# The shadow side of positive organizational change: practitioners' experience navigating dialectical tensions in appreciative inquiry

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The Shadow Side of Positive Organizational Change

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*Either write something*

*worth reading*

*or*

*do something*

*worth writing*


*Benjamin Franklin*

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Abstract

This research investigates tensions associated with positive organizational change (POC) that prioritizes positive possibilities over traditional problem-centric approaches. Recent literature critiques the prevalence of toxic positivity in society, claiming a bias toward positive thinking denies emotions of sadness, disappointment, anger, and frustration (Collins, 2022; Cross, 2022; Tufvesson, 2020). A recent flurry of studies suggests toxic positivity results in the marginalizing of individuals for expressing their emotions that may not always be positive (Collins, 2022; Cross, 2022; Tufvesson, 2020). A key question this research addresses is what do with the "elephants in the room" that represent what people think is undiscussable in a POC context?

Participants in the study include 41 organizational development practitioners with direct experience leading POC initiatives using the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) methodology. Practitioners shared their experiences of dialectical tension associated with AI in organizational change efforts and how they navigated those tensions in organizations. The practitioners have over 600 cumulative years of leading over 3,500 AI interventions in 39 countries.

This study responds to the gap for more research on polarities associated with privileging positive, strengths-based dialogue over talk about organizational problems or deficits (Fitzgerald et al., 2010) by bridging the concept of organizational shadow (Bowles, 1991; Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Jung, 1968) with dialectical tension theory (Baxter & Simon, 1993). This study's findings advance scholarship about positive organizing tensions by naming the leadership, voice, and temporal shadows. These shadows emerge as three dialectical tensions with theoretical implications for framing and understanding organizational tensions and practical implications for managing tensions. First, the voice shadow identifies the tension between free expression and

limited expression of what is discussable in the change process. The leadership shadow describes the tension between hierarchical and collaborative leadership. The temporal shadow describes short-term orientation versus long-term orientation tension that surfaces in POS initiatives. Further, this study problematizes our understanding of the positive-negative polarity commonly associated with AI (Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Kolodziejski, 2004) by identifying the contexts in which tensions are likely to arise, the theoretical implications of tensions and different strategies used to navigate tensions in a POC context.

Critical views of AI oversimplify a (perceived) myopic focus on the positive as restricting talk in change initiatives (Fineman, 2006; Grant & Humphries, 2006; Hill & Onyett, 2012). However, the results of this study indicate experienced practitioners often honor talk atypical of AI's focus on the positive while demonstrating nuanced approaches that manage tensions and coalesce toward a positive core. Strategies included coaching organizational leaders to demonstrate agility in support of collaborative leadership initiatives. In addition, practitioners used the AI principles of free choice and wholeness to enable the expression of counternarratives that diverge from dominant narratives. Practitioners often reframed tension as complementary dialectics such that one pole does not negate the other.

This research implies that practitioners need not fall prey to toxic positivity wherein organizational leaders and staff are reticent to talk about the "elephants in the room." The ability of practitioners to navigate dialectical tensions in POC initiatives demonstrates that it is possible to hold a vision of a positive future while also creating space to hear divergent perspectives.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Problem Statement

In 2003, positive organizational scholarship (POS) emerged as a new field of study in organizational sciences (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011; Cameron & Caza, 2004). Whereas organizational studies had focused primarily on problem-solving, profitability, and competitive advantage, POS turned the focus to positive variables. Studies focused on acting with compassion during change, engaging people in shaping change, and fostering a life-giving culture for organizational members (Golden-Biddle & Mao, 2011; Quinn & Wellman, 2011). POS scholars insist that problems and challenges are not ignored but are reinterpreted through a positive lens (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011).

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) scholarship paved the way for POS studies. AI's positive approach to change represented a paradigm shift in organizational change scholarship that has endured for over three decades (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). However, AI has been subject to scholarly critiques that question if prioritizing positive possibilities over traditional problem-centric approaches limits what change participants think they can or cannot discuss openly (Bushe, 2007; Fitzgerald, Oliver & Hoxsey, 2010; Gemmill, 1986; Grant & Humphries, 2006; Golembiewski, 2000; Pratt, 2002). Further, there has been a recent flurry of literature on the prevalence of toxic positivity in society, meaning a bias toward positive thinking that denies emotions of sadness, disappointment, anger, and frustration (Cross, 2022; Collins, 2022; Tufvesson, 2020). Studies suggest toxic positivity results in the shaming and marginalizing of individuals for expressing their emotions that may not always be positive (Cross, 2022).

AI's focus on the positive raises a question of how to address tensions that emerge as the organization's "shadow." Shadow has been defined in literature as censored thoughts and emotions by self or others, per organizational norms (Fitzgerald, Oliver, & Hoxsey, 2010; Jung, 1968; Bowles, 1991; Kolodziejski, 2004). The shadow manifests as people are directed to reflect on the positive aspects of organizational life but are reminded of negative or contradictory experiences that the organization has deemed inappropriate to share (Fineman, 2006; Fitzgerald et al., 2010). The shadows then show up as "elephants in the room."

The study of the shadow is vital to understanding positivity's polarizing effects. Fitzgerald et al. (2010) posited the shadow could have detrimental effects on organizations if not recognized. Following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, tensions have risen across the globe as people have called for organizations to take a stance against racial and social injustice. Business leaders have issued public statements expressing their commitment to positive change. The corporate statements acknowledged the importance of supporting people in expressing long-suppressed stories of inequity. However, tension persisted as employees from companies like Pinterest, Facebook, and Adidas took to social media to talk about racial inequities related to hiring, promotions, and pay. The employees' actions indicated they wanted a say and their input to influence positive change. The challenge for organizational leaders and positive change practitioners is navigating change and managing tensions related to what people think they can or cannot talk about openly.

This study addresses a gap in AI and POC scholarship that calls for further research to understand dialectical tensions experienced in organizations when focusing on the positive and how practitioners navigate dialectical tensions in organizations. Scholars have noted a dearth of literature on theoretical and practical approaches to navigating tensions in AI (Fitzgerald et al.,

2010; Johnson, 2013; Pratt, 2002), leading some practitioners to question their capability and

competence to do AI the "right" way (Johnson, 2013).

## 1.2   Background to the Research Problem

*During a positive organizational change intervention with 70 members of a public sector agency, I noticed several people sitting stone-faced with arms folded in silent protest. When I approached some disengaged folks, they said nothing would change until we addressed the "elephants in the room." Though most people were engaged in the process and seemed optimistic about the next steps, I felt ambivalent about my positive change approach. I decided to pursue the "elephants," which diverted attention away from the planned agenda to address some deep-seated frustrations. I wondered if there was a more effective way to maintain a positive focus without discounting or censoring peoples' negative experiences.*

Positive organizational change (POC) scholarship has been perceived as a panacea to traditional problem-centric change literature, primarily focused on profitability, competitive advantage, and economic outcomes (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011). As such, when the change program focuses on the positive, what do we do with the "elephants in the room?" This chapter briefly examines the centrality of problems in the history of first and second-generation organizational change to deepen our understanding of how POC fits within the context of organizational change literature. Next, the focus turns to third-generation change literature and the theoretical and practical shift toward the positive. The chapter highlights the proliferation of positive organizational scholarship (POS), a notable example of third-generation change. Next, AI is placed as a pioneer of POS to deepen our understanding of the juxtaposition of positive change and problem-centric change. The chapter proceeds with a brief definition of AI and establishes the effectiveness of AI, as noted in change literature. The chapter then examines an underdeveloped opportunity in AI research to identify underlying tensions associated with a

positive change focus. I return to the dilemma of the "elephants in the room" to explore gaps in

our understanding of tensions in AI and the resulting implications. The chapter concludes with

the introduction of subsequent chapters in this study.

## 1.3 Early Change Literature as Problem-centric

From the 1950s through the early 1980s, organizational change literature focused

primarily on theoretical approaches to solving internal problems. Targets and impetus for change

were typically focused on the organization as a single entity and were constructed based on how

organizational members interpreted problems and solutions (Seo, Putnam, & Bartunek, 2004).

This period, characterized as first-generation organizational change, launched a wave of

behavioral studies and theories about change and popularized the action-research approach to

planned change (Seo et al., 2004; Lewin, 1951). Action research involves collecting relevant data

focused on an organizational need or goal, providing feedback to the system, implementing

actions based on the diagnosis, and evaluating the results (French & Bell, 1995). Organizational

members were considered primary change agents, and consultants were facilitators or advisors

(Seo et al., 2004). Ground-breaking action research included the pioneering Hawthorne studies

(1924-1933) conducted at Western Electric by Harvard researchers to study worker productivity

and morale. The studies involved a series of experiments and interviews to determine how

working conditions, such as lighting, affected worker productivity and morale. They were

laudable because they found the most significant positive determinant to be attention to the

workers (Burke, 2008; Boonstra, 2004). The Hawthorne studies are instrumental to our

understanding of organizational change (Burke, 2008).

One of the most enduring first-generation change approaches has been Lewin's (1951)

three-stage unfreezing, movement, and refreezing model. The process moves an organization

from its current state (unfreezing) to a desired future state through education and awareness. The

organization is refrozen in the desired future state, assuming that whatever issues kept the

organization from moving forward were presumably solved (McLean, 2006). Lewin's model is

significant because it introduced a theory of change that is still widely accepted by scholars and

practitioners (Seo et al., 2004).

First-generation change approaches focused primarily on problem-solving to improve

supervisory and employee relations (French & Bell, 1995; Seo et al., 2004). Various innovations,

such as sensitivity training, team building, and quality of work life (QWL) programs, emerged

that are commonplace today. Shephard and Blake at the Esso refineries and Union Carbide

introduced sensitivity training as an organizational change intervention to train managers to

adapt more participative styles (Seo et al., (2004; French & Bell, 1995; McGregor, 1967). Team

building also emerged during this period to foster consensus building, conflict resolution, and

role clarity among in-tact team members (Seo et al., 2004; French & Bell, 1995). Quality of work

life (QWL) programs came to the forefront in the late 1960s and early 1970s. QWL promoted

positive interactions between labor unions and management teams through mutual problem-

solving interactions away from the bargaining table (Moch & Bartunek, 1990; Seo et al., 2004).

QWL approaches addressed structural barriers and power dynamics that were impediments to

fair compensation, healthy workplaces, personal growth, and development (Seo et al., 2004;

Mirvis, 1990). Survey feedback was another first-generation change approach. In the  1940s,

psychologists at the University of Michigan used surveys to solicit employee data regarding their

perceptions of the workplace, including feedback about their supervisors. The feedback summary

was shared top-down with employees to identify action steps for improvement. By the 1970s,

survey feedback was deemed the most effective way to bring about change in organizations (Seo et al., 2004).

While first-generation change addressed management-employee-related problems, second-generation change focused on solving external problems, such as manufacturing decline and rising competitive pressures (Seo et al., 2004). During this period, a flurry of theoretical models emerged focused on organizational adaptation, such as Katz and Kahn's (1966) open system theory, Lawrence and Lorsch's (1969) contingency model, and Nadler and Tushman's (1977) congruence model (Seo et al., 2004). Second-generation change approaches were typically large-scale interventions structured to foster systemic alignment toward a future vision. The primary focus was the whole organization (McLean, 2006). Open-space technology (OST) was another example of large-scale, systemic interventions (Owen, 1991). In OST, participants identified organizational topics of interest and invited others in attendance to participate in discussion and idea generation. The innovative aspect of OST included the "law of two feet," which promoted ownership of issues as people were free to move in and out of discussions depending on their level of interest (Owen, 1991). The future search conference (Weisbord & Janoff, 1995) was another example of second-generation change focused on identifying past and present external trends that informed the organization's strategic planning process. These large-scale change approaches flourished during this period as organizations sought solutions to global competition and economic threats (Seo et al., 2004).

## 1.4 Later-generation Change Scholarship: A Positive Turn

Third-generation change began mid to late 1980s and represented a fundamental shift from problem-centric change literature. Whereas the impetus for first and second-generation change was internal or external problems, the drivers for third-generation change focused on

capacity building to achieve aspirational goals (Seo et al., 2004). An example of third-generation

change is the concept of the learning organization, defined by Peter Senge (1990) as

"organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly

desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is

set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (p. 3)—the learning

organization approach to change promoted practices and processes that fostered feedback and

disclosure for continuous improvement. Learning occurs from successes and failures (McLean,

2006). Managers were encouraged to create employee learning opportunities, promote inquiry

and dialogue, encourage collaboration, capture lessons learned, and empower people to support a

shared vision (Watkins & Marsick,1996). Harris (1990) noted, "learning organizations also

manifest the sentiment that organizational life should be a source of intrinsic satisfaction for their

members and that individuals have the fundamental desire to be part of something more noble"

(p. 344). As part of a third-generation change, learning organizations signaled the turn from

problem-centric thinking toward thinking that leveraged the capacities and hopes of

organizational members.

## 1.5 The History of Positive Organizational Scholarship

Positive organizational scholarship (POS) was introduced as a new field of study in

organizational sciences in 2003 (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011; Cameron & Caza, 2004). Whereas

outcome variables in organizational studies had focused primarily on problem-solving,

profitability, and competitive advantage, POS turned the focus to positive variables, such as

acting with compassion during change, engaging people in shaping change, and fostering a

culture of change that is life-giving to organizational members (Golden-Biddle & Mao, 2011;

Quinn & Wellman, 2011). The POS movement sought to unify organizational studies focused on

phenomena that had been historically ignored, underdeveloped, or labeled as unscientific, such as virtuous acts that contribute to organizational flourishing (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011). POS advocated for awareness of the negative-positive bias in research and noted the disproportionate research on bad behavior in business versus examples of "good works" (Stansbury & Sonenshein, 2011). For example, POS scholars actively sought positive research on diversity that focused on phenomena other than prejudice, isolation, and intergroup conflict (Ramarajan & Thomas, 2011). Out of the 135 organizational studies on diversity published between January 1998 and April 2010, only 25% presented positive group outcomes (Ramarajan & Thomas, 2011).

POS positioned strengths in the foreground of organizational change to expand possibilities for research (Caza & Caza, 2008; Cameron & Caza, 2004). For example, "the negative aspects of downsizing (e.g., injustice, anxiety, and hostility) typically fill the foreground, whereas evidence of compassion and resilience become indistinct parts of the background" (Caza & Caza, 2008, p. 26). Studies of negative organizational phenomena dominated positive phenomena by a margin of 4:1 (Margolis & Walsh, 2003). Statistics demonstrate the tendency in organizational studies to focus on what is not working in organizations versus what is working. In POS, scholars insist the background of problems and challenges are not ignored but rather reinterpreted through a positive lens (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011). For example, crises are opportunities for interpersonal connection, compassion, and healing (Powley, 2011); adverse events become opportunities to strengthen resilience capability (Caza & Milton, 2011); trauma is reinterpreted as an opportunity for post-traumatic growth (Maitlis, 2011); and injustices are opportunities for third-parties to do the right thing (Mayer, 2011).

POS studies generated new ways of thinking about organizational change. Studies of organizations undergoing downsizing found a significant correlation between virtuous acts (compassion, integrity, forgiveness, trust, and optimism) and positive performance outcomes, including productivity, quality, customer retention, and profitability (Cameron & Caza, 2002; Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004). Cameron et al. (2004) also found that organizations perceived as virtuous by their members were more proficient at maintaining morale. Another POS study of downsizing in the airline industry after the 9-11 attacks found a correlation between airlines that implemented practices to ensure the well-being of their employees and financial gain in stock prices over the subsequent five years (Gittell, Cameron, Lim, & Rivas, 2006). A POS study of 40 financial service organizations and 29 health care organizations found that organizations with higher virtuousness ratings had better outcomes related to patient satisfaction, employee satisfaction, employee retention, interpersonal relationship quality, employee engagement, working climate, and external evaluations of the quality of care (Cameron & Caza, 2013). These examples highlight the shift in research trends inspired by AI and POS and the growing acceptance of studies focused on non-traditional aspects of organization change.

POS is growing in change research and practice, making it an important concept to study. The Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011) featured submissions by 149 scholars. Research domains included positive culture, ethics and virtues, positive leadership, meaning and purpose, positive practices, and positive relationships in an organizational setting. The University of Michigan also established a research hub, The Center for Positive Organizations, which the Academy of Management recognizes for opening a new field of inquiry in management science. (Source: http://positiveorgs.bus.umich.edu). POS encompasses individual, group, and organizational levels of analysis that have been largely

ignored (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011). Individual-level studies of positive phenomena include

individual attributes such as callings in work (Wrzesniewski, 2011), work engagement (Rothbard

& Patil, 2011), creativity (Ren & Zhou. 2011), and curiosity (Harrison, 2011). Group-level

studies highlight high-quality connections (Stephens, Heaphy & Dutton, 2011), relational

coordination (Gittell, 2011), reciprocity (Baker, 2011), intimacy in leader-follower relationships

(Kark, 2011), and civility (Porath, 2011). Organizational-level studies emphasize virtuousness in

organizations (Cameron & Winn, 2011), diversity (Ramarajan & Thomas, 2011), mindful

organizing (Vogus, 2011), managing the unexpected (Sutcliffe & Christianson, 2011), resilience

under adversity (Caza & Milton, 2011), and appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva,

1987; Cooperrider & Godwin, 2011).

## 1.6 Appreciative Inquiry Paved the Way for POS

AI research paved the way for POS and topics historically labeled as unscientific, such as

thriving, flourishing, abundance, compassion, and resilience in organizations (Cameron, Dutton

& Quinn, 2003). Appreciative Inquiry, introduced in the late 1980s, posited a positive approach

to organizational change. AI theorists argued a change effort focused on identifying problems

generated more problems to solve, whereas a focus on organizational strengths generated shared

optimism and promoted relational coordination to achieve ideal outcomes (Cooperrider,

Whitney, and Stavros, 2005; Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003). AI's theoretical principles,

processes, and practices promoted organizations as "life-giving" systems. In addition, AI

assumes that every social system works to some degree, and it is through inquiry and dialogue

that organizations discover their strengths (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). Scholars contend an

inquiry focused on an organization's core strengths may be harder to sell than an inquiry focused

on identifying and solving organizational problems (Bushe, 2016). Conversely, others argue a

problem-centric focus leads participants to regard the organization itself as problematic (Ludema, 2000). AI's positive approach to change represented a paradigm shift in organizational change scholarship that has endured for over three decades, making it an essential methodology for continuous research (Bushe, 2016; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

Notable organization development (OD) scholars Cummings and Worley (2005) and French and Bell (1999) credited AI for innovating the traditional problem-centric action-research approach to change (Yaeger, Sorensen & Bengtsson, 2005. While both models feature an initial diagnosis and action planning phase, the main difference between action research and AI is the focus on change. Action research aims to identify the problem, gather data, provide feedback about the problem, diagnose the problem, and develop a plan of action. In contrast, AI identifies an organization's core strengths, future aspirations, design possibilities, and an action plan to move the organization to an ideal state (Asumeng & Osae-Larbi, 2015).

AI has also won acclaim from OD organizations, such as the OD Network, OD Institute, The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), and the Academy of Management (Yaeger et al., 2005). Major corporations have participated in organization-wide AI change initiatives, such as Bell Atlantic, Cleveland Clinic, Hunter Douglas, Roadway Express John Deere Harvester Works, McDonald's, GTE, and The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (Ludema et al., 2003). Between 1986 and 2003, 468 AI articles, dissertations, papers, and books were published (Yaeger et al., 2005). GTE attributes more than 10,000 innovations to the AI process (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). Benedictine University and Case Western University offer a robust AI curriculum that has yielded master's theses and Ph.D. dissertations on AI (Ludema, Whitney, Mohr & Griffin, 2003). In addition, thousands of practitioners have attended AI courses offered through Benedictine University, Case Western Reserve University, NTL, and the

Taos Institute (Ludema et al., 2003). Online resources include The AI Commons open-source

website and the AI Listserv. Theoretical advancements include the formulation of a model for

planning and facilitating large-scale AI events, known as AI summits (Ludema et al., 2003), and

numerous practitioner guides (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2005; Cooperrider et al., 2005;

Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003; Watkins & Mohr, 2001).

AI has become an effective positive organizational change process. For example, the

Hunter Douglas (HD) Window Fashions Division (WFD), a manufacturing company in

Bloomfield, Colorado, was one of the first system-wide change AI initiatives that engaged

approximately 1,000 people in the AI process. The HD change initiative was significant because

it models the application of AI principles and practices (Trosten-Bloom, 2000). WFD had grown

from 27 people in 1985 to 687 people in 1996 and faced the challenge of keeping pace with the

burgeoning workforce. Silos had formed, turnover had increased, and employee survey results

showed downward trends in employees' experiences at HD. Four years after the start of the AI

change process, the organization realized positive changes in quality, customer service, and

employee retention. HD senior leaders noted:

> Within the first year, our production and productivity both improved—largely as a result
> of people's increased participation in 'problem-solving' and decision-making activities.
> Our operations improvement suggestions were up over 100 percent. (Trosten-Bloom,
> 2000, p, 207).

According to Trosten-Bloom (2000), the AI process exceeded most leaders' and employees'

expectations in the first nine months of the launch and the three years following.

Another organizational change study at Avon Mexico, illustrated the positive outcomes

of AI. The focus of the change was gender equity (Schiller, 2000). After a year of implementing

AI processes and practices, the organization implemented salary guidelines to ensure gender

equity, sponsored developmental experiences for women, developed gender awareness training,

and implemented policies requiring Avon Mexico task forces and managing teams to have male and female membership gender changes to foster equality for men and women, including salary guidelines (Schiller, 2000).

A study conducted in 94 fast-food restaurants of a Fortune 500 restaurant chain in a major metropolitan area further illustrates AI's effectiveness. The study aimed to discover if AI would positively affect the retention rates of salaried management employees (Jones, 1999). The study occurred over 18 months with all salaried management in 94 restaurants. The target population was divided into three similar demographic and geographic groups. Group one was identified as the AI test group and consisted of 33 locations. Group two consisted of 32 locations that used typical problem-solving approaches to address retention. Group three consisted of 29 locations that carried on business as usual. In the Jones study (1999), all groups responded to a survey that solicited responses on demographic and job-related data, job satisfaction and commitment levels, and intention to leave the job. The researcher also collected detailed turnover tracking data for each location. The AI test group participated in the "Project Appreciative Retention Roundtable." Outcomes of the roundtable included the development of affirmative topics and provocative propositions, identifying core values, action planning, and follow-up. The five affirmative topics included diversity, communication, cooperation, determination to be the best, possibilities/positive thinking, and conditions for people to excel. Group two used traditional problem-solving approaches to address staffing and retention, which Human Resources supervised. The approaches included promotions to fill vacancies, pay increases, schedule adjustments, poaching from competitors, internal and external job advertisements, recruitment agencies, referrals, training and development programs, borrowing managers from other locations, and college recruitment.

Group three did not participate in the AI methodology or have Human Resources assistance to address staffing and retention issues. The year before the study, the AI test group had the highest turnover rate at 36%. Group 2 had a 26% turnover, and Group 3 had a 30% turnover. After the study, the AI group had the lowest % turnover rate at 18%. Group two had a 38% turnover, and Group three had a 36% turnover. The AI test group generated several innovative ideas to reduce turnover, including team videos featuring success stories and annual awards celebrating individual and team success stories. The AI group also implemented a program to increase late-night sales, which resulted in an additional 2% increase in sales during the test period. The study assessed cost savings related to the retention study:

> If we conservatively estimate that negative turnover can be reduced by 25%, this would equate to $110 million savings to the average top-five restaurant organization, which is a 13.9% profit improvement (Standard & Poor's, 1998). The current study reduced turnover by 50% that, if extrapolated to the average top-five organization (of which, the study organization is one), would equate to $220 million savings or a 27.90% profit improvement. (Jones, 1999, p. 151).

The study supports our understanding of AI's effectiveness as an alternative to problem-centric organizational change. The AI test group's use of affirmative topics and provocative propositions set the group apart from the other two groups. In addition, amplifying the AI group's success stories highlighted what worked well—a hallmark of AI methodology.

AI's focus on the positive raises a question of how to address tensions that emerge as the organization's "shadow." Shadow has been defined in literature as censored thoughts and emotions by self or others in accordance with organizational norms (Fitzgerald, Oliver, & Hoxsey, 2010; Jung, 1968; Bowles, 1991; Kolodziejski, 2004). As the AI process directs people to reflect on the positive aspects of organizational life, the shadow manifests as negative or contradictory experiences deemed inappropriate to share. The shadows then show up as "elephants in the room." Similar to Wegner's (1997) ironic process theory, attempts at mental

control to attain a desired state of mind may ironically increase the accessibility of unwanted

thoughts. For example, a desire to stop smoking may increase thoughts about cigarettes and

memories of smoking. The study of the shadow is vital to understanding positivity's polarizing

effects. For example, organizational norms determine perceptions of what is undiscussable and,

therefore, relegated to the shadow (Fitzgerald et al., 2010). The "elephants in the room" create

tension between problem-centered and positive-focused discourse. This dissertation addresses a

theoretical gap concerning the shadow and what it consists of in the context of positive

organizational change. Subsequently, it seeks to understand the implications of managing

shadows in positive change.

## 1.7 Preview of the Study

Chapter One introduced the problem statement and provided the background of the study,

including the turn from problem-centric organizational change research to positive organizational

scholarship (POS). Chapter Two reviews the literature on AI as an exemplar of positive

organizational change and reviews AI's roots in social construction and the theoretical basis for

AI's guiding principles and methodology. The chapter then examines the implications of a

positive change agenda for what is "discussable" in AI and the "elephants in the room." Next, the

chapter examines the concept of organizational shadow to situate the study of tensions in

literature. The chapter explains the gap in AI and POS scholarship that this study addresses from

a dialectical tension perspective. Chapter Three illustrates the methodology and methods

employed in this study. Chapters Four, Five, and Six provide the study results and introduce

three shadows. In Chapter Four, the voice shadow illuminates the tension between free

expression and limited expression of thoughts that are not always positive. In Chapter Five, the

leadership shadow describes a tension between hierarchical and collaborative leadership

practices. Chapter Six presents the temporal shadow, which encompasses the tension between short-term orientation (STO) and long-term orientation (LTO). Each of the three results chapters includes strategies practitioners used to navigate the tensions. Chapter Seven includes a discussion of findings and conclusions.

## CHAPTER 2: APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AND DIALECTAL TENSIONS

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter establishes AI's contribution to third-generation change scholarship, establishing it as an ideal case to study the assumptions and impacts of the process. The chapter begins with a focus on AI's roots in social construction and outlines the guiding principles for enacting positive change. The section that follows examines AI as a paradigm shift in action research, which supports our understanding of AI's prioritizing positive discourse over problem discourse. The first section of this chapter concludes with an exploration of AI methodology from the perspective of setting the agenda for what is discussable in AI. The following section explores how a positive organizational change approach generates tensions that demand navigation strategies. First, examining organizational shadow situates the study of tensions in positive change literature. Next, tensions are explored through the lens of dialectical theory to identify opportunities for further scholarship. The section concludes with a focus on tensions in AI and the problem of how to navigate the "elephants in the room."

### 2.2   Socially Constructing a Positive Reality in Organizations

AI promulgates the theory that *words create worlds* to highlight the importance of social discourse and language in the context of organizational change (Cooperrider et al., (1995). Bushe (2000) noted, "as we talk to each other, we are constructing the world we see and think about, and as we change how we talk, we are changing the world." (p. 100). Gergen (2009) agreed, noting that we are not required to understand organizations in any specific way. For example, our understanding of an organization prioritizing profits over concern for people is one of many alternative ways to explain an organization's behavior. Gergen (2009) reminds us "that for any

state of affairs, a potentially unlimited number of descriptions and explanations should be

possible" (p. 5). Another explanation for an organization's focus on profitability may be to

ensure job security and competitive salaries for employees. As Gergen (2009) cited:

> When we say that a certain description is 'accurate' (as opposed to 'inaccurate') or 'true' (as opposed to 'false'), we are not judging it according to how well it pictures the world. Rather, we are saying that the words have come to function as 'truth telling' within the rules of a particular game—or more generally, according to certain conventions of certain groups (p. 1).

AI's intentional focus on the positive has been described as a *language game* in which words

gain meaning through implicit exchanges and rules of engagement. AI's language games

construct a reality in which certain rules of engagement facilitate positive discourse norms

(Gergen, 2009).

Cooperrider (2005), largely considered one of the founders of the AI philosophy,

provides an often-cited definition of AI:

> Appreciative Inquiry is the cooperative co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves the discovery of what gives "life" to a living system when it is most effective, alive, and constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. (Cooperrider et al., 2005, p. 3).

The definition of AI highlights the social construction of an organizational change methodology

focused on strengths rather than on finding problems to solve. The practice of inquiry,

intentionally designed to uncover strengths, facilitates positive change as individuals and

organizations discover their untapped capabilities and potential.

AI's guiding principles (Table 1) draw heavily from social constructionist philosophy

that assumes discourse creates, sustains, and transforms organizations (Barrett, Thomas, &

Hocevar, 1995). The principles are essential to our understanding of AI's construction of reality

in which there is a way of thinking, speaking, and acting. The eight principles include the

constructionist principle, the simultaneity principle, the poetic principle, the anticipatory

principle, the positive principle, the wholeness principle, the enactment principle, and the free

choice principle.

**Table 1**

*Summary of the Eight Principles of Appreciative Inquiry (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003, 54-*

*55*

| Principle | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| 1. The constructionist principle | *Words create worlds.*<br>• Reality, as we know it, is a subjective versus objective state.<br>• It is socially created through language and conversation. |
| 2. The simultaneity principle | *Inquiry creates change.*<br>• Inquiry is intervention.<br>• The moment we ask a question, we begin to create a change. |
| 3. The poetic principle | *We can choose what we study.*<br>• Organizations, like open books, are endless sources of study and learning.<br>• What we choose to study makes a difference. It describes-even creates-the world as we know it. |
| 4. The anticipatory principle | *Image inspires action.*<br>• Human systems move in the direction of their images of the future.<br>• The more positive and hopeful the image of the future, the more positive the present-day action |
| 5. The positive principle | *Positive questions lead to positive change.*<br>• Momentum for large-scale change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding.<br>• This momentum is best generated through positive questions that amplify the positive core. |
| 6. The wholeness principle | *Wholeness brings out the best*<br>• Wholeness brings out the best in people and organizations<br>• Bringing all stakeholders together in large group forums stimulates creativity and builds collective capacity |

| 7. The enactment principle | *Acting "as if" is self-fulfilling* |
|---|---|
| | • To really make a change, we must "be the change we want to see" |
| | • Positive change occurs when the process used to create the change is a living model of the ideal future |

| 8. The free choice principle | *Free choice liberates power* |
|---|---|
| | • People perform better and are more committed when they have freedom to choose how and what they contribute |
| | • Free choice stimulates organizational excellence and positive change |

The constructionist principle reinforces the assumption that "the way we know is fateful" (Watkins & Mohr, 2001), meaning habitual thoughts and assumptions about organizations can constrain imagination (Cooperrider et al., 2003). As such, AI intentionally solicits stories about the organization's "positive core" to create an awareness and appreciation of those moments and situations where the organization has been at its best. The constructionist principle assumes that every organization, no matter how dysfunctional, has experienced high points (Cooperrider et al., 2003).

