Auteursrechterlijke overeenkomst

Opdat de Universiteit Hasselt uw eindverhandeling wereldwijd kan reproduceren, vertalen en distribueren is uw akkoord voor deze overeenkomst noodzakelijk. Gelieve de tijd te nemen om deze overeenkomst door te nemen, de gevraagde informatie in te vullen (en de overeenkomst te ondertekenen en af te geven).

Ik/wij verlenen het wereldwijde auteursrecht voor de ingediende eindverhandeling met

Titel: Appreciative Inquiry : theory and application. A case study
Richting: master of Management optie Business Studies   Jaar: 2008

in alle mogelijke mediaformaten, - bestaande en in de toekomst te ontwikkelen - , aan de Universiteit Hasselt.

Niet tegenstaand deze toekenning van het auteursrecht aan de Universiteit Hasselt behoud ik als auteur het recht om de eindverhandeling, - in zijn geheel of gedeeltelijk -, vrij te reproduceren, (her)publiceren of distribueren zonder de toelating te moeten verkrijgen van de Universiteit Hasselt.

Ik bevestig dat de eindverhandeling mijn origineel werk is, en dat ik het recht heb om de rechten te verlenen die in deze overeenkomst worden beschreven. Ik verklaar tevens dat de eindverhandeling, naar mijn weten, het auteursrecht van anderen niet overtreedt.

Ik verklaar tevens dat ik voor het materiaal in de eindverhandeling dat beschermd wordt door het auteursrecht, de nodige toelatingen heb verkregen zodat ik deze ook aan de Universiteit Hasselt kan overdragen en dat dit duidelijk in de tekst en inhoud van de eindverhandeling werd genotificeerd.

Universiteit Hasselt zal mij als auteur(s) van de eindverhandeling identificeren en zal geen wijzigingen aanbrengen aan de eindverhandeling, uitgezonderd deze toegelaten door deze overeenkomst.

Ik ga akkoord,

VILCANE, Maira

Datum: 5.11.2008

Appreciative Inquiry

Theory and application. A case study

Maira Vilcane

promotor :
dr. Frank LAMBRECHTS

universiteit
►►hasselt

PREFACE

With this thesis I am ending my study – Master of Management. It was just one year program but experience I gained from it is immeasurable. Firstly, these were my first studies abroad. It was a great possibility to see Belgium, its culture and learn a new language. I met people from many European, Asian, African countries and learned about their culture as well. Working in such a diverse group helps to see things from many different points of view.

Secondly, the studies in Hasselt University turned to be very interesting. A lot of things were new for me and it was a challenge to study here. Another challenge for me was to follow lectures in English which is not my native language. My English skills have improved during this year, and I am very glad about it.

Finally, to obtain the master degree and finish this interesting journey, I had to write a thesis. I have to admit that in the beginning I thought of writing a thesis as a compulsory task that just had to be done. I didn't expect that it will turn in an exciting experience not only in my studies but also in my life. Appreciative Inquiry was also something very new for me; however, it has a unique characteristic to attract attention. As soon as I started to work on my thesis, I got involved in a very interesting research process. The process of research became even more interesting when I actually met and spoke to people who are involved in the positive change process caused by Appreciative Inquiry. This research made me think about a lot of things, for example, how to find things that gives energy to people and how to develop a more people oriented working environment. Moreover, it made me think about the things I would like to do in my life, what are my dreams and how I could make them real.

I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. Dr. Frank Lambrechts for his help, advices, and support throughout all the research process. I am especially grateful for his help in organizing interviews and providing various materials for my literature review.

I also would like to thank Stebo and every interviewee I talked to for their enthusiasm and interest to cooperate and provide information for my research. I am thankful that they agreed to share their experiences, thus making the research process much more interesting.

I hope that readers of this thesis will enjoy reading it and will discover something new and useful. I would like to wish everyone pleasant reading.

Maira Vilcane, Hasselt, June 2008

SUMMARY

The 21st century brings new challenges for both organizations and society. Rapidly changing environment, innovation, and dynamically changing markets demand new ways of working and more effective approaches to be developed and put into practice.

The future is in self organizing, dynamic, flexible organizations. Nowadays people want much more from their job than just financial reward. People want to work in healthy work environment, they want to be more involved in the decision making process and have more voice in it. Employee in the 21st century wants to be a part of the organization and help to build its future. For decades the human values were abandoned and not considered as the main factors in developing successful organization. Therefore, the traditional way of working and implementing changes in the organizations may not be so effective and appropriate anymore. New methods of working have to be in balance with the new values. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) may be the solution for organizations that want to stay ahead of the competition in the 21st century and show that human values should be a priority.

In my research I will investigate the possibilities AI offers to organizations. The research of this thesis addresses the questions of what really works in AI and how the AI approach should be implemented successfully.

In the beginning of the research AI is described as an alternative form of the action research approach, developed by D.L. Cooperrider and S. Srivastva. I will base my research on their argument that more traditional approaches to organizational development prevent an organization to reach the innovative potential and to develop its strengths and competences. Unlike more traditional approaches, AI nourishes the human spirit.

I will argue that there is not one concrete definition or description of AI and provide various definitions of AI developed over the time by different scholars and writers. I will come to the conclusion that AI can take various forms and can be applied in different ways. In this thesis I am going to describe some basic principles and values of AI, and further I will compare them with the principles and values of more traditional approaches to organizational development. It will also become clear that the most popular way to implement AI is the 4-D model that consists of 4 phases: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. The first phase of 4-D model is about "discovering" the best of what is. In the second phase participants explore and discuss

their visions, dreams, hopes, and ideas for the future. In the Design phase participants co-construct their new reality based on their articulation of direction, principles, strategic framework. Finally, in the last phase the design is put into practice.

To see how AI is implemented in the organization and how it works in practice, more practical research had to been done. Therefore, second part of my research presents the findings from practical investigation of organization that is applying the AI approach in their work. Stebo, an organization in Genk (Belgium), recently has adopted the AI approach in their working methods for giving guidance to people who are looking for a job or want to become an entrepreneur. AI has helped Stebo to reach so positive results that it has attracted the attention of other organizations and local authorities. Therefore, Stebo serves as a great example, and their experience and observations during the project and afterwards can be useful for other organizations or companies which want to implement similar projects. My goal was to collect these experiences by means of in-depth interviews and present it in the form of a case study.

The case study presents answers to such questions like: What were the reasons to start the project in Stebo? How did they introduce employees with the AI approach? What are the important conditions when applying AI? Are there any pitfalls? What changes did it bring to Stebo? How it is different from the previous way of working? The answers to these questions help to discover the factors that can play an important role in the AI implementation process.

After the literature review and the case study were completed, I linked my findings to the research questions I formulated in the beginning of the research. I show how information from the case study and the literature review complements each other.

I will conclude this thesis by saying that information obtained by means of interviews is precious, because it includes experiences of people who were directly involved in the change process in Stebo. I will argue that the successful AI implementation process depends on many different factors (e.g. working environment, organizational culture, top management involvement, introduction of AI). However, the most important ones are willingness to change and serious work of the organization as a system. In the end of my research I will propose to continue this research and take it to a whole other level.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: Introduction and problem definition

The aim of Chapter 1 is to introduce the reader with the subject, relevance of the subject and structure of the thesis. In this chapter I will point out the research objectives, the central research question, as well as research sub-questions. Research methods that have been applied during my research also will be described in one of the sections of this chapter. Finally, I will give short introduction to other chapters of this thesis.

1.1 Introduction to the subject and defining a problem statement

Relevance of the subject

Today we live in a very dynamic world. Everything is changing at a rapid pace. Companies that are successful today may be at the bottom tomorrow. How to stay ahead of the competition? How to survive in a rapid changing environment? These questions should be important for every organization or company in the 21st century.

Chowdhury (2000, p. 3-14) introduces concepts that will have a profound impact on all kind of companies and organizations in the 21st century. Some of Chowdhury's advices to managers and organizations are: "search a dream, act a dream, and make a dream come real", "rather than becoming individualistic, become peoplistic", "you should touch the heart, touch the mind, touch the emotion", "there must be an atmosphere in which people believe in strategy, believe in management decisions, and believe in their work", "the driving force behind a 21st century organization will be its people", and "all organizations should create a flexible working environment that attracts the most talented people to create the knowledge an organization needs." These new concepts are very different from the ones we are used to. For decades organizations have mainly focused on their profit and tried to find the ways how to increase it. What Chowdhury (2000) is trying to say is, that in the 21st century focus has to change towards people, because he believes that people create organizations, and people can destroy them. The most valuable commodity in business is not technology or capital but people.

The problem is that for developing people orientated organization we need new methods and principles, because the old ones, simply, will not work so well anymore. What I am trying to say is that AI has all possibilities and potential to become one of the most important methods in the organizational development process and bring an organization towards the 21st century.

Why Appreciative Inquiry is different?

The first thing people should know about AI is that there is not one concrete definition of AI. The term Appreciative Inquiry, was introduced in the 1987 by David L. Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva. Since then, plenty of definitions of AI have been developed by scholars, practitioners and people who have come in touch with this approach. I am going to look through this issue in Chapter 2 in more detail. Therefore, for a short introduction I would like to give a definition: "AI is an organizational development (OD) process or philosophy that engages individuals within an organizational system in its renewal, change and focused performance." It is a very general description given by D.L. Cooperrider; however, the key words we need for the beginning are there – "OD", "process", "philosophy", and "change".

I would like to explain two key assumptions upon which AI is grounded according to D.L. Cooperrider's definitions in his various works. Russell and Russell (2006) firstly emphasize that according to various definitions organizations are sustained by what they do well, their strengths, their success, and by the affirmative contributions that employees at all levels of the organization make toward the organization's success. The second assumption is that the nature on inquiry itself – the kinds of questions that you ask them – influences how the individuals in the organization respond. Hence, by exploring the organization's strengths in your inquiry, you will not only identify that which gives it lights, but also begin the subtle and positive shift of perspective toward an affirmative change process.

It becomes clear that AI is completely different from the traditional problem solving approach. Hammond (1998, p. 6-7) describes it in the following way: "The traditional approach to change is to look for the problem, do a diagnosis, and find a solution. The primary focus is on what is wrong or broken; since we look for problems, we find them. By paying attention to problems, we emphasize and amplify them". AI instead starts with looking for something that already works good and learning to appreciate it. Moreover, AI focuses on the future of an organization. By sharing good experiences and peak moments from their past and dreaming about the future, organizations create a vision where they want to be. AI promises much more success and thus better social and economic results for the organization than any other OD approach.

When the subject of the research is successfully chosen, it is time to set the research objectives and formulate research questions. Next sections will be dedicated to this issue.

1.2. Research Objectives

Despite of growing interest about AI, it is still a quite unfamiliar approach for most of the people and organizations. For me it is a challenge to study this approach because not so long time ago it was unknown for me too. However, AI has unique ability to rouse interest and excite curiosity in people's minds. Another challenge for me is to introduce AI in a way that the reader of this thesis would become interested in AI and would believe in its potential.

The general research objective of my thesis is to investigate possibilities for an organization offered by AI, as a relatively new method which is very different from traditional organizational development approaches. More specific objective of my work is to look into the work of the organization where AI is being applied in practice, thereby extend theoretical knowledge about AI and an application of this method.

1.3. Research questions

Central research question

In order to meet the research objective, formulation of research questions are needed. The following question will be central in my thesis:

> *"What really works in AI as a change process and how to apply AI to achieve successful change?"*

I chose this question for my research because it is important to find out what exactly makes this method so special and unique in comparison with other approaches (for example, problem solving approach). Trying to rouse interest in people about this method with theoretical information is one thing. Completely different thing is to tell them a success story of an organization that uses AI in practice. For this reason, I have chosen to make an in-depth investigation of the organization where AI has been applied in a very successful way. The particular organization will be introduced to the reader in Chapter 3.

Research sub-questions

In order to help find the answer to the central research question, some sub-questions have been formulated:

1) What is Appreciative Inquiry?
2) How does it work?

3) How does Appreciative Inquiry differ from other approaches to organization development?

4) What are the possible pitfalls when using Appreciative Inquiry? How to manage them?

5) What are the important conditions when applying AI?

6) Appreciative Inquiry in practice: How to implement it successfully? What are the results? (Experience of the organization)

The answers of these questions will provide an answer to the central research question and, thus, will help to achieve research objectives.

1.4. Research methods

For my research I will use two research methods. At first I will search available literature on the topic of Appreciative Inquiry (e.g. books, scientific articles) and carry out a literature review. The second part of my thesis will be a Case study.

Literature review

Theoretical knowledge about the subject of the thesis is obtained by means of literature review. For this reason certain terminology was indicated in the beginning of the research: ***appreciative inquiry, organizational change, organizational development, action research, and problem solving.***

An important resource for the literature review is the Internet. It provides significant amount of information and literature, however, for my research I found more relevant to use only scientific literature written by recognized and approved scholars and writers:

- The web site http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu. It is sponsored by the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University. It provides basic information about AI, stories and articles written by D. Cooperrider (developer of AI) and other writers. You also can find there links to other domains of positive change theory and practice, and discoveries;

- Scientific articles available online; written by D.L. Cooperrider, S. Srivastva, G. Bushe, D. Whitney and other important scholars who have done some research about AI;

- Electronically available books on the web site http://books.google.com (e.g. Hammond, S. (1998). *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*, Haneberg L. (2005). *Organization Development Basics*);
- ISI Web of Knowledge – interface that provides access to the Web of Science, Current Contents, INSPEC and Journal Citation Reports (JCR). Available through web site of Hasselt University Library;
- Journal articles from EBSCoHost – world's foremost premium research database service (e.g. Academy of Management review, Academy of Management Executive);
- Less scientific articles and literature published on the Internet.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of books about AI available in a printed version. However, Hasselt University Library provides enough literature about change management, organizational development, and action research which are also important topics for my research. The aim of the literature review is to provide answers to sub-questions Nr. 1., 2., and 3. Chapter 2 introduces the reader with the results of literature review.

A Case study

In order to answer the rest of the questions – 4., 5., and 6., more specific research method is needed. In addition to the theoretical research, more practical investigation of AI had to been done. The results of this investigation are presented in a descriptive way in the form of a case study. The aim of this case study is to show an example how AI has been implemented in a very successful way and to learn from this example.

In order to collect all necessary data, I used two methods:

1) In-depth interview

Information for a case study was obtained by means of in-depth interviews. The organization where AI has been used in practice was contacted and several appointments were set. The goal of these interviews was to talk with people who actually use AI in their daily work, can tell how did they implement it, how did it change the way they do things and much, much more.

2) Document analysis

Another source of information was the book "Van bezieling tot beweging. De waarderende benadering toepast" written by Griet Bouwen with the support of René Bouwen, Sylvia

Caputo, Frank Lambrechts end Styn Grieten. This book was the end product of the project "Vuurwerkt". It provides methodological guidelines for social workers who are going to use the AI method in practice; meanwhile, it helps answer some of my research questions.

1.5. Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1

In this chapter I gave a short introduction to my research, its objectives and relevance. It becomes clear that I want to investigate the possibilities offered by this relatively new approach – Appreciative Inquiry. In this chapter I formulated the central research question and several sub-questions. The research methods used to find the answers to the research questions are also described in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2

In Chapter 2 I will present the results of the literature review. In this chapter the AI method will be described in more detail. I will introduce the reader with various definitions of AI, thus I will emphasize that AI is a diverse approach and can take different forms. I will compare the AI approach with other organizational development methods, especially with traditional problem solving approach. I will also describe the 4-D process as a way to implement AI in the organization.

Chapter 3

In Chapter 3 I will introduce the reader to Stebo, the organization that uses the AI approach in practice. One of the goals of my thesis is to see how AI works in practice and how to apply it successfully. This chapter will present my findings on this issue.

In the beginning of Chapter 3 I will explain the data-collection process and methodology used to analyze and display obtained data from the interviews and document analysis. Further, I will present a case study where I describe the AI implementation process in detail: How did the whole change process start in Stebo? Who were involved? What were the pitfalls? How was it different from the previous way of working? What did change? All these questions are discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4

In Chapter 4 I will link my findings from the literature review and the case study back to the

research questions I formulated in the beginning of the research. I am going to compare the answers I found and see do they complement or confront each other. My discussion slowly will lead to the answer of the central research question:

"What really works in AI, as a change process and how to apply AI to achieve a successful change?"

I am going to analyze different factors that may influence the AI implementation process. The aim of this analysis is to find which of the factors can lead to success and which ones may impede the change process in the organization.

Chapter 5

In the last chapter of the thesis I will formulate some conclusions and suggestions. It will become clear that the research questions have been answered and the research objectives achieved. However, the research about AI and application of this method is not finished. New questions arise during the research, thus opening a window for further investigations. In Chapter 5 I will suggest which issues concerning AI could be interesting topics for other researches.

CHAPTER 2: Appreciative Inquiry: an approach to change

In Chapter 1 I already introduced the reader with some basic principles of AI. In this chapter I will describe AI in more detail, based on a literature review I have carried out. In the first section I will describe the formation of AI. In the second section I will argue that there is not one accurate definition of AI. Various descriptions of AI will be introduced to the reader in the second section. In the third section I will compare AI with other approaches to OD (including traditional problem solving approach). In the last two sections I will talk about the role of assumptions in an organization and AI implementation process.

2.1. AI as an alternative form of the action research approach

The term "Appreciative Inquiry" for the first time appears in the professional publication in 1987 when two professors at Case Western Reserve University (USA), David L. Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva, published the article "Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life". In this article AI is represented as a distinctive complement to the traditional forms of action research.

Action research, developed by Kurt Lewin in the mid 1940s, was designed as a collective approach to solving social and organizational problems. Action research is based on the proposition that an effective approach to solving organizational problems must involve a rational, systematic analysis of the issues in question. It must be an approach which secures information, hypotheses and action from all parties involved, as well as evaluating the action taken towards the solution of the problem. It follows that the change process itself must become a learning situation: one in which participants learn not only from the actual research, the use of theory to investigate the problem and identify a solution, but also from the process of collaborative action, problem-solving (Burnes, 1996).

