# Arguing with a colleague

Positive approaches couldn't be the same, but positive confrontation opens more opportunities to create new meaning, for both counterpart.

Kiran Kandade is an International Organisation Development Consultant based in Singapore. Her approach is deeply based on the improvement of Appreciative Inquiry to create organisational changes. Kiran is an appreciated colleague and a good friend. Recently we "*argued*" about life lessons: do they come to us just by successes or even by failures?

Kiran:

About AI: it was a process created by *David Cooperrider* in the 1980s when he was a doctoral student at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio - where I eventually did my master's degree in positive OD and where *Cooperrider* was professor -. He discovered that focusing on what is working, discovering the best that already exists, inquiring into our moments of pride and inspiration would take us along the path to transformational change much more than doing deep dive analysis of our problems, talking about our weaknesses, dwelling on our failures.

> Man's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains it's original dimensions
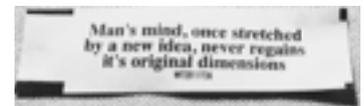
But that was just the tip of the iceberg. Based on positive psychology, sociology, neurology and medical science he then created the **AI 4-D cycle of change**. A methodology backed by a solid philosophy. A way of doing that requires a way of being. A process for large-scale, large-groups change defined by meaningful steps at the individual levels.

AI has changed my life almost entirely. Both sides on a professional and personal basis. The only way to be an AI facilitator and practitioner is to absorb it and internalise it into your own life. The process in AI is well defined, but no two AIs practitioners have the same approach. To carry out an AI requires the facilitator to believe in it....

Then and only then is it possible for
1. the unconditional positive questions which will spark change to be crafted and designed
2. the AI topic of inquiry that turns problems into possibilities to be decided on
3. the aspiration statements or provocative propositions be jointly written by the entire group
4. the action plans, milestones, measurement indicators, goals be decided upon by the participants themselves
5. actual change - visible, measurable, sustained - be created.

As an AI practitioner **I firmly believe** and have **observed that failure teaches us nothing**. Failures are simply things that happen, **they are a part and parcel of life**. But to take it further and **suggest that failures are important or necessary** for us to learn something from, is being rather fatalistic and negative in my opinion.

This has 2 aspects:

1. The thought that **only by failing** you can become successful. The hidden meaning here is that failures teach you the way to success. I put it to you that **failure teaches you the non-path to success. From failures you learn what NOT to do, not what TO DO.**

Saturday, 3 January 2015

Imagine you are in a room with 6 doors and you are told that one of the doors opens to a room full of gold. All the other doors will lead you to something horrible. You have only 2 chances to open the right door and get to the gold. You open one door and it is full of shit. Now what have you learned from this failure? You know which door NOT to open, but do you know which door to open next?

Let us further imagine that you participated in something similar in the past. Where you had a few options and you made a decision to take one course of action and that was the right one. Let us say you examine that success. Why did you choose that path? Was it the expression on the instructor's face when he explained the situation? Was it a smell that came from the other side of the door as you approached it? What led to that success? Armed with that you have a better chance of success now.

2. Failures teach us to be grounded and humble. I disagree. **Being grounded and humble is a function of us as people**. Some people are arrogant and entirely insufferable no matter what and some people are wise and grounded no matter what. **Failures cannot change our characters**. We alone can change our characters - purposefully and with a desire to change.

Forbes Thought Of The Day

" You can employ men and hire hands to work for you, but you will have to win their hearts to have them work with you. "

— William J.H. Boetcker

Antonio:
Thank you Kiran, I feel you have shown very well how we can support organisations in changes by working on each person's behaviours and beliefs. We all know how critical is the organisational mood and how it affects the performance of a single as well as the ones of the whole team. I would stay just on the lessons we have the possibility to get by a positive or negative experience. We disagree on how negative ones can teach us about strategy shaping. Here's my opinion:

You are right when you say **we get great, good lessons from our successes**, I haven't ever said no, but I think you have undervalued the lesson we can get from our failures. The reason lies just on the **ability to learn**.

When you say: "*The hidden meaning…is that failures teach you the way to success*" maybe we could say it better: **The way to success will be discovered on learning by doing.** Be able to learn is vitally important. On the top of the knowledge the role of experiences become essential. The Learning by doing we use in training people. Then about knowledge we could say: the more, the deeper, the better knowledge the subject has, the more, the better he/she can learn.

And we, as human being, learn at least equally when we get the right choice as well as when we get a worst one. Otherwise we do not learn even. We only have to focus our attention on improvement. What works and why, then what doesn't and why. Finally Celebrate the success or the lesson!

I also would point out as the example of the 6 doors over simplify the human being as a conceptual organism. As *Daniel Goleman* says well: "… **we are emotional being who think rather than thinker machines who feel** ".

