

Constructing the Future Together: National Police in Eastern Colombia

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This work grew out of a commitment of a Police Commander to strengthen the use of values in the police. The authors brought an approach which combined the best of two worlds – OS and AI – to the formal culture of the police. They invited the policemen to tap into their best experiences as police officers, to do some generative planning on the six themes in the police’s mission statement and to do some appreciative time travel into a preferred future.

Valores en la Policía



BUCARAMANGA. El general Hipólito Herrera Carreño (centro), comandante de la Policía en Santander, comprometió a su institución a aplicar un manual de valores en los programas de acercamiento con la comunidad. En un acto efectuado en la Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga, el oficial insistió en fortalecer en su personal el buen comportamiento, la espiritualidad y las buenas relaciones interpersonales.

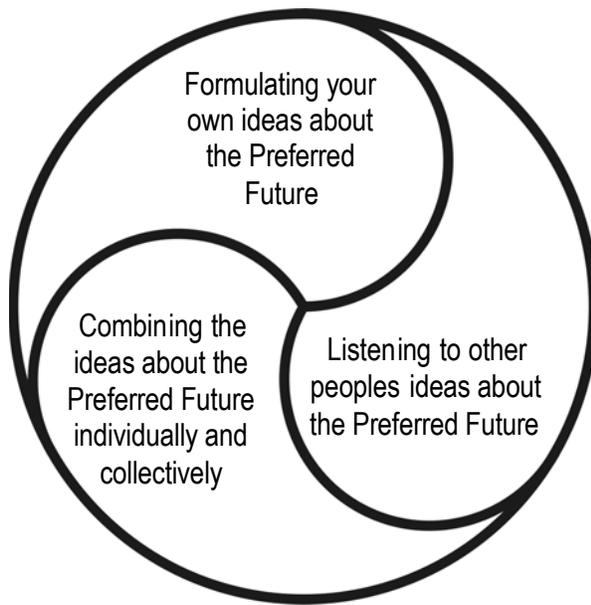
The Contact

One day in June 2004 Sara was reading the newspaper and saw a picture titled: Values in the Police. Her father was pictured with the bishop and the Chief of Police in Bucaramanga, in eastern Colombia, the city of her birth. The caption said that General Hipólito Herrera, commander in chief of the Santander Police committed his institution to apply a manual of values created with the community through support by UNAB, Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga. He talked about strengthening good behavior, spirituality and interpersonal relations in all policemen. Sara's father is the founder and vice

president of UNAB. She phoned him: “We want to help.” A three-hour conference with 280 police officers resulted.

Combining the Best of Two Worlds

We have combined ideas and elements from Open Space (OS) and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) for several years using AI's language and OS's movement from large group to small and back, participants choosing based on their passion. We are consultants with very different cultural backgrounds (Danish and Colombian) who share a dream: serving people with



useful tools and methods to make the world a better place. Life has been generous with us so we wish to share our experiences creating better futures for individuals, groups, organizations and communities.

We see the core of Open Space as a loosely coupled network of democratic conversations and the core of Appreciative Inquiry as a deliberate choice of talking about successes and potentials to generate improved relationships, positive images of a preferred future and knowledge on how to build that future together. We believe that Open Space and Appreciative Inquiry work like we have shown in this figure.

Appreciative Naming of the Conference: “Constructing the future with others”

Open Space invitations inspire us. Combined with ideas from AI, we defined three principles for the conference name. It should: be formulated positively, be an invitation to the future and include everybody who has to implement the results.

Welcome by the Host

Arriving early, we watched the officers report group by group – mounted police, airport police, internal affairs, community police and road police – to the commandant, who ensured they saluted the general when he arrived. They sang the Colombian national anthem and the hymn of Santander. The general welcomed everyone, then gave us command. We were struck by the very formal start and the informal way we planned to work.

Appreciative Naming

We introduced ourselves by telling stories about our names:

- Kaj is Chinese and means to Open; Voetmann means a soldier, a servant or a courier. By naming me Kaj Voetmann, my parents decided my destiny was going into the world and fighting to help people open something.
- Sara means princess. Gómez is the name of the people who harvested Góma from rubber trees and taught the world its many uses. By naming me Sara Gómez, my parents decided my purpose was to be the princess of the people bringing useful things to benefit people.

We told the participants that we travel the world finding useful ideas to open the future together and that we would share the best ideas with them.

