

Nurturing A Positive and Collaborative Leadership Through Appreciative Inquiry in South East Asia

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What is Important?

Content Curation is not a term exclusive to new media. Ever since people learned how to share, we have learned how to filter and process what we hear, and make them into our own. This is an individual skill, but when a group collectively digests new information, culture and values emerges. As part of G13 APLP, I have been exposed to a myriad of informations and ideas, but two key takeaways stuck with me. The first is how the world has moved from facing problems to facing predicaments, the main difference being that predicaments involve contradicting views of the intended state. Because of this, the second key takeaway is the realization that predicaments can't be solved. It can only be resolved.

If the shift has been identified, how do we prepare society to approach this new way of thinking? In the words of Victor Hugo, "Nothing is stronger than an idea whose time has come." Preparation is always key, and preparing for an idea to flourish is the most exciting of all. The mind must be nurtured and educated, first on an individual level, then as a group, which will spread to overall community. I am a supporter of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) framework, introduced by David Cooperrider, because it seeks to facilitate learning (or inquiry) by looking at the world through positive imagery. AI follows a 4D process: Dream – Design – Deliver – Destiny, and represents a cycle in changing social systems by looking at the greatest strengths and stories of an organization or community. Simply put, AI focuses on strengths instead of weaknesses. One of the basic principles of AI is Simultaneity, which proposes that as we inquire into human systems, we change them at the same time, and this is implicit in the very first questions asked.

In my work, clients would very often remarked "I understand the recommendation, but people will not do this because they have a different mindset." This indicates a widely held belief that people's mindset can't be changed. Cognitive development theories like those by Ron Heifetz or Robert Kegan has proven that it can. Personally, I find the ability to change mindset as the most important asset required in the 21st century.

So what happened?

APLP did. We all came together to do the program because we want to learn about leadership. Doing it at the East-West Center allowed us to access the level of leadership development programs that, frankly, are more advanced in the West. This is why we leave our homes, because we couldn't learn leadership like this back in Asia.

So then how do we learn? I think APLP emphasized two things. One is learning through reflection, leading out of who you are, taking the time to document your thoughts about global issues and discovering your tendencies, and what sort of leader you gravitate towards being. These are all

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individual reflection, though, and I think the other strong value of APLP is having a small community where we gather and discuss our thoughts for four months. That's a very long dialogue.

From these things I believe that we learn best through reflection, and that we reflect best through dialogue. If this is the case, in order to keep learning, we need to keep having dialogues no matter where we are, East or West, Honolulu or our home countries. But it can't just be any dialogue, it has to be *constructive* dialogue.

How do I want to be different because I lived in this world?

I am a trained facilitator and program designer, having worked as a management consultant for my entire career. My volunteer work is also in facilitating group learning through participatory and inclusive platforms. More important than all of those is that I know I have much to learn. Sharing ideas in a compelling way is something I love to always work on, and being in APLP made me realize that this skill is truly important when working with any groups of people.

My professional background is in corporate leadership development, so I specifically wanted to use this opportunity at GIST as a study of organizations, going beyond corporates, touching nonprofits and communities as well. This expansion of scope will contribute significantly to my career and research trajectory.

So what do you want to do?

To use this time and opportunity to apply what I learned in APLP in my home region of Asia. Specifically, South East Asia. Replicating the APLP experience everywhere I go is nearly impossible, but I can introduce what I believe is the biggest value of APLP, which is the way of learning through reflection and constructive dialogue. I will be using Appreciative Inquiry, a framework I've used before in my work as a management consultant, further reinforced in APLP when we talk about leadership. For this opportunity, I'd like to start a dialogue about leadership, but focusing on "what can be" rather than "what is wrong".

I will be having as many of these dialogues as possible, as I travel across the region. I will seek out what excites people about their lives or how they see their leadership roles. What were their greatest examples of being a good leader? What about being a good follower? What sort of leader figures do people look up to? I plan to have these conversations both to individuals, through interviews, or to groups, through class discussions and informal gatherings. Further, I also plan to talk to the *conversation makers*. As an event organizer, I plan to use my TEDx and other event networks to speak to those who conducts community events. I'd like to know what they see as good inspirations that their community responds to.

I would also like to delve into the different elements that make up a constructive dialogue. Appreciative Inquiry, for example, is a part of Positive Psychology. How to communicate and articulate your thoughts. Structure. Efficiency of speech. How to convey confidence and good manners. How to listen, actively and passively. How to ask questions that makes people think, and

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does not lead to a defensive reactions. Some of these things I have learned through APLP, and some I have learned in past experiences. I look forward to having conversations about these different elements, either through workshops or informal discussions.

As for my personal objective, I'd like to find out how one can have a constructive dialogue with one's self. We are often our biggest critic and our worst enemy. For me to really believe that people can have a meaningful, intellectual and critical dialogue that are still empowering and focuses on opportunities, I would have to apply the same concepts when dealing with my own personal issues.

What will come out of this?

First of all, as a content curator, I am very looking forward to collecting insights and stories of people. Collecting oral narratives has gained traction in the last few years (see <http://humansofnewyork.com> and its variations in other cities, including Vanuatu in the Pacific), and is now done to supplement data and information. As a professional presenter and facilitator, I am enticed with the idea of stories as a way of communicating messages before "presentations" was invented.

Second, I look forward to co-creating modules or learning tools about the different elements of constructive dialogues. Also, going back to my initial objectives, the dialogues are there to facilitate learning. How do we facilitate a lifetime of reflective learning? It can be done through learning tools, journals, or a set of guiding questions. What's important is for the modules to be *replicable*, in other communities, and can be used to learn about other subjects, not being limited to leadership.