

Consultant's Attitude in Applying Appreciative Inquiry

What Works?

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Abstract

Current literature on Appreciative Inquiry mainly discusses the concept of Appreciative Inquiry as a whole, its application in practice and limitations. This article explores a different perspective, it provides insights on specific attitudes that consultants display in order to use Appreciative Inquiry effectively as a change management approach. Secondary data is gathered through a literature study and empirical data is collected from interviews with Appreciative Inquiry practitioners. Findings are presented to the reader, through which both current Appreciative Inquiry users and newcomers to this approach can enrich their knowledge in order to apply Appreciative Inquiry more effectively in the future.

Keywords: appreciative inquiry, consultancy, application, consultant's attitude, role of consultant, organizational change, change management

In the context of change management the *Appreciative Inquiry* (AI) approach is gaining attention last years. AI has already been presented in 1987 by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) as an addition to traditional action-research, but not much attention has been paid to it until the last decade. Many articles and books have been written, but we have identified a literature gap on the topic of consultants' attitudes. Therefore this article focus on the attitudes a consultant should have in order to use AI successfully.

Instead of the action-research focus on problem-solving, AI aims to stimulate social innovation. This leads to a positive and constructive view towards people, organizations and situations (Ahaus, 2006).

In their article called "*Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life*", Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) compare organizations with human beings which are born and re-created through human interaction and dialogue. AI avoids simplistic diagnostic boxes by awakening the desire to create and

discover new possibilities (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). The final goal of AI is to provide possibilities for creating a better existence (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

The AI change process should have a number of prerequisites. To begin with, the process itself must be positively stated and should reflect important issues derived from the work floor. Moreover, the core theme of the AI approach must be aligned with the management style used, the company's vision and future goals in order to enforce the continuity of the desired organizational changes (Masselink, Van den Nieuwenhof, De Jong, & Van Iren, 2008). Third, the application of AI depends on the culture that prevails among employees. The AI approach is not applicable when a negative atmosphere prevails, since in such organizations there is great fear of spreading information (Diepenmaat & van der Woude, 2005). Fourth, Masselink et al. (2008) specifies that AI is applicable in companies where knowledge and opinions of several groups exist. In addition to this, the stakeholders involved also need to have an open attitude towards a reflective stance (Masselink et al., 2008). If people do not want to reflect on their own actions and behavior, it is questioned if AI can work (Masselink et al., 2008). Fifth, an applicator

must be congruent in words (what one tells about AI) and actions (what one does) (Masselink et al., 2008). If there is an incongruence, the efficient use of AI will be undermined, which will decrease the rate of success (Masselink et al., 2008).

Baring these prerequisites in mind, AI is built on five principles derived from five different constructs and values. These form the perspective that AI takes on organizing and changing an organization and its members. The five principles are: 1) *The Constructionist Principle*, 2) *The Poetic Principle*, 3) *The Simultaneity Principle*, 4) *The Anticipatory Principle*, and 5) *The Positive Principle* (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Discussing all five principles does not lie within the scope of this article about consultants' attitude. We have therefore decided to elaborate only on the Constructionist Principle, the Anticipatory Principle and the Positive Principle, rather than on all five principles. First of all, the Constructionist Principle deals with the idea that people are continuously trying to give meaning towards the reality in and around them (Masselink et al., 2008). Language is an important tool in creating this meaning (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Therefore, consultants who use AI should hold a strong focus on the

usage of their language, both verbally and gesture-wise. The Anticipatory Principle explains us that our imagination and the stories we tell about our future are the most important sources of inspiration for successful change (Masselink et al., 2008). Consultants working with AI use imagination and envisioning as tactics to create a readiness for change. The third and last principle to be discussed is the Positive Principle. This principle argues that a positive experience is as valid and powerful as a negative experience. The choice for a positive, rather than a negative focus, is then valid through a conscious choice (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005).