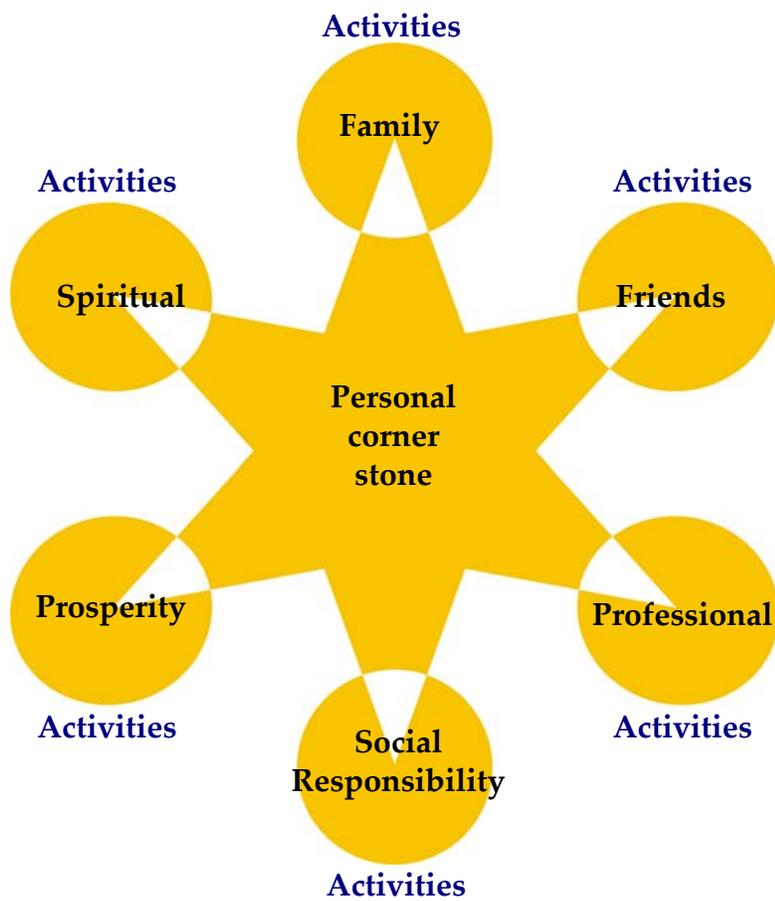
Appreciative Purpose Definition

We asked people to tear a piece of paper from their chair into four small pieces.

Then we asked them to answer this question four times - one answer on each piece: What

gives your life meaning? When everyone had four answers, we asked them to choose the one they valued least and crumble it. We did this two more times, leaving their most valued answer - the corner stone in their life. We showed them this figure to connect their personal corner stone to their communities of practice:

Personal Communities of practice



Past - Present - Future

We told them that this connects their past, present and future activities in all of their personal networks. The next activity was to build or improve relationships with these communities.

Appreciative Interviews

We gave them five questions connected to their work for paired interviews:

1. What are the best experiences you have had as a police officer?
2. What made them possible? What did you do? What did other people do? What were the circumstances?
3. What would have made these experiences even better?
4. What were the visible results of these experiences?
5. What do you value so much that it made you choose these experiences?

Two volunteers shared their stories with the whole group. In one, the guerrillas assaulted the police station. The officer in charge, who told the story, asked the other officers to protect the community from terrorist action. They did their best and happily no one was killed. At a meeting afterwards, the community thanked the brave officers for saving their lives. The storyteller was proud of himself and his colleagues. He was promoted for his actions. He valued this experience because it showed how police officers serve the country and act as community guardians.

