Appreciative Intelligence is the ability to see the generative potential in any situation—the oak within the acorn—and to actualize it. It is the subject of a new book of the same name by Prof. Tojo Thatchenkery (who studied under Academy Fellow David Cooperrider at Case Western) and Carol Metzker, published by Berrett-Koehler. Through extensive research the authors have found that individuals with this ability can reframe situations, appreciate the positive, and see how the future unfolds from the present. They show four consistent traits: persistence, conviction that one’s actions matter, tolerance for uncertainty, and irrepressible resilience.

A “first cousin” of Emotional Intelligence and Appreciative Inquiry, Appreciative Intelligence has widespread potential to assist large and small businesses, NGO’s, educational institutions, and non-profits to develop new solutions, collaborate better, innovate, and more. For example, the principles of AI were used by Rotary International in its successful effort to eradicate polio across all of India. It’s also in use at a remarkable Quaker school in Pennsylvania, and at businesses and governmental entities in the United States.

This article includes an interview with the authors, and excerpts from their just-published book.
Some leaders and innovators seem to be born with high Appreciative Intelligence. Many people we interviewed perceived the positive inherent general potential in the present early on in their lives. They seemed to reframe, appreciate the positive, and see how the future unfolds from the present effortlessly. They exhibited the ensuing qualities of Appreciative Intelligence—persistence, conviction that their actions matter, tolerance for uncertainty, and irrepressible resilience—and reaped the benefits of invention, innovation, creativity, and success at a young age.

Ed Hoffman, who reframed the program that addressed the Challenger tragedy as the beginnings of a larger initiative to cultivate NASA’s leadership skills, showed evidence of the ability to frame situations positively and uniquely as a child. “I grew up in Brooklyn,” he said, “an interesting place.” In an area where being at the wrong place at the wrong time could have serious ramifications or a seemingly simple conflict had the potential to escalate, “I’d deal with the possibility of getting beaten up or something scary.” Many times, he reframed a confrontation as something positive, a moment for humor, rather than aggression. He saw how to realize an outcome that had more helpful results for all involved, not just for kids who were smaller and physically less capable—those without “muscular forte,” Hoffman related.

At the age of 13, when many kids in the U.S. are spending money on hobbies, Michael Dell framed one of his as a moneymaker and ended up operating a mail order stamp business. He started the giant computer corporation bearing his name in his dorm room and paid cash for a BMW at age 17. Thus, he showed early evidence of reframing reality as opportunities. He demonstrated persistence and irrepressible resilience—patterns consistent with those of a leader and innovator with high Appreciative Intelligence—at a young age that has continued throughout his leadership of Dell, including through the downturn in the technology industry and overall economy in the early 2000s.

Everyone has Appreciative Intelligence. While some people such as Hoffman and Dell appear to have a predisposition or seem to be born with a high degree of Appreciative Intelligence, others slowly develop it through unconscious practice. Yet others proactively and mindfully cultivate it.
TOJO: Perception is the foundation. We talk about the difference between perception and sensation. Being a student of psychology, I am always curious about perception as something very different from sensation, and it always includes a judgment. We are not aware about it. In perception we are choosing. Geoffrey Vickers, an Englishman, made a very good point that all perceptions involve a judgment. He wrote about “appreciative processes.” When we perceive we have made a judgment. That judgment is what he called ‘appreciative.’ In a way I like his definition because he is not saying that appreciative means “positive”, necessarily, that it is good. He says that when you make a judgment, that itself is a process of appreciation. I give an example: if a child is crying and you ask it to shut up and smile, that is not appreciating. Appreciating is asking the child what makes it cry. This is an act of appreciation. Likewise, in our perception, judgment is the reframe. This is how we are making the link to the field of perception.

Identifying, developing, and enhancing Appreciative Intelligence in yourself or other individuals, and applying it for personal or organizational success, can lead to great advantage and reward. At the same time, a few challenges come with the territory of dealing with an invisible entity and trying to approach the complex mental processes directly.

**Grasping Intangibles**

How much creativity do you possess? How much integrity or hope do you have? Can you assign a numerical figure to the amount of those attributes? Could you quantify how much of them you have today compared to yesterday? Or could you say that you are 20 or 50 percent more trustworthy, open-minded, collaborative, or brave than another person? Likewise, how much innovation or knowledge does your organization have? Can you assign a number or dollar figure to the value of the quality of its leadership, reputation, or credibility?

Characteristics, values, and concepts such as creativity, knowledge, and credibility are intangible. They silently, invisibly influence our lives, organizations, and environment. But because we can’t see, hear, or touch them, they’re difficult and subjective to define and even more elusive to measure. We can’t use a traditional yardstick to measure concepts like trust, talent, and loyalty or set them on a scale to determine their weight.