An important framework which forms the backbone of AI, is the 4-D cycle. This cycle represent four distinct phases through which a consultants guides its team. The 4-D's consist of the Discovery, the Dream, the Design and the Destiny (Coopperrider & Whitney, 2005) The first phase, *Discovery*, is used as a reflective phase to gain insight on experiences and high points that are related to the organization. The *Dream* phase has the aim to break through existing patterns and create an image of the potential that exists in organizations. The Discovery phase is used as a source of information, which can be

used in creating the Dream. The *Design* phase builds on the Dream phase in that it questions what is needed to fulfill the vision created in the Dream. The *Destiny* phase is characterized by an improvising approach in realizing the future state. The use of improvisation (often through brainstorming) in this phase has the aim of establishing enough leverage throughout the entire organization (Coopperrider & Whitney, 2005).

As can be read from this introduction, AI depends heavily on the attitude of the consultant, regarding the focus on problem-solving, the five principles of AI and the 4-D cycle. Remarkably though, in literature not much attention has been paid to the attitude of the consultant using AI. Due to the fact that AI is focused at "*re-awakening the imaginative spirit of action-research and that to do this we need a fundamentally different perspective toward our organizational world, one that admits to its uncertainties, ambiguities, mysteries, and inexplicable, miraculous nature*" (Coopperrider & Srivastva, 1987:29), AI requires a certain attitude of consultants in order to use it successfully. This attitude is subject of investigation in this article. The research question of this article is as follows: *What attitude should consultants display in*

order to be good Appreciative Inquiry consultants?

Having explained the basis of AI in this introduction, an analysis of the literature study focuses on attitudes of consultants. Interviews with AI consultants have also been conducted and the outcomes are used in the results and discussion parts of the article to supplement the literature review.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this article is to find out more about the attitude of the consultant in using AI. This includes the behavior and way of acting of the consultant as well. The article is based on the research question stated in the introduction, which is as follows:

What attitude should consultants display in order to be good Appreciative Inquiry consultants?

The data collection for this article consists of a literature study and an empirical study. For the literature study, areas of focus were the basics behind AI and the attitude of AI consultants. Emphasis will be put on the latter. Regarding the performed empirical research, in total four interviews were conducted. The semi-structured interviews

with consultants involved in AI took around one hour and were held in Groningen (Kees Ahaus), Dwingeloo (Margreeth van der Kooij), Utrecht (Robbert Masselink) and Amsterdam (Ria Jacobs). All of the interviewed consultants use AI on a regular basis in their consulting practices. The interviewees are selected based on their experience in AI, their willingness to participate and their availability. The outcomes of the interviews are analyzed and compared to the literature findings. The main findings of the interviews are presented in the results section of the article. In the appendixes the interview guide and the transcripts of the interviews, with a short introduction of each consultant, are added.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will discuss the results of the literature study on consultant's attitudes in practicing AI. After defining the concept of 'attitude' five important attitudes for AI consultants are described. Each subparagraph discusses one attitude in order to provide an as clear as possible overview of the attitudes of AI consultants described in literature. In the last paragraph the attitudes of AI consultants are linked to the Lippitt and Lippitt Multiple Roles of the Consultant continuum.

Attitude

The attitude of an AI consultant is the main focus of this article. Therefore, it must first be defined in order to continue our exploration into this subject. Attitude is described by Princeton University's WordNet Search 3.0 as a “*mental attitude which is a complex mental state involving beliefs, feelings, values and dispositions to act in certain ways*”. Throughout the paper this definition will be used when discussing the ‘*attitude*’ of an AI consultant, because it is held to be a comprehensive definition.

Attitude for AI Consultants

As described earlier in this article, AI is a significantly different approach compared to the traditional action-research approach. This difference implies that also the consultant's attitude in using AI is different, compared to the traditional attitudes enacted in action research oriented approaches. This section focuses on the attitude an AI consultant can have in order to apply AI successfully.

