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The Promise of Appreciative Cities

Compelling the Whole to Act

Barbara Lewis
Karen Roney



Inside this issue

Welcome to November 2013 issue of AI Practitioner

"The Promise of Appreciative Cities: Compelling the Whole to Act" is full of detailed examples where cities have applied AI: in Police, Fire, Purchasing and Transportation departments; community engagement in major regeneration initiatives and local initiatives supporting a region's long-term vision. Editors Barbara Lewis and Karen Roney, who live in the United States and have been involved in award-winning work in this area, describe how cities have embedded AI over many years and set out the promise of even greater AI use.

In the Feature Choice, Dayle O'Brien in Australia describes a change and transition theory, Four Rooms of Change, that she has found invaluable in her coaching practice. Taking a strengths-based approach to the model, she describes how people move through the Rooms and learn to love change.

In this Research Notes, Jan Reed says "Goodbye and keep going" as she feels it is time to hand over to others. We thank her for her skill and wisdom in developing the column over four years. Showcased in the

column is a study of Caravaggio's paintings using AI as the research framework.

In AI Resources we welcome a new editorial team: Matt Moehle (USA), and Roopa Nandi and Hardik Shah (India). They bring their research, academic and consulting backgrounds to develop the next phase of this column.

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Mary Jo Greil

Dr. Greil has spent 20 years in corporate settings implementing internal leadership development, cultural change initiatives, and large-scale business redirection efforts. Over the past ten years, her business provides leadership coaching and consulting in both for-profit and non-profit sectors. In 2007, she led the community launch of Imagine Memphis. Contact: mj@carsongreil.com



Diane R. Spence

Dr. Spence's leadership coaching and consulting are built on previous roles in public and private primary and secondary education as a teacher and administrator, and adjunct teaching in a graduate program at a university. Holding a University of Memphis Master's and a Pepperdine Doctorate, she is grounded in strengths-based disciplines including AI. Contact: spenceconsulting@gmail.com



Youth Voices Revitalizing the Memphis Community

Steps, Impact and Keys to Success

In 2007, a small group of individuals, searching for ways to shift the negative conversations that were dominant in Memphis at the time, began dreaming about an Imagine Memphis (IM) project modeled after Imagine Chicago, launched by Bliss Browne in the 1990s. IM has evolved into a strategic initiative that continues to promote dialogue and facilitate positive change within the community.

"Faith is taking the first step, even when you can't see the stairway."
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr

In 2007, a small group of individuals, led by Mary Jo Greil, was searching for ways to shift the negative conversations that were so dominant in Memphis (Tennessee, USA). They began dreaming about an Imagine Memphis (IM) project to be modeled after Imagine Chicago, launched by Bliss Browne in the 1990s. Imagine Chicago began with a community vision resulting in thousands of interviews and grant funding from large foundations. On the other hand, IM started with a small group of volunteers drawing upon the in-kind contributions and individual funding to discover what would emerge as being vital to create a vibrant future for Memphis.

Seven years later, IM has evolved into a strategic initiative of Leadership Memphis, continuing to promote dialogue across cultural, racial, economic and generational boundaries to facilitate positive change in the community. Today's IM mission is to unite youth and adults – shaping the future of Memphis with positive community action. IM continues to plant seeds of transformation among individuals, schools, non-profit organizations and communities in metropolitan Memphis. Little did the original thought partners imagine the far-reaching effects of the "magic" that has been ignited through IM.

Design

The initial steps towards translating the dream into a viable process began with the formation of an IM design team. In the spring of 2007, Diane Spence joined Mary Jo Greil in co-leading IM, and they convened representatives from non-profits,

'I got tired of hearing negative things about Memphis.' Katelyn Nichols



The original mission of IM was to bring youth and adults together in order to experience and appreciate the strengths of Memphis.

higher education, youth leadership organizations and schools. This initial group united to define and sponsor this new initiative with the agreement that youth were to be a core part of the design team membership and the IM process. The group explored and committed to the use of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and to the cornerstone of the project, involving high school youth and adults with equal voice at every level, from design to implementation. This commitment to intergenerational engagement is reflected in the IM video, which was designed to introduce IM to new and ever-expanding participants in the Memphis community.¹

"I got tired of hearing negative things about Memphis. When I went to the first design meeting, I just became really attached to it because I loved everything they were doing." Katelyn Nichols, who was part of the initial IM design team and is now a University of Memphis graduate.

