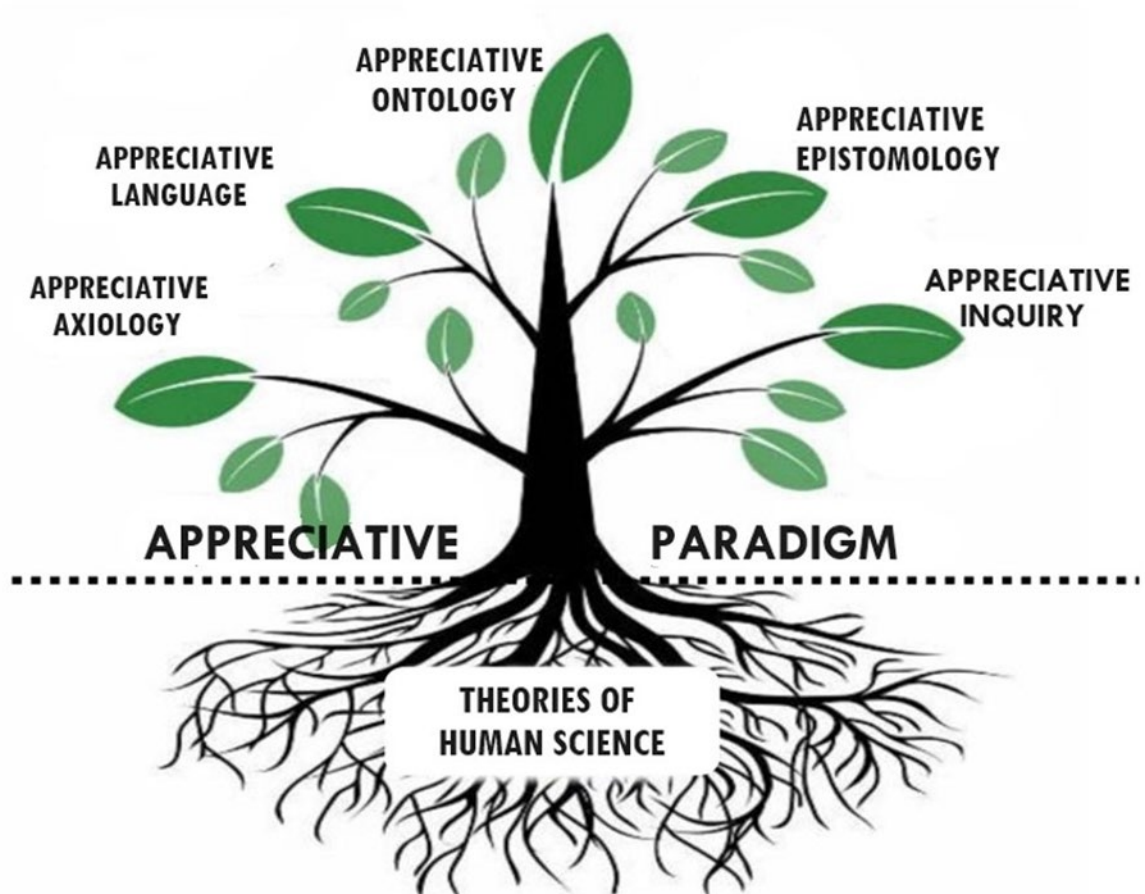


APPRECIATIVE PARADIGM

From Methodology to Paradigm



New Paradigm for Social Change

New Paradigm in Social Sciences

FEDERICO VARONA, Ph D.

Professor Emeritus

Communication Studies Department

San José State University, San José, CA-USA

federico.varona@sjsu.edu

Hollister, California, USA

September 7, 2022

INTRODUCTION

Since it was conceived in 1987, **Appreciative Inquiry** has been defined by various authors (Barrett & Fry, 2005; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003; Subirana & Cooperrider 2013; Watkins, Mohr, & Kelly, 2011) as a methodology for social change, a philosophy, a theory, an applied qualitative research methodology, and so forth. Nevertheless, the aspect that has been most frequently emphasized, to the detriment of other dimensions of Appreciative Inquiry, has been that it is a methodology for social change (Cooperrider, 2021; Pavez, Godwin, & Spreitzer, 2021). It is for this reason that I believe that the time has come to move past this partial perspective that Appreciative Inquiry is just a methodology and begin to see it in its full glory, that is, as a paradigm which I propose we call the **Appreciative Paradigm**.

The objective of this essay is to propose an integrative approach to Appreciative Inquiry by demonstrating that it contains all of the components of what we in the social sciences understand as a paradigm and thus assert that **Appreciative Inquiry is a new paradigm in the social sciences**. In order to achieve this aim, I will analyze the following topics:

In the first section, I discuss what a **paradigm in the social sciences** is: first, its definition, origin, and evolution; second, its components: 1) Ontology, 2) Epistemology, 3) Praxis, 4) Axiology, and 5) Language; and third, when a paradigm shift occurs in the social sciences.

In the second section, I explain the **imperatives that justify the proposal that Appreciative Inquiry is a new paradigm in the social sciences**: 1) the imperative of my personal experience; 2) the imperative of the need we have for an Organic Theoretical Framework (Terminology and Conceptualization); 3) the imperative of the development and success achieved at the theoretical and practical level; 4) the imperative previously suggested by Cooperrider; and 5) the imperative of being consistent with the principles of appreciative language.

In the third section, I describe what the **Appreciative Paradigm** is: first its definition and second its components: 1) Appreciative Ontology, 2) Appreciative Epistemology/Inquiry, 3) Appreciative Praxis/Methodology for human/social change, 4) Appreciative Axiology/Values; and 5) Appreciative Language.

And I finish with a brief **conclusion** that invites all of us to reflect on the implications of the integrative approach of the appreciative paradigm in our lives and in our professional activity as practitioners, academics, and researchers, but, above all, so that we can collaborate in the co-construction of this emerging appreciative paradigm.

I. THE PARADIGM IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Before presenting an argument on how Appreciative Inquiry is a paradigm, I believe it is first necessary to define what we mean by a paradigm in the social sciences: its origin, evolution, components, and when a paradigm shift occurs.