The importance of the scientific approach and quantified measurement took on new significance in our culture as people moved from an agrarian to a technological society during the Industrial Revolution. Methods for measuring and improving productivity, uniformity, consistency, and efficiency became important as modern automation and factory-produced items replaced physical labor and artisans’ hand-made goods. As application of numbers and metrics (speed, quantity of output, and so forth—therefore,
observable, measurable objects and processes) became more important to manufacturing, their significance seeped into other aspects of business and life. Other concepts—employee satisfaction, individual creativity, diversity of personalities—moved into a position of less importance or into the periphery of the modern factory mentality. Subjective knowledge and anecdotal evidence moved into the realm of the arts. Later, other concepts such as quality of management and brand reputation became less “trustworthy” if they were not supported by quantifiable metrics that would fit on a corporate spreadsheet. The bottom-line orientation brought most organizational processes to a number game.

Even though numerical representation or measurement of an abstract concept is nearly impossible, and it may not be the best approach to dealing with it, quantifying a concept sometimes affords certain advantages: recognition, measurement, and possibly an enhancement of the concept.

In the field of social sciences, researchers have been making efforts to examine intangible concepts both quantitatively and qualitatively. By attributing specific behaviors to abstract concepts and turning them into constructs, we can assign numbers and make judgments, comparisons, or correlations, such as with scores of resilience or the traditional measure of IQ. New imaging techniques and technological advances help us observe and measure the brain and its electrical activity, as in the identification of the location where insight takes place and how quickly a flash occurs.

Even qualitatively we can define, describe, narrate, and make relative comparisons of invisible concepts among people or organizations (such as “Anika is a stronger leader than Chris is” or “Company X has a better reputation than Company Y”) or between different concepts in the same person (such as “Kim is more knowledgeable than she is creative”). Ultimately, we can also know about an intangible and hold knowledge about it, even if it is tacit, unarticulated, or difficult to define.

In the same way, underlying your ability to identify, develop, and enhance Appreciative Intelligence in yourself or others in your organization is the understanding that, for now, you may not be able to approach or measure it directly. You can, however, understand instinctively what it is and spot evidence of it through the qualities that accompany Appreciative Intelligence.

More on Intelligence

In addition to accepting that it is possible to recognize and change your Appreciative Intelligence, although you cannot see it directly, you may also need to learn and accept that intelligence is neither entirely innate nor static. For quite some time, there has been a debate about the origin of a person’s intelligence: whether it is determined by nurture (environment) or nature (heredity), or in other words, whether it is shaped by a stimulating and healthy environment or it is a trait programmed by genetic code.

The nurture-nature controversy has continued despite better understanding of the impact of both through research. While there have been hundreds of
studies published on the controversy, their findings do not support either position solely, but instead underscore the importance of both. The most commonly cited studies on identical twins (who have the same genetic make-up) show that as they grow up, they have similarities and differences, implying that both genetics and environmental factors play a role in the development of intelligence. Furthermore, irrespective of the scientific evidence, there is an emotional component to the debate. Moral, religious, and political beliefs play a strong role in people’s stance on the debate. Yet even if we were to suspend all our personal values and beliefs and look at the evidence, the emerging picture does not point us either to environment or hereditary factors.

The lack of consensus on the relative importance of genetics or environmental factors on the development of intelligence does not diminish the importance of either. Ultimately, however, we need only revisit Rosenthal and Jacobson’s classroom with its “bloomers” [Editor’s Note: In Chapter 5 the authors mention a classic social science experiment in which test subjects lived up or down to their instructors’ prior expectations.] to remind ourselves that even environmental factors such as appreciation and expectation of teachers regarding students’ intelligence-related performance can actually improve IQ—as measured by standard instruments.

“We don’t know to what extent intelligence is hard-wired,” said John Kounios, professor and researcher at Drexel University’s EEG Laboratory. “It’s determined by who your parents were and by environmental differences. We do know that the brain is very plastic.” In other words, it can change, he added. He pointed to two pieces of evidence: first, that human neural connections...
can change during a 20-minute conversation, and second, that rats in an impoverished environment sprout new connections after being placed in a stimulating environment with toys. He also pointed to findings from his own research that show that people put their brains into a pre-creative state before insight occurs. “[The brain] is not a static piece of hardware,” Kounios asserted.

Such information is good news for those who want to expand their intelligence. Even if they may not be genetically endowed with high levels of Appreciative Intelligence, people can nurture or train themselves to become more intelligent.

With the right discipline, motivation, determination, and tools, you can increase your Appreciative Intelligence.

