



UKVI: Facing into Change

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UKVI Facing into Change

This report is compiled from interviews with people who have been involved with the Appreciative Inquiry initiative at UKVI. It includes direct quotes from the core teams in Croydon, Sheffield and Liverpool, people involved in Continuous Improvement and Customer Service Excellence, four Directors, and Director General Sarah Rapson and her Chief of Staff.

The report was prepared by the Institute for Employment Studies from interviews and group discussions carried out between September and November 2014.

Executive Summary

UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) was established in April 2013, replacing part of the UK Border Agency (UKBA), which was split into separate units within the Home Office. The legacy of the organisational split was a loss of confidence, a lack of belief that change programmes work and the need to energise UKVI around a vision of a 'safe and secure visa and immigration system' supported by three key principles: becoming Consistently Competent; being High Performing and having Customer Focus.

The Appreciative Inquiry (AI) initiative was designed to engage hearts and minds, and empower staff themselves to make the organisation a place they could be proud of.

The AI initiative

Rather than fixing problems, AI is a methodology that amplifies what is working well, thereby generating positive energy for change. By gathering and comparing stories of excellence, when people have felt at their best and produced great outcomes, staff are able to determine the root causes of success. These provide a basis for action as people take responsibility for the changes they want to see.

At UKVI the initiative began with a meeting of the Senior Team but the real impetus came from bringing together 18 committed individuals from across the organisational hierarchy who became the 'Core Team'. Following training in AI interviewing techniques, they went out into the organisation to collect around 120 'high point' stories during April 2014. The following month they met again to analyse the common success factors in these stories, producing five root causes of success (and a sixth at a later stage):

- We are at our best when we feel valued and respected.
- We are at our best when we really listen and respond to each other.
- We are at our best when we join up and work together.
- We are at our best when we are trusted to deliver in our own way.
- We are at our best when we bring a positive outlook to work.
- We are at our best when we are open and transparent.

Spread and sustainability

The core team have reached out to new audiences and spread the message in multiple ways:

- Presentations to visitors and invites from other teams who want to know more.
- Literature such as quick guides to AI.
- Notice boards and displays around their buildings.
- Building new networks and joint initiatives with other teams.
- An event for HEO's across Permanent Migration to raise awareness of how AI techniques can be used in 'business as usual'.

They have worked to embed change through:

- Bringing an AI lens to meetings, by asking what leads to success rather than focussing on what has gone wrong.
- New approaches to team meetings to acknowledge success and foster pride.
- Integrating activities into Customer Service and Continuous Improvement initiatives and complementing these programmes by investigating the conditions that give rise to successful outcomes.
- Setting up Positive Action Groups to make bottom-up changes that are important to staff and their wellbeing and getting other colleagues involved.

Early impact

The AI initiative is already showing impact at individual, team and organisational levels:

For Individuals

- People engaged in the AI process are starting to feel more positive.
- They are finding it refreshing to acknowledge their hard work and successes.
- There is anecdotal evidence from the AI stories and the interviews that the movement is winning hearts and minds.

For teams

- For those involved, team meetings are becoming more positive, identifying new ways to bring about improvements and raise productivity.
- There is an increased sense of pride through initiatives such as the 'proud board' and different ways introduced to acknowledge and celebrate success.

- It is becoming easier to talk about change.

For the organisation

- There is a sense of engagement and a more positive atmosphere in areas where AI has been introduced.
- AI has provided an opportunity to create trust between managers and staff that it is 'OK to collaborate and think outside the box'.
- More people are talking positively about Continuous Improvement (CI) and taking personal pride in improvement.
- People are spotting opportunities for improvement and taking them forward.
- There are examples of collaboration across teams and building networks to improve efficiency and productivity.
- The initiative has provided an opportunity for talent spotting, giving individuals who may not otherwise have had it, the opportunity to be leaders of change.
- Positive Action Groups are demonstrating a bottom up approach to change in various areas that are important to staff.

Challenges

There are many encouraging signs that the AI initiative will continue to gain momentum and grow but people are also aware that there are many challenges to face. These include:

Legacy, size and climate

- UKVI is an organisation with a legacy of criticism and for many staff this has left deep rooted scepticism.
- It is a large organisation and spread needs to be rapid to keep up the momentum. It is still early days and enthusiasm is still 'in pockets'.
- There are tough times ahead for UKVI because of financial pressures on the public sector. Some fear that a turbulent period will derail the fledgling movement.
- In particular middle managers are under acute pressure to deliver and may not see the AI movement as a top priority.

Organisational culture

- AI can feel culturally uncomfortable and very personal.
- The organisational architecture and other processes might not support change sufficiently.

General flux

- Key core team members and PAG members might move on to other roles, leading to instability in the teams.

Outcomes

- The outcomes remain uncertain and it is hard to assess how far AI is contributing to other initiatives such as Continuous Improvement.
- Some are unsure whether negativity has to be actively challenged and dealt with or whether it simply 'gets crowded out' by positive change. The experience of AI remains relatively limited.

Evaluating Success

The evaluation of change requires a long term perspective and the AI initiative is still relatively young. This report has therefore drawn on a framework that examines success and failure factors for social movements by Garrow and Cox, 2010. To date the UKVI initiative appears to demonstrate key success factors while avoiding those that lead to a decline in momentum. These include:

Offering a 'persuasive frame'

- Rooting change in values (becoming Consistently Competent; being High Performing and having Customer Focus) and engaging both 'head and heart'.
- Offering positive messages rather than endless criticism, blame and sense of failure. These resonate with individuals' own beliefs and aspirations.
- Providing opportunities to get involved in the core teams and collect stories from people at all levels in the hierarchy.

Building a sense of identity

- Enlisting 'activists' and champions of AI in the core team, who are peers that others can relate to and respect.
- Reflecting people's own experience by sharing stories and engaging them in a vision of what is possible as well as generating a collective sense of pride.
- Bringing together more people through the Summit and other events to share stories, and a call to action through the PAG groups.
- Breaking down hierarchy, with junior staff members often taking the lead and influencing Directors as well as colleagues.
- Bringing more appreciative language into meetings and organisational processes.
- Challenging leaders in the organisation, enabling barriers to be broken down.