McNiff and Whitehead (2006) believe that action research can be a powerful and liberating form of professional enquiry because it means that practitioners themselves investigate their own practice as they find ways of living more fully in the direction of their educational values. It is a popular practice all over the world because it is an easy way how to investigate and evaluate your work. Action research starts with questions: "What am I doing?", "What do I need to improve?", "How do I improve it?"

Many writers have expanded the concept of Lewin and developed different models of change.

The result is more than 30 models of planned change. Burnes (1996) refers to the model developed by Bullock and Batten (1985). They made an integrated, four-phase model of planned change based on a review and synthesis of these various models. The four change phases, identified by Bullock and Batten (1985), can be considered as a phases of the cyclical process. Figure 2.1. illustrates four phases of the action research cycle.

Figure 2.1. The action research cycle (Bullock and Batten, 1985)
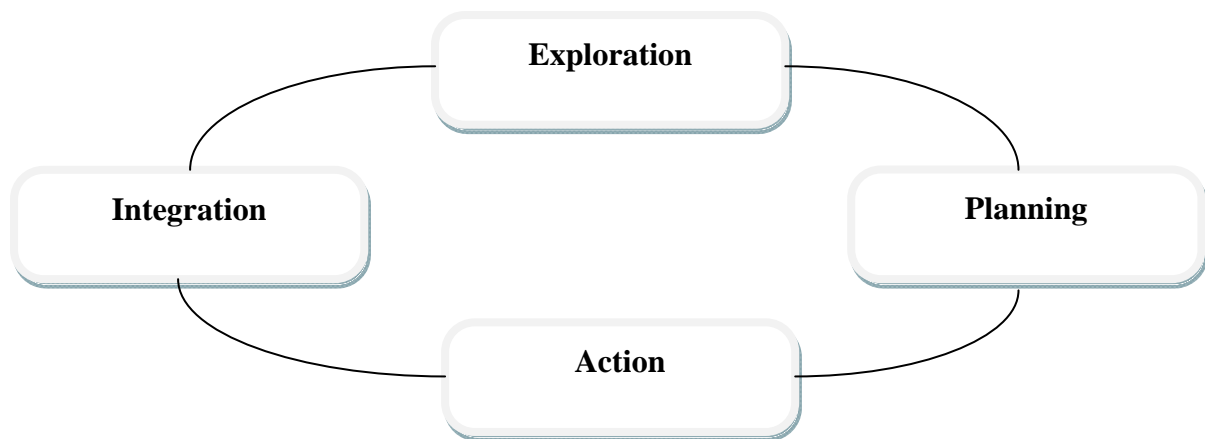
Becoming aware of the need for change is the first step for Exploration phase as well as for whole change process. Searching for outside assistance (a consultant/facilitator) to assist with planning and implementing the changes is another change process involved in the Exploration phase. Planning phase begins with understanding the organization's problem or concern. This phase involves collection information in order to establish a correct diagnosis of the problem. The goal of Action phase is to move an organization from its current state to a desired future state. It involves establishing appropriate arrangements to manage the change process and gaining support for the action to be taken. Integration phase begins once the changes have been successfully implemented. The aim of this phase is to stabilize the changes so that they become part of an organization's normal everyday life and do not require special arrangements to manage them.

Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) question the potential of the action research as an instrument for human development and social-organizational transformation. The main reason for the increasing uncertainty about the effectiveness of the traditional action research method is its focus on organizational problems. Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) believe that it

prevents an organization to reach the innovative potential and to develop its strengths and competences. In their opinion, it is more important to focus on the factors and forces involved in organizing that serve "to nourish the human spirit". They present a proposal arguing for an enriched multidimensional view of action-research which seeks to be both theoretically generative and progressive in a broad human sense. This more positively orientated approach to change they call Appreciative Inquiry.

2.2. Variety of AI definitions

In Chapter 1 I already mentioned that AI has not one concrete definition. In this section I will introduce the reader with most frequently used descriptions which I discovered during my literature review. For the search of AI definitions I reviewed scientific articles (written by scholars like Cooperrider, Whitney, Fry, Hammond and other), books, and websites about AI on the Internet. It is important to understand that AI can take on multiple meanings and forms, thus application of AI can be very diverse too.

For the beginning, I would like to explain the term of AI in a literal sense. Cooperrider and Whitney (1999, p. 2) give such explanations:

Appreciate: 1. valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems 2. to increase in value, e.g. the economy has appreciated in value. Synonyms: VALUING, PRIZING, ESTEEMING, and HONORING.

Inquiry: 1. the act of exploration and discovery. 2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities. Synonyms: DISCOVERY, SEARCH, and SYSTEMATIC EXPLORATION, STUDY.

The name of the approach already indicates two important characteristics. First, it involves appreciation and valuing the best in people or an organization. Second, AI involves exploration and discovery through inquiry.

Since AI was introduced in 1987, there is growing interest about this approach. Scholars, organizations or just enthusiasts are trying to create new practices for doing AI, thus different descriptions of AI are available. So, let's start with a simple question "What really is AI?"

It is important to start with the definition which is given by D.L. Cooperrider himself and is often found in other author's articles too. It is also published on the website http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu:

(1) "Appreciative Inquiry is about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives "life" to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential."

The conclusion about this definition is that AI is a search for something good that already exists in people and an organization. And the best way to do it is to ask questions in a way that would heighten positive accomplishments of an organization or people.

Bushe (2001, p. 1) describes AI in the following way:

(2) "Appreciative Inquiry is a form of action research that attempts to create new theories/ideas/images that aide in the developmental change of a system. The key data collection innovation of appreciative inquiry is the collection of people's stories of something at its best.… These stories are collectively discussed in order to create new, generative ideas or images that aid in the developmental change of the collectively discussing them."

The author of this description believes that shearing positive stories helps to develop new, innovative ideas or images for the future.

Other description given by Cooperrider is:

(3) "Appreciative Inquiry deliberately seeks to discover people's exceptionality – their unique gifts, strengths, and qualities. It actively searches and recognizes people for their specialties – their essential contributions and achievements."

It becomes clear that people and their straights are the main focus of AI. For example, on the website http://www.appreciative-inquiry.org AI is defined as "a theory and methodology of human development":

(4) "An exciting new paradigm for human development and social innovation. By asking positive questions, we can generate new images of the future… These powerful images … of

ourselves, our organizations, and the world … can inspire action and innovation."

However, for the most part, AI has been described as a process or a tool to implement changes in an organization.

Bentkowski and Yamaga (2006, p. 41) call AI a tool:

(5) "…organizational development tool that helps identify and implement changes within an organization."

Cooperrider, Powely and Fry (2001, p. 165) describe AI as a process for creating organizational change:

(6) "Appreciative Inquiry, a collaborative process for creating organizational change, focuses on the positive possibilities that arise from an organizational history. It assumes that planning for change is simultaneous with action and change, and that the organization begins changing the minute its people first ask themselves, what we are, and what do we want to become?"

In other words: change in an organization has to begin with a change in people's minds. People have to see themselves as developers of the future. Moreover, the future has to be based on positive actions taken in the past.

Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) believe that AI is something much more than just a method:

(7) "More than a method or technique, the appreciative mode of inquiry is a way of living with, being with, and directly participating in the varieties of social organization."

Clearly, developers of AI see this approach as a way of living.

Despite a wide variety of descriptions, some conclusions can be made. First of all, AI focuses on positive things; on something that already works well; on people's strengths; on positive experience in the past. In descriptions (1) and (3) AI is a search for the best in an organization as well as in people. AI also can be an innovative way to ask questions in order to discover positive past experiences (1, 4) or a collection of positive stories to build new future (2). For other authors AI is a tool (5) or a process (6) for crating organizational change. For some authors AI is much more than a method; it is a way of living (7). Thus, AI appears to be a diverse approach in a field of OD and change management.

This section provides the most important definitions of AI and gives an answer to the question: What is Appreciative Inquiry?

2.3. Appreciative Inquiry versus other approaches to OD

As I have mentioned already many times, AI, as a relatively new approach to OD, is not focused on problems and problem solving in an organization. It is very different from other OD approaches. Till now I have talked about the AI in a context of the action research method. In this section I will compare AI with some other OD approaches and will explain some possible differences. Further, I will compare AI and problem solving approach in more detail.

Three "generations" of planned changed

AI is so revolutionary and different from other methods it is even called the 3rd generation approach. According to French and Bell (1995) in Seo, Putnam & Bartunek, (2004), there are three "generations" of planned change, based primarily on when particular planned change approaches began to be implemented and on the more or less common assumptions that underlay these approaches. Table 2.1. presents which of OD approaches relate to first-, second-, and third-generation of planned change, according to.

Table 2.1. Generations of planned change (French and Bell, 1995)

Generation	OD approaches
First generation	action research, sensitivity training, team building, sociotechnical systems and quality of work life
Second generation	organizational transformation and large group interventions;
Third generation	learning organizations and appreciative inquiry

As you can see in Table 2.1., AI together with learning organizations is the third-generation approach. AI leaves action research approach behind – as a first generation approach.

According to Seo, Putnam and Bartunek (2004), AI shows an interesting tendency of going to extreme positions, namely selection of one pole and intentional rejection of the other pole that has been traditionally selected and/or emphasized in most of the first and second generation OD approaches. Writers emphasize that AI focuses on the positive aspects but avoids negative sides. That is the core of AI and a basic difference in comparison with most approaches to planned change. First generation OD approaches assumed the necessity of beginning with a

problem; otherwise there would not be enough of a "crisis" to get the organization to change. Second generation approaches were more likely to stress some positive future, even while implicitly assuming that the present was problematic. However, neither first- nor second-generation approaches emphasized positive features that currently existed in the organization. Seo, Putnam and Bartunek (2004) describe main differences between AI and other OD approaches:

- "AI presents one of the purest forms of teleological conceptualization of organizational change. Although most of the other approaches are based, at least to a certain degree, on a teleological assumption that organizational change is driven by participants' purposeful social construction, they are not committed to this assumption as entirely as AI is" (p. 96). AI believes that members of an organization have the capacity to create their own future, thus social construction process for change can occur at anytime, even without such driving forces as internal crisis, change in external environment or shift of leaders.

- "Other approaches, action research in particular, depend heavily on scientific, positivist methods that foster linear, cause-and-effect types of thinking but restrict human imagination for future possibilities and thus limit people's change potential" (p. 96). Instead AI is based on methods that stimulate human imagination and, thus, expend the possibilities for new social constructions.

- Other approaches have mostly focused on solving various organizational problems, which may also limit the possibilities for social construction by intimidating participants and inducing defensiveness. Unlikely other approaches AI relies on methods that decisively "appreciate" only the positive aspects of organization both in the past and in the future. The assumption is that this should better motivate people for participation and facilitate more free generation of human imagination.

- AI views the past experiences of individuals and organizations as a viable recourse for organizational change, in particular for generating imagination for future possibilities.

Positive Change vs. Problem Solving

From discussion above we can verify one more time that the traditional approach to organizational change has been rooted in problem solving approach and, according to Barge and Oliver (2003), in deficit language that draws our attention to the problems, shortcomings,

or incapacities of individuals and groups, which, in turn, discredits the individual or group. Deficit language has a negative impact on individuals and groups, because the vocabularies of human deficit produced by the critical social and organizational sciences diminish the human capacity for positive relational reconstruction by rending and unravelling the intricate social, political, and moral fabrics that make human existence and organizing possible (Ludema, Wilmot, & Srivastva, 1997 in Barge and Oliver (2003)).

Barge and Oliver (2003) give three reasons, why deficit language and problem solving approach, may not be the best solution for organizational change:

1) Deficit language and problem-solving approaches rarely result in new vision. Given that a problem is a "gap" between an existing and an ideal state of affairs, organizational members already possess a notion of what is ideal, and they do not search to expand their thinking, ideas, or visions; instead, they merely try to reduce the gap.

2) Deficit language and problem-solving approaches increase levels of defensiveness among organizational members. Problem solving approaches are based on the "blame game" and can rapidly create defensiveness because they must attach blame, responsibility, and accountability to someone or something that has created the problem.

3) Deficit language and problem-solving approaches can create a sense of organizational enfeeblement. Increased talk about the problems organizational members are confronting expands their vocabulary of deficit and develops their expertise in creating and sustaining their own dysfunction.

Van Tiem and Rosenzweig (2006) also emphasize the importance of positive language. They believe that questions are a critical component in initiating change. But it is not enough to ask questions. The way you write questions and the language you use are also important considerations.

The importance and value of positive language is linked to social constructionism, which defines reality as a function of our interactions with the people around us. What this means is that the world is not so much something we react to, but something we create through the words we use and the knowledge we share with others. It also suggest that individuals can view or construct the same set of facts differently, thus creating different realities. Out of this

concept comes the phrase "words create words". The choice for optimism and positive language is a simple resource with enormous potential. To set the right tone in applying AI, Van Tiem and Rosenzweig (2006) suggest:

- Ask questions that are framed to gather positive insights;
- Model and reinforce the belief system tied to positive change by selecting words that reflect your beliefs.

For example, if your organization chooses to focus on increasing customer satisfaction you have a choice between traditional questions, or asking positively framed questions.

Traditional questions:

- What are we doing to cause customer dissatisfaction?
- What do we need to do to decrease customer dissatisfaction?

Positive questions:

- When have our customers been really happy and satisfied with the company? What we were doing then that we can build on?
- How can we create an exceptional customer service experience?

Other scholars, like Barret, Cooperrider and Fry (2005), believe that problem focused questions invite people to elaborate further on disappointments, gaps, unmet expectations – the root causes that lead to a breakdown. They argue that a problem solving mentality is limited in furthering innovation in the organization

Barret, Cooperrider and Fry (2005) also admit that this first instinct – to improve performance, look for the gaps, address the problem areas, introduce solutions, and to ask about problems – is so automatic it barely seems to warrant questioning. "What is the biggest problem you face in your work? About what customers complain the most? What makes you feel unhappy at your work?" sounds like reasonable questions to be asked in a change process. However, scholars believe that a problem oriented organization unconsciously can cause even more problems:

- Further deficiency orientation;
- Create a social hierarchy with experts;
- Contribute to broad and cultural and organizational enfeeblement;

- Create further separation between stakeholders, who become experts in smaller parts of the problem.

Barret, Cooperrider and Fry (2005) believe that organizational interventions that seek to cultivate innovation need to become unlocked from conventional assumptions regarding diagnosis and problem solving. Efforts to discover and elaborate the positive core – the past, present and future capacities of the system – are more likely to lead to innovation and transformation. Powely, Cooperrider, and Fry (2001) argue that AI is based on the conviction that you can't separate strategic thinking from an organization's history. So, the process of AI begins with looking back. Traditionally, organizations have related to their past in four ways:

1) They block out their past experiences both good and bad;
2) They "eulogize" the past by selectively remembering only certain aspects:
3) They throw past problems and bed experiences on a "burning platform" to generate energy for the future;
4) They refer to histories as collections of quantitative and statistical "archival" data stored in company database.

These four ways how organizations use to view their history primarily focus on the deficiencies. AI offers completely opposite way to view the history of an organization. Organizations using AI search for successful moments in their past by asking: "When was the organization at its best? When did I feel the best at my work?" Barret, Cooperrider and Fry (2005) believes that the more attention an organization pays to identifying the best in its history, the more willing it is to enter innovative and fresh new thinking about the future. AI insists that organizations don't ignore themselves from their histories but, instead, carry the best aspects from their past into the future. In enables organizations to identify, keep and expand upon what they have done right.

Van Tiem and Rosenzweig (2006) argue that although the activities and process involved are very similar in both AI and problem solving method – analyzing, brainstorming, discussing, innovating, designing – the AI approach is different. "Rather than viewing problems as holes to be plugged, AI takes the approach that they represent opportunities to move to a positive, shares vision of what could be" Van Tiem and Rosenzweig (2006, p. 3). Table 2.2. presents comparison of AI and problem solving approach.

Table 2.2. Problem solving vs. Appreciative Inquiry

Problem solving	AI
"Felt need": Identifying a problem	Appreciating and valuing the best of "What is"
⬇	⬇
Analyzing causes	Envisioning "What might be"
⬇	⬇
Analyzing possible solutions	Discussing "What should be"
⬇	⬇
Action planning (treatment)	Innovating "What will be"
Basic assumption: *An organization is a problem to be solved*	**Basic assumption:** *An organization is a mystery to be embraced*

Based on: Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change, by Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005

The conclusion is that looking for the problems, analyzing causes, looking for the solutions is the traditional way how organizations all over the world is implementing a change. For many years this method has not cause any questioning. However, time has changed and new methods, models and approaches are needed to be introduced. AI offers something new and deserves attention.

2.4. The role of assumptions in the organization

In order to understand AI, you have to understand the role of assumptions in organizations. According to Hammond (1998), organizations are made up of individuals who form groups to get work done. The groups behave according to the rules of group behaviour. Assumptions are the set of beliefs shared by a group that causes the group to think and act in certain ways. Assumptions explain the context of the group's choices and behaviours, thus a shared set of assumptions of a group is a very powerful force.

Groups have a large number of assumptions operating at an unconscious level. Shared assumptions allow the group to work efficiently because they don't have to constantly stop and determine what they believe and how they should act. The downside is that group may fail to see new data that contradicts their belief and they may miss an opportunity to improve

their effectiveness. This is why it is important to bring it to the surface and evaluate group assumptions every so often to see if they are still valid.

Watching a long-held assumptions be questioned and replaced, tends to inspire people to question other long-held assumptions. This is the first step necessary for an organizational change. One of the reasons organizational change is so hard is that it produces uneasy feeling. One reason for the uneasy feeling is a fear of doing something wrong, which signals that you don't belong to the group. Hammond (1998) believes that the key to all change efforts is surfacing and examination of working assumption. According to her, there are eight assumptions on which the AI approach is based:

1. *Finding what works.*

   In every society, organization, or group, something works. Even troubled groups have capabilities and assets that generate pride. These strengths are building blocks and represents what the organization needs more of. The more clarity and common understanding exist around strengths, the stronger a foundation the organization will have for moving forward.

2. *Choosing the right focus.*

   What people focus on becomes their reality, and what they pay attention to tends to grow. If people focus on problems, problems become the frame for their world. If individuals instead focus on what is right and embrace their ideals, they can propel themselves in a distinctly different direction.