The original mission of IM was to bring youth and adults together in order to experience and appreciate the strengths of Memphis, and to be a catalyst for expanding the community's imagination and hope for a more vital future for Memphis. The long-range goal of IM was to help Memphis become a "city of choice" by actively tapping into our sustainable talent for generations to come.

"Although I was a teenager, I felt like an integral part of the team. IM was invested in young Memphians with big hopes and dreams for the city." Lilla Pivnick, who was part of the initial IM design team, and is now a second grade teacher in the Memphis Achievement School District.

Process

From the beginning, the Imagine Memphis process was designed to include three components: Discovery interviews, "Leading the Way" meetings and community gatherings or planning sessions. These three components continue to define the core process today. Each component is described below:

Discovery interviews – Following a brief introduction to appreciative interviewing, youth and adults use the IM interview protocol, designed following AI Discovery guidelines, to facilitate forty-five minute conversations that are documented by a note-taker. (See Appendix 1 on page 29)

"Leading the Way" (meaning making/action) – Youth (high school students) participating in the Discovery interview process gather with a facilitator to utilize the notes from the Discovery interviews to surface themes and patterns. Youth then use this "meaning making" to develop recommendations for action and presentations to showcase their recommendations. The presentations are shared with organizations or individuals (including the mayor of Memphis) to inform decisions. More recently, this process has evolved to include each IM participant committing to following through on an action step.

¹ <http://www.imaginememphis.org/video-overview.php>

'There is a verse in the Bible that says the old cannot lead without the youth because they don't have the strength; and the youth cannot lead without the adults because they don't have the wisdom.'
Brandon Harris



Community gatherings enhance the capacity for the ongoing development of Imagine Memphis.

Community gatherings/planning sessions – Participants of Imagine Memphis meet annually to network, grow and learn from how the IM process is being used in Memphis, and to plan for the future. These community gatherings enhance the capacity for the ongoing development of IM. Bliss Browne provided the facilitation for the first gathering.

Evaluation

Prior to and following each session, participant feedback surveys are used to collect data. This survey process assesses views about Memphis as well as how the session affected the participant's attitudes and actions. (See Appendix 2 on page 30) The design team uses these quantitative and qualitative results in yearly planning sessions to search for ways to continually improve IM. One of the major improvements has been to modify the interview process to include adults interviewing youth, in addition to youth interviewing adults. This provides equity of voice for all IM participants. The surveys are also used as part of the evaluation process to demonstrate IM's impact. As the reach of IM increases across the community, the process and the results are continually evolving.

Impact of the process

Since launching IM, this initiative has created a space for positive conversations about what matters between youth and adults, with a special focus on what makes Memphis unique and special. Youth who are actively involved in IM have first-hand experience with the personal history of Memphis and the opportunity to shape the future of their community. As one Imagine Memphis design team high school member, Brandon Harris, observed in launching IM: "There is a verse in the Bible that says the old cannot lead without the youth because they don't have the strength; and the youth cannot lead without the adults because they don't have the wisdom." By engaging members of organizations, individuals, businesses, associations, neighborhoods and schools in a positive dialogue about what is working in Memphis, all participants, young and old, are inspired to renewed commitment, enthusiasm and action.

IM removes adults and youth from the confines of their generational daily duties by letting them sit face to face in a forum of equals to participate in open, constructive dialogue about Memphis. The resulting conversation cultivates mutual respect between the generations and shared enthusiasm for the direction of their city.

Aisling Maki, Reporter, Daily News, March 21, 2011

Results from the first seven years of IM are summarized below (for more on the evolution of Imagine Memphis, see Appendix 3 on page 30):

1. Shifting perceptions about Memphis
 - Youth experiencing a sense of self-efficacy

The adults realized that youth need to be part of their city's strategic planning process.

- Developing increased understanding and respect among youth and adults
- Recognizing positive possibilities for the future of Memphis
- Youth choosing to go to college in Memphis or return to Memphis after college to be active in the community

For example:

The student president of a high school junior class had his first-time conversation with one of the school administrators through an IM Discovery interview. They discovered how much their leadership views were aligned. This encouraged the student president to assume a more active leadership role in his school as well as in other youth leadership organizations. At a later date, he said, "Imagine Memphis was his drugs."

The commander of the US Navy in nearby Millington, Tennessee was so moved through his Imagine Memphis Discovery interview with a freshman in high school that he found sponsors through the Millington Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Millington and principals of local high schools to launch Imagine Millington. The adults realized that youth need to be part of their city's strategic planning process.

