

What Is Appreciative Inquiry?

AI has been described in a myriad of ways: a radically affirmative approach to change that completely lets go of problem-based management,³ the most important advance in action research in the past decade,⁴ and organization development's philosopher's stone.⁵ Summing up AI is difficult—a philosophy of knowing, a methodology for managing change, an approach to leadership and human development. Here is a practice-oriented definition:

Appreciative Inquiry is the cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives a system "life" when it is most effective and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to heighten positive potential. It mobilizes inquiry through crafting an "unconditional positive question" often involving hundreds or sometimes thousands of people. In AI, intervention gives way to imagination and innovation; instead of negation, criticism, and spiraling diagnosis there is discovery, dream, and design. AI assumes that every living system has untapped, rich, and inspiring accounts of the positive. Link this "positive change core" directly to any change agenda, and changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized.

The positive change core is one of the greatest and largely unrecognized resources in change management today. The most important insight we have learned with AI to date is that *human systems grow toward what they persistently ask questions about*. The single most important action a group can take to liberate the human spirit and consciously construct a better future is to *make the positive change core the common and explicit property of all*.

Getting Started

The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle

The AI cycle can be as rapid and informal as a conversation with a friend or colleague, or as formal as an organization-wide process involving every stakeholder. While there is no formula for Appreciative Inquiry, most organization-change efforts flow through the 4-D Cycle (see Figure 1). Each AI process is homegrown—designed to meet the unique challenges of the organization and industry involved.

At AI's heart is the *appreciative interview*. The uniqueness and power of an AI interview stem from its fundamentally affirmative focus. Appreciative interviews uncover what gives life to an organization, department, or community when at its best. They discover personal and organizational high points, what people value, and what they hope and wish for to enhance their organization's social, economic, and environmental vitality.

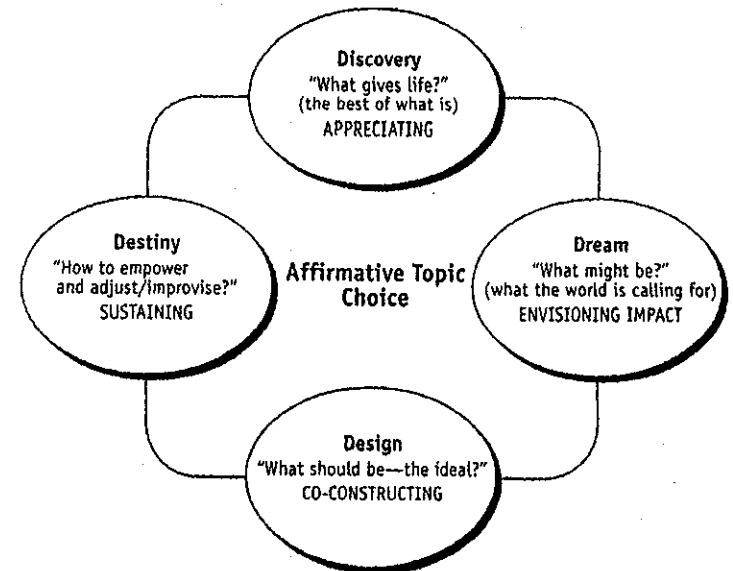


Figure 1. The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle

Source:
David Cooperrider + Diana Whitney
Appreciative Inquiry, 1999

Let's Illustrate

You have just received the following unsettling phone call:

My name is Rita Smith. I am president of a New York consulting partnership. Our firm specializes in organizational conflict: labor-management issues, gender conflict, issues of diversity. A Fortune 500 corporation contracts with us around sexual harassment, an issue that is deeper and more severe than virtually any corporation realizes. Our firm has specialized in this area for some years, and I'm beginning to ask myself the Hippocratic oath. Are we really helping? Over two years, by every measure—numbers of complaints, lawsuits, sexual harassment training evaluations, word of mouth—the problem grows. Our postworkshop interviews show that people feel less able to communicate with the opposite gender, they feel more distance and less trust, and the glass ceiling remains. So here is my question. How would you take an Appreciative Inquiry approach to sexual harassment?