The simultaneity principle in AI assumes that inquiry is intervention (Cooperrider et al., 2003). The first questions asked during an organizational change process set the stage for the data that is later discovered (Cooperrider et al., 2003; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). If questions focus on problems, problems are likely to be discovered. If questions focus on what is life-giving, then positive stories are likely to surface. (Cooperrider et al., 2003). "These data become the stories out of which the future is conceived, discussed, and constructed" (Cooperrider et al., 2005, p. 9). Given that inquiry and change happen simultaneously, AI intentionally crafts positive questions to inspire and facilitate positive change (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Questions that begin

with "What is working here?" are believed to elicit a more positive response than questions that

focus on "What is problematic here?" (Cooperrider et al., 2005).

The poetic principle embraces the metaphor of organizations as "open books" that are

continually co-authored by organizational members and stakeholders (Cooperrider et al. 2003).

The poetic principle posits the belief that "the topics we chose to study are fateful. They not only

determine what we discover and learn; they actually create it" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003,

p. 61). This principle assumes that if a direction or focus of change keeps the organization stuck

in a non-productive pattern of behavior, the organization can choose to focus in a different

direction. An important element of the poetic principle is co-authoring the organization's story.

The topics organizations choose to study will influence how people discover, learn, and create

the organization's future. (Cooperrider et al., 2005). It follows that the more positively focused

the topic, the more likely the organization is to discover positive phenomena.

The anticipatory principle recognizes the influence of positive imagery on current

behavior. The principle assumes that projections of the future mobilize action (Cooperrider et al.,

2005). "The more positive and hopeful the image of the future, the more positive the present-day

action" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 54). In AI, inquiries focused on "what should be?"

or "what might be?" are intended to inspire compelling images of the future (Cooperrider et al.,

2005); some question if the anticipatory principle conveys a sense of obligation to imagine a

positive future (Grant & Humphries, 2006).

The positive principle acknowledges that organizational change requires large amounts of

positive affect (such as optimism, inspiration, and excitement) and social bonding. (Cooperrider

et al., 2003). Positive questions amplify the positive core, leading to long-term positive change

(Cooperrider et al., 2005). In practice, the positive principle is the search for what nourishes

people and "what gives life to an organization when it is at its best" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 68). For example, a positive inquiry focused on empowerment will likely generate more positive effects than an inquiry focused on micromanagement (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). Of the eight AI principles, the positive principle is the most widely equated with AI (Fitzgerald et al., 2010). Feldman and Worline (2011) identified the amplifying effects of positive narratives that connect individual actions to larger organizing efforts. Given the positive principle requires large amounts of positive affect, the challenge is how to manage contradictory emotions that emerge during the process of AI (Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Grant & Humphries, 2006).

The wholeness principle in AI demonstrates the value of bringing the organization and stakeholders together to participate in the change process. Engaging the whole system is believed to facilitate the sharing of diverse perspectives, not to force agreement, but to create the whole story of the organization. AI scholars contend that honoring the wholeness principle creates a safe space for people to focus on issues that support the greater good (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

The enactment principle acknowledges that transformation occurs when organizations act as if the desired change has already been enacted (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). For example, "if organizations want people engaged in the business, they must act as if high participation and commitment are the norm" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 74). The enactment principle invites organizations to evaluate how their current norms align with AI's social construction of reality (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). The challenge in AI is managing tensions that arise when AI norms contradict organizational norms (Fitzgerald et al., 2010).

Lastly, the free choice principle recognizes that when people choose how they want to contribute to change, they perform better (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). In practice, the free choice principle sets an expectation that people may engage and disengage in the AI process at will, without fear of repercussion (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). The free choice principle may mirror or conflict with organizational norms for participation.

Of the eight principles, the positivity principle is most widely associated with AI and sets an expectation for the type of privileged discourse in a positive change approach (Fitzgerald, et al., 2010; Bushe, 2007). The positivity principle also constructs a dialogic and relational way of being that may surface organizational contradictions about what is deemed positive.

## 2.3 AI as an Alternative to Problem-centric Action-research

Until the advent of AI, the de facto approach to change was action research. Action research involves identifying problems, diagnosing causes, and analyzing solutions for action (Lewin, 1951; Rothwell, Sullivan, & McLean, 1995). AI scholars debunked the assumption that problem-solving was a requirement for organizational change, arguing that foregrounding and talking about problems creates more problems to solve (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). The AI versus problem-solving model (Figure 1) exemplifies the polarization of these two dominant paradigms (Cooperrider &Whitney, 2000).

**Figure 1:** *Two Paradigms for Organizational Change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000).*

| Paradigm 1: Problem-Solving | Paradigm 2: Appreciative Inquiry |
|---|---|
| "Felt Need"<br>Identification of Problem | Appreciating<br>"Valuing the Best of What Is" |
| Analysis of Causes | Envisioning<br>"What Might Be" |

| Analysis of Possible Solutions | Dialoguing<br>"What Should Be" |
|---|---|
| Action Planning<br>(Treatment)<br>*Organizing is a problem to be solved* | Innovating<br>"What Will Be"<br>*Organizing is a mystery (infinite capacity) to be embraced* |
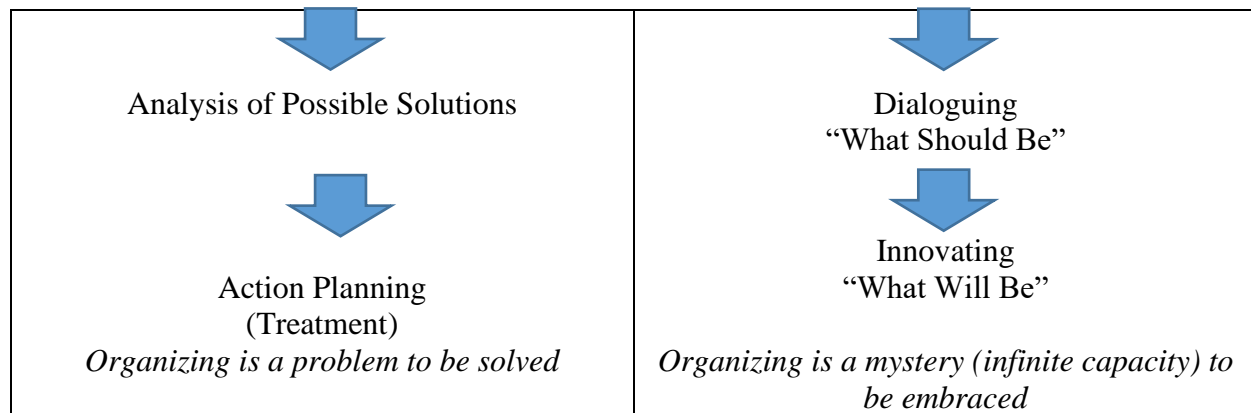
To emphasize the paradigm shift, the metaphor of organizing as a problem to be solved was attributed to traditional action research. In contrast, AI uses the metaphor of a mystery to be embraced (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Rather than assuming organizations need fixing, AI scholars argued: "Everything people find wrong with an organization represents an absence of something they hold in their minds as an ideal image" (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003, p. 19). The suggestion that problem-solving was inferior to AI has been a constant tension in AI scholarship.

The AI versus problem-solving paradigm noted extensively in AI literature (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000; Cooperrider, et al., 2005; Ludema, Whitney, Mohr & Griffin, 2003; Watkins & Mohr, 2001) gave rise to descriptions of AI as positive discourse and problem-solving as deficit discourse or "negative talk." Ludema (2000) noted:

> In response to the growing body of deficit vocabularies produced by critical approaches to social and organizational science, a handful of scholars are calling for appreciative approaches to social and organizational science that hold increased potential for revitalizing scholarship and enhancing the human condition (p.269).

Ludema argued that deficit discourse leads to the enfeeblement of society and advocates for the promulgation of vocabularies of hope. Ludema posited, "these hopeful images of the future, in

turn, become powerful catalysts for change and transformation by mobilizing the moral, social, and relational energies needed to translate vision into reality and belief into practice" (p. 271). While Ludema (2000) was not prescriptive about language that constitutes vocabularies of hope, he pointed to AI's focus on inquiry, dialogue, and the collective imagining of an ideal future as conditions that foster vocabularies of hope. In contrast, vocabularies of organizational deficit are described in AI literature as problems typically addressed in action research, such as role conflict, turfism, low morale, burnout, and job dissatisfaction (Cooperrider et al., 2005). AI scholarship implies that "problem talk" is analogous to deficit discourse, which goes against the grain of AI's privileging of positive discourse.

## 2.4 Setting an Agenda for What is Discussable

AI methodology is guided by positive inquiry. The methodology most widely associated with AI is the 4-D cycle (discovery, dream, design, and destiny), which sets the agenda for what is discussable in AI (Figure 2). The 4-D methodology builds on the theory that people and organizations move in the direction of what they study (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1999; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). The founders of AI were reluctant to prescribe a methodology for fear that it would stifle experimentation and creativity (Bushe 2012). However, understanding the methodology sheds light on when practitioners are most likely to encounter shadows in AI.
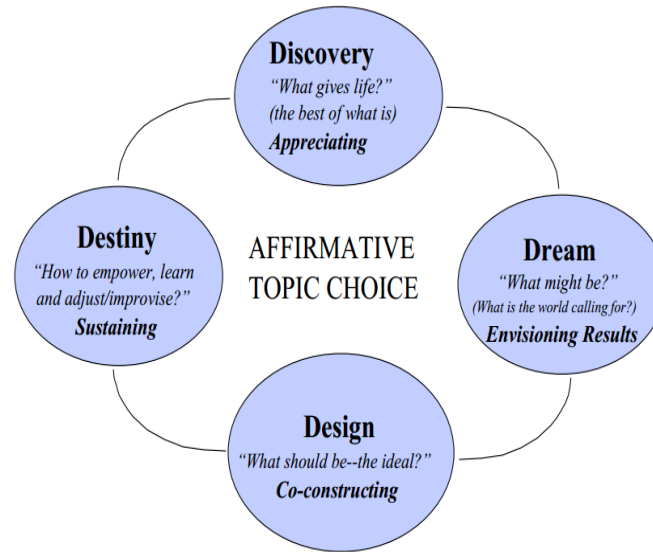
**Figure 2:** Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2005, p. 5).

In the *discovery* phase, organizational members interview each other to discover and appreciate "the best of what is" or has been in the organization. Discovery builds on the assumption that in every system something works, albeit a moment in time or longer periods. The *dream* phase is next. In this phase, organizational members engage in a collective visioning activity to imagine "what might be" regarding the organization's positive potential (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). The *design* phase involves writing a set of provocative propositions of "what should be," meaning the qualities and attributes participants most desire to see in the organization. The final phase is *destiny*, which solicits personal and organizational commitments to achieve "what will be." The Leadership Clergy Institute later suggested the 4-D model be revised to add Define as the first D to identify the focus of the inquiry, known as the 5-D model (Bushe, 2011).

The 4-D methodology also shapes the agenda for the AI summit, convening 30-3,000 internal and external organizational stakeholders in a 3-5-day event. Summits may encompass all

four stages of the 4D process if time permits. The AI summit aims to accelerate change by

having all participants focus exclusively on an affirmative topic. Ludema (2003) noted:

> When an organization decides to embark on an AI Summit process, it is committing to an unconditionally positive approach to organization change. Based on the principles of appreciative inquiry, everything involved in an AI Summit—before, during, and after—is focused on the positive (p. 39).

The summit's exclusive focus on the positive begins with selecting an affirmative topic by a

small group of organizational members. The affirmative topic intends to create a compelling

image that activates the heliotropic effect. The heliotropic effect theorizes that all living beings

are inclined to move toward positive energy and away from negative energy (Cooperrider &

Srivastva, 1987; Spreitzer & Cameron, 2011). Examples of affirmative topics noted in AI case

studies include Avon Mexico's focus on exceptional gender relationships, Myrada's focus on

creating and strengthening community development organizations, DTE Energy Services' focus

on creating a culture of choice, and Hunter Douglas Window Fashions Division's topic of

creating a shared vision (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). The planning group then makes vital decisions

that ensure an unconditional focus on the positive, including selecting summit participants.

Ludema (2003) noted the power of the planning team to affect the outcome of the summit:

> The planning team has tremendous power to influence what happens with the rest of the organization during the summit. If the planning team begins with a spirit of curiosity, curiosity will flourish at the summit. If the planning team continuously affirms the best in its members, affirmation and productive relationships will grow at the summit. If the planning team embodies inclusion and openness, inclusion and openness will be in full bloom at the summit (p.42).

The AI summit methodology bestows significant power on the planning committee. However,

Gergen (2009) reminds us that discourse is informed by organizational authority "over matters of

reality, reason, and right (p.47)," which raises questions about how power dynamics affect whose

interests are represented and whose voices are valued before, during, and after the summit.

Gergen's theory of power and authority in organizations builds on Foucault's (1979) concerns about how people willingly submit to subtle forms of power in everyday life without considering its positive and negative implications. AI literature has been largely silent on the implications of power-related tensions on positive change discourse. Accordingly, this study aims to understand, more broadly, the implications of tensions associated with AI in positive-focused organizational change, including attention to how power unfolds in the process.

AI summits' exclusive focus on the positive assumes deficit discourse is unproductive, whereas positive discourse is generative (Ludema et al., 2003). Generativity describes creating new images that change how people think so that new possibilities for action become available (Bushe, 2013). As such, the marginalization of people with less than positive narratives may happen in the process. Bushe (2013) offered a different perspective, noting, "Getting the stories of marginalized members of the system can sometimes be the most generative thing you can do. This allows the really new ideas, which always exist at the margins of social systems, voice" (p. 10). Other scholars have suggested that focusing exclusively on the positive limits the generative potential of deficit discourse. Barge and Oliver (2003) stated, "our concern lies with the idea that fixing the meaning of appreciative as 'positive' dismisses and discounts other equally important and appropriate types of conversation and emotionality in organizations that may foster learning and change" (p. 125). Fineman (2006) contends that "in exclusively favoring positive narratives, AI fails to value the opportunities for positive change that are possible from negative experiences" (p. 275). Bright, Powley, Fry, and Barrett (2011) have suggested that hidden images of hope are embedded in the cynical or critical voice. To that end, this study aims to deepen our theoretical understanding of the tensions that enable and constrain what is discussable in the context of positive change.

## 2.5 The Tension of Positive versus the Shadow

In positive change literature, the "shadow" metaphor conceptualizes the polar opposite or dark side of organizations (Kolodziejski, 2004). Shadow is described as "the facts which organizations wish to deny about themselves, due to the threat posed to self-image and self-understanding and, more generally, the need to be viewed in a favourable light by others" (Bowles, 1991, p.387). The concept of shadow was initially focused on the individual level (Jung, 1968) but was later applied to groups (Gemmill, 1986) and organizations (Bowles, 1991; Kolodziejski, 2004; Fitzgerald et al., 2010).

While the shadow is often associated with negative thoughts and emotions (Bowles, 1991; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995), scholars argue that the shadow may hold both positive and negative traits that have been repressed or censored by the organization (Kolodziejski, 2004; Fitzgerald et al., 2010). Kolodziejski's (2004) hermeneutic study drew from psychoanalytical and organizational behavior literature to explore the shadow generated by complex dynamics between individuals, groups, and organizations. In her dissertation, Kolodziejski (2004) described the shadow as "that which is considered inappropriate and shunned, that which is unbearable to hold consciously and denied" (p.64). She also called the shadow "trapped, untapped, potential." Fitzgerald et al. (2010) further developed the concept of shadow as a repository of behaviors that do not fit accepted cultural norms and includes "the full spectrum of censored feeling and cognition, ranging from repressed strengths and capacities to fragilities and abhorrent characteristics" (p.221). Fitzgerald et al. (2010) posited the shadow could have detrimental effects on organizations if not recognized and can also hold growth potential.

A dearth of scholarship focuses on the tension of positive versus shadow in organizational change. Allen and Pilnick (1973) focused on positive and negative norms

observed in retail and manufacturing organizations in the United States and abroad. The

researchers defined ten normative clusters influencing business success, such as organizational

and personal pride. For each cluster, Allen and Pilnick (1973) developed an illustrative

framework of what positive and negative organizational norms looked and sounded like (Figure

3). Behaviors anticipated or expected of group members constituted norms. The clustering and

identification of positive or negative (shadow) norms brought visibility to behaviors that had not

been typically discussed or explored. Organizations could use the framework to solicit feedback

from members on their experiences of positive and negative norms. The ten clusters guided the

feedback intended to be solicited verbally in meetings or through surveys.

**Figure 3**: **Ten Normative Clusters (Allen & Pilnick, 1973).**

| Norm Cluster | Positive | Negative (Shadow) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Organizational and personal pride | We enjoy working for the company | They are always trying to take advantage of us |
| Performance/excellence | People always try to improve, even when they are doing well | People are satisfied with the routine or mediocre |
| Teamwork/communication | People go out of their way to help each other | It's a dog-eat-dog and save your own skin |
| Leadership and supervision | It's tradition to ask for help when you need it | It is best to hide your problems and avoid your supervisor |
| Profitability/cost-effectiveness | Profitability is on the minds of everyone | Profitability is a management problem |
| Colleague or associate relations | Colleagues are treated with dignity and respect | Workers are treated as just a pair of hands |
| Customer and consumer relations | People are continually looking for ways to serve the customer better | People fail to make the effort to ensure customer satisfaction |
| Honesty and security | People are not willing to compromise security measures and regulations | People fail to realize the importance of security regulations |
| Training and development | The company really cares about developing employees | People de-emphasize training in favor of more pressing demands |

| Innovation and change | People are continually on the lookout for better ways of doing things | People tend to hang on to old ways of doing things even after they have outlived their usefulness |
| --- | --- | --- |

The significance of Allen and Pilnick's (1973) research in this study was the illumination of

shadow norms in organizations. In the study, the researchers pre-determined the clusters and

looked for behaviors that were either positive or negative relative to the cluster. My study is an

opportunity to interpret the shadow from practitioners' direct experiences and further analyze

how positive and negative norms inform the shadow in the context of positive organizational

change. Also, my study seeks to understand the shadow as a repository of repressed or

underutilized strengths.

2.6 Dialectical Theory as a Lens

        The dialectic scholarship helps us to understand the dynamic interplay of tensions

associated with positive organizational change. Baxter's (1988) seminal study of couples in

romantic, heterosexual relationships defined dialectical tension as opposing needs that exist

simultaneously, such as the desire for autonomy and connection. The two poles of autonomy and

connection are constantly struggling for dominance, as are other tensions, such as predictability

versus novelty, and openness versus closedness (Baxter & Simon, 1993). Baxter theorized that

dialectal tensions are inherent in all relationships (Baxter & Simon, 1993). Tracy (2004)

advanced the research by studying prison and correctional officers' reactions to organizational

contradictions in situ.

        Building on Baxter's work, organizational scholar Sarah Tracy (2004) observed four

families of tensions experienced by employees in a correctional facility setting: respect versus

suspect, nurture versus discipline, consistency versus flexibility, and solidarity versus autonomy.

While Tracy's study focused on employees in two correctional facilities, Linville et al. (2013) studied tensions as they manifested in a dyadic relationship between an employee and another person, such as a boss or co-worker. Linville et al. (2013) conducted in-depth interviews with fourteen employees from different organizations, including public corporations, privately owned small businesses, non-profits, and government agencies. The study focused on employees' experiences of dialectical tensions during organizational change events, such as mergers and acquisitions, organizational restructuring, and executive-level leadership changes. Linville et al. (2013) analysis of dyadic tensions between the employee and another person, such as a boss or co-worker, were defined as integration versus non-integration, expression versus non-expression, and change as necessary versus change as a threat.

These studies highlight the inevitability of competing tensions in organizational relationships and life. They provide a conceptual framework to study the dialectical tensions inherent in positive change initiatives. To date, AI scholarship has not used the frame of dialectical tension to understand a change effort at the meso level of organizing processes. Yet, given the acknowledgment of the shadow as an oppositional pole that emerges with the positive focus of change efforts, this study utilizes the helpful dialectic framework to understand the shadow in POS literature.

## 2.7 Identifying Tensions in AI

As aforementioned, the primary tension identified in AI literature is that which results from the focus away from problems and on to the positive (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000; Cooperrider, et al., 2005; Ludema, Whitney, Mohr & Griffin, 2003; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). Aside from the positive versus problem tension in AI, there is a lack of knowledge about other tensions that may emerge as the AI process unfolds. Grant and

Humphries (2006) questioned if "participants are able to openly choose the discourse/vocabulary with which they construct their realities and negotiate meaning, or are those discourses/vocabularies chosen-imposed on them in a manner reminiscent of the vast impersonal systems of control/power identified by Foucault?" (p.415). Srithika and Bhattacharyya (2009) noted that tensions associated with culture, leadership, and management style could emerge as organizations unlearn old routines and embrace AI. Fitzgerald et al. (2010) hinted at tensions that may surface when a less-than-ideal current state overshadows AI's aspirational focus. Bushe (2011) questioned, "Is it even possible to inquire into images of a positive future without evoking the negative past or present?" (p.18). In the last decade, AI scholarship began to explore how a focus on the positive has generated tension. Given the emphasis on the positive, many questions remain about what tensions surface in the process. This study adds to the literature by first identifying those tensions, asking RQ1: What are the dialectical tensions experienced in the AI process?

As noted earlier, scholars suggest a positive focus may censor or limit talk about problems (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Pratt, 2002; Fineman, 2006). Scholars have questioned the possibility of untapped knowledge when the focus is on the positive (Fineman, 2006; Grant & Humphries, 2006; Hill & Onyett, 2012). Other scholars have expressed concern about how selecting the positive can restrict what is explored and studied in organizations or discount negative experiences (Bushe, 2007; Fitzgerald, et al., 2010; Gemmill, 1986; Grant & Humphries, 2006; Golembiewski, 2000; Pratt, 2002). Others have cautioned about the stifling of conversations about hurts or injustices in favor of positive discourse, citing the danger of fostering mistrust, disengagement, or even violence (Oliver, 2005; Grant & Humphries, 2006). But how might the other guiding principles in AI become a source of tension? For example, the

wholeness principle advocates bringing all stakeholders together to stimulate creativity and build

collective capacity (Whitney & Trosten Bloom, 2003). But what are the assumptions underlying

the wholeness principle that may generate tension in organizations? For example, how are

decisions made? What role do leaders play? What role do organizational members play? What

tensions emerge because of assumptions about the meaning of wholeness? And what

assumptions underlie the whole of AI? To further understand these tensions, this study also seeks

to understand RQ1a: What are the assumptions that underlie these tensions?

Some scholars have suggested that the 4D methodology (discovery, dream, design,

deliver) may be where tension surfaces in AI. Fitzgerald et al. (2010) noted, "to the extent that it

(or normative definitions of the positive) become reified as 'the way,' it may censure

experimentation and novel approaches, and in our experience has done both." Fitzgerald et al.

(2010) raised the question of what assumptions are attached to the 4D model. If an organization

completes the process, is there an assumption about success? Conversely, if an organization fails

to complete one or more of the four steps, what are the assumptions, and how might assumptions

contribute to tension? Fitzgerald et al. (2010) stated, "the image of the 4D model has a normative

impact on our imagining of AI potentialities, so that the 'full transformative potential,' may not

be perceived as realized unless the full cycle is enacted." This study seeks to understand RQ1b:

How, when, and where tensions surface? In other words, what are the circumstances around the

tension when it surfaces?

To my knowledge, scholarship has been largely silent on the theoretical implications of

dialectical tensions in AI. Much of the AI literature has focused on the practitioner's recognition

of shadow norms. As Fitzgerald et al. (2010) noted, "Often the Shadow first expresses itself

through uncomfortable feelings and awareness. As facilitators, we are learning to first recognize

and include our own discomfort rather than to ignore or discount it, as integral to authentic

appreciation." (p. 229). Johnson (2007) suggested there is something to be learned "when we

look at how we think about and manage those uncomfortable moments when someone 'resists'

our appreciative frame, or when we are most uncomfortable in our own shoes as AI

practitioners" (p.18). Accordingly, there is an opportunity to identify theoretical implications

from practical experiences. As such, this study asks RQ2: What are the implications of the

tension?

Most of what we know about tensions in AI comes from practitioner's experiences. The

November 2012 issue of the AI Practitioner was dedicated entirely to articles focused on

"Embracing the Shadow through Appreciative Inquiry." The articles included intrapersonal

reflections from work in the field (Hill & Onyett (2012) and thoughts about AI and diversity

(Wasserman, 2012). In addition, articles included reflections on the ways that AI's positivity can

inadvertently generate the shadow, be used as an intervention into shadow, reflect a larger

cultural shadow of discomfort with painful conversations, and perpetuate an existing shadow by

not naming or challenging it (Fitzgerald et al., 2010). Practitioners' perspectives are vital to

answering RQ2a: How do tensions influence the change process?

Theoretical development opportunities also exist regarding how tensions are managed

and navigated in change processes. Allen and Pilnick (1973) offered strategies to navigate

tensions associated with their positive versus negative normative system. Proposed strategies

included behavior modification and training for organizational leaders, reinforcing messaging in

internal communications, and modifying recruitment, hiring, and orientation practices (Allen &

Pilnick, 1973). Baxter (1988, 1990) proposed various techniques for navigating tensions. For

example, choosing autonomy at the expense of connection is the selection technique. Baxter also

proposed separation as a technique for navigating tension, meaning the relationship parties

alternate between the two poles of autonomy and connection. The third technique is to neutralize

the intensity of the poles through small talk. The fourth technique is to reframe the tensions so

that the two poles are no longer regarded as opposites (Baxter, 1988, 1990). However, it is

unclear how these relational dialectics translate to change processes. Further research is needed

to identify approaches for navigating tensions in the context of positive organizational change.

Tracy (2004) expanded on Baxter's research and posited a theoretical frame for making

sense of organizational tensions—as simple contradictions, complementary dialectics, or

paradoxes. Simple contradictions frame tensions as a choice between two actions or alternating

between the two. Complementary dialectics reframe the tension so it is no longer viewed as

tension. Paradox frames the tension as a double bind—to obey is to disobey, and to disobey is to

obey. Tracy argues that framing tensions as complementary dialectics rather than simple

contradictions or paradoxes lets organizational members know that they are not alone in

experiencing contradictions, which may foster the open sharing of coping mechanisms. While

selection and reframing strategies offer insight into managing the "elephants in the room,"

further exploration is needed to identify additional strategies to navigate tensions in AI. Given

the proliferation of AI, this study asks RQ2b: What are strategies to navigate the tension?

This chapter identified gaps in AI and positive change scholarship that calls for further

research, including the need to understand dialectical tensions experienced in organizations when

the focus is on the positive assumptions about the tensions, theoretical implications of the

tensions, how tensions influence the process; and strategies to navigate tension. As such, the

following questions will guide my research:

RQ 1: What are experiences of dialectical tensions associated with AI in organizational

change efforts?

RQ 1a: What assumptions about the tensions became evident during the change

process?

RQ 1b: In what context did the tension arise?

RQ 2: What are the implications of the tension?

RQ2a. How did the tension influence the process?

RQ2b. In what ways are dialectical tensions in AI navigated in organizations?

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains my methods for participant selection, including purposive sampling, gaining access to participants, and obtaining participant consent. Next, my data collection method is explored, including the rationale for interviews, preparing for interviews, and conducting interviews. The following section explains the data analysis strategy for this study, including a five-step process. The chapter concludes with my role as a researcher and ethical considerations.

### 3.2 Participant Selection

The ideal study participants are individuals who have the requisite experience to answer research questions (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). AI practitioners are particularly well suited for this study because they have direct experience that qualifies them to answer questions about using AI in organizational change initiatives. Cooperrider and Srivastva (1999) originally conceived the role of the AI practitioner as "an active agent, an invested participant whose work might well become a powerful source of change in the way people see and enact their worlds" (in Cooperrider et al. 2005 p. 360). AI practitioners are ideal participants because they create the context, environment, and structure to foster positive discourse by embodying AI principles and the execution of AI methodology (Cooperrider et al., 2005). Practitioners also face the dilemma of maintaining AI's integrity and honoring AI participants' experiences, which may give rise to dialectical tensions.

### 3.2.1 Purposeful Sampling

Purposeful sampling is an appropriate strategy to identify participants who can provide information-rich data relative to the questions under study (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2016; Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood (2015). Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research to select individuals who can "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (p. 125). Homogenous and snowball sampling work well to identify study participants with the requisite experience in using AI in organizational change efforts (Palinkas et al., 2015; Creswell, 2007; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In the case of this study, homogenous sampling looks for participants with similar experiences (Patton, 2002), and snowball sampling requests referrals from participants identified through homogenous sampling (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002).

Given this, I sought participants via the Taos Institute network of practitioners. The Taos Institute's community of AI practitioners was an ideal source for homogenous and snowball sampling. Taos is recognized as the epicenter of AI in North America, especially given that its board comprises AI methodology and research founders. Taos is also the sponsor of AI conferences and events which attract researchers and practitioners from across the globe. This community of practitioners is particularly well suited for this study given their interest, willingness, and experience using positive change processes, such as AI (Wengraf, 2001).

### 3.2.2 Gaining Access

I gained access to potential study participants through AI events and the extended Taos network. I attended two AI events. The first event occurred in early spring 2016. As an attendee, I received a participant contact list, which included email addresses, organizational affiliation, city, and state/province. The attendees represented six different countries and 36 different

cities/provinces. None of the attendees were local to my city and state. The second event

occurred in the fall of 2018. For the second event, the contact list of attendees included

participants from 4 different countries, over 25 states/provinces/regions, and 50 cities. I used the

contact lists from both events to follow up with people that I had spent time with during the

event. In 2016, I sent letters via email to 15 attendees, and 10 people responded. Of those

respondents, all were willing to participate in the study, but due to scheduling conflicts, only

eight were available. The eight study participants lived in eight different cities and states. In

2018, I emailed 12 attendees I interacted with during the event. In retrospect, I should have sent

the invitations to all attendees and allowed them to accept or reject the invitation. I attribute my

reluctance to being a new researcher. Of those 12, eight agreed to participate in the study.

The eight participants lived in two different countries and seven different cities. None of

the participants lived in my city. In addition to the two AI events, I contacted the extended Taos

Community by contacting practitioners listed on the AI Commons website. I emailed 25

practitioners listed on the site. The email aimed to determine fit by providing background

information about the study's purpose and inviting them to participate (Magnusson & Marecek,

2015). Of the 25 emails sent, eight agreed to participate in the study. In addition, two referrals

agreed to become study participants, bringing the total number of participants to 26 AI

practitioners.

### 3.2.3 Participant Consent

Participants received a consent form to complete in advance of the interviews. The

consent form included the following key elements: the central purpose of the study and the data

collection procedures; comments about protecting the confidentiality of the respondents; a

statement about any known risks associated with participation in the study; the expected benefits

to accrue to the participants in the study; and the right of participants to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time (Creswell, 2007). In PDF format, participants returned signed copies of the consent form via email.

I asked participants to complete a Study Participant Questionnaire. The questionnaire asked how long the person had practiced AI, an estimated number of interventions including elements of AI, the specific elements of AI included in their interventions, the different types of organizations involved in AI interventions, and the countries in which the person has practiced AI. I compiled data from the Study Participant Questionnaire into a Study Participant Profile (Table 2). The 26 study participants had more than 388 combined years of experience practicing AI, with a median and mean of 15 years. Nearly a quarter of participants have 20 or more years of experience. The least amount of experience of a given participant was seven years. Study participants have led over 2,400 AI interventions in nearly 40 countries on six continents. Of the 26 practitioners, 23 had practiced AI in non-profit organizations, 21 had practiced in academia, and 20 had led AI interventions in the public sector. In addition, 15 of the 26 participants had practiced AI in religious organizations; 13 had worked in health; 12 had led interventions in information technology and the international sector; 11 had used AI in manufacturing; and eight had facilitated AI initiatives in the banking industry. In short, the participants represent an extensive arrangement of experiences with AI practices. Table 2 describes this detail and provides context for the analysis of findings in subsequent chapters.