Search for the positive. In an interview by Salopek (2006), Cooperrider argues that people do not need special training in order to conduct an AI, he argues that the key for an AI conductor is to craft

unconditional positive questions and that asking the right questions is important. This argument has implications for the attitude of an AI consultant. At first, the word ‘*unconditional*’ implies that a consultant must be open minded and willing to expect anything from the person he or she asks questions. The questions should not be directive. Second, the word ‘*positive*’ implies that a consultant must focus at the positive parts, which is a main characteristic of the AI approach. This necessary focus at the positive is only possible for a consultant if he has a positive attitude towards life and people. The word ‘*questions*’ then, implies that a consultant has to ask questions instead of telling others what to do.

Process oriented. Consultants can support the AI process by facilitating AI activities throughout the process and by continuously seeking ways to give the process away, to support organizational members in making it their own (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). This approach is essentially different to traditional consulting in which the consultant has an expert role and is the one determining the change process. In an AI process the consultant is the facilitator,

seeking for organizational members willing to do the work. So instead of the expert role attitude, the AI consultant should have an attitude of empowerment of members of the organization. The consultant has to let go and pass responsibility on to others, which the consultant only can do if there is enough trust in the capacities of others.

Van der Haar and Hosking (2004) explicitly state that “*the AI practitioner is part of (not apart from) the appreciative process and contributes one expertise among many*” (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004: 12). This shows an important difference to the traditional approach in which the consultant usually is the expert analyzing and telling what should be done. In the AI approach the consultant is just one of the participants with expertise, everyone contributes.

Appreciating. According to Rijsman (2010) the most important attitude as AI consultant is acting in a confirming and stimulating manner. Which implies letting individuals be who they are by asking questions about what makes them proud. One should stimulate others without threatening the self of the person involved. The consultant should ask employees to do things to improve the organization in a way

that confirms the self-esteem of the employee. Rijsman adds: “*That is what AI is! It is seeing the other as if it is you and dialogue that way.*” (Rijsman, 2010: 4). Based on this one can argue that an AI consultant should be an energizing, stimulating person who values others as high as himself.

Reflexive. An AI consultant should reflect his own way of working, this reflexivity is important to make change effective (Masselink et al., 2008). This means that an AI consultant must be open to feedback and willing to change himself or the way he works in order to apply AI effectively. According to Van der Haar and Hosking (2004) this reflexivity is a quality of the appreciative process. Masselink et al. (2008) also explain that applying AI does not automatically simplify the change process. An AI consultant will experience that a lot of patience, stamina and perseverance is necessary to practice the positive approach, because others are used to the problem oriented approach, which is completely different. And further, if what you say is not congruent with what you do the use of AI in the change process and your effectiveness will be undermined. So an AI

consultant has to believe in this approach and must be able to speak up for it.

Generating. In the conclusion of their article introducing AI Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) say: *“In short, the argument is a simple one stating that there is a need to re-awaken the imaginative spirit of action-research and that to do this we need a fundamentally different perspective toward our organizational world, one that admits to its uncertainties, ambiguities, mysteries, and inexplicable, miraculous nature.”* (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987:29). Translated to the AI consultant’s attitude in that it means that the consultant must be able to re-awaken the imaginative spirit of the people in an organization. An AI consultant has to ask generative questions to help people get out of their normal mindset and focus on what can be. The consultant has to stimulate people to dream about an unclear but exiting future of the organization. Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) also add: *“We do, however, think that through discipline and training the appreciative eye can be developed to see the ordinary magic, beauty, and real possibility in organizational life; but we are not sure we can so easily transform our central convictions.”* (Cooperrider & Srivastva,

1987:29). Thus, according to them people can learn to become appreciative and dream about what could be possible in organizations. It also means that people can become AI consultant by training and learning.

According to Thissen (Diepenmaat & Van der Woude, 2005) an AI consultant should give the people the opportunity to share anything that is bothering them. The AI process is mostly focused at positive stories but a consultant should allow people to share anything, even negative stories. The challenge is to reformulate it in something positive that deserves attention.