Affirmative Topic Choice

This was a tough one. At the core of the AI cycle is *Affirmative Topic Choice*. It is the most important part of any AI endeavor. We believe the seeds of change are implicit in the very first questions we ask.

If inquiry and change are a simultaneous moment, if the questions we ask set the stage for what we "find," and if what we "discover" (the data) creates the material for conceiving the future, then how shall we proceed with an appreciative approach to sexual harassment? Back to our phone call. Here is an excerpt from the response:

DAVID: We have an important question. What is it that *you* want to learn about and achieve?

RITA: We want to dramatically cut the incidence of sexual harassment. We want to solve this huge problem, or at least make a significant dent in it.

DAVID: Is that all?

RITA: You mean what do I *really* want? (Long pause . . . then she blurts out) *What we really want is to develop the new-century organization—a model of high-quality cross-gender relationships in the workplace!*

DAVID: What if we invited people in pairs to nominate themselves to share their stories of creating and sustaining high-quality cross-gender workplace relationships?

To fast-forward, a small pilot project surpassed everyone's expectations. Hundreds, not dozens, of pairs nominated themselves. That was surprise number one. Then another organization learned of the pilot and conceptualized a truly major effort. The pioneering organization was the Avon Corporation in Mexico. One hundred people were trained in AI interviewing. Over the next several weeks, they completed about three hundred interviews. At each interview's end, the interviewers asked the person if they could help interview—creating a waterfall. Stories poured in—stories of achievement, trust building, authentic joint leadership, practices of effective conflict management, ways of dealing with sex stereotypes, stages of development, and methods of career advancement—all focused on high-quality cross-gender work relationships.

A large-group forum was held, using the interview stories to imagine the future. Practical propositions were created such as, "Every task force or committee at Avon, whenever possible, is cochaired by a cross-gender pairing." Some thirty visionary propositions were created. Subsequent changes in system structures and behaviors were dramatic.⁶ From our perspective, perhaps most important were changes in the cross-gender membership of the senior leadership group. The changes

did more than improve interpersonal relations; the glass ceiling became a doorway. As with GTE, the story gets better. Avon Mexico received the 1997 Catalyst Award for best place in the country for women to work.

The First "D"—Discovery

The core Discovery Phase task is disclosing positive capacity. AI ignites this "spirit of inquiry" through the interviewing process. When asked how many people should be interviewed or who should do the interviews, we increasingly say "everyone" because in the process, people reclaim their ability to admire, to be surprised, to be inspired. What distinguishes AI at this phase is that every question is positive. As people throughout a system connect to study qualities, examples, and analysis of the positive core—each appreciating and everyone being appreciated—hope grows and community expands.

From Discovery to Dream

An artist's imagination is kindled not by searching for "what is wrong with this picture" but by being inspired by those things worth valuing. Appreciation draws our eye toward life, stirs our feelings, sets in motion our curiosity, and inspires the envisioning mind. The Dream Phase uses interview stories and insights discovered through the interviews. People listen together to moments when the organization was "alive," and the future becomes visible though ideals interwoven with actual experiences.

Design

Once the strategic focus or dream is articulated (a vision of a better world, a powerful purpose, and a compelling statement of strategic intent), attention turns to creating the ideal organization, a design of the system in relation to its world. One aspect differentiating Appreciative Inquiry from other planning methodologies is that future images emerge through grounded examples from an organization's positive

past. Good news stories are used to craft possibility propositions that bridge the best of "what is" with collective aspiration of "what might be." People challenge the status quo as well as common assumptions underlying the organization's design. They explore: "What would our organization look like if it were designed to maximize the positive core and accelerate realizing our dreams?" When inspired by a great dream we have yet to find an organization that did not feel compelled to design something very new and very necessary.

We recently worked with Dee Hock, a truly visionary CEO. Dee founded VISA, a breakthrough organization with over 20,000 offices. The VISA system in over two hundred countries would not be manageable using centralized, command-and-control design principles of the traditional organization. If General Motors defined the old model, perhaps Dee's "chaordic organization"—combining chaos and order (like nature's designs)—foreshadows an emerging prototype. From Dee, we learned how to move pragmatically and substantively from appreciative Discovery and Dream to a postbureaucratic Design that distributes power and liberates human energy in a way we have never seen.