3. *Creating reality*

   Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities. The world is dynamic, ever-changing and a function of individual interpretation. Reality therefore can be defined differently, by different people.

4. *Asking the right questions*

   The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way. Thus, considering the questions to ask is important.

5. *Carrying the past forward*

   People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).

6. *Carrying the best of the past*

If people carry parts of the past forward, those parts should be those things that are best about the past.

7. *Valuing Differences*

It is important to value differences. Organizations are living systems with beauty and possibility, if people only choose to see it.

8. *Using positive language.*

The language we use creates our reality.

This set of assumptions offers a completely new path for organizations and people. Assumptions above may seem rational and not very complex. However, as mentioned before, assumptions are the set of beliefs shared by a group and only when a whole group will believe in these assumptions, AI can be applied successfully. Traditional thinking about problems has to be left behind and a shift in a way of thinking has to happen before you start with AI.

2.5. Application of AI in an organization

In the previous section it became clear that there is a variety of AI definitions and different authors describe AI in a different way. Thus, we can perceive that there are possible different ways to implement and to perform an AI in an organization. However, during my literature review I discovered that most of the authors, practitioners and organizations describe the process of AI on the basis of the 4-D model, developed by D.L. Cooperrider. In this section I will describe a possible AI implementation process, including affirmative topic choice, a summit and the 4-D model.

Affirmative topic choice

The first step in applying AI is determining the expectations of the organizations, as defined by the affirmative topic choice. Topic selection is critical. It's the foundation and core of the whole AI process. According to Powley, Cooperrider and Fry (2001), change begins from the moment someone defines and articulates the strategic topic. They also say that this "someone" has to be an organization's top leadership. When Affirmative Topic Choice is made, it is passed along to a design team for enhancement. The design team formulates an Affirmative Topic that will become the basis discussion at a "summit" - "a representative group of stakeholders from all parts of the organization that will come together to examine the

organization's past, and then dream and design its future, using the Affirmative Topic as a guide" (Powley, Cooperrider and Fry, 2001, p. 169). The topic should be bold enough to stretch the organization to focus on something it really wants to see happen and that has the potential to energize people, mobilize forces, and be strategic. Table 2.3. illustrates several examples of how organizations can reframe problems into AI topics.

Table 2.3. Defining problems as opportunities (Haneberg, 2005)

Problem statement	Opportunity
Turnover is too high	How can we create a work environment that attracts and retains the best talent?
Projects are not getting done on time	How can we master project success, implementation, execution, and results?
Employees do not have the needed skills and are not performing up to expectations	How can we create learning organization where employees grow and help the organization respond to change needs?
Glass ceiling	How can we create positive cross-gender working relationship

When you and your organization make the decision to respond to these issues by focusing on the positive, rather than on solving a problem, you start on the path of AI. It means that organization chooses to develop and learn about something that works rather than tries to fix or solve some problem.

AI summit

The AI summit, defined by Powley, Fry, Barrett and Bright (2004), is a large-system change initiative that uses dialogic democratic processes to inspire positive change. Authors believe that AI can promote democratic organizing and develop strategic policy.

According to Powley, Fry, Barrett and Bright (2004), the AI summit usually is a three or four day working meeting, with the goal to incorporate AI in a whole system context. The key characteristic of the AI Summit is its democratic and participative design from beginning to end. In a typical AI summit 200-300 individuals are involved, but some Summits have ranged up to 1000 participants. Clearly, the AI summit is a large group intervention that seeks to

involve individuals from different hierarchical and functional levels, as well as external stakeholders. The aim of coming together is to inquire about and discover core success factors in their organization, thus uncover positive history of the organization. "By gathering large numbers of people together in "summit" meetings AI embraces an organization's whole system" (Powley, Cooperrider & Fry, 2001, p. 167). According to Powley, Fry, Barrett & Bright (2004, p. 70), the next step after coming together is to "generate strategic opportunities and voluntarily self-organize to work on specific project to transfer the system towards a shared, ideal state. Action teams develop strategic plans with actionable, time-bound goals that they commit to achieve after the Summit".

Powley, Fry, Barrett and Bright (2004) explain the positive aspects of the AI summit. First, participants of the AI summit together define and create change around a particular strategic objective. Through this process they create stronger collegial ties, deeper conviction to carry out important plans, and a shared understanding of change objectives. Powley, Cooperrider and Fry (2001, p. 167) add that during the summit, "opportunity groups" self manage their work and use positive dialogue – not traditional "problem-solving" – as the main tool. This means placing a high value on helping each other do the tasks". Second, the Summit design creates spaces that motivate people to assume more task responsibility for the incorporation of change. Third, the space created in a Summit fosters organizational learning. Participants have opportunities to offer comments on proposed actions, to express what they think and feel, without being criticized or judged. Listening and working together in this way instils confidence and a sense of efficacy in relation to the whole system and makes participants believe in the capacity of the organization. Finally, the AI summit represents a communal atmosphere where the temporary suspension of normal organizational structure allows for the accomplishment of significant, empowered strategic work. Having multiple stakeholders present and interacting as equals allows participants to offer their voices and to hear others in a new way. In addition, "large-group intervention enables the company to think more systematically, with input from a variety of people, from the floor sweeper to the CEO, from the customer to the dockworker (Powley, Cooperrider & Fry, 2001, p. 169).

Typical AI summit is designed based on 4 phases: discovery, dream, design and destiny. In the following section 4-D cycle is described in detail.

4-D cycle

As you can see in Figure 2.2., the phases of 4-D model are Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. Each phase presents a set of activities to complete and questions to ask. At the centre of the model is the affirmative topic choice, which starts the entire process of applying AI.

Figure 2.2. 4-D cycle (D.L. Cooperrider)
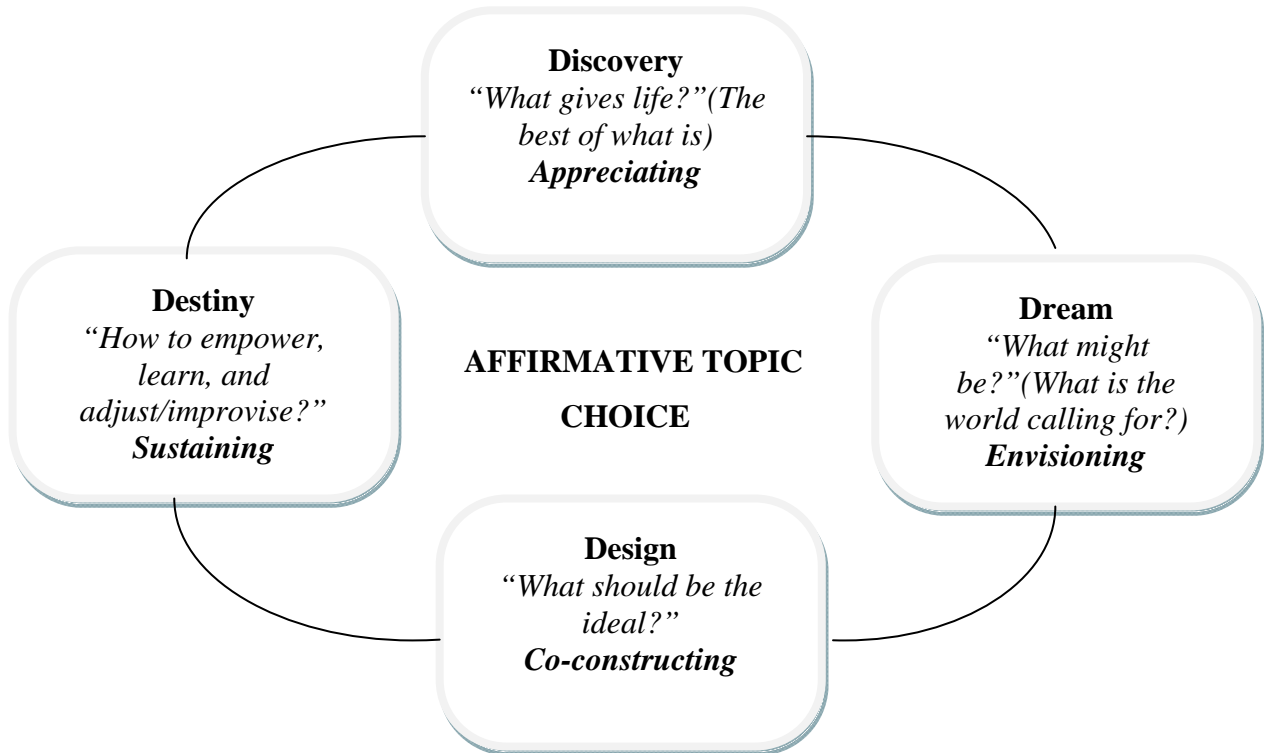
Discovery

The first phase of 4-D model is about "discovering" the best of what is. According to Powley, Cooperrider & Fry (2001), participants in this phase discover and value those factors that characterize an organization when it is at its best. The main goal of Discovery phase is to reveal stories about those "peak moments" and to discuss factors or forces that made them possible. It is easy to see that the goal of this phase is to discover and appreciate things that give life and energy to the people and their organization. The phase begins with revealing the positive and successful experiences of the individual and the collective. Participants try to understand and analyze unique conditions that made these peak moments possible, such as leadership, relationships, technologies, values, capacity building or external relationships. The

appreciative interviews are important part of this phase. Haneberg (2005, p. 50) suggests that "interview should start with the questions that would ask participants to recall success, high points and times of full engagement related to the topic". She also gives some examples how appreciative interview questions should look like:

- What is an experience that you enjoyed and would consider one of the highest points since working for "company"?
- What are the special strengths and capabilities of the "company X"?
- What are your special skills and talents?

These kinds of questions encourage people to share stories of exceptional accomplishments, discuss the core life-giving conditions of their organization and deliberate upon the aspects of their history that they most value and want to enhance in the future.

Dream

When the best of "what is" is discovered, the mind naturally begins to search beyond this; it begins to imagine new possibilities (Powley, Cooperrider & Fry, 2001). "Dreaming involves passionate thinking about a positive image of a desired and proffered future state" (Powley, Cooperrider & Fry, 2001, p. 169). In this phase participants explore and discuss their visions, dreams, hopes, and ideas for the future. Haneberg (2005) says that together they think big and beyond where they have in past. Boundaries are broken and everything is possible.

Information from the Discovery phase is used as a platform to speculate on possible and desired futures for the organization, system or team. In other words, participating groups discuss their individual visions of the ideal organization and describe what would be happening some years into the future. In the end of this phase participants should be able to create a clear results-oriented vision for the future (Mellish, 2003). According to Haneberg (2005), the main goal of the Dream phase is to create powerful and amazing vision for the future.

Design

In the Design phase participants together design an ideal or vision for the organization (Powley, Cooperrider & Fry, 2001). In this phase participants co-construct their new reality based on their articulation of direction, principles, strategic framework. Questions relate to what would be ideal, how we can make it work and what conceptual, behaviour, operational

changes we need to make (Mellish, 2003). Haneberg (2005, p. 52) emphasizes that "it is a time to remain creative and optimistic while considering how to realign various parts of the organization to the new vision for the future".

Destiny

The final phase of AI process is a Destiny phase. It is the phase of implementation and experimenting. The design is put into practice, and a constant learning environment is created, which then is the base for a new monitoring cycle, which now is not out of the blue but grounded in constant research on what gives life to the organization or community. Summit participants naturally find new ways to move the organization closer to the shared vision – sometimes even without any of the traditional change management techniques of action planning, task forces, project timetables, and deliverables (Powley, Cooperrider & Fry, 2001). Participants celebrate what they have created and set actions and projects in motion to make the vision a reality. Anybody who tries AI should be prepared that the process and outcomes take on life of their own (Haneber, 2005). "That the outcome cannot be predicted should not dissuade you from trying AI; the results are generally better and more interesting than you can imagine" (p. 53).

2.6. Critique concerning AI

Till now all literature I have reviewed and analysed talks about the AI approach in a very positive way, and it may seem that the approach doesn't raise any doubts concerning its effectiveness. I found it interesting to search for some different opinions and show it in my research. In my opinion, it would make the research more objective and complete. However, I should warn that there were not many writers and literature devoted to AI criticism.

Fineman (2006) has examined some shortcomings of the "positiveness" and "positive scholarship" as a recent strand in organizational theorizing, focusing on understanding the "best" of the human condition (AI is considered as a form of the "positiveness" in his work). Another writer Roberts (2006) responds to Fineman (2006) and analyse his and other scholars' critique concerning to AI. This section will be devoted to introduce the reader with Fineman (2006) critique and Roberts (2006) response to it.

Fineman (2006) believes that positive scholarship's moral and empirical shift to the best in human endeavour is rather more problematic than it initially appears. He argues that

"separation of positive from negative experiences and emotions is one of positive scholars' bedrock principles" (p. 281). This separation is arguable also by Lazarus (2003) in Fineman (2006). He compares positive and negative emotion to two sides of the same coin. He believes that it is out of negative experiences that positive appraisals and meanings evolve and vice versa. Therefore, "there is a convincing case that positiveness closes important doors, excluding opportunities that could serve its own aims" (Fineman, 2006, p. 275). He emphasizes that AI fails to value the opportunities for positive change that are possible from negative experiences, such as embarrassing events, periods of anger, anxiety, fear, or shame.

Another shortcoming Fineman (2006) talks about is that positiveness is culturally restrictive. Its valuation of emotional expressiveness is tied broadly to North American cultural norms, where individualism, optimism, and self-confidence are celebrated. The consequences are that the emotion display mores of one nation begins to penetrate those of another.

Finally, Fineman (2006, p. 281) believes that "there is an unarticulated dark side to positiveness". Furedi (2003) in Fineman (2006) argues that all positive discourses contribute to pathologizing negative emotional responses to the pressures of the life. The "negative thinkers" whose life experiences and workplace difficulties justify their sadness, or pessimism, are persuaded to think of themselves as odd or ill because of their reluctance or failure to think positive and optimistic.

Roberts (2006, p. 301) highlines 3 prominent concerns with positive scholarship:

1) Description – positive scholarship may create misperceptions by ignoring problems and deficits;
2) Prescription - positive scholarship may be used to inappropriately prescribe behaviours that generate profit by exploiting employees' goodwill;
3) Aspiration - positive scholarship may create unrealistic expectations for excellence and perfectionism that can, over time, undermine performance and well-being.

Analyzing these concerns in detail Roberts (2006) refers to Goleman (1989) who suggests that positive illusions and self-deception can lead to collective avoidance to dangerous problems such as environmental pollution and cultural genocide. By missing what's wrong we may let deficits go unchecked and lead to injustice. However, Roberts (2006) refers not only to writers who criticize the positiveness but also consider positive scholars' opinions

concerning to critique. Therefore, to defend positive scholarship Roberts (2006) refers to Baumeister (2001) who suggest that bad is stronger that good and that is highly unlikely we will ever be blind to what is wrong.

The second set of concerns relates to whether positive scholarship prescribes inappropriate or destructive behaviours. In advocating for a concentrated focus on the positive, scholars take a normative stance about what is good and desirable in organizations. Roberts (2006) refers to Brewster Smith (1969) who says that psychology cannot decide which values are the "best" but, rather, can investigate the consequences of holding certain values. A normative stance is problematic and challenging, as Fineman (2006) states, given that the nature of goodness is contextually influenced.

The third concern with positive scholarship logically follows the second. By prescribing a set of actions, behaviours, and attitudes that individuals and organizations should adopt, positive scholars set higher standards for individual and organizational functioning. The question is "Aren't these standards representing too unrealistic expectations from normal and healthy functioning? It is not unclear whether it is possible for individuals function at optimal levels all the time or not. Despite these concerns about unrealistic expectations, according to Roberts (2006) the discomfort with positive scholarship may simply reside in the fact that it calls for us to move out of our own comfort zone of detecting and reducing deficiencies. Instead, we are prompted to actively appreciate what is virtuous and growth enhancing in our world.

Now I have introduced the reader not only to the positive sides of the AI approach but also with some shortcomings and concerns regarding to AI. Seeing that most of the concerns can be overturned makes me believe that they are not very strong and they do not overshadow the approach. My goal isn't to preach the AI as a perfect method. Instead, I would like to show it as an interesting alternative to more traditional approaches.

CHAPTER 3: Appreciative Inquiry and 'Vuurwerkt' in Stebo

In this chapter I will introduce the organization where the AI approach has been used in practice. Moreover, the success Stebo has achieved with it has attracted attention of other organizations and governmental authorities. All information which has been obtained during my research will be presented in a form of a case study. According to Yin (1989) in Weerd-Nederhof (2001), a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.

The first reason for choosing a case study for my research strategy is descriptive nature of the research and the second reason is the dominance of "how" questions in my research. How AI should be implemented? How to do it successfully? How to manage positive change process in an organization? It is easy to see that I am going to conduct qualitative research about the AI method. Qualitative Research Consultants Association (QRCA) defines that qualitative research is designed to reveal a target audience's range of behaviour and the perceptions that drive it with reference to specific topics or issues. The results of qualitative research are descriptive rather than predictive.

The common pattern for conducting a case study given by Yin (1989) in Weerd-Nederhof (2001) is (1) case study design, (2) preparation for data-collection, (3) conducting case studies, (4) analyzing data, (5) reporting. I kept in mind this model when I was conducting my case study; however, I didn't do it step by step. As the case study is only a complementing part of my research, I modified the common pattern into three phase process: data-collection phase (including preparation for data-collection), data-analysis, and reporting (display) of results. These phases are described in the next sections.

The goal of this case study is to complement the results of the literature review in Chapter 2 and to extend the existing knowledge of AI. This will make clear vision about the AI approach; theoretical as well as practical.

3.1. Stebo – an organization for people and their neighbourhood

Since 1987 Stebo vzw (Genk, Belgium) develops new projects and services in the framework of social-economic development in the region. Stebo is active on 4 domains: neighbourhood development, living, entrepreneurship and labour market. Stebo always uses an approach that starts from the capacities of people and the social capital that is present at groups and

neighbourhoods. Innovation, target group participation and intercultural contact are the core terms for the approach which Stebo stands for. Stebo is undertaking an active diversity policy and has a team of 60 persons where a half of them have foreign background. Most of them work as a social workers/coaches and give guidance to the people.

