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Applied experiences of the SOAR framework by association management and foundation executives

Steven Wayne Swafford

Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

APPLIED EXPERIENCES OF THE SOAR FRAMEWORK BY ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT AND FOUNDATION EXECUTIVES

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by

Steven Wayne Swafford

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Kent Rhodes, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Steven Wayne Swafford

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Doctoral Committee:

Kent Rhodes, Ed.D., Chairperson

Kay Davis, Ed.D.

Rogelio Martinez, Ed.D.

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DEDICATION

To my father who inspired me; my mom who encouraged me; my sisters who cheered me; my partner who sacrificed weekends away from me; my Pepperdine cohort members who journeyed with me; my dissertation committee which challenged me; my evil-twin who harassed me; the California Society of Association Executives (CalSAE) which collaborated with me; and to God for His abundant grace which sustained me.

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VITA

EDUCATION

2013	Ed.D. Organizational Change Management	Pepperdine University Malibu, CA
2003	Master of Divinity	Wesley Theological Seminary, DC
1985	B.S. Journalism & Mass Communication	Kansas State University, KS
1983	A.A.	Pratt Community College, KS

PROFESSIONAL HISTORY

1997-Present	CEO, Leadership Outfitters; Balance Warrior; Co-Founder
1997-1999	Executive Director, Foundation of the American Subcontractors Association
1995-1999	Executive Director, American Subcontractors Association
1993-1995	Senior Director, Membership Marketing, National Association of Home Builders
1988-1992	Director, Chapter/Member Services, Club Managers Association of America
1986-1987	Educational Leadership Consultant, Lambda Chi Alpha Educational Foundation
1985-1986	Sports Information Director, Gallaudet University Athletic Department

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS & VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

2003 to Present	California Society of Association Executives
1989 to 2005	Greater Washington Society of Association Executives
1989 to Present	American Society of Association Executives

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Swafford, S. & McCrory, J. (2013). *SOAR don't SWOT for strategic thinking.* Presented at the American Society of Association Executives Great Ideas Conference, Colorado Springs, CO.

Swafford, S. (2012). *From firefighting to fire prevention: A systems thinking primer.* Presented at the American Society of Association Executives Great Ideas Conference, Colorado Springs, CO.

Swafford, S. (2011). *Ten community principles for associations and business partners.* Presented at the California Society of Association Executives, Irvine, CA; San Francisco, CA; and Sacramento, CA.

Swafford, S. (2011). *Living the new normal in association management.* Presented at the California Society of Association Executives Road Show, Irvine, CA and Sacramento, CA.

Swafford, S. & Maus, D. (2010). *Using chocolate to understand the "bright spots" of change.* Presented at the California Society of Association Executives Annual Conference, Monterey, CA

Swafford, S. (2010). *Train whistles: Association management trends coming down the track.* Presented at the California Society of Association Executives Annual Conference, Monterey, CA

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to explore the application of the strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results (SOAR) framework derived from the appreciative inquiry literature and through the lived experiences of California-based association management and non-profit executives leading professional societies, trade associations, or foundations. In addition, this research, using phenomenological interviewing techniques, aimed to determine whether or not association management executives working in California-based professional societies and trade associations changed their individual thought processes or behaviors as a result of attending a professional development program that demonstrated the SOAR framework. The research questions that guided this research were: (a) what changed mindsets were experienced as a result of an understanding with the SOAR framework in the strategic thinking process? and (b) what changed mindsets and organizational application were experienced as a result of an understanding with the SOAR framework in the strategic thinking process?

This qualitative study, using semi-structured interview questions, sought to explore and document the experiences of California-based senior association management executives with SOAR framework. This research aimed to add to the body of knowledge of SOAR as a result of expanded individual and organizational application of this approach as compared to other strategic thinking experiences. The study documents comparisons, by the non-profit executives involved in this study, between the more commonly known strategic thinking of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis and the positivity-focused SOAR framework.

Chapter 1: Overview of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the application of the strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results (SOAR) framework based on the appreciative inquiry literature through the lived experiences of California-based association management executives leading professional societies or trade associations.

The literature review identified key developments associated with the SOAR framework and how they fit into the larger organizational development (OD) body of knowledge. Also discussed are how the more common strategic-planning approach of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) emerged (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 1998) nearly 50 years prior to the introduction of the SOAR framework (Stavros, Cooperrider, & Kelley, 2003; Gergen, 1985) and how the early development of each process emerged primarily in the business community. The literature review then traced the appearance of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and positivity (Frederickson, 1998) and how both contributed to the ideas and concepts behind appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

Finally, the literature review highlighted the introduction of appreciative inquiry in both the corporate and association environment as well as how the SOAR framework fit into this body of work for organizational application. The study documented and examined mindset shifts and SOAR framework experiences of association management and non-profit executives regarding their strategic-thinking processes using the SOAR framework or other strategic thinking approaches to improve inquiry-based strategy processes.

Organizations, including trade associations and professional societies, use a variety of methodologies or approaches to plan for the future, improve management practices, or to bring about organizational change. While these approaches may have different structures or goals, a common phrase associated with these processes is *strategic planning*. The term strategic planning is described as a method to "help public and non-profit organizations (and communities) respond effectively to their new situations" (Bryson, 1988, p. 74). While data exist dating strategic-planning efforts in the public sector to the early 1950s and late 1960s (Young, 2003), there are limited data charting the unique history of strategic planning for trade associations or professional societies.

As early as 1957, what Mintzberg et al. (1998) called the design school of strategic planning can be seen at the University of California Berkeley, then at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1962, and in 1965 at Harvard Business School (Mintzberg et al., 1998). From these roots, the SWOT analysis came into use, as association management executives were urged to use this analysis to assess the operating environments of their organizations (Allison & Kaye, 1997). This involved creating lists of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats expressed in groups (Allison & Kaye, 1997) as part of their strategic-planning process. *Principles of Association Management* (Ernstthal & Jones, 1996), a key primer used by association executives, indicated the beginning of the strategic planning process within associations approximately 30 years ago. "The strategic planning process, first embraced by businesses and nonprofits in the 1980s, serves as a useful tool for achieving balance" (Ernstthal & Jones, 1996, p. 99). In a review of the limited association management

literature on strategic management and strategic planning approaches, SWOT analysis was identified as the only process used to consider the internal and external environments in both *Professional Practices in Association Management* (Cox, 2007) and *Principles of Association Management* (Ernstthal & Jones, 1996). "The SWOT exercise is a means to an end: identifying the critical issues that the organization must deal with in order to succeed" (Cox, 2007, p. 34). Both publications are regularly referenced by association management executives in their day-to-day operations. The *Professional Practices in Association Management* (Cox, 2007) is considered one of four essential resource texts required for study to attain the Certified Association Executive (CAE) designation. Over the same timeframe, the association management community was emulating the strategic thinking and planning processes of their for-profit counterparts, the psychiatric community was considering an alternative focus on the usual concept of negative thinking and problem solving.

From the works of Easterbrook (1959), Isen (1987), and Seligman (1999a, 199b) grew the concept of positive psychology. Subsequently, Frederickson (1998) connected positive psychology to positivity and considered that positivity applied to both individuals and organizations. Building on this thought process, Cooperrider and Srivastva, (1987) called for a change from what Gergen (1985) defined as deficit vocabularies to more appreciative approaches (Ludema, 2001) and introduced appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). In November 2003, the *AI Practitioner* included several articles on the topic of appreciative inquiry (AI) and the subject of SOAR was introduced as a "new framework for strategic planning" (Stavros et al., 2003, p. 1). Soon, SOAR was being tested within the corporate community as well.

The idea of positive thinking continued to be explored as the usage of AI and SOAR expanded. In 2010, Chip and Dan Heath released *The New York Times* best-selling book *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard,* which featured a core element in positive thinking, called *bright spots*, defined as "successful efforts worth emulating" (p. 28). The bright-spot approach identified areas where the organization or individual is excelling and then explores why a particular area is doing well. Heath and Heath (2010) proposed that once those positive characteristics or practices are identified, the premise is to replicate that same bright spot in other areas of the organization with the hope of similar positive outcomes. This approach is similar to the inquiry and positive-mindset process of AI and the SOAR framework.

Although AI and the SOAR framework have been used and their processes documented by corporations, municipal governments, and the healthcare arena, few associations have recorded their experience, positive or negative, with appreciative inquiry or the SOAR framework in academic literature or industry periodicals. Evidenced by the association management literature as of 2008, AI was still considered a relatively new concept that was most recently modeled by ASAE and the Center for Association Leadership (2006) as a new process at the Global Summit on Social Responsibilities.

This positive-thinking approach may be counter-intuitive to the association community, which continues using the deficit-weighted SWOT analysis as well as promoting SWOT benefits in the literature. The association community could be considered late adopters of new approaches, especially those originating in the corporate community, such as using new technologies as well as changes stemming from societal

trends due to their collaborative governance structures. Association leaders often point to the lack of knowledge of the unique governance and structure of associations in the corporate literature. Based on nearly three decades of industry observation, the problem-solving approach of SWOT analysis seems to have a stronghold within the association community judging by its use and its continued recommendation as a viable process.

The query for association management and non-profit executives is to determine their capacity and desire to experiment with a new organizational strategy process. An important distinction was the capacity and desire may be in place for the association or non-profit executive but the organizations was not in the right place to experiment with a new strategic thinking process. Would any of those participating in the professional development program on the SOAR framework take it back into their strategic-planning efforts and attempt to facilitate the SOAR process with another association initiative? In a community where change is often difficult, this study attempted to discover what resulted from the introduction of this strengths-based SOAR approach to California-based association management and non-profit executives.

Problem Statement

While SWOT emerged from the strategic design community as early as 1957, SWOT was subsequently used by a myriad of for-profit and non-profit organizations and government agencies (Mintzberg et al., 1998). In comparison to SWOT, the SOAR framework was a relative newcomer to the academic literature dealing with the strategic-thinking process (Stavros et al., 2003). With a limited amount of research, this qualitative study used a phenomenological questioning for the semi-structured interviews, seeking to explore and document how SOAR was engaged in California-based professional

societies, trade associations, and foundation executives. This SOAR framework research aimed to add to the body of understanding and knowledge (Creswell, 2003; Moustakas, 1994) of SOAR resulting in expanded individual and organizational application of this appreciative inquiry based approach.

Organizations generally engage in some aspect of strategic thinking initiatives or strategic planning at different time intervals, yet, reflect dissatisfaction with the process, the lack of usable results, and the inability for the process to elicit change (Bell, Moyers, & Wolfred, 2006; Hollan, 2008). Likewise, it is common for trade associations and professional societies to mimic their for-profit peers and use a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis in their strategic thinking initiatives or strategic planning process (Mintzberg et al., 1998).

This problem-focused SWOT method involves investing a great amount of time identifying weakness and threats. Although the strengths of the organization are recognized, the planning process tends to focus on addressing possible solutions to the identified weaknesses (Allison & Kaye, 1997). Although the shortcomings of problem-focused methodologies have been identified (Cameron & Caza, 2004; Hill & Westbrook, 1997; Karakas, 2009; Ludema, 2001) organizations, such as professional societies and trade associations, continued to use a SWOT analysis as the predominate method of examining the internal and external environments (Hill & Westbrook, 1997; Hollan, 2008). This mindset is set forth in *Principles of Association Management* (Ernstthal & Jones, 1996) an introductory primer that advocates only the use of a SWOT analysis for an association's strategic planning with no reference to any alternative approaches for strategic thinking. This is an important consideration, since, as stated previously,

Principles of Association Management (Ernstthal & Jones, 1996) is a required text for an association management professional to study for the industry's certification program leading to designation as a Certified Association Executive (CAE).

Recently, there was evidence that at least one association discussed using a *relatively new process* called SOAR instead of the SWOT analysis previously used for strategic planning (O'Neill, 2007). However, a quick scan of the article archives on the ASAE website (www.asaecenter.org/resources/index.cfn) resulted in articles and resources on association strategic planning processes using only SWOT, with no mention of the SOAR framework in any article in the archive. However, ASAE did sponsor the *Global Summit on Social Responsibility: Leveraging the Power of Associations for a New Magnitude of Leadership* in 2008, with David Cooperrider as the keynote speaker. While the program produced several initiatives associations could adopt or champion, minimal evidence of post-event progress can be found on the website.

The challenge for the association management or non-profit executive leading an organization is that minimal data is available documenting the successful application of the SOAR framework within this profession by any peer group. For more association non-profit executives to experiment with the SOAR framework, documented lived experiences from their peer group are needed to lend credibility and clarity to the process. An example of possible documentation might include case studies or articles describing how association management executives use AI and the SOAR framework for individual benefit or to improve the strategic thinking initiatives or strategic planning process in their organizations.

One of the few examples recently documented was featured in the January/February 2012 issue of *The Executive*, the bi-monthly magazine for the California Society of Association Executives (CalSAE). In the article, *Appreciative Inquiry: A Leadership Tool for Invigorating the Association*, Smikle (2012) briefly documents how the American College of Health Care Administrator's (ACHCA) executive team and board of directors applied an appreciative-inquiry approach to strategic planning. While ACHCA did not specifically use the SOAR framework, the association did use an adaptation of Cooperrider's *4-D Model*, which is considered to be the precursor to Stavros' (2003) SOAR framework.

The broader need for the association management profession is the ability to discover resources within the business sector and adapt them successfully for use in associations. While the above-mentioned article noted an example in 2012 of how an association adapted the appreciative inquiry approach for its own use, consider that AI was introduced in 1987 and has been modeled by corporations, municipalities, the healthcare industry, and others outside the association community for more than 25 years.

One of the more successful adaptation and application processes from corporate community to association management profession was observed in how the association management community embraced the best-selling business management books *Good to Great* (Collins, 2001) and *Built to Last* (Collins & Porras, 1994). After feedback from what Collins (2005) called the social sector, he recognized that some of his findings "resonated with the association community" but others "were problematic" (p. xiv). According to Collins (2005), after he released *Good to Great*, he began receiving regular communications from chief executives of professional societies, trade associations, and

government and social services agencies about how they were applying the concepts in his book.

This feedback from the wider non-profit community resulted in a subsequent monograph entitled *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* which addressed the specific issues that were more association specific (Collins, 2005). Collins (2005) estimated that "somewhere between 30% and 50% of those who have read *Good to Great* come from non-business" (p. 3). Although most association executives would not consider an association or professional society a non-business, Collins (2005) then understood how the business executives have more in common with their non-business counterparts than previously realized. However, change can go two ways and not just the association management profession modeling the best practices from their corporate counter parts. Collins (2005) illustrated this in *Good to Great and Social Sectors* when *economic engine* was replaced by *resource engine* as one of the three-concentric circles in Collins' (2005) Hedgehog Concept. It was Collins' (2005) exposure with the non-profit executives that prompted this change and the realization it takes people and finances for the social sectors of his model to be effectives.

"The good-to-great principles do indeed apply to the social sectors, perhaps better than we expected … particular questions crop up repeatedly from social sector leaders facing realities they perceive to be quite different from the business sector" (Collins, 2005, p. 3). ASAE recognized the market demand and worked with Collins (2005) to adapt his research methodology for the association management community. The results of this study were included in *7 Measures of Success: What Remarkable Associations Do That Others Don't* (ASAE & The Center for Association Leadership, 2006). Both *Good*

to Great and the Social Sectors and *7 Measures of Success* became popular sellers in the association management and foundation community and demonstrate that once corporate-based innovation is adapted to the non-profit audience, with its unique language, it is adopted more readily. In fact, Cooperrider and Whitney's (1999a) constructionist principle of "words create worlds" (Bushe, 2011, p. 8) can be applied here to accentuate the power the use of language has within the general non-profit community.

Appreciative inquiry and the SOAR framework are potentially of great importance to organizational strategic planning and creating and managing change, yet there were very limited academic studies which deal with the application or effectiveness of AI and/or the SOAR framework in producing either mindset changes in the association management and foundation executives, or subsequent changes in the professional societies, trade associations, or foundations they lead. Therefore, this study looked at analyzing and documenting the changed mindsets or behaviors of association management and foundation executives after their participation in a CalSAE professional development program on the SOAR framework, which was presented in October 2011 in Irvine, California and Sacramento, California.

The results of this study potentially supplement a body of knowledge for the association management and foundation community that did not exist previously. This study is about discovering the experiences of association management executives while documenting any changed mindsets or behaviors relating to management and strategic planning as a result of their participation in a professional-development program on the SOAR framework presented in October 2011.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study using semi-structured interviewing techniques was to determine whether association management executives working in California-based professional societies, trade associations, and foundations changed their individual mindsets or adapted organizational management practices by applying the principles of the SOAR framework following attendance at a professional development program that demonstrated said framework.

Research Questions

The following primary questions guided this study were:

1. What changed mindsets were experienced as a result of an understanding with the SOAR framework in the strategic thinking process?
2. What changed mindsets and organizational application were experienced as a result of an understanding with the SOAR framework in the strategic thinking process?