Lippitt and Lippitt (1978)

Although the focus of this article is on the ‘attitudes’ of AI consultants, we are in the opinion that the Multiple Roles of the Consultant continuum of Lippitt and Lippitt (1978) can be used as an addition to our previous literature findings in order to define in what roles an AI consultant behaves. For this, a definition of the word ‘role’ is required. A ‘role’ is defined by Princeton University’s WordNet Search 3.0 as *“the actions and activities assigned to or required or expected of a person”*. Similarities exist between the definition of

‘role’ and ‘attitude’, both are related to actions undertaken by a person.

The continuum of Lippitt and Lippitt (1978) is based on the consultants' level of activity in problem solving. Mulder and Solle (2008) used this continuum to distinguish multiple roles for an AI consultant: reflector, process counselor, fact finder, joint problem solver and sometimes even the advocate role. Most of the roles are at the left side of the continuum, which is congruent with literature earlier described. The AI consultant is not the expert doing the problem solving, but more the facilitator focusing on the processes, empowering the

employees to solve the problems and implement the changes. An interesting remark is made in the same article (Mulder & Solle, 2008) by Marianne Wehmeijer, an AI consultant, who says that in her point of view the activities of the AI consultants are mainly concentrated at the left side of the continuum because she thinks that for an AI intervention to succeed the people in the organization have to take the responsibilities for the outcomes of the intervention and that is why they should play an active role.

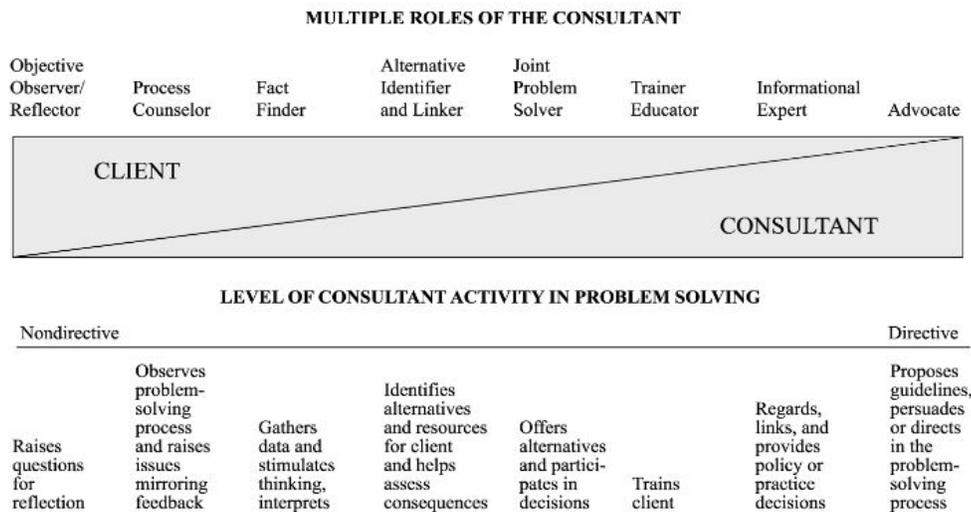


Figure 1: Multiple roles of the consultant and the level of consultant activity in problem solving (Lippitt and Lippitt, 1978).

RESULTS

This chapter explores the attitude of an AI consultant in an AI process by using data gathered through interviews with AI specialists. The interviewees are Kees Ahaus, director at TNO Management Consultants, the Netherlands. Ria Jacobs, former ING consultant and now owner of her own consultancy Vista HRM. Margreeth van der Kooij, a former speech therapist and currently a self-employed consultant mostly active in the non-profit sector, and fourth, Robbert Masselink, writer of one of the few Dutch books on AI and owner and consultant at Keynote Consultancy. The transcripts of each interview can be found in the appendix, accompanied is a short introduction of each consultant. When findings in this chapter are originated from one of the interviews, the corresponding names are displayed in *italics*.

Devote to AI as a Belief

To be a good AI consultant it is important to share the beliefs of AI. According to *Kees Ahaus* the beliefs of an AI consultant should correspond with the beliefs of AI, because AI is more than a trick.