2. Moving youth and adults to action

- Including high school youth in what are often viewed as programs for adults (i.e. strategic planning)
- Mentoring – accelerating learning and growth through personal connections
- Increasing community engagement (e.g. Imagine Millington)

For example:

A high school teacher from one of the larger Memphis City High Schools launched Imagine Memphis among administrators and students to broaden the vision of the school beyond achieving test scores. "I experienced IM providing a positive context for youth and adults to engage in complex but powerful conversations on the potential of improving experience, culture and outcomes of public education." Mark Sturgis, executive director, Strive Mid-South

High school students who were not participants in any youth leadership program had an equally profound experience. For example, youth who were participating in the Memphis Challenge Summer program experienced an inspiring interaction with adult leaders of for- and non-profit organizations. One executive director decided to expand his college internship program to also include high school students.

Relationships and new collaborations were built among schools, organizations and businesses.

3. Building social capital within the Greater Memphis community

- Enhancing the quality of relationships
- Developing cohesion among citizens who typically would not interact with each other
- Experiencing connectedness – among individuals, organizations and communities

For example:

Relationships were readily formed through the IM process as high school youth were randomly paired with adults. In some situations, the adults became resources for supporting the youth career goals (e.g. a FedEx employee who also was a barber was randomly paired with a student who wanted to become a barber and they continued contact.)

Relationships and new collaborations were also built among schools, organizations and businesses. For example, executive leaders of Leadership Memphis and BRIDGES (a youth leadership development organization) expanded some of their program offerings together.

4. Infusing a strengths-based way of working into organizations.

For example:

Some IM participants brought their experience into their own organizations. The head of nursing for one of the largest private hospitals headquartered in Memphis promoted and encouraged use of AI throughout her nursing program.

Curriculum that impacts students in metropolitan Memphis high schools shifted from using problem solving to using AI, resulting in more buy-in to the student projects. A director of a youth leadership organization helped bring about this change.

A leadership program director added a class on strengths-based community change to a master's level program at a local university.

Participating in the IM process, adults and youth experienced the power and energy generated by a group of people sharing their stories, highlighting the strengths of what is working in Memphis, and understanding that youth and adults share common hopes and dreams for the city. Putting cynicism aside, they planted seeds for new possibilities for connection and action. "In a city often noted for its lack of hope and positive outlook, IM provided me the opportunity to meet young – and older – leaders who not only saw the potential of Memphis, but were committed to it." Brandon Harris, Vanderbilt University Law School student

Participating in the IM process, adults and youth experienced the power and energy generated by a group of people sharing their stories.



Curriculum that impacts students in metropolitan Memphis high schools shifted from using problem solving to using AI.

Keys to success

The “magic” that is ignited through IM is due to many factors that all need to be present in its process:

- Commitment to appreciative communication – Design team members consistently embody appreciative communications (equity of voice, active listening, suspending judgment, valuing what is already working, etc.) in the monthly design team meetings, event planning and general team operations.
- Skills building in AI – Youth receive orientation to a positive interview approach and general interviewing skills, and adults are given an introduction to the “AI approach” prior to the Discovery interviews.
- Discovery interview protocols – Interview protocols are designed using the strengths-based process of AI.
- Creating a safe space – IM provides an emotionally safe and enriched environment that invites active participation. Deep listening is encouraged, and each participant’s contribution is valued.
- Experienced facilitation – Skilled facilitators orchestrate all these elements through the Discovery interviews and Leading the Way exercise to produce results that encourage self-efficacy and empowerment.

Opportunities to strengthen the process

As IM continues to develop and grow, two opportunities to amplify its reach and impact are clear: stable funding and formalized evaluation. Funding and operational support over the first five years was supplied by generous in-kind contributions and donations that supported:

'Evaluation is about critical thinking; development is about creative thinking ... developmental evaluation is about holding them in balance.' Jamie Gamble

- Facilities, materials and supplies
- Personnel to facilitate design, training and delivery of IM events
- An IM showcase with displays of pictures and highlights of results
- An IM brochure
- Research development and analysis assistance from social psychologists

In addition, small grants funded the IM website² and IM video.

While these in-kind contributions and grants allowed IM to develop and grow, sustainable funding is required for the long term.

Another opportunity for growth is formalized evaluation to support the process, coupled with expertise to guide it. Evaluation of impact is an essential component of formal grant requests and other funding opportunities. The use of the standard formative and summative evaluation processes fails to recognize the complexity of the innovative IM process. Developmental evaluation may provide an effective research methodology for the systemic and emergent nature of the IM process.