**Table 2**

*Study Participant Profile*

| Pseudonym | Years practicing AI | # of AI Interventions | Types of Organizations | # of Countries |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cecily | 19 | 100+ | Academia, Information | 6 |

| | | | Technology, Health, Manufacturing, Not-for-profit, Religious, Public Sector, International (NGO) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Juanita | 20+ | 30+ | Academia, Health, Manufacturing, Not-for-profit, Religious, Public Sector | 3 |
| Jasmine | 20 | 250 | Academia, Banking, Information Technology, Not-for-profit, Religious, Public sector, International (NGO) | 8 |
| Lori | 18 | 100+ | Academia, Health, Manufacturing, Not-for-profit, Religious, Public Sector, International (NGOO | 3 |
| Leanne | 19 | 20+ | Academia, Health, Not-for-profit, Professional and Civic Associations, Communities of Practice | 1 |
| Nate | 19 | 50 | Banking, Manufacturing, Not-for-profit, Religious, Oil & Gas, Cruise Lines, Education, Consumer Products | 4 |
| Rayelle | 13 | 50+ | Banking, Information Technology, Telecommunications, Not-for-profit, Public Sector | 1 |
| Wynonna | 16 | 400+ | Academia, Information Technology, Health, Manufacturing, Not-for-profit, Religious, Public sector, International (NGO) | 4 |
| Constance | 13 | 7 | Manufacturing, Not-for-profit, Public Sector, Associations | 1 |
| Sharon | 9 | 100+ | Academia, Banking, Health, Not-for-profit, Religious, Public Sector, International | 6 |
| Travis | 12 | 100+ | Academia, Health, Not-for-profit, Religious, Public Sector, International, Education | 6 |
| Sonita | 22 | 100+ | Academia, Banking, Information Technology, Health, Manufacturing, Not-for-profit, Religious, Public Sector, International | 10 |
| Ralph | 14 | 30 | Academia, Manufacturing, Not-for-profit | 2 |
| Melanie | 8 | 30+ | Academia, Information | 1 |

| | | | Technology, Not-for-profit, Public Sector | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vivian | 10 | 15+ | Academia, Public Sector, Criminal Justice | 3 |
| Thomas | 20 | 100+ | Academia, Banking, Information Technology, Health, Telecommunications, Not-for-profit, Public Sector, International, Social enterprise sustainability | 4 |
| Carla | 16 | 100+ | Academia, Banking, Information Technology, Telecommunications, Not-for-profit, Religious, Public Sector, International, Non-pharma, Business Entrepreneurs | 3 |
| George | 8 | 50+ | Academia, Information Technology, Telecommunications, Not-for-profit, Religious, Public Sector, Utilities | 1 |
| Cassie | 20+ | Unknown | Healthcare, Not-for-profit, Small business | 1 |
| Lynette | 7 | 50-100 | Academia, Manufacturing, Not-for-profit, Religious, Public Sector, and Professional associations | 1 |
| Reagan | 15 | 100+ | Academia, Banking, Information Technology, Health, Manufacturing, Not-for-profit, Religious, Public Sector, International, Research | 3 |
| Sienna | 18 | 40+ | Information Technology, Religious, Healthcare | 1 |
| Renata | 10 | 100+ | Academia, Health, Not-for-profit, Public Sector, International, Insurance | 3 |
| Lita | 7 | 200+ | Academia, Manufacturing, Not-for-profit, Religious, Public Sector | 1 |
| Sinead | 25+ | 200+ | Academia, Information Technology, Manufacturing, Not-for-profit, Religious, Public Sector, International, Retail | 13 |
| Karima | 10 | 50 | Academia, Health, International | 3 |

## 3.3 Interviewing as a Data Collection Method

The research questions for this study sought knowledge about experiences of using AI in organizational change. The interview is a suitable data collection method to solicit experiences, perspectives, and worldviews. Interviews facilitate knowledge creation through questions and answers co-authored by the interviewer and interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Lindlof & Taylor, 2009). Interviews also enable the researcher to collect data "about things or processes that cannot be observed effectively by other means" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2009, p. 174). A semi-structured interview allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and situations, relied on open-ended questions, met the objective of obtaining detailed responses to research questions, and allowed for the emergence of participants' perspectives and interpretation of meanings (Charmaz, 2014; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Lindlof & Taylor, 2009; Patton, 2002). In addition, a semi-structured interview approach aligned with the methodological commitments of the study in that the interviewer and interviewee were actively constructing meaning together in a deductive way (Silverman, 2014).

### 3.3.1 Preparing for the Interviews

To prepare for the interviews, I designed an interview protocol. An interview protocol was an appropriate method to guide the conversation's general flow and ensure asking the right questions to produce knowledge about the research questions (Creswell, 2009, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Charmaz, 2014). The guide included opening remarks, introductory questions, transition questions, questions to solicit input relative to the research topics, and closing comments (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Creswell, 2009; Krueger & Casey, 2009; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I assumed that I might not ask every

question and would adjust the guide to accommodate more in-depth descriptions and different

conversational styles of study participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

In developing the interview protocol, I addressed several considerations for structuring

qualitative interviews. The first primary consideration was to elicit participants' views and

concerns while also addressing my concerns as a researcher. As Charmaz (2014) noted, "Both

interviewer and interview participant bring their own priorities, knowledge, and concerns to the

interview situation, which may not be entirely compatible" (p. 58). The second consideration

related to the quality of questions regarding appropriateness, clarity, and conciseness (Kvale &

Brinkmann, 2009; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The interview protocol included introductory

questions like, "What is your history using Appreciative Inquiry in your work?" Introductory

questions helped ease participants into the conversation and elicited background information on

participants' history using AI. I included transition questions to shift the participant's focus

toward the specific research questions. An example of a transition question was, "Have you had

an opportunity to think about a time when you were practicing AI in an organization and

encountered challenges?" A question related to the key research question was, "Can you describe

what happened when you were practicing AI in an organization and encountered challenges?"

Sub-questions were also included in the protocol to deepen the inquiry related to the research

questions. Sub-questions included "what" or "how" questions, which tend to "elicit spontaneous

descriptions from the subjects" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). An example of a sub-question was,

"What was your sense of how others around you were experiencing the situation?

I used an interview protocol refinement (IPR) framework to ensure the interview

questions aligned with the research questions, fostered inquiry-based conversation, and were

jargon-free (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). For example, the IPR framework helped to identify

appropriate interview questions to solicit participant knowledge about the central research

question (RQ1):

> *"What are experiences of dialectical tension associated with AI in organizational change*
>
> *efforts?"*

I developed several interview questions to align with RQ1, including the following:

> *"Can you think of a time when you were using AI and the focus turned away from the*
>
> *positive?"*
>
> *"What was the intended focus of the AI initiative?"*
>
> *"In what ways did the focus shift from the original intention?"*

The IPR framework helped test the interview questions for appropriateness and clarity.

### 3.3.2. Conducting Interviews

The study participants had three options for a one-on-one interview: face-to-face (in

person), web-based video/audio conferencing, or teleconference. All twenty-six participants

opted to interview via the web-based platform. The advantages of virtual interviews included

accessibility without the cost of travel, scheduling flexibility across different time zones, and

ease of audio and visual data capture (James & Busher, 2009; Hanna & Mwale, 2017). I selected

the JoinMe platform for the first eight interviews. The JoinMe platform offered an automatic

scheduling feature, toll-free access, voice-over-internet protocol (VOIP), and call recording

(audio only). I selected the Zoom platform for the additional 18 interviews because Zoom

offered audio and video recording and the basic service offered by JoinMe. Both web-based

platforms were effective alternatives to face-to-face interviews because the platforms enabled

synchronous (real-time) audio and visual interaction between the interviewer and interviewee

(Hanna & Mwale, 2017). Participants were emailed instructions on how to access the web-based

conferencing platform. The JoinMe and Zoom platforms provided recorded files immediately following the interviews. The JoinMe (audio files) and the Zoom (audio and visual) files have been stored on a secure, cloud-based platform. The names of participants have been changed to pseudonyms to protect anonymity. The names of organizations have also been masked to protect confidentiality.

The first eight interviews were scheduled and conducted between July 2016 and September 2016. I conducted the second set of 18 interviews between December 2018 and July 2019. I scheduled the initial eight interviews for one hour as a courtesy to participants. However, in three cases, the interview extended beyond the hour, with the participants' permission. The most extended interview lasted 1 hour and 23 minutes. I scheduled all future interviews for at least 90 minutes. Some participants prepared several stories to share and needed minimal prompting. Others needed prompts to help them stay on track. And at least one participant had trouble thinking of examples related to the research questions. In the latter case, I shifted the conversation to elicit more background information on his use of AI, which seemed to relax him. Within a few moments, he was able to share a challenging encounter in his AI practice. The interview protocol was helpful as a guide; however, I conducted each interview differently to enrich the study participant's experience (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Study participants provided 55 examples of AI-related tensions in organizational change interventions. Of the 55 examples, 36 included rich (thick) descriptions (Creswell, 2007). After conducting 26 interviews, there were no new surprises in the data, indicating a saturation point (Creswell, 2007).

## 3.4 Data Analysis Strategy

This section describes the strategy that I followed to analyze the data. A thematic analysis (TA) strategy (Yin, 2016; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018) aligned with the goals of this study to solicit experiences from study participants, interpret those experiences, and produce useful knowledge. The TA strategy provided a multi-step process for data analysis (Yin, 2016) that included compiling the data, disassembling the data, reassembling the data, interpreting the data, and drawing conclusions (Figure 4). I describe each step of the process in further detail in the following sections.

**Figure 4: Thematic Analysis (TA) Strategy**

**Step 1: Compile Data**

| Transcribe 26 interviews verbatim | Use Quirkos (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software) |

**Step 2: Disassemble Data**

| **Domain codes** | **Semantic codes** |
| --- | --- |
| Practitioners' experiences of tension (81 codes) <br> Assumptions about tensions (103 codes) <br> Implications of tensions (54 codes) <br> Effects on the process (45 codes <br> Navigating tensions (226 codes) | Means-end: X is way to do AI (140 codes) <br><br> Attribution: X is an attribute of AI (42 codes) <br><br> Rationale: X is a reason to do AI (3 codes) <br><br> Cause and effect: X is a result of AI (28 codes) |

**Step 3: Reassemble Data**

| **Taxonomic Coding (Example): Naming the shadow is a way to do AI** | |
| --- | --- |
| **Vulnerability Shadow (114 codes)** | **Authority Shadow (86 codes)** |
| **Doubt Shadow (50 codes)** | **Inequity Shadow (15 codes)** |

**Step 4: Interpret and Further Reduce the Data**

| Shadow Codes | Underlying Tensions | Refined Shadow Interpretations |
|---|---|---|
| Authority | Hierarchical-collaborative Leadership | Leadership Shadow |
| Vulnerability/Inequity | Free expression-limited expression | Voice Shadow |
| Doubt | Future-present later evolved to Short-Term Orientation (STO)-Long-Term Orientation (LTO) | Temporal Shadow |

### 3.4.1 Compiling the Data

The first step of the TA strategy was to compile study participant interview data into a usable form (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2016). I compiled the interview data collected via audio and video files into written transcripts. The transcribed interviews totaled 575 single-spaced pages of data. I transcribed 25 of the 26 interviews. I sent one interview out to a professional transcription service. I decided the advantage of staying close to the data outweighed the convenience of having the transcription done by someone else (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I employed a transcription protocol to capture the actual words spoken, verbatim, by the interviewer and interviewee, with no "clean up" or polishing of speech (Cibils, 2019; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Transcripts included notations of laughter or nodding to provide added dimension but did not include notations of other gestures (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

I used Quirkos, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), to assist in data storage, retrieval, and coding. I selected Quirkos based on ease of use and the capability to organize coding into hierarchies and clusters (Saldaña, 2016). The Quirkos software

was compatible with Microsoft Word, allowing me to easily upload transcripts and download summary reports.

### 3.4.2 Disassembling the Data

The next step in the TA process was to take the data apart to create meaningful groupings (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2016) in preparation for disassembling the data. I read and re-read the transcripts multiple times to get a sense of the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I revisited my research questions, philosophical assumptions, and ontological and epistemological perspectives to confirm the type of knowledge to be generated by the study (Saldaña, 2016). Next, I determined that coding was appropriate for disassembling the data. Charmaz (2014) defines coding as "categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data" (p.111). Codes enhanced my ability as a researcher to "explicate how people enact or respond to events, what meanings they hold, and how and why these actions and meanings evolved" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113).

I utilized domain and semantic relationship coding strategies to discover and categorize knowledge collected from study participants (Saldaña, 2016; Spradley, 1979). A domain coding strategy facilitated data disassembly into categories (Spradley, 1979; McCurdy, Spradley, & Shandy, 2005). The domain categories aligned with my research questions regarding practitioners' experiences, assumptions about tensions, implications of tensions, effects of tension on the process, and navigation strategies. For example, I identified navigating strategies as a domain name, navigating strategies (Table 3).

**Table 3**

***Domain Coding Example***

| Domain | Examples from data |
|---|---|
| Navigating dialectical | Reframing tension (54) |
| | Acknowledge the tension (42) |

| tensions (226 codes) | Leadership coaching/development (29) |
|---|---|
| | Rely on the AI process (26) |
| | Create a safe space for positive engagement (11) |
| | Focus on concrete next steps (9) |
| | Find common ground (9) |
| | Teach new skills (8) |
| | Diagnose the tension (7) |
| | Diagnose inequities (7) |
| | Honor cultural norms (5) |
| | Facilitator owns the tension (5) |
| | Enact policy change (3) |
| | Tension deferred (3) |
| | View tension through core values lens (2) |
| | Emphasize voluntary participation in the process (2) |
| | Expand dualistic thinking (2) |
| | Address emotions (1) |
| | Hold up the mirror (1) |

I also used semantic relationship coding to disassemble the data (Saldaña, 2016; Spradley, 1979). I chose four semantic relationships that I believed would help me to analyze the data with a fresh perspective: means-end (X is a way to do AI); attribution (X is an attribute of AI); rationale (X is a reason for doing AI); and cause and effect (X is a result of AI). I read the transcripts multiple times to identify examples of the different semantic relationships. When examples were found, they were assigned a code that matched the name of the semantic relationship (Table 4). For example, an excerpt from a transcript read, "If I am going to do this again, I've got to be willing to push back, to name the shadows." I coded the excerpt as a means-end semantic relationship: naming the shadows is a way to do AI.

**Table 4**

*Semantic Relationships Coding Example*

| **Means-End Semantic Relationship** | **Examples** |
|---|---|
| X is a way to do AI (103 codes) | Preparing leaders (25) |
| | Meeting people where they are (15) |
| | Blended methodologies (14) |
| | Covert (not naming AI) (13) |
| | Naming the shadows (12) |

| | Persistence (6) |
| --- | --- |
| | Relationship building (5) |
| | Trust building (4) |
| | Training (3) |
| | Overt (naming AI) (2) |
| | Coaching (2) |
| | Storytelling (1) |
| | Put people first (1) |

### 3.4.3 Reassembling Data

I reassembled the data by combining domain codes and identifying themes (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2016). I used a taxonomic coding strategy to reduce the data by showing patterns in the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). A taxonomy defines hierarchical lists of domain data with a shared attribute (McCurdy et al., 2005). For example, *naming the shadows* emerged as a means-end semantic relationship from the transcripts. Looking across the data, I saw patterns that seemed linked to unnamed organizational shadows. I created four preliminary codes for each of the potential shadows: the shadow of authority, the shadow of doubt, the shadow of vulnerability, and the shadow of inequity. Next, I coded short phrases to describe the shadow. For example, I assigned 86 codes to the shadow of authority, including telling versus engaging, blocking (participation), and management knowing best (Table 5).

**Table 5**

*Taxonomic Analysis: Acknowledging the Shadow*

| **Shadow Description** | **Codes** |
| --- | --- |
| Shadow of Authority (86) | Telling versus engaging (11) |
| | Blocking (11) |
| | Management knows best (10) |
| | Perceived loss of control (8) |
| | Taking charge (6) |
| | Them not us (6) |
| | Handle it (6) |
| | Leaders drive change (4) |
| | Profit motivation (4) |
| | Unilateral decision-making (4) |

| | Censoring (3) |
| | Blaming (3) |
| | Favoritism (3) |
| | Dismantling (3) |
| | One-off versus ongoing (2) |
| | Regression (2) |

Next, I reviewed all 26 transcripts again to identify data that fit one or more shadow codes. Data included phrases and longer descriptions. There were over 100 codes assigned to the shadow of vulnerability, close to 90 for the shadow of authority, 50 for the shadow of doubt, and 15 for the shadow of inequity.

### 3.4.4 Interpreting and Further Reducing the Data

The fourth step of the TA strategy was to interpret the relational meaning between all coded data (Yin, 2016). At this stage, I needed to look beyond taxonomies and domains to think more broadly about what was happening within and across participants' experiences and not just restate codes and themes as interpretations (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I revisited the research questions to ensure my interpretations stayed close to the study's goals. I also reviewed my central research question, reminding me to focus my interpretations on dialectical tensions associated with AI in organizational change efforts. Three tensions emerged from the data: hierarchical-collaborative leadership, free expression-limited expression, and short-term orientation (STO)-long-term orientation (LTO). Further analysis helped to clarify and refine my interpretation of hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension through the lens of a leadership shadow, free expression-limited expression tension through the lens of a voice shadow, and STO-LTO from the perspective of a temporal shadow.

I developed an argumentative outline to facilitate the construction of claims. For example, as I considered the tension of hierarchical-collaborative leadership, I developed

argumentative claims to answer the central research questions (RQ1 and RQ2, and sub-questions.

I repeated the process with free expression-limited expression and STO-LTO. The arguments

became the foundation for the claims presented in the findings.

My interpretations of the data aimed to meet the five goals of good qualitative

interpretation, identified by Yin (2016) and outlined by Castleberry & Nolen (2018):

> First, the interpretation should be complete. Readers should be able to see the beginning, middle, and end of how the interpretations were drawn. Second, the interpretations should be fair in that other researchers should reach the same interpretation if given the same data. Third, the interpretations should also be accurate and representative of the raw data. Fourth, in the context of current literature, good studies will add value to our understanding of the topic. Fifth, the data methods and subsequent interpretations should be credible and gain respect from colleagues. (p.812)

As I developed interpretations, I referred to Yin's (2016) goals as a guide. For example, I

tested my interpretation of shadows with one study participant to assess the credibility of my

interpretation. The study participant was receptive to shadows and cited examples of when

shadows surfaced in his AI work.

As the interpretation process evolved, free expression-limited expression, hierarchical-

collaborative leadership, and STO-LTO tensions were central to answering the research

questions. Yin (2016) also posited that data analysis should lead to one or more conclusions

about the broader significance of the study (Yin, 2016). Conclusions may call for new research,

challenge conventional social stereotypes, introduce new concepts, theories, or discoveries,

generalize conclusions to a broader set of situations, or pose a call to action (Yin, 2016). I will

present conclusions about this study in later chapters.

## 3.5 Data Validation

To test the strength of the findings, I used a data validation methodology that involved taking raw data from the initial research back to individuals or groups with similar backgrounds and expertise who would recognize the findings as true and accurate (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). I chose Interpretive Focus Groups (IFGs) as my primary data validation method because it allowed me to engage more participants in one setting. IFGs emerged out of feminist research (Leavy, 2007) to extend the analysis of existing and the co-creation of new data as participants examine raw data chunks and share their interpretations of what they see (Favero & Heath, 2012; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Redman-MacLaren, Mills & Tommbe, 2014). My secondary method for data validation was individual interviews for anyone interested in participating in the process but unable to attend a scheduled IFG session.

### 3.5.1 Member Recruitment

I considered the AI Practitioner community ideal for IFG member recruitment since they likely had the requisite knowledge and expertise to validate the findings (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). I sent an email to Dr. Lindsey Godwin, Academic Director of the David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry at Champlain College in Burlington, Vermont, USA, informing her that I was interested in inviting alums of the AI certification program to participate in focus groups to test my findings. I explained the purpose of my study is to understand the experiences of practitioners who have used AI for organizational change, and during the process, the focus on the positive shifted in some way. Further, I included the aim to interpret shifts experienced by practitioners and what happened. As a token of appreciation, I offered volunteers a $10.00 e-gift card to Starbucks (coffee). I also included three optional dates to participate in the study. The Taos Institute and the Cooperrider Center responded positively to my request and sent a mass

email to AI certificate alums and the broader AI practitioner community. I sent a similar email

request to Dawn Dole, Executive Director of the Taos Institute. The mission of the Taos Institute

is to explore, develop, and disseminate ideas and practices that promote creative, appreciative,

and collaborative processes in families, communities, and organizations worldwide. Dole is also

the Knowledge Manager of the Appreciative Inquiry Commons, a virtual space for people

interested in AI to share resources and connect with the global AI community. Dole forwarded

my email request to 750 people affiliated with the Taos Institute, not all of whom were AI

practitioners. Godwin and Dole agreed to send the email request three times over three weeks.

     As people expressed interest in joining a focus group, I followed up the same day with an

email or telephone call to thank them for their interest and to confirm their preference for one of

the scheduled sessions. The following email to participants included a Zoom link for their

scheduled IFG session and a request to read, sign, and return a consent form and background

questionnaire. Both forms followed the same format I used to collect data from the original 26

study participants. I requested participants return the completed forms to me via email or postal

mail before their scheduled IFG session. I also included the data chunks as discussion prompts

for the IFG. I selected six excerpts of raw data that represented the significant findings associated

with free expression-limited expression, hierarchical-collaborative leadership, STO-LTO, and

the role of positivity in AI. In my invitation letter, I explained that the session aimed to solicit

their thoughts about what is happening in the excerpts and how the examples compare or contrast

with their own experiences using AI. Further, I invited participants to reflect on how they have

navigated tensions in their AI practice.

     A total of 15 volunteers confirmed their participation in one of the three scheduled IFG

sessions. The participants represented an international demographic of AI practitioners having

more than 250 years of cumulative experience (Table 6). Of the 15 volunteers, I slotted six in the

first group, four in the second group, and five in the third group. However, due to scheduling

conflicts, one participant in the first group requested to be moved to the second session. And two

volunteers in the third group dropped out at the last minute. Two people could not attend one of

the three IFG sessions but were available to participate in individual interviews to provide their

interpretations of the data excerpts. Adding the two individual interviews brought the number of

participants to 15.

**Table 6**
*Data Validation Participant Profile*

| Pseudonym | Years practicing AI | # of AI Interventions | Types of Organizations | # of Countries |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lorenzo | 13 | 15 | Academia, public sector, international, tourism | 1 |
| Adrienne | 10 | 1 | Not-for-profit | 1 |
| Grace | 15 | 35 | Academia, health, not-for-profit, public sector | 1 |
| Jackson | 17 | 50+ | Not-for-profit, schools | 2 |
| Julia | 27 | 100+ | Academia, banking, information technology, health, manufacturing, telecommunications, not-for-profit, religious, public sector, international | 13 |
| Julian | 26 | 150 | Academia, banking, information technology, health, manufacturing, telecommunications, not-for-profit, religious, public sector, international | 19 |
| Jacob | 27 | 100+ | Academia, not-for-profit, public sector, international | 7 |
| Donald | 16 | 100+ | Academia, banking, health, manufacturing, telecommunications, not-for-profit, public sector, international, military, fashion, consumer goods, | 7 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | agri-business, media, transportation | |
| Nancy | 7 | 500 | Academia, information technology, health, Telecommunications, not-for-profit, religious, public sector, international, counseling | 3 |
| Iris | 25 | 10 | Academia, health, manufacturing, not-for-profit, religious, public sector | 1 |
| Sebastian | He completed the consent form but not the questionnaire | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Joy | 22 | 100+ | Academia, banking, information technology, health, manufacturing, not-for-profit, religious, public sector, international | 6 |
| Jade | 18 | 50 | Academia, information technology, manufacturing, not-for-profit, public sector, financial planning, start-ups | 1 |
| Cedric | 17 | 100+ | Academia, information technology, health, not-for-profit, religious, public sector, international, | 5 |
| Tracy | 12 | 200+ | Academia, banking, information technology, manufacturing, not-for-profit, religious, public sector, international, energy, economic development, management consulting | 11 |

### 3.5.2 IFG Moderation

I was the lead moderator for the three focus groups. The role of the moderator is to guide

the IFG conversation while ensuring that participants can speak freely (Hesse-Biber & Leavy,

2007). Dr. Renee Heath, my academic advisor, was also in attendance. Dr. Heath's role was to take note of comments and themes emerging from the session. I began each session by welcoming participants. I also reminded participants about the recording of the call. In addition, I informed participants about the transcription service add-on feature (Otter a.i.). Next, I invited participants to introduce themselves by stating their names and geographic location. I then provided a brief overview of the study and thanked participants for returning the signed consent agreement. I also reminded participants about their voluntary participation, letting them know they could withdraw from the study anytime. I asked for a verbal acknowledgment to confirm their understanding. I stated that I might use quotes to support the data; however, I would remove any identifiable details to maintain their confidentiality. I finished the introduction by asking each person to consent to maintain the confidentiality of their fellow participants.

I called attention to the data excerpts included in their email invitation. I explained that the excerpts were from AI practitioners participating in my research. I paused to allow everyone a moment to read the excerpts projected on the Zoom screen. I explained the intention of using the excerpts as prompts and that we may or may not discuss all six excerpts. Once everyone had indicated they were ready to begin the discussion, I invited them to offer their reflections about any tensions they noticed and their thoughts about how the data compares or contrasts to their experiences navigating tensions in AI. I informed the group that anyone could start the conversation focusing on any excerpt, meaning proceeding linearly from excerpt one to excerpt two was unnecessary. I emphasized the intention to have a free-flowing conversation that allowed everyone to speak while honoring one voice at a time.

In the first two IFGs, which included five members each, we noticed that participants initially wanted to know more about the conditions leading up to the tension. We encouraged

them to focus on whether the excerpts presented were realistic and if they had experienced

similar situations in their AI practice. In the first and second sessions, two people stated they had

not experienced the scenarios depicted in the excerpts. However, we noticed that once one group

member acknowledged that they had personally experienced some, if not all, of the excerpts, the

group began to recall their own stories of anomalies. In the third group, which had three

members, the conversation developed quickly as one of the members stated upfront that their

experiences resonated with all the excerpts. In each of the three sessions, we paused at different

intervals to allow Dr. Heath to mirror the themes she heard from the group discussion. We

projected the themes on the screen. We asked participants to confirm whether the notes

accurately described the discussion up to that point. In all three sessions, participants

unanimously confirmed the accuracy of the themes captured in the notes.

### 3.5.3 Thematic Analysis

I read and re-read the 71 pages of transcribed notes from the IFG sessions and individual

interviews. I used Microsoft Word to cut and paste the 63 stories participants shared into themes

consistent with my initial findings (Table 7). The themes included topics identified in my initial

data collection regarding leadership buy-in for AI's collaborative leadership approach, the

expression and limited expression of painful narratives, the role of AI principles, strategies for

navigating tension, and understanding/misunderstanding of positivity in AI. In addition, new data

emerged regarding philosophy versus methodology, invited versus mandatory, generativity

versus positivity, leadership authenticity, story fatigue, the third voice, and the expression of

paradox in AI, such as the notion of staying with what isn't to elevate what is or the frustrated

dream.

**Table 7**

***Themes from interpretive stories***

| Themes | Number of stories |
|---|---|
| Leadership buy-in for AI | 17 |
| Expression of painful narratives | 11 |
| The embodiment of AI principles—not  just the positive | 9 |
| Navigating free expression-limited expression tension | 9 |
| Navigating hierarchical-collaborative tension | 7 |
| Navigating tension by reframing tension as complementary dialectics | 7 |

## 3.6 My Role as Researcher

The final section of this chapter positions my role as a researcher within the context of a constructionist, interpretive research paradigm. I examine my role at different junctures in the research process. Lastly, I discuss the ethical considerations of my role as a researcher.

I entered the doctoral program through my relationship with the Taos Institute. When I embarked on my research journey, I questioned whether I had the knowledge and expertise to write about a positive organizational change methodology, such as AI. I earned my M.S. in Organization Development (OD) from The American University in Washington, D.C., in 1989. I practiced OD as an internal consultant in the telecommunications industry from 1989 to 1992 before launching my private OD practice in late 1992. Although I had used elements of AI methodology in my professional practice for over a decade, I was not certified as an AI practitioner. I used the methodology enough times to form impressions about AI's strengths and weaknesses. I spent the first year of my studies reading and learning about social constructionist theory and AI scholarship. As I learned more, I anticipated this research would influence how I viewed myself as a change agent and researcher. I hoped that my research would inform my practice and that the lessons I learned about the practice of AI and positive change would inform scholarship. Coming into the study, I knew I was not a neutral or objective party. As Charmaz

(2014) noted, "We are part of the world we study, the data we collect, and the analyses we produce" (p.17). I committed to staying aware of my active role in constructing each study phase to mitigate potential bias.

My role as a researcher involved gaining access to study participants. Identifying research participants involved gaining access to a community of AI professionals. My first exposure to the community occurred at an AI gathering of practitioners. I was a relative stranger to the community of practitioners. My goals for attending the event were to learn more about AI and the AI community of practitioners and to network with potential research participants. I observed a tight-knit community that had deep experience using AI. I also experienced a sense of welcome. After the first evening, I lost the feeling of being an interloper. I also made several connections with attendees I thought would be ideal candidates for my research. I refrained from asking people to participate in the study during the event. I did not want anyone to feel compelled to agree because of "face-to-face" pressure. I chose, instead, to follow up with my "warm" a couple of weeks after the event. I was pleasantly surprised at the willingness of seasoned AI practitioners to participate in my research. I sensed a commitment on their part to advance knowledge about AI. As such, I felt responsible for doing good research that would contribute to the field.

I noticed that my confidence in conducting interviews increased over time. Although I had developed an interview protocol guide, the earlier interviews often focused too much on preliminary warm-up questions. I realized that discussing substantive experiences related to the research questions would be a better use of time. I also learned not to make assumptions about how participants were practicing AI. In one of my early interviews, I asked the study participant how she was applying the 4-D methodology. The interviewee initially seemed to be confused by

my question. At that moment, I realized I had assumed how people used AI methodology. From then on, I was more conscious of asking clarifying questions regarding how people practice AI.

Throughout the interview process, I learned to pay attention to how people talked about AI and how I talked about AI. One participant questioned my focus on "challenges" with AI, noting that the word was a negative label. The participant's reaction was not unexpected, considering AI's constructionist principle posited *words create worlds*. Instead of becoming defensive, I acknowledged my bias, which put the participant at ease. I wanted the participant to feel comfortable challenging me and my use of language, which created a more level playing field. The participant moved on and could identify several "challenging" experiences he had encountered using AI.