By this point of view I think your sample risks to seem too conceptualised: more often interactional choices and decisions are more complicate and they involve emotions of the actors as well as emotions of counterparts which, I mean, are not expected by those doors.

Saturday, 3 January 2015

Organisational decisions are so often made under a **high pressured environment**, with a **few control**, very seldom having useful information. **Any decision affects personal interests and opinions** and it's so often contrasted by good reasons and/or good negotiators. I cannot imagine your doors who warmly invite me to open just one out of them or don't open just the another one… Out of the joke, in samples like that we miss the importance of counterparts interaction, environment pressures and the need to decide getting information by the situation. So often in human management we have to **act out of the blue** into completely new domains.

So, on that sample, it simply doesn't matter if you have already experienced the same play: you will have always the possibility to get another right choice as well as a wrong one. In this way you can use the previous strategy or change it.

What normally happens in human brain is the implicit use of "*shortcuts*": when we have found a strategy which work we will simply repeat it with no deep analysis if the situation just seems the same.

Obviously **shortcut works in a stable environment** with no or just few changes, a territory determined by fixed rules. In a human environment, stable is just the change, as *Zygmunt Bauman* has well pictured out in his book *Liquid Modernity*.

In NLP we have learnt how the environment and the counterparts can affect each others and the interaction itself. **By Meta Model we dig out the deep meaning**, questioning about it, in positive but extremely sensitive, as well as cognitively way.

More, I like when you say "*Being grounded and humble is a function of us as people.*" then "*Failures cannot change our characters. We alone can change our characters - purposefully and with a desire to change.*"

Because I know how **you, Kiran, strongly believe in people changes** and I appreciate the support of the positive approach at change through experiences, I would point out how to **the experience of asking the right question** can support the change, **albeit people are not really committed to change**. Experiences come along the learning path: we try and fail then try again. When we become able to shape the right question we can see the effect it produces then we get success. But we become aware how the same question have no sense or creates problems to different people or different environments. Only when we will have experienced it, we will be able to evaluate the results which come. This will be our lesson: if we will be able to get it. We could develop a deep, clear **Know-How of shaping adequate questions** and its effects.

As human being our experience shapes our beliefs and they shape our behaviours. Each "selfish" or "humble" person has his/her own background and these attitudes have been developed through the experiences they have done. Is well known how to be selfish it's so often supported by a long series of successes as well as unknown mistakes.

We both use positive approach and energy to change people beliefs and we know how people change, How people learn from positive approaches and their success.

And even how we have learnt day by day by "*shit which happens*" because we can see what has worked and what didn't. We can evaluate the trait and the choices of a complex decision and we can clearly see what will steer it into failure!

Kiran

Although, I do think you didn't get my point on the 6-doors example. Of course I am over-simplifying and exaggerating to make a point. Of course real life situations aren't that simplistic or straightforward. The point is that a past failure cannot teach you what to do, but rather what not to do. And in situations when there are 100s of options to choose from, a past failure from which you've learned that one of them is wrong but does not even help you zero in on which of the remaining 99 are right is really of no use.

Here are 2 quotes by Edison:

"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."
— Thomas A. Edison

"Many of life's failures are people who did not realise how close they were to success when they gave up."
— Thomas A. Edison

Ok, so on the surface both seem to be glorifying failures and the lessons from them. But scratch a bit deeper - what is Edison saying in the first quote.... Exactly what he is saying in the second one!!!!
• Don't give up
• Don't let failures deter you
• Think of failures as stepping stone that are leading you towards success if you don't stop the journey

Nowhere does he suggest that failures are necessary or a must-have in order to reach success. He's just saying that they happen. You cannot avoid them, so please for the love of God, don't make a huge goddamned martyr or victim of yourself, or give up on that path to success, or decide that when you fail you are a failure!!! Because you're not a failure, you failed..... And that is how we should react to an inevitable event like a failure in our lives. That is all....

"Winners are not afraid of losing. But losers are. Failure is part of the process of success. People who avoid failure also avoid success." - Robert T. Kiyosaki

"You build on failure. You use it as a stepping stone. Close the door on the past. You don't try to forget the mistakes, but you don't dwell on it. You don't let it have any of your energy, or any of your time, or any of your space." - Johnny Cash

Kiyosaki hit the nail on the head. **Failures are a part of the process**. They are there whether you like them or not. Each failure is a stumbling block. It is useless to spend your time avoiding them because by avoiding them you also avoid success - failures are an indication that you tried, that you continue to try. So, yes, if you want to call them useful from that perspective, I completely agree.

"Positive thinking isn't ignoring your problems - it's having confidence in your ability to deal with them."

