An Introduction to
Appreciative Inquiry

presented by

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Appreciative Inquiry seeks to discover the root causes of success rather than the root causes of failure.

The term “Appreciative Inquiry” comes from:

“appreciate” • to value or admire highly
  • to recognize with gratitude
  • to increase in value, like money in a term deposit

“inquiry” • to seek to understand through the asking of questions

“Appreciative inquiry” (AI) involves making a very conscious and deliberate choice to ask only positive questions when we seek to understand what is needed to make life better in organizations; we want to ensure that the very act of our asking questions causes what is “best” about the organization to “appreciate”. (And in the process, the “problems” tend to wither away.)

“The task of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths . . . making a system’s weaknesses irrelevant.” Peter Drucker
There are several different models of AI, but they all share common assumptions and five generic processes.

Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry
from What Is Appreciative Inquiry? by Joe Hall and Sue Hammond, see Sources/Resources

1. In every society, organization or group, something works.
2. What we focus on becomes our reality.
3. Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities.
4. The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way.
5. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
6. If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.
7. It is important to value differences.
8. The language we use creates our reality.

Five Generic Processes Common to All Models of AI
from Appreciative Inquiry: change at the speed of Imagination, see Sources/Resources

1. Choose the positive as the focus of inquiry
2. Inquire into stories of life-giving forces
3. Locate themes that appear in the stories and select topics for further inquiry
4. Create shared images of a preferred future
5. Find innovative ways to create that future

The 4D Model
One of the original Appreciative Inquiry models was the “4D” model developed by the Global Excellence in Management Initiative.

The 4th D was originally called “Delivery”, but this has since been changed to “Destiny”, because at its best, the 4th D more closely resembles an inspired movement than a neatly packaged and engineered “change program”. For example, in the year following the company-wide AI process at GTE Telecommunications, employees suggested 10,000 innovations to improve the operations of the company. As a result, GTE was given an award by the American Society for Training and Development for having the best organizational change program in the United States in 1997.
First Generic Process: Choose the Positive as the Focus of the Inquiry

"The questions we ask set the stage for what we 'find,' and what we 'discover' (the data) becomes the stories out of which the future is conceived, conversed about and constructed. " David Cooperrider

Choosing the positive leads the inquiry in the direction of "life giving" forces in the organization, group, community.

Whatever we focus on grows. The questions asked at the beginning will determine the shape, "spirit" and feel of everything else that follows. The organization will move in the direction of its questions.

Example

What can we do about male chauvinist attitudes? When are women being harassed and who is doing it? What kind of sexual harassment policies should we have? Why aren't women able to move up into senior management? What are the barriers and how can we remove them?

Women feel devalued in this company. They complain about male coworkers' attitudes towards them, and about limits on the jobs available to them.

What are some examples of the very best work experiences men and women have had working together in this company? What circumstances made these possible? How can we recreate these conditions so that men and women have more "best" experiences working together?

"Appreciative Inquiry can get you much better results than seeking out and solving problems. That's an interesting concept for me—and I imagine most of you—because telephone companies are among the best problem solvers in the world. We troubleshoot everything. We concentrate enormous resources on correcting problems that have relatively minor impact on our overall service and performance (and which)...when used continually and over a long period of time, this approach can lead to a negative culture. If you combine a negative culture with all the challenges we face today, it could be easy to convince ourselves that we have too many problem to overcome—to slip into a paralyzing sense of hopelessness....Don't get me wrong. I'm not advocating mindless happy talk. Appreciative Inquiry is a complex science designed to make things better. We can't ignore problems—we just need to approach them from the other side". Tom White, President of GTE Telops - "Speeches of the Day" 1996
The Structure of Appreciative Inquiry
adapted from Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination
see Sources/Resources -back cover

The Crown
Appreciative Inquiry Practice
Many activities steps and applications specifically
designed to address each unique situation
Different models/different practitioners

The Roots
The Scientific Grounding of AI
Sociology of Knowledge (Social Constructionism)
Chaos Theory, Complexity Theory
Self-organizing Systems, Quantum Physics
Research on the Power of Image
(Energy Psychology)

The Trunk
"Core Elements"

Five Core Principles
a. Constructionist
b. Simultaneity
c. Anticipatory
d. Poetic
e. Positive

Five Generic Processes
1. Choose the positive as the focus of inquiry
2. Inquire into stories of life-giving forces
3. Locate themes that appear in the stories and
   select topics for further inquiry
4. Create shared images of a preferred future
5. Find innovative ways to create that future

The Trunk "Core Elements"

The "4 D" Model
Discovery
Dream
Design
Delivery/Destiny

Another alternative, developed by Bernard Mohr and Mette Jacobsgaard is
The "4 I" Model
Initiate
Inquire
Imagine
Innovate

The Five Core Principles Defined

The constructionist principle: social knowledge and community destiny are living, human constructions created through the conversations that we have with each other. "Reality is a negotiated interpretation." Shapiro & Carr, 1991

The principle of simultaneity: inquiry and change occur simultaneously. It is not the case that "first we do the analysis and then we decide on change." The very process of inquiry/analysis creates its own changes.