As a researcher, I built trust and rapport with study participants (Creswell, 2009). There were several instances where participants exposed their vulnerability relative to what they perceived as failures in their AI practice. In one example, a study participant described an AI summit that she had facilitated focused on eliminating racism. During the summit, several attendees accused the study participant, a white woman, of being a racist, as she tried to get attendees to focus on possibilities rather than on past injustices. She remembered how emotional it was for her, saying, "I would go in my room, and I would just cry, cry, cry, and just splash on water. And I would meditate and ground myself, and I would go back out." A second study participant shared her experience co-leading an AI initiative with attendees in a bitter conflict about school funding. The practitioner recalled how the attendees were rude to each other and also rude to her. She also noted how the attendees seemed to show more favoritism toward her male colleague. She reflected on her feelings and said, "It becomes a downward spiral, in my own narrative as a practitioner, feeling like a victim." In a third example, a female study

participant recalled how she experienced self-doubt about her ability to work effectively with

older white males in senior leadership positions. The practitioner noted, "There's something

about a woman talking about, asking into strengths, and focusing on the positives that feels like,

oh, sweet girl." And, in a final example, a study participant described her support of a client

seeking funding for an AI initiative. The client had also partnered with a financial consultant to

work alongside the study participant. According to the study participant, the consultant had a

much more traditional approach to the project and questioned the viability of AI. The study

participant noted, "he would write me and copy her on these long emails as to why what I was

doing wasn't working. And I got angry. I got defensive. And I would reply back with all of the

evidence defending AI." In those examples, I demonstrated empathy and respect for their

willingness to be open and vulnerable. I maintained rapport with participants by pausing,

listening, and acknowledging their thoughts and emotions. I recalled an observation by Charmaz

(2014) regarding women interviewing women:

> The quality of women's responses may range widely when other people had
> previously silenced them about the interview topic or the topic elicits shame. Hence,
> participants' responses to the interview may range from illuminating, cathartic, or
> revelatory to uncomfortable, painful, or overwhelming. The topic, its meaning, and
> the circumstance of the participant's life, as well as the interviewer's skills, affect
> how women experience their respective interviews (Charmaz, p. 77)

My ability to stay present with participants enhanced the interview process and deepened

the trust between the interviewee and interviewer. In all four examples cited above, I allowed

each person to process insights from their experience. The woman accused of being a racist

offered an insight that "people need to be heard and acknowledged." For the woman who

experienced rudeness and gender bias, she reflected, "I need to connect with them, even if it is

the most difficult connection to make." For the woman who felt diminished as a "sweet girl" for

focusing on the positive, her reflection was not to be afraid to say, "How do we engage and collaborate to figure out either how to stop wasting your time and my time and your money? Or how do we figure out how to move things forward?" And, for the woman who found herself defending AI to a critic, she reflected, "Sometimes, you have to just walk away from those situations for my own health and sanity."

As a researcher, I noticed how my biases affected my interactions with participants and the data. A bias that I was keenly aware of in the initial stages of the study was my "positivist shadow." My natural inclination to solve problems was to search for "the" answer. Hanging out in the constructionist space did not come naturally to me. As such, I realized the importance of continually challenging my thinking in a way that opened up possibilities rather than shut them down. I was constantly reminded of my role as a constructionist researcher to learn about participants' experiences in a way that knowledge and meaning were co-constructed. As I sought to understand and interpret the data, I also noticed my tendency to go "native," meaning, at times, I would find myself standing in the shoes of the practitioner versus the shoes of an academic researcher. With the help of my advisors, I worked diligently to develop a researcher's mindset as I worked with the data.

My role as a researcher was to uphold ethical practices. I followed ethical guidelines for obtaining informed consent, protecting the confidentiality of study participants by using aliases, safeguarding stored data, and being mindful of power imbalances that favor the researcher (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In one of my interviews, the participant expressed concern about whether her identity and comments would appear on social media. I assured her that the information would not be made public in that way, which eased her concerns. I explained that the research was for academic purposes and not for social media platforms. I explained that I would

use pseudonyms and mask the names of client organizations. The participant agreed and

proceeded with the interview.

       This chapter explained the methods I employed in my research and my role as a

researcher. This background is foundational to the three findings chapters that follow.

## CHAPTER 4: THE VOICE SHADOW

### 4.1 Introduction

Following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, tensions have risen across the globe as people have called for organizations to take a stance against racial and social injustice. Business leaders have issued public statements expressing their commitment to positive change, emphasizing listening to employees who have endured painful inequities as a critical first step. In June, 2020, 3M published an on-line statement (https://news.3m.com/Listening,-understanding,-acting) that read, "We have been intentional about listening to our employees, especially those in our African American community. We listened to their pain, to their anger, and to their exhaustion…taking time to listen and understand was our first step as a company. A memo sent to all Disney employees from CEO Bob Chapek, Executive Chairman Bob Iger, and Chief Diversity Officer Latondra stated, "We resolve to use our compassion, our creative ideas, and our collective sense of humanity to ensure we are fostering a culture that acknowledges our people's feelings and their pain" (Patton, 2020). Intel's CEO, Bob Swan, wrote, "To our black employees and communities inside and outside Intel, I hear you and see you. You are hurting deeply. You are angry. You are tired" (Intel Newsroom, 2020). Salesforce said, "Our primary focus is standing with and supporting our Black employees in this time of incredible grieving, pain, and loss" (Yu, 2020).

The corporate statements acknowledged the importance of supporting people in expressing stories of inequity that have long been suppressed. However, tension persisted as employees from companies like Pinterest (Jones, 2020), Facebook (Durkee, 2020), and Adidas (Butler-Young, 2020) took to social media to talk about racial inequities related to hiring,

promotions, and pay. The actions of employees indicated that they wanted to have a say and they wanted their input to influence positive change. The challenge for organizational leaders and positive change practitioners is navigating change and managing tensions related to what people think they can or cannot talk about openly.

This chapter introduces the voice shadow. The shadow has been interpreted in AI literature as the opposite or dark side of organizations that emerges when change participants are asked to focus on the positive aspects of organizational life and are reminded of contradictory experiences (Fitzgerald, Oliver, & Hoxsey, 2010; Jung, 1968; Bowles, 1991; Kolodziejski, 2004). Kolodziejski (2004) conceptualized the shadow as "trapped, untapped potential" (p.64), which scholars suggest has generative potential (Fitzgerald & Oliver, 2012; Wasserman, 2012). This study advances AI scholarship on organizational shadow by viewing the shadow through the lens of dialectical tension theory. In dialectic scholarship, contradictory needs are not judged as good or bad, and one need not prevail over the other (Baxter, 1988). A dialectical frame allows us to see the dynamic interplay between two simultaneous and opposing needs (Baxter & Montgomery, 1997; Tracy, 2004) underlying the shadow as a space of tension and possibility. In this chapter, the voice shadow illuminates the tension between free expression and limited expression of negative thoughts and concerns. The chapter begins with the illustrative story of an AI practitioner called Travis. The story sets the stage for discussing assumptions about expression in literature that undergird my research. I then return to Travis' experience to contextualize the analysis of practitioners' experiences of free expression-limited expression dialectic.

Next, I discuss the context for tension, including perceived limitations about voicing problems or negativity in a positive change process. The chapter continues with a discussion of

the different theoretical frames practitioners use to navigate dialectical tension. The section that

follows presents the various tactics practitioners used to navigate tension, including reliance on

AI principles of free choice and wholeness to support the expression of counternarratives and

skillful inquiry to bring forth generative dialogue about the "elephants in the room." The chapter

concludes by discussing the theoretical implications of constructing the voice shadow as a

dialectic of opposing needs for free expression-limited expression and the practical implications

of the tension for avoiding the trap of toxic positivity.

> *Travis has practiced AI since 2007. He has worked in six countries and various sectors,*
> *including academia, health, public, and not-for-profit. Travis and a colleague led an AI*
> *session to evaluate new-hire orientation training for prison staff. The session was*
> *attended by 25 recent hires and two prison officials who had designed the training*
> *program. On day one of the training, participants were asked to identify the positive*
> *aspects of their 10-week training program. At the end of day one, Travis described the*
> *session as "hard work but a good day." He also said that he had a feeling of "something*
> *not right." The original plan for day two was for the practitioners to lead with a formal*
> *introduction to AI. However, participants formed what Travis described as a*
> *"delegation" to express their dissatisfaction with "all this positive shit." Participants*
> *stated they had not been allowed to talk about their 10-week orientation. Travis recalled,*
> *"It was quite traumatic. it was quite a challenge, suddenly realizing that we were missing*
> *something." He and his colleague quickly improvised the agenda by putting the 25*
> *participants into small groups and soliciting their feedback on the most challenging and*
> *the hardest thing they had to do. The officers talked about the aspects of their orientation*
> *that were not positive, including the shock of seeing prisons in terrible condition, the*
> *threats they experienced, and the anger they felt because of a lack of organizational*
> *support. Travis introduced concepts from David Marquette's book, Turn the Ship Around,*
> *to "give them some tools." As he reflected on his experience, Travis noted the importance*
> *of letting people download, adding, "I think through the AI process, you can gloss over*
> *that."*

## 4.2 Voice Shadow: Underlying Tension of Free Expression-Limited Expression

Travis' exemplar illustrates AI practitioners' experiences managing the tension of free

expression-limited expression underlying the voice shadow. Assumptions about expression in

organizational studies have evolved. Traditional change approaches, such as Lewin's (1947)

unfreeze-movement-freeze process, involve diagnosis of the situation (unfreeze), change

implementation (movement), and adoption (freeze). Bushe and Marshak (2020; 2014; 2009)

classified Lewin's approach as Diagnostic Organization Development (OD). In a Diagnostic OD

approach to change, management typically vetted participant input, meaning participants may

have a say about change but may not influence how change is focused or implemented (Bushe &

Marshak, 2020; 2014; 2009). The emergence of Dialogic Organization Development (OD) in the

1980s illuminated a set of assumptions about expression that differed from traditional Diagnostic

OD (Bushe & Marshak, 2020; 2014; 2009). Dialogic OD assumes reality is socially constructed

through widespread engagement, and organizational members have equal opportunities to

influence outcomes (Bushe & Marshak, 2020). In Hosseini and Sabokro's (2022) systematic

literature review of 49 articles on organizational voice, theoretical assumptions about expression

include employees sharing their opinions to demonstrate support for organizational decisions

(Barry & Wilkinson, 2016), improve current work processes (Boxall, Freeman, & Haynes,

2018); and communicate dissatisfaction with the current situation (Holland, Teicher, &

Donaghey, 2019)., Appreciative inquiry is an example of Dialogic OD (Cooperrider, Barrett &

Srivastva, 1995). AI summits convene multiple stakeholders in the social construction of change

to give diverse participants an equal opportunity to have a say in change and influence change

outcomes (Ludema et al.,2003). Scholars stress the need for AI participants to experience

summits as a safe place to candidly share their hopes and fears (McQuaid, 2019).

Emerging scholarship on counternarratives adds to the discussion of expression.

Counternarrative is "a narrative that takes on meaning through its relation with one or more other

narratives" (Lundholt, Maagaard, & Piekut, 2018, p.1). Scholars posit counternarratives reflect

people's stories that diverge from the dominant narrative (Bamberg, 2004; Lundholt et al., 2018;

Stanley, 2007). Lundholt et al. (2018) emphasized that counternarratives are not necessarily oppositional but do reflect different interpretations of organizational reality, adding, "Attention to counternarratives can help organizations make tensions among differing perspectives salient by bringing the unheard and unsaid to light and making alternative viewpoints visible for analysis and discussion" (p.8).

A recent flurry of articles on toxic positivity suggests that a dominant focus on the positive can limit the expression of emotions of sadness, disappointment, anger, and frustration (Collins, 2022; Cross, 2022; Tufvesson, 2020) and can marginalize individuals for expressing emotions not deemed positive (Cross, 2022); however, there is an absence of empirical studies supporting this argument. In earlier literature, some AI scholars have questioned if a predominant focus on the positive can limit what POC participants think is discussible. For example, one of the eight philosophical principles undergirding AI is the positive principle, which establishes the norm of positive inquiry to affect positive change, positive affect, and social bonding (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003; Cooperrider et al., 2003; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). The ubiquitousness of the positive principle in AI practice has raised concerns among scholars that essential conversations about negative organizational experiences may be censored or ignored (Fineman, 2006; Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Grant & Humphries, 2006; Pratt, 2002). Johnson (2013) argued that AI's focus on positive aspirations might lead practitioners to regard conversations about problematic topics as the gateway to spiraling dysfunction or stagnation. Hill and Onyett (2012) questioned if imposing a norm of positivity can lead the practitioner to miss significant shifts in group dynamics, such as the proverbial "elephant in the room" or "moose on the table."

I return to Travis' story to illustrate the practitioner's experience of free expression-limited expression dialectic. The agenda on day one engaged participants in dialogue about the positive aspects of their 10-week orientation. In AI methodology, positive questions amplify existing strengths and future aspirations, which leads to long-term positive change (Cooperrider et al., 2005). However, Travis' sense of "something not right" foreshadowed an emerging tension. On day two of the session, the delegation's protest of "all this positive shit" signaled to the practitioners the participants' need for a different conversation about their orientation, likely to surface problems and concerns. Travis faced a decision whether to allow for or limit the free expression of talk that was not positive in an AI session designed to focus on positive change.

In 32 exemplars, practitioners described experiences using AI when they faced a moment to freely allow for or limit the expression of negative thoughts and concerns. The dialectic was visible in Melanie's experience leading an AI summit for 60 representatives of a public sector agency. Melanie has facilitated more than three dozen AI interventions since 2000. She has worked in academia, information technology, not-for-profit, and public sector organizations in one country. During the summit, Melanie showed a video about valuing the positive in everyday life. According to Melanie, in the many times she had shown the video, the audience response was always overwhelmingly favorable. In this case, one participant raised his hand and shouted, "What a bunch of bullshit that was." The participant was an ardent environmentalist who objected to the video production's carbon footprint. The participant also said, "You're probably not going to want to hear from me for the rest of the time." Melanie said the entire room fell silent, and everyone looked to her to see how she would respond.

Constance also faced a moment when she had to decide whether to allow for or limit negative talk. Constance began using AI in 2005. She has worked in one country and has

facilitated AI sessions with organizations that include manufacturing, not-for-profit, public

sector, and associations. The CEO, COO, and head of HR for a global membership organization

had recently decided to reduce staff and change professional membership requirements,

including certifications. The staff disapproved of the changes and accused the senior leaders of

acting impulsively. Membership renewals declined because many members disagreed with

changes affecting their professional certifications. The purpose of the AI summit was to bring

diverse stakeholders together to co-create new ways to grow membership. Constance designed a

staff workshop to identify peak organizational experiences. According to Constance, several

participants stated, "You're not letting us talk about the negative stuff." Constance recalled not

wanting them to focus on the negative, but they insisted they would not participate unless she

agreed.

The three exemplars in this section illustrate practitioners' experiences of free-expression-

limited expression tension when using AI for POC. The dialectic frame allows us to see how

positive-focused dialogue can evoke contradictory thoughts and emotions, setting the stage for

tension. Practitioners faced the challenge of allowing or limiting free expression of talk about

problems or concerns.

## 4.3 Questions that Surface Tension

In the 32 exemplars of free-expression-limited expression dialectic, tension arose amid

questions about what is or is not discussible in the context of positive change dialogue. In Travis'

exemplar, the formation of the delegation suggests a questioning of what talk other than "this

positive shit" is allowed. Similarly, in the case of Constance, participants questioned if the

process would allow them to talk about the 'negative stuff." In Melanie's example, the participant

questioned if others would want to hear from him again after his critical comments about a

positive change video. Karima, an AI practitioner with ten years of experience, said, "It could be the person who likes and talks about the methodology, or it could be the receiver's end, but the story you can tell yourself is that I can't say anything negative."

A further illustration of tension arising amid questions about what is discussible in AI is Sinead's exemplar. Sinead has over 25 years of experience using AI in various settings, including academia, information technology, manufacturing, retail, public sector, and not-for-profit organizations. During the planning phase of an AI initiative with a religious organization focused on fundraising, Sinead became aware of a recent round of redundancies. Sinead said, "No one ever had the chance to express how they felt about it. So, the whole thing was not healed." Sinead discovered a pervasive narrative in the organization: "We are nice people, and we don't do horrible things." Sinead suggested that the AI session could allow participants to "engage with this process in a different way and find a way of letting go and moving forward." However, when Sinead asked the leaders to share their commitments, she stated, "The whole mood of the room changed." Sinead recalled them saying, "You didn't tell us we would have to share this." Sinead recalled thinking, "It was clearly something about trust. That they didn't trust other people about things that were important to them." The practitioner's experience suggests tension surfaced amid questions about what should or should not be discussed in AI. The practitioner faced the challenge of whether to honor self-imposed limits of expression or to move forward in a way that made space for the participants to talk about experiences that were not necessarily positive.

The experiences of other practitioners demonstrated the context for tension in AI involved questions about what should or should not be discussed in positive change dialogue. George, an AI practitioner with eight years of experience, recalled a participant coming into the

AI session saying, "No one has listened to me so far, and if I come into this meeting and start sharing, I'm going to get blackballed. My manager's going to beat me up when I get back to the cubicle." Similarly, Reagan, a practitioner with 15 years of AI experience, described how minorities in a manufacturing organization had learned to "keep your mouth shut," raising questions about people's comfort in sharing their experiences in an AI setting. Sonita, a practitioner with 22 years of experience, recalled a manager saying, "Our problems are so deeply ingrained, a little AI isn't going to help us." The manager's comment implied a question about whether AI would accommodate talk focused on problems. Nate, a practitioner with 19 years of AI experience, recounted an experience working with an organization facing the threat of layoffs. Nate had planned the agenda and had the approval of the CEO weeks before the scheduled session. Nate recalled some managers saying, "This will fall so flat on its face if we do this, we're dead." Nate's experience demonstrated the leader's concerns about whether AI's positive change agenda would allow for or limit talk about the organization's challenges.

## 4.4 Navigating Tension

In this section, I first discuss the three theoretical frames practitioners use to navigate free expression-limited expression dialectic: complementary, simple contradiction, and vacillation framing. Next, I will discuss the tactics practitioners used to manage tension, including reliance on AI principles of free choice and wholeness to support the expression of counternarratives and skillful inquiry to bring forth generative dialogue about the "elephant in the room."

### 4.4.1 Theoretical Framing of Tension

In the 32 exemplars of the dialectic, practitioners demonstrated three theoretical frames for navigating tension. Tracy (2004) was one of the first scholars to use dialectical tension theory

to explain competing tensions that are part of organizational life. She observed four tensions in

her interactions with correctional officers and inmates: respect-suspect, nurture-discipline,

consistency-flexibility, and solidarity-autonomy. Tracy (2004) developed a theoretical model for

framing tensions as complementary dialectic, simple contradiction, or paradox. Framing tension

as a complementary dialectic neutralizes the tension to meet both needs. Framing tension as a

simple contradiction means choosing between two actions, for example, nurture or discipline or

vacillating between the two. Vacillation may depend on "the time, person being worked with, or

the topic/context" (p.129). The paradox frame represents a double bind. For example, nurture

versus discipline is interpreted as being empathetic by not caring.

     Practitioners experiencing free expression-limited expression tension framed the tension

as a complementary dialectic in 24 of 32 exemplars. I return to Constance's experience of using

AI with a global professional membership organization. The participants said they would not

attend the session if they couldn't discuss the "negative stuff. As the story continued, Constance

agreed to allow the group time to discuss the negatives. Still, she told the group she would start

by focusing on the positives, such as organizational milestones. Constance facilitated a

discussion to focus on what people most wanted to see. She recalled that when the agenda shifted

to the negatives, the group responded, "Well, I guess we have already talked about

this." Constance noted, "I tried to tell them this when I was designing; I'm like, it's going to come

out anyway." She added, "I turned it around into this positive thing, so they felt like they got all

there." Constance demonstrated a complementary framing of the tension that helped participants

see that having a dialogue focusing on strengths and what was most wanted allowed them to

reframe and neutralize the negatives.

Sienna's exemplar of working with a medical center to improve nurse retention further illustrated how practitioners framed tension as a complementary dialectic. According to Sienna, the doctors were complaining about the nurses not doing things correctly and doing things late. Rather than shut down or engage in problem-centric talk, the conversation was reframed to focus on what "right" looks like from the doctors' perspectives. One doctor said, "We've never thought about that." Later in the week, the doctors spelled it all out. According to Sienna, the nurses told them everything on the list was doable. The complementary framing of the tension addressed the need to limit talk about what was wrong while also addressing the need for free expression about what looks right, therefore neutralizing the tension.

A further example of complementary framing of tension was visible in an AI initiative led by Sinead. Sinead described an AI project with a division of a space agency that was in the process of winding down due to a decrease in orders but still needed people to continue working in the division to fulfill existing orders and maintain quality control. According to Sinead, a prevailing narrative for people in the division was "either you stay, and you nail yourself to the cross of martyrdom. Or you leave, and you are a traitor." Sinead stated that she wanted to find another way for the group to have a different conversation. She recalled saying, "This conversation, the metaphor isn't helpful. The duality of choice isn't helpful. We need to find another way of understanding what people's options are." Sinead noted,

> We managed to tease out that different people were in different situations, and some people were nearer retirement, whereas others had young families and had just taken on big mortgages and couldn't afford to lose their jobs…I was tying it to how can I be a good person in this difficult situation.

The dialectic manifested as allowing free expression about a challenging situation while limiting unhelpful talk, such as "nailing yourself to the cross of martyrdom." The practitioner's reframing

the conversation to focus on "how can I be a good person in a difficult situation" neutralized the tension.

### 4.4.2 Limiting Expression

In six of 32 exemplars, practitioners framed the tension as a simple contradiction and selected one pole over the other. (Tracy, 2004). In four of the six exemplars, practitioners honored the decisions of organizational leaders who chose to limit expression. One illustrative case was Cecily's AI work with an academic institution. Cecily has 19 years of experience using AI. She recalled how the leaders did not want the AI sessions to focus on "dysfunction." Cecily was uncomfortable with the decision but ultimately deferred to the leaders. In another case, Juanita, a practitioner with over 20 years of AI experience, recalled a leader abruptly cutting off a conversation in an AI session as task force members reported on their progress. Juanita recalled the leader's discomfort about not knowing what was happening. Juanita reported that the AI initiative came to a halt. Juanita deferred to the leader. Upon reflection, she noted, "Sometimes it may not work for reasons that are completely out of your control." In the case of Carla's AI work with a trauma hospital, she deferred to the CEO's decision to limit inquiry to what worked in the organization even though the organization was experiencing a significant challenge to its reputation.

In two cases, practitioners made decisions that limited the expression of talk about negativity. In the first case, Lita, a practitioner with seven years of experience, led several AI sessions for an educational system focused on developing a strengths-based approach to learning. Her work with 200 participants occurred as a relatively new AI practitioner. After the session, Lita received evaluative feedback from participants, including comments, "Lita only wants to

focus on the positive." And "Lita doesn't have any tolerance for hearing what's not working."

Lita stated, "Hard to swallow, but I could see the truth in what they were saying." Lita's

experience demonstrated how an exclusive focus on the positive limited what people thought

they could discuss in a positive change process.

In the second case, Wynonna, a practitioner with 16 years of experience, chose to limit

talk that had devolved into verbal attacks. Wynonna estimates she has led 40 AI events annually

for various sectors, including academia, IT, pharma, manufacturing, and international NGOs in

four countries. Wynonna led an AI summit for a large organization focused on eliminating

racism. Wynonna, a white woman, had experience working in the field of diversity. She and her

white colleagues had volunteered to do the work pro bono. According to Wynonna, many

attendees had fought for racial justice. They had what Wynonna described as "huge stories of

really tough things they experienced because they were taking a stand." According to Wynonna,

the conversation had become unwieldy as participants rushed to the stage to grab microphones

from each other to share stories about their experiences of racism. When Wynonna attempted to

close out the stories, participants accused her of being a racist.

Wynonna and her colleagues steered the conversation toward changes participants would

like to see implemented in their customer centers to be more inclusive and welcoming of patrons.

Looking back on the situation, Wynonna noted, "To this day, that conversation had to be shut

down. When you have people running up and stealing mics so that they can rile at each other in a

group that's all together, that conversation had to be shut down. It's damaging, right?" The

practitioner's actions demonstrated an intentional decision to limit unproductive talk about

racism, which was the original topic of inquiry.

### 4.4.3 Vacillation Framing

In two exemplars, practitioners framed the tension as a simple contradiction and vacillated between the poles (Tracy, 2004). Tracy (2004) argues the use of a vacillation approach can depend on the time, the person worked with, or the topic. The issue of time informed the switch between free and limited expression in the two exemplars. Returning to Travis' exemplar, the practitioner demonstrated a vacillation approach after a delegation formed on day one to protest the focus on the positive. On day two, the practitioner took steps to allow participants to talk about problems that had not happened on day one. In another example, Reagan recalled leading an AI session with a community development group. Reagan recalled how participants sometimes questioned her intentions, wondering if she had an agenda to gentrify their neighborhood. Reagan noted:

> I would deal with their questions and their concerns in the moment. And if it went on too long, or if people started to get bored, or some support started to show up for this person who had the resistance and was accusing me of having some vested interest and serving some other group conversations, then I would simply say, "Look, hang in there. Let's just get through this, and then I'm happy to have this conversation and answer any questions…And sometimes these resistors, these voices from the floor, who didn't trust, would disappear after the break. And other times, they would hang in there and become great advocates.

Reagan's actions demonstrated a vacillation frame as she alternated between allowing free expression to raise concerns and limiting expression that sometimes devolved into unproductive talk.

The exemplars presented in this section demonstrated how practitioners framed free expression-limited expression dialectic when navigating tension in AI. AI practitioners primarily framed free expression-limited expression as a complementary dialectic by tapping the generative potential of negative talk. In the few cases when practitioners framed the dialectic as a

simple contradiction, they typically deferred to decisions made by organizational leaders to limit expression. In only one case did a practitioner's narrow focus on the positive limit expression. And in one other case, the practitioner chose to limit expression as the conversation devolved into a personal attack. Practitioners used a temporal vacillation approach only twice. There were no examples of practitioners framing tension as a paradox or double bind in the data. This makes sense given the training and emphasis AI places on productive, constructive dialogue.

## 4.5 Principles and Practices Allowing Free Expression

In this section, I discuss how practitioners relied on AI principles of free choice and wholeness to support the expression of counternarratives. I also discuss how the practice of skillful inquiry enabled AI participants to have a generative dialogue about the "elephants in the room."

### 4.5.1. Free Choice and Wholeness Principles Support Counternarratives

In 13 exemplars, practitioners relied on AI's free choice principle to support the expression of counternarratives—stories that diverge from dominant organizational narratives (Bamberg, 2004). The free choice principle sets an expectation that people may engage and disengage in the AI process at will, without fear of repercussion (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Counternarratives enable individuals and groups to express stories about diversity, equity, and inclusion that may have been silenced or overlooked in organizations (Jones, 2020; Lundholt et al., 2018). In AI literature, scholars contend that an exclusive focus on the positive may stifle or discount narratives from marginalized voices (Barge & Oliver, 2003; Bushe, 2013; Fineman, 2006). Further, scholars suggest that hearing the stories of marginalized people with less than-positive narratives can be "the most generative thing you can do" (Bushe, 2013, p.10) to allow for new ideas to emerge.

Lori's exemplar is illustrative of practitioners relying on the free choice principle to support the expression of a counternarrative. Lori began practicing AI in 1999. She has facilitated AI summits in three countries for various organizations: academia, health, manufacturing, not-for-profit, religious, public sector, and international NGOs. Lori led an AI session with a leader and her team to align expectations. The leader expressed her desire for the team to support her decisions more. Lori described helping the team take "agonizing baby steps" to dive into the "muck" that kept them stuck. After several sessions with the leader and the team, a counternarrative emerged. The team shared that what they needed from the leader was to "let go and let them fly." Subsequently, Lori noted, "They made some progress they were willing to celebrate." Lori added, "If I listen as a practitioner and they really listen to what they're saying, the answers, the solutions to what they need and want are embedded in those frustrations."

Melanie's exemplar offers another demonstration of how practitioners leaned on the free choice principle to allow the expression of counternarratives. Melanie led an AI summit for convening 60 public sector employees from different regions. During a session with the core planning team, Melanie noticed that one team member seemed marginalized. Melanie recalled the person saying that he didn't believe people wanted to hear his perspective. Melanie followed up by saying:

> I want to hear what your concerns are because that's what helps us decide what you want. We don't want to stop with just what you want; it's what are all the problems going on here. The difference, though, with Appreciative Inquiry is that work happens as pre-work. We understand what it is that isn't working at a really deep level, so then we can design the summit, the event, around what would it look like if it wasn't that. And we need to understand what the "that" is and listen very closely. We can make sure we are designing this session to address those issues.

Melanie stated she intended to create space for divergent perspectives. Further, the practitioner's actions demonstrated an intentionality to build on those diverse perspectives. Melanie noted, "I'm not trying to mollify him. I really believe it. Because of what he had to say,

we added a whole different part of discovery that I have never done with any other group

before." Also, during the AI summit, Melanie clarified to everyone that she had developed a new

AI protocol because of the person's input.

      Free choice supported the expression of counternarratives in Vivian's exemplar. Vivian

has used AI since 2000. Her work in three countries includes academia and the criminal justice

system. Her work has included research studies, AI change initiatives, summits, and coaching.

Vivian led a national AI change initiative to make prisons more equitable and just for staff and

inmates. The free choice principle was visible as Vivian facilitated an AI session with prison

staff. According to Vivian, a comment from the staff was, "Don't get me in this room and be

telling me that I can change the world because I can't because they will all say no and all the

things we decide, nothing will happen." Vivian noted her response to the prison staff:

> What I'm going to do is create an environment and process where you share with one
> another…then at the end, they come up to you, and they go, 'I just wanted to shake your
> hand. I didn't think I was going to get anything out of this today…I was determined to
> keep my mouth shut and not say anything, but I'm just amazed.'

The free choice principle supported the expression of a counternarrative of people feeling

powerless to affect change.

      In eight exemplars of practitioners using free choice to support the expression of

counternarratives, practitioners also demonstrated the wholeness principle.  The wholeness

principle in AI demonstrates the value of bringing the organization and stakeholders together to

participate in the change process. Engaging the whole system is believed to facilitate the sharing

of diverse perspectives, not to force agreement, but to create the whole story of the organization

(Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Further, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) describe the

principle as "understanding the whole story. It comes about when people are able to hear,

witness, and make sense of each other's differing views, perspectives, and interpretations of shared events" (p.69). Intentional efforts to hear the "whole" of participants' experiences help to normalize the expression of different voices.

Reagan's exemplar demonstrates practitioners relying on wholeness and free choice principles to legitimize the expression of counternarratives. Reagan led a change initiative for a male-dominated organization interested in a diversity and inclusion initiative to ensure women, African Americans, and LGBTQ$^+$ organizational members had no fear of being themselves in the workplace. The topic of the AI summit was Freedom to Step Outside Your Comfort Zone. During the discovery interview process, the CEO, a middle-aged White male, came on stage and shared his interview story with all 400 organization members. He shared a painful counternarrative that, for years, he had merely tolerated diversity, but after hearing the stories of others, he was ready to embrace it. Following the CEO's comments, people lined up at microphones to share more of their personal stories. Building on the counternarrative about a personal failure to fully embrace diversity appeared to open up a larger conversation about how the organization regarded failure. According to Reagan, one of the projects that launched due to the AI summit was "It's okay to fail." Reagan reported that the diversity and inclusion initiative was going strong five years after the summit.

### 4.5.2 Skillful Inquiry

Practitioners demonstrated skillful inquiry to allow for the expression of generative dialogue about the "elephants in the room." In AI, generative dialogue refers to creating new images that change how people think so that new possibilities for action become available (Bushe, 2013). In one exceptional case, a practitioner was unprepared to use inquiry as a navigation strategy. Lita talked about her experience of limiting participant expression by

narrowly focusing on the positive. Upon later reflection, Lita stated, "I simply wasn't skillful enough at the time to be able to be with that in such a way that it didn't have the adverse effect of shutting them down." In this rare example, the practitioner's inability to engage in skillful inquiry limited her ability to allow for free expression.