A Model for Appreciative Intelligence

If possible, recall your early childhood experiences of drawing a picture (or a more recent observation of another child’s first attempts in art). Most likely, you (or the other child) created colorful but indistinguishable scribbles. You were pleased with your final product regardless of its lack of artistic proficiency. Not too long afterward, when drawing with other young artists, you may have realized that another child couldn’t make sense of your drawing or mistook the subject in your picture for something else. The realization that the drawing wasn’t as perfect as you once thought may have led to disappointment or confusion. But the knowledge that your drawing had room for improvement may have spurred you to copy others’ drawing techniques, trace an object, or make changes. Over time, with practice or art lessons, you became more accomplished at drawing until most people recognized your picture the way you had intended. You probably felt happy with the outcome, a product of relative artistic ability. If you learned more about art and technique, the process repeated as you grew into a better artist.

This example of a learning cycle occurs for sports, playing music, and a multitude of other skills. It is known as the conscious competence model of learning.

The conscious competence model—applied and discussed by many practitioners and authors, but from seemingly unknown origins, describes a four-stage learning process: unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, and unconscious competence. In the stage of unconscious incompetence, the learner is unaware that she is not an expert, like the young child who does not know that his or her drawings are unintelligible marks. An unexpected occurrence—a fall, failure, loss, or comment from another person—awakens the learner’s awareness of ineptitude or low level of skill, thus sending him or her into the second phase: conscious incompetence. To alleviate the discomfort that accompanies knowledge of incompetence, the learner can choose to either deny or ignore the surprise occurrence and resulting awareness (and thus move back into the phase of unconscious incompetence) or go to work. Through deliberate effort the learner practices conscious competence. In this stage, the child in our example intentionally
focuses on controlling lines or color in order to produce an acceptable drawing. Through hard work and behavior repetition, the learner progresses to stage four: unconscious competence, in which she is proficient enough that she no longer thinks intentionally about each movement toward the target behavior. In the fourth stage, the child has become an artist who joyfully and unconsciously creates beautiful lines and colors, art that is pleasing to her and others. This model of learning assumes that it takes an outside stimulus to bring about awareness and that learning is continuous.

There are numerous ways to learn, including discovery, resolution of ambiguity, intervention or gap analysis, modeling, and conditioning, to name but a few. Although many have the potential to help you stretch your Appreciative Intelligence, we suggest taking an appreciative approach, a conscious/unconscious model that is adapted to find possibilities and what is positive and that builds on what already exists within you.

**A Model of Appreciative Intelligence Development**

![Figure 8.1 A model of Appreciative Intelligence development.](image)

Figure 8.1 describes and walks you through the process of enhancing your own Appreciative Intelligence. In the lower left quadrant 1 (unintentional, lower appreciation), a person unconsciously or unintentionally frames reality in a positive light to see the inherent potential only occasionally or in limited domains (at home, work, with friends, or under other specific conditions). Unconsciously, he may exhibit only some of the qualities accompanying Appreciative Intelligence—persistence, conviction that his actions matter, tolerance for uncertainty, or irrepressible resilience—or he may exhibit all qualities, but to a minimal extent.

Chances are, by reading this book, you no longer live in this quadrant of the status quo. You are now aware of the existence of Appreciative Intelligence.
and its components, know the qualities that accompany the ability, and have probably considered your own abilities and behaviors by comparing your actions to those of the leaders of our stories and examples. You have already awakened to the presence of Appreciative Intelligence within yourself.

Once you have become aware of its presence, you have entered the second quadrant. By using the Personal Appreciative Intelligence Profile provided later in this chapter, you can assess your current Appreciative Intelligence. In this stage you determine under what conditions you reframe the present for a great view of the future, when or where you see oaks in acorns, and to what extent or how many ensuing qualities you already exhibit. By carefully considering, or reflecting on, what you already do well and what you would like to do in the future, you are ready to move to the next stage.

In the third quadrant of intentional higher appreciation, you deliberately practice reframing, appreciating the positive, exploring how the future could unfold from the present, and practicing the behaviors associated with the qualities of Appreciative Intelligence. You actively look for, metaphorically, mighty oaks in acorns. You transfer the abilities and qualities you found in the previous phase to new domains, such that you reframe in additional areas—seeing possibilities in products, situations, or people. Through discipline, effort, and techniques suggested later in this chapter, you can stretch what works well and enhance your personal profile of Appreciative Intelligence. With continued practice, the process of reframing, appreciating the positive, and seeing connections between the present and future begins to feel more natural. Creativity and possibilities start to flow. Without noticing it, you may slip into the final quadrant.

