Appreciative Inquiry
An introduction to Theory and Practice

Carlson
Wagonlit
Travel

What is Appreciative Inquiry?

A process for engaging people in building the kinds of families, communities, organizations and world they want to live in; and,

A practical daily philosophy, that can guide our work with families, communities, and organizations based on the realization that what we learn from what works and gives life is more effective and sustainable than what we learn from breakdowns and pathologies.

Appreciate: To value or admire highly; To perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems. To increase in value.

Inquire: To search into, investigate, to seek for information by questioning. It is the creation of meaning through a process of exploration and Discover.

The Principles that underlie the Philosophy

1. Constructionist principle:

We create reality through social discourse. Our conversations generate an agreement about how we see the World, what we accept as reality, and how we will act. The constructionist principle recognizes that knowledge and organizational destiny are interwoven. The *way* we know is fateful. We create what we can imagine. [1]

 2. **Poetic principle:**

The Poetic Principle acknowledges that human organizations are open books. An organization's story is constantly being co-authored by the people within the organization as well as by those outside who interact with it. The organization's past, present, and future are endless sources of learning, inspiration, or interpretation just as a good poem is open to endless interpretations. The important point is that we can study any topic related to human experience in any human system. We can inquire into the nature of alienation or the nature of joy. We can study moments of creativity and innovation, or moments of debilitating stress. We have a choice!

---

[1] Gergen, Kenneth. <u>Realities and Relationships</u>. Harvard University Press, 1995.

3. **Simultaneity principle:**

A realization that **inquiry is change**; that the first question we ask is fateful because the organization will turn its energy in the direction of the first question, whether it is positive or negative. The seeds of change are sown in the first questions we ask.

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 very first questions we ask. One of the most impactful things a change agent does is to articulate questions. The questions we ask set the stage for what we "find", and what we "discover" creates the stories that lead to conversations about how the organization will construct its future.

4. Anticipatory Principle:

The impact of anticipatory images; i.e., understanding that behavior and decisions about actions are based not only on what we were born with or learned from our environment, but also on what we anticipate, what we think or imagine will happen in the future.

Habits of the collective imagination, habits of the mind, habits of the heart guide images of the future. Images are relational, public property, dialogical.
The Anticipatory Principle says that the most important resource we have for generating constructive organizational change or improvement is our collective imagination and our discourse about the future. It is the image of the future that in fact guides the current behavior of any person or organization. Much like a movie projector on a screen, human systems are forever projecting ahead of themselves a horizon of expectation that brings the future powerfully into the present as a mobilizing agent. Organizations exist, in the final analysis, because people who govern and maintain them share some sort of shared discourse or projection about what the organization is, how it will function, and what it is likely to become.

5. Positive Principle:

The belief that a positive approach to any issue is just as valid a basis for learning as a negative approach. It is also just as contagious, which makes taking the positive stance an antidote to cynicism. In every system, something is working. There are stories of success, quality, and excellence.

This focus does not mean that problems do not exist, just that they are purposefully not the focus of the work. John McKnight uses the example of a carpenter who lost a leg in an accident. We can choose to focus on his capacity for woodworking, or on his deficiency – the missing leg.[2] The positive principle says that by focusing on his capacity, we sow the seeds for a creating our desired future.

The **positive principle** grows out of years of experience with Appreciative Inquiry. AI demonstrates that the more positive the questions used to guide a group process or organizational change effort, the more long lasting and effective the change effort.[3] People and organizations move in the direction of what they inquire about. A positive focus generates energy and commitment, critical factors for significant change.

---

[2] John McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*.
[3] Bushe, G. and Coetzer, G. "Appreciative Inquiry As a Team-Development Intervention: A Controlled Experiment. Vol. 31, Journal Of Applied Behavioral Science, March, 1995, pp. 13.

