

**David Shaked**

is a strength-based change consultant experienced in business improvement methodologies and strategic planning in large corporates in the US, Europe and Middle-East. David works with AI and other strength-based methodologies as well as business improvement approaches such as Lean and Six Sigma.

Contact: david@almond-insight.com
www.almond-insight.com



Part 2: Personal Challenges of Organisational Leadership

Creating a Bridge Between Deficit-based and Strength-based Problem Solving: the Journey of a Six Sigma Master Black Belt

ABSTRACT

David Shaked shares his personal journey which starts with learning deficit-based problems solving methodologies and continues to the discovery of AI and its implications for his work and personal life. This article explores his inner and outer worlds, the powerful questions he faced and the great outcomes these questions led to. It also proposes a way to bridge deficit-based and strength-based methodologies to reach a potentially powerful and positive result.

Part one: Building some problem solving expertise

I first heard about Appreciative Inquiry over three years ago. Until then, I had been busy developing a successful career in the large corporate world. I joined a leading global company after gaining a degree in Accounting and Economics. The experience led me to choose to further my studies and gain an MBA degree, a rich learning experience. I learned many approaches for analysing different business challenges and driving change.

After I graduated, I took on a new role, working with a different global corporate. There I learned some new and additional problem solving and business improvement techniques. These approaches were called Six Sigma and Lean Thinking. Through these approaches I learned to identify when defects occur, find the root causes and work on solving them as well as identifying and removing waste in the daily company activities.

My work covered all parts of the organisation, from manufacturing, through distribution, customer services and all the way to sales. Wastes and defects were everywhere and I was after them with the conviction that every step we take to eliminate waste or defects impacts our customers positively and brings the company to a better state. Not only was I busy helping the organisation with its waste and defect elimination efforts, I was also teaching others how to apply the tools and coaching them in their efforts.

There was a lot of work for us! As soon as one project finished, a new one emerged. Management (both top and middle) always had another challenge for people like me in the endless pursuit of better products, service and greater profits. I was working on projects in the U. S. and Europe, as well as providing advice to my colleagues in Asia. I had a lot of success in the work I was doing and enjoyed the experience I gained. It seemed that the tools and approaches I learned were useful to many situations and made quick, positive impacts. It was also gratifying to be called upon for help by so many people in the organisation.

'One of my most successful Lean Six Sigma projects focused on increasing the on-time shipment of products to our customers across Europe from a particular distribution centre.

We identified the root cause for the existing low level of performance in the parcel sorting machine and the process of sorting to destinations and worked on solving the various problems in the sorting process. On-time shipment went up from 65% to 98%.'

After three years I reached the top level of certification in my area of expertise.¹ I continued with this type of work for almost seven years. Over time, I sensed that many of the requests for support I received kept re-surfacing in one way or another. The problems I solved reappeared in another country or in a different part of the organisation, and my efforts felt somewhat repetitive.

I started asking for advice, which led to an extensive career-coaching process. At the end, I realised that my career vision lies in being a positive-change leader for individuals, teams and organisations. This realisation led me to further research through which I discovered Appreciative Inquiry as a positive-change approach.

Part two: Discovering AI – now what?

My first AI foundations course was a great experience.² I connected well with the methodology and approach. I learned new ideas and useful techniques. My big question at that stage was how to integrate this fantastic new approach with everything I was doing before, and how to bring AI to my corporate world. My main struggle was the realisation that everything I had done until then was deficit-(or problem-) based and all the new approaches I was attracted to were strength-based. In between there seemed to be a chasm.

All of a sudden I felt that my work with Six Sigma and Lean thinking was 'bad' and AI was 'good'. I felt I had to throw away everything I had learned and experienced until then and re-start a new learning journey. Six Sigma and Lean Thinking seemed to clash fundamentally in their style, language, process and logic with AI. How could I connect AI's 5D process with the DMAIC³ process from Six Sigma and its specific emphasis on finding root causes for problems through analysis? How could I continue my efforts to eliminate waste while inquiring into what gives life to my organisation? These questions confused me for a while. On the one hand, I loved the energy and creativity AI brought by focusing on the strengths and high moments. On the other hand, I didn't want to lose the familiar world of process mapping with post-it notes and deep statistical analysis.

