APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AS A MODEL FOR ASSESSING THE VALUE OF BUSINESS SCHOOL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT
The Appreciative Inquiry (AI) model is based on the assumption that the questions we ask will tend to focus our attention in a particular direction. Instead of asking "What is the problem?" which AI argues maintains a basis of deficiency, AI takes the alternative approach. As a self - defined asset-based approach, AI starts with the belief that every organization, and every person in that organization, has positive aspects that can be built upon. It asks questions like "What is working well?", "What is good about what you are currently doing? Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stravos (2008) explain that the outcome of an AI initiative is a long-term positive change in the organization. They assert that AI is important because it works to bring the whole organization together to build upon its positive core. The AI strategic framework is ideal for leaders within the higher educational arena called upon to assess the value of business school education. One of the most common areas utilized to assess the value of a business school education is student learning. The focus of the present research is to discuss current methods and challenges associated with assessing student learning within business school education. AI will be highlighted as an alternative method for assessing the value of the business school education reflected through student learning.

INTRODUCTION
With increasing pressure for accountability from a multitude of stakeholders, business schools are being challenged to provide direct and systematic evidence of student learning. In 2003, the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) passed *Assurance of Learning (AoL) Standards* requiring business schools to respond directly by proving that their students are learning. For 2007 and beyond, the AACSB stated that schools should be demonstrating a high degree of maturity in terms of delineation of clear learning goals, implementation of outcome assessment processes, and demonstrated use of assessment information to improve curricula (Rubin and Martell, 2009). Such evidence would ultimately point to the true value of business school education. Currently, it is common practice for business schools to document the quality of their teaching, student learning, and curriculum via a matrix focused on demonstrating how their business curriculum aligns with the topics and skill development that the AACSB considers mandatory. Many business schools rely heavily on proxy data from students, alumni, and employers to further document the quality of their programs. The range of assessment methods is vast. Given the many challenges associated with current methods of assessment, the present

research presents Appreciative Inquiry as an alternative, innovative approach to assess the effectiveness of student learning and the overall value of business school education.

CHALLENGES OF ASSESSMENT

One of the major challenges related to assessing business school educational value and student learning is helping faculty understand the true purpose of the assessment process. Pringle and Michel (2007) discuss the fact that some faculty are apprehensive and assume that program assessment data will be used to evaluate their teaching or second-guess their grading. Additional challenges are present within institutions who utilize the assessment process as a means to compare one educational institution to another. In his comprehensive analysis of the status of student learning assessment, Volkwein (2003) noted that faculty are more enthusiastic about assessment when they are fully engaged. Volkwen further discussed the challenges many institutions face regarding the limited knowledge faculty have regarding the effects of the use of assessment data.

An ongoing challenge facing many schools is providing the right form of evidence. Indirect and direct are the two standard methods for assessing student learning. Indirect methods of assessing student learning include processes such as focus groups and exit interviews, whereas direct methods include course embedded exams and/or case studies. The challenge of gathering evidence on student learning through direct measures is considerably more complex and administratively taxing than through the indirect measure which were standard prior to 2003. Aside from the administrative burdens that are synonymous with assessing student learning, business school faculty and administrators often lack tools and training needed to conduct adequate assessments.

CATEGORIES OF ASSESSMENT

The standard categories of assessment include cognitive learning outcomes; skill-based learning outcomes; and affective learning outcomes. Rubin and Martell (2009) summarize the classification of assessment of learning outcomes. The assessment method selection process can be simplified by classification schemes. Rubin and Martell (2009) assert that the best approach is to utilize multiple methods of indirect and direct assessment. The method measuring or capturing learning outcomes identifies the *what* of which will be measured. This is separate from *how* it will be measured; not to be confused with the assessment criteria. The following table is illustrative rather than exhaustive.

Learning Outcome Category	Learning Concept	Measurement Focus	Potential Assessment Methods
Cognitive outcomes	Verbal (declarative knowledge	Quantity of knowledge, recall accuracy, speed of recall	Exams, testing recognition (e.g., multiple-choice) or recall (e.g., essay, fill-in-the-blank). Concept mapping or card sorting
	Knowledge organization	Idea similarity, knowledge interrelatedness, hierarchical ordering	Concept mapping or card sorting
	Cognitive strategies	Forming concepts and procedures, problem solving	Case scenario, problem sets
Skill	Skill acquisition	Procedural compilation	Assessment centers, work

outcomes			samples, role plays, behavioral checklists, presentations
	Automaticity	Automatic processing	Behavioral observation, performance ratings
Affective outcomes	Attitude	Targeted object (e.g., ethics), attitude strength, self-efficacy	
	Motivation	Effort, tenacity, goal difficulty, motivation to learn	Self-report, observation, time-on-task, goal-difficulty ratings

Source: Rubin and Martell (2009)

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AS A METHOD OF ASSESSMENT
Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is discussed as an alternative and innovative method of indirect assessment. Firmly grounded in social constructionist theory (Gergen, 2009), AI emerged out the Department of Organizational Behavior (OB) at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland Ohio. The original method of AI called for a collective discovery process using grounded observation to identify the best of what is. It also focused on vision and logic to identify ideals of what might be, collaborative dialogue and choice to achieve consent about what should be, and collective experimentation to discover what can be. In 1997, the 4D model of AI, now universally described as the AI method was created. The 4D model includes four process; discover, dream, design, and deliver. The present research focuses on the utilization of the AI 4D model as a method for assessing student learning and value of business school education.