Operational Definitions and Key Terms

The following definitions were used to guide this research.

Action research: Research that is focused on solving a problem. Introduced by Kurt Lewin (1946) as "a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action" (p. 35). Lewin (1946) defines how that research takes place through a step-by-step process of "planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action" (p. 38).

Appreciative inquiry (AI): The "systematic discovery of what gives life to an organization or community when it is most effective and most capable in economic,

ecological, and human terms" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, pg. 8). AI can be considered a process of asking an "unconditional positive question" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, pg. 53) and involving many people in an organization in the process. Simply put, AI is the act of inquiring into and appreciating what is best and most successful in people, organizations, and the world around us.

ASAE: The acronym for the American Society of Association Executives, which was originally founded in 1920 as the American Trade Association Executives. The name was changed to American Society of Association Executives to represent the diversity of associations represented. In 2004 it was merged with other entities to become ASAE Center for Association Leadership, using only the acronym in the name.

ASAE Center for Association Leadership: In 2004, ASAE, the Greater Washington Society of Association Executives (GWSAE), the ASAE Foundation, and the Center for Association Leadership merged into one entity and was later renamed ASAE The Center for Association Leadership. As of 2013, this merged organization had 21,000 individual members representing trade, professional, and philanthropic associations.

Chief staff officer/Executive director: The chief paid staff position. The title has evolved from executive director to executive vice president or president and chief executive officer (CEO). The position has the ultimate responsibility for management, administration, and personnel.

Committees: Subsets of a board of directors and membership organized to advance the work of the board by pursuing strategic goals. Committees typically have a statement of purpose and a charge for the current year.

Environmental scan: A process used to assess internal and external impacts on the organization including but not limited to trend analysis and surveys.

Foundation: Classified by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service as a tax-deductible 501c3 (IRS code) organization with a common focus being religious, educational, and scientific or research focused.

Lived experience: An individual's perceptions of his or her experiences in the world (Morse & Richards, 2002). The recollections of lived experiences by association management executives provide insights into how they processed and applied the SOAR process in their organizations or individual mindsets.

Positive organizational behavior (POB): "The study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace" (Luthans, 2002b, pg. 59).

Positive psychology: "A science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions… [it] is about valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present)" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5).

Profession: A group of persons with a common purpose and standards engaged in an occupation or vocation.

Professional society: A nonprofit organization seeking to further a particular profession or the interests of individuals engaged in that profession.

Phenomenology: Identifying the essence of an experience through descriptive, reflective, interpretive and engaging modes of inquiry (van Manen, 1990).

SOAR: An acronym for strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results. SOAR builds on SWOT analysis, establishing a new framework that focuses not only on strengths and opportunities but also on aspirations and results. SOAR enables a focus on "what an organization is doing right, what skills could be enhanced, and what is compelling to those who have a 'stake' in the organization's success" (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009, pg. 6).

Social constructionism: Looks at how society realities and social phenomena are constructed. Social constructionist inquiry is "concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live" (Gergen, 1985, p. 266).

Strategic planning: The process an organization undertakes in order to plan for the future; usually including defining vision and purpose, identifying internal and external environments that contribute to or hinder the vision and purpose, and identifying, through goal setting and strategy building, how to achieve the vision and purpose.

SWOT: An acronym for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Usually termed SWOT analysis; it is a process that strives to examine internal and external environments and provides problem-solving steps to build a strategic plan.

The Center for Association Leadership: The Center was originally an organization founded by the Greater Washington Society of association executives (GWSAE) in 2001 with the intent of being a revolutionary learning center. It was later merged with ASAE,

GWSAE, and the ASAE Foundation to become part of the ASAE & Center for Association Leadership.

Trade Association: A nonprofit organization formed to provide services to members, promote education and professional standards, and influence government agencies through lobbying.

Importance of the Study

This study was important because there were minimal data documenting the application of appreciative inquiry or more specifically the SOAR framework as a strategic thinking model. In addition, those executives involved in the study provided specific examples of lived experiences regarding the use of the SWOT analysis and SOAR framework in their organizations. This is important to document as associations and foundations have traditionally opted for the more widely used problem-solving approach of SWOT over the less known but positive attributes of the SOAR framework in the process of strategic thinking.

As a result of documenting the lived experiences of association management executives using the appreciative inquiry-grounded SOAR framework, it was hoped that more association management executives will come to realize that there is an alternative to thinking centered on problem solving and SWOT analysis in the strategic-planning process. Warren Bennis (1963) said, "It is usually risky business to identify a 'trend' or a new direction before the major outlines of the alleged phenomenon can be clearly observed" (p. 125). This is why this study was important, to track the *major outlines* of the SOAR process and its varied applications and uses in the association community.

Assumptions

The basic assumptions of this study were:

1. The participants were truthful and authentic regarding their experiences.
2. Strategic planning will continue to be important to trade associations and professional societies.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included:

1. The ability of association management and foundation executives to recall, up to 17 months, specific incidents or processes where SOAR influenced their mindset.
2. The influence or bias of the interviewer based on personal experiences as both 14 years as a former association management executive and 15 years as a strategy and organizational development consultant to associations and foundations.
3. The limited span of this study in focusing on a small sample of association and foundation executives located in California, whereas associations and foundations are international in scope.
4. The reluctance to participate in a study when they have limited recall of the content presented 17 months following a professional development experience.

Organization of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on the background, purpose, research questions, assumptions, and limitations of the study. The second

chapter examines research related to SOAR and how appreciative inquiry influences this strategic thinking process. Chapter 3 covers the methods used in the study, including the study's design and rationale, sampling methods, human subjects' considerations, instrument development, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques. The fourth chapter includes the study results as answers to the research questions. Finally, Chapter 5 sets forth conclusions and recommendations for future research related to the SOAR framework explored by association management and non-profit executives.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review begins with an examination of organization development (OD) and the introduction of action research as a problem-solving process within OD. The emergence of SWOT analysis, which is the process most often used by associations and foundations in their planning efforts, is reviewed from within one of the many schools of thought on organizational strategic planning. Introduced next is the parallel movement in positive psychology and positivity in organizations, which began to change the negative-focused, problem-to-be-solved approach in both individuals and organizations. Also in this chapter is the history of appreciative inquiry and how it grew to include a more positive version of SWOT analysis transformed into the SOAR framework. Included also in the review is literature that helps frame an understanding of how associations and professional societies accept new concepts and adopt new processes.

Organization Development

Organization development (OD), as a field of practice, emerged in the late 1950's and early 1960's (Marshak, 2006). OD is generally considered a process that embraces a myriad of social and behavioral sciences and practices with the intention of improving the performance of an organization and equipping individuals with the tools to manage change. French and Bell (1984) defined organization development as "improving an organization's problem-solving and renewal processes through collaborative practices with the assistance of change agents or consultants guided by theories of human and organizational behavior and methodology of action research" (p. 18). Burke (1982) expanded on French and Bell's definition of OD as a "planned process of change in an

organization's culture through the utilization of behavioral science technology, research, and theory" (p. 10). Beckhard (1969) defined organization development as "an effort, planned, organization-wide, and managed from the top, to increase organization effectiveness and health through planned interventions in the organization's processes, using behavioral-science knowledge" (p. 9).

Cummings and Worley (2009) offered a collective perspective that sought to fully capture the different schools of thought in their definition. "Organization development is a system wide application and transfer of behavioral science knowledge to the planned development, improvement and reinforcement of the strategies, structures, and processes that lead to organization effectiveness" (Cummings &Worley, 2009, p. 2). As these practices progressed, the idea that planning, development, and change revolved around problem solving was evident (Mintzberg, 1994). OD's problem solving emphasis can be seen in the description that states that OD is "a long-range effort to improve an organization's problem solving capabilities and its ability to cope with changes in its external environment with the help of external or internal behavioral-scientist consultants, or change agents, as they are sometimes called" (French, 1969, p. 23).

Action research, a frequent strategy mindset in organization development, was a term coined by M.I.T. professor and social psychologist Kurt Lewin in the mid-1940s and was described as a process of progressive problem solving (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cunningham, 1993). It was based on participants in the process examining their present situation and deciding what required change or action (Marshak, 2006). Cohen, Fink, Gadon, and Willits (1984) described these stages:

> Action-research begins with an identified problem. Data are then gathered in a way that allows a diagnosis, which can produce a tentative solution, which is then

> implemented with the assumption that it is likely to cause new or unforeseen problems that will, in turn, need to be evaluated, diagnosed, and so forth. (pp. 359-360)

Lewin (1947) explained it as starting with an idea, working toward reaching an objective, then examining the idea and engaging in fact finding about specific situations. From this a plan for achieving the objective as well as the first action step comes forward. Well before the advent of SWOT analysis in the late 1950s, Lewin (1947) describes the fact-finding step in a social management example of the bombing of Germany as a "chance to learn, to gather new general insight, for instance, regarding the strength and weakness of certain weapons or techniques of action" (p. 38). French (1969) gave the key components of the action-research model as "diagnosis, data gathering, feedback to the client group, data discussion and work by the client group, action planning, and action" (p. 26). In the data-gathering stage questions were to be "problem sensing" (French, 1969, p. 27) and encourage "a reporting of problems as the individual sees them" (French, 1969, p. 28).

This is the beginning of the problem-solving issue that Cooperrider and Srivestva, (1987) were responding to with the introduction of appreciative inquiry into the organization development community. As a "conceptual reconfiguration of action research" (Cooperrider & Srivestva, 1987, p. 55), appreciative inquiry (AI) offered an alternative to a method known to begin with an identified problem (Cooperrider & Srivestva, 1987). Cooperrider and Godwin (2010) called AI "a paradigm-altering form of action-research that has permeated the fields of organization change and social innovation" (p. 1). Prior to examining AI's contributions to organization development more in-depth, the issues of strategic planning, SWOT, and the increase of what

Cooperrider (2001) later called "deficit discourse" (p. 1) are this study's underpinnings.

Strategic Planning and SWOT

As organization development was being cultivated, so too was the practice of strategic planning. According to Bracker (1980), "The need for a concept of strategy related to business became greater after World War II, as business moved from a relatively stable environment into a more rapidly changing and competitive environment" (p. 219). As early as 1957 what Mintzberg et al. (1998) called the design-school model of strategic planning, one of 10 "schools of thought" (p. 4) on planning, was introduced in two books from the University of California Berkeley (Selznick, 1957) and MIT (Chandler, 1962). Selznick (1957) identified the advantages of determining an organization's internal state and external expectations.

Mintzberg et al. (1998) favored the general management group at the Harvard Business School as the dominant voice in the design school of thought with its publication of a 1965 textbook *Business Policy: Text and Cases* by Christensen, Andrews, Bower, Hamermesh, and Porter (1982). This model described having the most emphasis on examining the external and internal environments of an organization, which then would reveal threats and opportunities as well as strengths and weakness (Mintzberg et al., 1998). This was the introduction of a planning model that became the central theme of the design school of thought in strategic planning. Focused on a process of external and internal appraisal, the model came to be called SWOT analysis, an acronym for the study of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Mintzberg et al., 1998). Mintzberg (1994) criticized the process, pointing out that it "considers strategy making as an informal process of conception" (p. 2) and "uses a few basic ideas to design strategy"

(p. 6). He points out that the focus on conception relies on the assumption that noted strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, are truly understood, and are truly characteristics of the organization and not subject to changing with changed circumstances. Better, he contended, would be the learning involved in the process of testing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats before applying as the basis for a strategy (Mintzberg et al., 1998).

Bryson (1988) outlined a step-by-step process for strategic planning using much of this early framework. Included in the steps was not only the mandate to assess internal and external environments through SWOT, but also a series of warnings for the planning team. The focus on conflicts and consequences became apparent in Bryson's (1988) admonition to identify strategic issues, which he defined as embodying conflicts: "In order for the issues to be raised and resolved effectively, the organization must be prepared to deal with such conflicts" (p. 76).

Bryson first authored *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* in 1988; it is now in its fourth edition (Bryson, 2011). The chapter on *Assessing the Environment to Identify Strengths and Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats* has not changed significantly nearly 25 years since it was first published (Bryson, 2011). In 1996 Bryson and Alston first published a companion workbook (Bryson & Alston, 1996) now in its third edition. In the most recent workbook, (Bryson & Alston, 2011) claim that the field has changed, and that the workbook has added new information on change. However, the chapter and worksheets on assessing the environment for SWOT remain an integral part of the workbook. No mention of strengths-based strategy, AI, or the SOAR framework was suggested in any of the editions of the main book or workbook. Bryson

and Alston (2011) emphasize the role of weaknesses in the statement: "Strategic planning at its best makes extensive use of analysis and synthesis in deliberative settings to help leaders and managers successfully address the major challenges that their organization (or other entity) faces" (p. xii).

The issues of negative language and the focus on problem solving are obvious in other strategic planning literature as well, with comments about the planning process focusing on possible solutions to the identified weaknesses (Allison & Kaye, 1997), and the shortcomings of problem-focused methodologies (Cameron & Caza, 2004; Hill & Westbrook, 1997; Karakas, 2009; Ludema, 2001). In spite of criticism, SWOT analysis continued being used as a viable problem-solving method for organizations. Subsequent actions responding to those concerns and SWOT continued to be the predominate method of examining the external and internal environments (Hill & Westbrook, 1997; Hollan, 2008). Bryson (1988) warned organizations that without strategic planning they would likely not "be able to meet successfully the numerous challenges that face them" (p. 74).

While information regarding the strategic planning efforts in the public sector dates to the early 1950s and late 1960's (Young, 2003), there is only limited information charting the history of association planning efforts. By the 1990s, however, association executives, like their corporate counterparts, were urged to engage in strategic planning and use SWOT analysis to assess the operating environment of their organizations by creating lists of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats expressed in groups (Allison & Kaye, 1997). Similar to their counterparts in the public sector, association and foundation executives recognized that there were shortcomings in the process, a lack

of usable results, and an inability for the process to elicit change (Bell et al., 2006; Hollan, 2008).

In a 1994 study of fifty companies, twenty were using SWOT analysis for their planning efforts (Hill & Westbrook, 1997). Included in this 1994 study was also the realization that in the SWOT analyses conducted, the lists of weaknesses outnumbered strengths, and there were slightly more opportunities than threats identified (Hill & Westerbrook, 1997). The conclusion from the study was that "SWOT as deployed in these companies was ineffective as a means of analysis or as part of a corporate strategy review" (Hill & Westbrook, 1997, p. 50).

However, organizations continued to use SWOT and books on non-profit strategic planning as the process to assess the organization (Allison & Kaye, 1997; Bryson, 2011; Bryson & Alston, 2011; Ernstthal & Jones, 1996). As late as 2001, one of the principal textbooks for the examination leading to the Certified Association Executive (CAE) designation not only included SWOT analysis as a strategic planning method, but also advised association leaders that in assessing strengths and weaknesses: "Nothing but a hard, beady-eyed look at reality will do" (Ernstthal & Jones, 1996, p. 102). From this research it seems clear that although SWOT and problem-focused strategies were viewed as less-than-effective, associations continued to use the methods. In a review of resources from the website of the ASAE Center for Association Leadership (ASAE) SWOT analysis was recommended as the primary tool in strategic planning in documents ranging from 2005 through 2012 (www.asaecenter.org/resources/index.cfn).

By 2007, at least one discussion about moving from SWOT to the relatively new process called SOAR was offered to nonprofit audiences (O'Neill, 2007). The literature

review indicated that the association community was not actively discussing alternatives to SWOT, nor was the idea mentioned that it was a negative, rather than positive-focused approach. At the same time, the OD community was actively addressing the impact of positive emotions on organizations and what affect those emotions had on change and transformation within the organization (Sekerka & Frederickson, 2008).

Positivity in Organizations

Positivity in organizations stems from the positive psychology movement spearheaded by Seligman (Luthans, 2002a; Seligman, 1999a; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010), which promoted the benefits of focusing away from weaknesses, or what is wrong with a person, to focusing instead on strengths. In an article that related the personal positivity stories of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), one anecdote shared was the realization, through an encounter with a daughter, that raising children "is vastly more than fixing what is wrong with them. It is about identifying and nurturing their strongest qualities, what they own and are best at, and helping them find niches in which they can best live out these strengths" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 6). He commented to the profession in a speech in 1999 saying, “But the problem is that because we have been a profession and a science focused on what was wrong, and what was weak, we know almost nothing about the strengths, about those virtues” (Seligman, 1999b, para. 22). He explored the personal side of positivity, establishing a Positive Psychology Network with a mission:

> To discover and then apply psychological knowledge acquired in scientific research to cultivate strengths and virtues: courage, optimism, interpersonal skill, work ethic, hope, honesty and perseverance. In so doing, we will increase the ability of individuals and organizations to perform at the highest levels and help people to have the most fulfilling relationships possible. (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 81)

Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000) further predicted that a future psychology of positive human functioning would emerge that "achieves a scientific understanding and effective interventions to build thriving in individuals, families, and communities" (p. 13).