Conversely, throughout the data, practitioners consistently demonstrated the skill of inquiry to facilitate generative dialogue about the "elephants in the room." An illustrative example was Melanie's experience facilitating the design phase of an AI process. In one of the design teams, Melanie observed several young women sitting silently with their arms crossed as an older white male dominated the conversation. Melanie spoke with the women separately and asked, "What's happening for you?" The women stated, "Our voices are being drowned out and undermined, and we don't want anything to do with this group." Melanie next asked the women, "What is it that you are really invested in as it relates to this topic? What is it that you would like to be talking about here?" The inquiry allowed the women to articulate that they wanted to engage in dialogue with others who shared an interest in how women could make meaningful contributions to a sector historically dominated by older white men. Melanie encouraged the women to invite others to explore their topic, and immediately, others joined their group. The practitioner's skillful inquiry allowed the women to talk productively about the "elephants in the room."

In Sienna's AI work with nurses, she observed the nurses using the term the "XX way" (XX is a stand-in for their hospital initials). The nurses explained, "That's when things are screwed up. And you accept it." The practitioner had to decide whether to allow or limit unproductive negative talk. The practitioner used inquiry to move the dialogue toward generativity. She asked, "Why is it okay to have a XX way?" And "What would the XX way

look like if it worked?" In addition, Sienna asked the nurses to consider, "What would it look

like if the XX way was excellent?" Sienna added that the nurses redefined the XX way to mean

excellence.

A dialectical framing of free expression-limited expression helps us see tensions inherent

in positive change initiatives that practitioners must manage. Practitioners often used skillful

inquiry to navigate tension, moving unproductive talk about negativity and problems toward

generative dialogue about possibilities for change (Table 8).

**Table 8**

*Using Skillful Inquiry for Generative Dialogue*

| Practitioner | Examples |
|---|---|
| Lori | What is the critical voice saying that you don't like? <br> What is the challenge or issue that's not working? <br> What is needed or wanted instead? |
| Karima | Make a list of things that are problems. How would you like to see this? |
| Sinead | This is what we are going to be doing today. Does that fit with what you are expecting? Is there anything else you want to tell me to ensure we have a good day? |
| Melanie | What are you really invested in as it relates to this topic? What is it that you would like to be talking about here? |
| Nate | How have you dealt with this kind of pain before? What helped you be successful last time? How can we apply that to what's going on with you right now? |

The examples demonstrate practitioners' ability to navigate tension by addressing concerns

through inquiry that allows for reframing tension. The inquiry meets participants where they are

with questions that also allow them to build a new vision for change.

4.6 Theoretical Implications

Previous AI studies conceptualized the shadow as censored thoughts and feelings trapped within as untapped potential. (Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Kolodziejski, 2004). The dialectical frame allows us to see the tensions that manifest the shadow as opposing needs. The findings problematize the positive-negative polarity commonly associated with AI (Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Kolodziejski, 2004) by interpreting the shadow as a source of generative change. The voice shadow holds the potential for developing untapped strengths that allow practitioners to engage participants' concerns and redirect them toward a positive vision, such as reframing tension as complementary dialectics (Tracy, 2004). Further, the dialectic lens allows us to look beyond the positive principle to other AI principles' role in navigating tension, specifically the free choice and wholeness principles. The findings answer the call for research into the role of less explored AI principles (Fitzgerald et al., 2010) by demonstrating how the free choice and wholeness principles enable the expression of counternarratives. The findings also support literature on the value of counternarratives to "fill in what has been missing" (Driskill et al., 2012).

## 4.7 Practical Implications

Concerns about the ubiquitousness of the positive principle in AI practice have been well documented (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Pratt, 2002), with scholars suggesting AI ignores problems in favor of positivity (Grant & Humphries, 2006). Recent critiques of POC argue a priority focus on the positive marginalizes individuals for expressing negative emotions, creating toxic positivity (Collins, 2022). Despite a dearth of empirical studies, the notion of toxic positivity revives critiques about positive change processes, such as AI. However, data in this study demonstrated practitioners maintained the ethic of AI's positive change methodology while allowing for expressing negative thoughts and emotions.

Practitioners did not demonstrate a myopic view of AI exclusively favoring the positive principle. Instead, they relied on the principles of free choice and wholeness to demonstrate support for the expression of counternarratives about painful stories of diversity, equity, and inclusion (Lundholt et al., 2018). When practitioners exercised the free choice principle, they honored participants' decisions about how and what they wanted to express. When practitioners adhered to the wholeness principle, the expression of counternarratives was normalized by including alternative perspectives as part of an organization's whole story.

Practitioners also demonstrated the skill of reframing tension as complementary dialectics to neutralize tension. Their ability to reframe inquiry demonstrated the practitioners' breadth and depth of knowledge and skill. In the rare instances when the practitioners limited negative talk, they deferred to organizational leaders or kept the conversation from devolving into personal attacks, or, in one case, the practitioner admitted not having the appropriate skill level to manage dialogue atypical of the positive.

## 4.8 Conclusion

This chapter established the voice shadow as the first dominant shadow in POC. The dialectic framing of tension allows us to see the construction of the voice shadow as opposing needs for free expression and limited expression of negative thoughts and emotions that surface in AI dialogic processes. As experienced AI practitioners encountered the tension, they often honored talk atypical of the positive. The findings address a critique in recent literature warning of toxic positivity—a denial of emotions that may not always be positive (Cross, 2022). Further, practitioners demonstrated adherence to AI practices and principles that allowed for generative dialogue and also supported the expression of counternarratives that reflected painful experiences related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The free choice principle allowed participants to engage in dialogue when and how they choose. The wholeness principle allowed participants to experience counternarratives as a part of an organization's whole story. Experienced practitioners demonstrated their ability for skillful inquiry to discover the positive aspects of organizational life and guide AI participants toward a generative dialogue about aspects of their work experiences that may not be positive. Instead of ignoring the proverbial "elephants in the room," practitioners relied on their training and experience to guide organizations toward a vision for positive change.

## CHAPTER 5: THE LEADERSHIP SHADOW

### 5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the voice shadow identified the tension of free expression-limited expression. This chapter's leadership shadow introduces a second dialectical tension of hierarchical-collaborative leadership. The dialectical framing of hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension contributes to AI scholarship, allowing us to view leadership assumptions differently. The tension manifests when assumptions about hierarchical leadership bump against assumptions about collaborative leadership in the context of a shared leadership methodology such as AI. Rather than consider hierarchical and collaborative leadership as a binary choice, a dialectical perspective allows us to see interdependencies and possibilities. Hierarchical leadership can support collaborative leadership by allocating resources and sponsorship and limiting shared leadership by defaulting to hierarchical routines. When opportunities for shared leadership are ignored or usurped, the leadership shadow becomes the repository for untapped strengths, such as leadership agility to move back and forth between hierarchical and collaborative decision-making processes. This chapter begins with Cecily's story of using AI to facilitate culture change in an academic institution. Cecily's narrative illustrates practitioners' experiences of hierarchical-collaborative leadership dialectic associated with AI in organizational change efforts. While Cecily's story anchors the analysis, examples drawn from various study participants establish this tension's ubiquitous among AI practitioners. The chapter proceeds with an explication of findings identifying competing assumptions about hierarchical and collaborative leadership relative to decision-making that became evident during the change process. Next, theoretical implications of the tension are discussed, including the sequential stages of the AI process in which tension surfaces and the demand for leadership agility. The

chapter discusses practical strategies practitioners use to navigate tension, including tools to

support shared decision-making and coaching to strengthen leadership agility.

Cecily has facilitated hundreds of AI culture change interventions in six countries. She

has worked in various settings, including academia, information technology, manufacturing, and

community-based organizations. Cecily led an academic institution's three-year culture change

initiative. The institution had done some initial work with a firm specializing in Appreciative

Inquiry and was interested in more in-depth AI training to promote collaboration and

engagement. For nearly three years, Cecily worked with organizational members to transform a

culture she described as "very command and control." Cecily's AI process included framing the

work around core values, engaging organizational members in inquiry, creating shared images of

the future, and cycles of action and reflection. Cecily's experiences identified hierarchical-

collaborative leadership tensions that emerged as the AI processes unfolded.

> *I think when the President learned about Appreciative Inquiry because, he got so excited about it, I think what got him excited was it was going to make everything feel positive. And didn't really…did not really get the whole process. So, the first year was a couple of trainings for the whole systems office and one for management and one for staff, and I don't know why they did that. I tried to get them not to, but they wanted them separate…The senior leaders were not part of that and senior leaders didn't have any interest in being part of that…There were a lot of people at mid-level management and below totally got it, loved it, saw the value…I kept hearing over and over from people, 'Yeah, this is great, we love it, but it's not getting done from the top down.'*

> *So, I worked with the Senior Leadership Team for a year, and they did everything possible to deflect from their own work…instead of learning it themselves…They were very command and control…they were worried politically about things… there was one particular person who kind of handled the President and gave him information that he wanted to hear and not all the information. I think part of what happens in community colleges is there's this political thing that you don't want to air any dirty laundry. And so…you know what surfaced? We did the values assessment with them as well because it felt like that was the only way, especially the President, was going to see the dysfunction in the organization...and you know, he looked at it and he was like, "I guess we can't hide from it anymore. There it is in black and white." So, he obviously knew, he*

*knew it was there, even though his handler was saying, 'No, it was fine. It's not a problem.'*

*And then we did slices by division and even senior leadership got that collaboration and engagement were important. I really think it was a combination of two things: one, this is the way I've always led, and I have been successful, and I'm close to retirement, so why should I change? And I think the other piece was a deep fear of if I say I don't know how to do something or I ask other people how to do it, they are going to suggest something that might not be a good thing for the college—we know better. Because we have greater input and access, and yet, when they got feedback and input from other people…they could see that people gave great suggestions, that it wasn't out of alignment with where they wanted to go. When we did some further inquiry with staff, they had some great ideas for how to bring the desired cultural values to change those things that were most dysfunctional. And there were a couple of senior leaders that were, "This is not appreciative. We're focusing on the dysfunction." And they just got angry. And, I'm like, 'Appreciative Inquiry is not about just focusing on the positive…it's about how you deal with the dysfunction.' The Finance guy actually said, 'I'm not engaging my people…' he flat-out said that.*

## 5.2 Hierarchical-Collaborative Leadership Tension Underlies the Leadership Shadow

Cecily's experience illustrates the hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension underlying the voice shadow. Dialectical tension theory has taught us about the dynamic interplay between opposing but interdependent forces, such as hierarchical leadership and collaborative leadership, that can exist simultaneously (Baxter & Montgomery, 1997). In literature, the term collaborative leadership is often used interchangeably with shared leadership, as Kramer and Crespy (2011) noted. Collaborative leadership is "relinquishing control to the performers so that power is redefined with less of a traditional hierarchy" (Kramer & Crespy, 2011, p.1025). Pearce and Conger (2003) defined shared leadership as "a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both" (p.1). Assumptions about collaborative leadership include formal leaders motivating others to act versus giving directives (Bennis, 1999;

Kramer & Crespy, 2011). Also, shared leadership assumes that power differences are minimized

through dialogue and group empowerment to make decisions (Kramer & Crespy, 2011; Fletcher

& Kaufer, 2003; Little & Little, 2006). Further, a condition for collaborative leadership success

is that the traditional hierarchy is prepared to let go of control (Kramer & Krespy, 2011;

Herrington, 2000; Zander & Zander, 2000). Scholars argue that one of the benefits of

collaborative leadership for individuals and organizations is the generation of novel ideas for a

more inclusive level of employee engagement (Hsieh & Liou, 2018; Kramer & Krespy, 2011;

Raelin, 2016).

     The centrality of interactions between people goes to the heart of AI methodology and

principles. AI has been described as a process that facilitates the integration of shared goals with

shared activities and relationships (Fitzgerald et al., 2010), which fits within the paradigm of

collaborative leadership. AI's principles also align with a perspective focused on leadership

practice. For example, the constructionist principle assumes that reality is socially created

through language and conversation; the anticipatory principle assumes that a positive image

inspires positive action through an inquiry about "what should be?" or "what might be?" The

enactment principle assumes participants act in ways that align with the desired change (Whitney

& Trosten-Bloom, 2003). The wholeness principle assumes that bringing all stakeholders

together facilitates the sharing of diverse perspectives. The principles underlying the AI ethic

infer that organizational members have the power to practice leadership in a way that affects

change through dialogue, inquiry, and shared visioning activities.

     The theoretical assumptions about hierarchical-collaborative leadership set the stage for

tension in AI. Scholarship has described hierarchical leadership as a form of leadership practice

that assigns different levels of responsibility and accountability according to position and rank in

an organization (Yukl, 1989). The hierarchical leadership model as a pyramid illustrates leaders

at the top of the pyramid setting strategic directions, formulating policy, making structural

modifications, and initiating new ways of working (Yukl, 1989). Lower on the pyramid,

managers interpret and implement policy and operate within the boundaries established by

leaders at the top (Yukl, 1989; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Assumptions about hierarchical leadership

are firmly rooted in Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy (1947). Weber argued that hierarchical

levels of authority enabled organizations to function rationally and orderly. Characteristics of

hierarchical, bureaucratic leadership included honoring the chain of command authority,

specialization, and division of labor, detailed job descriptions, rules and procedures, and formal

communication.

Hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension has theoretical implications for decisions

made in positive organizational change initiatives. Through a hierarchical-collaborative

leadership lens, AI represented an opportunity for leaders and others to make joint decisions in

the discovery, dream, design, and delivery stages. However, leaders could default to hierarchical

practices if unprepared to make joint, collaborative decisions. Joint decision-making is one of

five decision processes typically available to leaders. Vroom and Yetton (1973) outlined five

different types of decisions available to leaders, including two variations of autocratic decisions,

two consultative decisions, and one of collaborative decisions. Autocratic processes include A1

and A2 decisions. A1 decisions involve the leader making decisions alone based on available

information. In A2 decisions, the leader obtains information from a subordinate, either openly or

covertly, before making the decision alone. Consultative decisions include C1 and C2. C1

describes a consultative decision in which the leader shares the problem separately with a few

relevant subordinates, considers whether to use the input, and then decides alone. In C2

decisions, the leader brings a group of subordinates together to solicit their collective ideas and

suggestions, which may or may not be considered, before making the decision alone. The

collaborative decision process includes G2 decisions. In G2 decisions, the leader shared the

problem with subordinates as a group; the leader and the group then worked toward consensus,

and the leader accepted the solution that supported the entire group. Understanding the five

decision processes adds context to understanding hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension.

Drawing on hierarchical and collaborative leadership attributes, I unpack Cecily's

narrative identifying experiences of tension in AI organizational change initiatives.  As

hierarchical and collaborative leadership practices competed for attention, the neglected pole

generated the leadership shadow (Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Kolodziejski, 2004). Scholars have

studied the shadow as a repository of attributes an organization has refused to acknowledge,

including negative qualities and untapped strengths (Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Kolodziejski, 2004;

Bowles, 1991; Jung, 1968). In Cecily's example, tension manifested as hierarchical leadership

would sometimes support collaborative leadership processes and, at other times, act in ways that

seemed to usurp collaborative leadership processes. Cecily described how she rolled out AI

training and seminars for management and staff at the community college.

> So, the first year was a couple of trainings for the whole systems office and one for
> management and one for staff, and I don't know why they did that…I tried to get them
> not to but they wanted them separate…. The senior leaders were not part of that, and
> senior leaders didn't have any interest in being part of that… I was never really able to
> get them to sit down, and I tried in the very beginning—two days offsite, where it's, 'No,
> we don't have the time for that.'

Cecily had the support of hierarchical leadership to deliver the AI training that would prepare the

organization to engage in collaborative leadership culture change efforts. However, the senior

leaders' decision to conduct separate training sessions for management and staff seemed to align

with hierarchical leadership practices of preserving the hierarchy of authority and maintaining a

division of labor. AI's constructionist principle has advocated for shared conversations that

enable the letting go of assumptions that constrain imagination. In this case, the organization

missed an opportunity to support collaborative leadership by learning and talking about AI

together.

In 26 exemplars, I identified what I describe as the tension of hierarchical-collaborative

leadership, which helps to unpack assumptions about the leadership shadow and the two types of

leadership. For example, the design of AI summits promoted collaborative leadership, which

bumped up against bureaucratic, top-down leadership. As noted in AI literature, the summit

methodology was intended to represent a "radical shift away from traditional change

management approaches that puts the responsibility for change in the hands of just a few

individuals" (Ludema et al., 2003, p. 13). The narratives of study participants indicated the

emergence of leadership tension during AI summits. Melanie, an AI practitioner with eight years

of experience working in her home country, facilitated a two-day summit for 60 members. The

attendees represented 12 geographic areas. Melanie said the summit aimed to "look at how they

could communicate, collaborate, and support each other across very different systems." During

the summit, attendees identified initiatives, projects, programs, and innovations to meet the

diversity of constituents. Melanie noted that the attendees were "jazzed about what things they

actually designed and how they were going to keep that going." Melanie said the work initiated

over the two-day summit was to continue post-summit. She also noted that momentum was lost

when participants returned to their respective states, and the next steps hinged on hierarchical

leadership action. Melanie stated that she had prepared summary reports from the event and sent

the reports to her internal contact person before the 30-day deadline. However, six weeks

following the event, Melanie received a call from one of the state representatives asking when

the report would go out. Melanie reflected, "I'm sure at that Federal level, there are complexities

to it. It's one of those things." A transition in leadership also occurred, as noted by Melanie:

> One of the things that I think contributed to not as much post-momentum was they knew
> it, but I didn't know. The head of…for this region was moving into another region, and
> this other woman, who was like number two or three, was coming into her place, and she
> was not on the core planning team….and she hadn't been part of all the conversations
> that lead up to the use of Appreciative Inquiry that led to these particular focus areas for
> the summit….and she is the one that would make sure there is monies and time available.

 In an AI summit, all organization levels are simultaneously in the room. When the summit

ended, a bureaucratic, chain-of-command communication process kicked in. Although the AI

summit had generated enthusiasm, a change in leadership slowed momentum. Unlike her

predecessor, the new leader had not received an AI orientation, which could have potential

funding implications for continuing AI design and delivery steps. The loss of momentum

following the summit illustrated how collaborative processes could often run up against

hierarchical leadership routines, such as chain of command communication and bureaucratic

structures involved in resource allocation.

        The experiences of other study participants deepen our understanding of instances when

collaborative leadership initiatives in AI have clashed with hierarchical leadership. An AI

summit for an academic institution was the setting. Karima, an AI practitioner since 2008, has

led AI initiatives in three countries. Karima used AI with an academic institution to foster

collaborative leadership in the strategic planning process. The college had twice failed at

strategic planning before turning to AI. Karima described how faculty, deans, students,

graduates, and employees were invited to participate in an AI summit. The leadership provided

funding for the event and supported follow-up sessions, bringing people back to solicit their

input on the strategic plan. Karima described the positive effect of the process:

> The process made the planning process more transparent, and people did feel that they were involved and understood how the plan had been created. And this sort of groundswell of positive conversations, and positive stories, and exceptional positive moments…you could feel a change.

In this case, the AI process modeled the attributes of collaborative leadership. Participants from different hierarchical levels were involved in shared dialogue to co-create positive change. Karima described a slowdown in momentum following the summit. Karima explained that during the design phase of the summit, the participants had identified initiatives. Karima noted:

> I think that what slowed us down was when the new Vice President of Academics came because a lot of the initiatives needed to be prioritized and led by him…and we worked really hard at it, and at one point, I remember meeting with him…we just weren't coming to terms with things. So, you know, it was a good two years of continuing to move it along.

This situation highlighted competing assumptions about collaborative and hierarchical leadership. The AI summit employed a joint decision process to identify initiatives for action. Conversely, the Vice-President appeared to employ a C2, consultative decision process, bringing participants together to provide input. Still, the leader was not obligated to follow through on their ideas before deciding alone (Vroom-Yetton, 1973). The practitioner assumed joint decision-making processes in which they would "come to terms." The Vice-President was responsible for leading and prioritizing initiatives and may have held different assumptions about decisions in the context of an AI initiative.

The narratives of study participants, like Juanita, continued to illuminate how competing assumptions about hierarchical-collaborative leadership generated tension in AI. Juanita has practiced AI for more than 20 years in three countries. Juanita facilitated an AI summit for a team she said desperately needed help. According to the team leader, the team was falling apart. During the summit, Juanita described the team dynamics: "This is a group of people who have no voice, who have been marginalized, and all of a sudden, the leader is sitting back and

listening to them for the first time, and they are just stepping up." Juanita checked in with the

team monthly and made this observation:

> A month later, we check-in, and the task forces are going strong; people are excited, things are happening, everybody's happy. Month two, things are still going strong and then we're going to have this big meeting month three to come back together again and talk about where we are and how to go forward and stuff. So, we're at month three at the meeting, I come in, the leader goes to the front of the room and says, 'alright, all this has to stop. This is just out of control…. you've got this going on, this going on…I don't know what's going on,' …and he just killed everything.

Over a three-month time period, team members stepped up to take active roles in moving tasks

forward. As the team adapted behaviors consistent with a collaborative leadership approach to

change, bureaucratic assumptions about hierarchical leadership surfaced. The leader's decision to

"kill everything" was consistent with autocratic or consultative decision-making that granted the

hierarchical leader the final say.

Hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension, identified in the experiences of study

participants, gave us further insight into the leadership shadow. For example, Cassie, a

practitioner with over 20 years of experience working with various organizations, including

Fortune 500 companies, used AI to help a power plant develop a performance excellence plan.

The plant had a 3-month window to replace the main generator. The generator replacement

would mean the plant would have to undergo an outage. The plant had experienced problems

with the previous outage, so there was pressure to get this one right. The AI agenda was "outage

excellence."  Cassie described her process of engaging organizational members in the initiative:

> We put together what I call an AI learning team…and they were from all aspects of the plant…we were seeing just leaps and bounds of ideas... Before we were even done with the interview process, the data was starting to emerge with themes of low-hanging fruit that we could do stuff with right away.

Instead of a top-down approach to managing the retrofit process, AI's collaborative leadership

approach to change catalyzed practical ideas from organizational members across the plant.

However, things changed when a new plant manager entered the scene. Cassie described her

experience of meeting the manager for the first time:

> About halfway through the process…they hired a new plant manager. He comes in, having never touched this process, heard of this process, thought of this process, and went, 'What in the hell are you doing…taking 26 of my people, two hours every couple of weeks? I can't have this.'

The clash of decision styles (autocratic versus joint) exposed the leadership shadow. The plant

manager came into the process without having the same grounding in AI as the rest of the team.

The pressure was high to get the retrofit right. From a hierarchical leadership perspective, taking

people off production to participate in an AI planning team may have seemed counterintuitive to

the task at hand. From a collaborative leadership vantage point, pulling 26 people out of

production for two hours every couple of weeks had facilitated "leaps and bounds of ideas."

This section identified the experiences of dialectical tension associated with AI in

organizational change efforts and established the assumptions about the tension that became

evident during the change process. I identified how enacting AI processes can trigger

hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension—a tension not previously studied in AI. A

dialectical tension is two opposing but interdependent forces existing simultaneously. AI's

theoretical assumptions about collaborative leadership bumped against assumptions about

traditional, top-down leadership. Neglecting one pole of tension generated the leadership

shadow.

## 5.3 Implications of the Leadership Dialectic

In this section, I discuss several implications the leadership dialectic had on the process

and how leaders and AI facilitators managed it. In particular, findings indicate that a) the context

in which the tension arose happened during the sequence of AI stages, b) data indicate that

hierarchical leadership was the default setting utilized by organizational leaders when the

dialectic presented itself, and c) that one effect on the process was a demand for leadership

agility. Leadership agility manifested in reframing by leaders and was encouraged by the specific

practices utilized in the face of the dialectic.

### 5.3.1 Discovery, Design, and Delivery Stages Surfaced Tension

Analysis showed that the context in which hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension

surfaced was in three of the four critical stages of the AI process: discovery, design, and

delivery. The tension was rooted in autocratic or consultative decisions made by leaders that

veered away from collaboration. Interestingly, participant data did not point to tension in the

dream stages of AI. According to AI practices (Ludema et al., 2003), the dream stage of AI is

intended to build excitement for change as participants imagine what they want for the

organization, share their dreams with others, build upon one another's dreams and create

collective dream statements (Ludema et al. 2003). One possibility for the absence of

hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension at the dream stage was that dream statements are

constructed and shared without a push for a group decision. Jasmine, a practitioner with 20 years

of experience, has used AI with various organizations in seven countries. Jasmine described her

observations of an AI summit with school board representatives as they worked through

contentious issues around fiscal accountability. Jasmine reflected, "In the dream, hands down,

the room came alive…that's when the love affair flourished…they realized that they could

actually be hopeful at a time that was otherwise dark." AI practitioners consider the dream stage

the imaginative part of the summit that builds excitement for change (Ludema et al., 2003).

In six of the 26 exemplars, tension surfaced at the discovery stage when senior leaders decided to let others engage in the process without them. The discovery stage included a context setting, an orientation to AI, and participant interviews with each other to identify core organizational strengths (Ludema et al., 2003). The discovery phase introduces participants to reframing problems into possibilities for action. The data pointed to an absence of leaders in the discovery stage of AI as a source of complaints of change not happening from the top down. In one example, Renata, a practitioner who has facilitated more than 100 AI interventions in three countries over ten years, told how senior leaders were absent at the discovery stage of an academic institution's strategic planning process. Renata talked about the absence and said, "It would have been quite powerful if we had had the executive participation around the tables as a way to achieve shared understanding of the context. It's very human nature for people to fill in their own narratives." Returning to Cecily's narrative, she noted that as staff and mid-level managers learned about and began practicing AI, the senior leadership team "did everything possible to deflect from their own work…instead of learning it themselves." According to Cecily, organizational complained, "this is great, we love it, but it's not getting done from the top."

Similarly, Sonita's experience of facilitating an AI culture change initiative to foster cohesion within a non-governmental organization surfaced tension when leaders made an autocratic decision not to participate in the AI orientation. Sonita stated that the leadership team "wanted me to change the staff. They wanted me to offer them programs and training and then to sort of follow along with them and to see all that change." Sonita said the leaders excluded themselves from the process and told her, "Our problems are so deeply ingrained…a little AI isn't going to help us." According to Sonita, the staff and mid-level managers said, "We can't

actually do this until the senior management changes." Sonita noted that some mid-level

managers were "so embittered and feeling very badly treated by senior management and felt very

jerked around. And so, they wouldn't really engage." Sonita explained that many of the mid-

level leaders decided to leave the organization, saying things like, "I can't believe that they

would first of all spend all of this money to bring somebody in and have us spend all of this time,

and we're having good results, and they're not supporting it."

Hierarchical-collaborative tension surfaced in 10 out of 26 exemplars at the design stage

of AI when leaders made decisions that cut out others from imagining, planning, and

implementing provocative designs. The design phase bridges the discovery of the positive core

and the dream of what the organization could be (Ludema et al., 2003). The purpose of the

design stage was for participants to co-construct their ideal future by writing a set of provocative

propositions about the social architecture that would facilitate change—meaning systems,

structures, strategies, processes, and procedures (Ludema et al., 2003). Design was also the stage

where participants committed to organizing work, collaborating across divisional boundaries,

and planning and implementing work assignments. (Ludema et al., 2003). The design stage

typically happened during the summit but, at times, could continue beyond the summit. The

experiences of study participants identified tension at the design stage when leaders made

autocratic decisions that circumvented collaborative decision processes. Thomas, a practitioner

with 20 years of experience, has led over 100 AI interventions in four countries. Thomas

conducted an AI summit designed to produce draft plans to address feedback from an employee

survey. Immediately following the summit, Thomas observed that the senior leaders were

planning to continue working on the provocative propositions without input from organizational

members. Thomas recalled giving this feedback to the leaders: "This is a plan that all of you

were a part of creating…and there's going to be implications of shifting the framework, and you're going to need to bring them back together just to talk about why." The leadership team made the autocratic decision to carry on with their design plan without organizational input. Thomas decided to bow out of his work with the organization.

Another practitioner's experience further illustrated an experience of tension at the design stage of AI. In her 16 years of experience, Carla has led over 100 AI initiatives in three countries. She facilitated an AI summit for a hospital undergoing a massive leadership restructuring. Carla described the situation as a "hot mess." According to Carla, the hospital replaced the executive team and the board. The hospital needed to develop a strategy to rebuild its trauma center and chose the AI process to solicit input from various stakeholders. The AI process engaged 3,200 people in 42 discovery sessions. Participants included diverse stakeholders, special interest groups, physicians, and academicians.

Carla noted people sitting and talking to someone who was their arch-nemesis. According to Carla, "They had the most amazing experiences…It was the best thing that happened to that hospital during their transition. Because they were demonstrating listening."  But at the design stage of the process, Carla stated the CEO had a plan for what she had heard from these meetings, so she said, "Forget all of those things; this is how I want it done." By taking over the process, the CEO had veered away from the commitments people had made about how to own the change. Carla noted that trust was damaged in the organization, stating, "You get people excited. You ask them to share their ideas, to be vulnerable…you better use it." The CEO eventually moved on. Carla subsequently worked with a new administrator to re-engage the organization's stakeholders, with what Carla described as an understanding "to be meaningful and not just the lip service that they are suspicious it's going to be anyway."

Tension also surfaced in 10 of 26 exemplars at the delivery stage of AI when leaders made autocratic or consultative decisions rather than joint decisions about the next steps for action. The intended agenda of the delivery stage of AI was to inspire and support positive self-organizing, which could include time, human resources, funding, training, or coaching from senior leadership (Ludema et al., 2003). Sonita recounted her experience leading an 11-day AI summit with a relief organization in one example. The focus of the event was to educate organizational members about sociocracy. Sociocracy is a process that "relies on consent-based decision-making through active self-disclosure and feedback" (Saxena and Jagota, 2016, p.173). According to Sonita, feedback from the event was highly positive. The next step in the process was for leaders to formalize commitments to operationalize the process across the organization. However, a year after the event, the process was not widely adopted due to a lack of funding. According to Sonita, "The organization was perfectly set up at that time to really take this way of working further. And they just wouldn't do it."

In another example, an autocratic decision surfaced tension during the delivery stage of an AI restructuring initiative. The leader made an autocratic decision to return to business as usual without consulting with his team about what they needed from him to operationalize the restructuring. The leader made assumptions about the team's preparedness to operationalize the plan, but it appeared the team needed additional mentoring from the leader. The managers interpreted the leader's return to focus on his work as a broken promise to the process and the people involved.

A final example comes from Sienna, a practitioner who has led more than 40 AI interventions in one country over 18 years. Sienna supported an AI initiative with a hospital to improve nurse retention in the delivery stage when an autocratic decision by leaders surfaced the

dialectical tension. The initiative involved 400 nurses and a supportive Chief Nursing Officer (CNO). The nurses and the CNO participated in AI's orientation, discovery, dream, and design phases. The process had progressed to the delivery stage, during which time Sienna reported that the efforts of nurses were yielding results. According to Sienna, the efforts of nurses had reduced nurse turnover by 13%, reduced vacancy rates by 30%, improved nurse rating of the hospital as a desired place to work by 16%, and improved survey results that measured patient satisfaction with nurses by 20 points. Tension surfaced when the hospital was sold, and an autocratic, top-down decision directly affected the nurses. Sienna said, "It was like, we want to hear none of that. All we want to hear is how long did you spend with the patient and how can you do it faster?" As a result of the change, the CNO moved to a different hospital; many of the nurses left or were fired, and the remaining nurses lacked an advocate to help sustain the delivery phase of the nurse retention AI initiative.

