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India and Appreciative Inquiry

Generative Connection between Ancient
Wisdom and Today's Endeavours in the Field

Neena Verma
Ronald Fry
Zeb Waturoucha



Inside this issue

Welcome to a new year for AI Practitioner!

Anne Radford, Editor in Chief



We begin the year with an issue, gratefully sponsored by Involve Consulting in France, which focuses on India and AI and continue with issues on AI communities of practice, AI in Asia and the effect of AI within cities.

In this February issue, our articles connect ancient Indian philosophies with AI practices of appreciative engagement and mindset. Through the articles, pictures and poems, our contributors invite us to witness changes with GenY employees, tribal communities and innovation in Indian industry.

In our first Feature Choice article this year, Mo McKenna focuses on the urgent need for climate change in our physical and human world environments, including our organizations and communities.

In Research Notes, we focus on the potential complications which occur when the researcher is also a manager where she is collecting data and has a stake in the project outcome.

In AI Resources, you will find key books, articles and videos connecting AI and India. This column is dedicated to Suresh Srivastva, born in India and an instrumental figure in the creation and development of Appreciative Inquiry.

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Involve Consulting, pioneers of AI in France and specialists in OD and leadership development.

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Appreciatively Engaging GenY

Energizing 'the Base' in a Steel Plant

ABSTRACT

*Mitha zadana muliyane
shoshay nahi pan posay.*

'Tree roots, giving sweet fruits, are to be nurtured and not to be uprooted.' Gujarati folk wisdom

This article is about the Appreciative Inquiry-based engagement model – reversing the organizational pyramid and energizing the base – for engaging GenY employees. It explores life-giving sources for alignment with the company's vision to enhance engagement in a steel plant in Gujarat, India.

Practitioners and academics widely agree that an engaged workforce can create a competitive advantage. Engaged employees are more Receptive, Involved, Proactive and Energized (RIPE). Johnson (2004) has written that "the ability to engage employees, to make them work with our business, is going to be one of the greatest organizational battles of the coming ten years". Towers Perrin (2007) found that organizations with the highest percentage of engaged employees increased their operating income by 19% and their earnings per share by 28%. Organizations with higher engagement tend to have lower employee turnover, higher productivity, higher total shareholder returns and better financial performance. (Baumruk, 2006; Hay Group Report, 2010). Actively engaged employees care for the company's future and lead to positive business outcomes (Richman, 2006).

Most Indian organizations do not focus their efforts on engaging their employees, particularly those from GenY (those currently aged between 21 and 30), which will comprise the largest proportion of the employed workforce for next 30 years. In today's global economic turbulence, zapping organizational energies and reducing the level of engagement are key organizational concerns (Frank et al, 2004). The Electrotherm (India) Ltd Group (ET) had been challenged with an attrition rate of 33% for its GenY engineers, which consists of 20% of its workforce. The ET Group decided to improve GenY productivity and reduce attrition by strengthening engagement using AI as a methodology.

The youngest of the five directors at ET strongly believed in the adage, "Nurture your people (like trees), if you want to achieve the lifetime vision."

Nurturing the roots

The joint managing director entrusted the transformation responsibility of nurturing the roots – reversing the pyramid and energizing the base – to the office of strategy management and organization transformation (OSMOT). This paper tells the story of the AI journey that appreciatively engaged the



TMT bars and ductile iron pipe

GenY employees at ET. It describes our journey of inquiring about aspirations, integration through co-imagination, innovative ways to invite their wholehearted participation and actively engage them using 4-I model of AI (Watkins and Mohr, 2001).

The objectives

- Improving the retention rate for a selected GenY group in the steel plant by 5-6% annually
- Re-energizing and actively engaging the GenY generation

The organization

ET Group is a 29-year-old organization and a listed company at Bombay Stock Exchange. The ET Group established an integrated steel plant of 0.5 million metric tons per annum (MTA) capacity to manufacture thermo-mechanically treated bars (used in constructing houses) and ductile iron pipes (used to supply water; see Figure 1). The plant is operated by a workforce of 3,700 people. The company's vision is to become a 7,500 million rupees by sales with 1.5 million MTA steel company by 2015.

Appreciatively nurturing the roots of the GenY generation

The company conducted an engagement survey, which diagnosed some of the key concerns for the steel plant. Based on the findings, a group of 160 GenY-aged workers (Lancaster, 2002) were selected initially.

The engineers were selected using criteria based on their past year's performance and potential. Eight groups of GenY employees were formed. They were exposed to AI theory, tools and techniques. Icebreakers enabled cohesive and collaborative climates in groups. Story telling which captured life-giving forces were discovered at the plant, such as autonomy, independence, motivation, training and development, welfare and "homeliness". The process generated hope, trust and anticipation for change.

In the next step Expression Collage workshops were conducted with groups of between 20 and 25. The objective was to discover their career aspirations and motivators. They identified and emphasized three key themes: freedom, technology and employee caring.

'Nurture your people (like trees), if you want to achieve the lifetime vision.'
Gujarati saying





GenY employees making collage during an Expression workshop

After the collage workshops, focused group discussions were conducted to map their aspirations with current and future organizational practices.

The interventions were identified under five broad areas:

Organizational values and structure Organizational Values Percolation workshops were to be arranged, to develop appreciative culture through Appreciative Inquiry. Organization charts were to be clarified for the plant and a job analysis carried out for each position.