The anticipatory principle: current behaviour is guided by images of the future. People's expectations of the future are powerfully brought into the present as a mobilizing agent. self-fulfilling prophecy: "Pygmalion effect", "placebo" effect.

The poetic principle: human organizations, including communities, are an open book, constantly being revised and co-authored. Its past, present and future are an endless source of learning, inspiration and interpretation.

The positive principle: the momentum for change requires positive thinking and social bonding-qualities like hope, inspiration and joy in creating with one another. Positive questions guide organizational development and foster long-lasting and effective changes. People, businesses, organizations and communities move in the direction of their questions. "What impact is my question having on our lives together ... is it helping to generate conversations about the good, the better, the possible ... is it strengthening our relationships?"
A Process for Launching an Appreciative Inquiry in an Organization

1. Senior management decides to adopt the AI process: may set general area for the inquiry, e.g. customer satisfaction, improved quality of work life, team building, partnership building.

2. A “steering group” is selected: should be a diagonal cross section of the organization, with representation from all levels of the organizational chart. Working with the AI consultant, this group then:

   - is trained in AI concepts and engaged in the AI process; members practice “appreciative interviewing” on each other
   - identifies the specific topics of focus of the inquiry; there are usually 3-5 for an inquiry
   - frames the “architecture” of the inquiry: who will be interviewed and by whom - within or across functional groups
   - frames the “appreciative protocol” (the actual interview questionnaire) This process achieves clarity about the purposes of the inquiry and determines the questions to be asked
   - tests the appreciative protocol on itself and, based on the results, revises if necessary

3. “Storytelling” - the appreciative interviews are conducted - (Discover):

   - these are usually one-on-one interviews lasting one to two hours; ideally, everyone in the organization is interviewed; failing this, a representative sample is interviewed; often includes stakeholders outside the organization
   - involves active listening & eye contact on the part of the interviewer; if necessary, the interviewer may “reframe” negative comments into positive ones which still address the underlying issues
   - interviewer makes brief but precise notes during interview; makes more extensive notes immediately after interview is completed
   - the “data” is analyzed, themes are identified, organizational circumstances and conditions that give rise to “peak experiences” and “best practices” are defined

4. Imagining a “preferred” future - (Dream): based upon the best of what has already been, a future is imagined where the best is achieved more often; “images” are created - may incorporate art, sculpture, drama, music; “provocative propositions” are written that will guide movement towards the imagined “preferred” future.

5. Finding innovative ways to create the preferred future (Design and Destiny): structures and strategies are devised to take action on short-term, and longer-term goals; action plans are prioritized and implemented; change strategies are made sustainable through adjustment and improvisation and the creation of a “appreciative learning organization”. Ideally, the Design/Destiny phase will involve “recycling” the process through new 4D cycles.
Appreciative Inquiry in Organizations

Image by James E. (Jim) Taylor

The Sky
The Vision of What Could Be

Imaginatively co-created by everyone in the organization
Amplification of “best practices”;
Positive “wishes”, “best hopes” for the organization;
Nurtured by “life-giving” forces in the organization;
Vision provides “pull” for organizational practices
(beliotropic principle)

The Crown
Outcomes of the Inquiry

high morale, high productivity, common vision,
more effective teamwork, increased employee satisfaction,
increased customer satisfaction, improved work relations
energy, enthusiasm, empowerment, sustainability
appreciative learning culture

The Trunk
“Core Elements”

a. Management commitment to a
genuinely participative process and
willingness to allow the process to
“unfold”
b. Broad participation from
all levels of the organization
c. Openness to multiple
interpretations of the “data”
d. Willingness to commit necessary
time to the inquiry.
e. Willingness to trust the process and
its outcomes

The Roots

The best of “what is”: peak experiences/best practices
from the organization’s past and present.

