally."

Participant 3: "**I bring confidence. I have a lot of assurance and confidence** and I think that helps people a lot during [AI]...."

Participant 4: "I have a **much better understanding of myself**. And the AI principles have actually helped me do that."

Participant 5: "**Self awareness knowledge of self** that I think are all really important in how one is as an AI practitioner."

Competency: Dynamic leadership balanced with reflective thoughtfulness, humility, and no ego

Participant 1: "**Definitely leadership, strong qualities of leadership. The ability to get people engaged.**"

Participant 2: "**I have developed... leadership abilities....**"

Participant 3: "There is **no ego** in any of them. It's really a wonderful experience to work with them."

Participant 4: “And I believe that we need to make sure that the people that we are training understand that **their ego shouldn’t come to the table** and the ego cannot be left behind....”

Competency: Innovative and creative

Participant 1: “...I think that all of them have gone out and sort of broken new ground, done things that we haven’t thought were possible before...the capacity to creatively adapt the material is one of them and another is the capacity to really work well with the system to design what the system needs, creative adapting I think.”

Participant 2: “they are joyful, effective and **creative**....”

Participant 3: “he is a tremendous practitioner partly because I think he so well straddles the world of practice and practice development. I mean, **he is an innovator in terms of practice. He is an innovator in terms of theory. And, he is able to innovate in ways that engage and support client systems to take them to levels of change and performance that they would never be able to imagine without him.**”

Participant 4: “Another strength is **creativity**.”

Competency: Quick and good at improvising

Participant 1: “And I’m just kind of **improvising, you know in improvisation you really build a knowledge base and you’re really doing the particular things right at that moment and improvisation is not necessarily without preparation, in fact the best improvisers do a lot of preparation.** So to me that’s one key area.”

Participant 2: “the skill that I really like in doing that is **responding in the moment** to people's questions...comes out of these **instantaneous responses** that just come out of the depths from inside of me somewhere.”

Participant 3: “I think that I am flexible, that I can move in a variety of way **in the moment. I would say flexible and quick. You know, I can get it quickly,** I can see where things are needing to go. So being flexible, being able to move, but **move in a fairly quick way.**”

Competency: High ideals comprised of integrity, authenticity, sincerity, and honesty

Participant 1: “The third thing for me, I think, that people tell me about is **integrity.** I mean, I, I think that **I am known for telling clients when, when I can’t help them. Telling clients when I think somebody else would be better for them. Telling clients when I think that what they’re asking for is not going to, you know, get**

the results that they want to achieve. And, I think that people appreciate that.

Participant 2: “My **authenticity and conviction**, when I am working from an AI perspective.”

Participant 3: “I think the ethical issues of AI practitioners are the same ethical issues of organizational development consultants. Do no harm. **Present yourself with integrity.** Do what the organization needs, not what you want to do.”

Participant 4: “The truth not as a capital ‘t’ but **honesty in communication and intention is essential to a process of moving into alignment.**”

Competency: Strategic thinker with a thorough, organized follow through

Participant 1: “...the skills that I have in thinking about and **strategizing around change in complex systems** is another skill that I use with clients.”

Participant 2: “...possesses a **strategic perspective that allows organizations to evolve seemingly seamlessly with the AI process.**”

Participant 3: “...**strategic perspective. She is able to see the big picture....**”

Participant 4: "...from a skills standpoint, I'm a very **organized...I'm very thorough...and dependable...I follow through....**"

Participant 5: "because I am **a whole picture strategic thinking person, I see the whole big picture** and I can see how to break it down into chunks so we can work with a chunk at a time."

Competency: Appropriate sense of humor or playful, joyful and exuberant

Participant 1: "I also believe that **I have a pretty good sense of humor, not as in joke telling but just sort of a relaxed way in front of groups that enables people to sort of relax into the relational part of the process...to relax into it and enjoy it.**"

Participant 2: "And they're just **very exuberant, and they bring a lot of enthusiasm** and spontaneity...."

Participant 3: "The other thing is that **I really like helping people laugh and having what I think is a good sense of humor.**"

Participant 4: "But I think one of his core competencies – if you can believe this – is **humor. He makes the metaphors work.**"

INTERPERSONAL Competencies of AI Practitioners

The interpersonal category remained very close to the original emergent coded list of interpersonal competencies as can be seen in Table 5.2. Although counting the number of times a concept appears in the data is not the goal of qualitative study (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009), the most frequently mentioned competency was “listening,” with nineteen interviews naming it out of the initial twenty-nine interviews. This again figured prominently in the final two interviews as well. The numbering of each example does not necessarily indicate that the same practitioner gave responses each time the participant number is repeated. The interpersonal competencies for AI practice found in the data were:

- Appreciative listening
- Great teacher
- Instills trust
- Treasures others
- Need to be helpful
- Collaborative, creates community, connections and inclusive
- Holds others accountable
- Gives away the show
- Patient
- Affirming, great mentor, and confidence-inspiring coach

The data were informed by a clear underlying motive—a desire to make a difference in society and have a positive impact. This theme was certainly not a surprise in a helping field such as AI. Example codes depicting a desire to have impact were:

Participant 1: “...that **they really make a difference in the work that they do.**”

Participant 2: “I think this is part of it: I think I came here to the earth **to do something really important for the world...**we all did....”

Participant 3: “all he cares about is that people use it, **that [it] makes a difference.** It’s evident that all he’s about sharing the knowledge rather than trying to get credit for it.”

Table 5.2

Interpersonal Competencies of AI Practitioners

First Coding Attempt	Second Coding Attempt
Listening	Appreciative listening
Openness/Nonjudgmental	Great teacher
Coaching/Nurturing/Supportive	Instills trust
Good at Teaching the Process	Treasures others
Establishing Connections of Trust	Need to be helpful
Engages	Collaborative, creates community, connections and inclusive

Other-centered	Holds others accountable
Humane/Caring	Gives away the show
Makes Positive Impact	Patient
Articulate	Affirming, great mentor, and confidence-inspiring coach
Desire to Help	
Intuitive	
Leadership	

To further define the interpersonal competencies, the following demonstrates a selection of units of coding for the final interpersonal competencies list levied by this project. Some of the interpersonal competencies are demonstrated by multiple examples to provide rich, thick description (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 1994; Patton, 1990). The actual interpersonal codes are bolded:

Competency: Appreciative listening

Participant 1: "I am a **very good listener....**"

Participant 2: "Well, **very active and engaged listening** and communication that clarifies the needs and wants of the clients or what the client wants to happen...."

Participant 3: "What I try to do most and I think I am successful at is **listening.**"

Participant 4: "...the **listening** is a huge part of it... really listening with empathy, and...and, **being able to impart that reality for that for that moment that I'm with that person what they're saying is all that matters....**"

Participant 5: "...that **listening for what is really alive is an art.**"

Competency: Great teacher

Participant 1: "**I help my clients by teaching, I'm a good teacher....**"

Participant 2: "**She's a great teacher.**"

Participant 3: "All three of them are great in that they are really **good teachers** and mentors, and through the whole process they've really been able to guide us into becoming better practitioners."

Competency: Instills trust

Participant 1: "**I'm someone that tends to be perceived as trustworthy, but I also think I am quite articulate and that I have the ability to use my words to encourage people to try something and to help them trust that it's the right thing.**"

Participant 2: "...and the head people are there and they're really getting into it and they're saying "Can we do this, can we do this?"

And she's able with her competence because I think that **enables them to trust her**, she just says, "Just keep with it"-kind of thing. She builds the bridge of their willingness to take risk in something when it's not so clear to them what the pay-off is, so that enable the appreciative inquiry initiative to continue to move even when they're not sure because she's established a credibility that they're saying, '**Ok, I'll trust you to go further.**' So, to me that's a big thing."

Participant 3: "when they're with me, there's no sense of being 'shysted' ...**there's no trust issues**...none of that...I think that's really important and maybe that would be a separate one...**establishing trust**...."

Participant 4: "...someone who is really **trustworthy and can be trusted to bring his or her best everyday** and I guess, in my case, bring my best everyday to help them accomplish the goals they want to accomplish, that's also a strength that I bring: **being that trusted advisor.**"

Competency: Treasures others

Participant 1: "Actually, I could go on and on, but I think what stands out for me as making these folks so outstanding is **their huge generosity** within the AI

community, but that's also **generosity of spirit** in working with their clients. **They really care** about their clients, they connect with their clients, and meet the needs of the client."

Participant 2: "I think one of them is **the profound respect for the dignity of every human being**...that's one of my core values. And this (AI) in one sense enables me to live that out."

Participant 3: "...and how they're using that philosophy to engage people **in caring relationships**...And I think that's what intrigues me in how taking an appreciative inquiry approach and adopting that philosophy in just in the way that you live, you engage in **caring relationships with people**. So you actually **care**."

Participant 3: "I think that people who really embody this really have an **enormous reverence for life**. And faith in life. Capacity for life."