Mobilising – translating enthusiasm into action

- UKVI is benefiting from strong commitment and leadership from the top and a groundswell of bottom-up ideas and enthusiasm.
- Support is still available from the OD&D service in the form of action learning sets and follow up events are keeping the movement future focussed.
- Engaging middle managers in the process and recognising them as a key group, with some already playing important roles in facilitating change in their own areas.
- Structures such as Comms and HR need to encourage, mirror and help to amplify the progress of the movement so that it extends its reach.
- There are already quick wins happening (Chapter Five, 'Early Impact'). So far there are no reports of negative consequences.

Conclusion

The conclusions of this report are that the AI initiative is progressing well against the social movement model. It is, however, important that this fledgling movement is monitored and supported until the tipping point is reached where it becomes self-sufficient and 'business as usual'.

The initial signs are that the movement is constantly expanding, drawing in more activists and attracting interest from new teams. Invitations and requests for help to the core teams suggest that their influence is growing and new champions are stepping up to spread the message. The focus on processes such as communications, performance review, talent management and training also indicate a trend to ensure AI becomes central to business as usual. The evidence base of success is also continuing to grow with individual and team stories finding new audiences. For those who have been involved with the AI initiative so far, it is helping them find new meaning at work and confidence to meet change and make a difference and at the same time renewing a sense of pride in their work.

1. Fertile ground

We have changed our name, we have changed our structures but we have never done anything about how we feel about working here.

UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) was established in April 2013, replacing part of the UK Border Agency (UKBA), which was split into separate units within the Home Office.

The legacy of the organisational split was a loss of confidence, a lack of belief that change programmes work and the need to energise UKVI around a vision of a 'safe and secure visa and immigration system' supported by three key principles: becoming Consistently Competent; being High Performing and having Customer Focus.

Immigration is a very controversial subject politically, it is a bit of a football and staff can get caught in the crossfire – it can be negative and that can translate into the workplace. But you can still be creative and positive, you can still have ideas and we can still celebrate best practice.

UKVI is an organisation that makes decisions about people and staff engagement is seen as vital. An exploration into organisational culture showed that there was some way to go to engage hearts and minds but the DG, Sarah Rapson, did not want to go down the route of a general 'culture change' programme. She was keen to do something with the Leadership and when the Organisational Development & Design Service suggested an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) methodology, Sarah saw an opportunity to generate some positive thinking and energy so that people would 'feel' better about the organisation. The rationale was that if they felt more positive about their work, then staff would make a greater contribution towards delivering the organisation's performance objectives.

What would success look like?

Staff members had various ideas of what a successful outcome would be:

- Not using AI language or jargon, finding a more natural UKVI language and embedding AI into 'business as usual'.
- A healthy organisation emerging that is engaged and exhilarated. People responding in a positive and innovative way, not accepting second best and proud of their environment.

- Making lots of connections and better understanding across UKVI. Breaking down some of the organisational boundaries so that it would be recognisable that you are walking into a UKVI space.
- Improving the existing work being done on Continuous Improvement, Customer Service Excellence and change, with a greater number of people initiating positive improvements; people responding to problems and solving them themselves.
- Better, speedier and more confident decision making.
- People feeling a sense of pride and purpose in what they do, taking a personal interest in improving things and making things happen.
- Not hearing people complaining that they are not involved and a genuine sense of empowerment when you talk to people.
- Working in an environment that embodies the UKVI principles.
- The organisational structure to have been changed by the people operating it to enable them to give of their best rather than by a central change team.

The challenge for the OD&D team was to help people realise some of these aspirations and to mobilise staff to action.

2. Finding the energy for change

We run a massive operation about vast numbers of people - tangible, physical shifting – we are good at excel spread sheets. AI feels so opposite and that makes it quite important. I was a bit sceptical – it sounded a bit conceptual, a bit vague and I didn't care that O2 had done it. But the more you see – it's a disruptor, it breaks down hierarchies and those are things we need to do.

Sarah Rapson was keen that the OD&D team work where there was an open door and find people who had the energy for change initially so that others might be encouraged by and engage with their success. She was also happy to try an approach that at first seemed counter-cultural.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

We are moving away from talking about what is wrong with our organisation. When we talk about managing change or implementing new ways of working let's talk about our experiences of when change or staff contributions have gone really well. What we learn from those good things is what we take into the next phase of change we are trying to deliver.

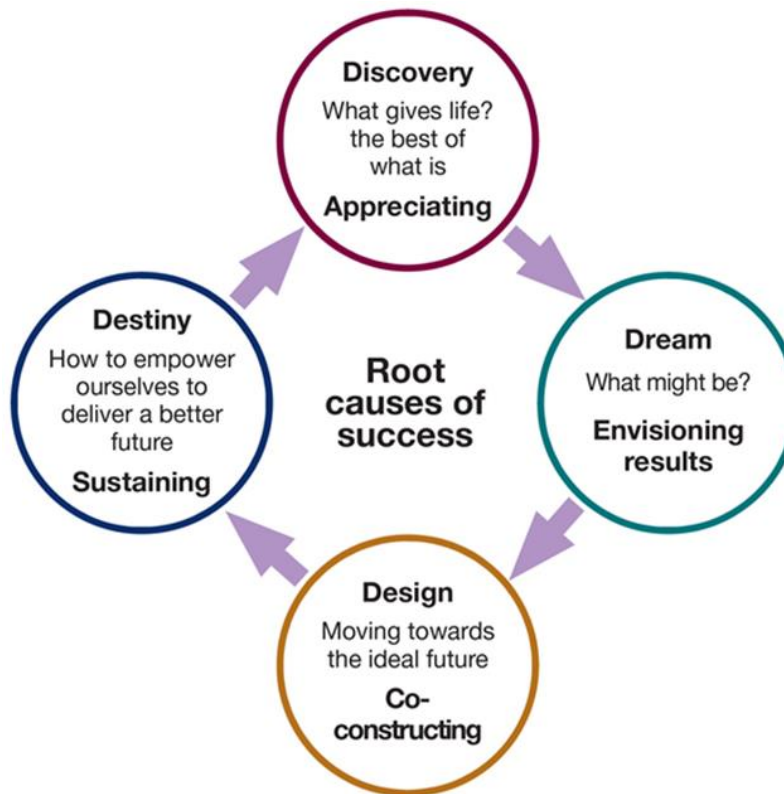
AI principles

AI offered a methodology to generate some positive momentum for change. Key principles include:

- Amplifying what works rather than fixing what doesn't.
- Discovering real stories of excellence to show what is possible so others can be inspired to try something similar in their teams.
- Generating energy as people tell stories of when they themselves, the team or the organisation as a whole has been at its best and they have experienced real pride at work.
- Identifying the root causes of these successful experiences and spreading them widely as the conditions for excellence.