"AI is based on a deceptively simple premise: that organizations grow in the direction of what they repeatedly ask questions about and focus their attention on. AI does not focus on changing people. Instead, it invites people to engage in building the kinds of organizations they want to live in. That’s hard to resist.” Gervase Bushe

"In a very real sense most human searches are a success. Not only do we seem to find whatever it is we are looking for but, as the legendary CEO Sam Walton demonstrated, when we search the world around us for what is best about a human system, the positive qualities tend to multiply. The active surfacing of good news - of opportunities, strengths, achievements, visions, innovations and the like - is not an avoidance of reality; it is the best way to improve reality.” (from the introduction to Encyclopedia of Positive Questions. Vol 1)
Second Generic Process:

Inquire into stories of life giving forces
(Discover the best of “what is”)

The “Discovery” stage uses interviews/conversations to learn about the very best of what is, creating opportunities for people to share stories about their “peak experiences” in organizations. People talk about their organizations when they function at their very best, and about their own individual strengths and resources. The interview guides introduce each topic with a positive prologue and then may use a phrase like: “Tell me a story about ....”. Seeks stories of personal experiences of those interviewed. Then it identifies themes in the stories and the circumstances that gave rise to the excellence/achievement, and analyzes the unique factors that contributed to the peak experiences.

Examples of “Discovery” Stage Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introductory Questions</th>
<th>If the Focus is Team Building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To start I’d like to learn about your beginnings at XYZ. When did you come to the organization and what attracted you to it? What keeps you at XYZ? What sets us apart and makes the difference for you?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. In your work at XYZ, you have probably experienced ups and downs, twists and turns. For a moment I would like you to think about a time that stands out to you as a high point, a time when you felt energized, passionate about your work and most effective — a time when you were able to accomplish more than you imagined. Please describe in detail the situation, the people involved and what made it a high point experience for you. What actions did you and others take? How did these actions translate into business results?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Let’s talk about some things you value most — specifically about yourself and XYZ as an organization. Without being humble, what do you value most about yourself — as a human being? What are the most important qualities or strengths you bring to XYZ? What is it about the nature of the work you do at XYZ that you value the most? What is most interesting or meaningful to you?</td>
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| Follow-Up Questions to Gather More Detail |

Would you elaborate on that? Can you say more about that? I'm beginning to get the picture. Please tell me more. What happened specifically? What were you doing? What were others doing? How did this fit together to produce something exceptional? When did that happen? Who all was involved? What role did you play? What role did others play? Where were you during that time? How did that come about? What would it feel like to have such moments on a deeper or more frequent basis?
The interview protocol for the Discovery phase usually includes questions designed to learn individuals’ hopes for and vision of the future, and what they want to preserve from the present. The example below is modified from a form used by the United States Navy in an Appreciative Inquiry designed to produce “empowered leaders at every level of the organization”.

Envisioning the future:

Tonight when you go to sleep, you have a very deep sleep, and wake up 4 years later. It is 2010. When you arrive at work, you begin to notice that XYZ is as you always imagined it could be — the way you believe it ought to be. In terms of the leadership of XYZ, describe what you see happening. How is it different? Describe what is going on in 2010 that exemplifies the ideal XYZ you have always imagined.

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

If you could change or transform XYZ in any way, what three things would you do to heighten the overall health and vitality of the organization?

1. __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

2. __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

3. __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

What single small change could we make that would have the biggest impact in improving XYZ right now?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

What bold change could we make that would have a big impact in improving XYZ?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

Great organizations know how to “preserve the positive core” of what they do best, and are able to let go of things that are no longer needed. As XYZ grows and expands, what are three things - core strengths, values, qualities, that you want to see preserved and leveraged as we move into the future?

1. __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

2. __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

3. __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
Third Generic Process:

Locate themes that appear in the stories and select topics for further inquiry.

Themes

1. __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

2. __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

3. __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

Fourth Generic Process:

Create shared images of a preferred future

The “Dream” stage focuses on what could be; people challenge the status quo by imagining a better, more vibrant, more “life-giving” future. It is both idealistic in that it creates an image of an “ideal”, future, and at the same time it is “realistic” because it grounded in the best of what has already actually occurred in the organization. Building upon the extraordinary moments from the organization's history and the themes identified in the “Discover” stage, people create a shared image of their organization as if it were “at its best” in all of the themes.

Three Wishes/Changes

1. __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

2. __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

3. __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
The Writing of “Provocative Propositions”

A good “provocative proposition” is:

• written in bold, affirmative language in the present tense
• “provocative” - it offers stretch and challenge (but is achievable)
• grounded in the best of what the organization has already achieved
• a reflection of people's highest aspirations for their organization; it provokes passion

1. __________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
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______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

2. __________________________________________________________________________
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Two Examples of Provocative Propositions

The examples below are from a 2003 Appreciative Inquiry Summit done by the Green Mountain Coffee Roasters company.