1. 1. Definition of a Paradigm: Origen and Evolution

The word paradigm is used to mean various things, both by the general public and by some theorists and researchers, so it is therefore necessary to define what we mean by a paradigm, referring to authors who have greater authority in the community of theorists, researchers, and scholars in the field of social sciences (Kuhn, 1962; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Hacking, 2012; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). A paradigm is generally a concept that includes a set of theories, research methods, postulates, and standards of what constitutes a new and legitimate way of contributing to the development of a certain scientific field and which differs and is distinguished from other existing ones. For example, in the social sciences we have the positivist paradigm that there is an objective and universal truth. On the other hand, those who follow the postmodernist paradigm believe that truth is subjective, socially constructed, and that there are no universal truths (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Aristotle (5th century BCE) was the first to use the word paradigm, which comes from the Greek *paradeigma*. He used it in his theory of argument in his treatise *Rhetoric* to mean an “example”, that is, the best and most instructive example that could be used in an argument, or an example that is so convincing that almost everyone in the audience would agree with him.

After Aristotle we have no record of its usage until the 20th century, when it was reintroduced by Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996). Kuhn started his scientific career in physics, but moved into the history of science (Kuhn, 1962). It was in this field that, in attempting to discover the source of the disagreements and arguments between scientists on fundamental issues, both in the physical and social sciences, he found that the key to explaining these differences was what he called “paradigms”, which he defined as follows: “These I take to be universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners” (Kuhn, 1962, p. xiii). It was Kuhn who coined the terms “**paradigm**” and “**paradigm shift**” in 1962.

In his 1974 book *Second Thoughts on Paradigms*, Kuhn underlined that he used the word paradigm to refer to the achievements of the scientific community that served as examples of what to do, the types of questions to ask, successful explanations, experiments and observations, and examples (Hacking, 2012).

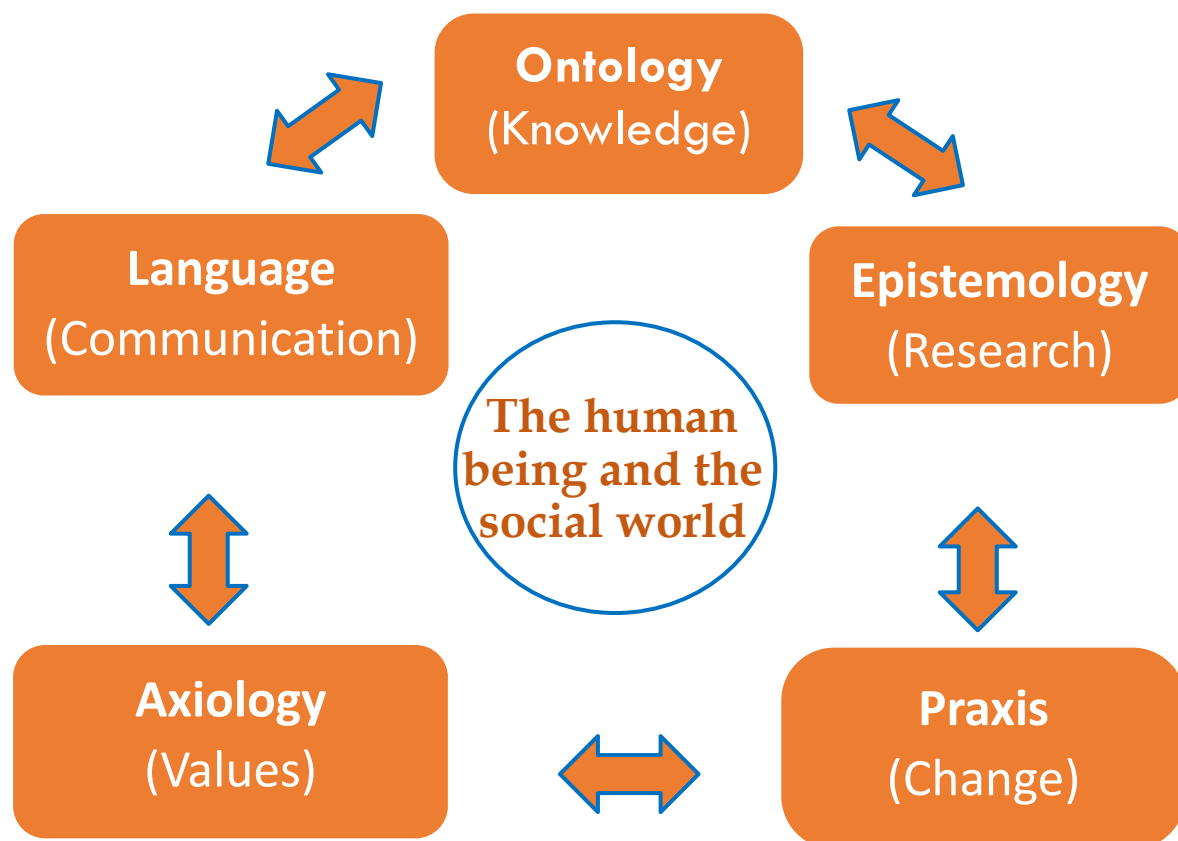
Therefore, Kuhn considered that the necessary characteristics of a paradigm are as follows: First, it must be universally recognized as a scientific achievement. Second, that for a time it offers models of problems and solutions to the community of practitioners. And third, it should differ from existing paradigms. Paradigms obtain their status as such because they are more successful than their competitors in solving problems. But being more successful does not mean that it is entirely successful in solving those problems. He also recognized that it is possible for two different paradigms to coexist peacefully for a period of time (Kuhn, 1962).

Kuhn admitted that, after he used it, the term paradigm began to be used very freely in the scientific field and that its meaning began to become far removed from how he had originally understood it. In 1970 he acknowledged that he had lost control of the term and finally ended up abandoning it. However, 50 years later in 2012, a group of scientists and philosophers attempted to restore its original usage.

1. 2. Components of a Paradigm in Social Sciences (Figure 1)

After Kuhn, various theorists and researchers in the social sciences began using the term paradigm and incorporating different components into the concept of a paradigm, such as anthology, epistemology, praxis, and axiology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To these four components, I have allowed myself to add a fifth, **language**, based on Kuhn, who already suggested it when he said that “every new paradigm ... changes even ... the very language in which we speak about some aspect of nature” (Hacking, 1962). However, I do this with the inspiration of the concept of language in Appreciative Inquiry when it contends that the language we use creates the world in which we live, what we see, who we are, how we operate, and the world that we want to emerge (Cooperrider, 2021). Below, I provide a brief definition and explanation of each of these five components of a paradigm in the social sciences.

