

Appreciative Inquiry

The field of organization development in the 21st century has a new look and feel. These revolutionary changes were fueled by exciting breakthroughs in our theories of leadership, organizational change and social innovation. Taken together we are now seeing a re-writing of many of the traditional methodologies such as the deficits approach or the needs assessment.

Solving Problems by Looking at What is Going Right

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a new paradigm that takes an opposite approach to development. *AI is based on the simple assumption that every organization has something that works well and those strengths can be the starting point for creating positive change.* An organization or community that focuses on problems will only find problems, but if they focus on their strengths, the organization/community will find the capacity to overcome those problems. This is opposite from the conventional problem-solving approach, which focuses on the things that are not working and try's to fix them. As you become more familiar with AI, you will see that building capacity is a fundamentally different task than fixing the old processes that are no longer working. (Adapted from Cooperrider, D.L., Whitney, D., Stavros, J.M. (2008). Appreciative Inquiry Handbook: For Leaders of Change (2nd edition) pg 3.

High Hope in the Himalayas:

A 2005 Nobel Peace Prize Nominee and Her Work With Appreciative Inquiry

"High Hope in the Himalayas: A Positive Approach to Peace" is about the important role that Appreciative Inquiry has played in the life and leadership development of Chhing Lamu Sherpa, nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005...

Born into the cultural community of the Sherpas in the rural mountains of Nepal, Chhing Lamu developed a strong love for her native land—for the wildlife, the mountains, the Himalayan culture and beauty, and above all, for the human communities that make their lives on such a naturally blessed section of the earth...It is this caring nature which eventually led Chhing Lamu in 1996 to form Mountain Spirit—a NGO focused on development in the mountain regions of the Himalayas....

Before beginning her development work, however, Chhing Lamu experienced a personal transformation in thought. Previously, her days and nights—"until 2AM"—were spent engaged in the negative discourse of critical argumentation. She remembers this pattern of thought leaving her unsatisfied. Her life changed in 1994 when she discovered Appreciative Inquiry (AI)—a positive, strength-based approach to change. Instead of asking "what is wrong", AI seeks "what is right", and in this process develops constructive discourse, strength-based action, and positive change.

Personally changed, she then set out to incorporate an appreciative attitude in her professional life. One of the many highlights of her work has been her involvement in conflict resolution... Within a country long acquainted with religious pluralism, an increasingly destructive conflict between Christians and Buddhists erupted in a small rural village. Using AI

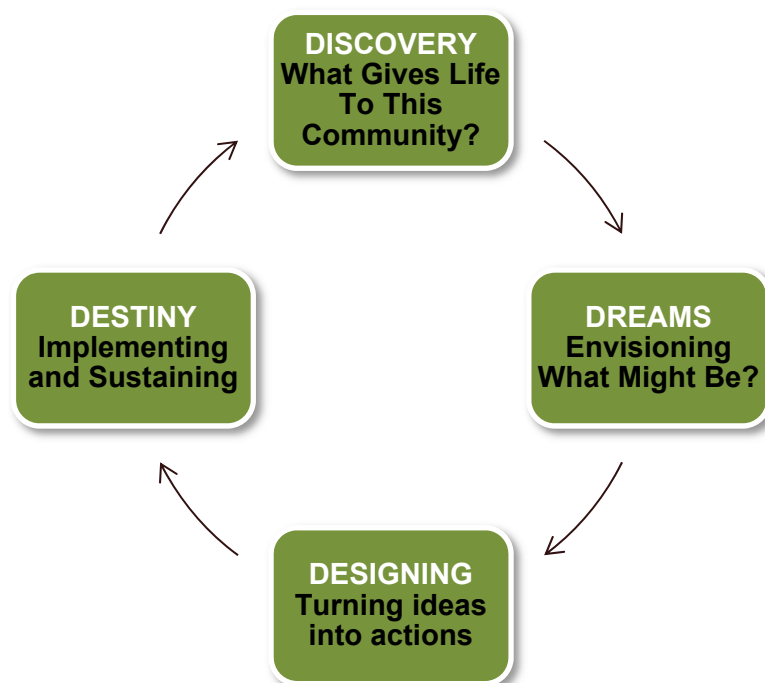
to begin the discourse positively, she led both parties to inquire into their best strengths as a community. They asked questions such as, “what good do we have in the village?”, “what are our most outstanding values?”, and finally, “what is our future dream?”

After the groups shared their answers, they were stunned with the responses. The two groups realized that they shared the same goals, the same values, and the same visions. Together they committed themselves to their mutual dreams and by the next day began cleaning the roads, making toilets for themselves, and beautifying the landscape.

Chhing Lamu had helped them to recognize what negativity, conflict, and the problem-solving approach had concealed: their unity as a community.