Positive emotions, and their contribution to organizational health, were also addressed by Fredrickson (1998, 2003, 2006, 2009) and others (Garland et al, 2010) who were making a connection not only between positivity and individual health, but also between positivity and organizational well-being. Psychological science had already concluded that negative thinking breeds negative emotions, which had the potential to spiral down into clinical depression and other pathological states (Frederickson, 2009). Pointing to work first done by Easterbrook (1959) on the effects of negative emotions on one's attention and focus, Frederickson (1998) makes the case that positive emotions can serve to enlarge one's cognitive context (Isen, 1987) and broaden one's scope of action (Frederickson, 1998, 2003).

Those positive emotions contribute to what Frederickson (2003) called upward spirals that move "toward optimal individual and organizational functioning" (p. 163). Following from the already accepted understanding of downward spirals of depression leading to worsening moods (Frederickson, 2003, 2009), damaging cycles (Garland et al., 2010), and subsequently narrowing ideas and actions (Frederickson, 2009), Frederickson's hypothesis was that once the positive emotions trigger upward spirals, those spirals do the opposite of negative spirals, that is, broaden one's mode of thinking and subsequent action (Frederickson, 2003, 2009, 2010). Whether referring to downward or upward spirals, the concept is the same: they are "self-perpetuating, self-maximizing

systems" (Garland et al, 2010, p. 851). Figure 1 illustrates the elements associated with the downward and the upward spirals.

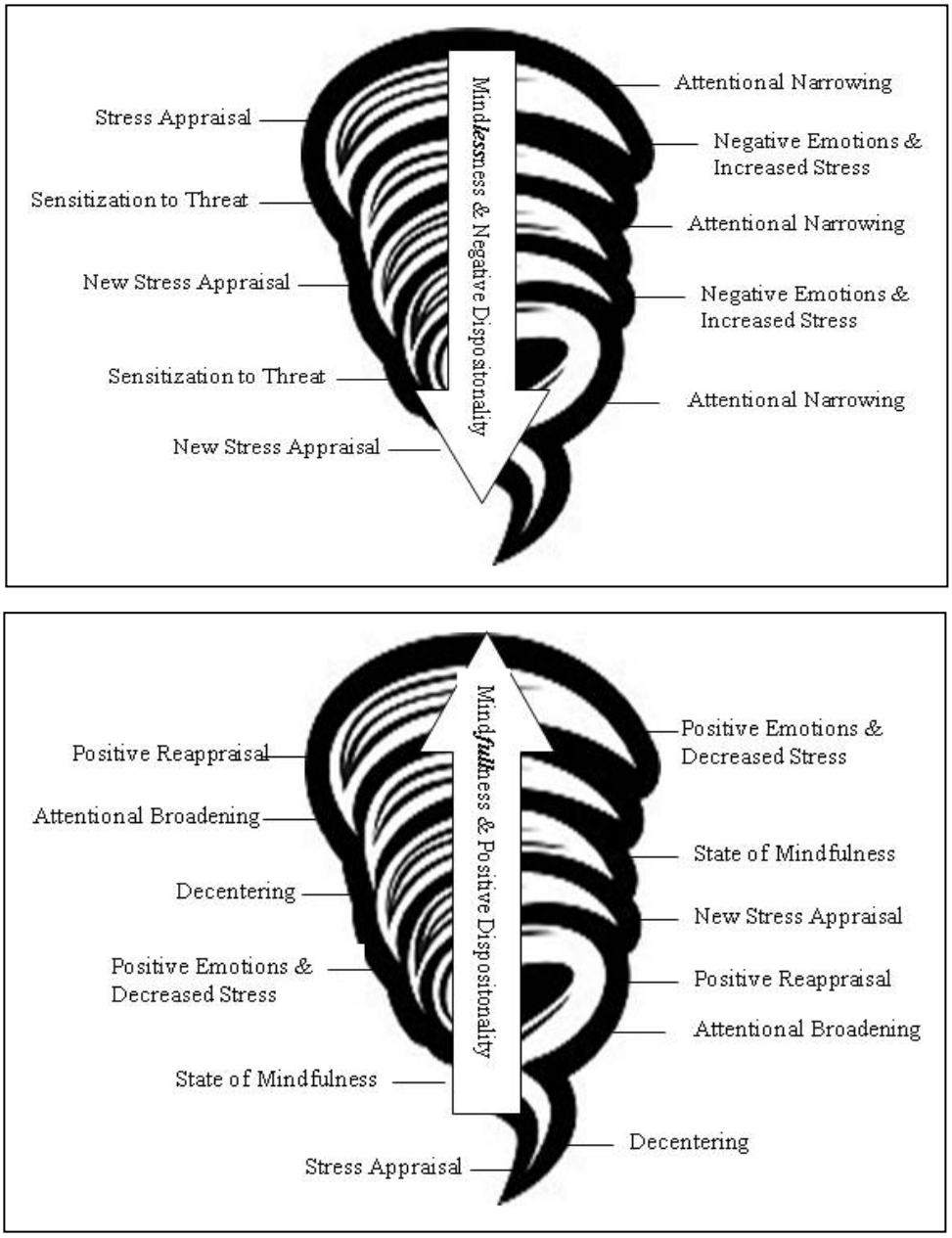

Figure 1. Downward spiral of psychopathology and upward spiral of flourishing. Reprinted from "Upward spirals of positive emotions counter downward spirals of negativity: Insights from the broaden-and-build theory and affective neuroscience on the treatment of emotion dysfunctions and deficits in psychopathology," E. L. Garland, B. Frederickson, A. M. Kring, D. P. Johnson, P. S. Meyer, and D. L. Penn, 2010, *Clinical Psychology Review*, *30*, pp. 849-854. Copyright 2010 by Garland, Frederickson, Kring, Johnson, Meyer, and Penn. Reprinted with permission.

Frederickson's (2003) broaden-and-build theory stated that not only did positive emotions broaden one's scope but also eventually built physical, intellectual, and social resources. This early work on positive emotions served as a catalyst for advances in areas of change management and organization development, efforts to build a positive workplace, and an increasing focus on strength-based rather than problem-solving approaches (Sekerka & Frederickson, 2008). Both Seligman and Fredrickson recognized that positivity has wide implications for organizational behavior (Luthans, 2002a).

Several approaches emerged, including positive organizational behavior (POB), (Luthans, 2002a), organizational effectiveness (Cameron, Mora, Leutscher, & Calarco, 2011), and the field of positive organizational scholarship (POS) (Cameron & Caza, 2004). Described by Cameron and Caza (2004) as a new movement, they defined POS as "the study of that which is positive, flourishing, and life-giving in organizations" (p. 731). Sekerka and Frederickson (2008) recognized the potential in the works of Cooperrider and appreciative inquiry (AI) and pointed to it as a means to "build relational strength within the organization [which] emboldens collectively experienced positive emotions that support personal and organizational growth and expansion" (p. 536).

Appreciative Inquiry

Understanding the theory of social constructionism, (Gergen, 1985), which asks the question "How do we know what we know?" (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 26), appreciative inquiry (AI) provides the method by which people can create meaning through their dialog together. As Gergan stated (2012) on the Taos Institute website:

> Social constructionist dialogues-of cutting edge significance with the social sciences and humanities-concern the processes by which humans generate meaning together. Our focus is on how social groups create and sustain beliefs in the real, the rational, and the good. We recognize that as people create meaning

> together, so do they sow the seeds of action. Meaning and action are entwined. As we generate meaning together we create the future. (Gergan, 2002, Constructionist theory section, para. 2).

David Cooperrider was one of several who were calling for a change from what Gergen (1985) defined as deficit vocabularies to more appreciative approaches (Ludema, 2001). There was concern that the overriding focus in organizational change approaches was that of problem solving and the need to "fix" something (Johnson & Leavitt, 2001). Cooperrider felt "organizations become trapped by the language of deficit" (Johnson & Leavitt, 2001, p. 130).

The idea of appreciative inquiry (AI) began as a collaborative effort between Cooperrider as a graduate student and his faculty mentor, Suresh Srivastva at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). During a project for the Cleveland Clinic, they focused on the organization's success stories and what made it effective rather than using the traditional action research technique of asking for strengths and weaknesses (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Cooperrider's subsequent presentation at the Academy of Management (AOM) and his doctoral dissertation advanced his concept of AI and the advantages of an affirmative rather than deficit or problem-solving approach (Watkins & Mohr, 2001).

The first mention of AI in a professional journal was in 1987 with Cooperrider and Srivastva's (1987) article *Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life* (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). From that point on projects, papers, studies, journal articles and books on AI appear, some by Cooperrider (1990, 1996, 2001), others by a combination of authors (Barrett & Cooperrider, 1999; Bushe, 1998, 2011; Cooperrider et al., 2005; Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999a) expanding the original thoughts from Cooperrider and Srivastva

(1987) and refining the process (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). In a review of advancement in the field of OD, AI was described as one of seven of the "most visible emergent models and innovations related to the field of organization development" (Karakas, 2009, p. 12) all of which "significantly contributed to the rapidly expanding field" (p. 13).

AI differs dramatically from the action-research practices described earlier. Not only does it focus on strengths and the generative aspects of the organization, but also it promotes a methodical approach of inquiry that traditional OD practices miss through its parts-focused approach (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). Table 1 illustrates the differences between the traditional action-research approaches and the AI approach.

Appreciative inquiry began to fundamentally reshape organization development practices in companies. AI was implemented as a process within cities and states, the health care system in Romania, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Used by the Dalai Lama, AI brought religious leaders together (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). In 2008, AI was introduced to 800 association and professional society leaders through the ASAE Center for Association Leadership's Global Summit on Social Responsibility.

Cooperrider (1996) identified numerous drawbacks to the traditional problem-solving paradigms: (a) these paradigms were "out of sync with the realities of today's virtual worlds" (pp. 22-23); (b) they were too slow; (c) they don't often result in new vision; and (d) they generate defensiveness and a silo mentality (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999a). However, the single most important discovery in this area was that "human systems grow toward what they persistently ask questions about" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999a, p. 9). Cooperrider discovered a valuable assumption inherent in AI that

if an organization focused on problems, then everything would be seen through that lens and set of assumptions (Hammond, 1998).

Table 1

Action-Research Problem Solving Assumptions and Processes Compared to Appreciative Inquiry

Traditional Problem Solving Assumptions	Traditional Problem Solving Process	AI Assumptions	AI process
There is some ideal way for things to be.	Identify what is wrong	The way things are is socially constructed by our system and can be changed.	Look at experiences in the area to improve to discover times when things were going well, when there were feelings of excitement, success and joy.
If something is not as we would like it to be, it is a problem to be solved.	Analyze the cause of what is wrong	In any situation, there are areas of excellence to build on.	From the stories collectively create a description of what we want (image of the ideal).
To solve a problem, break it into parts and analyze it.	Decide on goals to fix the cause	Build on excellence by seeking examples and sharing stories throughout whole system.	Ask others how they have successfully dealt with similar situations.
Once we find a broken part and fix it, the whole will be fixed.	Create a plan to achieve the goals	If we create an image of that excellence the system will move toward that image.	Share images, discover others' images, and continually re-create a generative and creative future throughout the system.
	Implement the plan		
	Evaluate if problem is fixed.		

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Heliotropic Principle

Stemming from the heliotropic principle, symbolized by the Greek god Helios and based on the fact that plants grow toward sunlight (Cooperrider, 1990), Cooperrider's heliotropic hypothesis (Bushe, 1998) was that "people and organizations move toward those things that give them energy and life" (Rogers & Fraser, 2003, p. 77). This posited that human systems have a tendency to move in the direction of positive images of the future. Cooperrider expanded this thinking to include the presumption that human systems move in the direction of whatever they study or ask questions about (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Bushe (1998) advanced this theory in discussion of a socially constructed reality, saying that how something is studied will impact not only what one sees but create what one discovers.

Hammond (1998) clarified the concept by stating simply that AI "is the belief that the language we use creates our reality" and "the emotional meaning in the words we use affects our thinking" (p. 25). Similarly, Cooperrider (1990) captured the short-hand constructionist principle describing powerful language with "words create worlds" (Bushe, 2011; Whitney, 1998). The intent of the phrase captures the essence when organization focuses on negative questions, the result will be a negative environment (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, n. d.). It is for these reasons that Cooperrider (1990) suggested the radically alternative approach away from deficit discourse and toward both affirmation and inquiry mindset presented in AI. As Watkins and Mohr (2001) stated:

> If we accept that there is at least a possibility that we socially construct our world and a reasonable amount of evidence that we have the power to create what we imagine, it follows that a process for facilitating organization change would consciously focus on empowering employees to believe that they can make a difference; rewarding leaders who know how to empower others; and directing

> the energy of the system toward the positive, generative, and creative forces that give life and vitality to the work. (p. 32)

By 2010 the premise of organizations understanding the concept of moving toward what they study can be found in the literature. In a Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, and Rader (2010) interview it is stated that "the choice of what to study – what to focus organizational attention on – is important and strategic" (p. 1). Cooperrider (2001) focused on creating a process that would create the environment or the "space for new voices and languages to emerge" (p. 27) and would allow for a new, positive construction of social reality.

Assumptions and Mental Models

Johnson and Leavitt (2001) gave three basic assumptions premised by AI, which are:

- Organizations will respond to the positives. Positive thoughts and positive knowledge are welcome. This was based on the heliotropic principle, which states that an organization will move towards the positives for energy much like a flower will turn toward the sun.
- Both vision, an organization's image of the future, and the process of creating how that vision will be achieved contribute to the energy that drives change. Being involved in the dialog, identifying positives, and moving from a positive place forward engages stakeholders in an entirely different way than identifying negatives and reacting to fixing the problems.

- There is power in affirmation. Engaging in positive affirmation, recognizing what is working and how those things can be improved; gives change a better chance of success (p. 130).

These assumptions show that there is a difference between the problem-solving mindset and the appreciative mindset. Even if a group begins with asking what has been done well, due to the prevalence of the problem-solving approach, the answers to "what have we done well?" may focus on "how can we do better as a result of what we didn't do well?" (Hammond, 1998, p. 23). The strength of positive mindset or mental model (Senge, 1990) is not to be underestimated. Senge (1990) stated "new insights fail to get put into practice because they conflict with deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting" (p.174).

Hammond (1998) pointed to the assumptions that drive AI including: that in every organization something must be working; that reality is something that is created in the moment; and that the questions asked will influence the group asking. If organizations move toward what they study, as Whitney (2010) stated, and if they embrace the assumption that reality is created in the moment (Hammond, 1998), then it is imperative that they understand that there are multiple realities (Hammond, 1998). The lenses that individuals in an organization look through (the mental models) can influence the focus of the discussion (Hammond, 1998; Senge, 1990). Barrett and Cooperrider (1990) thought these mental models could be "broken through" (Hammond, 1998, p. 28) using the appreciative inquiry approach and process.

Barrett and Cooperrider (1990) provided an example of a hotel group who, rather than focus on their problems of distrust and negativity, were taken to a four-star hotel to

find out what worked on this award-winning property. They found hope in the experience and began to look at what would work for their hotel in similar ways. Finding best practices at another property generated new ideas for their own property. Hammond (1998) pointed to the philosophy of Jung:

> An important problem is rarely solved instead it is outgrown, as a newer, stronger interest comes along to crowd out the problem. When a newer and stronger urge or life force appears on the horizon, people adjust to grow towards it; much like a plant grows toward light. (p. 30)

Cooperrider and Godwin (2010) expanded on this example: "through that newer, stronger life urge what was seemingly a problem was eclipsed, made irrelevant, or dissolved" (pp. 43-44). Hammond (1998) concluded, "Creating a newer, stronger life urge is often the rationale behind creating organizational visions" (p. 30).

Barrett and Cooperrider (1990) believed it was possible to foster appreciative dialog even in the face of negative mental models. They stated two factors: (a) "working at a tacit, indirect level of awareness through constructing a generative metaphor that deliberately fosters formation of new impressions and judgments allows new meaning to be given birth" and (b) "building an appreciative context rather than a problem-solving one helps generate the positive affect required for building social solidarity and a renewed capacity collectively to imagine a new and better future" (p. 220).

Eight Principles of Appreciative Inquiry

Cooperrider and Whitney (1999b) pointed to five principles that inspired AI and moved it from theory to practice. Later, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) expanded those principles to include an additional three. Table 2 illustrates the eight principles and their meanings.

