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SOAR – Workshop Review

By [Amanda Horne](#) on September 3, 2010 – 8:00 am

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Amanda writes on the **3rd of each month**, and her articles are [here](#).

What if strategic planning were invigorating? Or organization-changing?

In Australia, we were thrilled that John Loty of the [Appreciative Inquiry Network](#) invited Jackie Stavros here to facilitate workshops in July 2010. Jackie, an expert in strategy and Appreciative Inquiry, created her 'SOAR' framework and '5-I' approach to bring an appreciative approach to strategic planning. Jackie facilitated a series of one-day 'SOAR to Greatness' workshops for managers, change agents, HR Managers, and executive coaches in four Australian cities.

I was part of an enthusiastic group of participants who attended Jackie's Canberra workshop on July 26th. Being a long-time practitioner and fan of Appreciative Inquiry and Appreciative Coaching, I was eager to learn about Jackie's work.



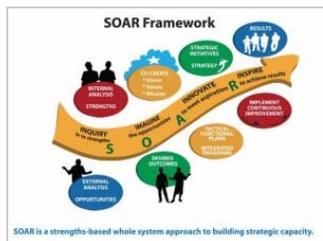
Jackie Stavros

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A little bit about Jackie: she has had extensive experience both teaching (Program Chair and Associate Professor, College of Management, Lawrence Technological University) and working with individuals, teams, divisions and organizations in the development of strategy, strategic planning, organizational development and change, marketing, teamwork and leadership. She is the co-creator of SOAR, a strengths-based approach to building strategic capacity and co-author of the *Thin Book of SOAR*, *The Appreciative Inquiry Handbook*, and *Dynamic Relationships*. Jackie uses strengths-based whole system approaches such as Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and SOAR to work with individuals, teams, divisions, and organizations to build dynamic relationships and co-create and facilitate strategic change initiatives with positive results. For a more extensive bio, [refer to her page at Lawrence Tech](#).



SOAR

SOAR stands for: Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results.

"SOAR is a strategic thinking, strategy formulation, and planning framework that allows an organization to construct its future through collaboration among its stakeholders. It is a strengths-based approach to building strategic capacity, and is an appreciative alternative to SWOT. SOAR Applications include: Strategy, strategic planning, team building, coaching, leadership development, and strategic summits."

SOAR Framework

The 5-I Approach

This is an approach using SOAR in formal strategic planning. The five "I" phases are: initiate, inquire, imagine, innovate, and inspire to implement.

The SOAR Workshop

Areas covered during our day with Jackie included:

- How to create strategic inquiry with appreciative intent

- The history of the SOAR framework
- Examples and case studies
- How to use SOAR using the '5-I' approach
- The '5-I' approach and formal strategic planning

Key points and thoughts which I noted throughout the workshop include:

What happened to SWOT? For those familiar with the SWOT approach (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), Jackie explained that she does not ignore weaknesses and threats. Instead they are acknowledged and reframed in the "O" piece of her SOAR framework. This heartened those in the room who feared that fields such as Appreciative Inquiry and Positive Psychology ignore the negative.

Why SOAR makes an impact: I like to think that SOAR is SWOT refashioned and updated for 21st Century organizations who are seeking to create workplaces which have greater employee engagement, collaboration, community, meaning, purpose, creativity and energy. SOAR conversations not only achieve strategic outcomes, they also contribute to achieving many other business objectives necessary for creating sustainable workplaces. Using Appreciative Inquiry, SOAR, or any other various based on the principles of AI works with any person, no matter what role or level they hold in or outside an organization. An even greater advantage of SOAR and Appreciative Inquiry, in my opinion, is that participants in the conversations don't even need to be interested in strategic planning. These are very inclusive approaches that work well for everyone. No matter what the level or skill, each participant had a voice that is valued and recognized. It is truly collaborative and consultative.



Soaring

Values, meaning, purpose and strengths: Whether from a whole system or individual perspective, life is better when we align with our values, have meaning and purpose in our work, life and in our vision, and we work from a place where we can use our best strengths to make meaningful contributions. The SOAR workshop reinforced that not only do SOAR and AI deliver in the project focus, by-products include greater connection to values, meaning, purpose and strengths. This is a good thing.

And further: SOAR and AI helps to break down silos, and to connect more strongly with stakeholders and clients, and creates an environment in which respectful conversations and relationships flourish. In her 'Thin Book of SOAR' Jackie notes that companies become more resilient, are better able to manage unexpected changes and uncertainty. This is partly due to the strengthening of the organization through its adoption of mindsets, approaches and methods based on AI.

Confidence: The workshop inspired people to include what they learned into their practices, and to have the courage to be creative.

References:

Stavros, J. (2009). [The Thin Book of SOAR: Building Strengths-Based Strategy](#). Thin Book Publishing.



[The Thin Book of SOAR: Building Stre...](#)

Jacqueline M. Stavros

Images:

Jackie Stavros by John Loty
SOAR framework by Jackie Stavros, at [AppreciativeInquiryNet](#)
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