Discovery
In the discovery stage, participants (i.e. students) reflect on and discuss the best of *what is* concerning the object of inquiry. The object of inquiry would ideally be the value of their business school educational experience as reflected through the assessment their student learning. The business school education participants could be expanded within this discovery phase to include other stakeholders within the indirect measurement process including faculty, administrators, and employers. This discovery stage is also known as the "positive core" (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2001), where an attempt is made to catalogue the signature strengths. For example, students might share their best experiences as students within the classroom and business degree program. Interviewers and interviewees fully engage in the act of inquiry itself (Carter and Johnson, 1999).

Dream
During this stage, stakeholders are asked to imagine their group at its best and identify the common aspirations of the system members and to symbolize this in some way. Similar to the discovery stage, stakeholders would include students, faculty, employers and other participants within the system. The dream phase often results in something more symbolic, like a graphical representation. During the dream phase, the interview stories and insights get put to constructive use. As people are brought together to listen carefully to the innovations and moments of the organization alive, sometimes in storytelling modes, sometimes in interpretive and analytic modes, a convergence zone is created where the future begins to be discerned in the form of visible patterns interwoven into the texture of the actual (Liebler, 1997). Some organizations turn the data into a special commemorative report celebrating the successes and exceptional moments in the life of the organization. Others have created a thematic analysis focused on documenting rich stories without one line quotes. In all cases, the data gathered from the dream phase serves as an essential resource and foundation for positive organizational change.

Design
The design phase of AI is a time for the creation of new forms, new containers, new practices and even new directions. Design brings to life a dream and supporting conversations needed to evolve it. Design draws on the power of dreams to inform the co-construction of overall design principles and then engages the people actually doing the work of the organization in inventing new social architectures . With a common dream in place, participants are asked to develop concrete proposals for the new or ideal group state (Bushe, 2011). Cooperrider called these "provocative propositions" – a phrase sill utilized in some models. Within this stage, for example, students and all stakeholder would develop a specific proposal within a specific category and be instrumental in the evolutionary process of change and improvement within the business school.

Delivery/Destiny
This fourth and final stage of the AI 4D model is similar to the change management stage of traditional change management. The purpose of the delivery/destiny phase is to co-construct a sustainable preferred future, embracing innovation at many levels. Techniques associated with this final phase include self-organized groups formed to implement the design statement. Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2008) explain that this phase involves neither prioritization of needs nor an imposed sequence of concerns. Instead, people who are passionate about implementing a particular aspect of the design step forward and join with like-spirited collaborators. It is a time of continuous organizational learning, adjustment, and improvisation.
Exactly what ought to happen in this phase has provoked the most confusion and the least consensus amongst AI advocates. Cooperrider (1999) and others caution that using the outcomes of design to fill in gaps, or create new targets and objectives is counter to the very philosophy of appreciative inquiry. In this phase, widespread agreement for the design statements are sought, and an event is orchestrated where stakeholders make self-chosen, personal commitments to take action consistent with any design element. Leadership makes clear that there will be no action plans or committees – instead, everyone is authorized to take those actions they believe will help bring the design to fruition (Bushe, 2011). Like the other phases, the delivery/destiny phase is systematic in terms of inspiring change and continuing dialogue. Overall, the goal of the delivery/destiny phase is to ensure that the dream can be realized. Ultimately this would be the dream of a more highly valued business school education for all stakeholders on a foundation of optimal student learning.

CONCLUSION
Assessment methods, regardless of how sophisticated or elaborate, contain imperfections. The AACSB explains that closing the loop is one of the key concerns that business schools have about assessment (Martell, 2007). This is defined as utilizing assessment outcomes toward the ongoing development of degree programs. To be successful at this step, programs need to present the data to stakeholders including department chairs, program coordinators, and deans, in a form that is sufficiently granular so that a set of actions can be developed. The recommendations need to be implemented and follow up is required to see if the implemented change actually made a difference. The standard categories of assessment discussed in the current research include cognitive learning outcomes; skill-based learning outcomes; and affective learning outcomes. The data harvested through the stories shared in the Appreciative Inquiry process can include each of these assessment categories and expand the possibilities for rich, meaningful, and ongoing change. Cooperrider and Sererka (2006) assert that inquiry into what people appreciate strengthens their relationships and increases positive emotions. Cooperrider (1990) argues that we tend to get more of whatever we pay attention to. Appreciative Inquiry is a continual cycle not only focused on the best of what is, but engages all stakeholders in a process of re-imaging what could be and taking ownership for what will be.

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