Table 2

The Eight Principles of Appreciative Inquiry

Principle	Definition
1. Constructionist Principle	Words Create Worlds Reality is a subjective rather than objective state. Conversations, and the language used create that reality.
2. Simultaneity Principle	Inquiry Creates Change The moment a question is asked change begins to be created.
3. Poetic Principle	We Can Choose What We Study What an organization chooses to study makes a difference. It describes, or creates, the world as we know it.
4. Anticipatory Principle	Images Inspire Action We move in the direction of our image of the future. The more positive that image is, the more positive our actions toward that image are.
5. Positive Principle	Positive Questions Lead to Positive Change Positive affect and social bonding are necessary to build the momentum for change. This is generated through positive questions and identifying the positive core.
6. Wholeness Principle	Wholeness Brings Out the Best Bringing everyone together stimulates creativity and builds the collective energy and capacity.
7. Enactment Principle	Acting "As If" is Self-Fulfilling If the process used to create change is positive, then positive change is more likely to occur.
8. Free-Choice Principle	Free Choice Liberates Power Giving people the freedom to choose how they will contribute encourages them and builds more commitment and performance.

Note: Reprinted from *The Power of AI: A Practical Guide to Positive Change*, (p. 52), by D. Whitney and A. Trosten-Bloom, 2010, San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler. Copyright 2010 by Whitney and Trosten-Bloom. Reprinted with permission.

The 4-D Cycle

The AI process centers on asking positive questions with the aim of drawing out the empowering aspects of an organization that are often unexpressed. Central to this is the 4-D Cycle comprised of *discovery*, *dream*, *design*, and *destiny* (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). Figure 2 illustrates the 4-D Cycle.

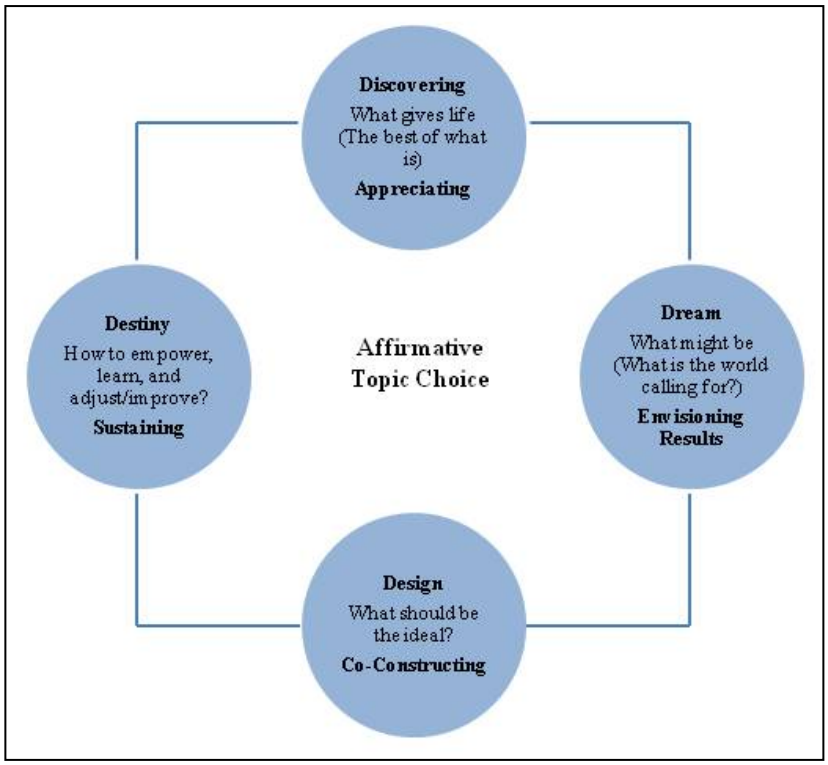

Figure 2: Appreciative inquiry 4-D cycle. Reprinted from *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change*, (p. 16), by D. L. Cooperrider, and D. Whitney, 2005, San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler. Copyright 2005 by Cooperrider and Whitney. Reprinted with permission.

There are four key phases of the AI process, following a selection of an affirmative topic, the most strategic aspect of the process (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The affirmative topic choice provides the focus for the phases that follow (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The first of the *D* phases, *discovery*, looks at what gives life or energy to the organization and what is appreciated. The "core task" is to

"discover and disclose positive capacity" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000, p. 10). *Dream* considers the vision of what could be. As stories and insights are shared a view of the future emerges. This often consists of three things: "a vision of a better world, a powerful purpose, and a compelling statement of strategic intent" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999a, 2000, p. 12). *Design* considers the possibility propositions of the ideal organization. It focuses on creating the ideal organization in order to achieve the articulated vision (Cooperrider et al., 2005). Finally, *destiny* defines what will be done resulting in the inspired actions that will support what the organization has decided it will be (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Using the 4-D approach, organizations experience a positive process compared to the approach traditionally practiced that is centered on problem solving.

The Four-I Model

Following on Cooperrider's 4-D approach, Mohr and Jacobsgaard created the Four-I Model (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). The four *I*s stand for *initiate*, *inquire*, *imagine*, and *innovate*. The *initiate* phase was designed as an introductory segment, including: building acceptance for the theory and practice of AI, creating project teams and groups and training them in AI processes, deciding on overall topic and project focus, and developing a preliminary project focus (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). The *inquire* phase includes conducting and developing protocol for interviews (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). *Imagining* includes sharing those interview data, pulling out themes, developing propositions (including a vision of the desired future), and validating those propositions with those involved in the system (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). And finally, the *innovate* phase involves engaging people in conversations about what new actions or roles are

needed to support implementation of those propositions and their subsequent implementation (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). The addition of this model is seen as valuable because of the business-like nature of the terms. According to Faure (2006), these terms would appease those people who would view a "dream" phase as too emotive (p. 26).

Appreciative inquiry (AI) provides organizations a unique strategy tool to enable them to create and move toward a desired future using either the 4-*D*s or the Four-I model to make positive progress toward that envisioned state. In contrast, the Newtonian paradigm of a parts-focused approach that addresses problems to be fixed is abandoned in favor of the positivity-based AI model that identifies what is successful and moves toward it, anticipating increased success (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). This model of appreciation and inquiry is the underpinning from which the SOAR framework emerged. The premise of AI for organizations is to focus on aspirational concepts that are grounded in measurable results compared to the deficit thinking and problem solving mindset of traditional strategy models.

SOAR Framework

Sutherland's 4Ps of appreciative inquiry. In November 2003, the *AI Practitioner* included several articles on the topic of AI and introduced the subject of SOAR as a "new framework for strategic planning" (Stavros et al., 2003, p. 1). Included in one of those articles (Sutherland & Stavros, 2003) was a discussion of two strategic models that emerged after appreciative inquiry was cemented, one being Sutherland's 4Ps of AI and the other the SOAR framework. Of these two models, SOAR, was further discussed in the *AI Practitioner* (Stavros et al., 2003) and continued to appear in the literature, although limited to a few authors writing along with Stavros (Stavros &

Hinrichs, 2007, 2009; Stavros & Saint, 2010), the initiator of the model. Sutherland and Stravos' (2003) 4Ps of Appreciative inquiry (purpose, progress, potential and partners) were rarely mentioned in academic literature aside from this one *AI Practitioner* article.

Stavros, Cooperrider and Kelley (2003) used the AI approach to transform the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of SWOT into a more positive framework of strategic thinking, keeping the strengths and opportunities topics, but substituting the positive topics of aspirations and results for weaknesses and threats. Thus, SWOT transformed into SOAR. (Sprangle, Stavros, & Cole, 2010; Stavros et al., 2003;). Rather than eliminating SWOT, SOAR integrated AI into the framework and built a "transformational" strategic thinking process (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2007, p. 4). Figure 3 illustrates the differences between SWOT and SOAR.

Strategic Inquiry	**Strengths** Our greatest assets	**Opportunities** Best possible market opportunities
Appreciative Intent	**Aspirations** Our preferred future	**Results** Measurable results

Internal Appraisal	**Strengths** Where can we outperform others?	**Weaknesses** Where can others outperform us?
External Appraisal	**Opportunities** How can we exploit the market?	**Threats** What or who could take our market?

Figure 3. Graphic illustration of the differences between SWOT and SOAR. Adapted from "The Heart of Appreciative Strategy" by J. Sutherland and J. Stavros, 2003 . *AI Practitioner 11*, pp. 2 &12. Copyright 2003 by Sutherland and Stavros. Adapted with permission.

Whereas SWOT concentrated on internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats, SOAR begins with strategic inquiry into strengths and opportunities and then moves to the more appreciative topics of what the organization aspires to become along with grounding those aspirations with measurable results

(Sutherland & Stavros, 2003).

Although the academic literature is limited, information that does exist overwhelmingly points to SOAR addressing many of the concepts set forth in concerns over creating a positive environment (Frederickson, 2009), avoiding the downward spiral of negativity (Frederickson, 2009), enlarging cognitive context (Isen, 1987), broadening one's scope of action (Frederickson, 2003), and moving toward what one studies (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The SOAR framework accentuates AI, providing a process that identifies and expands the strengths and opportunities that exist (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009) and creating a forward-looking method of determining aspirations and results (Sprangle et al., 2011).

Rather than focusing on problem solving, SOAR builds on the strengths of the organization and provides the framework for avoiding the downward spiral of negativity. As one individual described in Stavros and Hinrichs (2009) journal article: "Having used SWOT analysis for the previous 15 years, I had experienced that it could be draining, as people often got stuck in the weaknesses and threats conversations. The analysis became a descending spiral of energy" (p. 13). The SOAR framework, although a positive approach which seems to overcome negativity, does not completely avoid addressing challenges. Rather it reframes the negative issues into opportunities, creating a strengths-based approach to the process (Stavros & Saint, 2010).

The 4 *D*s were modified and the Four-I Model incorporated into the SOAR framework:

1. Inquire into strengths and opportunities;
2. Imagine the best pathway to sustainable growth;

3. Innovate to create initiatives, strategies, etc.; and

4. Inspire action-oriented activities that achieve results. (Stavros et al., 2007)

The basic properties of the SOAR framework can be seen in the 4 *D*s. Similar to the AI process, SOAR assumes that the focus will be on the positive aspects of the organization. (Cooperrider et al., 2005). The Discovery phase looks at the best of an organization, represented in the Strengths segment of the SOAR framework. There is "positive possibility" (p. 39) in both Discovery and Strengths. The Dream phase, explores "what might be" (p. 114) and the possible opportunities align with the Opportunities in SOAR. Cooperrider et al. (2005) stated that in the Dream phase, dialogue is focused on wishes, dreams, and opportunities, and that dialogue produces what is found in the Design phase: aspirations and vision for the future (p. 115). The Destiny phase creates "inspired action-oriented tasks" (p. 119) much like the Results phase of SOAR. Figure 4 illustrates the parallels between the 4 Ds and the SOAR framework.

Figure 4. The 4-Ds and SOAR framework. Adapted from *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook* (p. 29), by D. L. Cooperrider, D. Whitney, and J. Stavros, 2005, Brunswick, OH: Crown. Copyright 2005 by Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stravos. Adapted with permission.

The Five-I Model

By 2009 a fifth "I" had been added to the original 4 *I*s; *inspire* to *implement* (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009). Figure 5 illustrates how the five *I*s correspond to the components of the SOAR framework.

Figure 5. SOAR and the Five-I model. Adapted from *The Thin Book of SOAR: Building Strengths-Based Strategy* (p. 29) by J. Stavros and G. Hinrichs, 2009, Bend, OR: Thin Book. Copyright 2009 by Stavros and Hinrichs. Adapted with permission.

The SOAR framework effectively expands the AI model that moves toward a shared dream (Cooperrider et al., 2005) to include a method of strengths-based strategic planning not seen previously. The literature described some of the organizations where SOAR has been used, including one professional association governance board (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009).

Although over 800 association leaders throughout the world were exposed to the AI process in 2008, there has been no subsequent multiple association event that has included introducing the SOAR framework with a similar group of association management executives. It could be suggested that SOAR, like many initiatives, needs a leader or catalyst to keep the process moving forward with all parties being held

accountable. The possibilities of using SOAR are evident from the examples citing successes in businesses, government agencies, and schools (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009).

Implications for the Future

Evaluations of AI use. Although both appreciative inquiry and the SOAR framework hold promise for the field of organization development (Karakas, 2009; Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009), little published research was found evaluating either approach. There were critical evaluations of AI in the literature, (Bushe, 2005; Bushe & Coetzer, 1995; Grant & Humphries, 2006; Jones, 1998; Peelle, 2006; Rogers & Fraser, 2003; van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). According to Grant and Humphries (2006), AI "remains an action research process with little self-reflection or critique" (p. 402). A review of the literature described the use of an AI approach includes a variety of users including school (Lahman, 2012; Markova & Holland, 2005) and library systems (Kelley, 2010), as well as health care organizations (Mash, Levitt, Van, & Martell, 2008; Richer, Ritchie, & Marchionni, 2009), and executive educators (Preziosi & Gooden, 2003).

The use of AI as an approach or process within the actual staff and leadership groups within the association community was not readily apparent. There were few references to an association using AI at the board or staff leadership level. Surprisingly, an early white paper was written for the association management audience (Sugarman, 2002) and was credited with inspiring the Center for Association Leadership to hold their Global Summit, however several years later, the Global Summit did not inspire any further writing or examples of the use of AI in the association community around that time.

There are, however, examples of associations and professional societies publishing articles and papers on the use, or recommended use, of AI within their constituencies, including the American Association for Cancer Education (O'Donnell, 2004), American Association of Colleges of Nursing (Farrell, Douglas, & Siltanen, 2003), American Dietetic Association (Hellings, 2007), and the American Association of School Administrators (Markova & Holland, 2005). An exception is the use of AI by the American Optometric Association under the auspices of the Vision Council to address eye-health messaging (Taylor, 2012). A recent published study which targeted the association executive community used AI to conduct research into future opportunities and trends within associations (Alcorn & Alcorn, 2012).

Evaluations of SOAR use. Researching the evaluation and use of the SOAR framework garners virtually nothing other than what has been written by those who introduced the process and included examples of uses in various industries (Cooperrider et al., 2005; Sprangle et al, 2011; Stavros et al., 2003; Stavros & Hinrichs, 2007; Stavros & Saint, 2010; Sutherland & Stavros, 2003). Use of SOAR within associations was rarely mentioned in academic literature. Stavros and Hinrichs (2009) list a variety of examples of their use of SOAR and include one association, yet leave it unnamed. In this example, a professional association governance board used SOAR as a part of their strategic planning efforts (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009). In the 2008, The Center for Association Leadership's Global Summit for association leaders, not only was AI used, but Cooperrider used the SOAR framework within the program to move association leaders to design their vision for promoting social responsibility. Table 3 shows the nineteen satellite sites, which allowed the summit to include associations and professional

societies from the United States as well as international sites (Godwin, Kaplan, & Bodiford, 2012).

Of these sites, there was no readily available information or documentation on whether any of the organizations put the AI process to use in future efforts. According to those who were involved in the production of the ASAE Global Summit (Godwin et al., 2012), there were lessons learned as to the technology used, how the sites were connected, and what language was used for the sites. But after four years, there was no mention about what had been accomplished by any of those who participated in either the on-site group in Washington, DC or the satellite sites (Godwin et al., 2012). What is missing were those (a) success stories from associations and professional societies; (b) examples of how these trade associations and professional societies have used AI and the SOAR framework to their benefit; and (c) what those experiences have produced in the way of achieved results.

Table 3

Satellite Sites for ASAE's Global Summit on Social Responsibility

Sites in the United States	International Sites
California California Society of Association Executives (hosted by Los Angeles Bar Association in Los Angeles) California Society of Association Executives (hosted by The Safety Center in Sacramento)	**Brussels** European Society of Association Executives Interel MCI Brussels
Florida Florida Society of Association Executives Tallahassee Society of Association Executives Tallahassee Community College	**Dubai** CSR Network Middle East MCI Dubai MCI Abu Dhabi
Georgia Georgia Society of Association Executives	**Melbourne** SuccessWorks Australia
Illinois Association Forum of Chicagoland	**Singapore** MCI Singapore
North Carolina Visit Charlotte	**Shanghai** Kong & Allen LLC MCI Shanghai
Ohio Northern Ohio Electrical Contractors Association Independent Electrical Contractors Ohio Society of Association Executives Lakewood Cares Community Forum	
Minnesota Midwest Society of Association Executives	
New Mexico New Mexico Society of Association Executives/New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children	
Texas Texas Society of Association Executives	
Washington Washington Society of Association Executives	
Wisconsin American Society for Quality Visit Milwaukee Wisconsin Society of Association Executives	

Note: Reprinted from "Beyond the Room: Leveraging Collaborative Technology to Engage the Whole System" by L. Godwin, P. Kaplan, and K. Bodiford 2012, *AI Practitioner*, *14*(2), pp. 74-78. Copyright 2012 by Godwin, Kaplan, and Bodiford. Reprinted with permission.