Destiny

We used to call the fourth "D" Delivery. We emphasized planning and dealing with conventional implementation challenges. Then we discovered that momentum for change and long-term sustainability increased the more we abandoned "delivery" ideas of action planning, monitoring progress, and building implementation strategies. Instead, we focused on giving AI to everyone and stepped back. The GTE story, still unfolding but attracting national recognition, is suggestive. This story says organizational change needs to look more like an inspired movement than a neatly packaged or engineered product. Dan Young, head of OD at GTE, and his colleagues call it "organizing for change from the grassroots to the frontline." Call it the path of positive protest or a strategy for positive subversion—it is virtually unstoppable once up and running.

Applying the 4-D Cycle

Two totally different approaches to applying the 4-D cycle AI are emerging. One says get the whole system into the same room. We have called this the AI Organization Summit (like climbing to the peak of the Himalayas). The other says let the whole thing out of the room—make the later phases more web-like, more self-organizing, more like a social movement. It is an autopoietic⁷ network-structure within a bureaucracy. The first, the summit, is a modality that often results in “home runs” and strong relational ties. The second appears to be built on “the strength of weak ties” and “small wins.” Both have led to huge momentum.

The Appreciative Inquiry Organization Summit

The AI Summit is among the most exciting Appreciative Inquiry applications. It is a large-scale meeting process that focuses on discovering and developing the organization’s positive change core and designing it into strategic business processes such as marketing, customer service, human resource development, and new product development. Participation is diverse by design and includes all the organization’s stakeholders. It is generally four days long and involves 50 to 2,000 participants or more.

For example, Nutrimental Foods of Brazil, a 700-person company, closed for four days while employees and approximately 150 customers, vendors, and community members participated in an AI Strategic Planning Summit. One year later, profits were up 300 percent, and the company made the AI Summit an annual event. It was so cost-effective that it became the company’s strategic planning mode.⁸

While each Summit is a unique design, there are some common aspects of successful AI Summits. The four days flow through the AI 4-D Cycle (Table 1).

GTE: The 4-D Cycle Self-Organizes

The “GTE Together” article described a grassroots movement to build the new GTE. Initiated as a pilot to see what would happen if apprecia-

<i>Day—Cycle</i>	<i>Focus</i>	<i>Participants . . .</i>
1—Discovery	Mobilize a systemic or systemwide inquiry into the positive change core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in appreciative interviews • Reflect on interview highlights
2—Dream	Envision the organization’s greatest potential for positive influence and impact in the world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share dreams collected during the interviews • Create and present dramatic enactments
3—Design	Craft an organization in which the positive change core is boldly alive in all strategies, processes, systems, decisions, and collaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify high-impact design elements and create an organization design • Draft provocative propositions (design statements) incorporating the positive change core
4—Destiny	Invite action inspired by the days of discovery, dream, and design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicly declare intended actions and ask for support • Self-selected groups plan next steps

Table 1. AI 4-D Cycle and the AI Summit

tive inquiry was given to frontline employees, things took off. All of a sudden, without any permission, frontline employees were launching interview studies into positive topics like innovation, inspired leadership, revolutionary customer responsiveness, labor-management partnerships, and “fun.” Fresh from an AI training, one employee did two hundred interviews about the positive core of a major call center. Who is going to say no to a request like “Please help me. . . . I’m trying to learn about the best innovations. I see you as someone with insight into creating settings where innovation happens. . . . It is part of my leadership development. I will share my learnings with you!” Soon the topics were finding their way into meetings, corridor conversations, and senior planning sessions. The questions, enthusiastically received, were changing corporate attention, language, agendas, and learnings. Many started brainstorming AI applications. Ever done focus groups with customers who are 100 percent satisfied? How about changing call center measures? What if we replaced deficit measures with

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equally powerful measures of the positive? How about a gathering with senior executives celebrating our learnings, sharing how seeing the positive has changed our work and family lives, and recruiting them to join us?