Competency: Need to be helpful

Participant 1: "**So in my being, it is that desire to help individuals**...teams of people, organizations of people, to move up a notch. That sort of drives my whole process and AI is an incredible way of doing that, because it is so affirming."

Participant 2: "...that **I need to be helpful and I like to be helpful....**"

Competency: Collaborative, creates community, connections and inclusive

Participant 1: "I come from a very deep place with it... **it's as close to 'Love thy neighbor' as you can get without talking religion. It sort of gives voice to my intuitive sense that it's the best way for us to go on together as a world.**"

Participant 2: "What intrigues me most about it today is the openness with which all the practitioners **are willing to share** the various models, and the various training tools, the various experiences, listservs, and AI comments."

Participant 3: "I don't know, I just think that we are a **community** of thinkers-scholars-practitioners...and **we are all working and adding to it [AI]....**"

Competency: Holds others accountable

Participant 1: "I'm very responsive; **I follow up** and follow through"

Participant 2: "...and doesn't let go and **manages a client in a way that raises their level of contribution and accountability.**"

Participant 3: "But trying, you know, I want to give it away, I don't need to own it. I want to give it away to the client as much as they

are capable of doing their own work. You know helping them, giving it away. I think that I enjoy that, **I like to be able to give it away and help them do their own work but not do it for them.**"

Competency: Gives away the show

Participant 1: "He always found a way to make sure I **showed up powerfully with clients. So his willingness to give away his knowledge, give away his experience and position me as an equal** was incredibly impressive. He is the benchmark which by now I judge external consultants."

Participant 2: "...they all have an understated, introverted energy to connect to easily. **So when they are present, there is room for me to be present too. Some people fill the space with who they are, and David and Jim and Diana leave the space for others to be present.**"

Participant 3: "I think I do that **not being the show** very well, in fact, sometimes **I get a little bit unnoticed and that's ok with me.**"

Participant 4: "You also have the ability to help people see what it is they do want and the direction they want to

move. **Not because you are bringing that agenda to them but because you can listen in silhouette.”**

Competency: Patient

Participant 1: “So in any situation I have the capacity **to stay calm, centered and patient....”**

Participant 2: **“it’s about calming them down and reducing anxiety because in health care, people are very concrete and they’re used to hiring somebody to fix the way pharmaceuticals are delivered or to do whatever equipment, or whatever, but they don’t have a lot of experience with relational processes and how you build kind of a consciousness and a direction together with people and so I find my clients really need a lot of preparation, bolstering, and anxiety reduction as we go into AI on any given project”**

Participant 3: “The second skill that I feel is very, very vital is the skill of **patience**. The knowledge to know that the process will take longer....”

Competency: Affirming, great mentor, and confidence-inspiring coach

Participant 1: **“...they are affirming of the people around them, they’re generous, they tend to bring out the best in**

the people around them and I watch them using this inside of themselves to work out things that they need to work out along the way.”

Participant 2: “I said, great listening, good facilitation, inordinately positive attitude, and **affirming attitude....**”

Participant 3: “Because she always **pushes my thinking** and then **always helps...she can be available** to go over a design or edit and **encourages me** to do the same”

BUSINESS ACUMEN Competencies of AI Practitioners

The next category to be parsed was the business acumen, which was not mentioned as often in either coding results activity performed by the researcher. A comparison of resulting competencies from each coding is displayed in Table 5.3. Despite the rare mention for business-oriented competencies, “facilitation” was indicated 17 times in the original 29 interviews, and again mentioned in the final round of interviewing. The competencies were:

- Facilitation skills
- Appreciative framing & reframing
- Asking meaningful questions
- Effective synthesizer of large amounts of information
- Firm grasp of traditional OD models, process, and history

- Results driven to achieve client's goal and to demonstrate success of AI
- Good at designing initiatives
- Experienced consultant grounded in theory and practice
- Identifies client's core values, industry, and culture, and speak their language

Overall, the participants were very concerned about doing good business, which was professional and responsible, but a few were clear that what they do is not about getting a job or selling their services. Codes that demonstrated this belief were:

- "I think also **establishing a trusting relationship with the clients, especially the senior leaders because it is very lonely at the top often and if they've got somebody who they can turn to and know that they're not just trying to sell a business or knows they're not just trying to work their own agenda....**"
- "I am sincere in my desire to help the people that I'm with...and that is first and foremost.... **Whether I get any business out of it...whether I make any money...it's not irrelevant, but it's pretty far down on my list....**"

Instead, practicing AI is a "way of being" for practitioners such as these.

Table 5.3

Business Acumen Competencies of AI Practitioners

First Coding Attempt

Second Coding Attempt

Facilitation	Facilitation skills
Framing & Reframing	Appreciative framing & reframing
Asking Thoughtful Questions	Asking meaningful questions
Synthesizing/Simplifying Large Amounts of Info	Effective synthesizer of large amounts of information
OD Skill	Firm grasp of traditional OD models, process, and history
Business sense	Results driven to achieve client's goal and to demonstrate success of AI
Design/Planning	Good at designing initiatives
Consulting Skill	Experienced consultant grounded in theory and practice
Practical	Identifies client's core values, industry, and culture, and speak their language

To further define the competencies, the following demonstrates a selection of units of coding for the final list levied by this project. The words of the practitioners are descriptive. Again, participant numbers are repeated randomly. The actual codes are bolded:

Competency: Facilitation skills

Participant 1: “and what came easily was the positive, appreciative nature of AI, and what was easy was **the facilitation skills required to do AI**, it wasn’t that I had the answers but that **I could facilitate a group....**”

Participant 2: “but the way, a way to be in a group that helps to move a group forward and **to effectively facilitate** and immerse myself in the group but also at the same time to keep myself at arm’s length, so that I can see what is going on, so I can fix it, is another piece. So it’s **my capabilities as a group facilitator.**”

Participant 3: “I guess one of those skills would be helping them with...**facilitation skills....**”

Participant 4: “...**facilitating. I have a long history of being a facilitator of change...**So I would say that that’s my central skill, facilitating, whether it’s facilitating their understanding of what they’re looking for...So just being able to facilitate that in a way that keeps people on board, you know, not feeling confused so that they don’t understand what it is. I’m a facilitator, that’s my role all the way through, **helping people get a clear view of what it is that they want....**”

Competency: Appreciative framing & reframing

Participant 1: “One of the mantras I use on myself is ‘help me see this differently.’ I think I have the skill of **reframing that allows others to begin to see things differently**. And I collect specific tools like optical illusions and other practices and exercises that I can do with groups to help them open up and don't believe everything they think!”

Participant 2: “...rather than saying, ‘why aren’t we talking,’ I asked, ‘What are we afraid of?’ **It is an art of framing questions.**”

Participant 3: “And that is a person that is capable of **reframing or coming up with different assumptions or paradigms that shift things into the positive.**”

Participant 4: “being able to apply **reframing**; to be able to hear somebody complaining or being deficit oriented approach; open and to being able to engage that person, in not just showing them, **maybe offer them an alternative**. But engage that persons thinking in any way about the situation or the problem.”

Participant 5: “**the ability to constantly reframe situations into what people do want away from what isn’t working and what they don’t want. So that when someone says complaint, complaint, complaint, what you hear is hunger, hunger, hunger.**”

Competency: Asking Meaningful Questions

Participant 1: **“Asking questions that get to the heart of things and that really keep them focused on what's possible and what matters to them.”**

Participant 2: **“Knowing the right questions to ask and not being afraid of asking them; it opens doors.”**

Participant 3: **“I really like how the appreciative approach gives me the opportunity to ask meaningful and powerful questions.”**

Participant 4: **“Asking questions that get to the heart of things and that really keep them focused on what's possible and what matters to them.”**

Competency: Effective synthesizer of large amounts of information

Participant 1: I'm a **very good synthesizer, I help people make sense of things, perspective....”**

Participant 2: **“I think that ability to synthesize large amounts of information with the client system and figure out a way of how it breaks into serviceable parts, I think that is really what I bring to my clients.”**

Competency: Firm grasp of traditional OD models, process, and history

Participant 1: **“I had spent roughly the last 20 years or so consulting with a variety of organizations. First starting out doing**

organizational development work and then moving into whole system associate technical redesign and have had some successes and some not so successes, but had always noticed how much work it was to begin a process of transformation with people.”

Participant 2: “Facilitation, coaching, by **organization development...skills in general. I think it’s just a matter, you know, it’s the whole idea of being a change agent.**”

Participant 3: “I had been an **Organization Development consultant, for many years...trying to expect to diagnose the problem and fix it**”

Participant 4: “...they’ve got the sort of base-line competencies of being **really great OD consultants** and they bring that to appreciative inquiry.”

Participant 5: “for the first time I truly understood on an intuitive level that this is the correct way for me to work because **I’m trained traditionally in OD....**”

Participant 6: “I believe to be **a very strong OD background**, so personally, I **understand how the concept of Organization Development from an initial values and philosophies** are woven into what we do in appreciative inquiry.”