Ria Jacobs invigorates this statement by saying that “*AI is a way of live; it is a belief*”. To her, the belief in AI is derived

from the fact that she is convinced that bottom-up approaches towards change work best. She explains that bottom-up strategies have longer lasting effects and show less resistance, compared to top-down approaches.

According to *Jacobs*, AI can also be portrayed as a belief, since a dedicated AI consultant will probably solely work on the AI way, and not based on the more traditional consultancy approach build on the problem-solving paradigm. This statement is acknowledged and strengthened by *Margreet van der Kooij*, she indicates that for her, the belief of AI helps to fulfill intentions related to improving society as a whole.

Show Your Appreciation

Although it seems obvious that AI is about appreciation, it is important that consultant actively show this appreciation to all the people in an organization. From the point of view of *Ahaus*, AI is about respect. He mentions that openness is an important attitude for an AI consultant which feeds an appreciative view on organizations and its members.

Appreciation for the people in the organization is also helpful in grasping

available intangible knowledge held by people within the organization. In this light, *Robbert Masselink* contends that an AI consultant should know what appreciation is and how to behave in an appreciative way.

Do Not be Judgmental

According to *Masselink* an AI consultant should not provide individuals of an organization with his or her opinion. Suspending is an important attitude in using AI which captures the statement made by *Masselink*. This concept is explained by *Ahaus* as a multi facet attitude which includes; 1) respect for the people you work with, 2) a degradation of your role as a consultant, 3) letting the group do the work and finally 4) dismissing your own opinion.

Postponing your judgment is a very important attitude and something that must be acknowledged by every AI consultant at all times. *Masselink*, *Ahaus* and *Jacobs* all compared the idea of suspending with the attitude of a more traditional consultant who is more viewed as a content expert, where judgment is important and opinions must be heard. Instead of expressing an opinion an AI consultant should ask questions. According to *Van der Kooij* an AI consultant should not be pedantic, because this makes

an unhealthy situation in an organization to be continued.

On the word of *Van der Kooij* an AI consultant should have three competencies (expressed as attitudes), namely; 1) AI consultants should always oversee the whole system and know how to study the stakeholders dynamics, 2) therefore consultants applying AI must have the will and courage to look across borders, and finally 3) an AI consultant must be willing to look far ahead of the current situation and create a dream.

Do Not be a Negativist, Nor a Pure Positivist. Be a Realist

Ahaus, *Jacobs*, *Van der Kooij* and *Masselink* all explain that it is a misinterpretation to think that an AI professional should always be very positive. All consultants argue that an AI consultant should be neither positive, nor negative, but he or she should be realistic. *Ahaus* is furthermore saying that AI is not a tool you can naively apply.

Jacobs warns that an AI practitioner should prevent a situation in which a consultant holds an extraordinary positive attitude towards a specific situation, while in fact employees have to deal with large problems. This causes irritation and a form

of distrust among individuals of the organization. Although a slightly other approach is needed in such cases, one can hold to the methodology of AI, which includes being realistic and showing empathy.

To conclude, the main idea behind AI is that one should always have a positivist look at things, without being naive. Thus, the glass should be half full, instead of half empty.

Use the Power of the Group as Your Main Resource

Jacobs explains that the added value of AI is that everyone is involved. This means that also external parties can, or even should, be involved. *Ahaus* notes that in some cases also customers are invited for a AI intervention. *Jacobs* argues that you must have the ability to work with everyone in an organization; ranging from shop floor employees to management from the higher echelons.

Using the power of the group, also entails that an AI consultant does not show any pleasing behavior. The AI consultant must strongly rely and trust on his or her own capabilities. Appreciation for the power of the group is something that should be natural to an AI consultant.

Through appreciation, the consultant mobilizes the power of the group by bringing people from different departments of an organization together.