The pilot created an avalanche of requests for participation-confirming the large numbers at GTE ready for the task of positive change. Ten region training sessions, linked by satellite conferencing were held. Quite suddenly the power of a 1,000-person network caught people's attention. Changes happened not by organized confrontation, diagnosis, burning platforms, or piecemeal reform but through irresistibly vibrant and real visions. And when everyone's awareness grows at the same time, it is easier to believe that fundamental change is possible.

Then the unions raised questions. There were serious concerns, including the fact that they were not consulted earlier. We were told the initiative was over. A meeting of the unions and GTE would put the whole thing to rest. At the meeting, IBEW and CWA leaders said they saw something fresh and unique about AI. They agreed to bring two hundred union leaders together for an "AI evaluation . . . to see if it had any place in GTE's future." Picture the session: tables of eight evaluating the ideas and casting a vote of either "yes, move forward with AI" or "no, withhold endorsement." For thirty minutes thirty groups deliberated. And when asked "Table one, how do you vote?" the response was "We vote 100 percent for moving forward with AI and feel this is an historic opportunity for the whole system." Then the next table said, "We vote 100 percent with a caveat—that every person at GTE have the opportunity for AI training, and all new projects be done in partnership with the unions and the company." On and on the vote went. All thirty tables voted to move forward. Eight months later, a new era of partnership is announced. The historic Statement of Partnership: "The company and the Unions realize that traditional adversarial labor-management relations must change to adapt to the new global

telecommunications marketplace . . . the company and the Unions have agreed to move in a new direction emphasizing partnership."

AI accelerates organization breakthroughs by uncovering positive traditions and strengths, creating network-like structures that liberate an organization's positive core and enabling people to empower one another—to connect, cooperate, and cocreate. Changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized when people constructively appropriate the power of the positive core and—let go of accounts of the negative.

Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships

The role of an organization's leadership is that of *Positive Change Catalyst*—to plant the AI seed and to let it grow in its own way, in its own time. Leaders are invited to participate equally as one of the many essential voices at the table. Given the opportunity to listen to and hear the creative ideas, hopes, and dreams of their colleagues and organization stakeholders, leaders recognize that their greatest job is to get out of the way. Once the positive revolution begins, what it needs most is affirmation and a clear pathway for experimentation and innovation. AI is a high-participation process that once begun continues in remarkable ways, with remarkable results.

The consultant's role in AI is that of *Agent of Inquiry*.⁹ It includes four aspects:

- To view organizations as living spiritual-social systems, mysteries of creation to be nurtured and affirmed, not as mechanistic or scientific operations with problems to be solved;
- To work in the affirmative, continually seeking to discover what gives life to the organization and its members;
- To be facilitators of possibilities, hope, and inspired action;
- To continually seek ways to give the process away, to support organization members in making it their own.

	<i>Before</i>	<i>During</i>	<i>After</i>
Consultants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce AI to the organization • Focus on the "business case" for AI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train groups in AI • Support the Core Team • Facilitate the Summit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist the organization to integrate AI into daily practices
Sponsors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become knowledgeable in AI • Plant the AI seed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion AI in the organization • Participate—as an equal, essential voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask, How might we take an AI approach to this? • Lead by affirmation
Core Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become knowledgeable in AI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select affirmative topics • Create interview protocol • Determine interview strategy • Communicate "best" stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use AI as a daily practice
Interviewers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become knowledgeable in AI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct interviews • Summarize "best" stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use AI as a daily practice
Summit Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct interviews or be interviewed • Review interview report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in discovery and dialogue • Dare to dream • Design the ideal organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain AI organizational processes and practices • Create new systems and structures using AI • Share success stories

Table 2. AI Roles and Responsibilities

The primary role of an Appreciative Inquiry participant is that of *Student of Organization Life*. AI engages all levels and stakeholders in a cooperative learning and cocreation process. To be a Student of Organization Life emphasizes curiosity and learning in the most pragmatic ways possible. The best of what has been and what is possible can be linked to inspired action. Future dreams are grounded in reality and hence believable.