Figure 1
COMPONENTS OF A PARADIGM



1. 2. 1. Ontology

The first component is **Ontology**, “which deals with being in general and with its transcendental properties” (Real Academia Española). In the specific case of the social sciences, Ontology therefore refers to the **knowledge** we have of humans and the social and natural world in which they live. We create and formulate this knowledge by producing **theories** that explain the nature of human beings and **social phenomena** and how they relate to the natural world. The ontology of the social sciences thus includes **all theories that explain** the nature, causes, relationships, consequences, and transformations of human behavior and social phenomena.

Every paradigm in the social sciences has its own theories about the nature of humans and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live. Table 1 below provides some examples of social paradigms and their different theories on specific aspects of social reality.

Table 1
Examples of Paradigms in Social Sciences

PARADIGM	THEORIES
1. Positivism	The truth is objective and can be researched with scientific methods.
2. Social Construction	The truth is subjective, socially constructed, always changeable.
3. Critical	Power is manipulative, it imposes an ideology and emancipation is a process of liberation.
4. Postmodernist	Objective truth does not exist and it is not possible to know it.
5. Functionalist	Social systems function like a machine. The important thing is productivity.
6. Appreciative	Focused on discovering what gives life in a social system in order to build a better future. <i>(Instead of identifying and analyzing errors to solve problems, Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003, p. 225)</i>

1. 2. 2. Epistemology

The second component is **Epistemology**, which is the “Doctrine of the foundations and methods of scientific knowledge,” and the “Set of methods that are followed in a scientific investigation or in a doctrinal exposition” (Real Academia Española). Epistemology in the social sciences therefore refers to how we come to know human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live. In other words, epistemology is the science that studies the scientific methods of research by which we create new theoretical and practical knowledge.

Every social paradigm has its own epistemology, that is to say, its own particular way of conducting scientific research. For example, the positivist paradigm uses quantitative methods, such as questionnaires to collect information and statistical methods to analyze it. Meanwhile, the postmodernist paradigm uses qualitative methods, such as interviews to gather information and the content analysis method to analyze it. Every social paradigm therefore has various **theories and methodologies** regarding how to attain knowledge of human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live.

1. 2. 3. Praxis

The third component is the **Praxis** of social change. The term praxis, of Greek origin, refers to the process by which a theory or skill is put into practice. One of the definitions that come closest to the meaning of the concept of praxis as a component of a paradigm in the social sciences is “action aimed at changing society” (McLellan, D. 1970, p. 10). Marx uses the term “praxis” to refer to human activity “through which man creates (makes, produces) and changes (shapes) his historical, human world and himself” (Petrovic, 1991). It is interesting to note here how this term has been adopted to refer to those who practice appreciative praxis, whom we call Practitioners.

Every social paradigm has its own particular way of explaining what social change is and how it should be achieved in order to be effective. Each social paradigm therefore has one or more theories and methodologies of social change. For example, in the case of the functionalist paradigm, the objective of social change is to solve social problems, which does not work. Therefore, the first step of the methodology is to identify the problem, the next is to identify its causes, and finally to find a solution. This functionalist theory and methodology of social change is very different from the theory and methodology of social change in the appreciative paradigm, as I will explain later.

1. 2. 4. Axiology:

The fourth component is **Axiology**, which studies value, its nature, its classification, and what we value and why. It is also known as the theory of values. Value is everything to which we attribute significance or importance in our life (a person, belief, thing, action, word, or phrase). **Axiology** examines moral values (personal values), ethical values (standards of good or bad conduct established by certain communities or groups), aesthetic values, and spiritual values.

Every social paradigm has its own particular way of valuing what is important in human beings and in the social and natural world in which they live. Therefore, every social paradigm has one or more theories and methodologies regarding value and how to educate human, social, and natural values. For example, in the case of the functionalist paradigm, the importance of discovering what does not work (the problem) in the human being and the social world is valued and not the value of what works, as the appreciative paradigm does, as we will see below.

1. 2. 5. Language

The fifth component is **Language**. This means that the way in which we speak about human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live determines what we communicate and the generative and transformative

power it has on a rational and emotional level. The words we use when we speak and write are not insignificant.

Every social paradigm has its own particular way of communicating. Therefore, each social paradigm has one or more theories of language. For example, in the case of the functionalist paradigm, conceptual, expository, and rational language has more persuasive power than metaphorical, narrative, poetic, and emotional language. However, as we will see below, in the case of the appreciative paradigm, the opposite is true.

Now that we are familiar with the five components of a paradigm, I think it is time to propose a more complete and integrative definition of what a paradigm is in the social sciences.

What is a paradigm in the social sciences?

*A paradigm in the social sciences is a specific way of **understanding** (ontology), **researching** (epistemology), **transforming** (praxis), **valuing** (axiology), and **speaking** (language) about human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live that is adopted by a global community of academics and practitioners and which has proven to be more successful than other existing paradigms.*

However, a paradigm is not the sum of these five components, but an integrated system in which these components act in an interdependent and dynamic way, as shown in Figure 1 showing the Components of a Paradigm. If this is so, it implies that, for example, **the ontology** of a paradigm, that is to say, its way of understanding human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live, **influences its epistemology** (what we research and how); its **praxis** of social change (what we transform and how); its **axiology** (what we value and how); and its **language** (what we talk about and how). The same is true of each of the other four components; every one of them influences the others.

This concept (model) of a paradigm that I propose to apply to Appreciative Inquiry is, first and foremost, grounded in Kuhn's theory of what a paradigm is. Second, it is based on components that have subsequently been incorporated by social scientists, such as ontology, epistemology, praxis, and axiology (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). And third, it is founded on a new component that I am incorporating, which is **language**. Incidentally, this latter component is also suggested by Kuhn (Hacking, 2012) and is supported by one of the fundamental principles of appreciative language, which is that *the words we use to create the world in which we live and the one we want to build* (Cooperrider, 2021).

1. 3. When does a paradigm shift take place?

According to Kuhn (1962), a **paradigm shift** is a fundamental change in a scientific discipline in both the physical and social sciences and occurs when one way of seeing, thinking, and operating is replaced by a new and different way that has proven to be more effective.

