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The Promise of Appreciative Cities

Compelling the Whole to Act

Barbara Lewis
Karen Roney



Inside this issue

Welcome to November 2013 issue of AI Practitioner

"The Promise of Appreciative Cities: Compelling the Whole to Act" is full of detailed examples where cities have applied AI: in Police, Fire, Purchasing and Transportation departments; community engagement in major regeneration initiatives and local initiatives supporting a region's long-term vision. Editors Barbara Lewis and Karen Roney, who live in the United States and have been involved in award-winning work in this area, describe how cities have embedded AI over many years and set out the promise of even greater AI use.

In the Feature Choice, Dayle O'Brien in Australia describes a change and transition theory, Four Rooms of Change, that she has found invaluable in her coaching practice. Taking a strengths-based approach to the model, she describes how people move through the Rooms and learn to love change.

In this Research Notes, Jan Reed says "Goodbye and keep going" as she feels it is time to hand over to others. We thank her for her skill and wisdom in developing the column over four years. Showcased in the

column is a study of Caravaggio's paintings using AI as the research framework.

In AI Resources we welcome a new editorial team: Matt Moehle (USA), and Roopa Nandi and Hardik Shah (India). They bring their research, academic and consulting backgrounds to develop the next phase of this column.

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Dayle O'Brien

Dayle is an Australian OD practitioner who was introduced to AI while working with the ANZ Bank on their Cultural Transformation Team. Her success and affinity with AI inspired her to begin a consulting practice, paint group, which is dedicated to bringing a fresh approach to Change and OD in Australia.
Contact: dayle@paintgroup.com.au



Feature Choice

by Dayle O'Brien

Learning to Love Change – Taking the Strengths Approach to Moving Through the Four Rooms of Change

The Four Rooms of Change[®] theory, model and research is the work of a Swedish professor, Claes Janssen. Janssen uses the metaphor of a doorway to highlight the work and exploration that needs to take place in order to progress from one Room of Change to the next. By combining the principles of AI with Janssen's model, people can accelerate their growth and development; and an appreciation of change as a journey.

Working with Appreciative Inquiry and writing for AI Practitioner is an invitation to indulge a curiosity into why something works and the possibilities it presents for growth.

In writing this article, I hope to take you with me as I explore a change and transition theory that I have found invaluable in my coaching practice – made all the more powerful when combined with a strengths approach and Appreciative Inquiry (AI).

Introduction to the Four Rooms of Change

The Four Rooms of Change[®] concept, theory, model and research, is the work of psychologist, researcher and author, Claes Janssen, Ph.D.¹ It began in 1964 and has evolved into a body of work that has only recently been translated into English. (Janssen, 2011). The model is one about conflict and change: where our ability to work through change is related to our approach to conflict.

Janssen's model proposes that our response to change follows a pattern of behaviour and emotions, and that we pass through what he has named the Four Rooms of Change. These are Contentment – Self-censorship – Confusion – Inspiration and back into Contentment. (See Figure 1 on page 9) How willing we are to move on from each room is linked to our preference for belonging (our willingness to compromise our identity and values and/or what we know to be true, to “belong”) or being an outsider (our willingness to give up belonging in order to be

1 To learn more about the Four Rooms of Change concept, theory, model and analytical instruments contact A&L Partners AB at info@fourrooms.com. The Four Rooms of Change as well as the theory, concepts, the models and the tools that it protects, is a registered trade mark and may not be used without expressed and written permission from A&L Partners AB, Drottninggatan 55, 111 21 Stockholm, Sweden.

able to live what we know is true rather than to share an identity), and that the tension between the two extremes is the cause of conflict – internal and/or external.

Janssen uses the metaphor of doorways to highlight the work and exploration that needs to take place in order to progress from one room to the next. With each doorway, we move closer to Inspiration and ultimately into Contentment – having grown and developed throughout the process.

While this article relates to my coaching practice and an individual's journey of self-awareness and development, the model has also been applied to groups, organisations and communities experiencing change. One of the earliest references to the Four Rooms of Change and large-scale application is in Marvin Weisbord's book *Productive Workplaces* (2012) and as he developed the Future Search methodology.

My role as a coach is to equip individuals with the confidence and capability to embrace change for personal (and organisational) growth, and possibly even learn to love it. By bringing my knowledge and experience with Appreciative Inquiry to Janssen's model I have seen people accelerating their growth and development; instead of being stuck in the anxiety of feeling deconstructed and wanting to defend themselves, they are more open to exploring. They appear to reach the point where they feel better equipped with new skills and personal insights more quickly, and have develop further as leaders.