These are sometimes described in terms of a four D cycle shown in the diagram below.

The AI four D process



Gaining traction

AI is a mechanism for engaging a wide range of people – it grounded what we were doing in what we all recognised, so that people had ownership and belief. We needed to forget philosophy – this was about the kind of organisation we want to be, how we wanted people to feel.

A learning point for the OD&D team is that the theoretical/intellectual side of AI doesn't necessarily engage support. The initial meeting with the Directors was described as a 'bit of a car-crash' as the team had understood that they needed to give a sound evidence base for this methodology rather than solely examples of other organisations which had done this well.

For some Directors AI fitted with their natural style of people management. Others felt it sounded like a lot of work and needed a 'business case'.

I didn't quite know how the methodology would manifest itself but was prepared to go with it. I didn't need to know chapter and verse before we started. All our meetings are set up to report by exception and that is the things going wrong. As a senior leader, I had less idea of when things were going right and more importantly why.

It was a case of finding the right point of entry and, in this case, it was the identification of the a core team- of front line, operational staff; people with passion from across the organisation who got the journey underway.

3. The journey – key milestones

I warmed to it when we had a Directors' away day and they brought down some people from the core team who interviewed us. It was the positivity of the people and how hard it was to answer what we are proud of and the realisation that we don't think like that.

The challenge is about getting beyond. It started off well because they got a really good core team – they were really impressive. I have done quite a bit on staff engagement and it has always felt tokenistic.

Core team selection

A core team of 18 people were either chosen or volunteered and – in a few extreme cases – 'sent' to the first meeting without knowing what they were getting into. They were described as:

People who have a positive attitude – being involved in diversity, interested in how people work in teams, get on well with peers, well-connected and able to reach out to peers, able to go in with an open mind (blank canvas), not afraid to get up on a platform and speak their mind.

The core team was drawn from people at all grades from across asylum, temporary and permanent migration. They attended an initial event in London in April to learn the principles of AI and were then tasked with gathering five stories each from their own location. They were then joined by another team who focused on investigating where success lies in the temporary migration team in Sheffield.

Gathering stories

The core team were sent out to 'inquire' and gather 'high point' stories about the UKVI principles in action. Together they collected nearly 120 different stories of success. They explored examples of when people had been at their best in relationships, connections, performance, innovation, growth and possibilities.

Identifying the root causes of success, 17 May

When the core team came together again it was to examine the stories they had brought with them to uncover the underlying causes of success.

This deep inquiry produced five recurring themes that seemed to underpin the best of UKVI. These became known as 'the root causes of success'. A sixth root cause was added at a later stage after some further work by the Sheffield core team.

Root causes of success



People felt they could immediately recognise and relate to these root causes because they came from familiar stories. Comments about the process include:

The root causes of success that they had identified felt real and tangible.

It feels bottom up, genuinely organic.

The stories and identifying root causes are based on real examples of UKVI at its best - these have genuinely been put together by people who have worked in the organisation; they are very powerful – more authenticity. It gives us more confidence about using them.

The aim was now to grow these success factors, in order to spread better outcomes, contributions, energy and relationships and even joy and satisfaction at work. The core team did this by sharing the root causes with their colleagues so that other people could find examples of when they were at their best. This was all very far away from the usual management language that UKVI staff were used to experiencing in their change programmes!

The Summit, 17 July

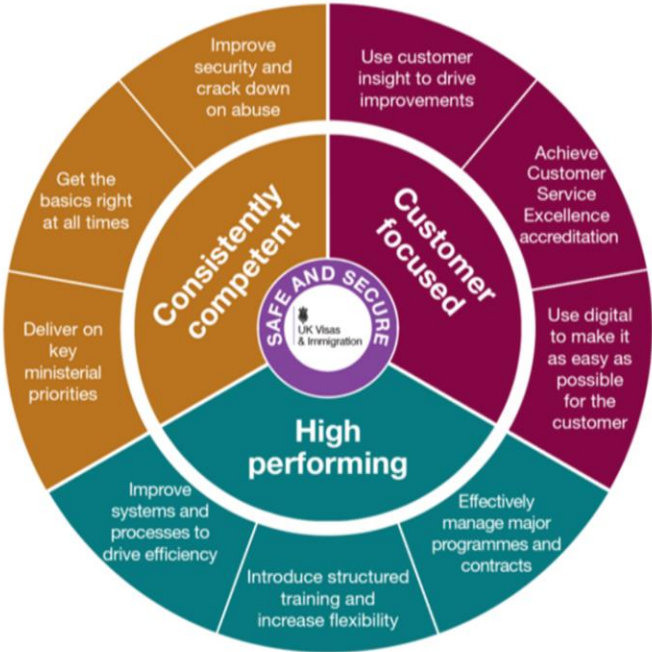
The Summit was a larger gathering of 120 people, comprising the core group and the team from Sheffield, plus people who had shared their stories with these two teams and others who were interested and keen to take part. It was an open invitation to staff in the UKVI business areas that were involved in this work.



It was an opportunity to focus on the three key principles and to experience more ‘appreciative conversations’ so that more personal highpoints of people’s experiences at work would add to the qualitative data that could be used to shape the future.

Participants used a work book to guide them through the AI process and remind them of the principles at each stage.

UKVI Summit Living our values



The conversations at the Summit focussed on ‘what we want more of’ in order to meet the challenges of the future. Using the AI four-stage process of Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny, the team used the Root Causes of Success to plan future action.

The Summit finished with an invitation for people to join Positive Action Groups (PAGs) and work on issues that were important to them, making positive changes at local level. These groups were not centrally led. They were instead run by staff attending the summit, on a collaborative basis with their peers. The summit attendees identified their own subjects which they wanted to take forward in their PAGs after the summit itself – thus integrating the culture change back into the day job.