A scientific revolution occurs when scientists encounter anomalies that cannot be explained by the universally accepted paradigm within which scientific progress has thereto been made, Kuhn (1962) argued. He contended that these anomalies exist in all paradigms, and the decision to reject one paradigm is always simultaneously the decision to accept another. Paradigms change and with them those who incorporate and practice them, but the world remains the same, Kuhn contended. Examples of paradigm shifts in physics include: from the Ptolemaic system (in which the Earth was the center of the universe) to the Copernican system (that the sun is the center of the universe), or from Newton's law of gravity to Einstein's law of relativity.

Paradigm shifts in the social sciences are not so absolute, that is, they are not as radical as in the physical sciences. We should therefore acknowledge that new paradigms in the social sciences are not presented as radical changes, but as alternatives to existing paradigms. Paradigms in the social sciences complement each other in terms of the way of understanding, investigating, and changing social reality, because this is a subjective and constantly changing reality that cannot be understood within a single and universal paradigm. It can only be understood in its full reality when we try to comprehend it using the whole variety of paradigms that continue to emerge in the field of social sciences. The consequence of this is that we cannot define any single paradigm as a panacea.

Now that we know what a paradigm is in the social sciences, the fundamental components that comprise it, and when a paradigm shift occurs, in the next section I outline the imperatives or reasons that justify the proposal that Appreciative Inquiry is a new paradigm in the social sciences.

II. IMPERATIVES OR REASONS THAT JUSTIFY THE PROPOSAL THAT APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY IS A NEW PARADIGM IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES.

The imperatives or reasons that have motivated me to propose that Appreciative Inquiry is a new Paradigm in the social sciences are the following: first, the personal imperative; second, the imperative of the need we have for an organic theoretical framework; third, the imperative of the development achieved at the practical and theoretical levels; fourth, the imperative that Cooperrider (2021) has

already explicitly suggested; and fifth, the imperative to be consistent with one of the principles of appreciative language.

2. 1. The personal imperative

I would like to share a little of the story of how I discovered the term paradigm and how its application to Appreciative Inquiry helped me to achieve an encompassing, integrative, and more profound view of the different dimensions of what I had, until then, called Appreciative Intervention. It was in the year 2000 when I came across Appreciative Inquiry and began training myself in it by reading various books in English. I immediately felt that I had happened upon a treasure that I simply had to share with the Spanish-speaking world, because nothing original had been written on the subject in that language at that time. That is how I undertook the task of writing my first book on the topic, which I titled: *La Intervención Apreciativa: Una manera nueva, provocadora, y efectiva para construir las organizaciones del siglo XXI* (Appreciative Intervention: A New, Provocative, and Effective Way to Build 21st Century Organizations). The book was published by Ediciones Uninorte of Universidad del Norte, Barranquilla, Colombia, in 2009.

In 2010 I began teaching a course on research methods using the Appreciative Inquiry approach at both the undergraduate and master's levels in the Department of Communication Studies of the School of Social Sciences at San Jose State University in Silicon Valley, California. I taught this course for two semesters every year for 10 years until I retired in 2020. In these courses I was able to discover the transformative power they had on my students, which transcended the methodological component of research, generating profound changes in the way they saw themselves, others, and the social world in which they were immersed. This experience strengthened my conviction that Appreciative Inquiry was far more than a mere methodology for social change and research. I thus began seeking a term that would capture all the other dimensions of what Appreciative Inquiry is, such as a new way of looking at human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world, a new way of valuing, and a new way of speaking. That is how I came across the term "paradigm" and began using it to refer to Appreciative Inquiry. Nevertheless, it was not until 2020 when I updated and expanded my first book (2009) for a second edition (2020) that I used the word paradigm in the title, which was: *La Intervención Apreciativa: Un nuevo paradigma para el cambio positivo en las organizaciones para profesores, estudiantes universitarios, consultores y gerentes* (Appreciative Intervention: A New Paradigm for Positive Change in Organizations for Teachers, University Students, Consultants, and Managers).

Having now discovered the word paradigm, I had the task of researching first the origin, concept, and evolution of this term in the field of social sciences, and second, analyzing whether or not Appreciative Inquiry fitted into the concept of what a paradigm is. With this purpose in mind, in 2022 I began to read Kuhn's classic book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn, 1962), in which he was the first to coin the terms **paradigm** and **paradigm shift** in the field of the physical and social sciences. Reading his book, I found what I was looking for and that enabled me to confirm the view that Appreciative Inquiry is indeed a new paradigm in the social sciences and that we are therefore experiencing a paradigm shift. Reading Ian Hacking's (2012) introduction to Kuhn's book was also very revealing and influential in this quest. This is the story of how the five components that I propose in this essay about what the appreciative paradigm began to emerge: appreciative ontology, appreciative epistemology, appreciative praxis, axiology, and appreciative language.

2. 2. The imperative of our need for a holistic/gestalt and organic view of what Appreciative Inquiry is

Appreciative Inquiry, as I have already stated, has been defined in many ways and by many people, in both English and Spanish, and this has created a certain amount of confusion from the theoretical point of view (terminological and conceptual), causing some repercussions in the practice. I believe this can be resolved with the proposal I am making. For example, **Appreciative Inquiry** (Subirana & Cooperrider, 2013, p. 27) is defined as a process and a methodology. This definition only highlights one of the components of something that is much more than "a process or methodology" and much more than a simple "tool" (Reed, 2007) because it is a **paradigm**, that is to say, *a new way of seeing, understanding, transforming, valuing, and talking about human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live.*

The concept of paradigm applied to Appreciative Inquiry offers us a gestalt view of it, that is, the possibility of seeing it as a whole, which is how our minds tend to perceive reality according to the Gestalt Theory (Wertheimer, 1938b).

On the other hand, I believe that it is necessary to create and propose the **organic theoretical framework** of the Appreciative Paradigm in Spanish with a **language (terminology)** and a **conceptualization of that terminology** that is standard in Spanish-speaking cultures at both the Ibero-American and global level, which enables us to communicate and understand each other better when we write, practice, and share our appreciative vision and experiences. I also believe that it is essential to create and propose this **organic theoretical framework** of the Appreciative Paradigm because *it will allow us to discover it in fullest sense, depth,*

power, and coherence. As a consequence of that, it will inspire and guide more coherent and powerful practice and theoretical development, because, as Kurt Lewin said, "There is nothing as practical as a good theory" (Lewin, 1951, p. 169)

In a recent paper, Pavez, Godwin, and Spreitzer (2021, p. 6) acknowledge that the proliferation of Appreciative Inquiry in the field of Organizational Development and Change has indeed resulted in a *simplification of Appreciative Inquiry as an interventionist methodology rather than a research methodology for creation of the future and prospective theory*. On the other hand, in this paper, these authors also recognize that Appreciative Inquiry has philosophical, epistemological, and methodological foundations (2021, p. 7). With that assertion, albeit without explicitly stating it, they have pointed to some of the components of the appreciative paradigm that I discuss in this essay.