Competency: Results driven to achieve client's goal and to demonstrate success of AI

Participant 1: **"it's about what kind of facilitation fosters really powerful sustained change,** those are two things that I can think of that would be good from a research perspective and what I would talk about in terms of **sustained change** would be change that has both a quantitative and a qualitative quality to it, where both the system achieved, especially in a for-profit environment, **it's important that there have been some fiscal results."**

Participant 2: "Why did I choose these people? I would say because I think that **they have real and genuine impact on the systems that they're in, and they provide real business results."**

Participant 3: "To understand where their strengths come from, leveraging those strengths and developing a strategic process to build on those strengths **so that they can achieve results they may not have achieved in the past."**

Participant 4: "In my particular practice, **I focus on significant business results."**

Competency: Good at designing initiatives

Participant 1: **"particularly good at design...** so she stretches me and I ask her for help on design... **she can conceive of projects**

that are large scale with big outcomes, bigger than me... is really **exceptional at design....**"

Participant 2: "Another one is helping them think strategically about **how to design a process** to get what they want...I find a lot of people, they don't know how to do that, it's a gift that I think I have and it's of value...."

Participant 3: "I am uniquely **good at conceptualizing large scale projects**. So I help my clients by giving them a picture of what is **possible and how their initiatives can proceed start to finish.**"

Participant 4: "I guess one of those skills would be helping them with **...design....**"

Competency: Experienced consultant grounded in theory and practice

Participant 1: "I have studied a lot, ...spent 23 years in school, studied a lot, and **a lot of theories**, a lot of cognitive knowledge and...**a lot of theory building**, and I think that's a quality or strength I bring to AI. I think it gives me some background so that I can sort of get into a discussion why AI can be better than a definitive model. By studying so many theories, I can see that this is more cutting edge...."

Participant 2: "**My professional background**. Although I am generically an organizational development professional, is really

as a facilitator, as a **meeting facilitator**. And I also have a strong **background in conflict resolution.**"

Participant 3: "we recognize that all of us were **very experienced and seasoned practitioners** before being "AI practitioners" and there was some people that enter the field not having practiced and this is their entry into becoming a consultant. I think there a lot of **consulting skills that are competencies that complement using the AI methodology that really can't be underrated as important**. There are, there is a depth of kind of theoretical routing in both organizational systems, and systems theory and social construction...."

Competency: Identifies client's core values, industry, and culture, and speak their language

Participant 1: "One thing is, I am a very good listener, and I can usually, I usually ask a whole lot of questions before we design the initiative **about what's going on in the system and what they're trying to accomplish and what's gone before this and what the system's like and how the business works and all of that. And I think that what I do that's really helpful....**"

Participant 2: "The other thing is, instead of releasing interviews into the system and having people just go out and

do it while they are on units and trying to do work, we have workshops, we protect time, we give training credit, we just have to, you have to have it in health care. **So I've developed some structures that work for health care that are faster, that are efficient and that very results based. You have to with health care people get concrete."**

Participant 3: **"I've translated appreciative inquiry into words that are much more ordinary and familiar to people."**

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTISE (APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY) Competencies of AI Practitioners

Finally, subject matter expertise (appreciative inquiry), the last category to be discussed, is the one that truly sets this practice apart from other facilitative, consulting-oriented, helping fields. The current list of competencies fundamental to AI matched the original coding results fairly well as noted in Table 5.4, but the latest rendition is more specific and comprehensive to better represent the data. This subject matter expertise, appreciative inquiry competencies list consists of knowledge, principles, philosophy, process, and skills:

- Innate or adopted resonance with AI
- Being/Living AI

- Comprehensive belief in AI
- Teaches, studies, and understands theory, philosophy, and history of AI
- Commitment to advancing AI scholarship, practice, and use
- Strengths-focused/“the positive core”

A frequent theme arose in the transcripts relating to the practitioner’s discovery of AI.

Many reported that they were at a low point, suffering from malaise or simply searching for something that they could not quite explicate. These circumstances also underpin the necessity of an open mind which surfaced in the personal competencies. One practitioner reported that upon hearing about AI for the first time:

Participant 1: **“I can’t even describe the emotion, but it was like I’d found God (laughs...) or something...I mean I heard him [the teacher of AI] speak and I felt like something deep inside of me clicked...and I said, “Oh, my God, I have found it” ... it felt like this was something I’d been looking for my whole life...in some way I couldn’t explain...I couldn’t describe the feeling and I felt such energy and connection...it was so intense...I couldn’t sleep the whole night...I could hardly talk...it was really wild...and it was just so intense and so incredible!”**

Participant 2: **“And it really confronted me with the state of my work at that moment. I was really not feeling the kind of fulfillment I really wanted to be feeling and I felt**

myself so powerfully compelled to make changes in order to make that be different. And what I realized is if it had that effect on me it would have that effect on other people.”

Participant 3: “...and I realized that there was a whole body of literature and all that kind of stuff about it and **this was like a breath of fresh air from what I had been doing. I had been looking for alternative ways....”**

The data were replete with equally life-changing moments when it “clicked” for others, too. The practitioners held nothing back in imparting their joy for AI. The stories are quite dynamic; the majority of the purist practitioners reported a profound passion for the newfound philosophy when they discovered AI.

Table 5.4

Subject Matter Expertise (Appreciative Inquiry) Competencies of AI Practitioners

First Coding Attempt	Second Coding Attempt
Big Picture Thinker/Strategic Perspective	Innate or adopted resonance with AI
Embody AI	Being/Living AI
Belief in the AI Process	Comprehensive belief in AI
Deep Understanding of the AI Process	Teaches, studies, and understands theory, philosophy, and history of AI

Commitment to advancing AI scholarship,
practice, and use

Strengths-focused/“the positive core”

To further define the competencies, the following offers a selection of units of coding. The competencies are represented by multiple examples with actual codes in bold and participant numbers repeated at random:

Competency: Innate or adopted resonance with AI

Participant 1: [When I discovered AI, it] **“sang to my soul”**

Participant 2: [AI] **“aligned with the very lens I view the world with but I’d never heard something that so captured the underlying, unarticulated frustrations I was experiencing trying to work in a world that sort of saw problems and issues and crisis as the driving dynamic of the world”**

Participant 3: “The thing that first intrigued me about appreciative inquiry is that **it was resonate with my own values in the sense that I really believe in the power of goodness”**

Participant 4: “So it’s almost like it’s given me a framework to approach life and **it sort of resonates with something that’s within me.”**

Competency: Being/Living AI

Participant 1: "He does embody it **he is appreciative inquiry**, He is hope. He just is there. I look at him and that's what I aspire to be like...."

Participant 2: "I can model it. That's the most important thing, it's the feedback that I get from people that when they are in my presence, they feel it that I live very congruent, that doesn't mean that I don't have my bad days, but **I believe in it, I model it at all levels, personally, relationally, and organizationally.**"

Participant 3: "**I am nourished by the process and way of being and it doesn't feel like work**"

Participant 4: "**it is never about a process**"

Participant 5: "The thing that I really value about it is that it's sort of universal and fundamental and I think it's applicable in every single human situation from the small individual thing to the largest collective thing. I think it's much more than a theory or method, **it's about a fundamental way of being.**"

Participant 6: "So I think it's critical, that from an ethical stand point, **you embody the qualities of what Appreciative Inquiry is all about, what the methodology**

is all about. You have to understand it. You've got to walk the talk."

Participant 7: **"Honestly it's everything. It's utterly who I am. I can say that not as a form of pride but because people say it to me about myself all the time. That this is who you are. It's in every cell of my body. To me it's not a methodology, it's a way of life. But that was also true of me when I was three years old; I'm not a recent convert. It's also true of my family. My parents also live and breathe this as a way of life."**

Competency: Comprehensive belief in AI

Participant 1: **"People see my commitment and heart for AI"**

Participant 2: **"He really believes in the methodology and he, you know, he professes not only in his speeches but in his action what AI was all about."**

Participant 3: **"My colleagues I work with say this about me. I have such faith in what I'm doing and that it's going to work that even when things look kind of goofy, I don't get shaken, I just keep going...people I've worked with used to say, 'boy you have a lot courage'...well, I just have a lot of**

faith...I think that's the most important thing. **It's going to work."**

Participant 4: **"How successful it is. How absolutely, unquestionably successful it is...it works. It just simply works, if people really get appreciative inquiry and can get it in their bones...."**

Participant 5: "I'm no longer skeptical, I've worked with it. **I've seen it produce results."**

Participant 6: **"I believe that the process works and my confidence in that gets transferred to the participants** who typically are pretty skeptical about the whole thing, and I think the calmness that I have in using it and the confidence that I have in using it really helps other people be open to the experience."

Competency: Teaches, studies, and understands theory, philosophy, and history of AI

Participant 1: **"I'm constantly trying to deepen my understanding of all of the stuff above all those knowledge bases and things like that, I'm constantly reviewing and search for information and visualize it."**

Participant 2: "...I would say it's the core principles of appreciative inquiry, the simultaneity, the positive, the

anticipatory, the poetic, that **if you really understand these principles, it allows you to be a very successful AI practitioner, I think people forget about the power of the principles.**"

Participant 3: "is epitome of, of an individual who characterizes not only of **great depth of knowledge but also the ability to share the knowledge, possess the knowledge** and even get organizations to look inside themselves and bring out the best of who they are."