The very first thing Stebo was doing was community development. Afterwards programs for unemployed people, mostly women, came up. After that Stebo started with the programs for unemployed migrants who wanted to start their own business. In early 90ties project for giving guidance to people who have a new house and want to renovate it started up. Since 2008 Stebo has a new project which main goal is to help renovate people's houses so that they would not have to use so much energy (gas, water, electricity, etc.) anymore.

We can highlight 4 core activities in Stebo:

- Neighbourhood development (Buurtopbouwwerk);
- Learning to work together (Samen Leren Werken);
- Chances in entrepreneurship (Kansrijk Ondernemen);
- Information centre for accommodation questions (Infocentrum Wonen).

Stebo's goals

Stebo aims for as big as possible participation of people and groups of people in society, and gives absolute advantage on whoever is treated with exclusion. Stebo believes that it is how we build on a democratic society where people can add value on their own capabilities and capacities.

Activities

Stebo develops projects, services and initiatives in important life-domains where exclusion mechanisms are prominent. Today those domains are employment, social togetherness, living quality, entrepreneurship and education. The activities that form Stebo are helping towards the social-economic development of the region and the neighbourhood.

Characteristics

The work methods of Stebo are characterized by searching and developing capacities of people and the social capital that is present in the groups and in the neighbourhood. Stebo mediates information between people who live there and the state policy. Stebo inspires and

influences the state policy. Stebo anticipates active and innovatively on social evolution and reaches concrete results.

Quality

Stebo realizes its objectives by developing a professional organization structure and culture. Quality and performance are constant values in all their activities. Stebo wants to be a financially healthy organization. A good administration and financial monitoring support Stebo freedom of actions and dynamism.

Employees

Stobo's personnel policy has been based on the appreciation of diversity within the staff group. Stebo offers personal development chances for every employee and pursue good labour agreements.

Location

Stebo has more than one office. The main office of Stebo you will find in Genk, Evence Coppéelaan 91. Another office in Genk is in Zwartberg. There are other 7 offices in different towns in the neighbourhood. The main circumstance of allocation of Stebo offices is to be as close to the people Stebo works with as possible.

3.2. Data-collection phase

Case studies typically combine data collection methods such as archives, interviews, questionnaires and observations (Eisenhardt, in Weerd-Nederhof, (2001)). Therefore, the very first step in my research was to contact the organization Stebo and to ask whether they would be interested in providing some information, thus, helping in the research I am doing about AI. Without help of cooperative and enthusiastic people from Stebo, my research could not be done. People, who were and still are directly involved in the change process in the organization and AI implementation, agreed to tell their experiences.

According to Yin (1989) in Weerd-Nederhof (2001) the major strength of the case study is to use many different sources of evidence. Thereby, it provides multiple measures of the same phenomenon. Very important factor in organizing meetings and selecting staff members of Stebo for the interviews was to include people from different organizational levels. In this way it is possible to observe different points of view and multiple perspectives are then taken

into account. For example, experiences of top management and employee who use this method in his or her daily work may be quite different. Information they would provide may complement each other and explain AI implementation in the organization much broader.

All persons I have interviewed for my research are listed in the Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Persons interviewed

NAME	FUNCTION	ROLE IN THE PROJECT "Vuurwerkt"	LOCATION	DATE	DURATION OF THE INTERVIEW
Griet Bouwen	Project manager in Stebo	project leader of "Vuurwerkt", member of the steering group	Stebo Zwartberg Zaveldriesstraat 31, 3600 Genk (Zwartberg)	10th March	2 hours
Fadma	Counsellor of potential entrepreneurs in Stebo	participant of the training course	Stebo Zwartberg Zaveldriesstraat 31, 3600 Genk (Zwartberg)	10th March	1 hour
Galina	Ex-student of the training 'Chances' (Kans) for highly educated newcomers with orientation towards a job	Observer, did not directly participate in the project	Stebo Zwartberg Zaveldriesstraat 31, 3600 Genk (Zwartberg)	12th March	1 hour 20min
Arno Vansichen	Consultant in Evenwicht (Work life balance) -consultancy agency, human recourse manager in Stebo for 2 years	member of the steering committee "Vuurwerkt", trainer	Blookstraat 47, Mopertingen-Bilzen	13th March	1 hour
Erwin Debruyn	Director of Stebo	member of the steering group "Vuurwerkt"	Stebo vzw Evence Coppéelaan 91 3600 Genk	14th March	1 hour 30 min
PhD Felix Corthouts	Professor Emeritus Organizational Development/Human Resources	member of steering group "Vuurwerkt"	Hasselt University	14th April	1 hour

Table 3.1. provides various information related to the interviews I did: person's name, his or her function in Stebo, his or her role in the project "Vuurwerkt", place and date of the interview, and duration of the interview.

As you can see in Table 3.1., in total I have interviewed six people. This number is not big and may seem not sufficient for the research. Therefore, I want to emphasize some important

factors, which may explain why so little number of interviews was done.

Firstly, the organization itself is not big. Approximately 60 people work in Stebo. All key figures that had experience in the AI implementation process, training, or applying it in practice were selected for the interviews. The function and the role in the project for different interviewees are different. Four out of six interviewees were members of the project "Vuurwerkt" steering group. These people were responsible for the whole project and all activities. This includes not only people from Stebo but also Prof. Dr. Felix Corthouts from Hasselt University who was also a member of the steering group. One of the interviewees Fadma works in Stebo as a social worker and participated in all training sessions. So, she could tell how the change process happened and how different the way she works now is from the way she worked before the project "Vuurwerk". A. Vansichen was working in Stebo for 2 years as a human recourse manager. In the project he was involved not only as a member of the steering committee but also as a trainer. So, he could explain the training process in more detail. Galina was doing her practice for one year in Stebo, and she saw all process of AI implementation even without direct participation in it. She agreed to tell about her experiences and observations. E. Debruyn as a director of Stebo, could explain the whole project implementation process from the top management perspective. The very first interview I had with G. Bouwen, a project leader of "Vuurwerkt". She introduced me with Stebo and its activities and explained how the whole change process started in Stebo.

Secondly, I want to accent the depth of these interviews. Preparation before interviews was compulsory. It was necessary to have background knowledge about AI, so the literature about change management and AI had to be reviewed before the interviews. Based on the first findings from literature review and questions that I had formulated in the beginning of the research, questions for interviewees were prepared. Questions were worded so, that respondent could not simply answer yes or no, but would expand the topic, thus it would lead to the in-depth interview. List of questions was composed together with the supervisor of the thesis Prof. Dr. Frank Lambrechts (see Appendix 1). Still it was very important to stay flexible and to adopt questions to particular respondent. As the function of every interviewee is so different, each of them could answer the same question from different point of view. The goal of these interviews was to discuss the AI method, its implementation process and the change it brought in Stebo.

Thirdly, I want to emphasize the duration of all interviews. As you can see in Table 3.1., all interviews were approximately 1-2 hours long. In my opinion it is an optimal time to obtain all necessary information without making an interviewee tired and wasting his or her precious time. With the permission of the respondent the interview was audio recorded. Almost all interviews were done within one week in Genk, in one of the two Stebo offices. Therefore, I had possibility not only to hear about Stebo's work, but to see their work places and the neighbourhood where Stebo operates. The environment where AI is going to be implemented and atmosphere in the organization are very important factors. It will be discussed later in this chapter in more detail.

Finally, I would like to stress, that interviews were not the only resource of information for conducting the case study. For my research I found very relevant to use a book (the end product of the project) "Van bezieling tot beweging. De waarderende benadering toepast" written by Griet Bouwen with the support of René Bouwen, Sylvia Caputo, Frank Lambrechts end Styn Grieten. This material had to be translated from Dutch language to English before I could use it for my research. Information from this book complements the answers of interviewees and provides much additional material, including some examples which I will present in the following sections in the text boxes.

All the factors emphasized above should convince the reader of this thesis that six interviews still can be a qualitative resource for the research. The depth and duration of interviews and additional resources of information are factors that should be taken into account before evaluating quality of the research.

3.3. Data analysis and display

Analyzing data is the heart of building theory from case studies, but it is both the most difficult and the least codified part of the process (Eisenhardt, (1989) in Weerd-Nederhof, (2001)). When I finished collecting all necessary data from the interviews and the book, I had to make decision about how all data will be analyzed and later displayed in my thesis.

As one of my research objectives is to rouse interest and present AI so that people would become interested in this method, a display of the data has to be light but still very complete. Therefore, I made some research to find out what different scholars say about data analysis process and data display.

By data displays Miles and Huberman (1994) in Weerd-Nederhof (2001) mean visual format that presents information systematically, so the user can draw valid conclusions and take needed action. It can serve both exploring and describing purposes (what is happening?) as well as explaining purposes (why or how is it happening?). From this it is easy to conclude that data display presents your, as a researcher, findings in a descriptive way.

Langley (1999) says even more clearly that process research is concerned with understanding how things evolve over time and why they evolve in this way, and process data therefore consist largely of stories about what happened and who did what when – that is events, activities, and choices ordered over time. This convinced me that the best way to present the results of my case study is to tell a story.

Polkinghorne (1995) talks about narrative configuration in qualitative analysis, thus provides some useful guidelines for data analysis for my particular case. He explains, that narrative is the type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happening, and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed processes. The purpose of narrative analysis is to produce stories as the outcome of the research. The data elements required for this production are diachronic descriptions of events and happenings. Narrative analysis composes these elements into a story. The process of narrative analysis is actually a synthesizing of the data rather than a separation of it into its constituent. The result of a narrative analysis is an explanation that is retrospective, having linked past events together to account for how a final outcome might have come about.

To make the story more systematic, it had to be written in sections which wouldn't divide story into separate parts but would be linked with each other and show the coherence of the events. The first task in analyzing data was to group all the answers, which were given on the same question and put them under one common heading. Every section in a case study presents answers to one of the questions or a group of questions I asked to my interviewees. Next sections of this thesis are devoted to show results of the research I have done. Information obtained by means of interviews and translation of the book "Van bezieling tot beweging. De waarderende benadering toepast" will be presented and analysed.

3.4. Results of the case study

3.4.1. From competences to talents

The first thing I wanted to know from interviewees is how the whole change process started in Stebo. As it turns out, an actual push to make a project in Stebo came from outside in 2005. It was a call from the European Union Social Fund. Flemish government was looking for organizations and businesses which would like to start a project on competence development issues. Project manager Griet Bouwen as well as a director of Stebo Erwin Debruyn saw the opportunity for their organization they could not miss. However, the way they wanted to work on competence management issues, did not really match the mainstream thinking about competences.

Competences are about what you know. Competences are visible in your attitude, and they are observable with the help of very clear criteria and also measurable, and developable (Bouwen, 2007) E. Debruyn says that competences are used as a way of control. Employers control their workers, see what they can, what are the lacks, what they still have to learn. It is often forgotten, that underlying competences are talents and drives. Talents and drives are much broader definition than competences. Bouwen (2007) says that talent is a born capacity to do something good. It is a gift. Talent needs water and light like a plant so it could grow. Only when you really invest in personal talent and develop some certain competences, the gift will become a real talent which is usable. Talent makes people do things in a very natural, effortless way, full of love and pleasure. The love and pleasure we get out of this is called a "drive". E. Debruyn admits that up till now there was not much experience in this field. Stebo felt real need to add something more on competences.

Traditional competence management was not really a good solution for Stebo, because Stebo works with people who usually need much more attention. For a big group of people Stebo work with, it is not easy to have a durable work. Who, for whatever reason did not finish his studies or has to cope with heavy social problems, has not much choice at the labour market. In times of growth they join the labour market, but in hard times or economical difficult times they are the first who fell off or get fired. When there's no work for them, they learn to live with limited financial resources end mostly in social isolation, without obligations that would structure their day to day life. Because the future is unsure, this people limit themselves with short term planning. They also feel pressured to activate themselves at the labour market;

therefore, people who have needed competences or profile will be fast convinced to accept the job, even if the function or the competences are not in the balance of his personal ambition. Often these kinds of people are slowly starting to lose motivation and they don't want to change anything in their lives. People who are long without a job need help. They need to discover again what gives them energy. When they discover that, the chances to have an attractive future again increase.

Stebo questions generally accepted opinion that it is enough for the person to find a job that fits into his/her competences and skills. Are you, for example, a good welder because you can weld well? Or you are only a good welder because you learned that in secondary school, but you are only really happy when you could help people. Prof. Dr. Felix Corthouts says: "If the person is good in something and you ask him to strengthen this competence, or to learn something new, this person has to be motivated to do it. If it is not something this person likes to do, it will be very difficult or even not possible to motivate him. If you don't like your strengths you cannot develop them." It is clear: there is needed much more than just management of competences alone. Stebo proposes that happy employees are better employees.

G. Bouwen made a project proposal, saying that Stebo is enthusiastic to work with competence management but they want to look for what comes before competence management – to look what drives people. The project was accepted by EU Social Fund in January 2006, and certain amount of money received for the project implementation. First questions for Stebo were: How do we discover that drive? Is it measurable? Can we investigate this? Or do we have to find new ways? Does this "drive" offer the energy to take the person's future back in his own hands? What can we do to motivate people to take initiative again?

3.4.2. From AI to "Vuurwerkt"

Shortly after the project was approved, the work on it could start. The first step was to look for the steering committee – a group of people who would be responsible for the project as a whole. Stebo had an idea to involve in this project academic people with the knowledge and experience in organizational development, change management and organizational innovation. Stebo thought it would be very interesting to make a team where academics and

practitioners could meet each other and work on this issue together. For this reason, Hasselt University was contacted and Prof. Dr. Felix Corthouts, who is a professor Emeritus of organization development and human recourses, agreed to participate in this project and shear his expertise in a field of organizational development. He joined the steering group together with Prof. Dr. Frank Lambrechts, research coordinator at Hasselt University and previous PhD student of Prof. Dr. F. Corthouts. Hasselt University was not the only one involved in this project. Prof. Dr. René Bouwen from the Catholic University of Leuven (KULeuven) also didn't reject the challenge to work on an interesting project. Thus, connection between practitioners and academic world was established.

The project was interesting for both parts because it was something different from the mainstream thinking, it was challenging and it probably would lead to discovering something new. E. Debruyn admits doubting at the very beginning and that he wasn't very optimistic about this project. Everybody knows that projects funded by EU funds have to be in concrete formats and present a result. E. Debruyn wasn't sure that this project will reach the "standard" and will satisfy EU Social Fond criteria. However, challenge and excitement to diversify the mainstream thinking about competences were stronger and uncertainties didn't shadow the work on the project.

The next task after bringing steering committee together was to search for the method which would already exist and could help them. One of the reasons for involving academicians was to use their knowledge to find the right way to make the idea of Stebo realistic and achievable. In this process Prof. Dr. René Bouwen played very important role. Based on his experience in the field of organizational change, he made a suggestion that the AI method could work here and give some useful guidelines for this project. Prof. Dr. R. Bouwen basically introduced the whole steering group with the AI method and its principles. He also provided literature about it, so his colleagues could read it and learn about AI by themselves.

In the book "Van bezieling tot beweging" AI is described as a method that can be used in any change process of people and groups of people, of course, after a careful preparation. Because as soon the process is started the changes start too. AI in Stebo is a way to ask thought-out questions at the right time, within a given situation. AI works in individual conversations between boss and employee, teacher and student, colleagues, etc. But even stronger results are in groups of people. AI is a perfect method to find out what somebody really wants in his life,

so consultants can figure out a future plan which is close to client's personal ambition. Whoever is aware of his/her ambition, can aim better on the future. That's also how social workers develop motivation in people to create their own future.

Stebo's team also accents that AI is not a crisis intervention or therapy. Of course, when a lonely mother suddenly has lost her only income, this urgent situation needs a very urgent solution in short term. In that particular moment there is no other solution then solving the problems first. Only when those fires are extinguished there is a space for AI.

When first discussions between the members of the steering group were done, the next important step was to involve other colleagues and ask them for a help to develop a practical method that could help them in their daily work. Prof. Dr. F. Corthouts emphasises the importance of the involvement of social workers who actually will have to use this method in their daily work life. Project leader G. Bouwen admits that it was also the time when organizational change begun for the first time.

3.4.3. Introduction phase and training

Introduction of AI to Stebo's social workers was very important part of the AI implementation process. It had to be educational but still very "light", so it would attract colleagues and they would believe in this method. For this reason, the next step was to organize first training session for not very big group. It was decided to bring together development team (also called kick off or design team) of 8 people for 2 days.

A. Vansichen together with his colleagues from consultancy agency "Evenwicht" were responsible for the training process. The aim of the first training was to introduce colleagues with AI, meanwhile, to feel what people think and how they react about it.

A. Vansichen says that the way how AI is introduced is very important. A training session usually starts with short introduction of AI. It doesn't have to be very theoretical introduction; it can be creative as well. For example, trainers can show a little act and demonstrate how to interview in an appreciative way. This is how they did it in Stebo.

The first problem trainers noticed in giving this training course was that Stebo social workers/counsellors already had experience in consulting and coaching other people. So, in the beginning there was some resistance, and people did not want to learn something new as their methods of working were showing results as well. A. Vansichen emphasizes that it was

very important to gain the confidence and trust from design team to go further and give training for larger group.

One of the ways to gain the trust in AI was to show the method in practice. Trainers gave a task for participants to interview each other in a positive way approximately for 30 min – 1 hour. In this way people experienced AI on themselves. They actually saw the positive effect of AI on "their own skin". After such experience people started to believe that if it works on them, it could work on other people too. All interviewees admitted that personal experience in the training was very important. G. Bouwen even admitted that these little interviews were one of the highest points in the all existence of Stebo. Colleagues talked with each other in a way they never have talked before. People told stories about their personal life and dreams, they felt confident and happy.

Galina believes that people can use this method to find their secret dreams and develop their world more purposeful. This method makes people think about the last time when they were really happy. What was the reason for that? It also helps to realize what skills do we have? Which skills we have learned somewhere and which are our inherent talents? Galina doesn't know any other method that could do that.