2. 3. The imperative of the development and success achieved at the practical and theoretical level

There has been an extraordinary amount of development and success achieved at both the practical and theoretical level during the 36 years in which Appreciative Inquiry has existed, as demonstrated in the brief account I give below.

In the field of theoretical development, we should highlight the abundance of books and articles that have been published on the subject of Appreciative Inquiry, particularly in English. The main publication on the topic is currently **Appreciative Inquiry Practitioner: International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry** <https://aipractitioner.com/>. This journal is published in English on a quarterly basis and includes articles written by practitioners and academics from all over the world. An issue was recently published in Spanish and English: [aip-sept-2021-appreciative-teams-89flah](#). There is also a hub called **AI Commons**: <https://evolucionat.padlet.org/carlespolo1/hl2d3r8jaork25k8> where the global community of scholars and practitioners can find or contribute publications, resources, and materials for the theoretical development and practice of appreciative change at the personal, team, leadership, organizational, community, or other levels. Meanwhile, **The Center for Appreciative Inquiry**: <https://www.centerforappreciativeinquiry.net/> provides certification courses to train of practitioners of appreciative change at the personal level (coaching) and for teams, organizations, and communities globally. The **Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University** <https://weatherhead.case.edu/centers/fowler/business/appreciative-inquiry> also offers an **Appreciative Inquiry Certificate in Positive Business and Society**, a **PhD in Organizational Behavior**, and an **MS in Positive Organization Development & Change** with an emphasis on Appreciative Inquiry.

In the field of appreciative change achieved during the last 36 years in which appreciative inquiry/interventions have been practiced, the record of efficacy is

certainly impressive, as demonstrated by the articles published in the aforementioned media and in the personal testimonies shared in the annual and monthly meetings of theoretical scholars and practitioners at the global and regional levels, such as the annual **AI JAMS** (Global Virtual Meetings). The Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry: <https://www.centerforappreciativeinquiry.net/> also organizes Webinars to offer the global community of practitioners and academics the opportunity to share knowledge, experiences, and results regarding the efficacy of the practice of appreciative change. I must also highlight the creation of the Iberoamerican Network of Paradigm Practitioners and Academics (RIPAPA by the Spanish acronym) on the platform Padlet: <https://evolucionat.padlet.org/carlespolo1/hl2d3r8jaork25k8> and on **WhatsApp**. These two platforms provide the Ibero-American community of practitioners and scholars with the opportunity to share knowledge, experiences, and results on the efficacy of the practice of appreciative change. It also organizes bimonthly webinars for the continuing education of its members. These webinars are organized by the team that is promoting the Appreciative Paradigm and Universidad del Desarrollo in Chile.

I consider that this **imperative of the theoretical and practical development** of Appreciative Inquiry is the most powerful argument we have, based on Kuhn's theory, that we are indeed facing a new paradigm for social change that has been adopted by a global community of practitioners and theorists and which is proving to be more effective than other paradigms of social change. We can therefore assert that Appreciative Inquiry has reached the necessary maturity to meet the requirements of a Scientific Paradigm in the Social Sciences.

2. 4. The imperative that Cooperrider (2021) has explicitly suggested

Another imperative or reason why I am proposing the Appreciative Paradigm is because Cooperrider, the creator of Appreciative Inquiry, explicitly suggested that in his last book (2021), in which he stated: “**Appreciative Inquiry, at a paradigm level, is part of today's emerging ‘enlivenment’ and ‘relational being’ paradigms** (Weber, 2008; Gergen, 2014)” (Cooperrider, 2021 p. 22). In this book, Cooperrider contends for the first time that **Appreciative Inquiry is an emerging paradigm** like the others he names and describes very briefly in this preface to his doctoral dissertation. In that introduction Cooperrider conceptualizes Appreciative Inquiry following a rigorous academic scientific process that is fascinating. This is essential reading for any scholar and practitioner who is interested in finding out about the original objective of Appreciative Inquiry, with that aim being to create a new research methodology within applied research in the social sciences.

Many of the authors of the original books present **Appreciative Inquiry** as a revolution. For example, this is exactly what Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros

understand Appreciative Inquiry to be in the title of the Preface to their book, *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook* (2003), “Appreciative Inquiry: A Powerful Positive Revolution in Change”. Kuhn (1960) mentions the necessity of scientific revolutions to advance science and how every paradigm involves a scientific revolution in both the physical and social sciences. So, we can conclude that if Appreciative Inquiry is “**a powerful positive revolution for change**” in the social sciences, **it is therefore a new paradigm**. Given his assertions, I cannot help but wonder, *why has Cooperrider not used and developed the term “paradigm” when referring to Appreciative Inquiry?*

2. 5. The imperative to be consistent with one of the principles of appreciative language

Another reason why I propose the use of the term and concept **Appreciative Paradigm** is to be consistent with the fundamental principle of **appreciative language**, which is that *the words we use create the world we live in, how we see it, communicate it, and transform it*.

Table 2 below illustrates the difference between what we communicate when we say that “Appreciative Inquiry is a Paradigm” versus “Appreciative Inquiry is a Methodology”.

Table 2
Paradigm Versus Methodology

What world (idea) do we create with AI when we say it is a PARADIGM?	What world (idea) do we create with AI when we say it is a METHODOLOGY?
A new way of looking (Ontology/Theory) at human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live.	It ignores, at least explicitly, the idea that we have of human beings and of their behavior in the social and natural world.
A new way to study (Epistemology/Research) human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live.	It ignores, at least explicitly, that research and the creation of new knowledge is the original objective of Appreciative Inquiry.
A new way to transform (Praxis) the behavior of human beings in the social and natural world in which they live.	It ignores, at least explicitly, the other components of the appreciative paradigm.

<p>A new way of valuing (Axiology) human behavior and the social and natural world in which they live.</p>	<p>It ignores, at least explicitly, the fundamental values that should guide the practice of our activity.</p>
<p>A new way of speaking (Language) about human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live.</p>	<p>It ignores, at least explicitly, the transformative power of the language that we use.</p>

As we can see in this table, the difference is clear and compelling. Accordingly, I think we can state, once again, that Appreciative Inquiry is much more than a methodology, it is a **Paradigm**.