The Four Rooms of Change model²

When I began using this model, I noticed how it helped normalise the internal conflict experience. The common feelings of being deconstructed and fears associated with the deeply personal work of coaching were allayed with the realization that what those being coached were experiencing was so normal it could be put into a universal theory and model. I observed the hope within the likelihood that they would emerge stronger; as well as an appreciation for change being a journey that takes time, patience and focus.

All this helped individuals step into and work through their discomfort and anxiety. I also noticed them using the language of the rooms and doorways to reference and express curiosity for what they were experiencing.

Allow me to step you through the Four Rooms in a “coaching for personal growth” context.

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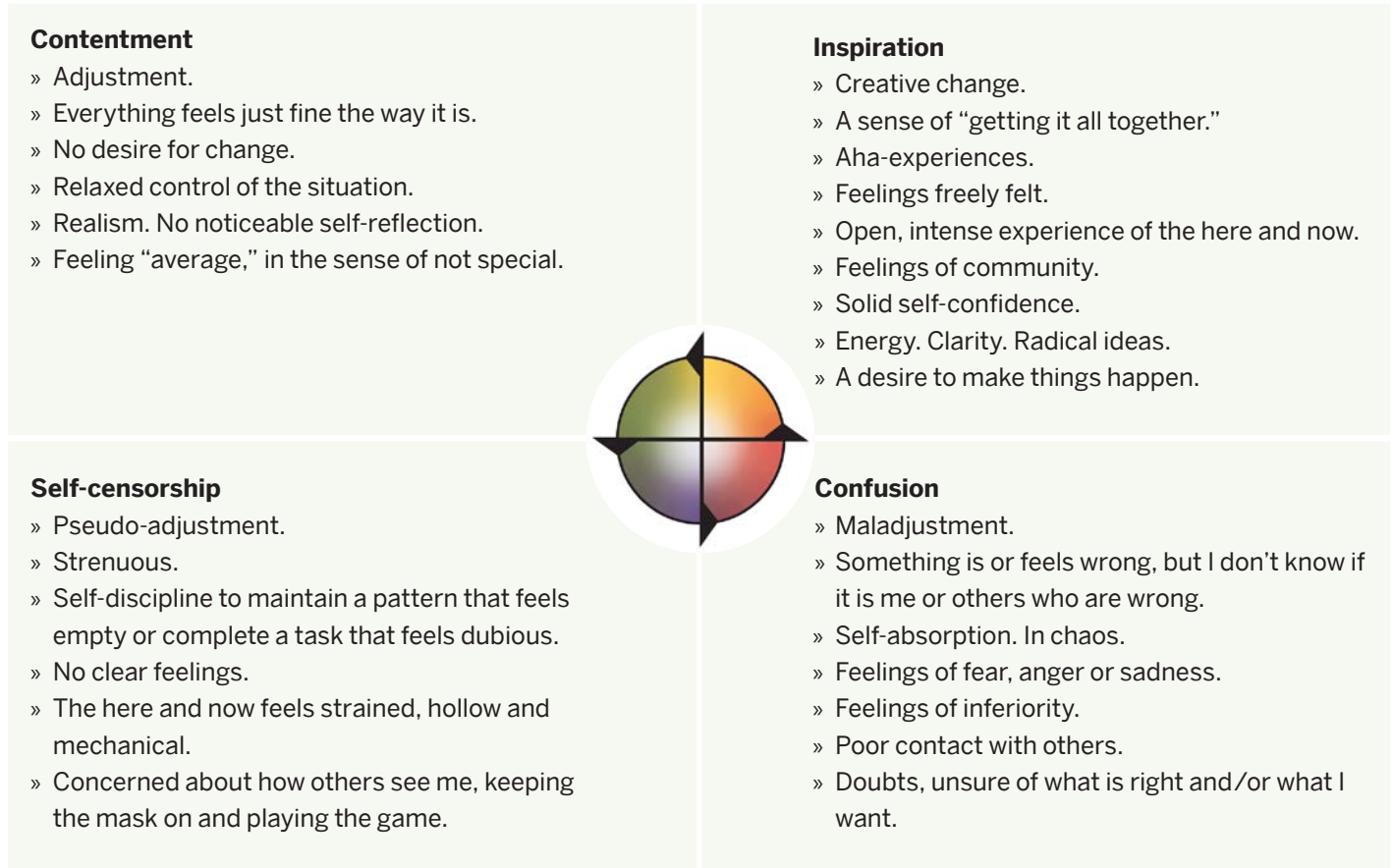


Figure 1: The Four Rooms of Change model

Contentment

- » Adjustment.
- » Everything feels just fine the way it is.
- » No desire for change.
- » Relaxed control of the situation.
- » Realism. No noticeable self-reflection.
- » Feeling “average,” in the sense of not special.