During the following year, I tried using AI with a few projects and experienced great success and strong interest from colleagues in my company. At the same time, I continued to use my old techniques of Lean Thinking and Six Sigma with other projects. The more I continued practising the two approaches in parallel, the wider the gap seemed to be. I knew I wanted to bridge that gap, but didn't know how. Talking to other practitioners of AI, Six Sigma and Lean Thinking did not seem to help. Each advocated the strengths of their approaches. The AI practitioners I met, whilst trying to appreciate my background, unique expertise and challenge, did not seem to understand my need and drive to bridge the two internal worlds I was experiencing. The Six Sigma and Lean Thinking practitioners were quick to point out the defects they believed were inherent within AI, as well as the potential waste.⁴ At that time, my organisation had a

1 The highest certification level in Six Sigma is called Master Black Belt. At that stage my key focus was on training and mentoring others as well as working on higher level, cross-company projects.

2 A course delivered by Mette Jacobsgaard and Jane Magruder-Watkins in Lincoln, UK.

3 DMAIC stands for the following: Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve and Control. The Analyse and Control stages of Six Sigma seemed particularly at odds with the spirit of AI.

4 Some of my Lean Six Sigma colleagues felt the AI approach ignored problems in each situation, was too slow to achieve results, wasn't based on sound data and potentially created an uncontrollable situation. Some of their comments seemed convincing, perhaps because they echoed some of my own doubts at that stage.

'The first time I used AI in my company turned out to be a huge success. The project focused on building better relationships with its biggest customer in Britain. After I explained AI, I had full management support.'

The inquiry focused on best experiences in existing business relationships, both between the two companies and with their other business partners, and the future hopes of both businesses.

One participant commented: 'I haven't seen a team come together better than this!' Also noticeable was how quickly the success story spread within my company around the globe.'

strong (and proud) problem-solving culture and my energy and interest were shifting elsewhere. I decided to leave my organisation and start pursuing my passions as an independent consultant. I continued to further my understanding of AI by reading literature and taking more advanced courses. The main driver was my desire to fill the gaps of knowledge I felt I had and possibly bridge the chasm I experienced.

Part three: Building a bridge – looking for strengths in the deficit world

The turning point arrived a year after my first course. I took an AI coaching course⁵ which significantly helped clarify my way forward. I realised that the way forward for me was not by addressing my knowledge gaps: I could keep doing that forever. Instead, I could gain new insights by looking at my strengths and best experiences to date, including the strengths and best experiences I had while practising deficit-based techniques. I also learned that the 5D model, while solid and versatile, is not the only way to apply AI. I had a deeper understanding and strong connection with the principles behind AI. I then realised how fundamental it was to have this deep understanding and connection with the principles of AI and how important it was to apply them in everything I did both professionally and personally. AI became far more alive and meaningful for me at that stage.

Over the next few months, I started asking myself different questions. Instead of asking what else I needed to learn, or how to 'fix' Six Sigma and Lean Thinking in order to create a bridge between my two internal worlds, I started exploring my own strengths. What do I do well when I work with Six Sigma and Lean Thinking? What were the most powerful experiences I had with these techniques? What did I like the most? Which tools worked best? What did people I worked with like about these methodologies? What worked well for the organisation when I applied them? What was so unique and attractive about these methodologies?

At the same time, I also referred back to the guiding principles behind Six Sigma and Lean Thinking. These principles were actually, to my surprise at the time, very strength-oriented. For example, the reason why Six Sigma is focused so much on defect identification and elimination is actually the pursuit of quality. The guiding principle behind Lean Thinking is the desire to deliver the best value to the customer as quickly as possible. All of a sudden there didn't seem to be such a dichotomy between the two worlds!