Stewardship of an organization-wide Appreciative Inquiry generally rests with a *Core Team* selected for diverse backgrounds, functional experience, and organizational responsibility. The Core Team oversees the process, monitoring its overall impact.

Appreciative Inquiry and Power in Organizations

We could have called this section "Eulogy for Problem Solving." In our view the problem-solving paradigm, while once perhaps quite effective, is out of sync with the realities of today's virtual worlds.¹⁰ Problem-solving approaches to change are painfully slow (always asking people to look backward to yesterday's causes). They rarely result in new vision (a problem, implicitly, assumes an ideal, so we are not searching for new knowledge but are searching for how to close gaps). Finally, problem approaches generate defensiveness and separation among people (it is not my problem but yours).

Our real concern is with power, control, and ways in which the problem-solving paradigm limits human potential. In particular, our concern is with more consciously linking the use of language to human potential and change. Words do create worlds—even in unintended ways.

It was an unforgettable moment in a conference on AI for inner city change agents, mostly community mobilizers from the Saul Alinsky school of thought (*Rules for Radicals*). After two days a participant challenged:

This is naïve . . . have you ever worked in the depths of the inner city, like the Cabrini Green public housing projects? You're asking me to "appreciate" it . . . just yesterday the impoverished children were playing soccer, not with a ball—no money for that, but with a dead rat. Tell me about appreciative inquiry in the housing projects!

A powerful question. It made us go deeper. First we argued that problem-diagnosis approaches, including Alinsky's confrontation methods, work, but at half AI's speed. As we explored the cultural consequences of deficit language (e.g., he's "manic-depressive"; she's "antisocial"), we saw a disconcerting relationship between the society-wide escalation of deficit-based change methods and the erosion of people power. From a constructionist perspective, words do not mirror the world out there; they coordinate our actions. Professional languages function like tools. When I gave my son a hammer, inevitably everything became a nail. What happens when the "scientific" human-deficit vocabularies become everyone's tool kit? In particular, scholars have documented that deficit-based change approaches reinforce hierarchy, erode community, and instill a sense of self-enfeeblement.¹⁰

Back at the inner city conference:

After tracing human-deficit vocabularies to the mental health professions, the rise of bureaucracy, skeptical science, original sin, and the cynical media, the Alinsky-trained activist gasped: "In the name of entertainment my people are fed negative views of human violence—surrounded by endless descriptions of their 'problem lives.' The result? People asleep in front of their TVs, unable to move. They have a voice in the housing project assessments. But it is a . . . visionless voice. They get to confirm the deficit analysis. . . . What hits me now is how radical the AI message is. Marx could have said it better: human

deficit vocabularies are the opiates of the masses. People have voice but are not mobilized by it anymore. Visionless voice is worse than no voice."

It is not problem-solving methodologies per se that are of concern, but that we have taken the tools a step further. Somewhere this shift happened: it is not that organizations *have* problems, but that they *are* problems (see Figure 2). Once accepted as fundamental truth, change management becomes infused with a deficit consciousness. For example, "Action-research is both an approach to problem solving, a model or paradigm, and a problem-solving process."¹²

Tough questions remain about power and deficit discourse. Our hypothesis is that when AI is conducted as a whole systems approach moving through the 4-D Cycle, the positive core becomes the explicit and common property of all. In every case there is movement toward greater equality and less hierarchy. Inevitably, post-bureaucratic organization designs that distribute power and liberate human energy emerge.