"Evaluation is about critical thinking; development is about creative thinking. Often these two types of thinking are seen to be mutually exclusive, but developmental evaluation is about holding them in balance." Gamble, 2008

Evolving possibilities

In 2012, Imagine Memphis became a formal strategic initiative for Leadership Memphis, a non-profit organization that had been involved with IM since its beginning. The current goal is to expand the IM model to more directly impact organizations while using additional funding sources. Future systemic opportunities are being explored, including: bringing IM into schools; enhancing mentoring programs for the professional basketball team, the Memphis Grizzlies; and providing input to the Memphis strategic planning process directed by Mayor A. C. Wharton. The future of IM, as well as the future of Memphis, continues to demonstrate innovation in action through the active participation of youth and adults.

References

Gamble, Jamie A. (2008) A Developmental Evaluation Primer. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.

² <http://www.imaginememphis.org>

Appendix 1: Imagine Memphis Interview Questions

(Note: the interviewer selected the appropriate sub-questions for each conversation)

<i>Conversation 1: Introduction</i>	How long have you lived in Memphis? What is your current community/neighborhood? How long have you lived there? What first brought you/your family to your community/neighborhood? What do you like about living here? When you think about the whole city of Memphis, what particular places, people or images represent the good of the city to you?
<i>Conversation 2: High point experience</i>	Tell a story about a high point experience in living in Memphis: What did that experience look like? What were the conditions/factors that brought about this special experience that made it so unique? What was happening for you? How was this positive for others?
<i>Conversation 3: Values</i>	What do you value most about Memphis? Please describe: Good values, qualities, behaviors, attitude, etc. What is good about the quality of life in Memphis today? What is it about Memphis that is so unique/so special? In Memphis, what gives you life?
<i>Conversation 4: Wishes for Memphis</i>	It is the year 20xx. You wake up and things have changed ... many positive changes for Memphis have occurred because of IM and other similar efforts. What has really been working in Memphis? What two things are making the biggest positive difference? What do you imagine your own role might be in helping to make this happen? Who could work with you as well? What are you proudest of having accomplished? As you think back over this conversation, what images stand out for you as capturing your hopes for this city's future?
<i>Conversation 5: Taking action</i>	What do you think would be an effective process for getting people across the city talking and working together on behalf of Memphis's future? Whom would you want to draw into the Imagine Memphis conversation? Who should we interview? Who is doing something that we should connect to? What do you want to do to help Memphis realize its vital future?

Appendix 2: Developmental and traditional evaluations compared

Based on Gamble, 2008, p. 62

Traditional	Developmental
Render definitive judgments of success or failure	Provide feedback, generate learnings, support changes in direction
Measure success against predetermined goals	Develop new measures and monitoring mechanisms as goals emerge and evolve
Position the evaluator outside to assure independence and objectivity	Position evaluation as internal, team function integrated into action and ongoing interpretive processes
Design the evaluation based on linear cause-and-effect logic models	Design the evaluation to capture system dynamics, interdependencies, models and emergent interconnections
Aim to produce generalizable findings across time and space	Aim to produce context-specific understandings that inform ongoing innovation
Accountability focused on and directed to external authorities, stakeholders and funders	Accountability centered on the innovators' deep sense of fundamental values and commitment
Accountability to control and locate responsibility	Learning to respond to lack of control and stay in touch with what is unfolding and thereby respond strategically
Evaluator determines the design based on the evaluator's perspective about what is important; evaluator controls the evaluation	Evaluator collaborates with those engaged in the change effort to design an evaluation process that matches philosophically with an organization's principles and objectives
Evaluation results in opinion of success or failure, which creates anxiety in those evaluated	Evaluation supports ongoing learning

Appendix 3: The Evolution of Imagine Memphis

Note: The design team met monthly for five years, assessing results and continuously improving IM.

2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched IM with sponsors and design team • Designed Discovery interviews
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offered initial community gathering to expand visibility and capacity • Designed "Leading the Way" (meaning making) • Expanded community reach • Designed IM event – Combination of Discovery interviews and Leading the Way
2009–2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offered annual community gatherings for strategic planning • Initiated IM as a program offering for Leadership Memphis and BRIDGES • Enhanced capabilities to expand community reach with videos, website, etc. • Launched research component
2011	Launched Imagine Millington
2012	IM becomes a strategic initiative of Leadership Memphis

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