Competency: Commitment to advancing AI scholarship, practice, and use

Participant 1: "**it's like the work is so much bigger than us**"

Participant 2: "Also **I highly value formal research because it provides credibility** and that's one way of meeting skeptics!"

Participant 3: "**a significant record of successes in federal agencies and corporations that prove the effectiveness of the change efforts using AI....**"

Participant 4: "You know, **it's not just some kind of new age way of describing something, but it has a basis in research.** I like the research-based part of it. I like the fact that it's not just

somebody's ideas about thing but that in fact **we're building a research based into why this stuff works."**

Competency: Strengths-focused/"the positive core"

Participant 1: "It's about always seeing the **best positive possibility in whatever the situation, whatever the problem, and building on the best experience of that system to help create that possibility**, to make that possibility real."

Participant 2: "I just see in those people a real **deep belief in the potential and the goodness of people and human organizations** and a tenacious **commitment to finding those strengths** and combining them in unique ways and building them and **leveraging them to make the world a better place...."**

Participant 3: "And, at the heart of that is being **intrigued by people's gifts, and their strengths and their capabilities**, and to move away from the habits of problems and deficit discussion and move into a deep understanding of gifts."

Participant 4: "I saw a quote this would have been probably 15 years ago that sort of zeroed in on what I wanted to be about in my life and the quote is 'Most men die with the music still inside them' so, **my purpose in life is to help people find their music and to set it free**, so, for me, I see that happen every time we use

Appreciative Inquiry so the connection is very...very strong... it's not a process for me, it goes back to the magic...."

Participant 5: "it's a way of sort of approaching and living life and that stays **open to the possibilities and it respects people as individuals with strengths and potential.**"

During the final stages of the coding process and into the analysis, the researcher focused solely on what the data said about effective AI practice. The remaining themes that had emerged such as *new theories added to practice* which went beyond indicating *innovation*, were put aside unless they offered insight into practice in some latent fashion.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed results of this exploratory study to determine which competencies would present as the researcher coded interview transcripts provided by a larger study. The research questions were: What will the competencies be? And will the competencies be different from the long line of OD competencies developed through decades of rigorous scholarship? The next generation interview protocol used in this study was comprised of a strengths-based approach. The final research question then was designed to determine what effect, if any, this modified BEI had on the study. After the competencies were introduced, the memos written during the coding process

were discussed along with the outcome of each. Examples of coding units were shared to help illuminate the definitions supporting the competencies.

The final chapter of this study offers conclusions, recommendations, and final thoughts.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

The final chapter of this research reiterates the study and discusses the key research questions in light of the supporting results. The researcher has interpreted a few conclusions that are discussed next. The chapter culminates in recommendations for the next steps in this study to explicate appreciative inquiry (AI) practitioner competencies and future research. Then, in final conclusion the chapter is summarized with closing thoughts.

Study Overview

Virtually no research exists on the competencies needed for effective practice of the post-modern organization development (OD) known as AI, an emergent approach to organizational change (Bushe & Marshak, 2009). Further, no study has been conducted to explore the differentiating competencies one practicing AI possesses over someone who practices traditional OD (Bushe & Marshak, 2009). This study's purpose was to identify those competencies necessary to exemplify AI practice. Not only can this knowledge assist AI practitioners in their development and application of the practice, but it can also inform the academic departments teaching future practitioners of AI and

offer data that can be published in scholarly contributions to the field (Donaher et al., 2007; Rothwell, 2005; Rothwell et al., 1999). The results of this exploratory study may help to guide the development of AI practitioners.

The researcher was given the data set of 29 AI practitioner interview transcripts on which to base the study. A secondary purpose was to assess the possible impact of the strengths-based interview protocol on the future of developing competency models, in light of an evolved approach developed by Rothwell, Sullivan, and Stavros.

Competency studies reign from the positivist paradigm of thought while AI developed from the anti-positivist mindset (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Garavan & McGuire, 2001). This incongruity has created a tension throughout the study that the researcher attempted to subvert by integrating the two concepts with a conduit of foundational, antecedent, and or related concepts. These intermediaries were:

- positive organizational scholarship (POS), and competence as POS,
- change and organizational change cynicism, and
- OD.

Using the conceptual framework of competency studies and AI, the researcher provided an overview of the differing philosophical paradigms of origin for both topics of study. After an extensive literature review of competency studies and then, AI, the methodology of this research was introduced. The research questions for the study were:

RQ1. What competencies can be drafted based on common perceptions across interviews of AI practitioners?

RQ2. How are the competencies of OD and AI practitioners differentiated based on previous studies of OD competency and the resulting competency list from this study?

RQ3. Was the new interview protocol used for collecting data for this study effective in developing a comprehensive AI competency study?

The research question drives the selection of methodology (Charmaz, 2006). Because of its emergence, the formative, exploratory study could only be successful with the use of qualitative research methods. A purposeful sample of AI practitioners with five or more years in the business was invited via email to participate in the research interviews.

Cooperrider, who had endorsed the larger project of which this research was a part, provided a note of introduction that was included in the email invitation. The audience chosen to receive the email was picked by Sullivan, Rothwell, and Stavros based on their participation in the field. Cooperrider also nominated a few practitioners to receive the invitation. A variety of AI practitioners responded with interest. After two semesters of interviews transpired, the researcher began to analyze the data in 2006. In this case, grounded theory following Strauss and Corbin (1998) mixed with the approach of Charmaz (2006) was chosen to underpin the thematic analysis after Boyatzis (1998). Violating a cardinal rule of grounded theory in allowing all the data collection to occur before beginning analysis created havoc for the novice researcher.

Interviews were open coded and then simultaneously open coded and axial coded, producing the first themes of the study. The themes aligned quite closely with the protocol questions. Categories were developed based on the impetus to build a competency list of AI practitioners.

Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is vital to a study's acceptance once complete (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study was enhanced by a multitude of trustworthiness applications; most were successful. The final version of the competencies list was posited as the first draft of AI practitioners' competencies which brought the study to a close, at least for now.

Discussion

Based on the findings introduced in chapter 5, a review of the research questions informing this study is in order to determine the outcome. Each question is discussed in succession.

Research Question 1

The first research question driving this exploratory study can be answered by reading through the final competency list for AI practitioners just posited. Table 6.1 summarizes the findings of this study. Specifically, the question was:

RQ1. What competencies can be drafted based on common perceptions across interviews of AI practitioners?

Table 6.1

Competencies List for AI Practitioners

Subject Matter Expertise Appreciative Inquiry	Business Acumen	Interpersonal	Personal
Innate or adopted			
resonance with AI	Facilitation skills	Appreciative listening	Open mind
Being/Living AI	Appreciative framing & reframing	Great teacher	Critical thinking lifelong learner, driven by curiosity
Comprehensive belief in AI	Asking meaningful questions	Instills trust	Courageous and willing to take risks to varying degrees
Teaches, studies, and understands theory, philosophy, and history of AI	Effective synthesizer of large amounts of information	Treasures others	Comfortable with ambiguity
Commitment to advancing AI scholarship, practice, and use	Firm grasp of traditional OD models, process, and history	Need to be helpful	Hopeful and optimistic, seeks the light
Strengths-focused/"the positive core"	Results driven to achieve client's goal and to demonstrate success of AI	Collaborative, creates community, connections and inclusive	Self aware and self confident
	Good at designing initiatives	Holds others accountable	Dynamic leadership balanced with reflective thoughtfulness, humility,

and no ego

Experienced consultant

grounded in theory and
practice

Identifies client's core

values, industry, and
culture, and speak their
language

Gives away the show

Patient

Affirming, great mentor,
and confidence-inspiring
coach

Innovative and creative

Quick and good at
improvisingHigh ideals comprised of
integrity, authenticity,
sincerity, and honestyStrategic thinker with a
thorough, organized follow
throughAppropriate sense of
humor or playful, joyful
and exuberant

To answer this question, a deep dive into the literature, including that on the philosophy of AI, was necessary. The literature review in chapter 3 indicated that AI is a dynamic and nonmechanical approach to organizational change (Reed, 2007) predicated on the predecessor concept of OD (Bushe & Marshak, 2009). AI is similar to OD only in the desired outcome of effecting change through collaboration while conceptualizing theory in the process (Burnes, 2007; Bushe, 2000). AI is rooted in a variety of philosophies, many of which differ greatly from the previous paradigm of positivism, such as social

constructionism or New Sciences (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Watkins & Stavros, 2009).

Just like the literature review expressed, AI practitioners live with AI at work and many of them adopt it for life as well, as the data showed. So, it stands to reason that practitioners espousing the AI worldview would best understand and be able to explain what is necessary to succeed in pragmatic practice. Based on a review of published AI initiatives, practitioners possessing this resulting set of AI practitioner competencies discovered in the data could certainly lead events or initiatives similar to those reviewed in the literature.