The future of AI and SOAR in association management. Karakas (2009) cast a future for "new organization development" which includes "reaching and engaging hearts, minds, souls" resulting in a "deeper reflection, inspiration, integrity, faith, hope, positive influence and action" (p. 18). These are congruent with the latest writings on change and organization development that called for a similar positive approach (Heath & Heath, 2010; Lewis, 2011; Rath & Conchie, 2008). Karakas (2009) predicted that in order not only to survive, but also to thrive in a future that is more complex, competitive, and rapidly changing environment than ever before, organizations will need to engage in a new paradigm:

> The new paradigm represents not only a shift of perception but also a shift of values. We are moving toward greater appreciation of intuitive, systemic, nonlinear ways of knowing, feeling and doing, as well as the values of cooperation, quality, integration, partnership, and connection. New organization development aims to increase intellectual, social and emotional engagement of managers and employees, and foster collaborative and dynamic approaches to learning that enable employees to develop integrative ways of knowing. (p. 21)

Although Karakas (2009) used the corporate language of "managers" and "employees," the association management community would understand the above advice in both the corporate language as well as the association language of "leaders" and "members." For an association and professional society audience, Cooperrider's (1999) work in providing a process of asking positive questions and drawing out the empowering aspects of an organization potentially provided the environment not only for a more positive experience, but also as Cooperrider (2005) stated, "changes never thought possible" (p. 3). The addition of the SOAR framework as a positive process of strategic thinking or strategic planning gives associations and professional societies, which have

generally used SWOT analysis, a tool with origins from AI and moves them toward those possible positive changes.

The most recent article targeted specifically to the association audience, and in particular those members of the California Society of Association Executives (CalSAE), stated that AI offers a valuable tool for associations (Smikle, 2012). Stakeholders in the process are recognized as association-based; members, staff, those in the industry or profession the association represents, those who use the industry's products and services, and others who are tangentially connected (Smikle, 2012). In one of the rare articles that outline AI for the association leaders, Smikle (2012) framed appreciative questions in association language:

- When our membership was at peak levels, what conditions existed within our association?
- What do you value most deeply about our association and its outcomes?
- When have you felt completely engaged in and committed to the work of our association? (p. 17).

Using these types of questions, Smikle (2012) connected the previously discussed processes to the association community and challenges leaders to take the new methods seriously. "Association leaders serious about staying on the forefront of innovation can utilize the principle of appreciative inquiry to transform their organizations" (p. 19). These words from Smikle (2012) actively promoted that associations and societies to engage into the appreciative inquiry conversation going on within corporations for the past three decades.

Cooperrider also invited associations into the conversation in a recent article drafted with Lindsey Godwin in 2010 entitled *Positive Organization Development: Innovation-inspired Change in an Economy and Ecology of Strengths*. In both this article and in one published in *AI Practioner* in 2008, the vision for AI expanded from his initial design of the process as an intervention to calling for "embedding a strength-based focus into everything" (Cooperrider, 2008, p. 8) an organization does.

This mindset provided associations with an approach that AI "shifts the change theory away from collaborative intervention to collaborative innovation" (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2010, p. 12). Cooperrider (2008) envisioned a future where, rather than AI being used primarily as an intervention, organizations themselves would become strength-based followed by those organizations extending their strengths outward to influence the world. Cooperrider (2008) described it, stating that "strength-based organizations are organizations, including groups, families and communities, explicitly designed and managed for the elevation of strengths, the combination and magnification of strengths, and ultimately, the amplified refraction of our highest human strengths outward into the world" (p. 11). Cooperrider and Godwin (2010) included associations as part of those "organizations" they spoke of, citing them for the first time in their 2010 article two years after the high-level exposure at the Global Summit in 2008.

The association management literature pointed towards the practice of holding on to past traditions as influential in whether associations would embrace new models such as AI and SOAR (De Cagna, 2008). "Conventional wisdom about tradition and the role it has always played within our organizations" (p. 1) will hold associations back from embracing these new mindsets. De Cagna (2008) called these association traditions "a

set of practices--the ways we have always done things-- that have been followed zealously since time immemorial" (p. 2). He called on associations to "abandon their fear of the profound changes taking place in our world and instead act to leverage the strategic momentum these changes produce to give their organizations maximum opportunity to reach their full potential" (De Cagna, 2010, p. 1). Although De Cagna (2010) cited a broad acceptance to what he terms business-model innovation, his comments were valid in the more focused issue of AI and SOAR as he stated:

> The larger challenge facing associations pursing business-model innovation may not be learning, but 'unlearning.' Organizational reinvention requires more than the development and implementation of next practices, although that is a very good start. It also demands leaders closely question and actively discard obsolete organizational assumptions about past drivers of success, without denial or nostalgia. This kind of unlearning runs directly is working. Instead, association leaders must act wisely to recognize ground truth and let go of outmoded beliefs so they do not interfere with the possibility of real innovation. (p. 2)

Summary

The literature review attempted to show a logical emergence and progression of appreciative inquiry and the SOAR framework. The literature review sought to illuminate the lack of substantial academic and industry literature within or about the association community as it regards those processes. This chapter illustrated the reluctance of the association community as early adaptors and how that factored into low acceptance of AI and SOAR as new models within this community.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Design and Rationale

Qualitative researchers advocate that quantitative research is not the "only way of establishing the validity of findings from field research" (Silverman, 2000, p. 7) and view social phenomena holistically, because they take place in "the natural setting" (Creswell, 2003, p. 181). According to Creswell (2003), characteristics of qualitative research include: (a) taking place in the natural setting, (b) allowing multiple methods of data collection, (c) allowing the data to emerge naturally, (d) openness to the interpretation of the researcher, and (d) being a values-based inductive and deductive process. Finally, qualitative research relies on the active participation of both the researcher and the study participants (Creswell, 2003).

Based on the work of philosopher Husserl, phenomenological research assumes that *lived experiences* are the foundation of research and that these experiences provide meaningful insights into the world (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 44). The lived experience is an approach to qualitative research that is distinct from traditional approach. Heidegger, a student of Husserl, introduced and explored the concept of *dasin* or *being there* (Heidegger, 1927, trans. 1962). Heidegger's concept of *being there* supported the concept that each person's perspective or lens is valid to his or her own life experience and is derived from the unique experience of each individual (van Manen, 1990).

Conducting a qualitative study using semi-structured interviewing techniques, the study drew upon the everyday *lived experiences* of participants in order to identify patterns and common meanings (Creswell, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). Stavros & Hinrichs'

Five-I Model (2009) was selected to thematically code the verbal interview data collected. The limitations of a pre-determined thematic data coding mechanism will be addressed in Chapter 4.

The study evaluated the identified patterns and common meanings in order to gain an understanding of how participants applied the content presented at California Society of Association Executives (CalSAE) professional development programs dealing with the SOAR framework in October 2011 as a senior association management or foundation executive. The two SOAR-framework programs were delivered in Irvine, California and Sacramento, California. The duration of each professional development program was two hours.

Phenomenological research is a multi-step process that includes gathering verbal data (e.g. from interviews), and then processing these data by reading and analyzing, breaking into parts, organizing into categories, and, finally, describing, summarizing and synthesizing (Giorgi, 1997). For Giorgi, the key word in phenomenological research is 'describe.' In addition, "the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved" (Welman & Kruger 1999, p. 189). Phenomenological research uses the researcher's own lived experiences as a starting point (van Manen, 1990), and is further developed through an investigation of existing literature and interviews.

The phenomenological-framed study using semi-structured interviews captured "the meanings and common features, or essences, of experiences or events" (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1374). The study explored changed mindsets or behaviors, if any, which emerged as a result of participation in the CalSAE professional development

program. Patton (1997) stated "the problem was not applying—just not using—what they knew" (p. 6). As part of the research, the participants in the study identified barriers or difficulties (*speed bumps*) that prevented the association executive from experimenting with and implementing SOAR principles, both individually and professionally.

One of the dynamics that is a product of the association structure and governance is the interconnected relationships that exist. The internal relationships for societies and associations are likely to include members with other members, members with leaders, leaders with other leaders, members and leaders with professional development programs, and members and leaders with association management executives. The external relationships for societies and associations might include those with legislators, the general public, allied-interest associations, geographical community and media. "Human behavior occurs in the context of relationship to things, people, events, and situations" (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 45). Because relationships comprise the single most important context for human behavior, they must form the key perspective used by qualitative methodologies that focus on how individuals experience, make meaning of, and reflect on both internal and external organizational interactions.

This relationship component is essential to the lived experience of the SOAR framework by the internal and external stakeholders in professional societies and trade association because each group has a unique lens on how its members engage with the organization. Relationships, both internal and external, form the key context for a phenomenological approach (Morse & Richards, 2002) exploring how these stakeholders responded, or did not respond, to any changed mindsets or behaviors as a result of the association management executive participating in the professional development on the

SOAR framework and how it can be applied for his or her own organization. A qualitative study using a phenomenological frame with semi-structured interviews allowed these association management executives to share their lived experiences resulting in an awareness of how the SOAR framework changed their individual mindsets or those of the association leadership.

Qualitative Study and Sample

Patton (1997) believed that the key to research usability is to identify people who will benefit or have an active interest in learning from the survey results. "Clearly and explicitly identifying people who can benefit from an evaluation is so important that evaluators have adopted a special term for potential evaluation users: stakeholders" (Patton, 2000, p. 427) and continued to define stakeholders as individuals that have a "vested interest in evaluation findings" (p. 427). The association and foundation executives participating in this study have a vested interested in both sharing their experiences as well as learning from their peer experiences using the SOAR framework with their organizations.

Using a phenomenological frame, the semi-structured interviews captured and recorded individual or organizational feedback the program participants discovered beneficial as a result of the executives leading associations and foundations that participated in the SOAR framework professional development program in October 2011. The study documented and explored the lived experiences of these senior level executives as they tested and explored the SOAR framework process in their own organizations.

A purposeful sampling method was used to ensure that a meaningful sample was researched, taking into account the time that passed since the SOAR program (17

months), as well as the size of the group experiencing the program (21 persons). All program participants were asked if they would like to participate during the voluntary phone interview process, a smaller sample group of 12 to 15 program participants was targeted for the semi-structured interviews. Creswell (2003) explained this process when the "researcher purposefully selects participants that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (p. 185).

Boyd (2001) suggested that 2 to 10 participants are sufficient to reach saturation of the data, and Creswell (1998) recommended "long interviews with up to 10 people" (p. 65) for a phenomenological-based study. The study included 9 association and foundation executives in the verbal data collection interviews. As part of the qualitative approach, program participants from the Irvine, California and Sacramento, California programs were asked if they would participation in a 60-minute phone interview exploring any individual mindsets or organization processes were changed programs that were changed as a result of their participation in the SOAR framework program in October 2011. If they chose to be considered as part of the study, they provided contact information for this data collection process for the semi-structured interviews involving their lived experiences related to the SOAR framework.

Participants who can "provide a detailed account of their experiences" were sufficient to uncover the "core elements" to distill the essence of the phenomenon (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1375). Participants were selected with the intent of building a sample that included a diverse cross-section based upon attributes such as, but not limited to, geographical location, membership size, financial resources, years in the profession, and gender.

This researcher was actively involved in the association management profession from 1986 through the time of the study, both as an association management executive and currently as an organizational development specialist for associations and foundations. Criterion sampling, which narrows the potential participant list based on specific criteria (Creswell, 2003), was used to filter and ultimately select study participants. The selection criteria was:

- Consideration of SOAR framework engagement with their organizations
- Consideration of SOAR framework engagement with their individual mindsets
- Current service as the Executive Vice President/CEO or senior staff executive of a professional society, trade association, or foundation
- Supervisory experience for staff, volunteers, board of directors, or committees

While not essential to the data collection, secondary efforts were made to select subjects from professional societies, trade associations, and foundations as well as representatives from both Southern and Northern California.

Potential participants were sent an email explaining the study, including purpose, structure, and required time commitment. Interested participants were asked to respond to the researcher by a specified date. The sample was to be narrowed or expanded based on the response rate and availability on certain dates. Selected participants who met the defined criteria were contacted directly to schedule a phone interview. Each selected participant was asked to review their rights as a study participant and sign the consent form if they agreed and still had an interest to participate in the study. (see Appendix D) Potential participants who did not meet the above listed criteria or who were unable to

participate in the phone interviews were excluded from this study. Interested participants not selected for the study received a follow-up thank you email.

Human Subjects Considerations

Written approval and endorsement were secured from the professional society representing the association management industry in California (i.e. CalSAE). (see Appendix A). To ensure the ethical protection of this study's human participants, approval was received from Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Exempted review was requested and approved based on the connection of the study to individual and social behavior.

Participants completed informed consent forms, which were signed and returned to the researcher prior to participation in the study. The form included information regarding the potential benefits and risks to participation in the study. Risks of participation were minimal, but study participants might have experienced minor discomfort with some questions.

Participants were notified that involvement in the study was entirely voluntary and that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time. If a participant chose to withdraw voluntarily, his or her response would be treated with confidentiality and would not be included in the data. Interviews were audio taped for transcription to ensure accuracy of the data collected. No personal identifying information was disclosed in the research findings. Participants received no financial compensation as a result of their participation in the study.

Procedures

The phenomenological-based semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted in March 2013 by individual 60-minute oral phone interviews. The interviews identified the lived experiences of association and foundation executives, and sought to determine whether they experienced a change in their organizations' thought processes or their individual mindsets as a result of their exposure to the SOAR framework in October 2011.

The interviews began with confirming basic demographic information including organizational title, geographical location, number of years as an association management executive, association membership size, association budget, and number of association staff. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed for analysis. The collected qualitative interview data were reviewed and analyzed using a pre-determined coding process using the 5-I Model (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009) to identify themes, as described in the section titled *Analytic Techniques*. The schedule for the data collection process was:

- Week 1 – Electronic communication (see Appendix B) to all program participants
- Week 3 – Participant letter requesting basic demographic profile information after an affirmative survey participant response was received (see Appendix C)
- Week 4 – Participant rights letter and Informed Consent form (see Appendix D)
- Weeks 5 to 6 – SOAR framework participant recorded phone interviews
- Week 7 – Recorded phone interviews transcribed

- Weeks 9 to 10 – Review interview transcripts with fellow researchers and initiate coding and theming of data using the Five-I Model (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009)

Instrumentation

The qualitative research questions were developed with the intention of exploring changed mindsets or behaviors as a result of the participants' exploration of the SOAR framework individually or with their organizations. The six interview questions were administered in accordance with a phenomenological frame for the participants selected for the study's research objectives of identifying any changed behaviors or mindsets with semi-structured interviews consistent with the study's two research questions.

Interview Protocol

Below are the interview questions used for the phenomenological data collection stage, which sought to capture and record the lived experiences of the association and foundation executives participating in this study.

1. Please describe why you decided to attend the professional development program on the SOAR framework in October 2011?
2. What, if any, factors contributed to your decision to explore or test concepts from the SOAR framework individually or organizationally?
3. What barriers or catalysts, if any, did you experience as a result of applying the SOAR framework individually or organizationally?
4. What developments or processes have been changed individually or in your organization as a result of exploring or implementing the SOAR framework?

5. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to comment on regarding your experience with the SOAR framework?
6. Do you wish to receive a summary of the dissertation findings at the end of the study?

Analytic Techniques

Preparation and organization of data. An exploratory design study requires a process of data reduction involving preparation, organization, and data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). The data were collected and recorded during the qualitative interviews via audiotape and transcribed verbatim by an independent third party into an electronic database format for further analysis. In phenomenological-based research, it is assumed by both the participant and the researcher that "their words were understood as spoken and intended (that is, their words speak for themselves)" (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The same understanding was processed in reviewing the qualitative data by the study participants as they shared their lived experiences regarding the SOAR framework.

Reliability and interpretation of data. Two fellow researchers in the field of strategic planning and association management participated in an ongoing audit of the data-collection process and analytical techniques to ensure the accuracy of the process and the findings. This audit included, but was not limited to, discussions with the researcher about the data-collection process, how the Five-I themes identified frame the data gathered, and the meanings attached to these themes by the researcher. One fellow researcher has more than 20 years of experience as both an association management executive as well as a strategic-planning expert. This researcher is Jill W. McCrory, Ringleader and President of Spiritual Outfitters, LLC headquartered in Kensington,

Maryland. See Appendix F for her background qualifications. The other fellow researcher has nearly 20 years of experience as an organizational change consultant and strategic planning facilitator. This researcher is Dr. Bridget Cooper, President of Pieces in Place headquartered in Hartford, Connecticut. See Appendix E for her background. Recommendations of the fellow researchers were open for incorporation if a direct connection was established to current literature.

Analysis of data. Phenomenological-based research is grounded in the interpretation and understanding of the researcher (Heidegger, 1962). The data collected in this study was analyzed and interpreted by the researcher consistent with Heidegger's (1962) statement using an existing model. The data was thematically coded using a SOAR framework-related model, which was the Five-I Model (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009). Each participant comment included in the study was reflected upon for the appropriate thematic area, and finally, writing and rewriting to ensure an accurate coding of the participant's lived experiences in that thematic area related to the Five-I Model.