The Process – The 5–D Cycle of Appreciative inquiry
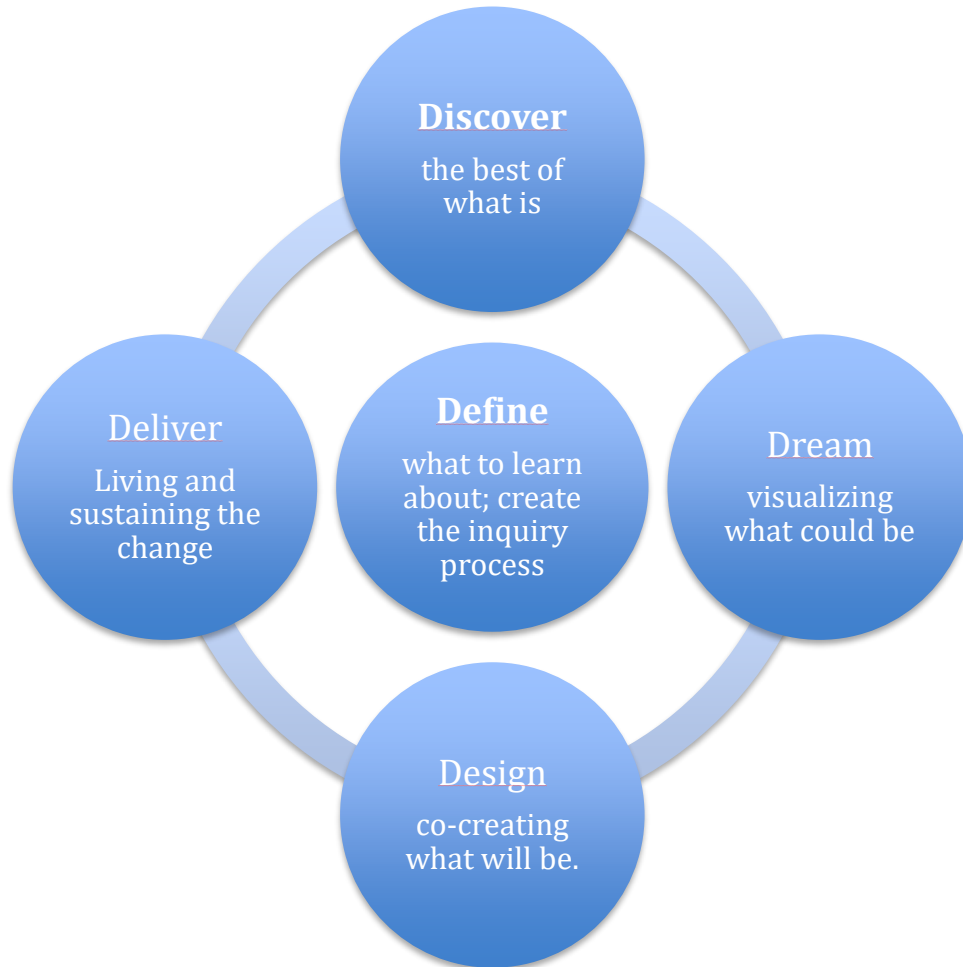
SUMMARY OF THE FIVE D'S CYCLE

DEFINE: During this first phase, the AI process is defined and the process to be implemented is agreed upon by the consultant and the client. Together, they decide what the system wants to learn about and create an Inquiry Process that is appropriate to their organization. During this phase, a typical process includes (1) Introducing AI to the client; (2) Establishing a guidance and support structure within the client system; (3) Creating a customized interview guide for the inquiry process; (4) Creating a plan for the interview process.

DISCOVER: in the Discover phase, a group of people who have worked with the AI consultant to create the process and the interview guide conducts interviews. Once the interviews are completed, the group has dialogue about what they discovered,

assemble the stories and key ideas that come out of the inquiry, and agree upon the major themes that emerge from the interviews.

DREAM: Once the themes are identified, the group generalizes those themes into an image of how the organization would function if those key topics and ideas were fully alive in the organization in the present. The image is put into words that create a "macro possibility statement" – a verbal description of the whole organization at its best.

DESIGN: Using the images and possibility statement as a guide, the group develops ideas and images of how the organization could be structured (the organization's socio--technical architecture) to reflect the best of what has been discovered and created in the previous phases.

DESTINY/DELIVER: To complete the circle, the whole organization begins to innovate to align the organization's structure with the proposed socio-technical architecture that came out of the Dream and the Design phases. At the same time, this phase focuses on building AI learning competencies into the system so that the AI process is imbedded in the fabric of the organization and becomes "the way we do our work."

"Greatness lies not in being strong, but in the
right using of strength."
— Henry Ward Beecher

Learning Laboratory for This Workshop

Focus of the inquiry: Exceptional Operations

This workshop is a "laboratory" to experience one approach to using Appreciative Inquiry. To really experience how AI works it is important to live it using a real topic. For that reason, we will focus on this group and how we can build an exceptional operation for the work we will be doing together today.

Exceptional Operations include:
- Represent the efforts of all roles & team members
- Empower all team members at all levels to identify improvement opportunities and to share them with other GSCs to identify best practices
- Fine tune our analysis to build continuous improvement initiatives – data, KPIs- ensuring the right measurement is used
- Our measures focus on what we want to achieve

Task 1: Appreciative Interview

Discover
Appreciating the best of what is

Appreciative interviews differ from traditional interviews. The questions are sequenced from past to future and they invite the interviewee to delve into the most creative, exciting, life-giving experiences of life and work. It is less important to get through all the questions than it is to tell a complete story. Try to evoke the situation, complete with details of what happened and the feelings involved. The interviewee's role is to help the interviewer experience the situation you are describing. The interviewer's role is to listen actively, occasionally prompting the person to be more descriptive and to enlarge the story.