Follow up events

On September 11th, the PAG groups and both Core Teams met at an 'Embedding the Principles' event attended also by Sarah Rapson and one of her Directors. Once again the room was full of people at different levels of the hierarchy, full of enthusiasm for change but looking to translate this into practical steps that could positively change how they did their work. A key focus for the day was 'the road ahead', support mechanisms required for those involved in the change. In addition, the group talked about how they get more people involved in this cultural change initiative beyond those already mobilised. Participants had a chance to pool ideas and actions so that the PAGs went away with new ideas for taking forward work across the organisation on tangible things that would make a real difference to people.

The OD&D Service have since held six weekly action learning sets for the Core Team and PAG ('first amongst equals') leaders since the Embedding the Principles event to support them in their work and helping maintain momentum.

AI HEO Summit Liverpool, 18 November

On the 18th November 2014, an Appreciative Inquiry event for HEOs across Permanent Migration was held to raise awareness of what Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was and how AI techniques can be used in 'business as usual'.



With an emphasis on engaging attendees on the practicalities of AI, the event was facilitated across 3 distinct sections:

- One to One conversations capturing successes within the 3 Principles of UKVI (Consistently Competent, High Performing & Customer Focused).
- The "Miracle Question" or dream exercise giving the attendees an opportunity to visualise how UKVI will look in 2017 based on the actions taken today.
- Finally the formation of Positive Action Groups (PAGs). To take back to the work place the actions designed to make the UKVI collective dream a reality.

The event was opened by AI lead, Steve Long, who then passed responsibility for the facilitation of the event to the local AI Core Team members. He said of the event:

The HEO staff who attended really engaged with Appreciative Inquiry and by the event conclusion we had 7 new Positive Action Groups formed within Permanent Migration. These new groups have identified key areas of good practice that can be shared not only across PM but also UKVI which cover the People Survey, Good News stories, Recruitment, Equality, Performance Development and Pathfinder. I met with the PAG leads on Thursday 11th December 2014 on the next steps before they meet as PAGs in early 2015 for the first time. These new groups will complement the existing PAGs and ensure that AI principles are fully embedded into the business. This is something that PM has already started to reap the benefits of and will continue to do so into the New Year and beyond

The way forward

The Core Team are organising an event in February to decide Next Steps. The decisions on who attends and how this is run is in their hands and they are still working on it.

The AI approach to culture & behaviour change is being integrated into other 'standing' events such as the leadership events, Sarah Rapson's roadshow events and the Customer Service Excellence Conference.

4. Achieving spread and sustainability

Reaching out to new people

Director Steve Long told the group assembled in the 'Embedding our Values' event that it was important they did not become an exclusive group and should constantly look for ways to broaden and spread the AI message. This would enable them to move from an initiative to a 'golden thread' and BAU (Business As Usual).

Since the start of the process the number of people involved has continued to grow and new people are stepping forward.

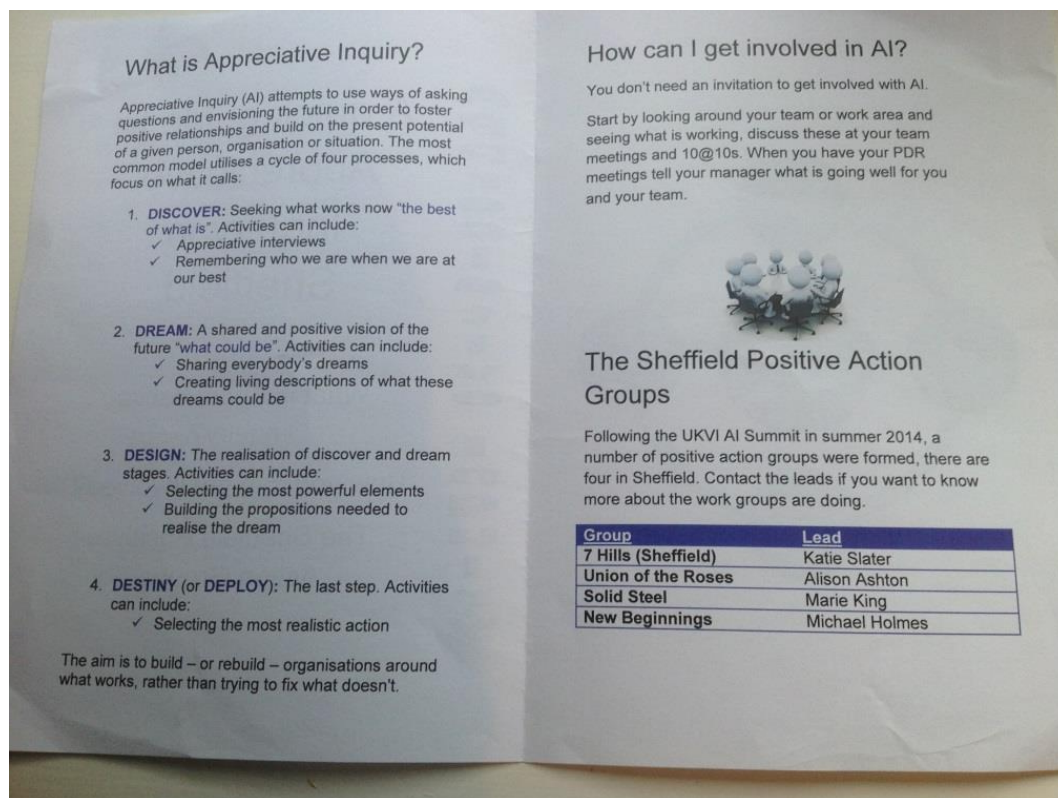
There has always been energy in UKVI but a lot of people who are sitting in that circle are new people in terms of providing wider support to their peers, thinking about how we can do things differently, whether PDR(performance management) or how we land change.

The core team has been active in spreading the word:

We started by visiting teams and explaining what AI was and what we were hoping to do and people would get involved with. It is now always in the forefront of everything we are doing so people are always aware; we have signage all round the buildings, any updates we send out to teams and we visit teams (5 teams – 120 people) on a monthly basis.

The Sheffield teams have produced a simple leaflet entitled, 'A quick guide to appreciative inquiry in Sheffield'. It explains what AI is, how people can get involved and contact details for the various PAG groups.

The quick guide to AI in Sheffield



Some areas are clearly seeing a snowball effect,

Other areas of UKVI want to be a part of AI and some core team members are creating new core teams, for example in complex casework, to expand the AI effect.

A Sheffield core team was also asked to run some AI sessions for another team and requested materials and ideas from the OD&D Service.

