

Appreciative Inquiry Overview

What is Appreciative Inquiry?

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a philosophy and a methodology for positive change. It is founded on the simple assumption that human systems – teams, organizations and people – move in the direction of what they study, what they focus upon and what they talk about with regularity.

The essence of Appreciative Inquiry is then the study of what “gives life,” energy and vitality to organizations, teams and people when they are at their best. Appreciative Inquiry does not assume that any person or organization is always at its best. It does posit, and both research and experience show, that people learn, and organizations change most readily when they focus on, study, and engage in dialogue about strengths, patterns of success and who they are at their best.

Ap-pre’ci-ate, v., 1. to value; recognize the best in people or the world around us; affirm past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems. 2. to increase in value, e.g., the economy has appreciated in value. Synonyms: prize, esteem, and honor.

In-quire’, v. 1. to explore and discover. 2. to ask questions; to be open to seeing new possibilities. Synonyms: discover, search, systematically explore, and study.

The process generally follows the Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Process: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny

AI is used throughout the world in both small- and large-scale change initiatives. It has been used as adaptable change method in combination with other organizational processes such as strategic planning, coaching, leadership and management development, redesign of structures and systems, mergers and acquisitions, cultural transformation, team building, valuing diversity, and social and sustainable development issues.

Appreciative Inquiry is based on the simple assumption that every human system (individual, group, or organization) has something that works well, and those strengths can be the starting point for creating positive change.

Inviting people to participate in dialogues and share stories about their past and present achievements, assets, unexplored potentials, innovations, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, benchmarks, high-point moments, lived values, traditions, core and distinctive competencies, expressions of wisdom, insights into deeper spirit and soul, and visions of valued and possible futures can identify a “positive core.”

How does AI differ from problem solving?

The basic assumption of problem solving is that there is a “problem to be solved.” The task of improvement traditionally involves removing deficits by 1) Identifying the key problems or deficiencies, 2) analyzing the causes, 3) analyzing solutions, and 4) developing an action plan.

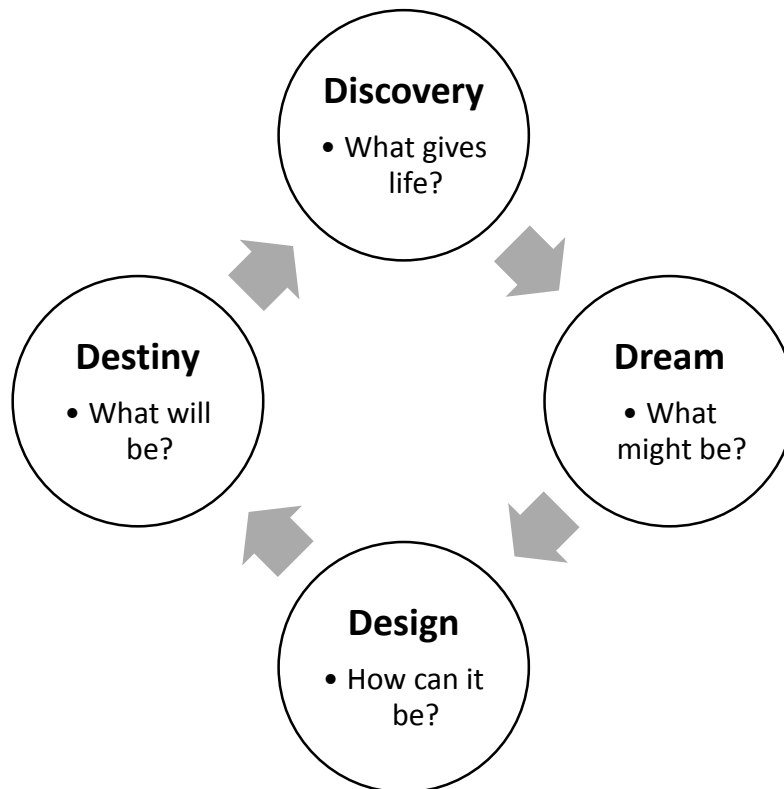
The underlying assumption of AI is that there is a “solution to be embraced” rather than a “problem to be solved.”

Adapted from the book Appreciative Inquiry Handbook for Leaders of Change, 2nd Edition, by Cooperider, Whitney, and Stavros

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Appreciative Inquiry “4-D” Cycle:

- **Discovery:** “What gives life?” (the best of what is); *Appreciating*
- **Dream:** “What might be?” (imagine what the world is calling for); *Envisioning*
- **Design:** “How can it be?” (determining the ideal); *Co-constructing*
- **Destiny:** “What will be?” (how to empower, learn and adjust/improvise); *Sustaining*



Books about Appreciative Inquiry:

- *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change* by David Cooperrider and Diana D. Whitney (Oct 10, 2005)
- *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook: For Leaders of Change* by Diana Whitney, David L Cooperrider, Jacqueline M Stavros and Ronald Fry (Jan 1, 2008)
- *Appreciative Inquiry in Higher Education: A Transformative Force* by Jeanie Cockell, Joan McArthur-Blair and Marjorie Schiller (Aug 28, 2012)
- *Appreciative Coaching: A Positive Process for Change* by Sara L. Orem, Jacqueline Binkert and Ann L. Clancy (Feb 9, 2007)
- *The Appreciative Advising Revolution* by Jennifer L. Bloom, Bryant L. Hutson and Ye He (Sep 15, 2008)

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Appreciative Inquiry: Interview Activity

Activity Instructions: Find a partner. Spend 5 minutes per person on each question. Rotate during each round of questions. Record your partner's responses on the worksheet. At the end, give the other person their recorded responses. (Total Time: 40 min.)

1. **What would you describe as being a peak experience or high point in your work life? This would be a time when you were most alive or engaged. (Discovery)**

(Think about a time when you were really engaged in and excited about your work. Tell me a story about that time. What was happening? What were you feeling? What made it a great moment? What were others doing that contributed to this moment? What did you contribute to creating this moment?)

2. **Without being modest, what is it that you most value about yourself, the nature of your work, and this project? (Discovery)**

3. **What are the core factors that give life to your work on this project? (Discovery)**

4. **Describe your vision for the future from your work on this project (for your students, college, consortium, industry, world ...)? (Dream)**

Imagine you have awakened from a long, deep sleep. You get up to realize that everything is as you always dreamed it would be. Your ideal state has become the reality. What do you see? What is going on? How have things changed?

Follow-up Group Discussion Questions:

1. How does this sound? Is it interesting enough to explore further?
2. In what ways can you imagine applying this to your work in student support services?
3. Think of a specific project or work activity where you might like to experiment with using AI.

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