

Advaita and Appreciative Inquiry Social Construction of reality by AI practitioners

The authors have been using Appreciative Inquiry for organization, community and personal change for the past several years. We were always confronted with the general notion that Appreciative Inquiry means looking at the “positive” and leveraging the same as opposed to other change management models that look at the “negative” and how to overcome the same.

We hold the view that AI believes in looking at the “whole” and locate the energy for change within that experienced reality. This approach to AI seems to be shared by some other AI practitioners but there seem to be new wave of “positive movement” happening in the AI world. This to us seem more of a reaction to the past 50 years of Psychoanalytical approach to change management that focused on the pathos, disease and unconscious muck in organizations and individuals. Now the western psychologists and OD theorists seem to be saying “We were looking at the wrong place all these years. This doesn’t necessarily bring energy for organizations and people to change. The right place to inquire is into the positive”.

The process of focusing on the positive comes from the same place as focusing on the negative. This is how the Western world has always viewed reality – in a dualistic way. The focus has changed but the belief exists that there is good and bad, positive and negative in any description of reality.

This is the social construction of reality among some of the AI practitioners, especially from the west.

Some of us hold the social construction that Appreciative Inquiry is like “Advaita” – hold the non-dualistic paradigm and valuing “what is”.

Advaita is a Hindu philosophy which is over two thousand years old, propagated by Adi Sankara, in 788 BCE. This philosophy basically questions the human tendency to “split” the world into cause-effect, mind-matter, good-bad and holds the belief that the nature of reality is one and “non-dual” (*Brahman*).

The theory of social construction emphasizes that the perception of reality is based on one’s beliefs i.e. “what you believe is what you see”. Reality exists

in its complete wholeness and it is we who choose to see that part that we believe exists.

We believe that both the paradigms of AI are real and valuable and need to be acknowledged and celebrated. This requires open dialogue amongst us as AI practitioners.

We are presenting this paper to encourage a debate within the AI community to reflect and review how we are taking the practice ahead.