This study's resulting categories and competencies mimic the language of AI revealed in the literature, which provides force to the list. For instance, any undertone or obvious mention of a strengths-focus, belief in the positive, life-giving energy, or the glass-half-full attitude, fortified the results. These in vivo codes captured in the data also reinforced the veracity of the resulting competencies list for AI practitioners (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). From the literature review of competency studies, it was clear that a common language standardizes the communication, training, and expectations related to specific jobs within this study's data (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Research Question 2

The resulting list of competencies for AI practitioners developed from this study has been introduced (see Table 6.1). The question now remains: how do AI

competencies delineate from the most recent list of OD competencies? (See Table 2.1)

The question in detail was:

RQ2. How are the competencies of OD and AI practitioners differentiated based on previous studies of OD competency and the resulting competency list from this study?

In response to research question 2, one must recall the lengthy section on the OD competency study from chapter 2. See Table 6.2 for one possible comparison of these OD competencies with the resulting list of AI practitioner competencies from this study. Clearly, there was quite a bit of overlap. *Self-mastery* equates to the AI practitioner's personal competency of *self awareness*. *Being comfortable with ambiguity* was exactly the same for both lists, as was *open mind*. The many OD competencies that related directly to the steps of ARM were analogous to the newly minted *firm grasp of traditional OD models, process, and history* as well as *good at designing initiatives* which also coupled up with *the positive core* to align with *set the conditions for positive change* and *participatively create good implementation plan*. *Be available to listen to multiple*

Table 6.2

A Comparison for Similarities of the Latest OD Competencies and This Study's AI Competencies List

OD Competency	AI Competency
Self-mastery	Self aware and self confident

Be comfortable with ambiguity	Comfortable with ambiguity
Keep an open mind	Open mind
See the whole picture	Strategic thinker with a thorough, organized follow through Experienced consultant grounded in
Integrate theory and practice, stay current in technology	theory and practice AND Teaches, studies, and understands theory, philosophy, and history of AI
Be available to listen to multiple stakeholders	Appreciative listening
Build realistic relationships AND Manage diversity	Collaborative, creates community, connections and inclusive Strengths-focused/"the positive core" AND Results driven to achieve client's goal and to demonstrate
Set the conditions for positive change	success of AI AND Identifies client's core values, industry, and culture, and speak their language AND Facilitation skills AND Appreciative framing & reframing

Manage client ownership of change	Holds others accountable
Participatively create good implementation plan	Good at designing initiatives
Clarify roles AND Manage transition and institutionalization AND Ability to evaluate change AND Manage the separation	Firm grasp of traditional OD models, process, and history AND Facilitation skills

Source: Worley et al., 2005, pp. 147—152.

stakeholders matched *appreciative listening*. The *see the whole picture* listing fit with *AI's strategic thinker* since it is underpinned by the wholeness concept of big picture thinking. Finally, *build realistic relationships* equated to *AI's collaborative, creates community, connections and inclusive*. Without question, other relationships could be drawn from these same lists as well.

To the point, AI's competency list is differentiated from OD's in a few obvious ways. First of all, although positive change made an appearance for the first time on the OD list, it was the only inclusion of a competency that is inherently, at its essence, positive. This was a total departure from the overwhelmingly positive and affirming nature of the AI competencies. Second, there was a clear reliance on the steps of the ARM to inform its list which one would expect, but AI has less need for the rigid mechanics of a step-by-step process and so none emerged in the list of AI competencies. Further, the OD competencies had a dimension of reliance on data—

specifically, use data to adjust for change, clarify data needs, and understand research methods.

The last and most obvious delineation centers on the *subject matter expertise of AI* category from this study, which includes the notion of being AI or living the philosophy as one's worldview. That is not to say that OD practitioners cannot adopt such a way of life; it simply means that this way of being in the world is not necessary for doing OD. Furthermore, AI is used as a technique or methodology by individuals who do not live the concept, but the majority of the study participants find that usage to be something different than truly effective AI practice, something contrived and empty of life-giving energy. One practitioner called it the difference between "being versus doing AI."

An inherent sub question hinted at in chapter 2 asked how comparing the resulting list of AI competencies to the notions raised in the literature—particularly the ad hoc competencies compiled by Watkins and Mohr (2001) might turn out. See Table 6.3 for a comparative representation including this study's findings, the current OD competencies, and any competencies called for in the text. In the literature, Bushe and Marshak (2009) and Reed (2007) called for mastering facilitation, which again figured prominently in this study's list. Bushe (2000) discussed the need to recast his client's view to a more positive focus which sounds much like the *hopeful and optimistic, seek the light* competency meshing with the *strengths-focused/the positive core* competency. Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) suggested that an AI competency would be "to work in

the affirmative” which is also what this study discovered (p. 19). With regard to Watkins and Mohr, they emphasized the need for strong OD skills (2001). With their ad hoc competencies list, there are other similarities. For example, in the facilitator level of their list, Watkins and Mohr focused on the skill of co-facilitating. Then in the Practitioner directives, they included the importance of theory and research, coaching, and collaborative/AI consulting, all of which surfaced in the data of this study.

Table 6.3

A Comparison for Similarities of the Latest OD Competencies with This Study's AI Competencies List and Competencies Suggested in the Literature

OD Competency	AI Competency	Literature AI Competencies
Self-mastery	Self aware and self confident	
Be comfortable with ambiguity	Comfortable with ambiguity	
Keep an open mind	Open mind	
See the whole picture	Strategic thinker with a thorough, organized follow through	
		Have extensive
	Experienced consultant	experience in a variety of
Integrate theory and practice, stay current in technology	grounded in theory and practice AND Teaches, studies, and understands theory, philosophy, and history of AI	AI applications and settings AND Have a firm grasp of AI theory, research, and models of practice and be aware of

what is going on
worldwide in this field.

Be available to listen to multiple stakeholders	Appreciative listening	
Build realistic relationships AND Manage diversity	Collaborative, creates community, connections and inclusive	Be actively participating in an ongoing forum for peer consultation and development;
	Strengths-focused/"the positive core" AND Results driven to achieve client's goal and to demonstrate success of AI AND	
Set the conditions for positive change	Identifies client's core values, industry, and culture, and speak their language AND Facilitation skills AND Appreciative framing & reframing	Mastering Facilitation skills AND Co-facilitation
Manage client ownership of change	Holds others accountable	
Participatively create good implementation plan	Good at designing initiatives	

Clarify roles AND Manage

transition and

institutionalization AND

Ability to evaluate change

AND Manage the

separation

Source: Worley et al.,

2005, pp. 147-152.

Firm grasp of traditional OD

models, process, and history

AND Facilitation skills

Strong OD skills

Appreciative framing &

reframing AND Strengths-

focused/"the positive core"

AND Hopeful and optimistic,

seeks the light

Recast the client's view

to a more positive focus

To work in the

affirmative AND

Coaching and

collaborative/AI

consulting

Affirming, great mentor, and

confidence-inspiring coach

Finally, under their Meta-Practitioner role, Watkins and Mohr included the following:

- Have extensive experience in a variety of AI applications and settings;
- Be actively participating in an ongoing forum for peer consultation and development; and
- Have a firm grasp of AI theory, research, and models of practice and be aware of what is going on worldwide in this field. (p. 50)

All of these themes emerged in the study's list through experience, supreme understanding of the foundational concepts of AI, co-creation, and dedication to advancing the field's scholarship, practice, and use. Watkins and Mohr developed this list through years of teaching the concept, and although not underpinned by a rigorous study, it is viable and valuable as it provides specifics for the functioning of the 4-D.

Research Question 3

With respect to the final question of the study, the quick answer is “yes”! But in scholarship, it is never that simple. Recalling that data collection through interviews has been an effective method in providing rich information for competency studies, one should consider that the data gathered within this study did indeed meet this goal (Boyatzis, 1982; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). The specific question was:

RQ3. Was the new interview protocol used for collecting data for this study effective in developing a comprehensive AI competency study?

A certain energy was evident in the transcripts which the researcher believes emanated from the questions being asked. To add a bit of anecdotal evidence, some of the interviewers shared the same observations and reported experiencing contagious energy as they conducted the interviews. The researcher conducted five of the interviews and each time felt a similar momentum building. The appreciative approach inspired that excitement; discovery mode was in play. This next generation protocol was

completely appropriate for this study and helped to incite rich, thick, descriptive data to be shared during the interviews (Charmaz, 2006; Patton, 1990).

Although one might suggest that using this next generation protocol with an already appreciative audience, such as AI practitioners, is an easy, manufactured choice for assessment of the protocol since they are accustomed to an abundance-based approach; the researcher disagrees. The researcher would argue that speaking to such an audience is a valuable and vital necessity to understanding what the competencies would be as discerned through the strengths-based protocol. It is true that many of the participants spoke about seeing the world from a basis of strengths rather than deficit—particularly those practitioners with purist inclinations towards identifying with AI philosophy. For this population, revisiting moments of optimal performance seemed to come naturally. A different but equally valuable test of the strengths-based protocol might be with OD practitioners, who are more accustomed to the draining activity of problem-solving rather than the question of strengths.