Another important condition for giving training to people is an environment. A. Vansichen deeply believes that any kind of training sessions should take place in a calm and relaxing environment. People will never feel open and relax in some busy, many-storey office building. It is more efficient as for participants as for trainers to organize training in more friendly environment.

After five month second, 2 days long, training session was organized. This time 25 people (including 8 participants from the first training) were involved to develop the implementation team. The training began the same way as first one – with short introduction of AI and little interviews. The atmosphere was even more open than in the first training because newcomers had heard positive comments from colleagues and they were curious.

Step by step team discovered strengths of AI. They created and adapted questionnaire, collected and created help tools for exercises, and formulated recommendations. The result of the team work was "Vuurwerkt" – a method which could be used by Stebo employees in their daily work. AI was adapted as a method to give an individual guidance to people.

When the method was more or less developed, it was time to start use it in practice – in the

people guidance and consultancy process. It was called a testing period. A. Vansichen told that there were 3 meetings during testing period when social workers came together and discussed how AI is working with their cases, what problems they have. All together they tried to find the best solution. A. Vansichen noticed that consultants started to experiment with the AI method and tried to adapt it to their particular cases and particular people they deal with. The steering committee and people who were using the method in practice very fast realized that this method actually was helping people to find a job and make lighter future much better than previous way of working. A. Vansichen says that "the method is very light with people but very result driven". It meant only one – Stebo was on a right track.

3.4.4. AI in individual guidance

It wouldn't be correct to say that in the end of the project Stebo developed a completely new working method. Prof. Dr. F. Corthouts emphasizes that "the method was already made by academics like D.L. Cooperrider, so it just had to be translated in the context of coaching". E. Debruyn explains that the AI method in Stebo is being applied mainly in 3 forms of consultations:

1) Guidance to people who want to find a job;
2) Guidance to people who want to start their own business;
3) Guidance to people who have a job but they want to develop further.

G. Bouwen emphasizes that it is quite different from the main issue of AI, which is to help make positive change possible in an organization, mostly working with larger groups and stakeholders. G. Bouwen explains that Stebo adapted the AI method to give individual guidance to people.

Stebo essentially respect the 4 phases of the AI approach. "Vuurwerkt" consists of discovery, dream, design and destiny phase. It looks like these 4 phases are steps on a straight line which move from start to end, but that isn't so. You should see it as point on circles that are forming a spiral towards a solution (Bouwen, 2007).

3.4.4.1. Guidance to people who want to find a job

The best way to explain how AI works in Stebo is to show some situations where AI is being applied by social workers. Examples presented in this section are drawn from the book "Van

bezieling tot beweging" and are presented in the text boxes.

Phase 1: Discovery of the fire

The session of the counsellor and the client begins with the 1st phase – Discovery.

> **Omar:** *He used to have two jobs; one in production and another in the cleaning sector. One job was during the workdays; the other in the weekends. Now he is without a job and he would like to spend more time with his children.*

The task of the social worker in this situation is to help the client to think about a new future. There are 4 steps the counsellor should do when he/she starts with AI:

1) *Asking a very helpful question*

This is the question which will put the tone for the whole further process. This questions aims on the strong moments from the past and on positive experiences. It is worthwhile to think about this first question before asking it. For example, conversation can start like this:

> *Think about 3 moments which were not so long time ago and where you did things you felt really good with. We are searching for activities where you felt good, and where you maybe forgot about the time when doing it. Moments/experiences which you want to have again. Tell about it like that so I would feel just like I was there.*

The goal is to search for the things that the person really enjoys. Not only questions about work or studies are important. Persons can also talk about their hobbies, social affairs, etc. These things also can help to find a good job which is perfect for the person.

The counsellor can ask for concrete moments where the person has done things by himself.

Tips:

- People can have it difficult to remember (for example, photos or their old CV can help in this situation);
- Break the ice by telling a story from yourself, but don't make it too spectacular.

2) *Telling a story*

Now the person has to choose one experience from his life and tell about it.

Tips for a social worker:

- Often you can see how people get enthusiast, they talk faster, spontaneous, use gestures, intonation, etc.;

- Your use of language is important try to get as close as possible of theirs. Try to let them tell the story in their language, if it is possible;
- Always accept the person like he is, they already have had a lot of disappointments in their lives. Support them!
- There are sometimes less nice moments in their story. Then try to go deeper in to that, but in a constructive way, and ask how they found the energy to continue instead of running away from the problems.

3) Give the spirit a name

The next task is look together for the capabilities and talents of that person which emerge from the story. Now try together to give a name to that spirit in the story. In the end of conversation the counsellor and the client can list core words that gave a teller such a spirit.

> *Omar: He is a good teller, enthusiastic, optimistic. He believes he can always do better, he is carrying, forgiving, welcoming other people, he is strong, he likes to help people, he is sensitive for troubles, believes people can change, he likes to be recognized, honoured, and respected. He likes to take the lead.*

4) Keep the spirit

Now the counsellor can invite the person to call the things that gave him the spirit. When people start to see it for themselves, their self-confidence will grow and it can lead to a very positive change.

> *Omar: I discovered a fire in my life. I came to the idea to become a police man because in that profession is everything I like to do and what I believe in. Soon I will do the first test and start with my course. Meantime, I am searching for the work because I have to take care of my children. Now I do job interviews for security guard, ambulance, parking guard. Those jobs I also see myself doing.*

Conclusion:
- Via an energizing fist question, we put the focus on positive experiences;
- People find a story about energy rising activities from their past;
- We search for elements that helped to have so strong/positive experience; search for the "drive";

- And we keep in mind these "drives" for the next activities.

A good chosen basic question encourages remembering good memories. The goal of the counsellor is to look for stories where the person itself played an active role. Telling nice memories is mostly a very positive experience. The original enthusiasm comes up again and delivers new energy. The sparkles of this energy should also reach the social worker. Together they discover that special thing which made that memory so special. So, the person rediscovers what he can do well, what he believes in and enjoy.

Phase 2: I dream I can fly

> *Aicha: She has 4 little kids. Most of the time she takes care of them alone and that causes a lot of trouble with her husband. But Aicha stays optimistic. She went to an orientation course and she hopes to find a job fast. In the discovery phase she told a very colourful story and it looks like she has many talents. She likes to organize things, can cook very well, is proud on her Moroccan culture and wants to tell all about it. She dares to start new adventures and she is very responsible. She is communicable with other people and can convince them to do things easily.*

The dream phase is based on the positive experiences which were told in the Phase 1. It encourages people to think and bring a story about his or her imaginary future. There are again 4 steps social worker can follow:

1) Introducing the dream phase

In the beginning the social worker has to tell which steps he/she wants to take and make clear to the person what the purpose of dreaming freely is. The person has to understand that he/she can dream anything and there are no limitations.

> *Aicha: She protests: "What's the use of dreaming? I can be happy, if I have a job. Dreams are not realistic".*

In this case the social worker can react in a following way:

> *"A dream is only the next step, if you want to go on with your life. We will see afterwards what we can do with it. With those talents of yours you can accomplish more than you think".*

Coaches say that this phase is quite difficult because most of the people don't want to dream or have forgotten how to dream. They don't believe that it can help.

2) *Asking the miracle question*

The miracle question gives the start sign for the dreaming about your future. This question pays all attention to the future. You think together, how all strong and important elements in the future can happen more. Developing positive feelings and trust in the future is important. The question can sound like this:

> *Close your eyes and come awake 3 years later. Your dreams became real and you do what you like to do. Tell what is happening when you come awake? What is happening in your private and professional life?*

3) *Tell about the dream*

If the listener can really imagine being in that dream, the dream has been told well. The counsellor has to listen and try to see his client's future image, hear it, experience it, but don't judge it.

> **Aicha:** *It takes a little while before she starts to tell her story: "I live again together with my partner who is nice to my children. We have a Moroccan bakery or a real Moroccan food restaurant. Our business is doing well and we have a lot of customers. She tells about the dishes which pop up in her head, she already sees how she would server it. Then she tells about the decoration of her restaurant. It is very cosy, in Moroccan style, with background music, colourful carpets on the wall.*

By asking her the right questions, you will come to the actions, values, elements in the "being" and not in the first place material affairs.

4) *Searching for the core of the dream*

It is important to understand that it's not about the dream, but it's about the core, fundaments of that dream, that are keeping the dream alive.

> **Aicha:** *Now she knows what is really essential for her. She wants to be independent, start something new on the ground that belongs to her. She wants to make people happy with her job. She also wants to give the Moroccan culture a better image.*

If this phase has been passed well, the person has more energy and he/she sees better what

he/she wants to do in the future. At this point it is important to keep that energy and don't wait too long to make the next move.

> *Aicha: She believes in her dream and believes it can come true when her children are a little bit older. At this moment, she wants to solve problems with her husband. She starts a course to have a degree in management. Meanwhile, she searches work in some restaurant to earn money and acquire experiences.*

Conclusion:

The Phase 2 starts with asking a miracle question about client's future. In this phase a social worker and a client together create a realistic image from client's dream. The next step is to search for the core of the dream and grab it close.

Phase 3: A Suitcase full of plans

> *Ali: He lives 7 years in Belgium and has the position of political refugee. In Iran he had an architect bureau and a concrete factory. Since he is in Belgium he doesn't have a job. He started to learn Dutch and English languages. He also took drawing, painting and cooking lessons where he built many social contacts. All his hobbies are active; he bikes, walks, and paints.*

From previous sessions with the social worker Ali knows the core of his dream. Now it's time to make it come true. The task of the counsellor is to investigate together with the person his possibilities to reach his wished future. "Vuurwerkt" working method offers 4 steps:

1) Present the future

The miracle question in the dream phase led to the description of Ali's future. It is important to find the core terms in this description and then work on them further.

> *Ali: "I come awake... I'm married and have 2 children. I go to work to my own architect bureau. I have people working for me in this office. In the mornings I draw plans, in the afternoon I visit customers, working places, and have business meetings. I have big construction projects in Brussels and Antwerp. I spend much time with my family and I draw new plans on my computer". Ali made conclusion of his core of the dream: **Organise – creative design – create – see results – deliver quality –family –committing and showing capacities.***

- **Think about scenarios**

When the list of core words is made, the next task is search for activities, professions, hobbies or other things you can think of that have something to do with those core words.

> *Ali: some possibilities Ali can think about are:*
>
> **Architect in service with another company, independent architect, drawing technician, leader of construction plant, organiser of exhibitions, painter, do-it-yourself-man, cook, teacher in practices, etc.**

- **Judgment**

The next step is to search for the "yes buts". People say it very fast: "yes but…", "I can't" or "I will not be able to…". It can limit possibilities of that person, therefore it is important to talk about these "yes but…" and try to find solutions. Ignoring a "yes but…" is losing every chance of self critic. Whoever wants to go for something has to go through doubts; it is a normal reaction of a person. The counsellor has to accept the doubting of the client. In a result some ideas will die, and some will become stronger.

- **Choosing**

Now it is time to analyse which idea the person prefers and what is the reason for that. Now the person is standing before his own decision and normally it shouldn't be made in rush. The counsellor has to let the client try to make a concrete, recognizable and inspirational prototype of his choice. How does the new situation look? This prototype makes the person's goal fixed and observable. Whenever it goes difficult or doubts come up this prototype can keep the fire burning.

> *Ali: he is handy and has some technical knowledge; therefore he could immediately start as a do-it-yourself-man. But he still holds on his dream. Being an architect is the future that fits him the best. His passion is to design and realise buildings.*

2) Packing suitcase

The journey to outline the future starts with collecting information. Together you make a realistic analysis of competences and talents. You make a list of all formalities that need to be completed. The task of the mentor is to think with the client and talk open about every "yes-buts…" which come up.

- **Talent, competences, and context**

The first step in "packing someone's suitcase" is to look together what this person already has or can do, what does he knows, which further competences can broaden/develop his existing talents. The counsellor should let the person collect information and learn how to use the right information channels by himself.

A good strategy for competence developing is:

- Further developing of talent;
- Developing of competences that can get more out of that specific talent;
- Searching for the right people who are competent in things we ourselves have no talent for.

> *Ali: he has already designed buildings in Iran but in Belgium it is very different. Having a good knowledge in laws system in Belgium is very important for every architect who wants to succeed. Also to be an entrepreneur in Belgium is very different than to have your own business in Iran. Ali realizes that he needs a lot of studying.*

The social worker should keep in mind the context. Does the person rather work in group or alone? Does he like to be independent or work for somebody else? Does he like chaos or peace?

> *Ali: He wants to work on his own tempo and be responsible for his creations. Like that he can be responsible for the quality of his work. The status of an independent entrepreneur is the best solution for him.*

- **Formalities**

The next step is searching of the formalities. What the person needs to have in his hands to realize his plans: degrees, licenses, money, permissions, etc. The task of the counsellor is to help him with these things and give advices.

> *Ali: in Iran Ali had a driver license and a diploma, those formalities are not valid in Belgium. So he has to find out how he can get a rightful driver license here in Belgium. More important are the degrees. Can he ask an official certificate in Iran? Can it be recognized in Belgium? Which courses he still need to attend? Does he have to restart his studies in Belgium? What he needs to become an entrepreneur in Belgium?*

- **Support and network**

The environment where you live influences what you are doing. Whoever knows that can learn to handle that strategically. The next task of the social worker is to talk about all the people that the person is connected to: family, friends, mentors, professional network etc. This will help in searching support and building out networks. It is useful to divide all people around the person in 4 groups:

- **The allies:** they help, give support are enthusiastic, they are positive about your dreams; the mentor also is an ally;
- **The supporters:** they are positive about your plans but they keep a distance. The person can tell to these people about his plans and explain why it is important to him;
- **The victims:** they are against your plans/dreams. They believe you will fail and think only about disadvantages and shortages of your plans. It is difficult to communicate with such people because defending yourself costs much energy, and anyway convincing them will never work;
- **The cynics:** they are negative about your plans but will not put much energy in protest. They give remarks, laugh with you. Your strategy in this case is don't spend time in defending yourself, just stick to your plan and use their useful remarks.

Nobody can make his future plans and dreams real without support of other people, contacts, good ideas, and experiences. So, the next step is to search together for the right people in the right places. Start with the question "Which contacts we would need?"

Ali: he wants to know about the building sector in Belgium better. He thinks that the best way to do it is to work as a volunteer or employee. So, he could meet new people, who could further help him to meet other people. He comes to the idea to start as a draughtsman and meet somebody who would bring him in contact with an architect organisation where he hopes to do praxis.

- **Balance**

The next step is to find a balance between the future plan and the rest of his/her life. Without balance the whole plan will fail. It is important to look what place the dream takes in the whole context of the existence of that person. Is that dream going to influence also other life domains, like work, hobby, family, children, money, rest, etc? Is it possible to combine it?

> *Ali: starting as entrepreneur is a project for a little bit later. For the beginning Ali will search for a work where he could gain experience. Now he is alone, he doesn't have to think about a family, and he can study fulltime. He still prefers to stay in the drawing and painting sector because there are more possibilities to have social contacts.*

3) Make an action plan

Now, with all information you have, it is possible to make a global action plan. The social worker has to help to analyze the steps client has to take and make sure they are possible to be undertaken. The person himself has to know what is possible and what is not. It's not up to the counsellor to decide what the person can or cannot do.

- The counsellor and the client have to search together for the answer on the question "What we have to do so this plan becomes realistic?"
- The counsellor's knowledge and observations are crucial, but it is important to be neutral when talking about possibilities and consequences for the persons actions;
- Recognizing good intentions, ideas and energy and showing appreciation for that is crucial;
- By further questions the counsellor leads the person to his own choices.

> *Ali: The global action plan for Ali is already very concrete:*
> - *Gaining experiences at the association of architects or a job as technical draughtsman;*
> - *Learn Dutch;*
> - *Learn a software that architects use a lot;*
> - *Get driver license;*
> - *A valid degree for architect or study more;*
> - *Business courses for entrepreneurs.*

4) Talk about the effort

When the action plan is ready, the next step is look at it and see is it feasible:

- Is the action plan close to the future plan?
- Is the person still enthusiastic?
- Does he want to start on it?

- Does he have enough time to do all those things?

If the answer is yes on every question above it is very good. Otherwise, you, as a social worker, have to take a step back and look into the matters deeper.

Conclusion:

- Planning is an analytical process of looking to different aspects of the future dream and how they appear in daily life now;
- The action plan builds a bridge between present situation and the future dream;
- The commitment of the person and the mentor is been agreed on;
- Learning from experiences and developing appreciative attitude is the core.

> *Ali: He did his praxis at "Architecten zonder Grenzen". This organisation will give him even more chances and search together with the OCMW for the further possibilities. He was selected for the course to learn Autocad at the VDAB.*

Phase 4: Make my dream come true

> *Anisa: She is a persevering person, married and has 2 children. Her husband is invalid and wants her to be around him all the time. Her children and housekeeping is all her life. She recently got her A2-deploma by 2nd chance education. It was very time-consuming process, without any support. However, she is not going to give up.*

This action phase is prepared more detailed and careful then previous phase – planning. You circle around the future image and work step by step actions, appreciate the efforts and results, you learn from experiences and search together for results on questions and problems. In this phase the person learns to plan better, carry out, and handle unexpected situations. Together you keep the end goal in front of your eyes, and adapt when it seems fit.

In this phase finally dream comes to the realization phase and it is time to make some serious decisions. The last phase contains concrete actions like practicing, experimenting, and learning. The future is being built on earlier successes, competences, energy sources which have been discovered in the earlier phases.

1) Preparing actions

The first step is to think together about the dream and put main goals in concrete actions and steps in which the person himself can make progress. These steps have to be SMART:

specific, **m**easurable, **a**cceptable, **r**ealistic, and within a certain **t**ime frame. Discuss who will do what, when, and who can help. Here the counsellor has to be careful because too hard work can let the fire go out.

Now when the steps are clear, the next task is DOING. Keep in mind that actions can fail. That's why it is important that the person feels good with the action plan, he has to feel strong enough and dare to do what he wants and likes. The enthusiasm and positive energy cannot go away now.