High Hope in the Himalayas - A Positive Approach to Peace,
(<http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/intro/commentSep05.cfm>)

Appreciative Inquiry is a process that cycles through the 4-D's



DISCOVERY

The process for AI begins with a survey, but it's not the typical survey that uses multiple choice questions or yes/no responses. The survey is really an *interview* that collects stories from the people who live in the community or work in the organization. The *appreciative interview* is at the heart of the AI process. The participants are asked to share memorable accounts about a

time when the community/organization was at its best; success stories from the past and present. In the Appreciative Inquiry Handbook, Cooperrider opens the chapter on Discovery with the following quote.

“Perhaps, the most important thing we do as leaders and consultant’s is inquiry... The questions we ask, the things that we choose to focus on, and the topics we choose to ask questions about determine what we find. What we find becomes the data and the story out of which we dialogue about and envision the future. And so the seeds of change are implicit in the very first questions we ask. Inquiry is Intervention” (Cooperrider, 2008)

In the AI process members of the community or organization take on the roles of both the interviewer and the interviewee. *(An important goal of the interview process is to stimulate excitement and interest as the participants’ share their stories and learn from each other.)* However, crafting a set of engaging appreciative questions can be a challenge.

Remember the questions asked by Chhing Lamu in the story from the Nepal rural villages.

“What good do we have in the village?” “What are our most outstanding values?” “What is our future dream?”

Note how the questions ask for positive images. AI uses those positive images to illuminate and understand the distinctive strengths that give the community life and vitality. Those strengths provide the foundation for building the future.

Storytelling or story sharing has proven to be an effective tool for generating interest in local issues and for building social bonds between community members. It is also a great way to help communities get past the usual ways of doing things. From the stories you should be able to identify common themes and shared values.

(The two religious groups in the Nepal story found that even though they were part of different spiritual communities they shared many of the same values. Those values became the basis for overcoming their differences.) Data collected from the stories serves as the basis for the next stage of creating the community dream.

DREAMS

If you had three wishes, what would you wish for your community/organization?

This is a typical question that would be asked at the end of an AI interview. The objective of this question is to develop a “vision” for the future; a future that reflects the needs and aspirations of the people who live in that community or work in that organization.

During the Dream phase, participants are encouraged to imagine how they would like to see the community/organization grow. An important objective is to identify common themes. *When the villagers from Nepal, shared their answers, they were stunned with the responses. The two different religious groups realized that they shared the same goals, the same values, and the same visions.*

The purpose of the Dreaming phase is not to identify one best idea but to look for broad themes that the group agrees on and to use those themes as the foundation for future development projects.

DESIGN

In the Design phase, participants are asked to review the ideas that were generated in the Dream phase and select a few of those ideas that best support the groups shared vision of the future. Participants are then encouraged to think creatively, and begin to build the bridge from the best of “what is” (present) towards “what might be” (future). For the participants, the momentum and potential for innovation is high.

In an example taken from Roadway Express Trucking, 180 Participants (management, sales, union, office personnel, and customers) generated 67 different ideas for changes that would help them reach the future images they had revealed in the Dream Stage. They were then asked to vote for the ideas that each person felt would be the most important next steps for the organization.

Each person had three sticky dots to “vote” by placing them next to the change idea/opportunity that he or she most wanted to work on, to make a reality. Based on the dot voting, seven top *priority areas* were determined. Groups then self-formed around the priority areas they most wanted to help make happen. It’s important to note, these group were still composed of management, sales, union, office personnel, and customers...

Excerpt from Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Approach to Building Cooperative Capacity. Frank J. Barrett & Ronald E. Fry pp 55-62.

DESTINY

The final phase focuses on the practicalities of turning the ideas into a reality. Here the groups will start to drill down the types of systems, processes, and strategies that will enable the ideas developed in the Design phase to be realized. However, Destiny is not really an end to the process. The Destiny phase leads naturally to new discoveries of community strengths, which lead to new opportunities and the AI process begins again.

The four phases for AI (Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny) can take place over a period of time or can be completed in a four day workshop. The most important element in using an AI approach to development is *inclusive collaboration*. AI is a form of collaborative inquiry. It always involves the whole organization or a representative cross-section of the whole organization or community. In this way all voices can be heard and everyone’s contribution valued. The opportunity for sustainable development is much stronger when the foundation is built on inclusive collaboration.

The information provided in this factsheet was adapted from the Appreciative Inquiry Handbook: For Leaders of Change (2nd edition.) Cooperrider, D.L., Whitney, D., Stavros, J.M. (2008). Brunswick, Ohio: Crown Custom Publishing Inc. (<http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>)

Appreciative Inquiry and Community Development (<http://www.iisd.org/ai/>)