The next stage in this journey was to take the tools and techniques from Six Sigma which I liked the most and apply an appreciative approach (or a 'lens') and the principles of AI to the tools or questions I used as part of these approaches. For example, I still use process mapping to help the groups I work with to have clarity around a given process. However, instead of focusing the group's attention on the waste in that process, I apply the positive principle by focusing them on the parts of the process where value is created.

It is also clear to me that waste will naturally disappear if people orient themselves⁶ towards ways of increasing the value they generate in any process. Another example is the use of the powerful statistical tools and rigour that Six Sigma and the DMAIC model provide to identify root causes of success and amplify them instead of studying defects. I also bring the principle of wholeness by involving a wider representation of the system I work with. Finally, I now know

⁵ This course was delivered by Barbara Sloan in Lincoln UK.

⁶ In other words, the anticipatory principle in action!

'I asked the sponsor how often the organisation changes rail carriages successfully and on-time? A powerful moment of silence followed ... 'I don't think we ever measured it.'

that the value of data and statistics is not in the numbers or charts, but in the conversations we hold around them. We can choose to interpret them as we wish (as I often did before) and we do so based on our (or our organisation's) mental model rather than any external, supposedly objective view. The link to the principle of social construction with data and statistics has never been clearer!

Part four: Appreciative Lean Thinking and problem solving in practice

Perhaps one of the best examples I have to date of the simultaneity principle in action was a recent client project I worked on. The client, a rail company, asked my colleague⁷ and I to facilitate a process improvement workshop to reduce the delays to rail services occurring when exchanging faulty carriages with serviced carriages. The need to exchange faulty carriages has many causes. The exchange, when not done correctly or in a timely fashion, creates delays to the rail service and a chain-reaction of further delays to other services.

At a meeting with the project sponsor, who is the head of the department in charge of rail performance, we were provided with plenty of data points about the delays, their frequency, root causes and their great financial impact on the company. I asked the sponsor how often the organisation changes carriages successfully and on-time? A powerful moment of silence followed... The answer our sponsor provided was 'I don't know... I don't think we ever measured it'. From that moment onward, our conversation took a completely different direction. We were all curious to find out how often the process works well, what contributes to this success and how we can do more of what already works well.

This single powerful question was the basis of the workshop we delivered. The workshop followed a new and innovative design following Lean Thinking process improvement workshops (kaizen event) I have delivered in the past but run with an appreciative, strength and value focus. We enquired about best experiences, mapping the process when it works, collecting stories and data about the process at its best and asking participants what would make it even better.

The questions asked, the evidence sought and the analysis conducted were all different from the normal Lean Thinking approach and more powerful. The great ideas the participants came up with came from good practices they were already doing or had done in the past. It was an exciting process to facilitate and observe. It also felt very satisfying personally to reach this point in my own professional development and to be able to connect my ideas and knowledge in this approach. A new, more appreciative and life-giving way for Lean Thinking process improvement was born!

Summary

To summarise my experience so far, I can offer other practitioners a wider and deeper look at AI and its implication on deficit-based approaches. As I learned from my own journey, there is no need to look at the two as opposites. AI can benefit from the variety and rigour of some of the deficit-based models that worked for us so well for such a long time. At the same time, successful practitioners of the various deficit-based models that have been developed during the 20th century could bring a lot of energy and exciting new innovations by applying AI principles to their strengths and great experiences.

⁷ Gill How of Buonacorsi Consulting, my colleague in this project, is an experienced coach who over the past 14 years has helped many organisations develop their own successful coaching and change programmes. The workshop described above was co-facilitated by the two of us.

