



**OBTC 2017 at Providence College
June 14th – 17th, 2017**

Submission Template

SUBMISSION GUIDANCE

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Submission Template for the 2017 OBTC Teaching Conference for Management Educators

1) Title, Abstract & Keywords

In your abstract, please include a brief session description (not to exceed 100 words), and three to four keywords. If your proposal is accepted, this description will be printed in the conference program.

Title: **Applying Appreciative Inquiry to action-learning projects in teaching Organizational Transformation to graduate students.**

Abstract: This session introduces a model for applying Appreciative Inquiry to a custom-designed change initiative in a graduate business course “Organizational Transformation”. In the course, we introduce Appreciative Inquiry as a change methodology. It is specifically selected for the action learning projects because the very nature of a strengths-based approach effectively pushes graduate students out of their comfort zone. In the session, we will replicate the student experience with a brief introduction of AI and an appreciative interview practice. Participants will be provided with course syllabus, project requirements and insights into providing formative feedback along the way.

Keywords: AI (Appreciate Inquiry), Change, Projects

2) Teaching Implications:

What is the contribution of your session to management pedagogy/andragogy? Specifically, please include your learning objectives, and describe what management and/or teaching topics are relevant to your session, and why. Also, include theoretical, disciplinary, or theoretical foundations that will help reviewers understand how your ideas fit within the broader field of management.

The contribution to **andragogy** covers Malcolm Knowles' 5 criteria (Employee Training & Development, Noe 2013, chapter 4, p. 161):

- (1) *Adults have the need to know why they are learning something.* Through lecture/discussion/demonstration and sharing of stories, and practical experiences students gain an understanding of ways that AI can be a helpful tool in their workplace and often in personal lives as well.

- (2) *Adults have the need to be self-directed.* (Project template is provided to guide students in learning AI process. Students choose the target of the AI, interviewees and other outcomes.)
- (3) *Adults bring more work-related experiences into the learning situation.* (Most students will conduct their AI at their workplace. Others who are Grad Assistants/full time students typically choose to conduct the AI in their department or with previous employers.)
- (4) *Adults enter a learning experience with a problem-centered approach to learning.* (For the project, students select a topic they want to explore – something that will help the target organization. Action-learning is a real-time strategy for problem-solving (The Action Learning Guidebook, Rothwell 1999))
- (5) *Adults are motivated to learn by both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators.* (Intrinsic - Students select a topic that is important to them. As part of the project, they must provide rationale for topic choice. Extrinsic – the project is 38% of final grade for the course.)

The contribution to pedagogy includes:

- (1) A project template/rubric is provided to students that breaks down the deliverables. (AI leverages some widely accepted, standard approaches and tools.)
- (2) Class demonstration that replicates what students experience in individual projects.
- (3) Provide formative feedback at 2 checkpoints (first 2 deliverables) to ensure each student is set up to be successful in completing remaining project deliverables.
- (4) Holding 1 on 1 meetings with students as they progress and get stuck in the process which is common – helping to talk them through select tasks and seeing the “light bulb” go off along the way. Many students freely state their skepticism of AI and it is fun to watch them change their perspective during and at the end of their projects.

Learning Objectives:

1. Describe key characteristics of Appreciative Inquiry.
2. Describe how AI methodology (3 of the 4 phases) can be integrated into an action learning project.
3. Practice an appreciative interview to recreate the classroom environment.
4. Make the case for action-learning as a critical component for an Organizational Transformation course.
5. Analyze an action-learning project rubric for potential adaptation into other courses.

I believe the relevance comes in the action-learning AND applying a strengths-based approach which pushes most graduate students way out of their comfort zone. The Organizational Transformation course offers a business survey of organizational changes. It covers a wide range of topics from the rationale for system-wide change, the

role of management, how to change, what to change, impact of systems/structures, power and culture, resistance, action planning and measurement. So there is no shortage of topics. Still, my students frequently tell me their pre course expectation is focused on “learning a bunch of new theories”. In the most recent class section, 71% of the students identified Appreciative Inquiry and their AI projects as one of five significant takeaways from the course in the final exam/Insight Essay. This same class section delivered the highest number of A projects across all my sections for the past seven years. I believe the attention to short term deliverables contributed to higher quality work.