The Contentment Room

Typically, people seek coaching when they are no longer in Contentment and are looking for a way to grow and develop. According to the theory, loss of Contentment can happen in three ways:

1. *A sudden change* – In the coaching context this can be as simple as a shock reaction to receiving 360° feedback for the first time.
2. *Incidents that in isolation have no significant impact* – But these isolated incidents can progressively move the person out of Contentment. This can happen when a small issues, left unaddressed when they first emerge, accumulate and merge to become one major issue. This could be when a leader turns a blind eye to an individual's poor performance, and down the track is dealing with a whole team of disengaged individuals – making work a hard place to be.
3. *The world around changes* – If change is not acknowledged and no adjustments to this change made, individuals can find themselves out of Contentment. Ignoring up-skilling or continuous learning, or not seeking a change of role, can be indicators of trying to stand still in Contentment, in a changing world.

Sometimes an individual comes to coaching, happily in Contentment. But if the purpose of coaching is for development, then my role as a coach is to find the question that sparks a desire to seek something more.

From AI we know that “change begins the moment you ask a question” and that a powerful generative question will spark the shift.³ Examples might be: when do you notice yourself feeling bored at work? What did you imagine for yourself five years ago, and what do you imagine in another five? Are you doing enough of what you love?

Of course, a powerful question is always in context and what is appropriate in one instance may not be in another.

At this point, noticing what triggers a loss of contentment can be important information in generating the topic of inquiry during the Confusion phase. But I am getting ahead of myself...

Self-censorship

- » Pseudo-adjustment.
- » Strenuous.
- » Self-discipline to maintain a pattern that feels empty or complete a task that feels dubious.
- » No clear feelings.
- » The here and now feels strained, hollow and mechanical.
- » Concerned about how others see me, keeping the mask on and playing the game.

The Self-censorship and Confusion Rooms

Self-censorship and Confusion are adjacent rooms. This is the only doorway the individual can move both in and out of – think of the swinging doors in a restaurant between the kitchen and dining room.

The initial reaction to the loss of Contentment is one of Censorship (Self-censorship) – be it unconscious or conscious – where indicators such as boredom, tension, avoidance, denial, hesitancy, oppression and withdrawal begin to reveal themselves. Once people embark on coaching, staying in Self-censorship becomes almost impossible and they begin to move into the adjacent room – Confusion – where they typically experience anxiety, frustration, rage, worthlessness, ambivalence, paralysis, isolation or restlessness.

People move out of Self-censorship as they open up to and receive feedback in its many forms: from themselves, their coaches, colleagues, loved ones and diagnostic tools. They begin to notice their reactions and responses to the feedback and, when they are ready, discover a need for self-awareness and a desire to move out of Self-censorship.

If this desire or ability to shift is absent, the individual risks being stuck, and languishes. So even the smallest of steps forward is valuable. It is also where an appreciative focus can aid an unrelenting search for the glimmer of light that illuminates what needs to be let go of, for the individual to feel free to move toward Inspiration.

³ For more information about the principle of Simultaneity and the other principles underpinning Appreciative Inquiry, go to AI Commons, a knowledge portal hosted by Case Western Reserve University: <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>

Confusion

- » Maladjustment.
- » Something is or feels wrong, but I don't know if it is me or others who are wrong.
- » Self-absorption. In chaos.
- » Feelings of fear, anger or sadness.
- » Feelings of inferiority.
- » Poor contact with others.
- » Doubts, unsure of what is right and/or what I want.

Letting go and leaving Confusion behind

A key part of the process is to explore such that individuals (and their coaches) remain open to seeing the “zero point”. This is often an ideal that they hold in their heads rather than in their hearts, or that falsely protects them from their fears. Identifying the zero point is a turning point – a point of no return – and it lies somewhere in the Confusion Room. It is the eventual insight that highlights what the person has been reluctant to let go of in order to create something new. It informs the focus of the inquiry that, when given an appreciative reframe, can take the individual out of Confusion and accelerate their progress to Inspiration. Thus, time spent between Self-censorship and Confusion should be treated as a search for the most powerful Topic of Inquiry (also known as the Define Phase).⁴

“Simone” had held a higher duty position on the executive team for six months until a replacement executive was found. When the position was filled she went back to her original role. Despite being under no illusion of remaining on the team, she was taking the “demotion” very badly and was desperate to get back onto the executive team. She was finding it very difficult to re-engage with the organisation and it was affecting her performance. She was undermining herself and didn't understand why.