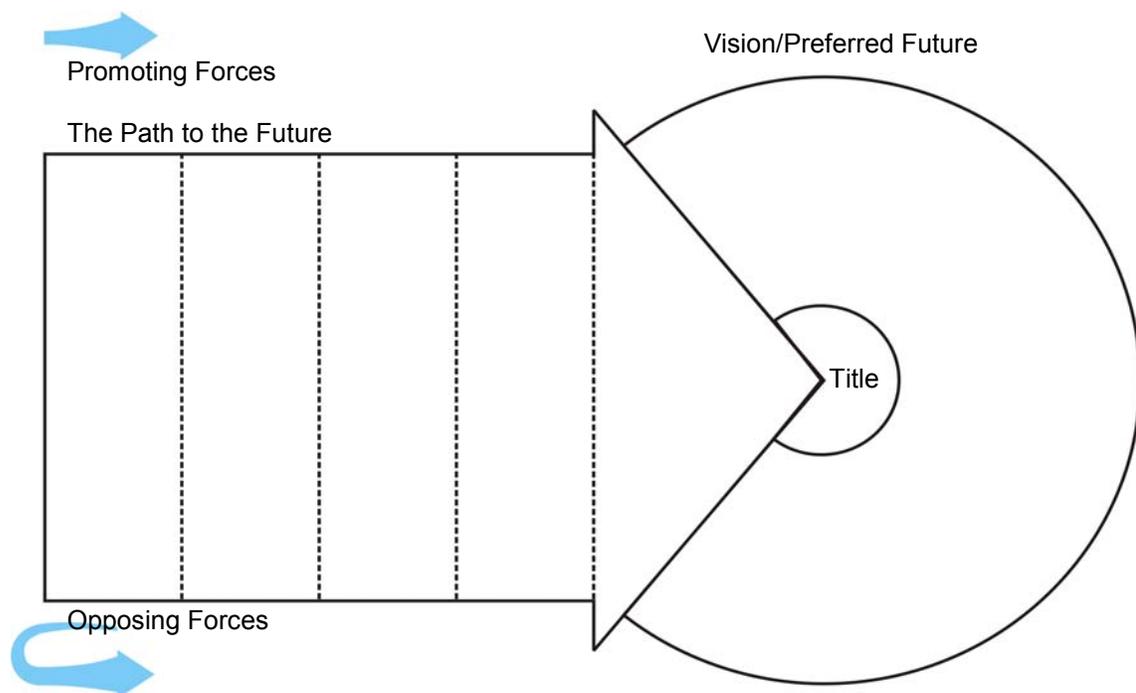
The other story was from a policewoman who worked at El Dorado, the Bogotá International airport. She was searching a suitcase and suspected it contained cocaine. She called another officer for help. The suitcase owner offered her money for her silence. She refused, making sure that the man went to jail. She was proud of herself, feeling that she improved the institution's image by demonstrating honesty.

Generative Planning in Small Groups

Before the conference, we had identified six themes based on the police's mission statement and the project they did with UNAB. They were:

1. Citizenship Culture
2. Service to the community
3. Ethical and moral values
4. Competent police officers in a democratic country
5. Tolerant and respectful people
6. Spirit of cooperation

Given our time and the group's size, we asked the participants to form 18 groups around the themes. They self-selected their group, with the general leading the way. We gave each group a large piece of paper with the design below. We call this graphic tool "generative planning" and use it with Appreciative Inquiry.



Appreciative Time Travel

We gave them these instructions:

“Travel to the year 2009, when all your ideas have come true. Describe it in the present tense. If there are multiple ideas about life in 2009, put them all in the circle.

“It is still 2009. Tell the story of how you got here. If there are multiple ideas, put them all in the large arrow.”



Appreciative Force Field Analysis

Next, we asked people to find the driving forces inside and outside themselves to create the preferred future, writing them over the arrow. Under the arrow, they wrote the opposing forces blocking the preferred future. For each opposing force, they brainstormed ways to overcome them or turn them to an advantage.

Sharing Generative Plans

We asked one of each thematic group to present their plans to everyone. Individual and collective decisions were left for after the conference. Here are some of the results:

The most important opposing force was corruption. To overcome it, the roots of change are in the families. Parents are the example and we must start with the children.

Appreciative Gossip about Past Achievements

We asked everybody to time travel again, this time to 2005 and gossip about what began back in 2004, when they co-constructed their future.

The most important change was to a positive mindset. The nature of their work and the risks they face daily are always in problem oriented language. After that day, they started using positive language and telling positive stories about their work.

The Appreciative Wave

We finished our part by doing “the wave”. You might know this from sports. We had 280 police officers jumping up and down with us. After this they sang the police hymn. The commandant thanked them for coming and sent them back to work.

Reflections

We combined the philosophies behind Appreciative Inquiry and Open Space:

From Appreciative Inquiry

- Use constructive, future oriented language

From Open Space

- Empower participants to use their resources in the best possible way

From both AI and OS

- Engage everybody in the communication
- Create a spirit of cooperation
- Tell the stories of passion (OS) and of pride (AI)
- Involve everyone responsible for implementation

We see the combination as the best way to work smarter, collectively, reflectively, emotionally and spiritually.

“Not the autocracy of a single stubborn melody on the one hand.
Nor the anarchy of unchecked noise on the other.
No, a delicate balance between the two; an enlightened freedom.”

*Johann Sebastian
Bach*

“Communication is not saying something, it's being heard.”

*Frances Hesselbein
Chairman of Leader to Leader, Formerly the Drucker Foundation
June 2, 2003 Collective Chaordic Spirit Interview*

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