International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry

Inside:

- 4** Introduction to The Inside and Outside Worlds of an AI Practitioner edited by Geoffrey Allan, Steve Loraine and Anne Radford
- 8** **Part 1: Personal Challenges of Organisational Leadership**
Fragile Practice, Humble Learning, Extraordinary Outcomes by Joan McArthur-Blair
Education is all that matters. It is the greatest gift a government can give people. Generative leadership requires both humbleness and passion.
- 11** An Appreciative Approach to Inclusive Teambuilding
by Bente Sloth and Carsten Hornstrup
A leader talks about her journey towards leading with a focus on inspiration, motivation, co-creating learning and not least, creating a great work environment.
- 16** **Part 2: Combining AI with Other Models**
Creating a Bridge Between Deficit-based and Strength-based Problem Solving:
the Journey of a Six Sigma Master Black Belt by David Shaked
The challenge of combining the energy and creativity of AI and process mapping with post-it notes and deep statistical analysis.
- 20** Appreciating Action Learning by Geoff Allan
Combining AI and action learning sets.
- 25** Neuroscience: a New Friend to OD and AI by Richard Coe
Looking for answers about how the brain functions, especially in different social circumstances and sensory environments.
- 29** AI KI DO by José Otte
AI combined with Akido creates a connection between East and West which can be used in organizations to create positive change, positive leadership and organization culture transformation.

International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry

Inside continued:

34 **Part 3: Evolving Our Practice Through Reflection and Working in New Ways**

It's Not the Events – It's the Spaces In Between by Sarah Lewis

A story about working with what you can, not what you can't.

39 'We're in it Together': Living Well with Dementia: Creating a Regional Strategy for the East Midlands by Julie Barnes

On 2 October 2009, 180 people from across the East Midlands, UK and from all parts of local health, social care and community services came together with people with dementia and their carers to create a regional vision for living well with dementia.

43 The AI Circle: A Place to Develop Our Skills and Ourselves by Jeanie Cockell

Creating a space for our internal selves to show up (who we are) as we share our strategies for working in our worlds (what we do).

47 Reshape to Reframe: Living AI in our Bodies by Roz Kay

Our mental frameworks are deeply rooted and they shape our bodies in ways that impact our listening, seeing, attention and more.

51 Confessions of an AI-coholic: The Road to LEAD by Ada Jo Mann

LEADing from your strengths.

54 **AI Research Notes** by Jan Reed and Lena Holmberg

Research Notes carries news of AI research which is about to start, is in progress or has been completed. Contributions are from researchers around the world.

59 **About the May 2010 Issue**

Guest Editors: Loretta Randolph and Neil Samuels

This issue will be devoted to Individuals and Organizations Flourishing Through Time.

60 **IAPG Contacts and AI Practitioner Subscription Information**



IAPG Contacts and AI Practitioner Subscription Information



International Advisory Practitioners Group IAPG

Members of the International Advisory Practitioners Group working with AIP to bring AI stories to a wider audience

Druba Acharya, Nepal

Gervase Bushe, Canada

Sue Derby, Canada

Sara Inés Gómez, Colombia

Lena Holmberg, Sweden

Joep de Jong, Netherlands

Dorothy Liebig, Germany

John Loty, Australia

Sue James, Australia

Maureen McKenna, Canada

Liz Mellish, Canada

Dayle O'Brien, Australia

Jan Reed, United Kingdom

Catriona Rogers, Hong Kong

Daniel K. Saint, United States

Marge Schiller, United States

Jackie Stavros, United States

Bridget Woods, South Africa

Jacqueline Wong, Singapore

Margaret Wright, United Kingdom

AIP Subscriptions

Individuals

NGOS, students and community groups

Small organisations

University/Research Institute

Large organisations

<http://www.aipractitioner.com/subscriptions>

Back Issues and Articles

<http://www.aipractitioner.com/issues>

<http://www.aipractitioner.com/articles>

Change of subscriber details

<http://www.aipractitioner.com/customer/account/login/>

Publication Advertising/Sponsorship

For the advertising rates, contact Anne Radford.

Disclaimer: Views and opinions of the writers do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher. Every effort is made to ensure accuracy but all details are subject to alteration. No responsibility can be accepted for any inaccuracies.

Purpose of AI Practitioner

This publication is for people interested in making the world a better place using positive relational approaches to change such as Appreciative Inquiry.

The publication is distributed quarterly: February, May, August and November.

AI Practitioner Editor/Publisher

The editor/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

Fax: +44 (0)845 051 8639

ISSN 1741 8224

AI Practitioner © 2003-2010 Anne Radford