> *Anisa: She knows what she wants. She sees herself as a bookkeeper/accountant. She likes to work with numbers. Now she has a degree of secondary school, thus she has possibility study further. She prefers to work halftime, so she has more time for her family.*

2) *Organise support*

You look together which persons can help or support the client's plans and which persons are better don't include in his/her plans.

3) *Carry out*

The person does the appointments/meetings by himself and you as a counsellor also can help, if you have arranged it like that. The counsellor's support will be needed in the activation of the personal professional network. A network of good contacts with other people and organizations can make many things happen faster and easier. The counsellor should motivate the person to create his own networks.

4) _Appreciate and learn*

As a mentor, you are an ally; you appreciate, motivate, help and support in hard moments. Strong moments and successes deliver the energy to go on. Make it clear to the person that some successes may go hand in hand with failures. But every failure is a chance to learn. Search together how you can bend this failure into a success. Think like this: "How we can make sure that…."

Mostly in this phase the doubting has arrived again. A failure makes the people doubt between "now" and "future unknown". Search together with the person what is causing the doubting. Only after careful analysis you can decide how to handle those causes. Sometimes it will make you think for new ways which you will have to plan again.

Practice shows, that in this phase the person grows into a more autonomic person, he develops his competences and he learns to appreciate himself. It makes him stronger against negative influences.

> **Anisa:** *she does not doubt. She takes care of her husband, 3 children, and a house and still chooses for her own future. It is not something that everyone could do. She realises it herself and it makes her stronger.*

5) Steering

It is important to always keep in mind the dream. When the person starts to lose energy and motivation to work further, the task of the counsellor has to remind him about that dream. It is the way how to keep energy flow.

Sometimes future brings some changes and it is important to adapt to it rather than ignore. Make sure the timing is not putting too much pressure, because too much pressure will let the energy go away.

6) Let loose

There has to be limits on the counsellor professional help. He can't keep supporting someone forever. The counsellor makes the person stronger, and gives him chances to gather new competences, however, the rest of the road he has to do himself.

After ending the whole consultation process, evaluate it together. If it is possible, keep the contact open, so the person can always contact you, if he thinks it is needed.

Conclusion:

- Making a dream come true is a concrete process of planning, doing, learning, and steering;
- People do concrete steps for the realisation of their dream;
- They search support for this in their neighbourhood, and at his/her mentor;
- Learning from experiences and developing appreciative behaviour is the core of this phase and the full appreciative approach.

This section provided useful information and showed the reader how AI is being applied in Stebo. Stebo uses the 4-D model in giving guidance to people who are currently not employed and are searching a job. The next section will tell how AI is being applied in the work with people who want to become an entrepreneur.

3.4.4.2. Guidance to people who want to start their own business

In the previous section I described in detail how Stebo adopted the AI method to give guidance to people who are currently unemployed but are willing to find a job. As it was mention earlier, it is not the only form of consultancies Stebo offers. Another consultancy type I would like to describe in this section is guidance to people who want to start their own business. For this reason I met Fadma, a counsellor of potential entrepreneurs in Stebo. She was also a member of the training course. After the conversation with her it is easy to see that the way she is working now is very different from the way she worked before AI was introduced in Stebo. She also tells about the problems she faced when she had to use the AI method for the first time.

Fadma works with people who want to start their own business. She speaks Turkish language and is aware of cultural background of Turkish people, thus her main focus group is Turkish people who are interested in starting their own business. Her direct job responsibilities are to talk with these people about their idea to start a business, answer their questions and to help them to reach their goals. Since Fadma uses AI in her work her direct job responsibilities have not changed, however the way she is doing it is completely different.

The old way of guiding a potential entrepreneur was more superficial. Moreover, the aim of conversation was to evaluate a concrete business idea or plan of a person, context of the plan, and personal skills of the person. Consultation was focused on positive and negative sides of the plan, and problems the person has or will face when establishing a new business.

Fadma admits that in the beginning it was very difficult to find the way how AI could help her. People came to her with a clear idea or a business plan and had concrete questions, for example, about formalities or financing. The AI method seemed inapplicable for her cases. However, after much of thinking and consulting with colleagues, the new way of consultation for potential entrepreneurs was developed.

The main difference from the previous way of working was the new method's focus on a personality and person's dreams. Still, the very first thing Fadma does is answers all questions persons have. Only when their mind is "clear" and their questions are answered there is a place for something else and AI can be applied.

Fadma in her work applies 4-D model and goes through all 4 phases: discovery, dream, planning and destiny. Fadma starts with the questions about person's past and discovering a

personality. What talents do they have? What they can do exceptionally well? It is important to understand as for the consultant as well as for the person, what is the main reason to start a business? Do they really know potential of their idea, or they just saw it somewhere where it worked well and now are trying to do the same? Mostly people who come to her don't know why they want to start their own business. Thus, through careful interview Fadma lets people to think about the real reasons behind the business plan.

The next step is to let this person dream and feel is it really something what he wants to do in his life. After that, reality must be faced. Therefore, next conversation is about things people will need to do or have to have to start a new business, including finance, education, skills, other people involved, formalities to start a new company, etc. When that is clear, the next step is to look into a future. In the end of consultation person's skills and competences are more connected with his dreams.

When person has gone through all phases, the result is completely different from the result Fadma saw when she was working in an old way. She emphasizes that the most important conclusion a person has to make in the end of conversations is: Is this new business something they actually want? They make up their mind and decide what they want to do. They also realize that preparation before set up a business is very important part of being an entrepreneur. Another advantage of the AI method in this kind of consultation is that people who decide to not start a business, very easy find a job they want to do. After the consultation people know much better what their talents and skills are.

3.4.5. Important conditions when applying AI

All interviewees admitted that there are certain conditions when applying AI and the method cannot be used before careful thinking and preparation. AI is a powerful instrument, however, it is just a working method and not always AI will be the best possible solution. Before social workers and counsellors start with the "Vuurwerkt" 1st phase – discovering the fire, the preparation is needed (Bouwen, 2007). Therefore, one additional phase – preparation, comes on top of the 4 phases. The book "Van bezieling tot beweging" presents five important conditions which should be considered before starting to use "Vuurwerkt" in practice.

1) **The person and his/her situation**

Every contact between a social worker and a person should start from the expectations of that

person. Those expectations sometimes look like they exclude AI as a working method, for example, acute money needs, depths, horrible divorce, loss of a close person, law case, etc. These are examples of situations which grab a person so strongly that his energy is going completely in handling those situations and to stay "alive". Then, of course, it is not the right moment to start the search for internal drive. AI offers the tools to get to that person's expectations. Choose a focus question and let the person tell stories from his/her past. You will find out together where his energy is going to and you will build trust. In a later phase you can start to work around his drives and talents.

2) **The consultant: his task and style**

The consultant has to believe in the AI method, or it will never work. If social worker's human view, worldview and work principles are not in a harmony with the AI method then "Vuurwerkt" will just become an "instrument". Everyone who starts with AI or "Vuurwerkt" should ask him/herself: does it fits with my working style, values and beliefs? Do I believe that people can take the future in their own hands, even if the circumstances are far from ideal? The consultant also has to dare start this adventure, leave the usual roads, or more often used techniques. He/she has to like to do this. Also important factors are being good listener and being creative. It will help a lot at discovering the possibilities.

3) **Relation between both**

"Vuurwerkt" is like going together on a travel and this asks trust between the 2 persons. You, as a social worker, have to be able to count on the good intentions of the other person. The person will want to tell stories, if he/she will feel good in your presence. First of all, social worker has to have an open mind. It is important that social workers do not judge the person who is sitting in front and need help. If he/she cannot let these judgements go, he/she is not the right person to use AI.

4) **Here and now: the context**

"Vuurwerkt" asks complete and deep attention. Consultants have to be alert and accessible. Their mind has to be clear and open. It is important to make the right environment. It has much influence on the quality of the talks and conversations. Some people do not have any difficulties to come up with their stories in an office environment. But others maybe need a different place, cosier etc. Social workers/consultants can go for a walk, for example, or do an activity together. Avoid disturbances, noisy environments, and colleagues who can jump in

without notice. More consultants will be prepared for the conversation, more possibility that "Vuurwerkt" will lead to the successful result.

5) Before you start with "Vuurwerkt" ask for green light

If the social worker is planning to start with "Vuurwerkt", it's always good to tell his/her partner about the way of working and what you want to accomplish with that. It is good, if the person understands which steps the social worker will undertake, and why he/she will use that specific way or method. Of course, it is not necessary to explain all theory. The beginning of cooperation between the social worker and the person could start like that:

- Tell them about your choice to start looking for the drivers of the person;
- Let them see the steps you will undertake with him/her and which steps you will pass;
- Answer his/her questions.

In addition, E. Debruyn accents the role of top management in the process of implementing such a project like "Vuurwerkt". He believes that only when all levels of organizational structure is involved successful AI implementation process is possible. It is also important for implementing change process in an organization. When all organization is involved in the change process it reduces the risk of sudden disruption or termination of the change. Top management has to believe in this method and support the project, and then the rest will follow.

Fadma, as a consultant of potential entrepreneurs, admits that it is very important to answer all questions person has in the first place. Only when their mind is "clear" and their questions are answered there is a place for something else and AI can be applied. She also emphasizes that it is important to understand the person's cultural background and if it is possible speak on his/her native language. If the person feels comfortable and relaxed there are more chances that it will lead to successful result.

Prof. Dr. F. Corthouts thinks that very important condition when applying AI is organizational culture and appraisal system in an organization. It can promote appreciative behaviour or diminish it. If the top management appraises their workers (in this case - coaches) only by quantity of sessions/consultations they do in some period of time (for example, per day), coaches will not be motivated to use AI, thus prolonging the session time with one client. Prof. Dr. F. Corthouts believes that if you introduce AI in a very authoritarian organization it

is very difficult to make it work. He says: "If you have an ambition to change the coaching style in your organization, the need to change the whole organization comes immediately after. It is not enough to focus only on individual development of a coach (training, exercises, and courses). Every coach who learns a new method of coaching has to feel the right climate and atmosphere to go after training and work in the way he/she has been told to do." Organization has to change together with their employees. If the coach doesn't feel the activity from the organization, he/she will not have motivation to change.

The steering committee of the project had a lot of sessions together with Stebo coaches. They didn't only work and exercise together but also thought about organizational characteristics that were needed to support the appreciative way of working. For example, a director of Stebo realized that he has to rethink his management style and the way of appraisal he was using to his people.

Prof. Dr. F. Corthouts detected that shift in mind happened very fast in Stebo: "Evolution from traditional way of teaching individuals changed to organizational development kind of thinking". Prof. Dr. F. Corthouts doesn't believe in change of individuals, it always depends on the context. He says: "System is influencing the behaviour of individuals. If you don't grasp the system you will never change much."

3.4.6. Possible pitfalls

AI is a method that asks much attention from everyone who is involved in the change process. As it was mentioned earlier, people must be prepared before they use AI or the whole "Vuurwerkt" process in practice. It is possible to have some pitfalls or problems when a new method is being applied. It is useful to know them, be able to recognize and be prepared to deal with them. Usually the reason for problems and pitfalls is disregarded conditions, which were described earlier.

All interviewees accented the important role of a social worker/coach. There really has to be a connection between person who is giving guidance and a person who is guided. A counsellor/social worker has to believe in this method and be confident about it. G. Bouwen says: "Social worker has to allow problem focus go. He/she has to change a point of view and be more focused on opportunities, instead of problems. Social workers have to believe in this

approach and feel it themselves." A. Vansichen is even more concrete: "…you have to feel connected to it. If somebody doesn't believe in it, it is better not to start with AI."

Galina emphasizes that people who are giving guidance have to be professional because their responsibility is to help make changes in some person's life. Sometimes social workers are in front of difficult choice. There are people with a certain education or working experience, they want to do some other job, but the AI dream phase shows that a person's dream is actually something completely different from his background and job he thinks he wants to do. Social workers have to have skills of psychologist to find out the reasons behind such uncertainty and what this person really wants to do. If social worker doesn't pay enough attention to a particular case, a consultation will not give a positive result. There has to happen more than one conversation and all phases of "Vuurwerkt" has to be passed. Only careful work and investigation can help to avoid pitfalls.

Galina also believes that this method is very good and will have a great future in organizational development processes. However, it doesn't mean that it will always work and will be applicable. Galina says: "Different people react differently when AI is being applied and questions about positive past experiences asked. Some people for the first time don't look at AI very serious, they are more sceptical. However, after first exercises they start to see the point in these kinds of questions. Some people are more open, some need more time, and some people stay closed and sceptical about this method". During her work in Stebo Galina noticed that some people don't want to discover something new, or they are afraid to look too closely inside themselves. Some people don't want to take responsibility about their decisions and hope that somebody else will make decision in their place. This method will not work with these people. She explains that there are other type of people who already know what they want and what they skills are. For them AI is also not useful anymore. They need a next step – realization. The conclusion is that a counsellor/social worker has to see from the situation whether AI is applicable in the work with the particular client or not. Without this analysis there is a risk that counsellor will waste his and his client's time without any perspective to reach positive results.

A director of Stebo E. Debruyn agrees with Galina that it is important to do all 4 steps and to end with a destiny phase. He says: "You can't stay in a dream phase; you have to make your plans concrete." Another pitfall E. Debruyn sees in an implementation process of AI is not

enough commitment and involvement of all organization's levels. AI will not work as a method, if it is used only in some parts of organizational structure as a trail. Only when all levels of organization are involved, positive change can happen.

During the method development process G. Bouwen noticed a dangerous pitfall. She says: "There is a risk to develop AI too much as an instrumental way to implement changes. Of course, it is still very important to use main principles, however, AI has to be an "open frame" approach and it has to give a possibility of free movement for a social worker who is using this method." The essence of AI is that it is a relational activity in which people can stay themselves and work according their values, and relate in an appreciative way.

Prof.dr. F. Corthouts thinks that the main pitfall in the beginning of the AI implementation process is when top management starts preaching the new method and tries to convince everybody that it is the "best way" or the "right thing" to follow. Every person needs an opportunity to find the right way by him/herself. Prof.dr. F. Corthouts says: "You should more try to bring them in situations, so they could find out themselves the things you want them to believe. And if your theory is good, people will find it out, if not – then, probably, your theory is not right. Of course, it is not an easy task and it takes a lot of time. Trying to convince people is less time consuming but it doesn't work." He also accents the importance of top management involvement in the change process. Persons who have top positions in an organization have to change their own behaviour and show an example. The rest of employees have to believe in it, and only then change can happen. If people don't see you applying your own preaching in your work, they will not change.

3.4.7. The key to success: why it works in Stebo?

This is what we all want to know the most. Why it works so well in Stebo? How did they implement the AI method so successfully? What other organizations could learn from them?

A.Vansichen thinks that the main reason for such successful results is the background of Stebo and its employees' experience in consultancy. For some people in Stebo AI wasn't a completely new method. They saw some similarities about the way they already worked with people. A. Vansichen divides consultants of Stebo in two groups. There were people who used traditional problem solving method in their work with clients. Another group of employees used potential thinking method. Thus, some people recognized AI in this potential

thinking. A. Vansichen believes that this was the main reason why Stebo could apply AI so successfully. He says that other reasons of success are stability in the organization and believe in this method. The intervention (testing period) also was very important part of the method implementation process. Counsellors came together, discussed problems, and tried to solve them. It made the method much more practical and adaptive to real life situations.

The very first reason for such a successful implementation process Prof. Dr. Felix Corthouts mentions is Stebo's real motivation to change and improve the coaching style. He also has a common opinion with A.Vansichen. They both think that people from Stebo found a lot of similarities in the AI method and the way they already were coaching. They intuitively did a lot of things in that direction and they were very pleased when they found out that it is actually not a very new and strange thing for them.

Prof. Dr. F. Corthouts one more time accents the importance of the top management involvement in the change process. In Stebo case all main persons were involved from the very beginning, and Prof. Dr. F. Corthouts thinks that this is one of the most important factors to implement AI successfully. Often you can see that bosses are delegating somebody who would be responsible for the project. In Stebo people from top positions did great impact on a group from the very beginning.

Another reason Prof. Dr. F. Corthouts gives is serious work of the steering committee and coaches. They did not only learn the theory about the method, but they immediately tried to translate and adapt it to their own situations and find out how to use it in practice. Meanwhile, they were also thinking about how to change Stebo personal management, human resource management, and personal systems, so that it would be more supportive for the behaviour they ask from coaches.

Galina believes that this method is so successful because it touches people's hearts. Nowadays people are very busy and don't have much time for themselves. The rhythm of life is so fast and busy that people don't think anymore what they really want. Mostly people do their job without any pleasure, just for financial reasons. This method helps to discover secret dreams of people, thus can make people much more satisfied about what they are doing. Once people feel positive energy AI is giving them, they want to experience it again.

E. Debruyn thinks similar: "It gives more energy to talk about positive and high points, instead of complaining. That is natural reaction of human system."

3.4.8. Changes AI has brought into Stebo

E. Debruyn, G. Bouwen, and Prof. Dr. F. Corthouts confirmed that the project "Vuurwerkt" didn't mean to be a change project in a traditional conception. Prof. Dr. F. Corthouts says that "project was, in fact, research project not the change project". E. Debruyn admits that "unexpected AI led to a very positive change in organization without really a goal to change". "Changes were not the main aim but they came up as soon as the work on "Vuurwerkt" began" adds G. Bouwen. Even if the changes in Stebo were not planned, they did happen and affected the organization in a very positive way.

E. Debryn tells that in this year Stebo is facing big challenges. Organization is growing for 50% comparing with the last year. They have to hire 20 new people on a group of existing 60. It is a big new group and the challenge is how to keep the same positive and energetic spirit, organizational culture, and involve newcomers in the life of Stebo.

Now E. Debryn sees that the project really led to a change in many ways. He sees that the AI method actually helps much more than a problem solving approach. E. Debryn believes that for making better strategic goals AI offers more possibilities than problem solving. E. Debryn explains that in any kind of performance measurement there is a goal to perform more, for example, to get from 70 to 100. Problem solving approach is asking: "How are we going to reduce the gap? Why we can't reach 100?" AI asks completely different question: "How did we get to 70? What we did right in the past to get where we are now? Can we build strengths to get further than 70?" It is easy to see that AI has a different focus. E. Debryn says that "you get what you measure". If you measure success you get success, if you measure a gap, you get a gap. The main idea behind it is: Where is your focus? Do you focus on problems or on success? And now E. Debryn definitely focuses on success.