The fact remains that this study was really just the beginning of an entirely new school of thought. Further, without much prior research on AI competencies, it is difficult to say if the study protocol was without a doubt able to develop a “comprehensive” competency study. It certainly succeeded in developing this draft list of AI competencies. The study would be strengthened by an elevation and extension to the next step of its evolution—validation.

Conclusions

A tension throughout this research surrounded the term competence. How it is rendered at times in the literature as either a value or an acceptance of mediocrity prompted confusion. Additionally, the relationship between competence and competency and the subsequent effect on the acceptance of competency studies was not thoroughly apprehensible. If the reader chose not to accept this work's assertion that competence is the baseline and competency is the correct execution of a task or a behavior that is deemed effective, the confusion intensified. Both terms appeared in the transcripts as they had in the literature. The irony is that when competence or competent was used by a practitioner during the interviews, it was done so in a positive form, just as POS suggests (Cameron et al., 2003; Lee et al., 2003). In response to questioning, if there were any more competencies he wanted to share relating to the effective practitioners he had just named, one prominent practitioner mused, "what else would be a competence?" in a clearly positive rendering of the word "competence." Another practitioner followed suit in describing one of her mentors in the field as being "very, very competent." Still a third interviewee claimed, "people are attracted to competence because they want it in themselves."

The term competency, however, when used by the practitioners was frequently a pejorative. This negativity towards competency levels aligns with the strengths-based premise discussed in relation to the Buckingham and Clifton (2001) work in chapter 3. Emphasis on one's strengths over identified weaknesses leads to a more successful

future per this strengths mindset. Cameron (2008) also claimed that focusing on developing strengths is effort well spent with regard to one's performance. The different conventions coloring competence and competency and subsequently competency studies appears to be another example of social constructionism creating reality where the contradictory schools of thought may need further consideration to finally come to terms with making one meaning.

Another implication arose during data collection that had not been anticipated by the researcher—a potential division in the field of AI. AI practitioners, who embody the philosophy of AI and live it daily, tend to be very protective of its purity. Many transcripts demonstrated with clarity that AI is NOT a process—it is a way of being. As such, initiatives are designed in an appreciative fashion. Examples of codes that demonstrated this emphasis were:

Participant 1: “There are people who are practicing what **they are calling AI and it isn't**. And the example I would give is a friend's husband told her that, ‘Oh, AI is really silly’ and she asked him why that was the case and he said, ‘Oh, we had somebody come in and she told us that if we complimented each other that was AI.’ **So clearly there are people who don't know what AI is and are purporting to be practitioners of it.**”

Participant 2: “I would **continue looking at the notion of an appreciative way of being in the world rather than simply looking at it as a technique.**”

Participant 3: **“People who use appreciative inquiry as a linear recipe lose me in the opening moments. There are some people in the field who do that.”**

Participant 4: “...you know one of the things we sort of struggle within our profession is quality control. Quality control is the wrong word...quality, **ensuring quality. And there are a number of people practicing appreciative inquiry, I would say partially practicing** where they sort of snag an interview and say they’re doing AI....”

The 4-D cycle is not considered a process in the linear, mechanical sense of the positivists (Watkins & Stavros, 2009). AI is fluid and elegant (Reed, 2007).

However, at least two if not more of the participants in this study revealed subtly positivist leanings in their language about the use of AI. For example, these codes in question were defining AI:

Participant 1: “...I would say at its core, it’s a methodology. I think it’s more expansive than that, but it’s a process that can be used in almost every environment....”

Participant 2: “So I think understanding AI as a systemic intervention, that is important.”

With regard to the last example, the term intervention implies that something requires fixing, language that contradicts the strengths-based focus of AI. In the former example,

the practitioner recognized that AI has a larger mission than just being a process, but not for her.

The assumption is that these two participants purport to be AI practitioners. Nonetheless, the practitioners who raised the concern about the purity of AI practice linked to one's worldview were pointing out how one's espoused theory may not align with one's theory-in-use (Argryis & Schön, 1974). The researcher fully believes, however, that it is possible for AI practitioners to adopt the AI worldview, but be in an early stage of the transition. Or, perhaps the researcher's interpretation of these practitioners' words was wrong.

Since language has proven so powerful in the AI concept, it is no wonder that a practitioner who may unknowingly verbalize a true positivist nature creates such a concern for the purists in the practice. The purists believe that this attempt to "do AI" as a tool, but not "live AI" cheapens the concept and threatens its reputation and future. As has been surmised in POS, social sciences disciplines are not easily accepting of concepts that come off as weak, faddish, or not credible (Cameron et al., 2003). Should one of these positivists in disguise as an interpretivist, as it were, facilitate a failing or weak AI effort and minimize the underlying philosophies, everyone in the field suffers. When the audience depicts AI in a derogatory way because they experienced a faulty version, they are creating a reality. As such, reality is created by the way the AI audience discusses it. Certainly, the tone for that dialogue is set by the practitioner.

The last implication to discuss regards an incongruity that troubled this study throughout. In the tradition, competency studies have been largely positivistic (Garavan & McGuire, 2001), with great rigor provided by statistical analysis. And, AI is firmly in place as a constructionist approach (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). This study suffered a bit of an identity crisis because of this incongruous coupling with AI, which at its core would slough off an attempt to quantify its success. “Assessing AI based on empirical studies in the tradition of logical-positivist research methodology may appear to be inconsistent with AI and its social constructionist foundation” (Sorenson, Sharkey, Head, & Spartz, 2000, p. 207). In more basic language, competency studies in the literature have been largely developed and validated in quantitative methodology while AI is not an approach that has been tested in traditionalist positivistic fashion, and nor should it be. Further, any competency study related to AI should be measured according to its paradigm of research—in this case the qualitative, interpretive fashion.

Recommendations

More attention is needed on the resulting competency list for AI practitioners developed in this study. The work to strengthen this list through the AI community’s acceptance has just begun. Clarification of language and perhaps even new language is needed if the researcher expects a group of practitioners governed by the strengths-focus to embrace a list of competencies when doing so may contradict a core value—working only to improve one’s strengths. It must be understood that in the traditional

sense, a competency study may be antithetical to an AI practitioner audience. However, when introducing this competency study to AI practitioners at large, it would be advisable to adopt a strengths-based approach. Applying the discovery or what is and the dream or what could be phases of AI to the unveiling of the resulting competency list for AI practitioners may help the audience of AI practitioners to embrace the study. Rather, viewing the study results not as a regimented and linear directive but as the chance to reinforce the existing strengths each AI practitioner possesses, may be the best way to get AI practitioners to utilize the study. Dialogue must continue not only among practitioners of AI, but also between practitioners and academics much like the call Warrick (2009) sounded in the field of OD.

The recommendations for future research that follow are differentiated by three general audiences. The groups in question who can help to elevate and extend these results further are future researchers, AI practitioners, and academic curriculum designers.

Future Research

With respect to future researchers, the resulting list of AI competencies introduced in chapter 5 can be strengthened. One option is to review the current coding scheme developed for this study to parse out effective AI practice competencies and test it again with new coders in an attempt to reach an acceptable level of intercoder agreement. In the future iteration, coder training should include far more explanation,

communication, and oversight with the coders to make the study valuable to those who expect a high rating of intercoder agreement. In addition to including the four categories of the coding scheme (subject matter expertise appreciative inquiry; business acumen; interpersonal; personal), the researcher should include this study's resulting AI practitioner's competencies list to further detail the code book and the expectations with the new group of coders.

To this point, full behavioral indicators (Spencer & Spencer, 1993) need to be pulled from the data and coupled with each competency to better explain the category comprehensively for new coders. For example, from the following coding unit, two behavioral indicators could be produced for the resulting competency—comfort with ambiguity:

“And you know, we know what we are trying to achieve, we know what the inquiry is about, but tracking it and predicting what outcomes are going to be is a mystery.”

The behavioral indicators taken from the data might be:

- Model calmness for the client.
- Remind the client that not knowing all the details before an AI event begins is normal since the path will be developed by the group to ease anxiety.

The researcher discovered some important points about the methodology utilized that could inform future researchers in this study, as well as other studies

exploring nascent topics with novice researchers. First of all, when peer coders are utilized to establish intercoder agreement, their experience level with coding and knowledge of the topic in question must be closely assessed. If the peer coders are novices, then a decision about using any type of measure of agreement among raters must be made. With a novice group of coders, perhaps the use of intercoder agreement indices is a poor choice as their lack of knowledge with the topic may inevitably hamper confidence in the results and frustrate the study outcome. Should the researcher have only novice peers available, it may be best to establish study trustworthiness with the many other alternatives available, such as full disclosure of all study details and rich, thick description (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 1994, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Sykes, 1990).