Hierarchical spread

Alongside the AI work the OD&D Service was asked to work with a number of senior management teams, to develop their leadership capability as a collective leadership group. This has included a focus on diagnostics – where the group currently are, interventions with the group and recommendations for how the groups can operate going forward.

AI quickly achieved sufficient senior level support and a groundswell of bottom up action but the middle managers are seen as vital in supporting the spread of AI throughout the organisation.

Our management team had an open day and did a session on AI and they were tasked to go back to their teams and get positive vibes to promote what we do well. It is better in areas where managers are supportive particularly in allowing time for activities as well as processing cases.

A summit for middle managers has been organised so that they can experience AI for themselves and to connect and engage them so that they don't feel threatened.

Bringing a new lens to agendas

AI is reaching new meeting agendas and providing a new lens for each debate. For example, one person described attending a meeting on the quality of decision making and suggested looking at the root causes of success rather than reasons for failure.

The links to Customer Service were immediately apparent in starting to value what customers appreciate rather than simply looking at complaints. At a recent week of activities on Customer service Excellence, short workshops were held to discuss and encourage integrating an AI approach.

New networks and relationships

Shadowing other teams and opening up communications are both on the agenda for the PAG groups. One example of joint learning and collaboration is the Manchester Open Day, which brought awareness of how departments could work together and liaise when making decisions.



New processes

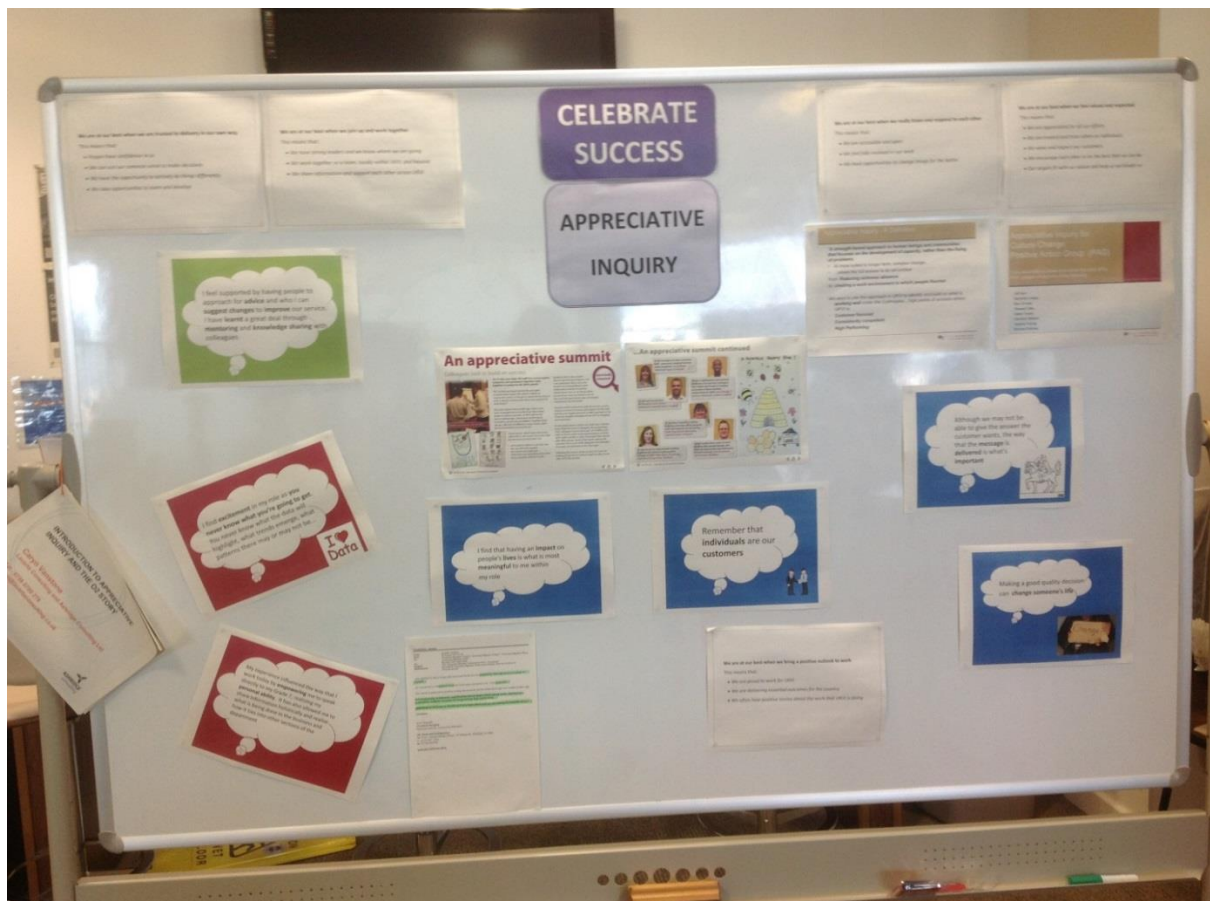
AI is prompting staff to develop new processes such as the new 'Proud Sheet', which encourages people to consider their own satisfaction and contribution, reward and aspirations, skill requirements and how they might be more effective. It consists of a short form, which takes them through:

- Business needs.
- What have I achieved/completed within work that I am proud of?
- Evidence of recognition received for task.
- An example of where I have provided excellent customer service.
- What new skills have I developed this month?
- What skills would I like to develop?
- What new skills would equip me to be more effective?
- What element of my job has given me most satisfaction throughout the year (end of year performance development review)?
- Within UKVI where do I want to be in 2017 and how do I get there?

The physical environment

The teams have been using opportunities to put information about AI around the building to attract more interest. These include an AI stall for customer service week, a proud board in Liverpool, posters about AI, and an AI information board in Sheffield (shown below).

The AI/CI Board in Sheffield



The AI board alternates with a Continuous Improvement board on the reverse to maintain interest. Another innovative way to ensure people read the information was a competition to spot what had changed on the board.

Sheffield also has a room set up for AI where all the root causes of success are displayed. The 'success room' can be used for team meetings.

Building AI into training

AI is being incorporated into the training tools used to upskill and induct new entrants into the organisation. These products have been reviewed and rewritten to complement an appreciative approach.

Support from the OD&D team

Several support mechanisms have been suggested and/or provided by the OD&D service in order to ensure changes are sustainable.