The purpose of this qualitative study using semi-structured interviewing techniques was to determine whether association management executives working in California-based professional societies, trade associations, and foundations changed their individual mindsets or adapted organizational management practices by applying the principles of the SOAR framework following attendance at a professional development program that demonstrated said framework.

The one question that had some participant data was the first question, which sought to capture the reason or catalyst for attending the SOAR framework professional development program.

> Phenomenology seeks to understand lived experience phenomena through language that is pretheoretical, without classification or abstraction. It requires that the researcher bring forth previous understandings connected to the phenomenon being studied. This is necessary for researchers to be open to the lived experiences of others. Phenomenology offers intuitive interpretations of text through the process of writing and rewriting. (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002, pp. 452-453)

Through the process of thematic and analytic coding using the Five-I Model, the researcher developed a close understanding of the data and of the experiences of study participants as related to their engagement and experimentation with the SOAR framework.

Coding and themes. A coding system, in which data were decontextualized, was used to sort and analyze the data before recontextualizing them back into consistent themes of the Five-I Model (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009). The limitations of this pre-determined coding and theme format will be explored more in Chapter 5. The coded data were compared to identify any perceived changes in participants' individual mindsets or in the mindsets of the leadership or membership of the associations they led as a result of the exposure to the SOAR framework professional development program in October 2011. Initially the researcher planned to use topic coding to break up the data into specific categories, followed by analytic coding which focused on the development of concepts (themes) based on the data (Morse & Richards, 2002). However, the Five-I Model (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009) cited earlier was used to code the qualitative interview data. These five areas assisted with filtering the various lived experiences into general areas based on the four SOAR areas. The phases of the Five-I Model of appreciative inquiry that framed the coding process are: *initiate*, *inquire*, *imagine*, *innovate*, *and implement*.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

Presented in Chapter 4 are the findings of this study based on the data collected during interviews and analysis of common themes and experiences of the survey participants. Analysis was conducted to determine why association management professionals attended a professional development program that focused on the strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results (SOAR) framework in October 2011 and subsequently how they applied the content, personally or professionally. Direct quotations and demographic information from participants have been included to ensure that the uniqueness of each of the participants is evident and that their individual voices are heard.

Demographic Information

The researcher initially contacted 21 association management and foundation executives from an attendee list provided by the California Society of Association Executives (CalSAE). These attendees registered and were present at the October 2011 professional development program. CalSAE willingly collaborated with this researcher by granting permission to contact the program attendees for the purpose of this study. Nine participants responded affirmatively to participate in this study, with three indicating a "no" response. The common theme of all three *No* responses was a perceived limited recollection of the material 16 months following the October 2011 program. There were nine attendees from the October 2011 program who did not respond to any correspondence related to research participation.

Nine phone interviews were conducted in March 2013. The semi-structured interviews were recorded by the researcher and transcribed by an independent third-party

transcription service. The researcher reviewed the recordings to ensure accuracy of the transcribed data. The researcher thoroughly read and reviewed the transcribed interview responses multiple times prior to thematic coding and analysis, noting patterns, questions and emerging themes. Careful attention was paid to what participants said and did not say about their lived experiences related to the SOAR framework. The researcher identified statements and phrases that directly connected to the phenomenon being studied of either changed behavior or mindset as a result of experiencing the SOAR framework.

Basic demographic profiles were collected in advance of the interviews to develop a better understanding of the scope of the associations and foundations involved with this study as well as the depth of executive management expertise in the research group (see Table 4). Each of the participants served as a senior-level executive in a California-based non-profit organization. Due to professional transitions since October 2011, some of the study participants changed organizations or were in professional transition between positions. Six women and three men participated in this study. The research group was considered an experienced group of association and foundation professionals. Two participants had 11-15 years of experience; four participants had 16-20 years of experience; and three participants had 21+ years of experience. No participant in the study had less than eleven years of non-profit management experience.

The survey participants represented a diverse group with 22 percent working for trade associations; 56 percent for professional societies; and 22 percent for foundations. Typically, trade associations are represented by company-based memberships, while professional societies generally have individual-based membership structures. The

individual-based membership, non-profit organizations represented those with 1,200 to 42,000 members and the company-based non-profit organizations included those with memberships between 100 to 400 companies.

Table 4

Participants' Demographic Information

Participant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Gender	F	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	F
Years in Non-Profit Management	16-20	16-20	21+	21+	11-15	11-15	21+	16-20	16-20
Certified Association Executive Designation?	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Organization Budget Size	$1.6M	(*)	$1.9M	$5M	$7.5M	$4M	$1.2M	$4M	$31M
Non-Profit Type	T	P	T	N	N	P	P	T	P

Note. (*) = No Data Provided; (T) = Trade Association; (P) = Professional Society; (N) = Foundation/501c3.

The budget range for the organizations represented in this study was between $1.6 and $31 million. Six of the nine participants had obtained the Certified Association Executive (CAE) designation, considered the profession's highest level of certification. One participant in the interview group had earned a Ph.D.

The data focusing on the lived experiences of these non-profit executives were initially coded by topic based on the Five-I Model (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009). This model allowed the researcher to organize comments by how the research participants responded to experiencing the SOAR process; advance knowledge of the SOAR framework; and positive reactions to the program leading to implementing a SOAR

experience in another setting as a result of their attendance at the October 2011 professional development program.

The topic data were analyzed for commonalities and disparities among interview participants. All transcribed data were reviewed to organize the data into common themes and meanings (see Table 5) using Savros and Hinrichs' Five-I Model to organize the data. The qualitative data themes were based on a deeper review and understanding of the lived experiences of the participants expressed by them during the data-collection process through the coding filter of the Five-I Model.

Throughout the analysis, the researcher and two third-party non-profit experts, identified in Chapter 3, participated in an on-going discussion of the thematic coding and analysis process. The two industry experts whose backgrounds are included as Appendices E and F provided insights, questioned assumptions, and highlighted gaps in order to strengthen the data analysis. The researcher communicated with both of them in person and via phone/email to discuss findings and analysis. Both experts were aware of the researcher's experiences as a former association management executive and current consultant serving the non-profit community.

The two research questions focused on either changed mindset or changed behavior as a result of attending the SOAR professional development program. The first question addressed on changed behavior and how the association and foundation executives experienced the SOAR framework in their own organizations. The second question explored any changed mindset related to the SOAR framework.

Table 5

Topic and Thematic Coding Using the Five-I Model

Topic	Themes
Initiate: The choice to use	Linked to Appreciative Inquiry Future Focus & Positive Emphasis Explore a New Thinking Model Previous Knowledge of SOAR
Inquire: Into strengths	Emphasis on Future Strengths-Based Dialog Focus on Positive Mindset Connected Thinking Process
Imagine: The opportunities	Versatile Application Positive Dialog Continuum Stand-Alone or Connected With Other Processes
Innovate: To reach aspirations	What Do Want to Become? Where Do We Want to Go? How Do We Do More of What We Do Well? What Do We Hope to Achieve?
Implement: To achieve results	Fact and Data-Focused Step Dashboard Friendly Time-Bound Element Accountability

Research Question One

This question sought to identify the lived experiences that resulted in changed behaviors of non-profit executives as a result of the awareness and application of the SOAR framework in the strategic thinking process. As noted earlier in Chapter 4, the data focusing on the lived experiences of these non-profit executives were coded by topic

based on the Five-I Model (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009). These five areas framed the changed behaviors shared as a result of the participant's exposure to the SOAR framework. It was the intent of the researcher to apply a SOAR-like filtering process to the comments from the study participants.

The Five-I Model was selected over the SOAR framework because the first "I" in the Model is Initiate: The Choice to Use, which captures the spirit of both research questions. The research questions sought to determine "changed behaviors" or "changed mindsets" as a result of engagement with the SOAR framework. Initiate: The Choice to Use speaks to both a choice of changed behavior and changed mindset. The remaining Is in the Model parallel each letter in the SOAR framework, resulting in a complementary fit for filtering and theme identification.

Initiate: The choice to use. Of the participants in this study, five of the nine applied the SOAR framework in their own professional societies or trade associations since October 2011 with all five having a positive experience. Participant Eight shared "I think by doing SOAR it brought out a different result of [where is our] opportunity and where are we going to be the best." Another participant chose to use SOAR because of the perception that the structure was not too positive or too negative. Participant One said "SOAR gives enough structure so that the group feels like they know what is expected of them without moving too far on either [end] of the spectrum." Participant Two decided to subsequently use SOAR based on the sophistication or maturity of the group and said, "I've actually used both [SWOT and SOAR] together if they [organization] are either very mature and can accept the SOAR framework."

[1] All direct quotes were obtained through personal communications during phone interviews with participants.

Of the remaining four participants, three indicated a future desire or intent to introduce the SOAR framework within their organization; two cited a plan to introduce the process within the next six months. One participant noted a desire to explore SOAR in light of the organization having experienced a significant membership decline and perceived the SOAR framework as being able to provide different insights or future results. Participant Five said, "I thought maybe shifting things positively could help us … we've spent a lot of time looking at the past and not a lot of time looking at the future." Even though this participant recent changed organizations, there was intent to explore the SOAR framework with the new non-profit. On March 9, 2013, Participant Five contacted the researcher, and asked for the October 2011 handout to share with the chief executive officer of that organization. The timing of the interview and a professional transition prompted an inquiry of action to revisit the SOAR framework with the new organization. While Participant Six noted a positive reaction regarding the SOAR framework, there was not a defined future opportunity to explore this process in the organization.

Eight of the nine participants noted the positive-based or forward-thinking themes as key reasons for introducing the process to their organizations. Participant Seven highlighted the strategic-thinking language that resulted from the positive-based theme. "It's not only a positive document, but it's the language that we're using really conveying who we are more closely than prior documents." Participant Eight had similar insights on the results of the positive-based theme. This participant perceived that correcting weaknesses necessarily focuses on the past, since that's where mistakes were made, while exploiting strengths focuses on the future, since that's where excellent performance will

result. Participant Eight said, "It's more forward thinking as opposed to what's wrong with our organization."

Four participants cited a general theme of using a new process or alternative to the traditional SWOT analysis. One participant noted a theoretical knowledge of the SOAR framework and the connection with Appreciative Inquiry, but had not observed it modeled or applied. Participant One said "I was familiar with SWOT technique and I had read a bit about appreciative inquiry so I was hoping to delve a little bit more and see SOAR demonstrated."

Inquire: Into strengths. All nine participants identified the positive-focused approach that is central to the SOAR framework. Five participants noted the forward-focused or future-thinking theme as an additional strength. Both the positive language descriptors and forward or future theme were common threads in all the interviews. Participant Nine said "SOAR has a much more positive spin to it than SWOT because of the weakness and threats being very negative words whereas SOAR has that aspirational part … let's really look at what we can do with our abilities that we have." Another association management executive who started using the SOAR process added the following thoughts about the positive versus negative aspects of the process: Participant One added "I've used SOAR and you talk about the opportunities and aspirations … in either one of those there's a chance for you to tease out what might be standing in the way. I prefer the more positive notion because I think groups can get really stuck on the threat part."

Similar words or phrases like *fluid*, *flowing in one direction*, and *dialog continuum* were additional strengths noted by three survey participants. The expanded

comments around the connectivity of the process related to the symbiotic relationship between each of the four SOAR words contrasted against to the silo-like structure of a SWOT analysis. Participant Seven said "There's an analogy between the SWOT process reinforcing a silo mentality with work plans where the SOAR process has morphed ... to encourage more cross-functional dialog." Participant Two added a perspective on the continuum theme and said, "To me, SOAR allows you freedom … it's continual improvement."

In addition to the fluidity theme, three individuals believed that the SOAR Framework is more mission and purpose focused than other processes. Participant Four said "We've changed to start focusing more on our mission and I think SOAR ties in to that very well … I think it gives us a better framework to help us as an organization."

Imagine: The opportunities. In reviewing the qualitative data, one theme was by nearly half of study participants. This theme was the perceived flexibility and compatibility with other strategic-thinking processes or existing measurements or metrics used by the organizations represented in this study. Four of the individuals cited either the ability to connect with another organizational measurement such as a dashboard metric or connected with a change catalyst discussion, which identified how the economy, technology, culture, and government instigated change that may affect their organization.

A strategic environmental scanning activity that focused on four primary change catalysts (economy, technology, government, culture) was shared with the survey participants during the October 2011 professional development program. The researcher has designed this activity to capture the threats and weaknesses dialog from the SWOT

analysis. The intent is to reframe the external and internal catalysts in a more neutral mental model so the organization does not dwell on forces or catalysts many times outside of their control. As this two-step process of looking at change catalysts first followed by the SOAR framework has been tested by this researcher, the dialog has shifted from functional silo objective areas to cross organization behaviors expected (e.g. community, innovation, standards) in all divisions and departments. So these comments may have been influenced by the content included in the material presented at the professional development program.

While *opportunities* are included in both SWOT analysis and the SOAR framework, there was a perception by three participants that the *O* in SOAR was more future-focused and pointed to how the organization could improve moving forward. In reviewing the transcripts, there is an indication of an overall mental model of positivity around the SOAR framework.

Participant Eight said, “With SOAR, you still identify the challenges but you identify them in a positive way of what we need to do – what’s our opportunity and how can we build on it.” This might be a consideration for future study to be captured in Chapter 5 on a strategy mindsets related to the context of the words strengths and opportunities included in both a SWOT Analysis and SOAR framework.

Innovate: To reach aspirations. All nine participants identified that one or more "blue-sky" questions such as “Where do we want to go?” or “What do we hope to achieve?” related to the SOAR framework resonated with them on some level. Participant One said, “I think that SOAR is a great catalyst for thinking and envisioning what can be.”

One participant directly noted that SOAR would allow the organization to stay focused on being strategic; building on strengths; mission-focused innovations; and the belief that a new process would produce new results. Participant Seven said, "SOAR with the aspirational focus and results focus tends to create a higher and more constructive dialog."

Implement: To achieve results. All nine participants noted some type of measurement; changed behavior; or accountability element related to the SOAR framework. Consistent themes such as data-focused, dashboard friendly, idea implementation, and accountability emerged during the interviews. Participant One said "I think that the results component anchors things because I think one cautionary note is when you talk about strengths, opportunities, and aspirations it can get so blue sky that it is not anchored to reality."

One participant looked at the results element as allowing for a process that would result in a new dialog among board members who have known each other for several years. Participant Eight said "I was excited about using SOAR with my organization because I didn't want to have the same old plan … I think by doing SOAR it was able to bring out a different result."

Another participant noted a preliminary expectation after recently experiencing the SOAR process in the organization. Participant Seven said, "The dashboard has to support the strategic plan and then we'll see how well all the activities converge and relate to these SOAR objectives."

The first research question sought to identify the lived experiences that resulted in changed behaviors of non-profit executives as a result of the awareness and application of

the SOAR framework in the strategic thinking process. From the participant survey comments, a majority of the survey respondents started to explore the results of these changed behaviors in their organizations.

The next research question focused more on the changed mindsets associated with the SOAR framework.

Research Question Two

This question sought to identify the lived experiences that resulted in changed mindsets of non-profit executives as a result of the awareness and application of the SOAR framework in the strategic thinking process. These five areas framed the changed behaviors shared as a result of the participant's exposure to the SOAR framework.

Initiate: The choice to use. As noted earlier, all participants indicated a positive perception of the SOAR framework. Five of the nine already experimented with this process in their organizations. Three of the four remaining survey participants indicated a future desire or intent to introduce the SOAR framework in their organization in the near future, with two citing a plan within the next six months. One of the four had a positive perception of the SOAR framework but had not explored it with their organization was Participant Nine who stated "SWOT seems to have an even emphasis on strengths versus weakness and opportunities versus threats and I don't think it is necessary for that even amount of emphasis."

Another participant identified a mindset shift on a future choice to use with an internal transition document related to the current CEO. Participant Four said "She (CEO) changed from a SWOT analysis to a SOAR framework process that the Board

would go through in the succession plan in terms of identifying the type of roles and responsibilities for the future CEO [to] have going forward."

Eight of the nine participants noted the positive-based theme or innovation focus as key reasons for a change in how they viewed the difference between SWOT and SOAR. In retrospect, Participant Five said, "The big, big, big difference between SWOT and SOAR to me is SWOT is about the past and SOAR is about the future." While another participant took a more neutral view in comparing the two approaches. Participant Three said "SOAR is an alternative to SWOT in terms of ways to look at the organization to make it relevant and to assure that it would be servicing and meeting the needs as the nature of associations has changed." From an innovation lens perspective, Participant Two said "There's so much going on right now [dialog] in the area of innovation and this process [SOAR] supports innovation so much."