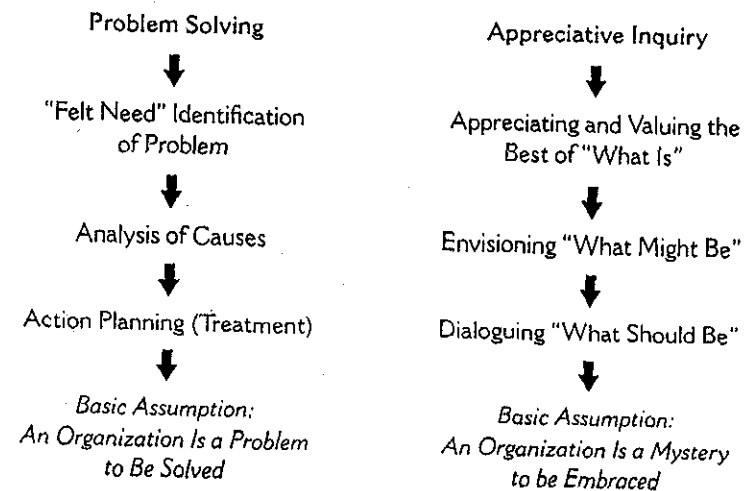


Figure 2. Problem Solving and Appreciative Inquiry

Conditions for Success

Appreciative Inquiry best serves when there is a high level of *process integrity*, where the means and the ends are the same. If an organization wants greater cooperation across functional lines, greater employee commitment and responsibility, and faster cycle time, the process must engage people in interviews across functional lines, involve employees in making decisions and determining the process, and do it faster than usual.

Human change integrity also contributes to AI's success. This is the capacity for system members to be, in Gandhi's words, "the change they want to see." AI impacts personal, relational, and organizational performance profoundly and simultaneously. As individuals are interviewed, they experience unfamiliar validation and support. Telling their stories and being witnessed by other people is an exceptionally transforming experience. At the relational level, the interview taps a human longing to experience and recognize meaningful connections. Once discovered, the stories, the shared experience, and the connections become part of the individuals' and the organization's identities. With AI, the organization, its members, and stakeholders transform simultaneously in relation to one another.

Perseverance in change is another success criterion. Change is life itself, not an event. At its best, AI leaves greater organizational capacity to change through inquiry, sharing stories, relationship-enhancing communication, and cooperative innovation. We do not leave organizations in a final state called effectiveness or excellence. We persist in being open to learning, discovering new possibilities for understanding and performance, and sharing our best with others to raise the collective standard of living within our organizations and on the planet.

Creating *narrative-rich communication* ensures a fertile field for success. In contrast to memos, plans, and policies, Appreciative Inquiry works into the organization's communication through storytelling, testimonials, and large-group forums. AI taps into the organization's inner

dialogue—the stories that members tell about themselves and their organization. In effect, sharing best practices, magic moments, and life-giving experiences is how organizing occurs. Through narrative-rich communication, best practices are disseminated and enhance enthusiasm and the sense of well-being. When appreciative stories "have wings" and fly around, the capacity for change and high performance expands.

Inquiry and dialogue create rich *anticipatory images*. AI is based on the principle that our future images guide our present performance. Where the images are hopeful and expansive, organization performance and personal motivation are generally high. Where the images are depressed or deficient, morale tends to be low and turnover high. By fostering the discovery and sharing of success stories—past and imagined—AI invites affirmation and expansion.

Theoretical Basis

AI accelerates organization breakthroughs. Changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized when people constructively adopt the power of the positive core and simply *let go* of negative accounts.

But then the question is always voiced, "What do we do with the *real* problems?"

Basic Appreciative Inquiry Principles

To address this question in anything other than Pollyannaish terms, we need to comment on the work that inspired AI. Five principles central to AI's theory base are discussed below:

The Constructionist Principle: Human knowledge and organizational destiny are interwoven. To be effective, we must understand organizations as living, human constructions.

We are constantly involved in working to understand the world around us—doing strategic planning, environmental scans, audits, surveys, and so on. Constructionism replaces the *individual* with the

relationship as the locus of knowledge by valuing the power of language to create our sense of reality.

Inquiry is inseparable from action. Its purpose is to create “generative theory.” Rather than explaining yesterday’s world, it articulates tomorrow’s possibilities.

The Principle of Simultaneity: Inquiry and change are not separate moments but are simultaneous. Inquiry is intervention. The seeds of change—the things people think and talk about, the things people discover and learn, and the things that inform dialogue and inspire images of the future—are implicit in the first questions we ask. They set the stage for what we “find.” What we “discover” (the data) becomes the stories out of which the future is conceived. Therefore, one of the most impactful actions a change agent takes is to articulate questions.