When novice coders are the only option and intercoder agreement is sought, the researcher must emphasize the comprehensiveness of the code book and peer coder training. Each coder should undergo a module on coding and thematic analysis coupled with the specifics of the codebook conducted by the lead researcher. Further, a module on the subject matter of the research should comprise a second training conducted by the principal investigator before each coder begins his/her process. Until the world of the social sciences more readily accepts nonpositivistic methods of proving study trustworthiness, researchers must be prepared to posit intercoder agreement arguments.

Another goal of future research is to have an expert panel review the resulting list of AI competencies introduced in chapter 5, and discuss its usefulness. Once their edits are incorporated into the mix, another rendition of the list should be sent to the original participating AI practitioners for validation and input. After that step is complete and any modifications are added, the AI competencies list should go back out to the original participating AI practitioners as well as the expert panel for one final sanction following the lead of Worley et al. (2005) with the latest version of the OD competency study discussed in chapter 2. The last step would see this more comprehensive AI practitioner competency study published, not only in refereed journals but also in practitioner-read versions. With publication, the ultimate goal of providing enhancement to development is met. The next stage of this study would then be a revision to the list when another criterion sample of practitioners would be interviewed.

The scope of the current study—to develop an AI practitioner competencies list—did not allow for the application of more dimensions to the competencies. As Mansfield (1996) asserted, competency models with a range of levels of performance for each competency differentiates between novices and experts. This would also satisfy Boyatzis' (1982) call for the same need to distinguish the superior performance from the average and poor. Thus, future studies relating to this emergent concept of AI should include a facet of exemplary versus average performance in AI practice, just as Watkins and Mohr's (2001) list did when they denoted three levels of development.

Also, the study did not explicate a future competencies facet. Like everything, AI continues to evolve. Next-level changes already have been made in the concept, such as the AI summit methodology (Ludema et al., 2003; Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003) and the SOAR framework (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009; Stavros & Saint, 2009). Competency studies have a responsibility to anticipate the future needs of the profession just as McLagan (1989) demonstrated with her *Models for HRD Practice* published during the early stages of competency studies development.

The results of this study need to be proliferated for another goal. Further investigation is needed to determine if the strengths-based protocol would work with other fields or industries. As discussed, the average AI practitioner is accustomed to and comfortable with the language of abundance and strengths which comprises the next generation strengths-based interview protocol of this study. Other, perhaps less sanguine, fields would be a strong test of whether the protocol could produce rich data necessary for a competency study.

AI Practitioners

In addition to answering the call for assistance in first creating this competencies list, validating it should occur next. AI practitioners can continue to engage in dialogue in general about their practice and appropriateness of competencies. As the transcripts demonstrated, collaboration is an activity that is vital to successful and enriching AI

practice, so this recommendation should not be a difficult sell. For example, one practitioner said of her mentor in AI:

Participant 1: "I think she fully embodies AI...She's very actively involved in listservs, coaching...she's helped me a lot..."

Participant 2: "We have with the context of the Taos Institute I suppose, what you would call a community of practice."

Participant 3: "...the Broccoli Alliance Group in Philadelphia...we learn together and we work together on different projects and we stay in touch and we mentor each other...."

The community of AI practitioners is uniquely qualified to discuss how the training of new practitioners in the field might transpire in an organic and generative way. In addition, this study's AI practitioner competencies and any subsequent revisions as the basis of the training should be discussed. As noted, informal mentoring is already in place within the AI practitioner community.

Again calling upon the inherent collaborative and mentoring spirit of AI, perhaps a more formalized mentorship program can be designed. Using the competencies list as a guide, the mentor could share his or her wisdom with the mentee, competency by competency determining along the way, what competencies the mentee inherently possesses. These competencies would then drive the subsequent training agenda for that individual.

Furthermore, as a group, the dialogue needs to broach the subject of some yet-to-be-defined method of correcting practitioners who are not honoring the true philosophy of AI practice in order to preserve the purity of practice, a directive that seemed to jump out of the data. One more example of this sentiment speaks to the ethical consideration of topical practice:

“Well, I think probably the biggest challenge for all of us is to “be” AI, to model it in all of our personal and professional practice. And that is an ethical issue- because you can’t fake it. I think you have to deeply believe in the power of it.”

The true assessment of what the AI practitioners are calling for to ensure the purity of AI practice cannot yet be apprehended, but it needs to be determined at some later juncture.

Finally, a language needs to evolve around the integration of competency studies and AI that honors the historical procedures for developing competency lists as well as satisfies the call for less constraint and acceptance of a more open approach to competency list development. More scholarship is needed to present competency to constructivist minds in such a way that they do not feel constrained by a one-size-fits-all model. AI’s cyclic and fluid essence seems opposite to the linear, sequential rigidity of the competency study’s methodology, especially when the study is conducted by a positivist who chooses mixed-method frameworks and measures over a purely qualitative approach.

Academic Curriculum Designers

Those in academe who are already teaching OD and associated concepts should embrace the addition of AI to lesson plans if they have not already done so. Creative and experiential activities could underpin illuminating the competencies that surfaced in this study. Perhaps academic programs could offer to facilitate an AI for their respective schools, utilizing the students as AI trainee facilitators. The students, under the close supervision of faculty, would receive priceless experience in the ways in which AI actually transpires. After trying out the facilitation, the students could be assessed by their faculty, their peers, and the audience, and also self-assess about the aspects of AI practice in which they excelled, based on this study's AI competencies list.

Final Thoughts

There was a dearth of previous research related to the competencies of AI practitioners (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). The lack of a published research study on AI competencies provided ample opportunity to study the field without constraint. There was clear interest from the field as evidenced by practitioner response to participation requests; the majority of the study participants requested the results once completed. This study is the first step in what should be a more comprehensive and full study of AI practice thanks to the larger overarching study of Rothwell, Sullivan, and Stavros titled, *"To Identify and Validate Positive Change Agent Competencies of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Practitioners."*

As one considers that competency study comes from the positivist tradition, the new generation of BEI protocol has launched a different and possibly multi-paradigmatic approach. Burrell and Morgan (1979) said that one cannot occupy two philosophical paradigms at once; further, scholars rarely jump paradigms. With the new generation of interview protocols, the same cannot be said for competency studies as a concept. Just as with AI, the post-modern version of OD arose from a different philosophy than OD. It is possible that competency studies are on the brink of a yet-to-be-named revolution as well, which will take the methodology into the constructionist mind set.

As for the question of integrating two concepts from two different thought paradigms, the response is less clear. A competency study was launched and a list of AI competencies was distilled, but its use has yet to be tested. The list needs further validation by the experts. Whether AI practitioners will embrace it is also unknown. The now finer line of tension between competency studies and AI remains. As one practitioner relayed during the interviews, her wish for the field was that scholarship would let go of the idea that there is only one right way to do AI. It can be argued that a competency study does indeed advocate this premise; however, as the literature has suggested, each person is not expected to perfect each competency (Hollenbeck et al., 2006; Rothwell et al., 2007). This study, too, would then advocate that each individual in AI practice would be stronger at some aspects than others, recalling the strengths revolution of Buckingham (2007) and colleagues (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

As this exploratory study to develop a competency list for AI practitioners concluded, the possibility arose that with its conclusion and findings the future meanings and applications of competency study may be impacted and altered. The researcher looks forward to further exploration.

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Appendix A

Initial Email Invitation Script

Original Message -----

From: Michele L. Newhard

To: Various

Cc: David Cooperrider; Jackie Stavros; Michele L. Newhard; Patricia Malone;

Roland Sullivan; Soren Kaplan; William J. Rothwell

Sent: 9/26/2005 3:47:53 PM

Subject: An Invitation from David Cooperrider

The AI Competency Project Research Team **invite your participation into a study of the core strengths of AI practitioners. Interviews will be completed** by Dr. Rothwell's Penn State University graduate students this fall. The interview guide is attached for your reference. If you have at least **five** years experience in the field of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), please accept our invitation to participate by replying to this email. We would provide the opportunity for you to follow the research as it progresses.

Please read the following invitation from David Cooperrider:

To: Accomplished Appreciative Inquiry Practitioners.

What core strengths do positive change agents best use? To date very little research exists in this area. Our dream is to employ an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach to discover and define what the core competencies are for positive change agents.

Our focus is at the organizational level of analysis and intervention that leads to positive results. What kind of person do you need to be to have greatest impact in that role? Having the answers to these and related questions would be immensely useful to the field of positive organizational scholarship. Additionally, what we learn will be helpful to academics and practitioners who seek to prepare people to enter this field.

As a leading AI practitioner, you have been recommended and selected as an expert to be interviewed. Share with us your stories. Share with us your wisdom. In return for your participation, you will be among the first to learn our findings as our study progresses. You also will be listed as “one of the leading experts” in Appreciative Inquiry and Positive Change.

Initially there will be two deliverables. **First** is a positive change agent competency study of AI practitioners. **Second** will be implications of the study to impact the larger world of how competencies are discovered and established. Ultimately, the outcome of this project will be a multi-media book on positive change practitioners. We expect to provide a foundation and strategy for best developing current change agents along with executives and managers in organizations that are using or wish to use positive approaches to organization development, change, and transformation. In addition, it will serve as a text to be used to teach organization change to students.