Based on the reasons presented: the personal imperative, the imperative regarding our need for a holistic/gestalt and organic view of what Appreciative Inquiry is, the imperative of the development achieved at the practical and theoretical level, the fact that Cooperrider has already explicitly suggested it, and the imperative of being coherent with one of the main principles of the appreciative language, I propose the following statement:

*Appreciative Inquiry, since it was conceived in 1987, is being used globally by a community by a community of practitioners of personal development and social systems and scholars in the field of the social sciences who have found the appreciative paradigm to be much more effective to accomplish change at the personal and organizational levels, and to build a better social world than previous paradigms have achieved. Therefore, we can assert that we are experiencing a paradigm shift in the social sciences and that the **appreciative paradigm** is emerging.*

III. THE APPRECIATIVE PARADIGM

In this section I propose a definition of the Appreciative Paradigm and a summary of the five fundamental characteristics of each of its five components: Appreciative Ontology, Appreciative Epistemology, Appreciative Praxis, Appreciative Axiology, and Appreciative Language.

3.1. Definition of the Appreciative Paradigm

The **Appreciative Paradigm** is a **new way of seeing and understanding (Ontology), studying (Epistemology/Research), transforming (Praxis), valuing (Axiology), and speaking (language)** about human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live, which has been adopted by a global community of scholars and practitioners because they find it more effective than

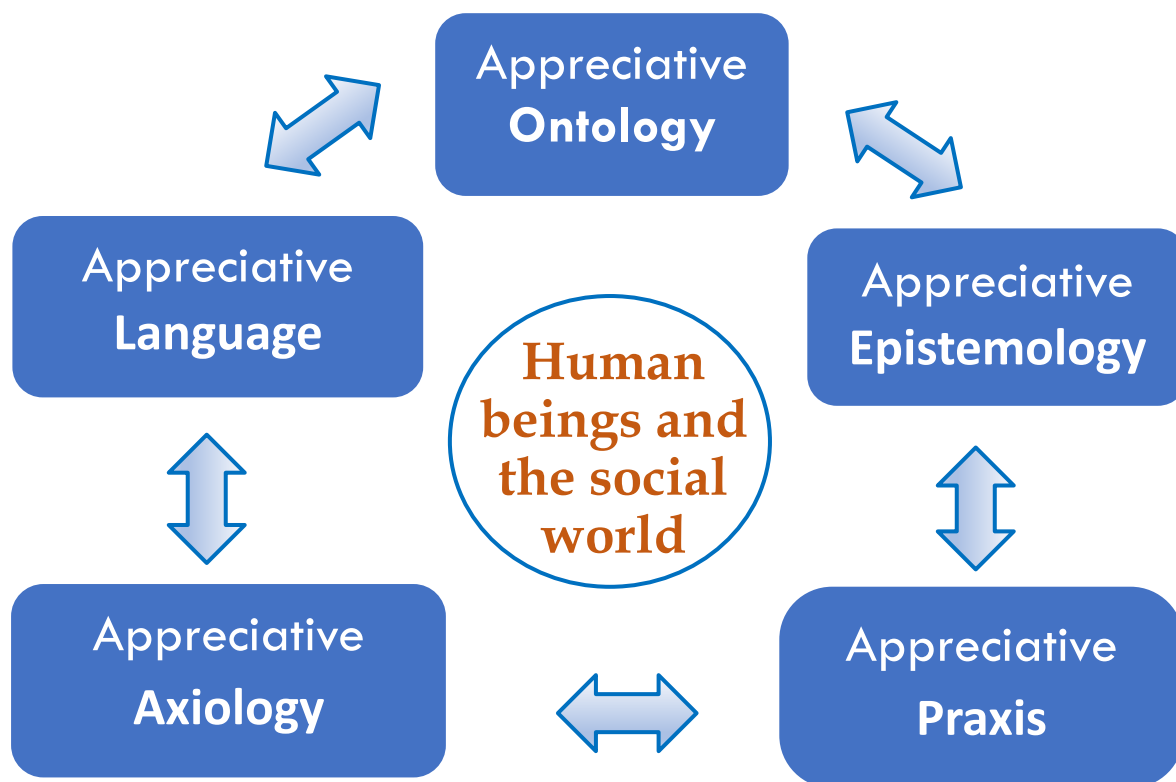
other social paradigms, as demonstrated by the development and success achieved at the practical and theoretical levels.

3. 2. Components of the Appreciative Paradigm (Figure 2)

In this section I offer what I would call a first attempt to demonstrate how the appreciative paradigm does indeed have an Ontology, an Epistemology, a Praxis, an Axiology, and a Language that are original and different to other social paradigms. To do this, I propose some of the fundamental, unique, and distinctive principles of each of the five components of the appreciative paradigm.

Figure 2

COMPONENTS OF THE APPRECIATIVE PARADIGM



3. 2. 1. APPRECIATIVE ONTOLOGY

The fundamental principles of **Appreciative Ontology**, that is to say, **how the appreciative paradigm views and defines** human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live, are the following:

First, human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live is a mystery that we are unable to fully understand. We always find that there is something that we cannot explain and which also inspires admiration and disappointment in us because humans are capable of the best and the worst. The view of life as a mystery and not as a problem that we have to solve radically changes our relationship with the world (Marcel, 1963).

Second, in every human being and in every social and natural system in which they live (family, team, organization, community, nature) there is a **core of strengths, a positive potential** that is **waiting to emerge** and which we have to discover and develop in collaboration.

Third, the view that we human beings have of ourselves and of the reality and nature in which we live is **subjective, socially co-constructed, and dynamic**, that is, ever changing. Social reality (the observable behavior in a social system) is perceived in a highly subjective manner by each of its agents and, therefore, each of them constructs his or her own view of reality (his/her mental interpretation). This subjective view of reality only becomes conscious when it is communicated and only in dialogue with others can we manage to construct it.

Fourth, human beings have **infinite creative capacity**, as we have demonstrated in the world we have co-constructed since we first appeared on the Earth. One only need look at the creativity we have achieved in technology, the arts, architecture, agriculture, and so forth, and what is waiting to emerge.

Fifth, human beings and the social systems in which we operate generate an irresistible energy and will to strive to build a better future from the very first moment we are invited to discover our positive core and empower it collectively.