Performance contribution (Sarkar, 2011) Mutual goal setting processes were to be facilitated and periodical “dashboard” review meetings organized. Coordination among departments was to be enhanced. A performance-based Employee Recognition Scheme was to be launched.

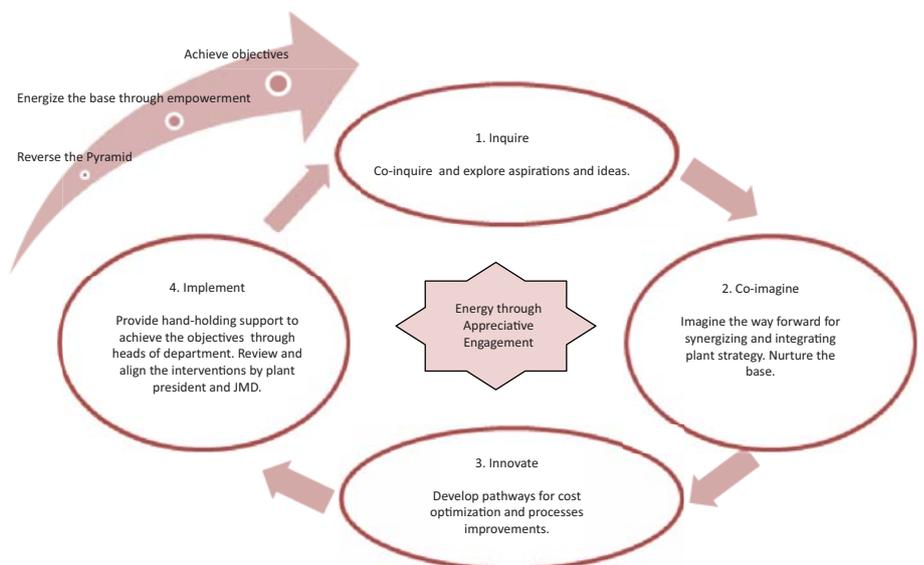
Standard operating procedure (SOP) requirements: A mass-scale interaction process and suggestion scheme was to be implemented, and a 5S¹ system and campus-branding scheme facilitated. Personal protective equipment (PPE) and a health and accident insurance policy were to be provided.

Career enhancement and training (Emelo, 2011) A competency framework was to be developed and training needs identified. Gaps in skills, performance and motivation were to be addressed. Continuing education opportunities were to be provided.

Recreation and welfare A sports complex was to be developed, and a decision taken to celebrate “ET Annual Day”, as well as to provide adequate bus and canteen facilities. Bachelor and family accommodation were also to be provided.

OSMOT, with GenY teams, prepared an action plan to implement the interventions and realize the dreams. The groups presented to the directors.

Figure 1: Appreciatively engaging GenY model: reversing the pyramid and energizing the base



¹ “5S” is the name of a workplace organization method that uses a list of five Japanese words: *seiri*, *seiton*, *seiso*, *seiketsu*, and *shitsuke*. The English equivalents are: sort, set in order, systematic cleaning, standardize and sustain.

Organizational support for implementation was obtained from all of all heads of departments.

Table 1: Using AI to engage GenY employees at ET

AI steps	AI activities
<i>Pre-AI</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic survey • Identification of areas of concern for the GenY employees in the plant
<i>Inquire</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AI theory presentation • Icebreakers • Storytelling about peak experiences in the plant
<i>Imagine</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-imagining the future • Exploring current and future career aspirations • Making collages about the plant five years in the future • Discovering themes from the stories and presenting them as poetry, songs, jingles and so on in the local language
<i>Innovate</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying the underlying elements of purpose, values and cultural ethos for the future of the ET Group • Brainstorming about process/practices to be modified/changed
<i>Implementation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Execution plans for the intervention • Presentation to the executive director • Getting organizational support for implementation

‘AI is an eye opener, has to be nurtured continuously.’
GenY employee and participant

The follow up

Six months after the change process was initiated, we sought feedback from selected team leaders. About 65% of them said that AI had equipped them for the business transformation by dealing with each other in a more mature manner emotionally. This was evident in the qualitative feedback:

- “AI is an eye opener, has to be nurtured continuously.”
- “We are moving towards No. 1 steel company in India.”
- “Our chairman will be the ‘Furnace King.’”
- “Engagement is retaining.”
- “We can reach to stars, if provided sunlight (freedom) and water (autonomy).”

Energizing 'the base' of an organization is a powerful vehicle, leading to effective change

- Productivity has been improved by 7% over past six months.
- Engagement level has improved by 24% compared with last year's engagement survey.

Our learnings

- Change is the holder of organizational optimism. Nurturing the people as "roots" leads to success.
- Energizing "the base" of an organization is a powerful vehicle, leading to effective change. Storytelling, poetry, painting, collage-making, music, and celebration are powerful techniques to express feelings and reconnect with life-giving forces.
- The ancient folk wisdom "the tree roots giving sweet fruits are to be nurtured and not to be uprooted" stands reaffirmed and further strengthened as a fundamental belief in the organizational philosophy of ET.
- The appreciative process helped us transcend a dismal state of alarming attrition to move towards energizing the base, and has opened creative vistas for appreciative engagement at ET.

Building excitement in the lives of GenY employees working in a remotely located, seven-year-old steel plant was a challenge. Applying Appreciative Inquiry creatively infused with local Gujarati folk wisdom was an inspiring change initiative. Affirming GenY motivation and energy is self-fulfilling: we believed in them and they started believing in themselves!

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