One great myth is that first we analyze, and then we decide on change. Not so, says the constructionist view. Even the most innocent question evokes change—even if reactions are simply changes in awareness, dialogue, feelings of boredom, or laughter. When we consider that inquiry and change are a simultaneous moment, it is no longer, “Is my question leading to right or wrong answers?” but rather, “How does my question impact our lives together. Is it generating conversations about the good, the better, the possible?”

The Poetic Principle: Human organizations are like open books. An organization’s story is constantly being coauthored. Pasts, presents, and futures are endless sources of learning, inspiration, and interpretation—like the endless interpretive possibilities in a good poem. The implication is that we can study any topic related to human experience. We can inquire into the nature of alienation or joy, enthusiasm or low morale, efficiency or excess, in any human organization.

Constructionism reminds us that the “world out there” doesn’t dictate our inquiries; rather, the topics are products of social processes (cultural habits, rhetoric, power relations). AI makes sure we are not just reproducing the same worlds over and over again through simple

and boring repetition of our questions (not one more morale survey). AI also says, with excitement, that there are great gains in linking the means and ends of inquiry. For example, in talks with great leaders in nongovernmental organizations (Save the Children, World Vision) we have begun to appreciate the profound joy that CEOs feel as “servant leaders.” This positive orientation plays a profound role in creating healthy organizations. Does this mean that joy has something to do with good leadership? Why aren’t we including this topic in our change efforts? What might happen if we did?

The Anticipatory Principle: Our positive images of the future lead our positive actions—this is the increasingly energizing basis and presupposition of Appreciative Inquiry.

The infinite human resource we have for generating constructive organizational change is our collective imagination and discourse about the future. The image of the future guides any organization’s current behavior. Much like a movie projector to a screen, human systems are forever projecting expectations ahead of themselves. The talk in hallways, the metaphors and language, bring the future powerfully into the present as a mobilizing agent. Inquiring in ways that redefine anticipatory reality¹³—creating positive images together—may be the most important aspect of any inquiry.

In studies of positive imagery from athletics, research into relationships between optimism and health, placebo studies in medicine, and studies of the Pygmalion dynamic in the classroom, the conclusions are converging on something Aristotle said long ago: “A vivid imagination compels the whole body to obey it.”

The Positive Principle: Our experience is that building and sustaining momentum for change requires large amounts of positive outlook and social bonding—things like hope, excitement, inspiration, caring, camaraderie, sense of urgent purpose, and sheer joy in creating something meaningful together. We find that the more positive the question we ask, the more long-lasting and successful the change effort.

Sustaining the Results

Results generated through Appreciative Inquiry are immediate, often surprisingly dramatic and broad in scope, touching personal as well as whole-system transformation and enhancing organization performance, productivity, and profitability.

The key to sustaining high participation, enthusiasm and morale, inspired action, and organizational agility and innovation lies in an organization-wide commitment to becoming an Appreciative Inquiry Organization (AIO). Sustainability depends on consciously and strategically reconstructing the organization's core processes—human resources, management, planning, and measurement—in alignment with the AI principles and methodologies.

As AI's principles and methodologies become embedded in daily practices, the organizational capacity to sustain high levels of participation and enthusiasm increases. For example, at one AIO, all meetings begin with a brief inquiry into "magic moments"—times of extraordinary success among members. Other organizational enactments of AI include annual strategic planning summits, appreciative interviewing as an employee-orientation process, appreciative feedback, and affirmatively focused measurement systems.

Conclusion

To be sure, Appreciative Inquiry begins an adventure.

We are infants in understanding appreciative processes of knowing and social construction. Yet we are increasingly clear that the world is ready to leap beyond deficit-based change methodologies and enter a life-centric domain. Organizations, says AI theory, are centers of human relatedness, first and foremost, and relationships thrive where there is an appreciative eye—when people see the best in one another, when they share their dreams and ultimate concerns in affirming ways, and when they are connected in full voice to create not just new worlds but better worlds. The velocity and largely informal spread of the

appreciative learnings suggests a growing disenchantment with exhausted change theories, especially those wedded to human-deficit vocabularies, and a corresponding urge to work with people, groups, and organizations in more constructive, positive, life-affirming, even spiritual ways. AI, we hope it is being said, is more than a simple 4-D Cycle of discovery, dream, design, and destiny; what is being introduced is something deeper at the core.