- **PAG Watch:** Several Directors support the PAGs and facilitate their work to unblock obstacles as the PAG teams work on change projects. A monthly conference call with PAG leaders is held to report on progress.
- **Recipe book:** This will act as an evidence base of around fifty positive success stories to inspire and reinforce understanding of the root causes of success.
- **Action learning sets** have been set up with the OD&D Service to support and challenge PAG leaders and core teams and to facilitate cycles of change and learning.
- It was also suggested to have a support line so that anyone active who needs help can call in.
- **Communications:** the OD&D team were keen that there should be a named person in each location as a point of contact so that there would be someone responsible for disseminating information.
- There were further suggestions of branding the initiative.

This ongoing support from the leadership and the OD&D Service is providing important encouragement and validation for the change initiatives the various teams are undertaking.

5. Early impact

If everyone were performing at the level of the best, that would be transformative, we would have become high performing.

There are several reports of early impact in the AI initiative and people have clearly been inspired by hearing success stories. This is felt at individual, team and organisational level.

Individual level

People engaged in the AI process are starting to feel more positive:

I joined last year when there was a large case back log and it now feels like an entirely different place to be working. It is massively different and people do feel the positivity where we are in a good situation.

They are finding it refreshing to acknowledge their hard work:

I have worked here ten years and this last six months is the first time I have looked at what we do right. We do a lot of things well and staff work really hard.

And there is anecdotal evidence of an infectious change taking place at an individual level:

This is about changing hearts and minds starting with the individual. We have heard many stories about those who were previously cynical but have moved to become thoroughly engaged in AI.

Team level

Change becomes particularly potent at the team level with mutual encouragement to achieve the best:

On my team, our meetings have a more positive outlook – how much we have improved since last month – that has definitely changed. We are looking for improvement in a positive way, the good idea's out there, it is changing the whole mindset.

Finding a sense of pride

It has required something of a cultural shift for people to accustom themselves to accepting praise and discovering a real sense of pride in their work:

We have meetings called 10@10s (ten minute meetings at 10am). Slowly a couple of teams have introduced employee of the week/month and people are getting used to the idea of being proud and getting over the embarrassment of being named at team meetings. That works two ways: you have good competition because others want to be named but also genuine appreciation and getting people to think about it.

The 'Proud Board' where people are able to share their successes has already been mentioned.

Easier to work on change

One Director described how the positive atmosphere provided a better context to talk about change:

Bearing in mind that immigration is a very controversial subject politically, it is a bit of a football and staff can get caught in the crossfire – it can be negative and that can translate into the workplace. You can still be creative and positive, you can still have ideas and we can still celebrate best practice. All those things create the right mood for me to work with my team on change.

Organisational level

At the organisational level people describe a range of impact:

A sense of engagement and a positive atmosphere

Though the ripple hasn't gone everywhere, people are aware that something is going on that is different. It is a different brand, it is more positive, people feel more engaged in the processes that are happening.

The staff survey also shows engagement scores heading in the right direction with a nine points increase over two years for UKVI. While there are a number of factors influencing these scores they demonstrate that something positive is happening in the organisation.

Building trust

AI has provided an opportunity to create trust between managers and staff that it is 'OK to collaborate and think outside the box'.

A Director's perspective

What we can all do is introduce change that is participative, with opportunities for staff to influence the shape and the delivery of the business.

He describes AI as a bridge to help people move from the old model of 'my way or the highway' to participation and innovation.

There has to be a bridge which helps people to relax and builds confidence about participating that feels they can trust managers to respond in the right way. AI allows you to do that more aggressive change using staff skills because they have confidence and trust.

More people are talking positively about Continuous Improvement (CI) and taking personal pride in improvement

A key benefit from the AI initiative has been a new boost to the Continuous Improvement programme. Comments suggest that the programmes are mutually reinforcing:

A greater number of people are initiating positive improvements; people are responding to problems and solving them themselves. It is complementing CI.

People feel a sense of pride and purpose in what they do; that means they want to go that extra mile to improve things. It is difficult to quantify, more a feeling.

People are spotting opportunities for improvement and taking them forward:

Improvement story from Sheffield

I set up the Tier 1 Interview Team, including writing training material, delivering training, recruiting staff, managing the day to day activity of the support team and interviewing offices. Sourcing accommodation, working with security team and producing MI for a pilot report. Within this, I managed the pilot working with HM Passport Office to share skills, accommodation and test the possibility of introducing audio recording of interview as opposed to traditional hand written notes. This was a marvellous opportunity to me. There is now a team firmly rooted in Temporary Migration conducting interviews on a day to day basis.

Working closer together

As part of the programme (example above) to develop UKVI's interview capability, a small team in Sheffield have been working with colleagues in Her Majesty's Passport Office (HMPO) to identify and develop opportunities for closer working.

A project nominated in the “working together” category in the Home Office Excellence Awards

The aim of the project was to improve the services offered by both organisations when interviewing clients – whether they were applying for leave to remain in the UK, or a British passport.

The project team, which included staff from both UKVI and HMPO, designed a pilot which during its 12-week run was able to deliver:

- *420 additional interviews*
- *a 30 minute (35 per cent) reduction in appointment duration*
- *a 50 per cent increase in volume of interviews conducted per day*
- *increases in the number of applications meeting the 20-day service level agreement*
- *an enhanced customer experience: 90 per cent of UKVI customers rated their interview experience as positive.*

Temporary Migration’s Eleanor Webster says:

‘The pilot was a real success, both operationally and for customers. We also trialled the use of digitisation in our interviewing, which we have real ambition to develop.’

Michael Holmes, Tier 1 Interview Team says:

‘What is described here directly contributes to the Home Office’s Transformation agenda and its effort to support the development of a more agile, effective and efficient operational capability.’

An opportunity for talent spotting

The AI initiative is supporting the talent pool in UKVI, giving individuals who may not otherwise have had it, the opportunity to be leaders of change.

Story from the Temporary Migration customer service team (‘TM has talent’ from ‘On the case’ newsletter)

As a core member of the Sheffield team responsible for delivering the appreciative inquiry (AI) initiative, I recently had the opportunity to present an overview of AI at the Sheffield Viewpoint sessions alongside director of in-country migration Paul Morrison. As well as a fantastic opportunity to share my knowledge and experience this also enabled me to develop my presentation skills. I am now much more confident with presentations and have since gone on to deliver key messages to external stakeholders and senior representatives of a number of Premium Sponsors.