Questions:

What are other unique features of Appreciative Ontology regarding human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live that distinguish it from other ontologies?

What are the implications of this Appreciative Ontology for Appreciative Epistemology/Research, Appreciative Praxis, Appreciative Axiology, and Appreciative Language?

3. 2. 2. APPRECIATIVE EPISTEMOLOGY

The fundamental principles of **Appreciative Epistemology**, that is, **how to become familiar with (investigate) human beings in terms of their behavior** in the social and natural world in which they live, are the following:

First, we examine **what gives life to (animates) human beings and all social systems in extraordinary, ordinary, and tragic moments** (Cooperrider, 2021). In doing this, we include something that traditional research has ignored, which is to study the **extraordinary and the ordinary, and not merely what does not work (the problem)**, which has been the predominant focus of research in the social sciences. With this statement we can move past the misunderstanding that Appreciative Inquiry focuses only on the positive, on what works, and not on the negative and what does not work (the problem).

Second, the objective of our research is **to discover the future that is about to emerge**. Our aim is to study what we are and what we want to become as human beings, as a society, as an organization, as a team, and as a cosmos (universe). (Cooperrider, 2021, p. 27). We research in order to create prototypes of a better future that transforms our lives and society (Cooperrider, 2021).

Third, appreciative inquiry is a form of qualitative applied research (Cooperrider, 2021). That is, a research methodology that is not only capable of **creating new social theoretical knowledge**, but also **new social practical knowledge** (Reed, 2007). Its objective is the discovery of new explanations or plans of action that allow us to better understand and transform the social world (Cooperrider, 2021).

Fourth, Appreciative Inquiry, as a form of grounded theory, challenges the classic research methods of social sciences and **“asserts, first of all, that we can all be original theorists, and that theory developed inductively from the real world, with real voices, and in real settings, could not only create more relevance in theory, but also invite more original and creative theorizing”** (Cooperrider, 2021, p. 28-29). For these reasons, Appreciative Inquiry incorporates methodologies that have been ignored in social sciences, such as art, poetry, meditation, intuition, and so forth (Cooperrider, 2021).

Fifth, in Appreciative Epistemology we believe that **research and social change are simultaneous processes**. Appreciative inquiry proposes that the change we want to appear in people, organizations, and communities when we conduct research should begin from the very first moment the process of inquiry is initiated and not just when the action plan or the new social change scenarios that have been generated are implemented (Reed, 2007, p. vii-viii). This principle has traditionally been ignored by the majority of traditional research methods in the social sciences.

Questions:

What are the unique characteristics of Appreciative Epistemology/Inquiry about human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live that distinguish it from other epistemologies/research methods?

What are the implications of this Appreciative Epistemology/Inquiry for Appreciative Ontology, Appreciative Praxis, Appreciative Axiology, and Appreciative Language?

3. 2. 3. THE APPRECIATIVE PRAXIS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Appreciative Praxis is a **new way of generating social change** in human beings and in the social and natural systems in which they live. The fundamental principles of **Appreciative Praxis**, that is to say, how we change human beings and social systems, are the following:

First, the goal of **Appreciative Praxis** – Appreciative Methodology/Intervention-Inquiry – of Social Change is discovering what gives life and what is best in human beings and in social and natural systems at extraordinary, everyday, and tragic moments, because it is based on the belief that **in every human being and social system there is potential and a great many positive stories and values** that are both authentic and inspiring which are waiting to be discovered.

Second, Appreciative Praxis is a new way of **generating positive social change** and the **future that is about to emerge in relation to human beings and their behavior in social systems and nature** by generating new prototypes (scenarios) of behavior of the future that we desire and which has yet to emerge.

Third, the **process of this Appreciative Praxis/Methodology/Intervention/Inquiry for social change**, which is original and flexible, consists of six basic, but not unique, phases:

- 1) Identify the **inner point of consciousness** from which all participants will operate.
- 2) Define the **issue that** we wish to transform.
- 3) Discover the **core of strengths** with the **Appreciative Interview**.
- 4) **Dream** the ideal social reality that we would like to have.
- 5) **Design the culture and structure** of that ideal social reality.
- 6) **Live that ideal social reality**

Fourth, the Appreciative Praxis of personal and social change is **collaborative, inclusive, and democratic**. All members of a social system are included in the entire process of change with the same power of participation in deliberation and decision making.

Fifth, the appreciative praxis of personal and social change is **gestaltic (total)**, that is, in the process of change it includes emotionality, rationality, intuition, admiration, imagination, will, and commitment.

Questions:

What are the unique features of Appreciative Praxis of Social Change that characterize it and distinguish it from other praxis/practices for human and social change?

What are the implications of this **Appreciative Praxis of Social Change** Appreciative Praxis/Practice/Intervention/Inquiry for Appreciative Epistemology/Inquiry, for Appreciative Ontology, Appreciative Axiology/Values, and Appreciative Language?

3. 2. 4. Appreciative Axiology

Appreciative Axiology is a new way of appreciating (valuing) human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live. The fundamental values of **Appreciative Axiology** are as follows:

First, we value what **gives life** to human beings and social systems in the ordinary, the extraordinary, and the tragic in all possible contexts. **Everything that happens to human beings and everything that happens in social systems is an opportunity to learn and improve.**

Second, we value the **positive potential** that every human being and social system has, positive potential that we must discover and develop.

Third, we value the infinite **creative capacity** of human beings. It is always possible to improve. We value **creating something new or better** when we discover that it does not work rather than fixing it.

Fourth, we value the power of **focusing on the positive**. We believe that when we focus on the positive, **we awaken the best** characteristics of human beings and social systems: their motivation, energy, and creativity.

Fifth, we value the power of **anticipating how we are going to act** before we do so (the anticipatory principle) to develop creativity and excellence in carrying out what we do.

Questions:

What are the implications of Appreciative Axiology/Values for Appreciative Ontology, for Appreciative Epistemology/Inquiry, for the Praxis of Appreciative Change-Intervention/Inquiry, and Appreciative Language?

What are the **fundamental values** that characterize and distinguish Appreciative Axiology/Values? That is, what are the values and beliefs that are unique, provocative, challenging, energizing, motivating, inspiring, and which characterize and distinguish it from other axiologies with regard to human beings and their behavior in the social world and in nature?