During the next 40 minutes, you will conduct an appreciative interview. Select someone who you don't know very well, or who you would like to know better. Decide who will interview whom first. Interview your partner for 20 minutes then switch roles so that your partner interviews you. Use all the time available for these interviews. They will form the basis for everything that comes after.

Why start with a story?
The story is a powerful tool for the construction of meaning. Stories lead to real discovery. They are less predictable and more grounded, because they are based in lived experience.
"*Stories have the felicitous capacity of capturing exactly those elements that formal decisions methods leave out. Logic tries to generalize, to strip the decision making from the specific context, to remove it from subjective emotions. Stories …encapsulate, into one compact package, information, knowledge, context, and emotion.*"
Daniel Pink, quoting Don Norman, "A Whole new Mind"

As you interview, take notes of words, phrases, quotes and ideas that seem emotional and important. It is not necessary to take detailed notes, just enough to be able to remember the whole story and to be able to retell it later. You can use whatever space you like for this interview. Please be back in this room at the time we indicate.

Appreciative Interview Protocol

Excellence occurs when all parties have voice and share responsibility for creating the future. This requires honesty, trust, respect and a focus on common interest; as well as a willingness to respect disagreements. In exceptional operations, all parties gain from the relationship.

1. **Best experience**
   a. Other than work, what gives you most satisfaction in life?
   b. Tell me about a time when you felt most successful in your role?
   c. Tell me about the greatest collaborative team experience you've had. Describe it in detail, what were you doing? Who was involved? What happened? What fostered the collaboration?

2. **Value & Strengths**
   a. Share a story about someone you know that adds great value to the outcomes for CWT?
   b. Without being humble, what is the value and strengths you bring to the team?
   c. Amongst all CWT GSCs, what sets the CR office apart?

3. **Core factors**
   a. What would it look like to be a true center of excellence for CWT?
   b. Wishes

INTERVIEW NOTES

Task 2: Sharing stories

Stay with your partner and form groups of 6-8 (three to four pairs). In these groups, take turns sharing the highlights of your partners' stories. As you share stories around the circle, take note of the themes that you identify in these stories. A theme is a phrase, concept, idea, behavior, or significant factor that captures what is important in the story shared. Don't try to identify the "correct" or common themes. Rather take note of what you find to be important, significant or original in your own perspective in each of the stories.

Themes:

Task 3: Identifying common themes

Share all of the themes you identified and generate a complete list as a group. Discuss them and, as a group, identify the themes that are common or particularly important. Which of these themes represent the most important factor for an exceptional teamwork?

From your **group's list,** come to agreement on 3–5 themes for your group. As a group, select the themes you believe are most important for creating an effective and exciting team for the AI experience tomorrow. Write the 3-5 themes on the sheet provided. Post your sheets on the wall. (Try to be sufficiently descriptive to communicate the meaning for other groups).

Task 4: Prioritizing themes

In this task, the whole group will create a scatter-gram to identify the themes of highest energy.

Each of you has 3 "dots" to use on the lists of Themes listed on the charts displayed on the wall.
 Individually read the charts and decide on 3 of the themes that you personally feel you would MOST like to have as a part of an exceptional team   Use only 1 "dot" per theme and place it next to the theme.

Multi-voting Technique
When confronted with a number of good options, a multi-voting process helps to get a quick read of where a group has the highest energy. This method has the advantage of being quick and visual.
Be careful not to assume that the option with the most votes is, automatically, the preference of the group. The differences between 24 and 22 votes are not statistically significant, they simply show a roughly equal proportion of energy for those options. .
Source: Sure Fire Meetings, Valerie Uccellani, Global Learning Partners globallearningpartners.com

What strikes you about the way the points were distributed? What aspects seem particularly important to this group? What concepts are emerging as personally important for you?
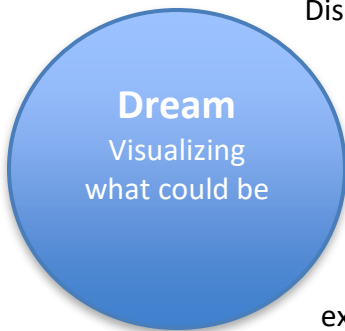
Task 5: Creating visual images and possibility statements

Dream
Visualizing
what could be

Discuss the themes that emerged and choose the 3 to 5 themes your group agrees are the most important to be present in this team. Write these on chart paper.