I was also seconded to be the lead representative for the sponsorship unit's push to achieve accreditation to the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) standard. This helped me gain a broader understanding of both the unit's functions and its customer base. I was able to help the team achieve its best sponsorship score to date, and I have since been asked to continue supporting the TM lead towards full CSE accreditation.

One Director felt that people who have been in the shadows for a while, have 'stepped up to the plate'. He welcomed the benefits of 'using staff as senior consultants to make changes within.' They now have opportunities to work with colleagues across the organisation. Some of the Liverpool team, for example, have been asked to work with a different department to share the AI principles.

AI has been a vehicle for change

AI has brought a new perspective to meetings and processes. It encourages people to look for root causes of success rather than concentrate on the root causes of failure. A typical example is a Continuous Improvement Officer describing a move from a monthly Failure Report to a monthly Success Report.

One participant described AI as less top down (unlike other change approaches like Kaizen) and promoted through core values. It prompts a change in other structures such as communication.

People want to do a good job and be customer focused, they want to be efficient. I don't think they want to waste their own and taxpayers money. They will meet the challenges as long as people feel they are not being done to and doing it their way. I think AI is a vehicle for taking it somewhere – before that it would have been a global email 'this is what we have decided in London and this is what we are going to do to you'.

Positive Action Groups (PAG)

Twelve Positive Action Groups (PAGs) were set up each with an identified 'first amongst equals' leader and Director sponsor. Staff working in PAGs are starting to change their own workplace in many different ways using an appreciative perspective. For example, one group is tackling the performance management(PDR) process and started by carrying out a staff survey. They are now looking at the impact of negative language, such as 'being in the bottom 10%' and focussing on emphasising development to improve performance. HR are supporting them but also setting parameters for change; for example the PAG group is not able to change the rating system although they are pressing for more friendly language in that too.

Another group has taken forward the theme of building pride and looking to join up several strands of work relating to communication, PDR and proud sheets.

PAG, Liverpool

In July at the AI meeting our PAG team discussed communication and the current PDR system and how we could engage and appreciate staff. There were various ideas and discussions and we decided to look at the PDR and ask staff to look at what they had achieved which made them feel proud. This angle came from a song at the event by M people and from a board I had introduced locally on the team known as the proud board in which colleagues nominate each other on a weekly basis. This board has since been implemented by Santander through a colleague. The monthly proud sheet is an A4 sheet which replaces the difficulty of trying to create 400 words for their PDR at mid-year and at the end of the year. This is filled in by the staff member on a monthly basis and discussed with their line manager with their achievements for that month and any development they wish to have and their ambitions. The monthly proud sheet is being trialled by DPT, CT3 and Steve Long in this half of the reporting year. Our PAG is also now working with a team in Temporary Migration who are looking at the PDR report to join up this venture.

Other groups are taking forward the theme of building connections and spreading the message of AI through posters, email updates and other forms of communication. In Sheffield one group is building connections across the business:

PAG, Sheffield

One of the root causes of success identified was about working better together and breaking down barriers. The team identified the barriers in each different work areas and after the Summit they decided to hold a series of open days in Sheffield and Manchester to build connections and knowledge sharing.

One of the tangible things for us in that 6 months' time we will be able to see that the Manchester curtailment team will have done many thousands more curtailments in our area (family casework), based on being upskilled through the open days and training sessions and this has all come from AI. We should have some good evidence there.

Unexpected outcomes/surprises:

The AI initiative is highly participative and a characteristic of bottom-up change is the unpredictable nature of outcomes. Some of the unanticipated outcomes described by participants are as follows:

- Directors have expressed surprise at the thirst for it in the organisation and strength of passion.
- It is providing a new means for senior managers to engage with staff, along with a new language to talk about improvement.
- One of the key strengths has been the lack of hierarchy and importance of grades.

- New champions have emerged from all corners of the organisation.

Challenges

Whilst the AI story is an exciting one, the scale of change required cannot be underestimated. There are still a lot of challenges ahead:

Legacy, size and climate

- UKVI is an organisation with a legacy of criticism and for many staff this has left deep rooted scepticism. Many, including some Directors, are waiting to see if this initiative is just a 'flash in the pan'.
- It is a large organisation and spread needs to be rapid to keep up the momentum. It is still early days and enthusiasm is in pockets. One Director described it as 'ink blots' that need eventually to join up to form a coherent whole.
- There are tough times ahead for UKVI because of financial pressures on the public sector. Some fear that a turbulent period will derail the fledgling movement for change.
- In particular middle managers are under acute pressure to deliver and may not see the AI movement as a top priority.

Organisational culture

- AI can feel culturally uncomfortable and very personal. Although there are some strong leaders and champions, others prefer to keep their heads down and have difficulty in acknowledging personal success.
- The organisational architecture might not support change sufficiently. For example other processes might unwittingly hamper cultural change.

General flux

- There is a concern that key core team members and PAG members will move on to other roles, leading to instability in the teams.

Outcomes

- The outcomes remain uncertain. One Director questions what the 'counterfactual' would be ie what would happen without AI? How successful would Continuous Improvement be alone?
- Some are unsure whether negativity has to be actively challenged and dealt with or whether it simply 'gets crowded out' by positive change. The experience of AI remains relatively limited.