The findings in this section contributed to AI and POS literature by identifying the implications of the tension, specifically, the context in which the leadership tension was likely to surface. The data identified tension that arose in AI's sequential process and identified missed opportunities for leaders to mitigate tension at critical stages of positive change. At the discovery stage, tension was likely to surface when leaders were absent from the process. Missed opportunities for leadership development included being a part of a context setting so that organizational members saw that it was "getting done from the top." Also, at the discovery stage, leaders missed the opportunity to gain a solid orientation to AI, which included the skill of reframing problems into possibilities. This skill would be essential for navigating tension throughout the AI process. Tension at the design stage of AI surfaced when leaders made decisions that prevented others from imagining, planning, and implementing provocative designs

for change. The design stage of AI signaled an opportunity for leaders to learn how to encourage

organizational members to take ownership of the elements they wanted to change. In the delivery

stage, tension surfaced when leaders engaged in decision processes that precluded joint decision-

making with organizational members. An opportunity for leadership development was for

leaders to learn how to engage in collaborative decision processes. Also, at the delivery stage,

there were missed opportunities for leaders to reinforce self-organizing efforts by providing

needed resources, mentoring, or advocacy.

### 5.3.2 Hierarchical Leadership as the Default Setting

Over one-third of exemplars of a hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension in AI, there

was a default to hierarchical leadership. Literature has discussed hierarchical leadership as

formal authority enacted through legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959; Yukl, 1989). Yukl

(1989) defined formal authority as "the perceived right of one position occupant to influence

specified aspects of the behavior of other position occupants. The agent has the right to make

particular types of requests, and the target person has the duty to obey" (p.15). Yukl describes

formal authority as an implicit social contract between leaders and organizational members that

allows organizations to function effectively.

The experiences of study participants established formal leaders often reverted to

hierarchical leadership as hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension emerged in AI. For

example, in Cecily's culture change work with the community college, the staff prioritized the

elevation of values to address organizational dysfunction. However, several senior leaders had

different opinions about focusing on the change effort. Cecily noted:

> And there were a couple of senior leaders that were, 'This is not appreciative. We're
> focusing on the dysfunction.' And they just got angry…the Finance guy actually said,
> 'I'm not engaging my people…' he flat out said that.

The leadership shadow emerged when leaders had different assumptions about the strategic focus

of AI, which led senior leaders to reject ideas that seemed to veer away from positivity and

appreciation. In AI, collaborative leadership efforts can sometimes compete with hierarchical

leadership. As illustrated in this case, tension can trigger a default to formal authority routines,

where the leader has the right to make a request, and the target person is obligated to obey (Yukl,

1989). In another example, Sonita, a seasoned AI practitioner, was a mentor consultant to a more

junior practitioner. Sonita has practiced AI since the late 1990s. The junior practitioner had led

an AI summit for an international organization and had called Sonita to debrief the event. In her

debrief conversation with the practitioner, Sonita asked about the next steps in the design stage

of AI:

> And I said, 'Well, how did you put the teams together for carrying the design work
> forward?' And he said, 'Well, we turned it over to the management team.' And I said,
> 'But those people didn't get to carry on with the work on the issues.' And he said, 'no,
> we turned it over to the departments….and I said, 'how do you think it's going to turn
> out?" And he said….' Oh my God…. we went back to business as usual.'

The phrase "back to business as usual" epitomized leadership falling back into familiar work

routines and directing tasks from a hierarchical perch. The decision to take over the design phase

of the AI process bumped up against AI's embedded assumption to promote collaborative

leadership. Sonita's coaching allowed the junior consultant to reflect on his intentions and the

impact on the process.

Data showed further examples of when leadership tension triggered a return to the default

hierarchical setting. Thomas, a practitioner who has used AI since the late 1990s, held a debrief

session with senior leaders to review the design ideas that organizational members generated

during a 2-day AI summit. During the debrief, Thomas observed the leadership team's response

to the design output:

> I would say that was the point where it went back into the old hierarchical of structure…all of a sudden, there was kind of like that "old shit moment" of we've got to take this inside, we've got to re-work it. Let's get the senior leadership team, let's reorganize the plan like that.

Although the summit had engaged participants in a collaborative process, leadership's return to native communication steered the process to familiar routines, in which leaders exercised their formal authority to rework the plan. In another similar example, Carla, a practitioner of AI since 2002, experienced hierarchical leadership routines coming up against collaborative leadership initiatives. Carla worked with a medical facility to help rebuild the reputation of their trauma center. Carla had successfully guided the organization through 42 discovery and dream sessions with 3,200 stakeholders, including physicians, special interest groups, and academics. When the AI process shifted to the design stage, there was a pivot to native communication. According to Carla, "The CEO really had a plan for what she'd heard from these meetings, so she said, 'forget all those things; this is how I want it done.' A default to hierarchical leadership pre-empted the opportunity for organizational members to co-design the way forward.

Nine out of 26 exemplars showed an organizational tendency to slip back into top-down leadership routines when new leaders entered the scene. Sienna, an AI practitioner since 2001, described her work with a hospital to elevate the nursing profession—the initiative aimed to provide nurses with training and resources to improve working conditions and departmental collaborations. According to Sienna, nurses had developed protocols for interviewing and onboarding nurses, created one-on-one instructions for novice nurses, and implemented mentoring and coaching for nurses. Sienna stated that the hospital was sold during her work with the nurses. Sienna explained how the new president had a different agenda for the organization:

> The problem that happened there, it's a very heavily doctor-run hospital. Nurses really don't count. Doctors really do. And they hired a new president of the hospital….and he came in, and it became even more about doctors and less about nurses. And if you have

that position and you put all the money and the energy into doctors and not nurses, you struggle.

AI's focus on involving nurses in solving the problem of nurse retention has facilitated the

flourishing of collaborative leadership in a bureaucratic organization. Investing in providing

nurses with training and resources enabled nurses to enact significant changes before the

leadership transition. However, the sale of the hospital and a change in top leadership spiraled

the organization back to familiar routines, and resources and energy shifted to the doctors.

Sienna would experience a similar situation in a different hospital. In the second hospital, nurses

developed education and training programs for nurses and doctors on talking appreciatively to

patients. The nurses continued developing training when a new Chief Nursing Officer (CNO)

came on board. Speaking about the CNO, Sienna recalled, "She disavowed anything, from the

day she came in…and the people that hired me got literally removed to a far out building…they

were the people who were educating and developing nurses." Within six months, the people who

had hired Sienna had left the organization.

There was further evidence of leaders defaulting to hierarchical practices when new

leaders came on board. During Cassie's AI work with the power plant. The 26-member AI team

had been conducting discovery interviews when a new plant manager objected to pulling people

out of production to engage in the AI process. Cassie noted the culture of the plant as "being

regulated to pieces," which hinted at the leadership routines grounded in bureaucracy

(Weber,1947). Although the discovery interviews had generated what Cassie described as "leaps

and bounds of ideas," the default setting for the new plant manager was to exercise his formal

authority to get people back to work. In another example, a manufacturing firm had used AI

summits for several years to foster collaborative leadership up and down the supply chain. Ralph,

an internal practitioner who had used AI since 2004, noticed a shift when the organization

brought in two new top executives. Ralph stated, "All the pockets of the organization went back to their old silos of responsibility and metrics of success." The execution of formal authority returned the organization to more traditional ways of working and away from AI.

For Karima, an academic institution's AI strategic planning process was in jeopardy when a new leadership team took charge. The AI strategy focused on educational innovation and putting students first. According to Karima, the board had approved the plan, but then there was a leadership change. Karima noted the new leaders did not understand AI's importance in "keeping it front and center and actually resourcing and executing the strategy." Karima added, "The college sort of fell back a little bit…I think that can happen in AI…there is a learning process …particularly the Vice-President of Academics, he was an engineer. He had a difficult time understanding…it wasn't business as usual." Reflecting on the situation, Karima said, "This is a strategic plan meant to take us in a different direction. And I think he was so bogged down with operational things." The new leaders in these scenarios missed the opportunity to understand the value of AI to the organization and organizational members.

Accordingly, these data contribute to AI scholarship by establishing hierarchical leadership as the default setting when tension surfaces in AI. A default setting indicated a return to native communication practices, wherein leaders acted from a position of authority to decide how AI initiatives should be strategically focused and how AI design plans should be framed and executed. Leaders needed to be better prepared to support collaborative leadership efforts, specifically by having a solid grounding in AI, seeking to understand the benefits of collaborative leadership initiatives to the organization and its members, and having a greater self-awareness of how leadership decisions and actions influence the AI agenda and positive organizational change.

### 5.3.3 The Demand for Leadership Agility

One implication of the tension and its effect on the process is the demonstration of leadership agility. Scholarship on leadership agility includes four key attributes: context setting, stakeholder agility, creative agility, and self-leadership agility (Joiner, Rademakers, Scheepstra, & Stokes., 2019). Context setting enabled leaders to scan the environment, anticipate change, and assess what needs to happen to achieve desired outcomes. Stakeholder agility enabled leaders to appreciate stakeholders' views and perspectives and to work toward alignment. Creative agility involves challenging assumptions and gaining broader perspectives about issues and solutions. Leadership agility focuses on self-development, soliciting feedback, and acting on lessons learned.

Three notable examples from study participants showed evidence of several of the four attributes of leadership agility, as defined by Joiner et al. (2019). The first example showed leadership agility in context setting and stakeholder agility. Reagan, a practitioner, has used AI since 2004 in three countries with various sectors. One of Reagan's AI projects was with a large manufacturing organization. The project was to make diversity and inclusion a strategic imperative. The client leader had heard about AI and believed in the process. The plan involved training 24 internal organizational members to conduct discovery interviews. The next step was to invite all 400 organization members to an AI summit to participate in a dream and design process. The senior leadership team was skeptical of bringing close to 400 people together in a room to design the strategy, mainly because the organization had invited external experts to help inform the strategic agenda in previous years. Senior leaders' primary concern was whether the AI process would generate meaningful data. Reagan observed how the CEO carefully prepared for the event, taking care of the upfront planning and what would happen afterward. According

to Reagan, the leader "positioned it very well, that it would be in service to the organization; and people would take ownership for what they were going to do after the event." Reagan described her interactions with the leader, noting, "She was really very professional in the sense that It was always focused on, what is the process? What are the metrics? How are we going to do it? Give me the plan." Reagan described how the CEO wanted to provide her leadership peers with data to convince them that the AI summit would be a good investment. The CEO also required that a senior leader agree to have an organizational member conduct a discovery interview with him live in front of a room of 400 people. The CEO intended to model the organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion. According to Reagan, the summit was hugely successful. And five years following the event, diversity and inclusion are operationalized and remain on the strategic agenda. The leader demonstrated agility by setting the context for the AI summit and ensuring 400 stakeholders could participate.

An AI initiative led by Cassie is an illustration of context setting and self-leadership agility. The situation was an AI summit for a large organization that brought together 400 HR professionals. The vice president wanted to engage with participants intentionally, staying attuned to her desire to have a free flow of ideas unencumbered by bureaucracy. The Vice-President solicited coaching from Cassie on how she should best show up in the room. The leader asked Cassie's advice about whether she should join a group or exclude herself from the process. Cassie's coaching to the leader was to participate and join in discussions that she was passionate about. Cassie observed the leader fully engaged in the process, not from a hierarchical stance. Cassie noted the dynamics in the room, "leadership just emerged, totally on its own…totally organically…and the Vice-President wasn't one of them. The leader's report to Cassie was, "I just got to chime in with what I was thinking, and they are not just saying, okay,

do I have to do that? And I'm like, no, they are totally empowered." The leader was able to scan the environment and assess what was needed. In addition, the leader solicited feedback from the practitioner and acted on the feedback immediately.

The third example of leadership agility illustrates context setting, stakeholder, creative, and self-leadership agility. Thomas facilitated an AI culture-building initiative with a 500-person business unit of a construction company. The company was involved in research, production, operations, supply chain, and facilities management. The AI agenda was to build a culture that would accelerate impact. However, Thomas explained that the organization's financial performance declined around six months into the project, and a forced restructuring would involve job losses. Rather than default to hierarchical leadership, the senior leaders leaned into collaborative leadership. Leadership agility was evident in the leader's decision not to abandon the AI process but to re-focus the AI work on strategic and operational alignment. Thomas also noted that the senior leaders were committed to having the culture change initiative owned by the organization's members. Instead of top-down edicts from HR and senior leaders, Thomas explained, "What wound up happening was the culture building team put together what I would call the change management plan or the transformation plan…it was awesome!" Thomas also described how organizational members and leaders spent dedicated time talking about their reflections on the change—a conversation the leaders did not shy away from. According to Thomas, the organization participated in AI interviews that helped people build on past experiences where they have been successful in times of change. Thomas noted, "It definitely moved from a reflection on the best of the past to more of a deep dive of what would support people." According to Thomas, ideas emerged from those interviews that the organization acted upon. The leaders in this situation demonstrated context setting by scanning the environment,

anticipating change, and assessing what is next. The leaders also demonstrated stakeholder and creative agility by engaging organizational members in developing a culture-building plan. Lastly, the leaders demonstrated self-leadership agility by actively self-reflecting on the change.

### 5.3.4 Leadership Practices That Demonstrated Agility

The analysis of study participants' responses to tension showed that in 15 exemplars, practitioners framed tension as complementary dialectics, such that the two poles were no longer viewed as opposites (Tracy, 2004). In seven exemplars, practitioners vacillated between the two poles, moving between the leaders' authority and collaborative leadership. In four exemplars, practitioners selected the hierarchical pole, deferring to the authority of organizational leaders. The examples cited in previous sections of this chapter described how a default to hierarchical leadership bumped up against collaborative leadership practices, which created tension and demonstrated missed opportunities for top-down support for collaborative leadership.

Participant data established reframing as an effective leadership practice when the dialectic surfaced in AI. For example, Cassie's AI initiative with a nuclear power plant involved a leader's success at reframing hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension. The plant was preparing for an outage to install a new generator. The vice president of the organization, who hired Cassie, told her that the experts in the field thought that a 90-day lead time for outage preparation was "nuts." The confidence of the nearly 700 workers was low. The plant had already experienced two previous outage failures. Cassie stated the plant was heavily regulated and that people were expected to find problems. According to Cassie, people felt browbeaten for making a mistake. Rather than reinforce the tension of top-down regulation, the Vice-President opted to reframe the tension. The first step was to frame the project as "outage excellence." The reframe focused on the ideal outcome, not the past failures. The next reframe was to look at

existing solutions that people believed would work well and expand on those solutions. The third reframe was that the plant began recognizing people for their innovative solutions instead of brow-beating people for mistakes. Ultimately, the plant successfully replaced the generator three days ahead of schedule and three million dollars under budget.

In a similar example of reframing, Leanne, a practitioner with 19 years of experience leading 20 AI initiatives, described an AI intervention with a large university. The university chair had put five-million dollars on the table for faculty to develop new program ideas. However, in the first year, only a handful of proposals were submitted, and only five thousand dollars had been spent. The provost wanted to use AI to help bolster the faculty's confidence in developing curricula and programs. Instead of focusing on the disappointment of receiving a small number of proposals, the leader took another tact. According to Leanne, the reframe focused on elevating strengths, such as past successes of writing new curricula and sharing how that came to be with peers. Leanne noted they convened up to 70 faculty in a huge room to share their stories. Leanne noted, "You have to picture the easels at each table with the list of programs they wanted to work on and voting for each other's stuff." The dialectic of hierarchical-collaborative leadership could have led to the shaming of people for not stepping up to the plate. Instead, organizational members had renewed faith in proposing and developing new curricula.

In a final example of reframing, Thomas described how, during an AI intervention with a construction organization aimed at accelerating impact, a downward financial performance forced layoffs and required people to re-apply for their jobs. The leaders decided to carry on the AI work that had begun to foster collaborative leadership activities. According to Thomas, the leaders acknowledged that there was stress and anxiety in the system and made a conscious decision not to spiral into deficit thinking. Instead, the leaders took a reframed response to the

tension and chose to focus the organization's attention on strategies to support each. The reframe of "support" grounded the AI discovery interview process, in which organizational members interviewed each other about what had helped them in times of significant change. Thomas reported that the reframe supported people in building a culture of "we."

The experiences of practitioners established that the practice of reframing tension added to Joiner et al. (2019) scholarship on leadership agility. Leaders and organizational members were able to continue the practice of reframing, introduced in the discovery stage of AI, to reframe organizational tensions such that past failures became opportunities for excellence; the search for problems turned into the search for innovative solutions; shortcomings became opportunities to elevate strengths; and organizational upheaval were opportunities to build a culture of support.

## 5.4 Practitioner Strategies for Navigating Tension and Fostering Agility

AI practitioners offered leaders practical strategies to navigate tension and foster leadership agility that went beyond reframing problems into possibilities. The tension of hierarchical-collaborative leadership illuminated underdeveloped strengths, such as leaders' ability to engage in collaborative decision-making processes at critical stages of AI and leadership agility to resist the default setting of hierarchical leadership. Kolodziejski (2004) has argued that untapped strengths become trapped in the shadow. Leaders can potentially take lessons from the shadow regarding supporting collaborative leadership practices from a hierarchy position. However, tapping into and acting on underutilized skills demanded leadership agility. Participants introduced leaders to several practical strategies to navigate the tension of hierarchical-collaborative leadership, including sociocracy decision processes, a transformation

playbook, and individual leadership coaching (Table 9). These practices developed greater

precision for understanding how leadership agility can support leaders moving back and forth

between hierarchical and collaborative leadership.

**Table 9**

*Strategies to navigate hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension*

| Strategy | Navigates the tension by… |
|---|---|
| Sociocracy | Teaching leaders and organizational members how to engage in joint, democratic decision-making processes |
| Transformation playbook | Engaging a cross-functional, multi-level team in developing a road map for change. The plan supports collaborative leadership in crucial planning areas, such as leaders stepping up. |
| Individual leadership coaching | Coaching leaders on how to support collaborative leadership initiatives, such as AI. |

A practical strategy to navigate tension was to train leaders and organizational members

in a democratic decision process called sociocracy. Sociocracy is a process that "relies on

consent-based decision-making through active self-disclosure and feedback" (Saxena and Jagota,

2016, p.173). Sonita planned and facilitated an 11-day AI summit for an international relief

organization, which included educating attendees on the benefits and applicability of sociocracy

decision processes. The organization wanted to prepare people in different countries worldwide

to feel empowered to make decisions versus relying on top-down decision processes. Sonita

worked with a planning team to organize an 11-day AI summit to introduce participants to the

process and give them opportunities to practice. Sonita recalled positive feedback from senior

leaders about the model's usefulness in guiding collaborative decisions. From a leadership agility

perspective, the sociocracy model gives leaders a tool to facilitate collaborative leadership and allows leaders to break free of the possibility of reverting to bureaucratic, top-down decisions.

The concept of a transformation playbook emerged from an AI change intervention facilitated by Thomas. The construction organization focused the AI work on creating a culture of "we." The formation of a culture-building team aimed to move the organization forward. The team comprised 40 members representing different geographic locations, functions, and levels, including senior-level leaders. According to Thomas, the culture-building team created a change management plan with a transformation playbook. The playbook outlined plans for how change and transition would be managed. The plan included work streams to address values integration, engagement, and communication. Thomas shared that a playbook section was dedicated to "leaders stepping up." Thomas noted:

> They said at this time, we are going to need all of our leaders to step up and step into this. They were making suggestions not just to be the change themselves and guiding the transformation but also had a handful of other things that included leadership would need to do and how they would need to operate from a place of values.

Remember that the culture team responsible for creating the playbook was cross-functional and multi-level and demonstrated both collaborative leadership and leadership agility.

Study participants identified individual coaching as a practical approach to developing agility in formal leaders involved in AI initiatives. Of the 26 study participants, 14 mentioned coaching as part of their AI practice. Practitioners used inquiry to help leaders build awareness of the need for agility. Questions directed leaders to consider who should be involved in change efforts, behavioral changes demonstrating a willingness to let go of untested assumptions, and actions to facilitate change. (Table 10).

**Table 10**

*Leadership agility coaching*

| Practitioner | Examples |
|---|---|
| Vivian | If we are going to be successful in making a change here, who would we need to get in the room? |
| Travis | What are the challenges of personnel?<br><br>What do you need to do differently?<br><br>If it was different, what would happen? |
| Lori | What do you need to let go of to fully embody the potential? What is the value of doing that? |
| Lita | How are you showing up?<br><br>What might be going on that you absolutely have no clue about and are just making assumptions?<br><br>What do people care most about? What would it look like if it were working?<br><br>How is it that you may be potentially contributing to the problem? |
| Nate | What are you going to do to help the rest of the organization appreciate and understand this situation and these changes? How are we going to do that? |

Lita coached leaders in advance of an initiative to clarify the role they would play in AI. Rayelle noted the benefit of coaching leaders in advance, "when the leader gets it, the leader can be a big part…like she just had the ability to flow with it." Other practitioners coached leaders on agility. For example, Carla helped to prepare leaders by coaching them through the various stages of AI. George, a practitioner who has led over 50 AI interventions in eight years, mentioned how he used coaching when an AI meeting was "going off the rails" due to a lack of leadership focus. Renata stated, "I think having someone external who can coach and support and advise and guide…is helpful to clients to be successful." The experiences of study participants suggested that coaching leaders before or during AI has been a helpful development tool.

Data indicates practical strategies for navigating tension and fostering leadership agility. Leadership agility goes beyond reframing problems into possibilities. Agility in AI requires that leaders respond to calls for collaborative leadership and move back and forth between hierarchical and collaborative leadership. Practitioners provided leaders with guidance, training, and support in three specific areas: the use of sociocracy as a tool to facilitate collaborative decisions, the development of a transformation playbook jointly created by leaders and organizational members as a guide for positive change, and executive coaching to foster agility to know how and when to support collaborative leadership initiatives.

As I moderated IFGs and individual interviews to test the validity of my findings, participants shared 17 stories related to hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension, specifically about buy-in to AI's shared leadership philosophy. Jackson reflected, "It's not just the leaders—the identified leaders, but it's really for everyone as we look at leadership. Lorenzo noted, "When I look at the leadership structures, how many of them are authentically interested in having a full involvement model?" Lorenzo added, "I'm coming and saying, is there a flattened model where people are really invited in…is their voice really going to be valued?" Julia stated, "I sometimes feel like leaders are like they're used to being at the top, and now they are with the whole." Tracy noted, "Even if they are not like super hierarchical people, they're still leaders who have a need to know and to have the answers."

Further, Grace noted that in her experience, organizational members worry about "can the organization, can the department, can the leader really sustain that…or will it go back to, you know, the way it used to be?" Lorenzo added that even if leaders are intentional about empowering others, he has noticed that, at times, the leaders "weren't as sharp with their practice and in their oversight. Julian described his experience of AI being scary for leaders. Donald

reflected, "I also tell leaders, the leaders that I've worked with, that yes, it might be scary at

times, but it might actually alleviate a lot of the weights you're actually carrying on as a leader.

Donald spoke further about how leaders are prepared to engage in AI, noting, "Maybe we have

prepared them for the first summit. But coming month three, we still need to prepare them. It's

ongoing handholding and coaching and enabling them to flow with that process and everything

that it brings up."

Participants described situations highlighting leadership tension, including when leaders

say "no" to things Tracy believes are "healthy." However, Tracy has seen it become an issue if

there are a lot of "no" responses. Grace noted, "You may have a wonderful leader today, but then

a new leader comes in two months from now and is oppressive." Nancy recalled a situation in

which new leaders made many promises to be different from the previous leadership but soon

defaulted to the same behaviors. Donald leverages the wisdom of others in the organization to

coach the leaders, noting that "someone in the room knows what's going on, or parts of what's

going on." Iris stated, "It does way more damage to invite this kind of process and then shut it

down, to never invite people's voices in." Jade reflected that in her experience, "If top leadership

hasn't brought into it, it can be almost worse to do it than to not do it." Julia concurred, noting,

"If you know in your in your mind, in your heart, that the leadership team is not buying into this,

you have to have the moral courage to say, I don't think you're ready."

Practitioners offered additional strategies to navigate leadership tension in A, including

taking a break during AI conversations to coach leaders on how to stay present, acknowledging

that AI can be scary at times for leaders but also liberating and transforming, helping the leader

identify low-hanging fruit that the leader can say "yes" to immediately during the design phase

of the AI process; preparing a guide to help leaders prepare for high engagement processes;

teaching leaders to have genuine conversations; and using the core AI team as a coaching

resource for leaders.

## 5.5 Conclusion

The first part of this chapter established the leadership shadow as the second dominant shadow in POC. While the concept of shadow has been studied relative to the polarity of positivity versus problems, AI literature has been largely silent on the implications of power-related tensions on positive change discourse. The findings constructed the leadership shadow not as good or bad but as a complex model requiring different skills at different times. Next, I introduced hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension as the second prominent dialectic in AI. The dialectic represents oppositional needs associated with the need to make hierarchical decisions, such as allocating time and resources, that can sometimes run counter to collaborative decision-making processes valued in AI. The findings demonstrated the dialectic surfaced at different stages of the AI process, including the discovery, design, and delivery phases. The triggering of tension during different phases of the process illuminated missed opportunities for hierarchical leaders to set the context for positive change, encourage organizational members to take ownership of change elements and reinforce self-organizing efforts by providing needed resources, mentoring, or advocacy.

The second half of the chapter established collaborative leadership was a new way of working for hierarchical leaders that called for leadership development. This study furthers the work of Srithika and Bhattacharyya (2009), who noted that tensions often surfaced when leaders had to unlearn routines and embrace AI. The data also established four attributes of leadership agility as opportunities for development: context setting, stakeholder agility, creative agility, and self-leadership agility (Joiner, 2018). While there was evidence in the data of practitioners demonstrating several of the four attributes, there was also evidence cited throughout the chapter that more was needed in agility to navigate dialectical tension.

Lastly, the chapter identified three strategies for navigating tension: sociocracy, a democratic decision-making process that enables hierarchical leaders to engage in joint decision-making; creating a transformation playbook to facilitate leaders and stakeholders in collaborative planning processes; and leadership coaching to prepare leaders to address emerging tensions in AI. Practical navigation strategies supported leaders in knowing when and how to move in and out of hierarchical and collaborative ways of working to initiate positive change.

The increased demand for positive organizational change in the wake of racial and social justice unrest emphasizes the timeliness of this research. Leaders are being called upon to exercise agility to lead from a place of authority while engaging with emergent collaborative leadership. A recent webinar sponsored by The Stanford Innovation and Entrepreneurship Program focused on leading in turbulent times. The session taught participants how to decide what matters most (and least) during a complex and surprising crisis, how to use this time as an opportunity to change outdated practices and strategies, how to reset expectations and operations—and why it's the best time to do so; and how to avoid burning out and stay healthy. The O.C. Tanner Institute recently released its 2020 Global Culture Report, which studied more than 20,000 employees and leaders worldwide. The report revealed a crisis in leadership. Only 26% felt that their leaders encouraged collaboration. More than half said their leader would not give up control over anything. The report called for leaders to mentor, encourage collaboration; and help employees build their own social networks within teams and with others in the organization. The time is ripe for leaders to learn and practice new routines to effectively navigate tensions inherent in organizational change.

## CHAPTER 6: THE TEMPORAL SHADOW

### 6.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, the voice shadow and leadership shadow illuminated the dialectics of free expression-limited expression and hierarchical-collaborative leadership, respectively. This chapter's temporal shadow illuminates the third dialectic of short-term orientation (STO)-long-term orientation (LTO). STO prioritizes immediate change, whereas LTO privileges a longer time horizon focused on sustainable outcomes (Das, 1987; Huy, 2002; Stjerne, Minbeva, & Söderlund, 2019; Sheri, Tanqlrala, & Venkataramanib, 2019). The dialectical framing of STO-LTO allows us to see how practitioners experienced and navigated temporal tension in positive organizational change.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of how STO and LTO have been studied in POS literature and organizational change scholarship. Next, the findings explicate practitioners' experiences of STO-LTO tension, which sometimes overlapped the dialectics of hierarchical-collaborative leadership and free expression-limited expression. The chapter presents findings that establish a pattern in the AI practice of framing STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics, such that one pole did not negate the other. Next, the chapter proceeds with an overview of tactics used by practitioners that framed STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics. Finally, the chapter discusses the theoretical and practical implications of STO-LTO tension in positive change and framing temporal tension as complementary dialectics.

### 6.2 Temporal Lens Reveals Tension in Positive Organizational Change

As organizations engage in positive change initiatives, different temporal orientations set the stage for tension to emerge. Scholarship has shown us that for some change participants, a short term-orientation (STO), focused on immediate action, is more salient than a long-term orientation (LTO) directed toward sustainable outcomes (Hofstede, 1991; Lin et al., 2019; Lumpkin & Brigham, 2011; Sheri et al., 2019). Early literature on STO and LTO grew from studies focused on national cultural values, such as the need for immediate gratification or the prioritization of tenacity in pursuing goals (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Later research turned attention to the subjective preference of managers toward STO and LTO when making strategic decisions (Bluedorn & Martin, 2008; Crossan, Cunha, Vera, & Cunha, 2005; Lin, Shi, Prescott, & Yang, 2019; Lumpkin & Brigham, 2011). Further, management studies argued that a dominant STO focus prioritized efficiency and immediate returns (Bearden, Money, & Nevins, 2006; Lin et al., 2019), whereas a dominant focus on LTO prioritized decisions affecting long-term organizational viability (Geletkanycz, 1997; Lin et al., 2019).

My findings established STO-LTO tension as a dialectic not previously identified in AI and POS literature. My research showed 19 examples of STO-LTO tension. One illustration of the tension was visible in the example of Rayelle, who led an AI initiative for a public sector agency. Rayelle has 13 years of experience and has facilitated over 50 AI sessions in her home country. She has worked with various public, banking, IT, telecommunications, and not-for-profit sectors. Her work with a public sector organization focused on enhancing collaboration between two divisions. STO-LTO tension arose as the divisions worked together to imagine a desired future. Rayelle described the conversation as reaching a point of "breakdown" as the teams expressed concerns about budget allocations. Rayelle recalled participants saying, "This is

all wonderful…how does this happen?" According to Rayelle, allocating financial resources

between the two groups was an immediate concern.

Rayelle was able to satisfy STO questions about how cross-team collaboration would

affect each division's budget by inviting a budget specialist to answer questions in real-time. In

addition, Rayelle noted:

> We prompted a couple of questions, and they were appreciative questions, but that were
> designed to get them thinking about what they are there for, what are they trying to
> create, and what are the parts that they're playing and how does this have an impact on
> the whole? I think just letting some of that air out allowed them to get back into the
> practice.

The practitioner's description of a "breakdown" is illustrative of a tension that needs

managing as change participants grappled with a temporal shift from "how it is now" to "how it

will be" in the future.

A further illustration of STO-LTO tension is an example of Reagan's experience leading

an AI strategic initiative for a manufacturing organization. As a reminder, Reagan has led over

100 AI sessions in 15 years. The desired long-term outcome was to develop a diversity and

inclusion (D&I) strategic agenda. The short-term objective was to facilitate buy-in for D&I

across the entire system. According to Reagan, the organization had a D&I executive in place,

but "they hadn't seen any shifts" in how the organization was embracing diversity. Reagan

added, "People were still feeling that…if they were in a minority group, they were still in a

minority group." Further, from a strategic planning perspective, Reagan noted:

> It was on the strategic agenda, but there was nothing around to put it into action…How to
> flesh it out, make it work, and make a really big difference? And, how to get people
> talking and behaving and making different decisions in how they engage with clients
> externally and how they promoted people internally? So, it really needed to flow into a
> lot of their processes where it hadn't show up yet.