Perhaps our inquiry must become the positive revolution we want to see in the world. Albert Einstein's words clearly compel: "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."

Notes

Introduction

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- ² The *New York Times*, *The Downsizing of America*. New York: Times Books, 1996.
- ³ Holman, Peggy, and Tom Devane, eds. *The Change Handbook: Group Methods for Shaping the Future*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999. This book contains over twenty such stories of stellar results from high-involvement, systemic change.

Appreciative Inquiry

- ¹ White, T. W. "Working in Interesting Times." In *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. LXII, no. 15 (1996), pp. 472-474.
- ² Cooperrider, D. L., and S. Srivastva. "Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life." In *Research in Organization Change and Development*, vol. 1, edited by W. Pasmore and R. Woodman, pp. 129-169. Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1987.
- ³ White, T. W. "Working in Interesting Times." In *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. LXII, no. 15 (1996), pp. 472-474.
- ⁴ Bushe, G. R., and T. Pitman. "Appreciative Process: A Method for Transformational Change." In *OD Practitioner*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1991), pp. 1-4.

- ⁵ Sorenson, P. F., Jr. "About This Issue." In *OD Practitioner*, vol. 28, nos. 1 & 2 (1996), pp. 3-4.
- ⁶ Schiller, M., and M. Worthing. "Appreciative Leadership," e-mail, August 7, 1998.
- ⁷ The term *autopoiesis* was coined by two neuroscientists, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. *Auto* means "self" and refers to the autonomy of self-organizing systems; *poiesis* means "making"; so *autopoiesis* means "self-making." Autopoiesis is the process whereby an organization produces itself. An autopoietic organization is an autonomous and self-maintaining entity that contains component-producing processes. In this way, the entire network continually "makes itself." See Maturana, H., and Varela, F., "Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living." In *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science*. Cohen, R. S., and M. W. Wartofsky (eds.) 42. Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1980.
- ⁸ Whitney, D., and D. L. Cooperrider. "The Appreciative Inquiry Summit: Overview and Application." In *Employment Relations Today*, (Summer 1998), pp. 17-28.
- ⁹ Cooperrider, D. L. "The 'Child' as Agent of Inquiry." In *OD Practitioner*, vol. 28, nos. 1 & 2 (1996), pp. 5-11.
- ¹⁰ Cooperrider, D. L. "Resources for Getting Appreciative Inquiry Started: An Example OD Proposal." In *OD Practitioner*, vol. 28, nos. 1 & 2 (1996), pp. 23-33.
- ¹¹ Gergen, K. *Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. New York: Basic Books, 1992.
- ¹² French, W. L., and C. H. Bell, Jr. *Organization Development: Behavioral Science Interventions for Organizational Improvement*. 5th ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1994.
- ¹³ Cooperrider, D. L. "Positive Image Positive Action: The Affirmative Basis of Organizing." In *Appreciative Management and Leadership*, Rev. ed., edited by S. Srivastara and D. L. Cooperrider, pp. 91-125. Cleveland, Ohio: Williams Publishing Co., 1999.

RESOURCES

Where to Go for More Information

Since our focus has been to give you an *introduction* to Appreciative Inquiry, we want you to know where to go for more information. Here are books, articles, Web sites, and other sources that can help you develop a more in-depth understanding. In addition, we have provided recommendations of works that have influenced us.

Organizations

Case Western Reserve University
Weatherhead School of Management
(216) 368-2215 (216) 368-4785 (fax)

- Research studies and graduate degree programs

The Corporation for Positive Change

P. O. Box 3257
Taos, NM 87571
(505) 751-1231

coopdlc@prodigy.com (e-mail) whitneydi@aol.com (e-mail)

- Appreciative Inquiry consultation and services

The Taos Institute

P. O. Box 3257
Taos, NM 87571
(888) 999-TAOS

www.serv.com/taos (Web site)

- Conferences, workshops and training
- Contact for an extensive AI reading list

Appreciative Inquiry References

For an extensive Appreciative Inquiry reading list, contact the Taos Institute.

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