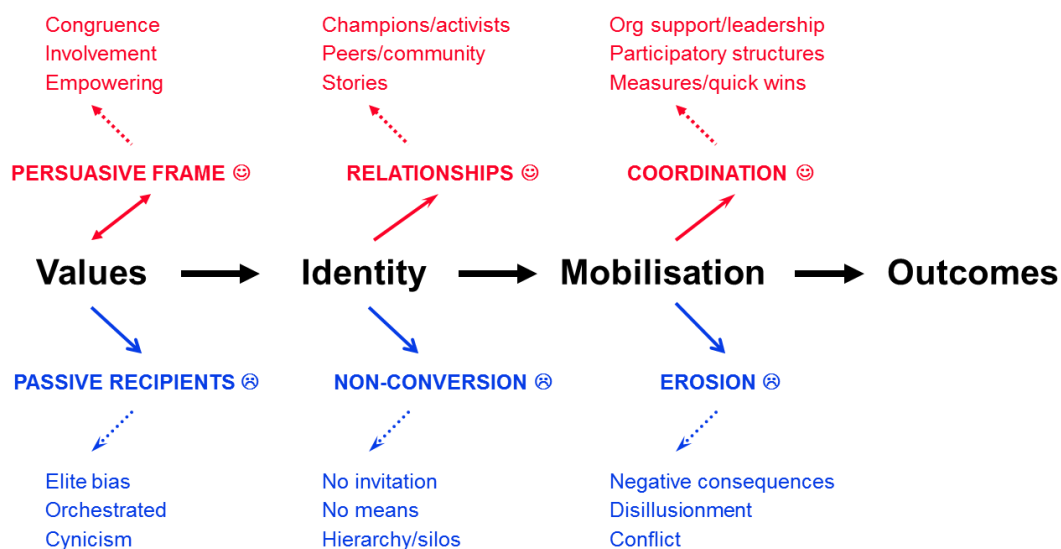
6. Evaluative summary

It is early days to evaluate the success of the AI initiative at UKVI. There is certainly some good initial impact at individual, team and organisational level but there are also many challenges ahead. It should also be noted that AI is not the only driver of change and it is difficult to isolate its impact from say the effects of a new Director General or the impact of the Continuous Improvement training.

The initiative might best be assessed as a social movement, generating a groundswell of support, which will succeed if it continues to engage employees and spread continuous improvement both in service quality and the working environment.

The following assessment draws on a framework developed from an in depth literature review on why social movements succeed or fail (Garrow and Cox, 2010¹). While it is not yet clear that the term social movement (such as Civil Rights, Arab Spring, Feminism, etc) is applicable in an organisational setting, there is considerable interest in this kind of widespread values-driven mobilisation in the NHS and the first Obama campaign drew heavily on social movement principles to galvanise supporters during the election.

Indicators of success and failure in social movements



Garrow & Cox, 2010

¹ Garrow V, Cox A, Higgins T (2010) *Large Scale Change – NHS Mobilisation*. NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement

The central part of the diagram shows the progression from a values-driven proposition, through developing a shared identity, widespread mobilisation and call to action leading to outcomes and change. It is a linear model of change unlike most OD models. This acknowledges that although change may require iteration and reinforcement, once a tipping point is reached (a critical mass of proponents), attitude change is permanent (eg smoking ban, environmental issues, language relating to minority groups, etc).

Success factors at UKVI

If we consider the AI initiative in the light of the Garrow and Cox framework, we can trace how it is developing in the manner of a social movement, identifying some of the success factors (top half of the diagram) and how it is so far avoiding the negative pressures (bottom half of the diagram).

1. Offering 'a persuasive frame' rooted in values

This first stage of a social movement is about attracting attention and 'landing' a message or proposition of change.

- ☺ Change at UKVI is rooted in three key principles, becoming Consistently Competent; being High Performing and having Customer Focus. Without AI these might have simply appeared top down (elite bias) with the traditional communication (orchestrated) and would probably have been received with little interest (cynicism). AI is engaging both 'head and heart'.
- ☺ AI offers a 'persuasive frame'- something positive rather than endless criticism, blame and sense of failure. It resonates with individuals' own beliefs (congruence) and aspirations for their workplace.
- ☺ People have the opportunity to get involved in the core teams and are empowered to go out and interview others at all levels in the hierarchy.

2. Generating a sense of identity

The second stage of social movement goes from developing initial individual interest to a sense of community with a shared story.

- ☺ The core teams were the first 'activists' and champions of AI. Social movement activists are peers that others are able to relate to and want to listen to.
- ☺ The core teams gathered stories that reflect people's own experience and engage them in a vision of what is possible as well as generating a collective sense of pride.
- ☺ The Summit brought together even more people who shared stories, and offered the larger group an invitation to action through the PAG groups.

- ☺ One of the success factors highlighted by those involved is the lack of a sense of hierarchy in the process. People from all grades are taking part and junior staff members often take the lead, impressing and influencing Directors as well as colleagues.
- ☺ There are examples of activists starting to bring more appreciative language into meetings and organisational processes.
- ☺ Activists bring constructive and healthy challenge to leaders in the organisation, enabling barriers to be broken down.

3. Mobilisation

The third stage is about translating the enthusiasm of the community into action. This requires coordination with participative support structures, leadership and some way of measuring progress.

- ☺ UKVI benefits from having strong commitment and leadership from the top and a groundswell of bottom-up ideas and enthusiasm. Directors are involved in PAG Watch, an enabling role for the various PAG groups to remove barriers to progress where possible.
- ☺ The Director General voices her full support for the AI initiative.
- ☺ Support is still available for the core teams from the OD&D service in the form of action learning sets and follow up events are keeping the movement future focussed.
- ☺ Middle managers are seen as a key group and there are plans to engage them in the process. Those who are already involved play a key role in facilitating change in their own areas and accepting the AI work as a valuable use of time.
- ☺ Structures such as Comms and HR need to encourage, mirror and help to amplify the progress of the movement so that it extends its reach.
- ☺ There are already quick wins happening (Chapter Five, 'Early Impact'). So far there are no reports of negative consequences.

So far, so good

The UKVI AI initiative is progressing well as a social movement but has still a long way to go in terms of spread through such a large organisation. A key hurdle is to avoid the 'erosion' of existing enthusiasm and support. There are dangers of disillusionment. For example, some of the PAG groups may find they achieve little as they come up against formal structures and policies, time constraints, team members moving on and general organisational pressures. Failed change programmes result in ever increasing cynicism and, because social movements tap into emotions, failure can result in bitterness and anger. It is therefore important that this fledgling

movement is monitored and supported until the tipping point is reached where it becomes self-sufficient and 'business as usual'.

The initial signs are that the movement is constantly expanding, drawing in more members and attracting interest from new teams. Invitations and requests for help to the core teams suggest that their influence is growing and new champions are stepping up to spread the message. The focus on processes such as communications, performance review, talent management and training also indicate a trend to ensure AI becomes central to business as usual. The evidence base of success is continuing to grow with individual and team stories finding new audiences.

The staff in UKVI perform a crucial role in society. As they deliver the immigration, visa and asylum system, they are also mindful of security issues and political pressures. For those who have been involved with the AI initiative so far, it is helping them find new meaning at work and confidence to meet change and make a difference and at the same time renewing a sense of pride in their work.