The dialog that takes place between students and with the professor as they work through the project is very helpful and I believe, contributes to the outstanding project deliverables.

AI was first introduced in the 80s by Dr. David Cooperrider and colleagues at Case Western Reserve University. As a business practitioner for many years prior to coming to higher education, I had the opportunity be trained in AI, to practice AI for both small and large scale change AND to experience its value. Appreciative Inquiry, used in conjunction with other employee engagement approaches can absolutely drive performance improvement. This interests business students.

3) Session Description and Plan:

What will you actually do in this session? If appropriate, please include a timeline estimating the activities will you facilitate: how long will they take, and how will participants be involved? Please remember that reviewers will be evaluating how well the time request matches the activities you'd like to do, and the extent you can reasonably accomplish the session's goals. Reviewers will also be looking for how you are engaging the participants in the session.

- I. Present Org Trans course components (5 minutes)
- II. Present AI methodology (5-10 minutes)
- III. Begin AI Interviews focused on a topic (TBD) related to higher education - 1 on 1 interviews. (10 minutes)
- IV. Debrief interviews for themes (10 minutes)
- V. Describe the Org Trans course action learning project; including an action-learning best practice brainstorm & idea sharing among participants. (10 minute)
- VI. Review tools (short version syllabus, project rubric) (10 minutes)
- VII. Close with student comments about how learning about Appreciative Inquiry impacted them. (5 minutes)
- VIII. A general theme in the detailed design will be to allow time for as much discussion as practical, demonstrate AI in as many ways as possible, to try to

recreate part of the student experience and to share ideas about how to effectively use action learning projects.

4) Application to Conference theme:

How does your session fit with the overall OBTC theme of *Navigating the Changing Currents*?

Since my course is called Organizational Transformation and my career has in large part been about the practice of driving change for improved results, I seek to make this course as practical as possible for my students by exposing them to tools for leading and managing change. I strive to balance the need to understand various models, theories and approaches AND at the same time to have them actually DO something that is a useful takeaway from the course – work that, if they choose, can continue post course. Many of my students are technically oriented (IS, engineers, supply chain) AND I find to the person that gaining awareness and understanding of Appreciative Inquiry pushes them far out of their comfort zone and challenges them in new ways. The action learning course and the associated weekly application exercises, both on own and in class, support a course that encourages more active learning vs. passive learning.

The course description states: *A comprehensive study of innovations in organizations designed to increase human satisfaction and productivity through changes in human management.* Most of my students are considering, for the first time, the impact of change on people and how their own change management and change leadership matter to the success of any change initiative.

5) Unique Contribution to OBTC:

Have you presented the work in this proposal before? If so, how will it be different? Is this proposal under current review somewhere else? If so, please explain. How will your proposal be different for the OBTC conference?

September 2016: As a guest professor at a local university business school in a module on organizational change for their Executive MBA Program, I was invited to share my practical experience with AI. I took the opportunity to also share with the EMBA's how I use AI in the classroom to help set the stage for their own upcoming AI projects. I also helped the professor design her AI lesson and assisted in students' interview debrief.

October 2016: I submitted a proposal to the 2017 Teaching Professor Conference under the conference topic of "Active Learning Assignments and Activities". Notification is expected by January 15, 2017. My emphasis there is on how powerful action learning assignments can be and some of the best practices associated with my action learning project. It is a 60 minute session and will be

similar in nature to my OBTC proposal with slightly different focus. However, if I am lucky enough to be accepted at TPC and OBTC and able to attend both, I plan to further customize each session with TPC focus being on action learning activities in a graduate course and OBTC focus being on AI as a change methodology, how it's incorporated in the course project and the impact on students.