Inquire: Into strengths. All nine participants identified the positive-focused approach that is central to the SOAR framework, with five participants noting the forward-focused or future-thinking theme as a strength. Both the positive language descriptors and forward or future theme were common threads in all the interviews regarding mindset shifts. Participant Eight said, "SOAR is more forward thinking than looking behind and seeing what we need to change."

Two participants noted specific mindset themes of focusing on the organization's strengths and replicating what the association or society does very well. Participant Four said "The fact that it was based on appreciative inquiry … you're doing more of what you do well rather than focusing on the things you don't do well." In addition, another individual pointed out the downward spiral that could happen as a result of focusing on

the organization's negative attributes. Participant Seven said "SWOT can bring up a lot of negativity and you create a dynamic where people start focused on the weak spots and wanting to fix them."

One participant noted a mindset change and shift based on the lived experiences shared as a result of attending the October 2011 professional development on the SOAR framework. Participant Two said, "I think SOAR allows you the freedom to explore whereas SWOT keeps your focus within the four walls. SOAR allows you to get to the edge of the building and teeter on the edge of the rooftop."

Another study participant emphasized how a self-identified data-driven and analytical non-profit executive adopted a changed mindset based on the lived experience from the October 2011 professional development experience. Participant Two said, "I'm data driven. I'm analytical. I want to base my decisions on the facts and research. I think this [SOAR] gives people the opportunity to focus on the positive. That's because if you put your energies there, you're going to know what your threats and what your weaknesses are because you are doing better than anybody else and that's your competitive advantage."

Imagine: The opportunities. One mindset theme that emerged was the opportunity to try new processes for an organization. Participant Four said, "I'm always looking for models that I feel comfortable with the philosophy and can bring back for my own organization." Another individual shared a mindset shift on how SOAR might exist in an organization where the chief executive officer might prefer the SWOT analysis. Participant Five said "SOAR could be applied to pockets within an organization where the organization itself might use SWOT."

Another interesting mindset emerged which was the perception of SOAR in contrast with SWOT on capturing group feedback. One participant noted the potential for individuals at various levels of the organization to safely contribute to the process. Participant Seven said "SOAR process can be applied, it seems to me, more across the board for folks in getting feedback." While not fully verified or supported by other study participants, it surfaced another possible benefit of the SOAR framework. The shift from using the SOAR framework as a preliminary strategy tool to a post strategy dialog was a new concept not previously discovered in the literature.

Innovate: To reach aspirations. All nine participants identified that the SOAR framework-related, "blue-sky" questions such as "Where do we want to go?" or "What do we hope to achieve?" resonated with them on some level. Participant Four said "I just think the SOAR process is a really good way for them all to find some way they can make a contribution in terms of where we're going to be as an organization." Another participant compared the aspiration nature of SOAR to the perceived analytical nature of SWOT. Participant Nine said "I liked the aspiration nature of SOAR … I think that it is a more positive look at things rather than the purely analytical side of SWOT." and participant Nine said "SOAR has a much more positive spin to it than SWOT does because of the weaknesses and threats being very negative words whereas SOAR has that aspirational part which I prefer." Participant Two added, "It [SOAR] allows you to focus on that sweet spot … the result looking at this aspiration and allowing yourself to identify your strengths in a different way."

Implement: To achieve results. As noted earlier, all nine participants noted some type of measurement, changed behavior, or accountability element attribute related

to the SOAR framework. Consistent themes such as data-focused, dashboard friendly, idea implementation, and accountability emerged during the interviews as well as some of the mindset shifts regarding the SOAR framework. Participant Four said "As you know, it's nice to blue sky but what can we realistically do and how can we make sure that we're doing it successfully or implementing it to the best of our ability."

Another study participant was more specific with the measurement aspect. Participant Four said "SOAR is most effective when it's connected either to a timeline or a SMART goal process or integrated into a dialog to provide direction." Another individual believed action and accountability were important attributes of the results phase. Participant Nine said "SOAR is the starting point and you need to be able to translate that into action and that is a very important element … SOAR has a nice emphasis on results which is at least edging you towards something actionable and what is our next step."

Summary

Nearly all the participant data collected and transcribed naturally aligned with the themes of the Five-I Model (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009) and study data that did not naturally align with this coding mechanism was primarily associated with the first interview question which was *Please describe why you decided to attend the professional the professional development program on the SOAR framework in October 2011*? For example, Participant One said, "I was becoming more interested in learning more about CalSAE and it's hard for me to find professional development opportunities that I am interested at this stage of my career." Participant Seven cited a more personal reason for attending and said, "You (researcher) were putting it on, and because I like to get new

ideas." For the very reason van Manen (1990) emphasizes the researchers own lived experiences as a starting point, the Stavros and Hinrichs'(2009) *Five-I Model* aligned naturally with both the research questions and gathering verbal data for the participant interviews. To illustrate the natural alignment of the *Five-I Model* as documented earlier, the verbal data collected revealed significant repetition of the themes of the need to *initiate, inquire, imagine, innovate*, and *implement* through the verbal data collection stage.

While using an existing model to code the data themes might be non-traditional, in this case, the data coding aligned naturally with a few exceptions noted earlier. The intent of appreciative inquiry is to ask *What might be? What should be? What will be?* from a strategic thinking mindset. The SOAR framework provides that strategic thinking process in a way that prompts organizations to focus on what they do well and with a future focus mindset.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Limitations, and Recommendations

Purpose and Significance of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study using semi-structured interviewing techniques was to determine whether association management executives working in California-based professional societies, trade associations, and foundations changed their individual mindsets or adapted organizational management practices by applying the principles of the SOAR framework following attendance at a professional development program that demonstrated said framework.

This study identified the lived experiences that resulted in changed behaviors or mindsets of senior non-profit executives as a result of the awareness and application of the SOAR framework in the strategic thinking process. More specifically, this research examined if and how non-profit executives tested and/or adapted the SOAR framework, an appreciative inquiry strategic thinking process, within their own organizations. Written demographic participant surveys and phenomenological framed semi-structured interviews explored the lived experiences of the research participants' exposure to a SOAR-based content presented at a California Society of Association Executives (CalSAE) professional development program in October 2011.

The academic literature and non-profit periodicals revealed no scholarly research related to the SOAR framework as it pertained to usage within the association management community. In addition, there were publications and articles documenting the advantages of a SWOT analysis and how to use a SWOT analysis within the professional society and trade association communities. However, there was minimal documentation of the *success stories* on how organizations have actually used a SWOT

analysis in the strategic thinking process. Both major industry-specific publications, *Professional Practices in Association Management* (2007) and *Principles of Association Management* (1996), provided only one option for analysis when describing the accepted steps of the strategic planning process: SWOT analysis.

Both publications are considered primary resources for the Certified Association Executive (CAE) designation. The CAE designation is the highest level of individual accreditation recognized by the association management community, and therefore one might deduce that the SWOT analysis is the preferred or recommended strategic planning approach for trade association and professional society executives. A recent strategic planning publication, *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* (Bryson, 2011), recommended the SWOT analysis as the focus of organizational review, with no mention of any strengths-based strategic thinking processes. This brings up the question: Has the SWOT analysis continued to be featured as the "recommended" process because of the perceived lack of an alternative such as the strengths-based SOAR framework?

Due to the limited academic-connected research related to the strategic thinking process, especially on the SOAR framework, within professional societies and trade associations, additional scholarly documentation related to the SOAR framework for these organizations was needed. While there were periodic featured stories of associations having success with a strategic thinking or strategy process, the literature review as well as a scan of industry-related publications did not reveal any documented research that identified themes or academic publications citing an accepted benchmark for a non-profit strategic thinking process.

In addition, research on the SOAR framework was necessary to provide benchmark data for future measures on the strategic thinking process for this community. Based on this researcher's 25 years in the non-profit community, it could be perceived this group is generally more conservative than their for-profit counterparts due to the volunteer structure or governance model. However, associations and foundations are prone to trying a fresh approach if another organization has tried the new idea with success. The "success" stories or comments featured in this research may prompt other non-profit executives to explore the SOAR framework if a respected peer group has already tested or experienced the SOAR framework. The results of this study could be important for other association and foundation executives interested in an alternative strategic thinking model to the traditional SWOT analysis. Another essential aspect of this research was how it contributed to the greater body of knowledge on a positive, forward-looking alternative such as SOAR, compared to the weakness and threat elements of a SWOT analysis, which has been used by both the for-profit and non-profit communities for nearly 50 years. The literature featuring the history of the SWOT analysis can be linked to Kurt Lewin (1947) and subsequent action-research model (French, 1969) as early foundations for SWOT. The reasons noted above amplify the reasons why this scholarly research on the SOAR framework was essential for the non-profit community in particular since nearly every organization of this type engages in some type of strategic thinking process.

In the past 15 years, non-profits have shifted with their for-profit colleagues from the BHAG, Big Harry Audacious Goal (Collins & Porras, 1994), which had organizations looking at where they wanted to be in 20 plus years to a much shorter visioning timeline.

The biggest contributor to this strategy mindset shift was the pace of change. Participant Two characterized this by noting that the "decision making process had been condensed." due to the rate of change for the association and the need to focus on what the organization does best.

Participant Two and the other research participants consistently noted the forward-thinking and positive-focused nature of the SOAR framework. Participant Eight commented on a changed mindset: that the SOAR framework allowed the Board of Directors and Staff Leadership to think proactively in light of significant state funding cuts. In *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard* (Heath & Heath, 2010), the authors emphasized the need for organizations to focus on the "bright spots," meaning focus on what they do best. This *bright spot* mentality complements the positive-focused approach of the SOAR framework in identifying what an organization does well and then discovering new ways to replicate these "bright spots" in other areas of the organization.

The data from participant interview show that there is a significant attraction to the positive-based approach of the SOAR framework. Although there were differing degrees of how this positive mindset manifested itself among the participants, there was a consistent mention of positivity from all participants regarding their lived experience with the SOAR framework. Earlier in Chapter 3, it was noted that Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) attributed positive psychology (Seligman, 2000) and positivity (Frederickson, 1998) as the ideas behind appreciative inquiry and the strategic thinking SOAR framework. In a later work, Frederickson (2003) explored the concept of positivity causing positive emotions (positive spiral) and conversely negativity causing negative emotions (negative spiral), resulting in the effects of positive and negative thinking.

Frederickson's spiral images provided solid parallels of what tends to happen in a SWOT analysis where 50 percent of the process is weighted to weaknesses and threats. This is in contrast to the SOAR analysis focusing on strengths, opportunities, and aspirations, and resulting in an upward positive spiral. It is these core concepts of positive psychology that underpin the appreciative-inquiry-based SOAR framework for strategic thinking.

Conclusions

Using the Five-I Model (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009) as a frame, thematic coding was used to analyze the data and develop a common and integrated understanding of the changed behaviors and mindsets related to the SOAR framework. The conclusions featured in this chapter present the importance of this study, a discussion of findings, reflections and suggestions for future research.

The data demonstrated that all the participants in this study had a positive perception of the SOAR framework and there was a varying degree of experimentation and implementation following the October 2011 professional development program that focused on the SOAR framework. Eight of the nine participants noted the positive-based and forward-thinking focus as a key reason for wanting to explore the SOAR framework for a future strategic thinking process. Based on the interviews, there was definitive interest in discovering an alternative to the traditional SWOT analysis and recognition of the advantage of SOAR being linked with the Appreciative Inquiry school of thought.

Both the positive language descriptors and forward or future themes were common threads in all the interviews. Similar words or phrases like *fluid*, *flowing in one direction*, and *dialog continuum* were additional strengths noted by the survey participants. Another thought-provoking theme emerged, which was the perceived

flexibility and compatibility with other strategic thinking processes or existing measurements or metrics used by the organizations represented in this study.

All participants identified some type of blue-sky questions such as *Where do want to go*? or *What do we hope to achieve*? related to the SOAR framework. They stated that these questions resonated with them on some level. Some of the more distilled comments related to doing strategic thinking were related to the issues of focusing on staying strategic, building on strengths, mission-focused innovations, and the belief that a new process will produce new results. Consistent themes such as data-focused, dashboard friendly, idea implementation, and accountability emerged during the interviews. Two research participants noted the *compatibility* with other planning processes as another significant attribute. Participant One noted the flexibility and compatibility of the SOAR framework with a consensus facilitation process used by this research participant. Participant Two highlighted the compatibility and flexibility of blending the SOAR framework with a SWOT analysis with selected regional groups in that non-profit organization.

Based on the participant data, it can be concluded the SOAR framework is an alternative to the long-used SWOT analysis for organizational strategic thinking. It should also be noted that Participant Two has embraced the SOAR framework and it experimenting how both the SOAR framework and SWOT analysis could be integrated into an organizational strategic thinking process. Based on these participants, the SOAR framework is a robust alternative to the SWOT analysis with these California-based non-profit executives.

Limitations of Study

One of the study limitations is the geographical composition, as three-fourths of the participants were from Northern California and one-fourth of the participants were from Southern California. However, this percentage was not unusual, as many California associations and foundations are based in Sacramento. It is common in every state to have an abundance of non-profit headquarters located in the capital city for easier access to regulatory decision makers that might have an impact on their profession or industry. This study focused only on California-based non-profit organizations and did not include more geographically diverse organizations, domestically or internationally.

There was a representative mix of participants representing 501c3 non-profits, which are tax-deductible foundations, and 501c6 non-profits, which typically cover trade associations and professional societies. However, there were no 501c7 organizations included in the study which typically represent fraternal or social non-profits, which is another study limitation.

The more significant study limitation was the 17-month lapse between the SOAR framework live experience and participant interviews. While a 17-month period gave participants a wealth of time in which to think about and perhaps even apply SOAR in their organizations, it was a considerable period of time that could have deterred other association and foundation executives who either did not apply the SOAR framework or did not recall the professional development experience from October 2011. While the participant survey invitation was sent to every non-profit executive that attended the SOAR framework program, only 9 of the 26 individuals responded affirmatively to study participation. For example, Participant Six was not sure she attended but did recall

learning about the SOAR framework at some point over the past two years. However, all other survey participants clearly remembered the experience as well as selected instances where they applied the SOAR framework with their own organizations.

Recommendations

In every data collection interview, each non-profit executive cited a comparison between SWOT and SOAR in some context. With those comparisons from the lived experiences resulting from a SOAR framework experience for association management executives in October 2011, the following recommendations will look at selected contrasts between the SWOT and SOAR processes.

One area to consider for future research would be to document non-profit executives who had previously used a SWOT analysis in their strategic thinking process and now have decided to engage the SOAR framework for the next strategy session. While the comparison points between the two processes would need to be carefully defined, it would be helpful to get comparison data between SOAR and SWOT. In *Process Consultation Revisited* (Schein, 1999), a starting measurement dialog could look at the comparisons between the SWOT *problem solving* approach and the SOAR *what could be* framework for the strategic thinking process.

Another area to research or document is to determine how objectives and goals from both processes might be implemented. Survey Participant Two indicated a perception that "goal development seemed to flow in a more connected way" with the SOAR process. If organizations were willing to share strategic planning documents, organizations using the SWOT analysis and SOAR framework could be compared for use of common words or for how results were measured. Admittedly, much of the plan

development and process is at the discretion of the strategic thinking facilitator, but some common attributes might be identified for future study.

With all new processes or procedures, change is seldom easy. It would be beneficial for the non-profit community to have data or benchmark studies on whether the organization continued to use SOAR or reverted back to using SWOT analysis, or whether any of the organization's leaders or staff members recommended the process to their colleagues. This was somewhat the case with Participant Five, who brought the SOAR framework back to the chief executive for the upcoming strategic thinking process and was rebuffed, since the SOAR framework seemed to be *too new* and *unfamiliar* to the organization. However, this same participant did note later in the data collection interview that the SOAR framework could be used within one or more departments even though the organization as a whole used the SWOT analysis for the strategic thinking process. In *Good to Great* (Collins, 2005), the author refers to this sort of event as a *pocket of greatness*, which is about having an influence of change in your own area even though the larger organization might have a different culture.

In addition, supplemental research might be considered if the non-profit executives experimenting or fully implementing the SOAR framework in their strategic thinking processes continued to use the process when another opportunity emerged to do so. This would be of particular interest to this researcher to document as subsequent SOAR framework processes were adapted or adjusted to fit the culture of that organization. In either case, it would be of interest to explore and document what residual impact, if any, there was for both the non-profit executive and the organizations they lead.

Another area where future research could be considered is the physical and emotional effects of participating in SWOT analysis compared to using the SOAR framework. An expanded study might include the physical and emotional impacts of engaging in a problem-solving, negative, past-focused dialog (SWOT) versus a positive, aspirational, future-focused one (SOAR). In addition, more research is needed to focus on the negative and positive spirals and the desire of leaders to break the momentum of the spiral. This research might compare the flexibility of SOAR versus SWOT (Frederickson, 2003, 2009; Garland et al., 2010).