The practitioner's observations illuminated STO to create a more inclusive environment for

minorities. In addition, the change initiative had an LTO focus to elevate diversity and inclusion

as a strategic imperative and an integral part of decision-making processes affecting internal and

external relationships.

The data showed that in 13 of 19 examples, STO-LTO tension surfaced during periods of

organizational downturn involving low employee morale, in-fighting, layoffs, or performance

setbacks. STO prioritized immediate action, whereas LTO focused on long-term sustainability.

One representative example was Leanne's experience leading an AI initiative for a fine arts

gallery on the verge of going under for the third time in 10 years. As mentioned earlier, Leanne

has nearly 19 years of experience facilitating over 20 AI sessions in her home country. Leanne

noted that the gallery was also a premier place to go for instruction. A long-term desired

outcome was to expand program offerings to include instruction for youth. However, in Leanne's

follow-up meetings with the group, she recalled, "80% of their meeting was spent talking about

recruiting faculty and whether or not they should do a catalog." Leanne noted, "It seems like the

reason they get caught up in this is…our meetings have always felt like this…this is what the

agenda looks like." Leanne recalled telling the staff, "If you really thought you wanted to do

youth programming, it seems like 80% of your effort should go into discussion of how you

would tap your resources to do youth programming." Leanne noted how taking a "time out"

helped to "prioritize" their agenda. The practitioner's intervention worked to facilitate an

understanding of how STO attention to immediate action could also align with LTO desired

outcomes.

In a further example, STO-LTO tension surfaced during major project cancellations and

layoffs in an AI initiative led by Nate. Nate began using AI in 2000 and has facilitated 50

positive change initiatives in four countries. He has worked with various sectors, including

banking, manufacturing, not-for-profit, religious, oil and gas, cruise, education, and consumer

products. A week before the AI summit, several leaders worried that a focus on culture-building

would fail to recognize the organization's immediate challenges. Nate revised the agenda to

allow time and space for leaders to talk about the current state and long-term implications. Nate

noted:

> There was a lot of discovery going on, in terms of not the traditional way we think of it,
> but discovering what really does underpin some of the decisions that had been made,
> changes that had been made to really appreciate the business situation and the rationale
> behind these decisions, which were painful and huge impact… but it was helping them
> understand what possibilities these changes created in the business that would have
> otherwise gone down the tubes.

The practitioner found it necessary to make time in the agenda to discuss STO concerns related

to layoffs without backing away from LTO decisions to save the business.

The data indicated that in seven of 19 examples of STO-LTO dialectic, tension surfaced

during the launch of strategic growth initiatives. Growth initiatives included enhancing diversity

and inclusion, employee engagement, and cross-team collaboration. An illustrative example was

Melanie's experience leading a multi-regional AI session to promote new strategic initiatives to

attract more age and gender diversity to the field. Melanie has led more than 30 AI initiatives in

eight years. During the AI strategic planning session, Melanie noticed that in one of the working

groups of older white males and young women, the males dominated the conversation as the

women sat with their arms folded. In a private conversation with Melanie, two women said they

felt "disrespected, like our voices are being drowned out, undermined." According to Melanie,

the behavior of the older men seemed to suggest, "We're the experts. We know what needs to

happen. Why aren't you young people listening to our greater wisdom?"  Melanie coached the

women in redirecting the conversation. The women followed up by proposing a new topic for

discussion that involved leveraging social media to move the organization closer to a long-term goal of attracting younger talent. The practitioner's coaching encouraged the women to focus on STO actions that could support LTO outcomes for diversity and inclusion.

A further example of how STO-LTO tension arose during strategic growth initiatives was Lynette's experience. Lynette has led close to 100 AI initiatives over seven years. She has worked with various sectors in her home country, including academia, manufacturing, not-for-profit, religious, and public sector organizations. Lynette led an initiative for a shipyard aimed at developing a leadership talent pipeline. At the same time, Lynette observed that the organization was "filling up roles and advancing people before they even learn their jobs. And they don't have the leadership skills on top of it."  The organization's growth mode surfaced STO needs to fill positions quickly and illuminated LTO needs for a strategy to develop a pool of leadership talent.

An assumption about STO-LTO tension that became evident during AI change processes was that the tension often co-existed with free expression-limited expression and hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension. Foundational research on relational dialectics established multiple dialectics are in constant play and are not mutually exclusive (Baxter & Simon, 1993). Examples of overlapping dialectics in relationships include autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, inclusion-seclusion, revelation-concealment, predictability-novelty, and conventionality-uniqueness (Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Baxter & Simon, 1993). In my research, there were five examples of STO-LTO and free expression-limited expression tension overlap; two examples of STO-LTO tension overlap with hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension; and ten examples of STO-LTO overlap with both free expression-limited expression and hierarchical-collaborative leadership. Simultaneous tensions are identified throughout the chapter.

In summary, the data presented in this section established STO-LTO tension as a dialectic not previously identified in AI and POS literature. The data indicated that tension surfaced during periods of organizational downturn *and* the launch of strategic growth initiatives. Findings also showed how STO-LTO tension often overlapped with hierarchical-collaborative leadership and free expression-limited expression.

## 6.3 Tension Framed as Complementary Dialectics

The findings indicated practitioners responded to STO-LTO tension differently than they did to hierarchical-collaborative leadership and free expression-limited expression tension. In all 19 examples, practitioners framed STO/LTO tension as complementary dialectics, such that both poles are viewed as means to achieving the other (Tracy, 2004). The results are not surprising, given AI literature emphasizes the importance of reframing deficit dialogue to focus on what is wanted instead (Cooperrider et al., 2005; Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Further, AI methodology assumes that conversations in the present shape the future, and images of the future shape real-time conversations (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). In the 32 free expression-limited expression tension examples, practitioners framed 24 as complementary, six as simple selection, favoring limited expression over free expression, and two as vacillation, alternating back and forth between the two poles (Tracy, 2004). In the 26 examples of hierarchical-collaborative tension, 15 practitioners responded to tension as complementary dialectics, seven examples of vacillating between the two poles, and four framed as simple selection, favoring hierarchical leadership over collaborative leadership.

An illustrative example of how practitioners framed STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics was the experience of Vivian, who used AI to help build a culture of equality in a national prison system. Vivian had to "help people put a different set of glasses on…help them

see that things could be different—where could the hope and the opportunity lie and how could

they believe that these things were possible." Vivian noted, "People will say things like, 'There

isn't a best day in here. Nothing positive ever happens in here…There's nothing I'm proud of.'

Vivian noted that she engaged participants in inquiry to elicit hope. For example, she described

her line of questioning as follows:

> What's today been like?" What was yesterday like? How are they different than the day before? If tomorrow was going to be a better day, what would tomorrow look like? What parts of today wouldn't be in tomorrow? What would be there instead?

The practitioner's inquiry allowed participants to articulate a desire for change grounded in their

current reality. The practitioner was able to frame STO-LTO tension as complementary

dialectics by reinforcing the message that today informs tomorrow and tomorrow informs today.

## 6.4 Tactics for Navigating Tension

The data indicated that in 11 examples, practitioners used inquiry to reframe temporal

perspective (Table 11) by linking the current reality to visions of an ideal future.

**Table 11**

*Inquiry to reframe temporal perspective*

| Practitioner | Example |
|---|---|
| Lori | In the current culture that you've all said is difficult to work in right now (so validate their reality), certainly, there must be something that is working in your favor. |
| | Tell me, what does work around here? What do you think creates that? What is your vision of what's possible? What are your pains and frustrations? |
| | What would really activate the potential here? What would really get you to where you want to be? If this didn't exist, what would exist instead? |
| Lita | What is the sadness about? The more you are willing to be with it, the more you can find the unrealized dream. |

| Sharon | How would it be if we focused more explicitly on peoples' strengths instead of their weaknesses and problems? |
|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Thomas | We are going down this downward spiral, how can we reframe to what we want more of? |
| Cassie | Have you ever had an issue arise and something didn't go right, and all you know is don't do that again? But what am I supposed to do instead? So, we're trying to find the "instead." |
| Nate   | How are people benefiting from this set of behaviors? How does this mindset work for what the organization needs to do? What might a different future look like? What would it take to create a different set of mindsets and behaviors that are more useful for the strategy? |

A further example of how practitioners used inquiry to reframe temporal perspective was Renata's experience leading an AI strategic planning initiative for an academic institution. Renata invited participants to imagine how the organization might look in five years when she began the AI process. Renata recalled that participants had difficulty thinking about the future because of a pervasive focus on toxic relationships within the institution. Renata noted that with her encouragement, people could say, "'I'm hearing what you are saying about things now; what would you want them to be if things were perfect?' The reframe tactic acknowledged STO perspectives of how things are now and invited participants to expand their thinking to reimagine what more is possible in the long term.

Similarly, Sienna used the reframe tactic to help AI participants see the connection between short-term and long-term thinking. Sienna led AI initiatives in different hospital settings to identify nurse retention strategies. Sienna recalled one AI session with a group of experienced nurses:

> They were talking about how badly they treat new hires, and it's from the interview all the way through—it's just awful. And I said, "Okay, what would it be like if it were the positive opposite of what you are talking about? They couldn't even speak...finally

somebody said, 'We nurture our own'…because all of them are proud of, 'We eat our young.'...And then, they wrote a descriptor of what that meant. And once again, that was like, light bulbs--holy shit, it doesn't have to be like this.

Inquiry to reframe temporal perspectives allowed change participants to see the short-term and long-term as intertwined rather than working to negate the other. The practitioner facilitated an immediate shift in mindset from "eating our young" to "nurturing our own."

In addition to inquiry to reframe temporal perspectives, practitioners utilized six other tactics to frame STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics (Table 12). In seven of the 19 examples of STO-LTO tension, practitioners used the tactic of reinforcing shared values; four examples involved acknowledging discomfort; three involved providing timely progress updates; two related to parking concerns; two focused on building financial literacy; and one detailed scenario planning. Each tactic will be further explained in the following sections.

**Table 12**

*Tactics to frame STO/LTO tension as complementary dialectics*

| Tactic |
|---|
| Reinforcing shared values |
| Acknowledging discomfort |
| Providing timely progress updates |
| Parking concerns |
| Building financial literacy |
| Scenario planning |

### 6.4.1 Reinforcing Shared Values

Reinforcing shared values worked to forge a link between STO and LTO priorities. One example was Lynette's experience leading a culture change initiative for a publishing organization. Lynette noted that the desired outcome for the AI work with the publishing organization was to build a strengths-based culture. However, her conversations with staff

revealed immediate concerns about micromanagement. Lynette implemented a values

assessment tool that identified inclusion and engagement as shared values across the

organization. Lynette said, "We carved out the time, so they were able to have a different

conversation, and you saw more joining of the minds." The values assessment helped to bridge

STO concerns about micromanagement with LTO desired outcomes to build a strengths-based

culture of inclusion and engagement.

Similarly, in the exemplar of Cecily, the tactic of reinforcing shared values worked to

bridge STO-LTO priorities. Cecily also experienced hierarchical-collaborative leadership as she

led an AI culture-building initiative with an academic institution. STO-LTO tension manifested

as an overlapping tension when staff favored immediate action to address unmet expectations

related to leadership engagement. At the same time, leaders privileged LTO change focused on

building an appreciative culture. Cecily conducted a values assessment for the entire

organization, noting:

> You get to see how much function or dysfunction is in the current culture. People
> experience it, but you also get to see, here's the kind of culture we want …we want
> engagement, collaboration, shared vision…shared information, and…teamwork.

The assessment tool identified collaboration and engagement as shared values aligned with STO

needs for leadership engagement, and LTO desired outcomes for a more positive culture of

collaboration.

Further, in the exemplar of Thomas, STO-LTO tension surfaced with the overshadowing

of the AI culture change initiative by the need to downsize staff. Thomas initiated a values

assessment that identified ownership and accountability as shared values. According to Thomas,

the attitude across the organization was, "If this is what we say our positive culture looks like,

these are the values that underlie it. This is how we are going to get there." From an STO-LTO

perspective, initiating the values assessment process was an immediate action (STO) that identified ownership and accountability as foundational elements for LTO positive culture change.

## 6.4.2 Acknowledging Discomfort

The tactic of acknowledging discomfort worked to validate STO priorities without discrediting LTO desired outcomes. The tactic was evident in the example of an AI change initiative led by Karima for a college experiencing difficulties related to budget, enrollment, downsizing, and layoffs. Karima noted, "People perceive that maybe all of this is happening, but we have to be positive." The practitioner's observation highlighted that STO focused on the present realities, and LTO focused on positive change. Karima noted, "Sometimes you just have to lean into that and really acknowledge the difficult times… without turning it into, there's a pot of gold at the end of every rainbow, when it doesn't feel like that." Karima reported advising leaders to sit with people, listen to their concerns, and acknowledge their discomfort. The tactic acknowledged STO priorities concerning job security without negating LTO desired outcomes to build an appreciative culture.

Acknowledging discomfort framed STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics in an AI initiative led by Carla for an academic institution. The desired outcome of the initiative was to plan and implement a voluntary organizational restructuring. During the 18-month planning period, Carla knew people were concerned about job security. To help ease the tension, Carla provided participants with confidential access to a human resources partner who would be available to answer immediate concerns and questions. Carla intended to "make the discomfort as manageable as possible." The practitioner's actions acknowledged what organizational

members were experiencing in the short term as LTO decisions to finalize the restructuring were

in progress.

### 6.4.3. Providing Timely Updates

Providing timely updates helped close the gap between STO needs for immediate action

and long-term desired outcomes for sustainable change. The tactic was evident in an AI initiative

led by Cassie to help a nuclear facility build an enduring culture of excellence. Cassie also

experienced hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension during her work with the facility.

According to Cassie, an immediate concern for employees was whether they could meet a

mission-critical deadline after experiencing two previous failures. Cassie noted, "I thought it was

a strategic move to look at the data as we were going." Cassie took specific steps to ensure

employees had access to up-to-date information. For example, she began by providing the leader

with weekly updates about what the AI process was uncovering regarding innovative ideas. As

the initiative progressed, Cassie coached the leader to deliver daily progress reports to employees

via television monitors throughout the plant. The tactic reminded employees of the relationship

between STO priorities and LTO outcomes.

A further example of how progress updates worked to frame STO and LTO as

complementary dialectics was an AI culture change initiative led by George. Since 2011, George

has facilitated over 50 AI interventions in his home country for various sectors, including

academia, information technology, telecommunications, the public sector, and not-for-profit

organizations. During an AI initiative with a marketing organization, George recalled how the

organization's vision was to create a cultural identity that would be attractive to people inside

and outside the organization as employees sought immediate relief from micromanagement,

which, according to George, was prevalent in the organization.

George coached the leaders to give employees more autonomy to prioritize their work

while facilitating weekly meetings to review their progress. In addition, George encouraged the

leaders to meet monthly to talk about the culture:

> They're updating each other as a group…We insisted upon it. At least once a month,
> everyone gets in a room and asks questions and talk…That's changed the dynamic. So,
> culturally, it will change them. Because what you're changing are norms of behavior.

The practitioner's insistence that leaders schedule regular updates helped to align STO needs for

immediate autonomy and less micromanagement with LTO needs to measure progress toward

culture change.

### 6.4.4 Parking Concerns

The tactic of parking concerns worked to frame STO-LTO tension as complementary

dialectics by inviting participants to verbalize any immediate concerns that would prevent them

from focusing on positive long-term outcomes. The tactic was visible in an AI initiative led by

Travis for a healthcare organization. Travis asked participants to write on a post-it note, "What is

causing you tension?" Participants posted or "parked" notes on a board in the room. Sample

comments included, "Management didn't listen. They didn't care. They didn't appreciate us."

The comments remained visible throughout the AI session. Travis noted, at the end of the day,

"We then go back and see what we covered." The list allowed STO concerns to be present

without overshadowing LTO dialogue. A footnote in Travis' use of the "park-it" tactic was

sharing the list with management after the session to help them see the importance of not rushing

to meetings and saying good morning and thank you.

Sinead used a second variation of the "park it" tactic in an AI initiative with a

multinational organization. Sinead conducted individual conversations with change participants

prior to the whole group session. Sinead noted, "One of the reasons I like to have pre-

conversations with people is that the stories they are telling about why things are the way they

are… they put a lot of thought into that, and it's really important to them." Sinead added, "very

often, because they know I know, they don't feel the need to necessarily say it, because they

have deposited it with me beforehand. They told this important person who is going to try and

make things better." The practitioner's action allowed concerns to be "parked" with her in a way

that acknowledged both STO and LTO priorities.

## 6.4.5 Financial Literacy

The tactic of building financial literacy helped to establish an understanding of how

spending decisions affected the short-term and the long-term. The tactic was visible in AI

initiatives led by Jasmine and Rayelle. In both examples, fiscal information about the present

state enabled participants to think more expansively about a long-term vision. For example,

during Jasmine's work with school district representatives, she recalled a long-term plan to

restructure spending authority from a localized to a centralized model. As a reminder, Jasmine

also experienced hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension while working with the

organization. Jasmine recounted, "They were making decisions on spending that impacted their

own zip codes and no one else…people had to be wooed and swayed to let go of broken

spending decisions." Jasmine also noted, "It was really two tasks--I had to harness the

hope…and at the same time…help them more narrowly articulate how they're going to manifest

that vision into a specific social or technical architecture for moving forward."

The practitioner had two tasks--highlighting STO priorities to privilege individual zip

codes and LTO desired outcomes to address a more expansive spending issue. Jasmine decided

to educate the participants on the implications of their financial decisions and noted:

> When you did the math and looked at the problem, it was through the roof, beyond
> control…we wound up…taking the time to create some type of financial literacy in the

room and to educate people about how in the red we actually were…And by educating them on the problem, they became more mindful and attentive to the larger system within which they worked.

The practitioner's actions framed STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics by demonstrating how mindfulness and attentiveness to short-term spending decisions had long-term implications. Building financial literacy helped illuminate the need to protect the future of the whole system rather than individual zip codes.

Similarly, in the example of Rayelle, presented in the previous section, the practitioner could satisfy STO questions about how cross-team collaborations would affect the budget allocations of the two divisions by creating time and space for a budget specialist to address questions about resource implications. Rayelle stated, "I think just letting some of that air out allowed them to get back into the practice." The practitioner's actions facilitated immediate action to address STO concerns without negating LTO outcomes for collaboration across the two divisions.

### 6.4.6 Scenario Planning

The tactic of scenario planning helped participants imagine potential long-term outcomes to help make sense of short-term priorities. An example is Sinead's experience leading an AI initiative to help a helicopter manufacturing division navigate an 18-month transition period. Sinead also experienced free expression-limited expression tension during her work with the organization. According to Sinead, no new orders were coming, jeopardizing the organization's future. Sinead noted:

The HR department was encouraging people to leave this division and find other jobs. At the same time, the division still had work it had to complete. The division wanted to keep people… the challenge was how to keep up motivation, morale, and quality. How do you keep people motivated when the future is very uncertain?

The practitioners' observations demonstrated how LTO concerns about the division's future and questions about job security could negate the importance of STO priorities focused on keeping people motivated to deliver quality expectations.

Sinead facilitated the scenario planning exercise by creating three potential outcomes for the division that people could think about together. She invited participants to select one of three different scenarios to explore with others. Sinead described the three different scenarios as follows:

> One is to think about the worst possible outcome, given what we know. One is going to think about the best possible outcome if all of these things that might happen happen. And the other one is going to think about what if we just carry on as we are and slowly run down.

According to Sinead, the large group debriefs focused on identifying common themes that would allow participants to "think about what can we be doing now that is useful?" Sinead added, "Somehow, we managed to tease out that different people were in different situations, and some people were nearer retirement, whereas others had young families and had just taken on big mortgages and couldn't afford to lose their jobs." Sinead also noted a member of the worst-case scenario discussion group commented, "I'm glad I looked it in the face." The participant's feedback demonstrated how imagining LTO scenarios helped crystalize STO efforts' relevancy.

In summary, findings indicated that practitioners used tactics beyond the AI practice of reframing perspectives to frame STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics. The findings contribute to AI and POS scholarship by offering practitioners a variety of ways to navigate tension associated with competing temporal perspectives arising in positive organizational change initiatives.

## 6.5 Implications of STO-LTO Dialectic

A dialectical framing of STO-LTO tension complicates our understanding of temporality in AI change methodology and opens the door for future research about the antecedents of STO-LTO tension. In addition, more research is needed to analyze the theoretical implications of STO-LTO tension overlap with hierarchical-collaborative leadership and expression suppression tension relative to navigation strategies. For practitioners, there are opportunities to engage change participants and peers in the co-creation of tactics to frame STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics to answer the question, what are the implications of the tension (RQ2b)?

### 6.5.1 Theoretical Implications

In the two previous chapters, we learned how practitioners had to navigate the dialectic of free-expression-limited expression when leading positive change initiatives. We also learned how hierarchical-collaborative leadership informed the need for leadership agility. The dialectical framing of STO-LTO tension complicates our understanding of temporality in POS scholarship that goes beyond the 4D process of engaging participants in dialogue about the past, present, and future (Cooperrider et al., 2005; Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Whitney &Trosten-Bloom, 2003). STO-LTO tension allows us to see the need for practitioners to manage different time orientations that exist simultaneously in positive dialogic change processes.

AI literature has been silent on when different temporal orientations may surface. My research indicated STO-LTO tension surfaced in AI initiatives during periods of low employee morale, in-fighting, layoffs, or performance setbacks, *and* the launch of strategic growth initiatives focused on diversity and inclusion, employee engagement, and cross-team collaboration. Further research is needed to gain clarity about the antecedents of STO-LTO tensions. In addition, dialectical tension theory allows us to see that tension is never resolved and

may manifest at various times with different intensities (Baxter & Erbert, 1999). Future research

may further explore the conditions in which temporal tension surfaces, is neutralized for a time,

and surfaces again.

The co-existence of STO-LTO tension with free expression-limited expression tension

and hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension calls for further research to analyze the

rationale for responding to overlapping tensions in different ways, including framing tensions as

complementary dialectics, privileging one pole of the tension over the other, or vacillating

between two poles.

### 6.5.2 Practical Implications

The framing of STO-LTO as a dialectical tension allows practitioners to normalize

temporal tension that may surface in positive change initiatives. For example, practitioners can

work with organizational members to facilitate a shared understanding of short-term needs and

long-term desired outcomes. By establishing STO and LTO needs, practitioners can also help

change participants notice when privileging one pole of the tension may overshadow or negate

the other. In addition, practitioners can create learning opportunities for AI participants and

organizational leaders by being transparent about opportunities to frame STO-LTO tension as

complementary dialectics. Further, practitioners can invite AI participants to co-construct tactics

to frame STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics. Lastly, practitioners can create

opportunities for a wider audience of practitioners to generate new ideas for navigating STO-

LTO tension.

## 6.6 Conclusion

My research established STO-LTO as a dialectical tension that needs to be managed in positive organizational change. Sometimes, practitioners had to navigate multiple dialectics as STO-LTO tension overlapped with hierarchical-collaborative leadership and free expression-limited expression tension. The simultaneous occurrence of dialectical tensions is not unusual; however, practitioners demonstrated a unique response to STO-LTO tension. Instead of selecting one pole over the other or vacillating between two poles, practitioners consistently framed STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics such that one pole did not negate the other. In addition, practitioners used various tactics to frame the tension as complementary dialectics that went beyond the AI practice of reframing perspectives.

The dialectical framing of STO-LTO tension makes visible gaps in our theoretical understanding of antecedents of STO-LTO tension that demand additional research. More research is needed to analyze how responses to STO-LTO tension affect hierarchical-collaborative leadership and free expression-limited expression tension that may exist simultaneously.

Practitioners can normalize STO-LTO tension by involving change participants in articulating STO-LTO priorities. Further, practitioners can engage organizational members in the social construction of tactics to frame temporal tension as complementary dialectics. Lastly, practitioners can work with their peers to explore and expand tactics that support framing STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics.

# CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

## 7.1 Introduction

Positive organizational change (POC) prioritizes a focus on positive possibilities over traditional problem-centric approaches to change. A key question is what to do with the "elephants in the room" representing what people think is undiscussable in a POC context. This study merges dialectical tension theory and the concept of organizational shadow to address tensions affecting dialogue in POC processes, such as Appreciative Inquiry (AI). The research questions addressed in this study include: what are practitioners' experiences of dialectical tensions associated with AI in organizational change efforts? What assumptions about the tension became evident during the change process? In what context did the tension arise? What are the implications of the tension? How did the tension influence the process? And, in what ways are dialectical tensions in AI navigated in organizations?

Scholars have argued for more research on polarities associated with favoring positive, strengths-based dialogue over talk about organizational problems or deficits (Fitzgerald et al., 2010). Scholars contend polarities are central to the manifestation of the shadow--a repository of censored organizational traits and underdeveloped strengths (Bowles, 1991; Fitzgerald, Oliver, & Hoxsey, 2010; Jung, 1968; Kolodziejski, 2004). In literature, the shadow is often associated with negative thoughts and emotions (Bowles, 1991; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). A dialectical lens makes visible the tensions underlying the shadow that allow or limit the expression of negative thoughts and emotions (Baxter & Simon, 1993). This study addresses a theoretical gap concerning the shadow--what it consists of and how it shows up in the context of positive

organizational change and problematizes our understanding of the positive-negative polarity commonly associated with AI (Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Kolodziejski, 2004).

This study advances what we know about the shadow side of organizations by identifying specific shadows of dialectical tension inherent in AI initiatives, legitimizing them as typical of the process. The findings problematize the positive-negative polarity commonly associated with AI (Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Kolodziejski, 2004) and instead build on previous articulations of shadow to define it as a dialectic of opposing needs. This study identified the voice shadow as a tension between free expression and limited expression; the leadership shadow as hierarchical-collaborative tension; and the temporal shadow as a tension between short term-long term orientation needs. The dialectical framing of tensions makes visible assumptions inherent in POC methodology about *what* dialogue is expressed or limited, *who is* empowered to make decisions, and *when* different organizational priorities are in play. Further, this study contributes to POS and AI scholarship by identifying the contexts in which tensions are likely to arise, the theoretical implications of tensions, and different strategies practitioners use to navigate tensions.

A primary contribution of this study is that it addresses the critique in literature warning of toxic positivity (Cross, 2022; Collins, 2022). Such research suggests toxic positivity results in the shaming and marginalizing of individuals for expressing emotions that may not always be positive (Cross, 2022). Yet, this study found experienced AI practitioners often honored talk atypical of the positive, while demonstrating nuanced approaches that moved organizational change initiatives toward constructive solutions.

The findings demonstrate that when the change process turned away from the positive, practitioners often responded by framing tension as complementary dialectics. In 77 examples of AI practitioners encountering a turn from the positive, these experienced facilitators navigated

opposing needs by both engaging participants' concerns and redirecting them towards a positive

vision by a nearly three to one margin (58 of 77 exemplars). The findings challenge the

stereotype that positive change processes suppress substantive concerns found in negative talk.

This chapter is structured thematically by dialectical tension, beginning with free

expression-limited expression, followed by hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension and

STO-LTO tension. First, I summarize key findings relevant to the research questions. I continue

the discussion with theoretical implications followed by practical implications. The practical

implications section includes sample tools to help practitioners identify and navigate the tension.

The chapter proceeds with a general discussion of limitations and opportunities for future

research.

## 7.2 Free Expression-Limited Expression

This study introduces the voice shadow in AI constructed by the dialectical tension of

free expression-limited expression. The tension manifests as opposing and simultaneous needs to

allow for and limit the expression of negative thoughts and concerns. The findings indicate the

tension arose amid questions about what is or is not discussible in positive change dialogue.

Further, the findings establish that practitioners primarily allowed for free expression even when

employees surfaced grievances. In the exemplars of the tension between free expression and

limited expression, practitioners demonstrated multiple strategies to navigate the tension,

including framing the tension as complementary dialectics so that both poles were no longer

opposites (Tracy, 2004). While complementary framing was the dominant strategy, there were a

few instances when practitioners limited expression based on the demands of organizational

leaders or when the conversation devolved into unhelpful attacks. Also, in rare instances,

practitioners vacillated between free and limited expression at different periods.

7.2.1 Theoretical Implications

This study identifies counternarratives as a critical part of AI conversations that foreground participants' stories about diversity, equity, and inclusion that may be painful (Jones, 2020; Kinloch, Penn, & Burkhard,  2020; Lundholt et al., 2018).The discovery of counternarratives in positive change dialogue reflects a willingness of practitioners to explore stories that diverge from dominant narratives focused on the organization's positive core (Bamberg, 2004; Lundholt et al., 2018; Stanley, 2007). In addition, this study supports the literature that positions counternarratives as "a means to envision a future of working together…a way to fill in what has been missing" (Driskill et al., 2012).

The findings established practitioners prioritized principles over stringent processes, allowing AI principles such as free choice and wholeness guide their choices in facilitating change initiatives.  Practitioners relied on AI principles of free choice and wholeness to support the expression of counternarratives. The free choice principle allowed people who were at times marginalized or reticent to express a divergent perspective to speak out. The wholeness principle normalized counternarratives as part of an organization's whole story (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Further, practitioners were skillful in using reframing inquiry to talk about the "elephants in the room" to allow for generativity dialogue.

The findings have implications for future research on how counternarratives in positive change dialogue undermine fears about toxic positivity. Scholarship on toxic positivity suggests remedies include demonstrating empathy (Tufvesson, 2020), validating concerns (France, 2021), and communicating authentically (Collins, 2022). This study adds to the conversation by suggesting practitioners adhere to multiple AI principles, not just the positive, to allow for free expression of the whole story experienced by all participants engaged in the process. Further, this

study answers the call for research into the role of less explored AI principles (Fitzgerald et al.,

2010) by demonstrating how the free choice and wholeness principles enable the expression of

counternarratives and generative conversations about the "elephants in the room."

### 7.2.2 Practical Implications

This study identifies examples of free expression-limited expression tension. The

template below supports practitioners in identifying the tension in positive change initiatives

(Table 13). In addition, practitioners can use the inquiry considerations for self-reflection or as

facilitative prompts.

**Table 13**

*Identifying Free expression-limited expression Tension*

| Characteristics | Inquiry Considerations |
|---|---|
| Free expression allows people to talk about the "elephants in the room." | What topics are emerging as the undiscussable "elephants in the room? In the practitioner role, what choices allow dialogue about the "elephants?" What is happening as a result? |
| Limited expression ignores or censors talk that is not positive | What type of talk is limited? What is the reason to limit expression? What is happening as a result? |

The template below supports practitioners in navigating free expression-limited

expression tension (Table 14). The tool is derived from practitioners' experiences using the free

choice and wholeness principles to navigate tension. Practitioners can consider the questions to

evaluate how adherence to principles affects what people think they can or cannot discuss.