And then when Cash says, "you don't dwell on it" that's perfect as well. Don't waste time over-analysing your failures. Don't give it any of your energy, your time or your space. Step on them, over them and move on towards success. Again, the reason you don't forget them is because you know that you're greater than those who never failed because it means they never tried!!!

Antonio:

Thank you Kiran, I'd like to start from your own words again: *"Ok, so on the surface both seem to be glorifying failures and the lessons from them. But scratch a bit deeper - what is Edison saying in the first quote.... Exactly what he is saying in the second one!!!!"*

Ok Thomas Edison stated "I had no failure" essentially he said: "I have learned!". About this point I think we do agree, don't we? What divides our ideas is what he has learnt: you are stuck on his own words just "…10,000 ways that won't work." That's nothing, it has no worth.

In my opinion this quote again shows the rules of a world with fewer changes, characterised by less parameters: a mechanical world. Action and reaction, quite simple. The second quote confirms it: the more you try the more you can cancel options and the more you reach the goal. Failure is worthless it just serves to eliminate wrong options. But the world of the human mind is definitively more complicated.

All that can work, better in an environment where interactions do not affect feedback. What happens when all the 100 options can work with 100 different people or situations? I think you are still undervaluing the human being as the subject and the object of the experiment.

While Thomas was working with glass, iron and electricity to create the lamp, I can imagine his statements after 70, 80, 90 trials which didn't work!

"DAMN, S**T, Fu***ng Ba**rd! Why don't you wanna work???? Are you an As**le! What Damn of piece of s**t are you????" Can you imagine that?? Because of the pressure, the nerves, the sense of failure after hours and hours and days of trials attempts…

I have a friend of mine who is used to calling me *Silly Man*. She calls me in this way and smile. When she writes to me saying: *"Hey silly man want you believe that you are right???"* And I smile. In this environment she is allowed to tell me that, it's a kind of code. We both know the true meaning of the little insult. Ok, let's now do an experiment: Do not change the people, we just change the environment, take a standard situation in which we are involved in a client meeting, just a formal meeting. What if she eventually calls me Silly Man? Do I still smile? Try now to shift just the mood: We would arguing about a challenge which doesn't work as we want it to, and she calls me Silly Man shouting. Do I continue to smile?

I'm quite sure the bulbs had little reactions to Edison's words. And now human beings are just a bit different in how they take bad words addressed to them…

Anyway I can't deny there are situations which require a sense of urgency and loudness can be useful for this purpose. Imagine you have to save a life, if you do that without politeness like using "*please, I'm sorry….*" Do someone will complain it?

If you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original.

Again: "You build on failure. .... Close the door on the past. You don't try to forget the mistakes, but you don't dwell on it. You don't let it have any of your energy...."

What Kivosaki said is Do Not dwell on them. You don't forget them, but do not spend your energy dwelling on failures. Think positive, look ahead. This is the main issue of positive approach. We agree with it. In the same way I do not say we have to punish ourselves because we experienced a failure! We do not need to cry, or **overanalyse**, nor search for the guilty person! We just have to check what happened and learn the lesson not only cancel options which don't work. We can learn when an option works in an environment, with some people, in a certain mood and, generally, one which is related to any other mutable human parameter.

You then say: " *It is useless to spend your time avoiding them because by avoiding them you also avoid success - failures are an indication that you tried*…"

I cannot agree: failures in this sense teach you when an option is not working in one specific situation. Be careful, we are talking about intangible things, no iron, no bulbs, no material stuff, just words. Words in human interactions. Words which create your world, words which open minds, words which burn dreams, words which fire emotions, words which alter love.

No Kiran, I cannot agree, success in human interaction does not come mechanically, cancelling options, success is created when we are able to read the surrounding environment and then act on the option which works.

Just learning helps us to understand the environment and its possibilities. Using mistakes and failures to test what works and where, can teach us how to understand new situations and new meanings which are not mechanically regulated.

Positive approach serves to support the motivation, support people to stay committed, to not quit, to still try. Then still learn! Positive approach does not mean to forget mistakes or think all is beauty. Positiveness is great when applied to failures: look at the good lesson we have got! Why hasn't this worked here? How do we change it, or shape it to make it work?

In this way failure can teach us more than success can. Doing the right thing in a mutable world is never the same. Best Practices are the right things well done. But in a Liquid Modernity World, in which everything changes, how can the right thing last longer?

Zygmunt Bauman: "…. *become able to "learn how to walk" instead of "learning the road". The road changes every day; being able to walk on every road allows us to face any path wherever we are going to. Be able to seek for the unique, right answer which fits the momento.*"

Just some weeks ago I have met **Jurgen Appelo**, the Management 3.0 author. A very smart guy. His history is really nice.