Part 1: Create a visual image of exceptional operations when all of these themes are fully present and fully expressed. You will be presenting your work to the whole group.

(Your group can create a picture, create other images, "perform" an image, etc. Be as creative as you like!) Use materials at hand, and others you might discover.

Part 2: As a group, create a possibility statement, that converts your image into words. Review the guidelines and a few examples on the following pages.

Remember: a possibility statement is not a marketing slogan. It is a rich description of the team you will create.

> **Why use a visual image?**
> Images are glue for ideas and concepts in the human brain. The act of creating an image taps into your creativity and demands the level of creativity necessary for the work in the Design phase, the work of co-creating the change within the organization. The conversations about the image are more important than the artistic quality of the visual.

Write your possibility statement on chart paper and prepare to present your statement and image to the whole group.

> Appreciative Inquiry is, in part, the art of helping systems create images of their most desired future. Based on the belief that a human system will show a heliotropic tendency to move toward positive images, AI is focused on the generative and creative images that can be held up, valued, and used as a basis for moving toward the future."
>
> Watkins, Mohr, "Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination" p. 30

A possibility statement makes a bridge between the best of what is, and the vision of what could be. It is a positive description of a new future that challenges the status quo and inspires action. It is written in the present tense as if it describes the current reality.

As we create possibility statements we clarify our shared vision of the future, we create a focus, a set of distinctive phrases that paint a picture of what this group imagines for its most desired future. This provides a clear and shared direction to guide activities.

Criteria for good possibility statements:
1. They are provocative. They stretch, challenge and interrupt the status quo.
2. They are real. There are examples that show how the ideal is a real possibility, even though it is still beyond what is in place today.
3. They are desirable. If the statement could be fully implemented, the organization and YOU would want it.
4. Language is bold and affirmative.
5. Language is sufficiently descriptive to serve as a guide for the group and for individual stakeholders.

Adapted from *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination,* Jane Watkins, Bernard Mohr, 2001

Examples of Possibility Statements

"To us, customer service means satisfying the internal customer. Purchasing is a service organization that must meet the requirements of all customers, whatever and however differently they might be from one to another.

"We encourage open communication with our customers and specifically ask they how we are doing. Our customers have a pleasant experience when they talk to us. We anticipate their needs and have the information available when they call. We work through the information in an uninterrupted sequence and they talk to only one person. The information we need to answer their questions is available to us with a touch of the finger. We devote time to learning more so we keep our expertise current. We do our best and know that our decisions are appreciated by others. We feel comfortable providing extraordinary service for our clients because we know that is why they choose us. We continually learn as we work. We feel the support of our other organizational members and are confident we all know extraordinary service is how we help people. Our business provides an important service to our customers. We are proud to be a part of this organization."[4]

Our company is poised for a positive future because partners at all regions share a basic common vision in relation to the firm's core missions, intent, and direction. It is an exciting, challenging, and meaningful direction that helps give all partners a feeling of significance, purpose, pride, and unity. The firm uses whatever time and resources are needed to bring everyone on board and thus continuously cultivates "the thrill of having a one firm feeling", of being a valued member of one outstanding national partnership. "We have created an organization where everyone experiences themselves as owners of the business-- where everyone at all levels feels the organization is theirs to improve, change, and help become what it can potentially become. (Our company) recognizes there is a big difference between owners versus hired hands. Ownership at our company happens in three way: (1) on an economic level it happens when everyone is a shareholder and shares in the profit; (2) on a psychological level it happens because people are authentically involved; and, (3) on a business level it happens when the "big picture" purpose is shared by all, and all take part at the strategic level of business planning."

"Walking into our facilities you can feel the energy.
a) We build upon each other's strengths.
b) We respond to the unpredictable with balance and passion. c) We nurture each other with challenge and understanding. d) We step out of defined roles to pursue the extraordinary. e) We seek places never imagined possible.
We build for the future while living in the present and being grounded in the past."

---

[4] Source: OMEGA POINT INTERNATIONAL, Inc. info@omegapoint.net Adapted from training provided by The Taos Institute.

TASK 6: Presentations of Images and Statements

Each group presents its visual image and Possibility Statement to the whole group. The whole group then discusses commonalities and ideas that will be important to include in planning for this team. These ideas will be guidance for the next task.

Design
co-creating
what will be

TASK 7: Design – what will we do to be sure this happens?

The design and plan created in this phase will depend in large measure on the organization and the specific focus. In an Appreciative process, the most important thing to remember is that the plans are made and implemented by those who "are in the room" and engaged in the process. This ensures commitment and personal accountability for the future we have envisioned.

To conclude our laboratory:

Think about this shared image of exceptional operations. What is one commitment you will make to bring this image to life for the rest of our time together?