Regarding this topic, *Masselink* argues that this depicts the largest difference between traditional consulting methods and AI consulting. Consequently, AI is an process of democracy and breaking walls, because it is the intention of the AI consultant that people of different departments and functions start talking to each other.

Use Language as a Tool to Make AI Work

As indicated in the previous paragraph, AI is about using the power of the group. *Jacobs* argues that the more people attend during the Design phase, the more successful AI becomes. That is why dialogue is so important. *Van der Kooij* also highlighted the importance of language, because language makes it possible to make problems negotiable. Once that is happened the phase of thinking about the future can start.

As described before, interviews are key in this phase of the AI process. The way an interview is conducted and the language used for this are factors which are of utmost

importance for the effectiveness of the eventual AI process.

In addition to the verbal language, *Masselink* argues that also non-verbal and unspoken actions are vital to be revealed by an AI consultant. Once these underlying patterns are discovered generative questions can create the breakdown of the dysfunctional patterns that the consultant has found previously.

The use of language does not only involve speaking or the use of non-verbal communication, but is also highly dependent on listening abilities. Active listening is an important attitude for AI practitioners. AI consultants should listen in another way compared to non-AI consultants. Analyzing how people talk, what they talk about and what other things occur in their environment is part of these active listening skills. Especially if more than one person talks about something that is on their mind, it is very helpful in AI application to “listen” to the environment in which conversations are held.

All in all, the statement by *Van der Kooij* summarizes this paragraph by stating that “*language shapes the way we think*”.

Focus on the Processes

The interviews revealed that AI is focused mainly on processes, rather than content. That is also where the concept of creativity comes in. In the whole process the AI consultant should keep the focus on enhancing and stimulating creativity, as *Jacobs* explains: “*the AI consultant must make clear that the employees are the owners of the process and that is why they must do the job by themselves.*”

Masselink argues that the AI specialist is more a facilitator than an active player. Although the AI consultant must sometimes support the people in the organization to find out exactly what their problem is. Building on this, *Ahaus* argues that it is sometimes necessary to change the process of an AI intervention by re-framing a problem that is brought up by employees. This is for example the case when people tend to talk purely about symptoms and not about the real underlying issues. This re-framing is an interference which is rather unusual in the AI process. However, *Ahaus* depicts that it is only possible when the consultant carefully observes the processes and listens to the employees involved in the AI intervention.

Try AI

Since AI is largely build on social interactions between individuals one might expect that working experience, and or knowledge of life, is something an AI consultant should have in order to successfully use it. Nevertheless, the AI consultants interviewed did not agree with this statement. In their point of view everyone can be an AI consultant.

According to *Masselink* there is not something as the right age to start as an AI consultant. Trial and errors helps you to become a good AI consultant. From the point of view of *Ahaus* life and work experience provides a solid basis which might become helpful in certain situations of resistance. For example, he argues that this experience can help you as an AI consultant to intervene more successfully when people have quarrels and signs of inter-group distrust occurs.

Jacobs denotes that it is mainly work experience, rather than general knowledge of life, that is helpful in performing AI. The experiences gained through various jobs helps you to find out what will work and what will not work. In her point of view younger people might have more dramatic experiences than older people. Thus,

knowledge of life is not a good predictor for a good AI consultant.

Masselink continues on this and argues that the attitude of current graduates suits the principles of AI. The past couple of years universities continued to focus on group work with the aim of cooperativeness in solving problems. The younger generation also grew up with the idea that information should be accessible for everyone, everywhere and at any time. These concepts are important to AI as well.

All the interviewed consultants emphasized the importance of asking the right questions. Especially in the Discovery phase this is important. In doing so, the attitude of an AI professional must include some kind of natural desire to know everything, which also includes the underlying patterns.

The Roles of Lippitt and Lippit (1978) in AI Practice

This final paragraph continues on the discussion in the theoretical framework about the Multiple Roles of the Consultant continuum (Lippitt & Lippitt, 1978).