3. 2. 5. APPRECIATIVE LANGUAGE

Appreciative Language is a new way of talking about human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world in which they live. The main principles of **Appreciative Language** are as follows:

First, the appreciative paradigm asserts that **language we use creates the world in which we live on a personal level and the world in which we live in the different social systems in which we operate. And it also creates the world that we want to emerge in us and in the different social systems in which we operate** (Cooperrider, 2021). The words we use create what we see, what we feel, what we are. **Appreciative language is capable of generating new possibilities**, as it changes the way we see, the way we feel, and the way we act. If we want to change ourselves and the world we live in, we must change our language.

Second, it is a language that knows how **to listen appreciatively to the negative** in order to reformulate it and thus be able to view the negative as an opportunity to generate new positive possibilities for understanding and acting.

Third, it is a language that generates **emotions, thoughts, and affirmative actions**. Appreciative language values the use of words that arouse emotions and generate passions more than rational language that generates ideas and concepts.

Fourth, appreciative language values and practices the use of metaphor, poetry, storytelling (**metaphorical and poetic, narrative**) because it allows communication with greater depth, strength, and beauty than conceptual and expository language.

Fifth, it is **personalized** language (not impersonal) that generates commitment and action. For example, "I am going to be more creative," "We are going to be more creative" as opposed to "We have to be more creative."

Questions:

What are the unique characteristics of Appreciative Language? What are the unique characteristics of appreciative language that distinguish it from the language of other paradigms in the social sciences?

What are the implications of this Appreciative Language for Appreciative Ontology, for Appreciative Epistemology/Inquiry, for Praxis of Appreciative Change, and for Appreciative Axiology/Values?

III. CONCLUSION

My proposal of the Appreciative Paradigm is only a first attempt and, therefore, its evolution and development has only just begun. I am aware that what I share in this essay is merely my point of view and that each of you, readers, scholars, and practitioners, all have your own perspectives. I would therefore like to invite you to collaborate in the co-construction of this emerging paradigm, sharing the discoveries that we make every day based on the experience, reflection, research, and practice of the appreciative paradigm. If you wish, you can send me your comments and contributions to this email address: federico.varona@sjsu.edu. Many thanks!

References

Barrett, F. B., & Fry, R. E., (2005). *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Approach to Building Cooperative Capacity*. Chagrin Falls, Ohio: Taos Institute Publication.

Cooperrider, D. (2021). *Prospective Theory: Appreciative Inquiry: Toward a Methodology for Understanding and Enhancing Organizational Innovation*. Kindle Edition.

Cooperrider, D., & Sekerka L. E., (2003). *Toward a Theory of Positive Organizational Change*. In Cameron, K., Dutton, J. E., Quinn, R. E., (Eds.), *Positive Organizational Scholarship*. San Francisco. Berrett-Koehler Publisher, Inc.

Cooperrider, D., Whitney, D., & Stavros, J., (2003). *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook*. First in a Series of AI Workbooks for Leaders of Change. Bedford Heights Ohio: Lakeshore Publishers.

Cooperrider, D. (1990). "Positive Image, Positive Action: The Affirmative Basis of Organizing." In S. Srivastva & David Cooperrider (Eds.), *Appreciative Management and Leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. (2004). *Social Construction: Entering the Dialogue*. Chagrin Falls, Ohio. Taos Institute Publications.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (2009). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research (4th edition)*. New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105–117). Sage Publications, Inc.

Hacking, I. (2012). Introductory Essay to Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (50th Anniversary Edition). University of Chicago Press. Kindle Edition.

Kivunja, C., & Kuyini, A. B. (2017). Understanding and Applying Research Paradigms in Educational Contexts *International Journal of Higher Education* Vol. 6, No. 5; 2017. <http://ijhe.sciedupress.com>.

Kuhn, T. S. (1962, 1970, 1996, 2012). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (50th Anniversary Edition). University of Chicago Press. Kindle Edition.

Kuhn, T. S. (1972) [1962]. *La estructura de las revoluciones científicas* [The Structure of Scientific Revolutions] *México, D. F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica. [ISBN 9788437500461](https://www.isbn-international.org/product/9788437500461).

Lewin, K. (1951). *Field Theory in Social Science. Selected Theoretical Papers*. New York: Harper and Roe.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (Eds. 1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Marcel, G. (1963). *The Existential background of human dignity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

McLellan, D. (1970). *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*. London: McMillan and Co.

Pavez, I., Godwin, L., & Spreitzer, G. (2021). Generative Scholarship Through Prospective Theorizing: Appreciating the Roots and Legacy of Organization Development and Change to Build a Bright Future. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Vol. 57(4) 459–470.

Petrovic, G. (1991). "Praxis". In Bottomore, T., Harris, L., Kiernan, V. G., Miliband, R. (Eds.), *The Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Second edition). Blackwell Publishers Ltd. [ISBN 0-631-16481-2](https://www.isbn-international.org/product/0631164812).

Reed, J. (2007). *Appreciative Inquiry. Research for Change*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Subirana, M., & Cooperrider, D., (2013). *Indagación Apreciativa. Un enfoque innovador para la transformación personal y de las organizaciones* [Appreciative Inquiry. An innovative approach to personal and organizational transformation]. Barcelona, Spain: Editorial Kairós.

Varona Madrid, F. (2020, 2nd Edition). *La Intervención Apiciativa. Un nuevo paradigma para el cambio positivo en las organizaciones para profesores, estudiantes universitarios, consultores, y gerentes* [Appreciative Intervention. A new paradigm for positive change in organizations for teachers, university students, consultants, and managers]. Barranquilla, Colombia: Universidad del Norte.

Varona Madrid, F. (2009, 1st. Edition). *La Intervención Apiciativa. Una manera nueva, provocadora, y efectiva para construir las organizaciones del siglo XXI* [Appreciative Intervention. A new, provocative, and effective way to build 21st century organizations]. Barranquilla, Colombia: Universidad del Norte.

Watkins, J. M., Mohr, B., & Kelly, R. (2011). *Appreciative Inquiry. Change at the Speed of Imagination*. 2nd Edition. San Francisco: Published by Pfeiffer.

Weber, A. (2008). *Enlivenment: Toward a Poetics for the Anthropocene*. Cambridge Mass: MIT Press. See also: Gergen, K. (2009). *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wertheimer, M. (1938b). Gestalt theory. In W. D. Ellis (Ed.), *A source book of Gestalt psychology* (pp. 1-11). London, England: Routledge & Kegan Paul. (Original work published 1924).