In the fourth phase of unintentional higher Appreciative Intelligence, your thought processes are often automatic; you simply live and breathe your higher Appreciative Intelligence. You see the mighty oak in the acorn spontaneously and effortlessly; possibilities appear to you before you become aware that you are looking for them. As your qualities of persistence, conviction in your actions, tolerance for uncertainty, and resilience grow, you begin to reap the rewards of success. You reveal your own great view of the future.

Assessing Your Personal Appreciative Intelligence

In the second phase of the model of Appreciative Intelligence development, when you assess your current degree of Appreciative Intelligence and strength of ensuing qualities, it’s important to remember two things. First, the same way everyone has general intelligence, everyone has Appreciative Intelligence. It exists to different degrees and in different domains, but it is present in everyone.

Second, when aiming to enhance your Appreciative Intelligence, the best way to go about it is appreciatively. Determine what your abilities and qualities are, where they are strongest, and build on them. Stretch them, strengthen them, and use them in new areas of your life. For many people, this approach will be contrary to what they have learned and the way they may go about business. As indicated by Martin Seligman, leader of the Posi-
tive Psychology Movement, the trend in psychology for years was to focus on deficits, problems, and, therefore, interventions. In corporations and elsewhere, consultants and management look for the holes or what’s broken and try to fix them. The sticky point about this gap analysis approach is that, often, filling a hole only brings the situation back to a minimal level of what’s working right—not to an optimal level or desirable end state. And by pointing out what is wrong, the subsequent finger pointing and blame can cause additional problems. Rarely does such an approach bring about a superlative future.

Therefore, we suggest that as you complete the following profile of your personal Appreciative Intelligence, you focus on what exists (not what doesn’t), what has been successful (not what has failed), and how and where you’d like to expand what is already within you. Your responses to the questions will not lead to a numerical score, but they will prompt you to think about and reflect on areas and conditions where you reframe situations or products, see the best in others, and exhibit persistence or irrepressible resilience—that is, what your Appreciative Intelligence looks like.

To be concluded next week

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Tojo Thatchenkery, Ph.D., is a Professor of Organizational Learning and Knowledge Management at the School of Public Policy, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia. He is also a member of the NTL Institute of Applied Behavioral Science and the Taos Institute. He has over twenty years of experience in teaching at various MBA, public policy, organizational development, and executive programs in the United States, Europe, Australia, and Asia. Tojo founded the Organizational Learning Laboratory at the George W. Johnson Learning Center at George Mason University and served as its director from 1995 to 2000. His research has been funded by agencies such as the U. S. National Science Foundation and the U.S. National Security Agency.

For more than 15 years Tojo has been researching, consulting, and teaching in appreciative organizational design. Examples include Appreciative Inquiry, which he has been teaching to graduate students at George Mason University for over a decade, and Appreciative Sharing for Knowledge, a new knowledge management tool to leverage tacit knowledge in organizations. He has written extensively on appreciative processes in organizations, which include his doctoral dissertation, numerous refereed publications, and a recent book, *Appreciative Sharing for Knowledge: Leveraging Knowledge Management for Strategic Change*. Tojo has extensive consulting experience in change management, organization design, and knowledge management. Past clients include IBM, Fannie Mae, Booz/Allen/Hamilton, PNC Bank, Lucent.
Technologies, General Mills, British Petroleum, Tata Consulting Services, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, United States Department of Agriculture, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Tojo is on the editorial board of the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences* and the *Journal of Organizational Change Management*. He is also the book review editor of the *Journal of Organizational Change Management* and the past Program Chair of the Research Methods Division of the 16,000-member-strong Academy of Management. Tojo has also used the appreciative lens to study diverse themes such as information communication technology (ICT), the economic development of South Asian countries (co-edited book), and the social capital and organizational mobility of Asian Americans in the United States.

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**Carol Metzker**

For over 15 years, Carol Metzker has helped clients tap into their success stories to uncover best practices, share knowledge, and communicate clearly for successful outcomes. She has worked successfully in educational, non-profit, and corporate environments. She has a Master’s degree in Organizational Learning from George Mason University.

Stories she has written as contributing editor for Investor Relations Update about executives in Fortune 500 companies appear in monthly print and online publications of the National Investor Relations Institute.

Her articles have appeared in numerous publications including Global CEO, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, *Management Next*, and the Association for Financial Professionals’ journals *Pulse* and *Exchange*.

Her past experience as Director of Client Services at Anderson Leadership Group, a leadership communication consulting firm, cultivated her interest in leadership development and gave her the opportunity for close observation and experience with top-level leaders. Her work as a writer and consultant has led to interviews of hundreds of executives about their successful and innovative practices, providing a close look at companies and their members. Her work as an interviewer and writer for a National Science Foundation-sponsored study on the impact of information technology on India’s development provided an exceptional view of a variety of social and business cultures.

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