**Table 14**

*Navigating free expression-limited expression tension using AI principles*

| AI Principle | Inquiry Considerations |
|---|---|
| **Free choice**: People can choose how and what they contribute. | What counternarratives are emerging in AI? As the practitioner, what choices are you making to support the expression of counternarratives? What are you saying and doing? What do you notice happening as a result? |
| **Wholeness**: Bringing people together to understand the whole story of an organization. | As the practitioner, what choices are you making to demonstrate the need to hear the organization's whole story? What are you saying and doing to normalize the expression of counternarratives? What do you notice happening as a result? |

## 7.3 Hierarchical-Collaborative Leadership Tension

This study identifies the dialectic of hierarchical-collaborative leadership as a tension not previously explored in AI. The dialectic represents oppositional needs associated with traditional, bureaucratic leadership that runs counter to assumptions laid out in AI and POS literature for joint, collaborative decision-making processes. The findings suggest that three stages of AI's 4D process trigger hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension: discovery, design, and delivery. At the discovery phase, evidence points to leaders making unilateral decisions to exempt themselves from activities aimed at context setting and orientation to AI. At the design stage, tension is visible when leaders exclude organizational members from activities to imagine provocative propositions of what the organization could be. Further, at the delivery stage, hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension surfaces when leaders decide the next steps for action alone.

Further, the findings suggest that leaders often default to familiar bureaucratic routines when the dialectic presents itself. Evidence includes examples of leaders falling back into patterns of directing work tasks. Contributing factors indicate a lack of strategic alignment, a

tendency to re-work plans developed through collaborative leadership processes, new leaders

coming onto the scene with traditional ideas of how change should be planned and executed, and

pressures to turn around failing organizations. The findings also suggest leaders must be better

prepared to support collaborative leadership efforts. A solid grounding in AI and greater self-

awareness about leadership decisions and actions are required to influence joint decisions about

the positive change agenda.

      The findings indicate the need for leadership agility to support collaborative leadership

efforts from a perch of authority. The study suggests that positive change participants expect

leaders to appear meaningfully, beyond lip service. Opportunities to demonstrate leadership

agility include responses to downward turns in organizational performance when leaders default

to hierarchical working methods. Further, the findings suggest leadership agility happens when

leaders can respond to tension as complementary dialectics, such that one pole of the dialectic

does not negate the other (Baxter, 1988, 1990; Tracy, 2004). The findings indicate that reframing

tension encompasses four attributes: recasting past failures as opportunities for excellence,

turning the search for problems into innovative solutions, reframing shortcomings as

opportunities to elevate strengths, and positioning organizational upheaval as an opportunity to

build a culture of support. The findings indicate a reframed response to tension addresses the

need for leadership agility in positive change.

### 7.3.1 Theoretical Implications

      Positive change scholarship has been largely silent about the implications of power-

related tensions on positive change discourse. AI literature emphasizes the egalitarian intention

of the AI summit (Ludema et al. (2003), which takes for granted that leaders know how to

support a collaborative leadership model. This study demonstrates otherwise, as hierarchical

leadership patterns usurp collaborative leadership initiatives at various stages of the change

process. This study acknowledges the need for leadership development to create a new default

setting when the hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension presents itself.

Reframing tension expands our thinking about how leaders demonstrate agility in

organizational change settings. This study adds the ability to reframe tension to Joiner and

Josephs' (2007) Leadership Agility framework. The framework includes context setting,

stakeholder agility, creative agility, and self-leadership agility. This study suggests reframing

tension demands an agile mindset, which, according to Joiner and Josephs (2007), represents the

evolution of cognitive and emotional capacities. Dialectical tension theorists suggest reframing

tension is more complex and cognitively advanced than selecting one pole over the other,

vacillating between poles, or neutralizing the intensity of each pole through small talk (Baxter,

1988, 1990; Tracy. 2004).

### 7.3.2 Practical Implications

A potential tool for practitioners is a template to help identify hierarchical-collaborative

leadership tension and inquiry considerations (Table 15). The template describes tension

characteristics gleaned from the data. Practitioners may use the questions in the inquiry

considerations column for planning and debriefing conversations with peers or leaders.

Questions can initiate conversations about resources, tools, and practices needed to navigate

tension with change participants. Inquiry considerations can support practitioners in normalizing

dialogue about hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension.

**Table 15**

*Identifying Hierarchical-collaborative Leadership Tension*

| Characteristics | Inquiry Considerations |
| --- | --- |

| | |
|---|---|
| Collaborative leadership involves formal leaders and organizational members making decisions together.<br><br>Hierarchical leadership involves formal leaders making decisions alone. | How do you imagine formal leaders behave differently in a collaborative leadership context?<br><br>How do you imagine organizational members behave differently in a collaborative leadership context?<br><br>What behaviors may need to be learned/unlearned by formal leaders when engaging in collaborative leadership decision-making processes?<br><br>When engaging in collaborative leadership decision-making processes, what behaviors may need to be learned/unlearned by organizational members?<br><br>When do you think it may be necessary to move back and forth between collaborative and hierarchical leadership?<br><br>What resources/tools/practices will help leaders and organizational members toggle back and forth between collaborative and hierarchical leadership? |

This study identifies strategies practitioners use to help leaders and organizational members navigate hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension. The three strategies described in the template below (Table 16) include learning and development, the creation of a transformation playbook, and individual coaching. Practitioners can use the sample questions under the inquiry considerations column as dialogue prompts for change participants.

**Table 16**

*Strategies and Sample Inquiry to Navigate Hierarchical-collaborative Leadership Tension*

| Strategy | Inquiry Considerations |
|---|---|
| ***Learning and development:***<br>Teaching leaders and organizational members how to engage in joint, democratic decision- | What are we discovering about the positive aspects of collaborative decision-making processes?<br><br>What are our hopes and dreams for leveraging collaborative decision-making processes?<br><br>What do we need to consider when implementing a |

| making processes such as sociocracy | collaborative decision-making process? |
|---|---|
| | What changes will we enact to support collaborative decision-making processes? |
| | When do you think it may be necessary to move back and forth between collaborative and hierarchical leadership? |
| | What resources/tools/practices will help leaders and organizational members vacillate between collaborative and hierarchical leadership? |
| ***Transformation playbook:*** Engaging a cross-functional, multi-level team in developing a roadmap for change | What are opportunities to step into collaborative leadership? |
| | How will collaborative leadership efforts be adopted across various work streams? |
| | What mechanisms will sustain collaborative leadership? |
| ***Individual leadership coaching:*** Coaching leaders on how to support collaborative leadership initiatives, such as AI | What are examples of collaborative leadership at its best? (Discovery) |
| | What possibilities exist for collaborative leadership during this change process? (Dream) |
| | What do you need to do to prepare for collaborative leadership? (Design) |
| | What will you do to demonstrate continued support for collaborative leadership? (Deliver) |

## 7.4 STO-LTO Tension

STO-LTO tension is not new in organizational change. What is new is how AI practitioners can consistently reframe the tension as complementary dialectics such that one pole does not negate the other (Tracy, 2004). Practitioners' responses to STO-LTO tension differ from those to free expression-limited expression and hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension. The findings establish that practitioners already manage the STO-LTO dialectic as

complementary more so than the other two tensions. Responses to free-expression-limited

expression and hierarchical-collaborative leadership tensions include reframing tension as

complementary dialectics, vacillation, and selecting one pole over the other (Tracy, 2004). The

reframing of STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics bridges the gap between "how it is

now" and "how it will be" in the future. Further, the findings demonstrate how imagining a more

positive future supports participants in reframing negativity in the current state.

   The findings indicate practitioners use a variety of tactics to frame STO-LTO tension as

complementary dialectics that go beyond the AI practice of reframing deficit dialogue. AI

literature encourages practitioners to reframe problems as possibilities (Cooperrider et al., 2005;

Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). While this study indicates that

reframing dialogue is a valuable tactic to help change participants see the short-term and long-

term as intertwined versus working to negate the other, practitioners also use different strategies.

More specifically, reinforcing shared values works to forge a link between STO and LTO

priorities. The tactic of acknowledging discomfort works to validate STO priorities without

discrediting LTO desired outcomes. Communicating timely updates helps to close the gap

between STO needs for immediate action and long-term desired results for sustainable change.

Parking concerns help participants verbalize immediate fears that prevent them from focusing on

positive long-term outcomes. Building financial literacy establishes an understanding of how

spending decisions affect the short- and long-term. Scenario planning helps participants imagine

potential long-term effects to help make sense of short-term priorities. The six tactics

demonstrate various approaches to reframing STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics.

### 7.4.1 Theoretical Implications

This study extends existing research on the viability of using dialectical tension theory to understand how organizational conflicts are managed (Erbert, 2014). This study responds to the call for empirical investigations of members' responses to various tensions and how tensions are communicated within the organization (Erbert, 2014). Further, this study shows that framing STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics helps to manage conflicts related to resource sharing, diversity and inclusion, handling of layoffs, and distrust between leaders and staff. The consistent framing of STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics indicates practitioners have prior experience reframing tension. One explanation is that STO-LTO tension is ingrained in change literature, making it familiar for practitioners to rely on proven navigation strategies. This study suggests reframing tension as complementary dialectics legitimizes opposing needs. The reframe also allows participants to have a facilitated conversation about the deeper conflicts underlying oppositional poles.

### 7.4.2 Practical Application

The template below is a potential tool to help practitioners identify STO-LTO tension (Table 17). The table includes characteristics of the tension derived from the study to help practitioners recognize the tension. Inquiry considerations assist practitioners in leading dialogue about examples of STO-LTO tension in the organization. Practitioners can ask questions about how STO of LTO informs each other to create transparency of the tension as complementary dialectics.

**Table 17**

*Identifying STO-LTO Tension*

| Characteristics | Inquiry Considerations |
|---|---|
| | |

| Short-term orientation (STO) prioritizes immediate change.

Long-term orientation (LTO) prioritizes sustainable outcomes. | What are examples of STO priorities for this organization?

What are examples of LTO priorities for this organization?

How might STO priorities inform LTO aspirations?

How might LTO priorities inform STO needs? |

This study included tactics practitioners used to reframe STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics. The template below (Table 18) offers practitioners a composite resource for navigating STO-LTO tension. The inquiry considerations support reframing tension as complementary so that one pole does not negate the other. Practitioners can use the questions as dialogue prompts to help change participants see the interdependence of STO and LTO needs.

**Table 18**

*Tactics for Reframing STO-LTO Tension as Complementary Dialectics*

| Tactic | Inquiry Considerations |
|---|---|
| Reinforcing shared values | What values are reflected in STO needs?

What values are reflected in LTO aspirations?

How can you be intentional about living your values now?

How will living your values now prepare you for the future? |
| Acknowledging discomfort | What thoughts and emotions are evoked when you think about STO needs?

What thoughts and emotions are evoked when you think about LTO aspirations? |
| Reframing perspectives | What has today been like?

If tomorrow were going to be a better day, what would tomorrow look like?

What parts of today would not be in tomorrow? |

| | |
|---|---|
| | What would be there instead? |
| Communicating timely updates | What was accomplished today? |
| | What if anything was unexpected? |
| | What is essential to be aware of? |
| | What are the priorities for tomorrow? |
| | How are today's results contributing to long-term desired outcomes? |
| | What contributions should be acknowledged? |
| Parking concerns | What is causing you tension? |
| | How did it feel to "park" your concerns? |
| | What new awareness do you have after parking your concerns and engaging in dialogue with others? |
| Building financial literacy | What are the financial implications of short-term needs? |
| | What are the financial implications of long-term aspirations? |
| | How will STO spending decisions affect LTO aspirations? |
| | How will LTO aspirations affect immediate spending practices? |
| Scenario planning | Given what we know, what is the best possible outcome? |
| | What is the worst possible outcome? |
| | What do you expect to happen if you take no action? |

Participants in the IFG sessions and the individual data validation interviews offered additional

strategies that aligned with efforts to frame tension as complementary dialectics, including

helping people to view the tragedy through the lens of strength and resilience, using the

opportunity tree method to list problems you are facing on one side and the opportunity the

problem presents on the other side; honoring tension as an experience of the "whole" than can also be managed as a "whole;" and building on what people understand and know about the now to prepare for the future.

## 7.5 Limitations

Participants represent a homogenous group of seasoned AI practitioners, having led over 2,400 AI interventions with over 640 years of combined experience and an average of 16 years facilitating AI change initiatives. That said, limitations of this study include sample size and homogeneity of study participants. While the interviews produced rich data, the small sample size of 41 participants may limit the generalization of findings. Of the 41 participants, 29 were women. Further, study participants are part of a network of practitioners associated with the Taos Institute, including many of AI's founders. Being a part of the network may or may not affect the participants' views. In addition, the wealth of participant experience benefitted the study but may infer that all AI practitioners have the same level of knowledge. New practitioners may be limited in their familiarity with various change management tools and techniques. For example, the practitioners in this study often relied on tools and techniques outside of AI, such as training participants on sociocracy, supporting organizations in developing a transformation playbook, or providing organizational leaders with one-on-one coaching. In addition, the practitioners in this study demonstrate an ability to leverage various tactics to frame tension as complementary dialectics that may not be readily accessible to novice practitioners. Lastly, the study is limited to practitioners' uncontested memories and perspectives, which has implications for future research on organizational members' experiences of tensions.

The interpretive focus groups (IFGs) validated themes related to free expression-limited expression and hierarchical-collaborative leadership tensions. However, participants in the two

focus groups initially seemed reticent to explore the tensions represented in the excerpts. In one case, a practitioner said that after reading the first excerpt, he stopped because "I don't feel that I can really waste my time." Rather than name the tension (what is happening?), participants initially guided the conversation to why it was happening, focusing on the AI practitioner (i.e., "they were not prepared"). One explanation could be that asking AI practitioners in a social group to engage with tensions was contrary to their AI sensibilities, as such a question is rooted in attending to what is not going well. As the conversations ensued, and IFG participants were assured s of the extensive experience of participants behind the excerpts, IFG members shared similar themes and stories. Given practitioners' commitment to social constructionist values and awareness that "words create worlds," their initial hesitation to talk about AI challenges makes sense; however, this may be a possible impediment to studying tensions in AI, using surveys or focus groups, given the social desirability bias to not focus on that which does not work.

## 7.6 Opportunities for Future Research

The three dialectical tensions introduced in this study present opportunities for future research. First, the dialectical framing of free expression-limited expression tension highlights the importance of counternarratives in positive organizational change. However, further research is needed to understand how current political and social issues affect change participants' perceptions about topics deemed off-limits for discussion. For example, in the United States, there has been a political backlash to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives that may alter what people think they can or cannot say. This study suggests strategies to ensure the expression of counternarratives in a positive change. Future research must evaluate how responses to counternarratives in positive change are unique or similar to other change initiatives. From a practical perspective, this study suggests that free choice and wholeness principles support the

expression of counternarratives. Researchers should explore strategies for enabling the expression of counternarratives beyond adhering to multiple AI principles.

Second, this study suggests agility is essential for navigating hierarchical-collaborative leadership tension. Leaders must unlearn familiar top-down decision-making routines to engage in democratic working methods. Future research should expand the competencies required for leadership agility beyond this study's contribution of reframing perspectives to Joiner and Josephs (2007). What remains unexplored are the additional challenges leaders must overcome to support collaborative leadership processes from a position of authority. Questions remain about the types of decisions ripe for collaborative leadership. Also, how are leaders prepared for collaboration? Researchers should investigate the kinds of decisions leaders consider off-limits for collaborative leadership. In addition, there is an opportunity for future studies to identify "grey areas" where leaders are ambiguous about whether to prioritize hierarchical or collaborative leadership. This study indicates that strengthening agility involves formal training, cross-functional, multi-level collaborations, and individual leadership coaching. Future research opportunities include exploring additional strategies for improving leadership agility in organizational change settings.

This study suggests new leaders entering positive change initiatives tend to slip back into top-down leadership routines. Future studies should analyze the organizational stressors that tend to pull new leaders back into hierarchical work patterns. Questions remain about preparing new leaders to support collaborative leadership efforts already underway. Opportunities for future research include interviews with new leaders and change participants during transition periods. Research should include direct observation of new leaders with implications for collaborative leadership. Further, researchers should investigate tools, resources, and strategies that help new

leaders develop the agility to support collaborative leadership efforts in various stages of implementation.

The dialectical framing of STO-LTO tension presents opportunities for future research in three main areas. First, this study demonstrates that STO-LTO tension often overlaps free expression-limited expression and hierarchical-collaborative leadership and tensions. Foundational research on relational dialectics indicates multiple dialectics are in constant play and are not mutually exclusive (Baxter & Simon, 1993). Dialectics in relationships include autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, inclusion-seclusion, revelation-concealment, predictability-novelty, and conventionality-uniqueness (Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Baxter & Simon, 1993). Tracy (2004) identifies a family of tensions in correctional institutions, including respect-suspect, nurture-discipline, consistency-flexibility, and solidarity-autonomy. More research is needed to understand how a positive change focus affects emerging tensions. Also, questions remain about unidentified tensions co-existing with STO-LTO, free expression-limited expression, and hierarchical-collaborative leadership dialectics. The data validation process surfaced additional tensions for potential exploration, including invited participation versus mandatory participation, process versus principle, and generativity versus positivity.

Next, this study indicates that practitioners consistently frame STO-LTO tension as complementary dialectics. Dialectical tension scholars suggest reframing tension as complementary is more complex and cognitively advanced than other responses, such as selecting one pole over the other or separating the poles by alternating attention to both (Baxter, 1988, 1990; Tracy. 2004). Future research should investigate what factors make reframing tension easier or more challenging. For example, this study indicates that STO-LTO tension surfaces during periods of organizational downturn *and* the launch of strategic growth initiatives.

Opportunities ripe for future research include investigating the antecedents of STO-LTO tension in two different organizational contexts. How do the two scenarios create unique challenges for leaders relative to reframing? Are there tactics for responding to tension as complementary dialectics that work more effectively in different contexts? Further, what additional tactics are practitioners using to help leaders and organizational members reframe tensions as complementary dialectics?

## 7.7 Conclusion

Over the past three decades, the positive change methodology has suffered a reputation for ignoring problems in favor of positivity. This study demonstrates that practitioners need not fall prey to toxic positivity wherein organizational leaders and staff are reticent to talk about the "elephants in the room." The experiences of AI practitioners teach us that positive change dialogue can and does encompass dialogue about power inequities, marginalization, gender and age bias, racial discrimination, job insecurity, and harsh work conditions. The ability of practitioners to navigate dialectical tensions in positive change initiatives shows us that it is possible to hold a vision of a positive future while also creating space to hear divergent perspectives. This study shows us that the key to addressing the "elephants in the room" is to exercise the full breadth of AI methodology, particularly the foundational principles of free choice and wholeness. This study does not intend to suggest that positive change dialogue is without messiness. Practitioners, at times, expressed doubts about whether they were doing AI the "right way" by diving into the muck of organizational life. However, through courage and perseverance, practitioners demonstrated an ability to expand their own and others' thinking about what more is possible.

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**De Schaduwzijde van Organisatorische Verandering**

**Ervaringen van Professionals bij het Omgaan met Dialectische Spanningen in**

**Waarderend Onderzoek (Appreciative Inquiry)**

## Samenvatting

Positieve benaderingen van organisatieverandering (POC – naar positive organizational change) kunnen spanningen met zich meebrengen. Bij POC wordt voorrang gegeven aan positieve mogelijkheden, en ogenschijnlijk minder aandacht besteed aan het aanpakken van problemen. In 2003 is de positieve organisatiekunde (POS) ontstaan als een nieuw studiegebied binnen de organisatiewetenschappen (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011; Cameron & Caza, 2004). POS-onderzoekers stellen dat problemen en uitdagingen niet genegeerd worden, maar opnieuw geïnterpreteerd worden door een positieve bril (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011). Recente literatuur bekritiseert echter wijdverbreide 'toxische positiviteit', waarbij wordt verondersteld dat een voorkeur voor positief denken, emoties zoals verdriet, teleurstelling, woede en frustratie zou ontkennen (Collins, 2022; Cross, 2022; Tufvesson, 2020). Een kernvraag van dit onderzoek is hoe om te gaan met de 'olifanten in de kamer', die staan voor wat mensen onbespreekbaar achten in de context van POC?

Deze studie bevraagt ons begrip van de positief-negatieve polariteit, vaak geassocieerd met Waarderend Onderzoek (AI – naar 'Appreciative Inquiry'), een toonaangevende POC-methodologie die al meer dan drie decennia bestaat (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). In het afgelopen decennium heeft AI-onderzoek onderzocht hoe een focus op het positieve 'schaduwen' heeft voortgebracht. In de literatuur wordt 'schaduw' gedefinieerd als door jezelf of anderen gecensureerde gedachten en emoties, conform de organisatienormen (Fitzgerald, Oliver,

& Hoxsey, 2010; Jung, 1968; Bowles, 1991; Kolodziejski, 2004). Wanneer mensen worden

aangemoedigd om zich te richten op positieve aspecten van het professionele leven, manifesteert

de schaduw zich in de vorm van herinneringen aan negatieve of tegenstrijdige ervaringen die de

organisatie ongepast vindt om te delen (Fineman, 2006; Fitzgerald et al., 2010). Deze schaduwen

komen dan naar voren als de 'olifanten in de kamer'. Een dialectisch kader laat ons de

dynamische interactie zien tussen twee tegelijkertijd bestaande, maar tegengestelde behoeften

(Baxter & Montgomery, 1997; Tracy, 2004) die ten grondslag liggen aan de schaduw als een

gebied van spanning en mogelijkheid.

Deelnemers aan het onderzoek in deze dissertatie zijn 41

organisatieontwikkelingsspecialisten met directe ervaring in het leiden van POC-initiatieven,

gebruik makend van de AI-methodologie. Ik heb deelnemers geselecteerd met behulp van

homogene sneeuwbalmethode (Lindloff & Taylor, 2019) via contactlijsten van het Taos

Instituut, een spilpunt van AI. Een eerste reeks semigestructureerde interviews werd afgenomen

bij 26 specialisten, voornamelijk zelfstandige ondernemers met samen meer dan 388 jaar

ervaring in AI-praktijken, in alle sectoren van de organisatie, waaronder non-profit, academische

wereld, publieke sector, religieuze organisaties, gezondheidsorganisaties, IT, internationale

organisaties, productie en bankwezen. De getranscribeerde interviews omvatten in totaal 575

pagina's aan data.

Een thematische analysestrategie (TA) (Yin, 2016), in lijn met de doelstellingen van deze

studie, werd gebruikt om ervaringen van deelnemers te verzamelen, te interpreteren en

waardevolle inzichten te produceren. Deze strategie omvatte meerdere stappen: het samenstellen,

demonteren, opnieuw in elkaar zetten, interpreteren van de data en het trekken van conclusies

(Yin, 2016). Ik heb Quirkos, software voor computerondersteunde kwalitatieve data-analyse (CAQDAS), gebruikt voor het opslaan, ophalen en coderen van gegevens. Daarnaast heb ik de data georganiseerd in korte verhalende voorbeelden (Van Maanen, 2004) die de gecodeerde spanningen vertegenwoordigen.

Om de robuustheid van de bevindingen te testen, gebruikte ik een data-validatiemethode waarbij ruwe data uit het oorspronkelijke onderzoek werden teruggebracht naar individuen of groepen met vergelijkbare achtergronden en expertise, die de bevindingen als waar en nauwkeurig zouden herkennen (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Als primaire methode voor datavalidatie koos ik voor Interpretatieve Focusgroepen (IFG's), omdat dit het mogelijk maakte om in één setting meer deelnemers te betrekken (Leavy, 2007). In totaal droegen 15 deelnemers bij aan het verifiëren van de plausibiliteit van de gegevens. In totaal namen 41 AI-specialisten deel aan de studie, wat resulteerde in een aanvullende 71 pagina's getranscribeerde data. De focusgroepen identificeerden thema's die overeenkwamen met de oorspronkelijk gecodeerde spanningen.

De bevindingen tonen aan dat de specialisten drie primaire schaduwen tegenkwamen in POC-initiatieven: De stem-schaduw, de leiderschap-schaduw, en de tijd-schaduw. De stem-schaduw (voice-shadow) duidt op de spanning tussen vrije expressie en beperkte expressie van wat bespreekbaar is in het veranderingsproces. De leiderschap-schaduw (leadership-shadow) omschrijft de spanning tussen hiërarchisch en collaboratief leiderschap. De tijd-schaduw (temporal-shadow) beschrijft de spanning tussen een korte-termijnoriëntatie en een lange-termijnoriëntatie die naar voren komt in POS-initiatieven.

De stem-schaduw belicht de spanning tussen vrije expressie en beperkte expressie van negatieve gedachten en zorgen. In 32 voorbeelden beschreven de specialisten dat ze moesten

beslissen of ze de zorgen van betrokkenen bij een organisatieverandering moesten toestaan of

beperken. Uit de bevindingen blijkt dat de specialisten zich hielden aan AI-praktijken en

principes die ruimte bieden voor generatieve dialoog, inclusief het uiten van tegenverhalen –

verhalen die afwijken van de dominante organisatieverhalen (Bamberg, 2004), waaronder

pijnlijke ervaringen met betrekking tot diversiteit, gelijkheid en inclusie (Lundholdt et al., 2018).

Het principe van vrije keuze binnen AI stelt deelnemers in staat om naar eigen inzicht deel te

nemen aan de dialoog. Bovendien maakt het principe van heelheid het mogelijk voor deelnemers

om tegenverhalen te ervaren als onderdeel van het totale verhaal van een organisatie.

De bevindingen suggereren dat de specialisten verschillende strategieën gebruikten om

met spanning om te gaan. Voornamelijk kaderden zij de spanning in als complementaire

dialectiek, zodat de beide polen niet langer tegenover elkaar stonden (Tracy, 2004). De term

‘dialectiek’ wordt hierbij gebruikt om het balanceren of navigeren tussen deze tegenstrijdige

elementen of krachten te benoemen.

Er waren enkele gevallen waarin specialisten de expressie beperkten op basis van de

eisen van organisatieleiders of wanneer het gesprek ontaardde in weinig productieve aanvallen.

In enkele gevallen gingen de specialisten op en neer tussen vrije en beperkte expressie. Andere

tactieken omvatten het gebruik van sociocratie, een democratisch besluitvormingsproces dat

hiërarchische leiders in staat stelt om gezamenlijk beslissingen te nemen, het ontwikkelen van

een transformatiehandboek om leiders en belanghebbenden te begeleiden in collaboratieve

planningsprocessen, en het coachen van leiders om opkomende spanningen in AI aan te pakken.

De leiderschap-schaduw heeft betrekking op het spanningsveld tussen hiërarchisch en

collaboratief leiderschap. In 26 voorbeelden kwamen tegenstrijdige behoeften, gerelateerd aan

het nemen van hiërarchische beslissingen (zoals de toewijzing van middelen en tijd), in botsing

met collaboratieve besluitvormingsprocessen die gewaardeerd worden in AI. De specialisten rapporteerden voorbeelden van leiders die terugvielen op vertrouwde hiërarchische routines in plaats van collaboratieve leiderschapsinspanningen te ondersteunen. Wanneer kansen voor collaboratief leiderschap worden genegeerd of overruled, wordt de leiderschapsschaduw de bewaarplaats voor onbenutte potentie, en kunnen leiders niet meer heen en weer bewegen tussen hiërarchische en collaboratieve besluitvormingsprocessen.

Leiders reageerden op de spanning tussen hiërarchisch en collaboratief leiderschap door de spanning te kaderen in termen van complementaire dialectiek, en heen en weer te bewegen tussen de twee behoeften, of hiërarchisch leiderschap te kiezen boven collaboratieve besluitvormingsprocessen. Uit de bevindingen blijkt de noodzaak voor leiderschapsbehendigheid om collaboratieve leiderschapsinspanningen te ondersteunen. Leiders hebben baat bij een solide basis in AI, het streven naar begrip van de voordelen van collaboratieve leiderschapsinitiatieven voor de organisatie en haar leden, en een groter zelfbewustzijn over hoe leiderschapsbeslissingen en acties, positieve organisatorische veranderingen beïnvloeden.

De tijd-schaduw beschrijft de dialectiek tussen een korte-termijnoriëntatie, die prioriteit geeft aan behoeften voor onmiddellijke verandering, en een lange-termijnoriëntatie, die duurzame verandering voorstaat. In 19 voorbeelden was de spanning tussen korte-termijn- en lange-termijnoriëntatie zichtbaar tijdens perioden van organisatorische neergang, gekenmerkt door lage werknemersmoraal, onderlinge strijd, ontslagen of prestatieproblemen. Deze spanning ging vaak samen met de spanningen tussen vrije en beperkte expressie en tussen hiërarchisch en collaboratief leiderschap. De bevindingen tonen echter aan dat de specialisten consequent de korte-termijn/lange-termijn dialectiek behandelden als complementaire dialectieken. Terwijl in voorbeelden van spanningen tussen vrije en beperkte expressie en tussen hiërarchisch en

collaboratief leiderschap, de specialisten voornamelijk reageerden op de spanning als complementaire dialectieken, maar ook, soms, schommelden tussen de twee polen of één pool verkozen boven de andere (Tracy, 2004). Een mogelijke verklaring voor het consistente kaderen van de korte-termijn/lange-termijnspanning als complementair kan zijn dat aannames die ten grondslag liggen aan AI-principes en -methodologieën suggereren dat gesprekken over de toekomst en toekomstbeelden de gesprekken van het moment vormgeven (Cooperrider et al., 2005). In de 19 voorbeelden van korte-termijn/lange-termijnspanning pasten de specialisten zes tactieken toe om de spanning als complementair te kaderen, waaronder het versterken van gedeelde waarden, het erkennen van ongemak, het communiceren van tijdige updates, het parkeren van zorgen, het opbouwen van financiële geletterdheid en scenario planning.

Een belangrijke theoretische bijdrage van deze studie is het identificeren van specifieke schaduwen van dialectische spanningen binnen AI-initiatieven, en het legitimeren ervan als typisch voor het proces. Dit onderzoek impliceert dat specialisten niet hoeven te vervallen in toxische positiviteit, waarbij organisatieleiders en personeel terughoudend zijn om over de 'olifanten in de kamer' te spreken. In 58 van de 77 AI-voorbeelden navigeerden ervaren facilitators tegenstrijdige behoeften door de spanning als complementaire dialectieken te kaderen, deelnemers bij hun zorgen te betrekken en deze om te leiden naar een positieve visie.

Het vermogen van specialisten om met dialectische spanningen om te gaan in POC-initiatieven toont aan dat het mogelijk is om een visie op een positieve toekomst vast te houden en tegelijkertijd ruimte te creëren om afwijkende perspectieven te horen.

## Curriculum Vitae

Sheila Tyler Haji was born on December 9, 1953, in Virginia, USA. She obtained her Bachelor's degree in English from the University of Virginia in 1976. Following graduation, Sheila began a 16-year career in management in the telecommunications industry. While working full-time, she obtained a Master of Science degree in Telecommunications Policy from The George Washington University in Washington D.C. in 1982 and a Master of Science in Human Resources from The American University in Washington D.C. in 1989. Sheila started her research at Leiden Law School as an external PhD candidate in 2016.

Sheila launched Common Ground Consulting Services Inc. in 1992, providing consultative services to multi-national organizations, public sector agencies, philanthropic institutions, and non-profit sectors focused on community development. In addition to her consulting services, Sheila was adjunct faculty at Johns Hopkins University from 1992 to 1998, delivering courses on organizational behavior, leadership, and group dynamics to graduate students in the Behavioral Sciences program. She also taught courses at Georgetown University for students in the Organization Development Certificate Program and the Coaching Certificate Program from 1995 to 2005.

Sheila's professional affiliations include the Association of Change Management Professionals and the Chesapeake Bay Organization Development Network, where she served as a board member and President.   Her certifications include Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, 360 By Design, and Benchmarks 360 from the Center for Creative Leadership, Hogan Leadership Forecast Series, Team Diagnostic Coaching, and Appreciative Inquiry.

Sheila is a contributing author to *On Becoming a Leadership Coach: A Holistic Approach to Coaching Excellence*, published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2008.

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