**Culture**

GMCR's distinctively fun culture is continually energized by sharing its stories and learning through the driven commitment to quality, environment, employees, and stakeholders. Our GMCR feeling as employees is that we are globally and individually respected, empowered, encouraged, and challenged. This encourages a climate that is open, honest, positive, fair, and creates the freedom to enjoy our balanced lifestyles. GMCR is THE place to work!

**Communication**

Effective communication is one of the foundations for phenomenal, sustainable growth; and as such is a core competency of each employee. Relevant information is shared between all stakeholders to maximize alignment with company goals. GMCR recognizes that timely, consistent information fosters individual empowerment and facilitates decision making throughout the company. This serves to clearly define to the world who we are as an organization.
Fifth Generic Process:

Find innovative ways to create that future

The “Design” stage focuses on determining what will be; participants work to discover innovative ways to bring into existence the “preferred future” they have envisioned in the “Dream” stage. The work in this stage helps participants to develop the structures and strategies to take action on short-term and longer term goals. One effective Individual Action approach is the “Requests, Offers, & Commitments” approach. Using this method, each individual participating in the Design stage makes:

- a Request (e.g. to meet with other “sections” of the organization to discuss a topic of mutual interest),
- an Offer or “gift” to the process (e.g. to share knowledge or resources),
- a Commitment to take specific actions that are within his/her ability to deliver.

Request: ______________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Offer: ____________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Commitment: ______________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

In the “Destiny” stage, formerly known as the Delivery stage, group members mobilize resources, form new relationships, acquire new skills and implement their action plans....Ideally, in the Delivery/Destiny stage, an “appreciative learning culture” is created, and the process becomes self-sustaining. Once a given “Destiny” has been achieved, it gives rise to new “peak experiences” which can be brought to light through a new “Discovery” phase, leading to new “Dreams” and new “Destinies” and so on.

“And so we end this book repeating our mantra: Appreciative Inquiry is a way of seeing and being in the world. It is based on the belief that we can create what we imagine when we open our minds and our social processes to the widest possible dialogue among the largest number of people who are involved and invested in our enterprise. Appreciative Inquiry applied, whether as a planning process or an evaluation process, becomes empowering and life-affirming in any human system.

The two-cup tumbler with one cup of water is, indeed, both half empty and half full. How we describe it is our choice to make. We wish for each of you the image of half full; a life lived, like the sunflower, turned towards the sun; and days full of powerful and positive images of a future that is generative, creative and joyful.”

Sources/Resources - Recommended Books


Recommended FREE Resources


There are also many excellent free resources from the Appreciative Inquiry Commons at: http://appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu/ and from the web site of Gervase Bushe, a Simon Fraser University professor and OD consultant. www.gervasebushe.ca.

Do you want to do a better job of employee performance appraisal?

Make an easy start of it:

Take a Trip to the Behaviourally Anchored Rating Scales

Behaviourally Anchored Rating Scales (BARS) offer an effective evaluation tool to overcome many common performance evaluation errors. They are also:

- perceived to be more accurate and valid by users of the tools,
- useful in providing feedback to the employee in the performance evaluation interview, and
- shown to improve the attitudes of supervisors toward performance appraisal in general.

In 2003, working for his client, Heywood Holmes and Partners Chartered Accountants, Jim developed 45 randomized “generic” performance evaluation measures that can be applied to almost any work situation. He also coached the firm in developing their own accounting industry specific measures. (The story of the collaboration is available as a pdf file to anyone interested in it.)

Heywood Holmes and Partners has now used the BARS system through three performance evaluation cycles and their initial appreciation of the system has been reinforced with each subsequent use.

Together, the partnership and ROLYAT CORP. LTD., now offer access to the “generic measures” databank to other companies or organizations seeking to improve their performance evaluation systems. The generic measures assess general employee competencies such as Communication Skills (4 measures), Interpersonal Relationships (5 measures), Trust/Integrity (4 measures), Supervision Skills (11 measures), Leadership Skills, Client Service, Decision Making etc.

Depending upon what you are doing now, the BARS system might give you a more systematic and “scientific” method of evaluating employee performance than what you are currently using.

If you want help to develop your own industry specific BARS measures, Jim can coach you. Or you can make a start by just using those "generic" measures that fit with your situation.

Two Additional Consulting Services from ROLYAT CORP. LTD./JIM TAYLOR

Communications Services
Jim is a polished writer of curriculum materials, funding proposals, manuals and easy-to-read reports. If you have information that you want communicated clearly, concisely and persuasively, in written format or in presentation, we can help you.

Meeting Process Design and Facilitation
Jim has demonstrated considerable skill in designing and managing group processes that help everyone to stay civil when strong feelings are in play. He has helped several groups engaged in conflict to identify and build upon areas of common interest.