All you need to do is agree to participate in a 45-minute interview. We know how busy you are. We invite you to give back to a community that you have been part of. This should be a fun use of your time. This offers a time when you can reflect on your contributions and success. Thank you for your consideration.

This study is being conducted by the following research team:

- David Cooperrider, Case Western Reserve University
- Soren Kaplan, iCohere, Inc.
- Patricia Malone, DBA student from Lawrence Technological University
- William J. Rothwell, The Pennsylvania State University
- Jackie Stavros, Lawrence Technological University
- Roland Sullivan, Mohd-Sullivan Associates

One of us will be contacting you to set up a time for the interview.

Cordially,

David

David Cooperrider

<<interviewguideforAIstudyv6.doc>>

Thank you, we look forward to receiving your reply of acceptance by the 16th of November.

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form for Social Research

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Core Strengths of Positive Change Agents – IRB# 21833

Principal Investigator: Michele L. Newhard, Graduate Student
Department of Workforce Education and Development
111 Redifer Commons, University Park, PA 16802
TELEPHONE: 814.863.1255; EMAIL: mln4@psu.edu

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Other Investigator(s): Dennis Gilbert, Tristana Harvey, Jean Pulaski, Ji Hoon Song, Stacey-Ann Sylvester, Ruth Weber, Marlene Weitzel, Dave White, Shubha Kashyap, Tabitha Anderson-Service, Catherine Chambers, Ray Chambers, Lori Johnson-Vegas, Patricia Gouse, Madhavi Kari, Yi Xue, Bernadette Kasshanna, Kathleen Wolfhope, Gary Chinn, Amy Freeman, and Wei Wang.

- 1. Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research study is to identify and validate positive change agent competencies of appreciative inquiry practitioners.
- 2. Procedures to be followed:** Following the email request and your affirmative reply, you will be asked to consent to participate in an audio-recorded personal interview. To provide signed consent, a student researcher will send you an electronic consent form. Please save a copy of the consent form to your computer. Use the “File, Save As” feature from the dropdown file menu to save the document to your hard drive. Once saved, mark your preferences in the shaded boxes by inserting the cursor into the box, double clicking, and then choosing “checked” within the default value information. Then choose type your name in the signature line and email it back via attachment to the graduate student researcher who will then set up a phone interview with you. During the phone interview you will be asked to answer 30 questions.

☐ I prefer that you NOT audio-record the interview

☐ Yes, you may audio-record the personal interview

3. **Benefits:** Your experiences will help in the construction of a competency model for practitioners of appreciative inquiry which will help the field in general.
4. **Duration:** It will take about 45 to 60 minutes to complete the personal interview.
5. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Only the research team, and assistants, will know your identity if you deem it so. Only the research team will have access to the audio tapes and data. The audio tapes and data will be stored and secured at in a locked cabinet in Dr. Rothwell's office and destroyed within three years. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared if you deem it so.
- ☐ Yes, you may link my real name to my individual responses
- ☐ No, you may not link my real name to my individual responses
6. **Right to Ask Questions:** You can ask questions about this research. Contact Michele Newhard at 814.883.3564 with questions.
7. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please type your electronic signature below, note the date beside your electronic signature, and return an electronic copy to the researchers. Please maintain or print a copy of this signed and dated consent for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix C

Interview Guide Original of Rothwell, Sullivan, Stavros

An Interview Guide Discovering Strengths of Positive Change Agents

(At least 5 years experience in the field to qualify for the study)

This interview guide is intended to capture your impressions of the characteristics essential for practitioners of Appreciative Inquiry and Positive Change. The interviewer will pose these questions in a telephone interview. The composite will be analyzed to identify key themes that surface across many interviews.

Name of Interviewer

Name of Respondent

Date

What AI Means to You

1. Tell us *the story* when and how you first learned about Appreciative Inquiry (AI)? Who was there? What was the situation? Where were you? Can you recall what year it was?
2. What most intrigued you when you first learned about AI?
3. In one sentence how do you best define AI?
4. What do you most value about AI?
5. What intrigues you most about AI today?

The AI Practitioner

6. What is it in your “Being” that significantly underpins your success as an AI practitioner? (We define “Being” as who you are. By being we mean one’s integrated self and it includes self-awareness or self-realization, personal values, and guiding principles.)
7. What knowledge base (i.e. relevant theories, concepts, and models) do you use that most support your success as an AI practitioner?

8. What skills do you use to best help your clients?
9. What are the most important qualities or strengths you bring to the practice of AI?
10. What *new* theories, concepts, models or principles have you added to the practice of AI?

AI Community of Practice

11. What was your first client experience using AI?
12. Describe a peak experience or high point as an AI practitioner. What was exciting about this experience? What did you and others do to make it effective?
13. Who comes to the top of your mind as the best external practitioners? Collectively, why did you choose these people? Can you list two or three core competencies that these external practitioners exhibit? Or, what is it you observe in them that lets you know that they embody AI?
14. Can you provide us a list of 10-12 people whom you believe are the best internal practitioners? (please provide position and name of organization) Collectively, why did you choose these people? Can you list two or three core competencies that these people exhibit? Or, what is it you observe in them that lets you know that they embody AI?

The Future of AI

15. What are three wishes you have for competency-based research to strengthen the practice of AI in the future?

AI Practitioner Profile Questions

- A. How many years have you been working in the field?
- B. What is the name and position of the organization that you work for?
- C. Can you email us your resume/CV or a bio?
- D. How many client projects have you worked on?
- E. What key projects are you working on today?
- F. What outcomes do you regularly achieve with your clients?
- G. What ethical issues most affect the professional practice of AI practitioners, and how do they affect it?

- H. What type of training have you had in AI?
- I. List two or three meaningful or engaging books and tell us why they are important to you.
- J. What is your educational background?
- K. What professional associations do you belong to?
- L. Who is your mentor(s) in the field? Tell us why?
- M. Have you published in the field? (can you send us a list of your publications)
- N. What key journals do you read?
- O. What conferences do you attend (for learning and/or presenting)?

Appendix D

Interview Guide 2

1. Tell us *the story* when and how your first learned about Appreciative Inquiry (AI)? Who was there? What was the situation? Where were you? Can you recall what year it was?
2. What most intrigued you when you first learned about AI?
3. In one sentence how do you best define AI?
4. What do you most value about AI?
5. What is it in your “Being” that significantly underpins your success as an AI practitioner? (We define “Being” as who you are. By being we mean one’s integrated self and it includes self-awareness or self-realization, personal values, and guiding principles.)
6. What knowledge base (i.e. relevant theories, concepts, and models) do you use that most support your success as an AI practitioner?
7. How do you define what makes an AI successful?
8. What skills do you use to best help your clients? Why do you think these particular skills are most beneficial to a successful AI?
9. What are the most important qualities or strengths you bring to the practice of AI?
10. What *new* theories, concepts, models or principles have you added to the practice of AI?

11. When you first began using AI, what skills required more time for you to master and what skills came easily to you? What advice if any, would you give to new practitioners of AI based on your own road to success with AI?
12. Describe a peak experience or high point as an AI practitioner. What was exciting about this experience? What did you and others do to make it effective?
13. Who comes to the top of your mind as the best external practitioners? Collectively, why did you choose these people? Can you list two or three core competencies that these external practitioners exhibit? Or, what is it you observe in them that lets you know that they embody AI?
14. What are three wishes you have for competency-based research to strengthen the practice of AI in the future?
15. What should I have asked you about building AI competency? Or, is there anything else about AI competency that you would like to suggest to me?

VITA

Michele L. Newhard

EDUCATION: The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
May 2010 Ph.D. (ABD) in Workforce Education & Development
May 2004 M.S. in Workforce Education & Development
May 1998 M.A. in Ancient Greek History
May 1990 B.A. in Classics

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE: Penn State University

Jan 2005-present Special Programs Training Coordinator, Auxiliary Services
Sept 1995-Jan 2005 Program Specialist, Auxiliary Services
Sept 1996-2007 Seasonal Teambuilding Facilitator, Shaver's Creek Environmental Center

TEACHING & RELATED EXPERIENCE: Penn State University

2007, 2008, 2009 "Project Leadership" Course, Food Services
Fall 2007 Designed a Team Building Course, WFED 596, Rothwell
Spring 2007 Guest Instructor, WFED 597J, Marketing OD, Rothwell
Fall 2006 Co-Teacher, WFED 572, Organization Development, Rothwell
2005-2006 Graduate Student Assistant & Protocol Training, *Appreciative Inquiry*
Core Strengths of Positive Change Agents Study
2004-present "Extraordinary Customer Service (ECS)" Courses, Food Services

PUBLICATIONS:

Newhard, M.L. (2008). Succession practices at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In Rothwell, W.J., Alexander, J. & Bernhard, M. (Eds.). *Cases in Government Succession Planning* (pp. 153-168). Amherst, MA: HRD Press.

Newhard, M.L. (2006). Appreciative inquiry. *HR Dictionary* in-press & online at www.hrdictionary.com.

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