From the book
"**How To Change the World**"
    Jurgen Appelo

15 Years of Failure

I love bragging about the fact that I have been a failure for more than 15 years. In 1992 I tried to start an international newsletter about dance music, and I failed. In 1994 I tried to launch a game development company, and I failed. I spent three years writing bookkeeping software, but I sold it to only a few customers. In 1997, with a friend, I started a software company, which was successful for a while. But eventually, together with the parent company, it collapsed. (Just like the dozen or so relationships I had in that decade.)

The first signs of change seemed to arrive in 1999, when I launched an Internet startup that produced games charts. My business plan was so impressive that I won a national award for it. And it helped to attract one million euros from informal investors. My team and I were quite successful at *spending* all that money to the last euro. But, alas, we didn't find any customers, and this business collapsed as well. I will spare you my many failures between 2000 and 2008, which included a novel, a cartoon, a blog, another book, and several original but doomed software projects. Again and again I tried to have some impact on the world around me. And every time I failed.

Did I give up? Of course not.

Starting in 2008, for some inexplicable reasons, things changed. My blog NOOP.NL is a success, hailed as the 3rd most popular Agile blog in the world

Sometimes people ask me, "What has changed?" or "How did you do that?"

Indeed, I've been wondering about that too…

Maybe I have exhausted the total supply of failure that was available for me in the universe. Maybe some god up there shook his head and said, "That's enough failure for you. If you go on like this there will be nothing left for the European government."

Jurgen in his book has shaped **Celebration Grid**
Using this tool managers can share better practices to reward the job.
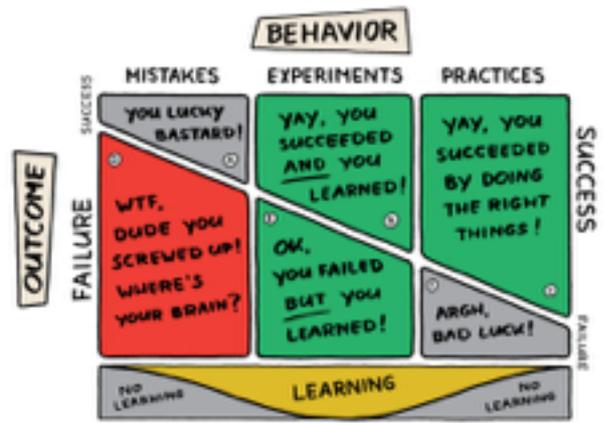
How do Celebration Grid works

No more rewards to lucky bastards who get results acting with bad behaviours.
Less emphasis on winners who just do good practices with no risk.
Focus on what makes us learn: the experiment!

Doing the right things which work do not add anything to what we already know. It's just a simple routine which gets results. If bad luck doesn't affect them...
Yes, we get results but will be forever right the right thing? What happens when something changes? How will we be able to learn how to manage the new scene?

Doing the thing badly, or in the wrong way can also lead to success, but it's just a lucky bastard who enjoys it. This way only teaches the options we can cancel or the people we have to fire...

Doing thing differently, trying to adapt routines and actions to different environments, weird feedback, unknown situations is risky. This path is the one which allows us to stay awake to the changes the world will bring. Learning what option works here and why, as well as the one which works in other situations but not here, highlights the concealed rules.

Organisations have to support innovators, put energy in creating new knowledge, a new culture! Understanding where the options work and how they create value: the value to manage the emerging future.

That's the reason, Kiran, why I agree with Jurgen: **Failure teaches us much more** than we are able to learn achieving only successes. More often than not is just success celebrated and rewarded. Often with no or little inspection on its causes. Success, as well as failure, has to be analysed deeper, dwelled upon understood, because we need to learn, just as with failure. In this way both of them teach us a lot more....

Then I agree with you too: too often organisations celebrate success without dwelling on it and they are focused about failures and to spin around them, their reasons so often are just to find the guilty. This is the negative approach we have to eliminate through management practices.

Kiran:

I think I see your point. While you don't disagree that it **is more fruitful to analyse successes** to get better and holistic solutions, what you're saying is that **we shouldn't lose the lessons from failure either**... I particularly liked what you said about how the reason for a failure may not have been a strategy *per se* but rather a mismatch with certain environmental attributes...

So, with the failure we shouldn't throw out that approach or strategy too... It could lead to success in a different environment... You're right!

Thank you. I learned something today.

Me and Kiran

So that, dear readers, **you have already understood**, Kiran and I didn't argue at all, we have simply shaped on a more complex idea about **Positive Approach** and its deployment using tools like **Appreciative Inquiry** or **Neuro Linguistic Programming**.

It's very important to have discussions, even the hard ones, with someone who can confute our beliefs, because we all well know how **the greatest risk of one idea** is to be strongly attached to that, especially if it is the only one you have ....