E. Debryn also admits that AI is the most powerful way discovered to get commitment from the team or stakeholders. Stakeholders are seldom involved in a problem solving process, because it is something you keep quiet from your stakeholders and try to solve internally. With AI it is opposite because you talk about success, strengths, and high points, and stakeholders are interested to hear that. You prove them that their choice to finance and support is right. Positive atmosphere also makes easier to talk about what you do want to achieve and, meanwhile, receive from stakeholders.

Galina immediately saw that AI is different from other methods because it focuses on the

person's inside. Nowadays the rhythm of life is so fast and busy that people don't think anymore what they really want. Mostly people do their job without any pleasure, just for financial reasons. Galina says that "this method makes people think not only during the training session but, what is more important, - afterwards".

Prof. Dr. F. Corthouts emphasizes changes that happened in the behaviour of coaches. Traditional philosophy of consulting was to search for the problem person has, and then look for the solution. The coach was supposed to know, what the best is for the person. The AI method focuses on a person and what he/she wants. The task of a coach is to clarify and help this person to find himself what he really wants. The clearer it becomes for a person, the more chance that he/she will be motivated to make changes in his/her life. A coach also has to help to detect what this person needs to do or to have to reach it. A coach has to encourage person to take responsibility of his/her life and don't expect that somebody else will solve his/her problem. He also admits that Stebo now pays more attention to the organizational conditions and Human Resource systems.

All interviewees emphasized that change didn't happen only in the coaching style but also within an organization itself and among colleagues. It was mentioned earlier that E. Debryn, a director of Stebo, had to search for the new ways to apply AI in his work and show an example of appreciative way of working. So, one of his ideas was to use AI in an Employees' satisfaction survey. Many companies use it to evaluate is employee still happy in this work, is he motivated. However, E. Debryn calls it an Employees' "dissatisfaction" survey because questions that are asked in this survey are more like "What don't you like about your job? What makes you feel unhappy?" He believes that it is not the best way to approach satisfaction. After survey is done, board of directors have to evaluate complains from employees. This doesn't make anybody happy. AI in this kind of survey gave completely different results. It led to conversations about the strengths of an organization, attractive images of the future, high points of experiences in Stebo, and what to do more to have these high points. Also points of attention have to be faced, because "sun is not shining every day" and problems are still there, emphasizes E. Debryn. But it has to be done in a context of strengths organization has. The new way of doing survey changed the focus of directors' board too. Now the main focus is towards the organization's strengths.

Relationships between colleagues changed from the moment AI was brought in Stebo. Prof.

Dr. F. Corthouts says: "When you have a common philosophy, how to relate with each other and clients, you are aware of it and try to follow. When you talk with somebody at your workplace, you know that this person knows the idea of appreciative relations. It means that there are more chances that the quality of relations is improving." Galina also has noticed that relationships between colleagues have changed. She says: "…they are more open with each other". All interviewees admitted that now atmosphere in Stebo is friendlier and common work on the project "Vuurwerkt" did develop a strong team spirit.

One of the greatest positive changes that happened in Stebo is concerned with their image in the market as the organization. In December 2007 Stebo organized a conference where they presented the results of the project "Vuurwerkt" in front of 250 people. According to all interviewees, it was the most positive experience in the whole Stebo existence. Other organizations were so excited about Stebo success that it led to a new project. This time the goal is together with approximately 50 other organizations develop learning network.

E. Debryn admits that Stebo success is appreciated not only in Belgium among other organizations. Great scholars like D.L. Cooperrider and R. Fry from USA are also showing an interest in Stebo projects and will participate in the next training sessions. Prof. Dr. F. Corthouts at this point sees Stebo as an innovative organization with motivation and mood to develop and grow further.

With this section I am ending the case study. I have explained the change process in Stebo in detail from the very beginning. The case study presents many useful tips and suggestions to other organizations which would like to implement the AI approach. In the next chapter it is time to link my findings from the case study and the literature review done earlier. I am also going to answer the research questions I formulated in the beginning of the research.

CHAPTER 4: Answering the research questions

In the beginning of the research I formulated the question which I wanted to answer in my thesis. To help answer this question I prepared several sub-questions. In this chapter I want to show my findings from both the literature review and the case study and see whether they complement each other or differ from each other. Hopefully, it will give the reader enough insights about the AI approach to see potential in this method.

4.1. Answers to the research sub-questions

I would like to remind that the central research question of the thesis was:

> *"What really works in AI, as a change process, and how to apply AI to achieve a successful change?"*

In order to answer the central research question, 6 sub-questions were formulated. In this section I would like to go through these questions and try to show my most relevant findings. I will not go very much into details in answering every particular question because results of my research can be found in the previous chapters. The goal of this discussion is to provide the main outcomes of the research and show the most important findings after both parts of my work –literature review and case study – were completed. Thus, I can give the answer to questions from two points of view – theoretical and practical.

1) What is Appreciative Inquiry?

It was the very first question I asked in the beginning of my research. In order to find the answer, I searched literature that would provide information about the AI approach. It surprised me that there is magnificent amount of literature available on this topic, however, the approach itself is not very popular and even unknown for the most of the companies and organizations.

Another surprising fact was that AI doesn't have one concrete definition. During my literature review I found various definitions, explanations and descriptions that have been developed over the years. However, it didn't confuse me and I accepted that AI can be something more than just a tool, just a methodology or just a technique. It is one of the unique characteristics

the AI approach has. Despite wide variety of definitions, we still can conclude that AI is some kind of process for creating organizational change.

Stebo describes AI as a method that can be used in any change process of people and groups of people, of course, after a careful preparation. AI in Stebo is a way to ask thought-out questions at the right time, within a given situation. AI works in individual conversations between boss and employee, teacher and student, colleagues, etc. But even stronger results are in groups of people. Stebo believes that AI is a perfect method to find out what somebody really wants in his life, so consultants can figure out a future plan which is close to client's personal ambition. It is easy to see that the description of AI given by Stebo is very similar to definitions described in Chapter 2.

One of the main issues of AI is to help make positive changes possible in an organization, mostly working with larger groups and stakeholders. However, in Stebo AI actually was not applied in order to implement changes and it means that the AI application process in Stebo began for different reasons. Stebo admits that changing organization was not their primary goal. It was the call from EU Social Fund to make a project on competence management that interested Stebo. It led to the project which had the goals to (1) make some changes in the mainstream thinking about person's competences and (2) develop a new method in giving individual guidance to people. AI was just an approach which Stebo adapted to develop its own working method. However, even without real goal implement changes in the organization the implication process of AI brought some meaningful changes that affected the whole organization.

The conclusion is that AI in any form of application will lead to organizational change. Even without real willingness to change, an organization faces a lot of new challenges as soon as AI is introduced in an organization. However, it doesn't mean that the AI approach (like any other method) always guarantee positive results or any kind of change at all. Mainly it depends on how successful you are in implementing it. If an organization wants AI to work, it has to be flexible and be able to adapt to new circumstances that emerge from AI application. Leaders of the organization have to be very alert and make sure that organization works as a whole system and all people have the same vision about the future of the organization. Top managers have to see in advance where organization is going and what has to be done to develop environment, where appreciative way of working could flourish.

2) How does it work?

The most popular way to apply AI is 4-D model (cycle). It consists of 4 phases: discovery, dream, design, and destiny. Stebo also uses exact the same model in giving guidance to people who want to find a job or want to become an entrepreneur.

Before Stebo started to use appreciative way of working and consulting, employees of Stebo, which are mainly social workers/counsellors, had to be introduced with the AI approach. The steering committee (formed in the beginning of the project) together with employees had to work on a new project and develop a method that would be different from the previous way of working. Therefore, two training sessions were organized where everybody could meet each other and work together. Stebo compares this process with the "AI Summit" described in the Chapter 2.

Indeed, the process of working together in 2 days long training sessions can be considered as an "AI summit". Firstly, it involved individuals from different hierarchical and functional levels (top management as well as social workers); secondly, together they discovered core success factors in their organization, thus uncovering positive history of the organization; thirdly, together they defined and created change around a particular strategic objective (in this case – individual guidance). However, some differences also appear. Firstly, according to Powley, Fry, Barrett and Bright (2004), a typical summit involves 200-300 participants, so it means that it is a large group intervention. A summit in Stebo was much smaller; only 9 participants were involved in the first training and 25 in the second training. Writers also mention the presence of external stakeholders in a summit, however, in Stebo's trainings it didn't happen.

Stebo applies AI mostly in the 3 forms of consultations:

- Guidance to people who want to find a job;
- Guidance to people who want to start their own business;
- Guidance to people who have a job but they want to develop further.

Full consultation process for one person consists of 4 phases. The first phase is discovery of the fire. In other words, a coach and a client have to find the "drive" that gives energy to the person. The goal of the counsellor is to look for stories where the person itself played an active role. Telling nice memories is mostly a very positive experience. The original enthusiasm comes up again and delivers new energy. Together they discover that special thing

or a "drive" that made that memory so special. In the first phase the person rediscovers what he can do well, what he believes in and enjoy.

The second phase is dreaming. The Phase 2 starts with asking a "miracle question" about client's future. In this phase a social worker and a client together create a realistic image from client's dream. The next step is to search for the core of the dream and grab it close.

The next phase is called "packing a suitcase". In other words, it is a planning process which involves thinking about possible scenarios, looking together what this person already has or can do, what does he know, which further competences can broaden/develop his existing talents. It is an analytical process of looking to different aspects of the future dream and how they appear in daily life now. In the end of the Phase 3, the person has to have an action plan that would serve as a bridge between present situation and the future dream.

The last phase is taking concrete actions to make a dream come true. It involves planning, doing, and learning. More than ever, the person needs to develop his own professional network and find support in his neighbourhood. A network of good contacts with other people and organizations can make many things happen faster and easier. The counsellor should motivate the person to create his own networks.

The conclusion is that the number of participants in the AI summit and a size of an organization don't matter. It is possible to reach positive results and implement changes even in the little organization or company. Learning from experiences and developing appreciative behaviour is the core of the AI implementation process and the whole appreciative approach.

3) *How Appreciative Inquiry differs from other approaches to organization development?*

Chapter 2 presents the results of my literature review and one section is dedicated to this question. It describes AI comparing with other OD approaches and explains the main differences in detail. In the case study I do not have the separate section to explain how AI differs from the previous way of working in Stebo. Instead, comparison of the new and the old way of working in Stebo is presented more scattered. The reader can feel it in almost every section of the case study. I start with explanation why previous way of guiding was not so efficient for Stebo; in another section I introduce the new way of working in detail, and I

describe changes that happened in Stebo after implementing the AI method. This all give an understanding how different from other approaches the AI approach is.

According to the literature review, traditional approaches to OD are looking for problems, gaps, or shortcomings in an organization. The whole process of change is rooted in the search for the solution to the particular problem. According to developers of AI, the traditional approaches prevent an organization to reach the innovative potential and to develop its strengths and competences. AI, instead, searches for something that already works well in an organization or people. The main goal of AI is to build desired future based on positive experiences in the past.

Stebo has adapted the main principles of AI, such as searching for the best in people, shearing positive stories, asking questions in a way that would heighten positive accomplishments, focus on desired future, using positive language, generating new images, and dreaming. It is very different from the previous way of working in Stebo. Before the project "Vuurwerkt" Stebo was trying to help people by understanding problems they have in their life and trying to find the solution. Stebo admits, that AI is more effective and result driven method than problem oriented approaches.

4) *What are the possible pitfalls when using Appreciative Inquiry? How to manage them?*

If previous research sub-questions would be possible to answer only based on the literature review then following questions (4., 5. and 6.) need to be answered from more practical point of view. For this reason opinions and experiences of interviewees were very important in order to find the answers to this and following questions. Especially because the critique and shortcomings concerned with the AI method and "positiveness" in general, described in the literature review, is very different from the possible pitfalls mentioned by interviewees.

The main shortcomings of AI, described by Roberts (2006), are that it may create misperceptions by ignoring problems and deficits, and expectations for excellence that can, over time, undermine performance and well being. Another writer Fineman (2006) emphasizes that AI fails to value the opportunities for positive change that are possible from negative experiences, such as embarrassing events, periods of anger, anxiety, fear, or shame. However, people of Stebo have other answer to this question. The main "danger" areas in

their opinion are following:

- <u>Connection between the person who is giving guidance and the person who is guided.</u> A counsellor/social worker has to believe in this method and be confident about it. He/she also is responsible to develop friendly relationship with a client and show respect and willingness to help.

- <u>Insufficient preparation and analysis of the situation.</u> This method will not work with people who cannot open themselves and reach something in their lives. For people who already know what they want the AI approach is also not useful anymore. They need the next step – realization. The conclusion is that a counsellor/social worker has to see from the situation whether AI is applicable in the work with the particular client or not. Without this analysis there is a risk that counsellor will waste his and his client's time without any perspective to reach positive results.

- <u>Not enough commitment and involvement of all organization's levels.</u> Organization has to work as a whole system. The top management has to show an example to everybody with active participation in the change process.

- <u>Incomplete 4-D cycle.</u> Every consultation should consist of 4 phases described in the previous sections. Usually it is not possible to complete all of them in one session; therefore other appointment with a client should be set. The task of a counsellor is to (1) convince the person to come back next time and (2) make sure that the person completes all 4 phases and ends with a destiny phase. The person can't stay in a dream phase; he has to make his plans concrete.

- <u>A risk to develop AI too much as an instrumental way to implement changes.</u> Of course, it is still very important to use main principles, however, AI has to be an "open frame" approach and it has to give a possibility of free movement for a social worker who is using this method.

The conclusion is that, like any other method, AI includes some pitfalls practitioners have to be aware of. Shortcomings of AI described in the literature (Roberts, 2006; Fineman, 2006) are quite different from the pitfalls and problems that are described by interviewees. The main difference is that pitfalls mentioned in the literature are more general and theoretical, but information from the interviews is more concrete and is concerned with the actual implication

and application of AI in the organization.

Prof. Dr. F. Corthouts also has opinion on this issue. He argues that calling approaches as "positive scholarship", "positiveness", "positive psychology", etc. may lead to misinterpretation and critique. Hearing these names can make people think that it is only about being positive and talk positive things. AI doesn't say that we have to be positive all the time. That is not the principle of AI. Prof. Dr. F. Corthouts emphasizes that "the principle of AI is going into things with energy. It is not just being nice to each other. When people give such critiques they don't know about what AI is. AI basic fundamental issue is a quality of relationship. And high quality of relationship doesn't mean that you always have to be nice. The sign of appreciation is that you are honest with each other". Prof. Dr. F.Corthouts emphasizes that AI is not about being positive but more about "how to relate with each other, so we could move in better direction".

5) *What are the important conditions when applying AI?*

In the literature review you can see that writers sometimes suggest how AI should be implemented and what practitioners should be aware of. For example, Hammond (1998) believes that the key to all change efforts is surfacing and examination of working assumptions. According to her, there are eight assumptions on which the AI approach is based: *Finding what works; Choosing the right focus; Creating reality; Asking the right questions; Carrying the past forward; Valuing Differences; Carrying the best of the past; Using positive language.*

Van Tiem and Rosenzweig (2006) also emphasize the importance of positive language and suggest asking questions that are framed to gather positive insights. They also advice to model and reinforce the belief system tied to positive change by selecting words that reflect somebody's beliefs.

However, the best way to learn something about the important conditions when applying AI is to hear it from people who actually have done it. The end product of the project "Vuurwerkt" was the book "Van bezieling tot beweging. De waarderende benadering toepast" written by Griet Bouwen with the support of René Bouwen, Sylvia Caputo, Frank Lambrechts end Styn Grieten. It serves as a guide for every social worker who would like to apply AI. The book provides many tips how AI should be applied, including important conditions which have to

be taken into account for successful application of the AI approach in giving guidance to people.

Stebo advices to start with the preparation phase and only after careful situation analysis social workers should start with AI. In other words, one additional phase – preparation, comes on top of the 4 phases. For example, social workers have to see if there is some serious problem in the person's life: acute money need, depths, horrible divorce, loss of a close person, law case, etc. Then, of course, it is not the right moment to start the search for internal drive. Solving that problem should be the priority.

Another condition Stebo emphasizes is the appreciative way of relation between the social worker and the client. The main task of social worker is to build strong contact with a person he/she is guiding. In other words, the person has to trust social worker and feel free. A counsellor has to choose a focus question and let the person tell stories from his/her past. In this way you will find out together where his energy is going to and you will build trust. In a later phase you can start to work around his drives and talents.

The consultant has to believe in the AI method, or it will never work. If social worker's human view, worldview and work principles are not in a harmony with the AI method then "Vuurwerkt" will just become an "instrument". First of all, social worker has to have an open mind. It is important that social workers do not judge the person who is sitting in front and need help. If a counsellor cannot let these judgements go, he/she is not the right person to use AI. The AI method asks complete and deep attention. Consultants have to be alert and accessible. Their mind has to be clear and open. It is important to make the right environment. It has much influence on the quality of the talks and conversations.

Before a counsellor starts with the AI approach, he/she should tell to client about the choice to start looking for the drivers of the person. A counsellor should let people see the steps he/she will undertake and why it its needed. It is very important to answer all the question the person has in the first place. Only when their mind is "clear" and their questions are answered there is a place for something else and AI can be applied.

6) *Appreciative Inquiry in practice: How to implement it? What are the results? (experience of the organization)*

It is very broad question and actually all case study is dedicated to answer this question. The

case study is based on information obtained during interviews, information published in the book "Van bezieling tot beweging. De waarderende benadering toepast", and my own observations. The results can be found in Chapter 3. In this section I will highline the most important findings of the case study.

Behind every project has to be a reason. In Stebo case it was an idea to change mainstream thinking about people's competences. Moreover, there was a call from EU Social fund to make a project on similar issues. Further, it is important to have a group of people who would be responsible for all activities and project as a whole. Stebo teamed up with professors from different Belgium universities, thus forming a strong steering committee including people with different knowledge. Every project also has to have a goal. For Stebo it was developing a new working method that could be used in giving guidance to people.