All four interviewees were asked if they could indicate where an AI consultant should be placed at the continuum of Lippit

and Lippit (1978). Not remarkably all consultants indicated that they would position themselves on the left-hand side of the figure. Additionally, all consultants stressed that an AI consultant should not lock-on one role, but use different roles for different stages of the AI process. Sometimes the role of trainer is necessary to use, sometimes even the role of expert. This latter role is only used in urgent situations, and for a very short time span. They put themselves in the left part of the continuum because an AI consultant is not the problem solver, that has to be done by the client. The AI consultant is focused at the processes in the organization and tries to stimulate and empower employees to change the organization themselves.

The roles that fits the AI consultants most, as indicated by the interviewees, are the reflector, process counselor, fact finder, joint problem solver and in some cases even the advocate role. Most of these roles are on the left side of the continuum.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to explore the attitude of a consultant in using AI. Literature provided some insights on this topic. Sometimes in a direct manner, but also in an indirect way which uttered the

need of making assumptions. The literature set the framework for further investigating the topic by conducting interviews. The outcomes of the literature as well as the interviews will be used to answer the research question in this part. As a recall, the research question is as follows:

What attitude should consultants display in order to be good Appreciative Inquiry consultants?

The main findings supported both in literature and the interviews will first be examined. An important similarity is derived from one of the words of the abbreviation AI, namely ‘*appreciative*’. An AI consultant must have an appreciating attitude towards the people he works with and appreciate and value what they contribute. This also means that an AI consultant must not be judgmental but must search for the positive and ask questions to find out what people drives. The challenge is to ask generating questions to stimulate the people to envision a better organization, and to work on that.

The process orientation is another similarity between literature and empirical data. The AI consultant is not at all focused on the content but tries to influence the process so that a successful change is possible. The change itself is done by the

employees in order to create more commitment. It is important for AI consultants to be able to empower others and value their contributions as much as their own contributions. The AI consultant is not the expert, as in traditional consulting approaches, but the facilitator. The employees as a group are viewed as the experts who jointly know what is best for their organization. But all stakeholders have to be involved in order to use AI successfully, ranging from top management to shop floor employees and sometimes even external stakeholders.

The Multiple Roles of the Consultant continuum of Lippitt and Lippitt (1978) is used to define the AI consultant, both in the literature review as well as in the interviews. Based on that it can be concluded that the AI consultant can be placed in the left of the continuum but that multiple roles are used by AI consultants. The client is the problem solver in the AI approach whereas the consultant is the facilitator focusing on the process.

Additionally, the interviewees acknowledged that AI must be a belief for a consultant, not just another trick for enabling change. The norms and values of a consultant have to connect with the AI method. And using AI does not mean being

solely positive, according to the consultants an AI consultant must be realistic with a positive view on the world.

As a last remark, most of the interviewees stated that age is not that important for using AI. Of course work experience is useful, but that is applicable to every consulting practice. An AI consultant must be a good communicator and must endorse the norms and values of the AI approach.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This article retrieves its added value from the focus on specific attitudes that an AI consultant should have compared to a more traditional consultant focused around the problem-solving paradigm. As showed in his article, the AI practitioner shows very specific attitudes, roles and behavior contributing to the effective use of AI. Most current AI users will probably acknowledge these findings and recognize them. For junior consultants or other practitioners who want to become acquainted with AI and actively use it in their consultancy work, this article provides some basics regarding the role of an AI consultant.

Further research could address the limitations of this study. First of all, the

findings on the consultant role in AI are based on only four interviews. A research which is based on a larger sample of AI practitioners increases the generalizability of findings. In addition, attitudes that appear to be valuable for AI in applying it in the Netherlands, might turn out to be less applicable in other parts of the world (i.e. the Asian or American regions).

A second limitation is that we have mainly focused on the consultant role for AI consultants, and did not actively compare it to other forms and ways of consultancy (i.e. the problem-solving approach). Although some small comparisons were made, it might be interesting to further investigate the main differences between AI approaches and other paradigms with regard to consultants attitude.

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