This study focused only on the experiences of professional society; trade association; and non-profit executives in California-based organizations. An expanded geographical non-profit study could allow for a deeper understanding of the benefits related to the SOAR framework related to an organization's strategic thinking process. As mentioned earlier, the use of the SOAR framework has gained popularity in the for-profit sector more rapidly than the non-profit sector. This acceptance factor might be impacted if more success stories could be found within the association and professional society communities. Expanding the scope to similar non-profit organizations outside of California would provide a larger data pool and hopefully provide more instances of positive acceptance. Enlarging the data pool to include for-profit companies would result in more data and perhaps provide both a different perspective as well as positive examples that could be provided to the non-profit community.

A longitudinal study of members of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) is warranted to determine whether there is a measurable strategic thinking difference between the traditional SWOT analysis and the SOAR framework as

well as whether there are advantages to using one over the other. As pointed out previously in this paper, the association community has been using SWOT analysis for over 50 years (Hill & Westbrook, 1997; Hollan, 2008) and continues to be urged to do so by authors of books, magazine articles, and journal articles (Allison & Kaye, 1997; Bryson, 2011; Bryson & Alson, 2011; Ernsthal & Jones, 1996).

While most non-profit organizations engage in some type of strategic thinking or strategic planning process, the actual processes to clarify an organization's purpose and mission have not changed much over time. A study which showed measurable results might lay the groundwork for change in the way association executives approach the strategic thinking process. This type of study would help professional societies and trade associations navigate the ever-changing environment in which their organizations exist.

Further exploration of the benefits of recognizing areas of strengths and replicating these areas elsewhere organizations might show how Appreciative Inquiry and SOAR could work together to further strengthen an organization. The research would assist non-profit executives in the strategic dialog and subsequent strategy document outlining their future direction.

There is work to be done in exploring and measuring the appropriate uses of the SOAR framework in an organization. The use of SOAR spontaneously, as recommended by one of the study participants, should be explored as an appropriate use of the framework outside of formal strategic thinking or planning.

The SOAR framework has been shown, both by the literature and by the interviews with those who participated in the October 2011 program, to be useful and appreciated. What has not been established is an overall knowledge and acceptance of

the process by the non-profit community. When introduced to SOAR, association and foundation executives displayed acceptance and commitment to using the positive-focused process in their organizations. However, the literature also shows that after 800 association and professional society executives were introduced to and experienced a positive application of appreciative inquiry and the SOAR framework in 2008, minimal residual applications were mentioned or documented following the exposure (Godwin, et al., 2012).

Through the participant interviews it was determined that there was some prior knowledge and practice of SOAR, but the question remains for the future: How can the positive aspects of SOAR be introduced, accepted, and used by the non-profit sector? Is the SWOT analysis and its problem-solving approach so imbedded within the association community that any new strategic thinking process that changes the mental model around planning would be difficult to implement? One study participant said in the interview process, "SOAR is an alternative to SWOT in terms of ways to look at the organization to make it relevant and to assure that it would be servicing and meeting the needs as the nature of associations has changed." If the SOAR framework can be shown to be a positive approach to servicing and meeting those changing needs, perhaps it would be more readily accepted and implemented.

Based on more than 25 years working as both an association management executive and business partner to the industry (see Appendix G), additional research comparing the effects of negative-based versus positive-based thinking on the emotional and physical states of those in the planning process, may provide further justification for acceptance of the SOAR framework. Data showed that those involved in the hours-long

process of negative-based problem solving were more physically spent and emotionally discouraged might be the catalyst to move executives to experimenting with the more positive-based SOAR framework. The future implications of organizations practicing strengths-based or positive-based thinking would provide significant documentation determining the long-term change in both the staff and volunteer strategic thinking environments for association and foundation executives leading non-profit organizations.

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APPENDIX A

Letter of Support from the California Society of Association Executives

CalSAE

California Society of
Association Executives

Advancing the Association Community in California

August 31, 2012

Graduate and Professional School IRB
Jean Kang, CIP
Graduate and Professional Schools IRB Manager
Graduate School of Education & Psychology
Pepperdine University
6100 Center Drive 5th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90045

Dear Jean:

Our vision for the California Society of Association Executives (CalSAE) is to be the trusted partner and the preferred source for association management executives seeking to achieve their personal and professional goals. CalSAE is aware and in full support of the research regarding the professional development program on the SOAR framework being conducted by Steven W. Swafford.

We are pleased to cooperate with Mr. Swafford on this project and grant our approval to collect data from the association management professionals that participated in a professional development in October 2011. We are aware that involvement in this study is voluntary and has minimal risks associated with participation in this study. It is our hope this data will add to the growing body of academic research in the association management community and subsequently benefit all association executives in the future.

Sincerely,

Jim Anderson, CAE
President & CEO
California Society of Association Executives

775 Sunrise Avenue, Ste 270 · Roseville, CA 95661 · 916-443-8980 · FAX 916-749-3369 · www.calsae.org

APPENDIX B

Electronic Study Participant Interview Request Form

CalSAE "Living the New Normal in Association Management"

According to the California Association Executives (CalSAE) professional development records, you attended a program in October 2011 called "Living the New Normal in Association Management." A significant portion of the content presented last year focused on the SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, results) framework and how this model could be applied to your association or CalSAE.

I am currently working with Pepperdine University and CalSAE on exploring any changed behaviors or mindsets that might have resulted 12 months following your exposure to the SOAR framework after your participation in this program.

However, before the individual interviews are conducted concerning any changed behaviors or individual mindsets shifts are explored, I would like to ask you what questions should be asked in the subsequent one-on-one phone interviews with a select group of program participants. In other words, what questions do you believe are important for me to ask in the interviews regarding SOAR that you would find valuable and useful to ask your association management executive peers?

Both the program evaluation and subsequent 60-minute phone interviews are part of my dissertation through Pepperdine University.

NOTE: By participating in this online electronic survey, it does not require you nor does it imply your inclusion to participate in the 60-minute one-on-one interviews regarding your experience with the SOAR framework. The comments you provide on this electronic survey are optional, confidential, and anonymous. You are under no obligation to participate or respond to this survey. Your participation is entirely optional.

I sincerely appreciate your time in responding to these brief interview development questions. Please respond by (month, day), 2012.

Thank you!
Steven Swafford

1. Please fill in the blank below (ASSOCIATION FOCUS):
"From my association management peers that attended the 'Living the New Normal in Association Management' program, I would like to know _____ regarding their application of the SOAR framework in their association?"

2. Please fill in the blank below (INDIVIDUAL FOCUS):
"From my association management peers that attended the 'Living the New Normal in Association Management' program, I would like to know _____ regarding their application of the SOAR framework with their individual mindsets or thought processes?"

CalSAE "Living the New Normal in Association Management"

3. What do you believe this program evaluation should aspire to capture or measure regarding the SOAR framework?

4. Would you like to be considered for a 60-minute phone interview regarding your experience with the SOAR framework? If "yes", please go to Question #5 and provide your name, organization, email, and phone. Thank you!

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Comments

5. If you answered "yes" to Question #4, please provide your name, organization, email, and phone in the box below to be considered for one of the 10 interview participants. Each interview is anticipated to be 60-minutes in length.

6. Additional Comments? Observations? Suggestions?

APPENDIX C

SOAR Framework Program Participant Demographic Information

First Name: _____

Last Name: _____

Years in Association Management? _____ Current Title:_____

Email: _____

Age Range (please check one):

□ Under 21

□ 21-30

□ 31-40

□ 41-50

□ 51+

Association Background (please list association(s) worked for starting with the most recent) and attach a resume/vita if that is more convenient:

Membership size of current association: _____

Budget size of current association:_____

APPENDIX D

Participation Overview and Informed Consent Form

DATE: Insert Date

TO: Insert Association Executive Name

FROM: Steven Swafford, Doctoral Candidate
Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

RE: 60-minute Phone Interview & Participant Informed Consent Form

Recently, you responded to an electronic survey indicating your affirmative interest to participate in a phone interview regarding your individual or organizational experience with the SOAR framework.

The phone interview will take approximately 60 minutes. The phone interview will include the following questions:

1. Please describe why you decided to attend the professional development program on the SOAR framework in October 2011?
2. What, if any, factors contributed to your decision to explore or test concepts from the SOAR framework individually or organizationally?
3. What barriers or catalysts, if any, did you experience as a result of applying the SOAR framework individually or organizationally?
4. What developments or processes have been changed individually or in your organization as a result of exploring or implementing the SOAR framework?
5. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to comment on regarding your experience with the SOAR framework?
6. Do you wish to receive a summary of the dissertation findings at the end of the research?

You have the right to refuse to answer any questions you choose during the phone interview. Thank you for interest and agreeing to participate in the SOAR framework study. Please contact me with any questions or comments regarding this study at xxx-xxx-xxxx or electronically steven.swafford@pepperdine.edu. The only foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study are the amount of time involved on the phone interview as well as the possibility that reflecting upon your lived experiences regarding the application or considering the application of the SOAR framework may cause minor emotional or intellectual discomfort.

Although you may not directly benefit, a potential benefit of participating is to provide information that can help other association management executives learn from your lived experience regarding the SOAR framework.

When the results of the phone interviews are shared with other association management executives, the information that is provided will describe the group as a whole, not the individual association management executive. However, there may be selected individual responses highlighted that capture the essence of a theme or trend but no specific identifying information will be associated with the association management executive's comment.

The phone interviews will be recorded and subsequently transcribed for coding and content themes. I am required to keep these recordings and transcripts in a locked fire-proof filing cabinet for at least 3 years. After the recorded phone interviews and transcripts are no longer required for research purposes, the recordings and transcripts will be destroyed.

A summary of the findings may be obtained in approximately 4-6 months. If you wish to receive a summary of the findings, please indicate this desire during the phone interview. This question will also be asked again at the end of the phone interview. You may request a copy of the findings regardless how many questions you choose to answer during the phone interview.

If you have further questions about the study, you may contact my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Kent Rhodes (kent.rhodes@pepperdine.edu), Pepperdine University, Graduate School of Education and Psychology, 6100 Center Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045. If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board, Pepperdine University, Graduate School of Education and Psychology, 6100 Center Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045, (310) 568-5600.

Your informed consent and participant demographic information for the interviews can be securely sent to my personal fax machine located in a private area at xxx-xxx-xxxx or sent as a pdf to steven.swafford@pepperdine.edu. Please return the informed consent form within seven (7) days and if you have any questions or clarifications, please contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or my email noted earlier in the paragraph.

Steven Swafford
steven.swafford@pepperdine.edu

Application Explored From a SOAR Framework Experience for Association Management Executives
Participant Informed Consent Form

I, _____, agree to participate in the research being conducted by Steve Swafford under the direction of Dr. Kent Rhodes, Dissertation Chairperson, Pepperdine University.

1. The purpose of this utilization-focused (aimed at intended use by intended users) study using qualitative phenomenological-based interviewing techniques (concentrating on lived experiences) is to determine whether association management executives working in California-based professional societies and trade associations changed their individual thought processes or adapted organizational management practices by applying the principles of the SOAR framework following attendance at a professional development program that demonstrated said framework.
2. Your expected duration is the time needed to read this consent form; complete the basic demographic information at the end of the informed content; and subsequent participation in a 60-minute interview with this investigator.
3. There are no physical requirements to this study other than responding to a series of questions related to this study. There are no experimental or medical procedures involved with this study.
4. The only foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study are the amount of time involved on the phone interview (60 minutes) as well as the possibility that reflecting upon your lived experiences regarding the application or considering the application of the SOAR framework may cause minor emotional or intellectual discomfort.
5. Although you may not directly benefit, a potential benefit of participating is to provide information that can help other association management executives learn from your lived experience regarding the SOAR framework.
6. When the anonymous results of the phone interviews are shared with other association management executives, the information that is provided will describe the group as a whole, not the individual association management executive. However, there may be selected individual responses highlighted that capture the essence of a theme or trend but no specific identifying information will be associated with the association management executive's comment. The phone interviews will be recorded and subsequently transcribed for coding and content themes. I am required to keep these recordings and transcripts in a locked fire-proof filing cabinet for at least 3 years. After the recorded phone interviews and transcripts are no longer required for research purposes, the recordings and transcripts will be destroyed.
7. There is no monetary compensation for your participation in this study.
8. If you have further questions about the study, you may contact my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Kent Rhodes (kent.rhodes@pepperdine.edu), Pepperdine University, Graduate School of Education and Psychology, 6100 Center Center Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045. If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board, Pepperdine University, Graduate School of Education

and Psychology, 6100 Center Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045, (310) 568-5600. NOTE: As a study subject, you will receive a copy of this consent form.

9. Participation is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. There are no consequences of the subject's decision to withdraw at any time. There will be approximately 10 subjects involved with this study.

I have read and understand my participant rights and the scope of my involvement.

_____ _____ Print Name:_____

Participant Signature Date

APPENDIX E

Vita - Jill W. McCrory

EDUCATION

2010 Master of Divinity, John Leland Center for Theological Studies, Arlington, VA

2007 Diploma of Theology, John Leland Center for Theological Studies, Arlington, VA

PROFESSIONAL HISTORY

2012-Present	Chief Executive Officer Spiritual Outfitters, LLC, Kensington, MD
2012-Present	Senior Content Development & Facilitation Leadership Outfitters, LLC, Eugene, OR
1997-2012	President Leadership Outfitters, Inc., Kensington, MD
1993-1997	Senior Director of Training & Education
1985-1993	Assistant Director, Remodelers Council National Association of Home Builders, Washington, DC

APPENDIX F

Vita - Bridget Cooper, Ed.D.

EDUCATION

2005 Doctorate in Educational Leadership, Higher Education Administration (HEA) Graduate School of Education and Human Development (GSEHD), The George Washington University (GW), Washington, DC.

1997 Master of Arts, Human Development and Family Relations, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT

1991 Bachelor of Science, Human Resource Management, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA

PROFESSIONAL HISTORY

2004-Present Founder & Owner, Pieces in Place, Glastonbury, CT.

2007-Present Senior Training Consultant, Leadership Outfitters, Eugene, OR.

2010-2011 Interim Education Director, Construction Education Center, Rocky Hill, CT.

2009-2011 Director of Training and Marketing, Client Conservation Consulting, Glastonbury, CT.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS & PUBLICATIONS

Burley, E. (2010). *Money management: From grade school to grad school.* New York, NY: Vital Visions Publishing. Provided technical editing services.

Hoare, C. (2006). *Handbook of adult development and learning*. London: Oxford University Press. Was research and editorial assistant with duties including investigating and approaching potential authors, screening and editing manuscripts, and providing content and technical editing assistance with all aspects of the handbook.

Cooper, B. (2005). *Social network structures of women in academic medicine.* Paper presented at the Educational Symposium for Research and Innovations, GWU.

Cooper, B. (2005). *Social network structures of women in academic medicine.* Dissertation Abstracts International, 370.

Giraldo, M. (In development). *The dialogues in and of the group: Lacanian perspectives on the psychoanalytic group*. London: Routledge Press (publishing house not finalized). Provided content and technical editing services.

Hoare, C. (In development). *Book on Presidential leadership as known through their eulogies.* Providing research services.

APPENDIX G

Dissertation Development Background

By accident, I stumbled across the field of association management on an early job interview in the Washington, DC area. The Club Managers Association of America (CMAA) would select me to be their Manager of Chapter Services in 1987; 25 years later I am still intimately connected with the profession. I served as an association executive for 10 years holding a variety of positions such as manager, director, vice president, and eventually executive director before co-founding a strategy and leadership-development firm in 1997. While I continued to work as executive director for an association in the DC area until 2000, I worked on weekends building the strategy and leadership development business, called Leadership Outfitters. The focus of Leadership Outfitters was, and continues to be, on collaborating nearly exclusively with the association management community.

Through my professional and volunteer leadership positions, I experienced a variety of strategic-planning processes both as participant and, subsequently, as facilitator. During the first 20 years, I experienced nearly exclusively the use of the SWOT (or environmental scanning) process in developing a strategic plan. However, this all changed on January 12, 2008 when Dr. Jane Watkins presented the SOAR framework as part of her "Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination" to Pepperdine University's Organizational Change Management Program in Monterrey, Mexico.

By July 2008, I had started pilot testing the SOAR framework with our clients during strategic planning. In the past 2 years, my work has shifted mostly to using the SOAR framework for the foundation of strategy development with association clients.

While I continue to experience some resistance by clients wanting to use SWOT analysis, I asked clients to trust the new SOAR process. As a result, I often ended up with a new convert to the SOAR framework.

While this dissertation journey has taken a variety of turns, none has been more exciting than the emergence of SOAR as the major focus of my research. I anticipate the research will continue to provide more revelations on how SOAR can be adapted and refined specifically for the association management community while at the same time contributing to the bodies of knowledge surrounding strategic planning and appreciative inquiry generally.