Employees of Stebo had to be introduced with AI. It is very important part of the whole AI implementation process. Introduction to the AI approach had to be educational but still very light, so it would attract people and they would see potential in this method. For this reason special training sessions were organized.

Very soon consultants started to experiment with the AI method and tried to adapt it to their particular cases and particular people they deal with. The intervention (testing period) also was very important part of the method implementation process. Counsellors came together, discussed problems and tried to solve them. It made the method much more practical and adaptive to real life situations.

Soon Stebo realized that they are not changing only the coaching method but the whole organization. When organization decides to start with AI, it has to reconsider the values organization presents and the reward system for employees. Working environment has to encourage appreciative way of working and appraise employees who applies the new method. It also has to emphasize the human values, such as recognition and quality of relationships.

4.2. Getting to the core

Slowly the answers to 6 sub-questions bring us to the core of this thesis. It is like putting together a mosaic; by putting piece by piece next to each other we can have a beautiful picture. After the research process is completed it is not difficult anymore to answer: *"What really works in AI, as a change process and how to apply AI to achieve a successful change?"*

AI offers organizations many advantages: development, growth, positive changes, satisfied employees, and even better economical results. However, it becomes clear very fast that to achieve positive results you need more than just a method; you need successful implementation of it and that AI cannot guarantee. It depends on an organization's skills, dynamism, creativity and many other factors which I am going to describe in this section.

During my research I tried to look for the different factors that could help organizations to implement AI successfully and gain from this method as many advantages as possible. Therefore, one of my objectives was to investigate the organization where AI is already working. The case study presents the successful implementation process from which other organizations could learn. In the result of practical investigation and in-depth interviews, many important factors, which could not be discovered during the literature review, came to light.

Firstly, I want to emphasize that the background of the organization and experience of employees is important. In the Stebo case AI wasn't something unknown and strange for employees. Some of them were already working and guiding people in similar way to AI. When the method is not something completely new for people it is much easier for them to believe in it and have trust in it. The best way to show how AI works is to let them experience it. With the AI it is very easy. People can try to interview or be interviewed in a positive and appreciative way. When people feel this positive effect of such an interview, they see how powerful this method is.

Employees of Stebo are using the AI method to give guidance to people who are looking for the job or want to start their own business, therefore the contact between the person who is guiding and the person who is being guided has to be open and positive. Stebo is guiding people with very different cultural backgrounds – Turkish, Moroccan, Russian, Italian etc. It is not a problem for them, because Stebo team is very diverse too. In Stebo case it is very important factor, because it can play important role in making good and reliable contact with the person who needs help. The AI approach will always work better when there is a good connection and trust. It is not a surprise that Stebo can help so many people to find their place in the life.

From this follows that introduction of AI to employees is crucial part of implementation process. People who want to introduce the new method (like in this case a steering committee)

have to know the right way how to do it. Top management should try to avoid preaching and convincing that the new method is the best and everybody has to follow it. Employees should come to this conclusion by themselves. Therefore, introduction to the new method should be well prepared. In Stebo case the best solution was to start with the small group of people and organize 2 days training session where AI was introduced to them. Environment where the training sessions take place can influence the end result. Friendly, relaxing, and calm environment makes people open and think positive.

One of the main success factors for Stebo was their people. Employees did believe in this method and saw the potential of it. It didn't take long time before employees switched from traditional problem solving approach to appreciative way of working. Employees started to work as a team and felt that they are not alone in this but they are part of the organization. In the result they all together developed the common psychology for their organization. Colleagues started to be more open with each other and working atmosphere became friendlier.

It depends mainly on the top management whether people will follow the new method and will believe in it or not. In Stebo case top management and all important persons from different organizational levels were involved in the process from the very beginning. They not only organized meetings and sessions but also actively took part in them. Moreover, the process of learning didn't stay in the training room. Immediately the new method and new way of working was tried in practice. Everybody could experiment with it and try to adopt it in their particular cases. When there was some problem, meetings were organized and the problem discussed with the steering committee or other colleagues. It is easy to see that the AI method should be flexible and easy adoptable to real life situations.

Another serious step from top management is to develop an environment and working atmosphere that would support the new method and motivate employees to use it. In other words, it means that organization has to change also. New working environment should be creative, flexible, result oriented, and it should motivate employees to work for the organization and build its future together. Moreover, working environment has to let people stay themselves and work according to their values, and relate in an appreciative way.

Appreciative way of working is highly appraised in Stebo. Top management came to conclusion that AI can be very good way to organize satisfaction surveys in Stebo. In such a

survey employees would be asked about strengths of organization and their job instead of weaknesses.

The conclusion is that top management plays important role in the AI implementation process. They are leaders of the organization and, therefore, they are responsible for building common psychology and healthy working environment in the organization. They are also responsible whether or not the new working method will be implemented successfully. The way new method is introduced to other employees, level of participation in the project, and appraisal system depend directly on top management's decisions; therefore, it can affect the whole change process in the organization. Stebo is a good example that shows how top management decisions can influence the change process. Top management's direct participation in the project is the leading factor in successful AI implementation process.

Other factor that makes changes so positive in Stebo, in my opinion, is that Stebo didn't abandon the traditional way of working. Before they start with AI they carefully analyze the situation and see whether AI is the solution for particular case or not. If the person has a serious problem (e.g. acute money need, depths, horrible divorce, loss of a close person, law case) AI will not be a right method for him. The serious problem has to be solved first. The counsellor also has to feel confident about this method and simply like to use it.

As a result of the project the working method "Vuurwerkt" was developed. It was published in the book which can be used as a guide for anybody who would like to use this method in practice. It is a good tool for Stebo employees to read it anytime they need some help. It is full of examples and tips, so counsellors can refresh their memory every time they feel it is needed. In my opinion, it is also a factor that makes Stebo so successful.

Finally, people realize very fast that the AI method is quite unique. The method no longer focuses on problems or shortages that most of the times generate negative emotions and oppress innovation and creativity. Instead, AI is oriented on success and desired future. It is in the interests of the management to motivate employees to build desired future of the organization together. AI is one of the best ways to do it. When employees can share their positive experiences and accomplishments with the leaders or other colleagues, it energizes them and makes them feel appreciated and valuable. At this point it is responsibility of the top management to see what these things that give energy to people are and how to develop environment that wouldn't extinguish this fire.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusions and recommendations

In the last chapter of this thesis I am going to summarize the research process and will make conclusions about the most important findings. I will also propose to focus on further investigation of a number of issues.

Firstly, I would like to evaluate the research process which brought me to the new and interesting findings. In my opinion, one of the strengths of this research is that the greatest part of it is based on information obtained by means of interviews. It makes this research very objective and practically oriented. The information obtained from the interviews is precious because contains an opinions and experiences of practitioners, observers, and academics who were involved in the AI implementation process in Stebo. The information they have shared can help many organizations which are interested to implement the AI method or positive change in their work.

All my research was devoted to find out how organizations can implement the AI method in their work and how to do it successfully. Thus, the information I have provided in my thesis can be helpful and give an interesting insight of the AI implementation process. Why it is important to talk about the successful implementation process? In my opinion, even the very good method doesn't guarantee the results. The success and positive results depend on many other factors. So, my task was to search and analyze the factors that play a big role in the AI implementation process.

AI is unique in many ways. It makes people look at the same things they have been looking at all their lives but see them from another angle. Looking for the problems and things that don't work is no longer an issue of AI. Instead, AI looks for something that works and gives energy to people and/or their organization. However, my goal is not to preach this method and say that it is the best solution for every organization. I would rather say that it is an interesting alternative to the traditional way of implementing change in organizations and it deserves attention.

The research shows that AI is a method that should not be enforced. Some organizations, people, or situations are not suitable for AI. So, I would recommend spending some time to analyze particular situation or people, or even yourself before start with AI. Questions like: "Is it something for me or my organization? Do I feel comfortable with it?" should be asked

in the very beginning of the AI implementation process. Only when you feel connected to it and have trust in it, this approach can lead you to positive results.

However, the research also shows that sometimes, when the AI approach seemed to be inapplicable in Stebo, they still found the solution. It means that the AI implementation process is time consuming and needs continuous attention. I would recommend organize discussions by means of meetings, workshops or trainings before decide that AI is not applicable. After working together, cooperating and discussing, the appropriate way of AI application may be discovered.

Even providing many useful tips and recommendations doesn't guarantee that the process of implementation will be easy. The method requires serious work and willingness to change. Moreover, it demands shift in people's minds. Traditional problem focus has to go. It may be a very difficult task for people who are too conservative or reserved to new approaches and new ways of working. However, it is not an impossible mission. Atmosphere at the work, organizational culture, top management involvement are the factors that have enormous influence on the employees' motivation to follow the new way of working. It can either lighten the implementation process or impede it.

In so rapidly changing and dynamic environments we have to look for new ways of working, otherwise we will simply not survive for very long. The main outcome of my research is that the future organization should focus on people, quality of relationships, and human values. It promises much better results and growth for the organization.

A successful organisation must not only be well-organized, it must be able to adapt. An organization which is creative and willing to learn increases its survival odds. The organization which behaves as a whole system will manage to implement changes, AI or any other project successfully.

Suggestions for further research

Based on the findings emanating from the exploratory research, further research could usefully focus on a number of other issues that were not investigated in my thesis. New questions arose during the research, thus opening a window for further investigations. In this section I will suggest which issues concerning AI could be interesting topics for other researches, thereby emphasize that the research about AI and application of this method is not

finished.

In my research I investigated only one organization where AI has been used in practice. The implementation process in Stebo has been so successful that shows an example from which other organizations could learn. However, that has some disadvantages for my research. In my opinion, the reader would like to hear also some stories that are not so successful and see what mistakes or problems can emerge when you start working with AI. So, learning from other organization's mistakes and looking for the possible solutions and the way to implement the AI approach successfully for that particular organization can be an interesting topic for other research.

Process of change in Stebo did not stop with the project "Vuurwerkt". The next step of Stebo is to develop learning network where approximately 50 organizations will be involved. It will be a large group intervention and, in my opinion, should be investigated in detail. In this case not only Stebo will be involved in the positive change process, but it will affect all organizations that are participating in the project.

Comparing different ways of the AI implementation processes could be another interesting proposition for the further research. Instead, of investigating only one organization, researcher could conduct a case study describing more organizations and their ways of working with AI.

I would also like to propose to compare the results of the case study with the available theory about AI. I have mentioned and analyzed many factors that play important role in a successful implementation process of AI. It would be interesting to analyze whether the findings of the case study complements the theory or differ from it. This kind of research would be devoted to search for shortcomings and differences in the available literature.

My research stops at this point. But as I mentioned before, it opens opportunities for new researches. It was great possibility to see so successful change process in an organization and learn from it. It was pleasure to write about it and, hopefully, motivate others to search for things that give them energy, and live the life in balance with human values.

REFERENCES

Barge, J., & Oliver C. (2003). Working with appreciation in managerial practice. *Academy of Management Review, 28,* 124-142.

Barret, F. J., Cooperrider, D. L., & Fry R. E. (2005). Bringing every mind into the game to realize the positive revolution in strategy. The Appreciative Inquiry summit. In *William J., Rothwell, R.S., & Gary N. (Eds.),* Practicing Organization Development: A Guide for Consultants (pp. 501-549). *John Wiley & Sons Inc.*

Bentkowski, E., & Yamaga, M. (2006). Exploring Appreciative Inquiry. In H. Nguyen & C. Perrin (Eds.), *TESL Working Paper Series, 4* (pp. 41-50). Hawai'i Pacific University. Downloadable at:
 http://web1.hpu.edu/images/GraduateStudies/TESL_WPS/08Bentkowski_AI_a17239.pdf

Berrisford, S. (2005). Using Appreciative Inquiry to drive change at the BBC. *Strategic Communication Management, 9,* 22-25.

Bouwen, G., Bouwen, R., Caputo, S., Lambrachts, F., & Grieten, S. (2007). *Van bezieling tot beweging. De waarderende benadering toepast.* Genk: Stebo vzw.

Bradbury, B., & Bergmann Lichtenstein, B.M. (2000). Relationality in organizational Research: Exploring the Space Between. *Organization Science, 11,* 551-564.

Bright, D.S., Fry, R.E., & Barret, F. (2003). The Strategic Impact of Multiple AI Summits: Developing the U.S. Navy's Information Professional Community. *Ai Practitioner, Nov.,* 34-39.

Burnes, B. (1996). *Managing Change*. Pitman Publishing.

Bushe, G. (2001). Five Theories of Change Embedded in Appreciative Inquiry. In D.L. Cooperrider, P. Sorenson, D. Whitney & T. Yeager (Eds.), *Appreciative Inquiry: An Emerging Direction for Organization Development* (pp. 117-127). Champaign, IL: Stipes. Downloadable at: http://www.gervasebushe.ca/ai5.pdf

Chowdhury, S. (2000). *Management 21st C.* Financial Times Prentice Hall.

Cooperrider, D.L. (1996). The child as agent of inquiry. *OD practitioner*, *Jan.,* 5-18.

Cooperrider, D.L. & Whitney, D. (1999). A Positive Revolution in Change: Appreciative Inquiry. Downloadable at:
 http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/practice/toolsPackDetail.cfm?coid=2159

Cooperrider, D.L., & Srivastva S. (1987). *Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life.* JAI Press Inc, 129-169. Downloadable at: http://www.appreciative-inquiry.org/AI-Life.htm

Fineman, S. (2006). On being positive: Concerns and counterpoints. *Academy of Management Executive, 31,* 270-291.

Hammond, S. (1998). *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry.* Thin Book Publishing Company. Downloadable at:

http://books.google.com/books?id=0gC1O1hP69gC&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+Thin+Book+of+Appreciative+Inquiry&sig=Hzl17b61EYra-3SbrCaWuoMA2JI

Haneberg L. (2005). *Organization Development Basics.* American Society for Training and Development. Downloadable at:

http://books.google.com/books?id=j2SEXmz_r4C&pg=PT166&dq=Haneberg+L.+(2005).+Organization+Development+Basics.&sig=v7sNN504stDl_6HAc53fIxrF8fo

Langley A. (1999). Strategies for theorizing from process data. *Academy of Management review, 24,* 691-710.

Mellish, L.E. (2003). Appreciative Inquiry – Can we change the way we change? Downloadable at: http://www.mellish.com.au/Resources/lizarticle.htm

McNiff, J., & Whitehead, J. (2006). *All you need to know about Action Research.* Sage, London.

Polkinghorne, D.E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. In J.A. Hatch & R. Wisniewski (Eds.), *Life History and Narrative* (pp. 5-23). Taylor & Francis Ltd.

Powley E.H, Cooperrider D.L., & Fry, R. (2001). Appreciative Inquiry: A revolutionary Approach to strategic Change, In EC Media Group & Thomson Financial Firm (Eds.), *Handbook of business strategy* (pp. 165-172). Thomson Financial.

Powley, E.H., Fry, R., Barrett F., & Bright, D. (2004). Dialogic democracy meets command and control: Transformation through the Appreciative Inquiry Summit. *Academy of Management Executive, 18,* 67-79.

Roberts, L. (2006). Shifting the lens on organizational life: added value of positive scholarship. *Academy of Management Review, 31,* 292-305.

Russell, J., & Russell, L. (2006). *Change Basics*. American Society for Training and Development. Downloadable at:

http://books.google.com/books?id=akBcoExPqgcC&printsec=frontcover

Seo. M., Putnam. L.L., & Bartunek J.M. (2004). Dualities and Tensions of Planned Organizational Change. In M. S. Poole & A. H. Van de Ven (Eds.), *Handbook of Organizational Change and Innovation* (pp. 73-108). Oxford University Press US. Downloadable at:

http://books.google.com/books?id=SEeFyb6s7mcC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Handbook+of+Organizational+Change+and+Innovation.&sig=EzR3B4OT9x4mu5uRvrWT5rr1JtU

Thatchenkery, T., & Chowdhry D. (2007). *Appreciative Inquiry and Knowledge Management. A social constructionist perspective.* Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Van Tiem, D., & Rosenzweig, J. (2006). *Appreciative Inquiry.* American Society for Training and Development. Downloadable at:

http://books.google.com/books?id=VJqvEcEJyKEC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Van+Tiem,+D.,+%26+Rosenzweig,+J.+(2006).+Appreciative+Inquiry.&sig=poHQyVN4HNxIxq2JpjOxGiBTDLo

Weerd-Nederof, P.C. (2001). Qualitative case study research. The case of PhD research project on organising and managing new product development systems. *Management decisions 39*, 513-538.

Internet recourses

Appreciative Inquiry and Community Development
http://www.iisd.org/ai/

Corporation for Positive Change
http://www.positivechange.org/appreciative-inquiry.html

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/drugfree/sa3act.htm

Qualitative Research Consultants Association

http://www.qrca.org/

Stebo vzw, Genk

http://www.stebo.be

The Change Management Tool book

http://www.change-management-toolbook.com/Default.aspx?tabid=509

The Appreciative Inquiry Commons

http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/

APPENDIX 1 Information gathered from each interviewee

Master of Management
Maira Vilcane
Master thesis topic: <u>Appreciative Inquiry: theory and application. A case study</u>

Questions I would like to discuss with you due to my research:

1) How did you become involved in the project Fireworks?
2) What role did you play in the project?
3) From where (whom) did you heard about AI for the first time? And what were your first reaction / thoughts?
4) Tell the story of the Fireworks. How did you apply AI: *in your work;
   *in the organization.
5) What is so special / unique in this project?
6) How is it different to dominant thinking about advising and helping people with competency development?
7) How it is different to your previous way of working: *with clients;
   *in the organization.

7) What results do you see?

8) What "really works" in the Fireworks? Explain the way AI is applied in your work?

9) What are important conditions when applying AI? Are there pitfalls? How to manage them?

10) Do you see effects of the Firework that expand beyond the scope of the project: * how colleagues relate to each other? * how others relate to you and you relate to others?

11) AI is a change process in the organization. Can you tell me something about the way the change process is implemented? What really worked? Who was involved and how did you involve people (training sessions, etc.)?

Thank you for your time and cooperation,

Maira Vilcane