During the exploration of Self-censorship and Confusion some information emerged: she preferred the technical tasks of her old research job; she had less stress and less travel; she enjoyed having the time back to spend with her family; and she agreed she hadn't quite developed the leadership capability required of an executive in her organisation. So, what was the contentment she experienced on the executive team that she was so attached to and couldn't let go of?... Status!

This realization was a surprise to us both when it emerged but it was clearly a zero/turning point. Once established, I was able to reframe and use appreciative questions to identify the possibilities (Conscious Realistic Choices) that would help Simone move through the doorway into Inspiration, questions about what she wanted to create, how she wanted to feel, what she wanted to be known for, and what could not be compromised.

Conscious Realistic Choices are the options or actions that feel achievable for the person – with the aid of courage.

Conscious Realistic Choices – the doorway into Inspiration

Conscious Realistic Choices are the options or actions that feel achievable for the person – with the aid of courage. What I think is realistic is not necessarily realistic for the person I am coaching and my role is not to advise but to ask questions that might help them discover these choices.

“Nick”, bitterly unhappy at work, was increasingly despondent. He had lost interest in his profession. Deep down he wanted to leave but it didn't feel like a realistic choice. What else would he do? How would he provide? Would he be

⁴ For more information about the principle of Inquiry and its role in the 4-D cycle of Appreciative Inquiry go to AI Commons, a knowledge portal hosted by Case Western Reserve University: <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>

less of a man if he didn't don the suit and head to work each day? This was the contentment he was hanging on to; fear of letting go of it all was more than he could shoulder. He would sit at each session, drowning in a bath of sweat.

As I asked about his family, his interests, his hopes for his sons, it become clearer to him that there were other choices, and that his wife was supporting him in his desire for change by saying that she could continued working while he renovated their home, something he had a passion for.

The last I heard, Nick had taken a redundancy package, enrolled to study carpentry, was collecting his boys from school and renovating the family home.

Using inquiry to give Nick time and space to find these choices was critical, because it is through recognising our own choices and readiness that sustainable change can be accelerated. Appreciative (generative) reframing highlights the hope and possibility of a return to Contentment. It sparks a willingness to find the courage required for the most exciting part of the journey – Inspiration.

Inspiration

- » Creative change.
- » A sense of "getting it all together."
- » Aha-experiences.
- » Feelings freely felt.
- » Open, intense experience of the here and now.
- » Feelings of community.
- » Solid self-confidence.
- » Energy. Clarity. Radical ideas.
- » A desire to make things happen.

The Inspiration room

On the other side of the Confusion/Inspiration doorway is a room full of possibility, hope, energy, challenges, strength and vitality. It can feel like a busy room, and unless managed into Contentment, the flurry of activity can be just that, and not realised as sustainable change. Alternatively, the choices made can be so powerful and clear that the individual is quickly able to filter the seeds they want to sow.

The goal is to determine what new action or activity the individual wants to sow, pay attention to and nurture into Contentment. The metaphor of planting, growing and harvesting is most apt because Contentment is about reaping the rewards of hard work, and giving ourselves time to smell the roses. Nick's story is an example of Inspiration and someone who found their way back to Contentment. Given enough time, Nick may find himself out of Contentment again and back into the cycle that the Four Rooms of Change represents.

For the love of change

This model, combined with AI, has given me an invaluable coaching tool and technique. But beyond that is my own personal experience of recognizing and acknowledging when I have left Contentment and how to work my way through the rooms toward something new and inspiring. Sometimes it is a brief journey; sometimes a long and confronting one. But it is one I feel better equipped to take and hope I am equipping others to take as well.

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Janssen, C. (2011) The Four Rooms of Change, Part 1: A Practical Everyday Psychology. Ander and Lindstrom.

Weisbord, M. (2012) Productive Workplaces. Jossey-Bass.

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AI Practitioner Editor/Publisher

The editor-in-chief and publisher is Anne Radford. She is based in London and can be reached at editor@aipractitioner.com

The postal address for the publication is:
303 Bankside Lofts, 65 Hopton Street, London SE1 9JL,
England.

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7633 9630

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Shelagh Aitken is the issue editor for AI Practitioner.

shelagh@editorproofreader.co.uk

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