

What is Appreciative Inquiry?

from *A Positive Revolution in Change: Appreciative Inquiry* by David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney.

Ap-pre'ci-ate, v., 1. valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming 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: VALUING, PRIZING, ESTEEMING, and HONORING.

In-quire' v., 1. the act of exploration and discovery. 2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities. Synonyms: DISCOVERY, SEARCH, SYSTEMATIC EXPLORATION, STUDY.

Appreciative Inquiry is about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives “life” to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms.

AI involves, in a central way

- the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential
- the mobilization of inquiry through the crafting of the “unconditional positive question” often-involving hundreds or sometimes thousands of people.

In AI the arduous task of intervention gives way to the speed of imagination and innovation; instead of negation, criticism, and spiraling diagnosis, there is discovery, dream, and design. AI seeks, fundamentally, to build a constructive union between a whole people and the massive entirety of what people talk about as past and present capacities: achievements, assets, unexplored potentials, innovations, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, benchmarks, high point moments, lived values, traditions, strategic competencies, stories, expressions of wisdom, insights into the deeper corporate spirit or soul-- and visions of valued and possible futures.

Taking all of these together as a gestalt, AI deliberately, in everything it does, seeks to work from accounts of this “positive change core”—and it assumes that every living system has many untapped and rich and inspiring accounts of the positive. Link the energy of this core directly to any change agenda and changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized.

Read the complete excerpt from [A Positive Revolution in Change: Appreciative Inquiry](#) by David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney.

For more definitions and explanations of Appreciative Inquiry [click here](#).

(Source Unknown)

Appreciative Inquiry is the study and exploration of what gives life to human systems when they are at their best. It is an organization development methodology based on the assumption that inquiry into and dialogue about strengths, successes, values, hopes and dreams is itself transformational.

It is founded on the following set of beliefs about human nature and human organizing:

- People individually and collectively have unique gifts, skills and contributions to bring to life.
- Organizations are human social systems, sources of unlimited relational capacity, created and lived in language.
- The images we hold of the future are socially created and, once articulated, serve to guide individual and collective actions.

Through human communication (inquiry and dialogue) people can shift their attention and action away from problem analysis to lift up worthy ideals and productive possibilities for the future.

In short, Appreciative Inquiry suggests that human organizing and change, at its best, is a relational process of inquiry, grounded in affirmation and appreciation.

One way to understand Appreciative Inquiry is to consider the meaning of its two words. Each word alone has implications for the practice of organization change. The power of Appreciative Inquiry, however, is the by-product of the two words working together. Like hydrogen and oxygen that combine to make water - the most nurturing substance on earth - "appreciation" and "inquiry" combined produce a powerful, vital approach to leadership and organization change.

Why Does Appreciative Inquiry Work? Appreciative Inquiry works because it treats people like people, and not like machines. People are social. We create our identities and our knowledge in relation to one another. We are curious. We like to tell stories and listen to stories. We pass on our values, beliefs and wisdom in stories. We like to learn and to use what we learn to be our best. And we delight in doing well in the eyes of those we care about and respect. Appreciative Inquiry enables leaders to create natural human organizations - knowledge rich, strength based, adaptable, learning organizations.

Appreciation: Recognition and Value-Added Appreciation has to do with recognition, with valuing and with gratitude. The word "appreciate" is a verb that carries a double meaning. It refers to both the act of recognition and the act of enhancing value. Definitions include:

1. recognize the best in people and the world around us
2. perceive those things which give life, health, vitality and excellence to living human systems
3. affirm past and present strengths, successes, assets and potentials
4. increase in value (e.g., the investment has appreciated in value).

Indeed, organizations, businesses and communities can benefit by greater appreciation. Around the globe, people hunger for recognition. They want to work from their strengths on tasks they find of value. Executives and managers long to lead from their values. They seek ways to integrate their greatest passions into their daily work. And organizations strive regularly to enhance their value to shareholders, employees and the world at large.

Inquiry: Exploration and Discovery Appreciative Inquiry is about more than appreciation, recognition, and enhancement of value. It's also about inquiry. Inquiry refers to acts of exploration and discovery. It implies a quest for new possibilities, being in a state of unknowing, wonder and a willingness to learn. It implies an openness to change. The word "inquire" means to:

- ask questions
- study
- search, explore, delve into or investigate.

Inquiry is a learning process for organizations as well as for individuals. Seldom do we search, explore or study what we already know with certainty. We ask questions about and query into areas unfamiliar to us. The act of inquiry requires sincere curiosity and openness to new possibilities, new directions and new understandings. We cannot have "all the answers," "know what is right," or "be certain" when we are engaged in inquiry. The spirit of inquiry is the spirit of learning.

How Does Appreciative Inquiry Work? The process used to generate the power of Appreciative Inquiry is the 4-D Cycle. Based on the notion that human systems - people, teams, organizations and communities - grow and change in the direction of what they study, Appreciative Inquiry works by focusing the attention of an organization on its most positive potential - its positive core. The positive core is the essential nature of the organization at its best – people's collective wisdom about the organization's tangible and intangible strengths, capabilities, resources, potentials and assets. The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D cycle unleashes the energy of the positive core for transformation and sustainable success.

Affirmative Topic Choice: The 4-D Cycle begins with the thoughtful identification of what is to be studied - affirmative topics. Since human systems move in the direction of what they study, the choice of what to study - what to focus organizational attention on - is both essential and strategic. The topics that are selected provide a framework for collecting stories, discovering and sharing best practices, and creating a knowledge-rich work environment. They become the organization's agenda for learning and innovation.

Once selected, affirmative topics such as "inspired leadership," "optimal margins," or "culture as competitive advantage" guide the 4-D Cycle of Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny.

Discovery: The Discovery phase is a diligent and extensive search to understand the "best of what is" and "what has been." It begins with the collaborative act of crafting appreciative interview questions and constructing an appreciative interview guide. Appreciative Inquiry questions are written as affirmative probes into an organization's positive core, in the topic areas selected. They are written to generate stories, to enrich the images and inner dialogue within the organization, and to bring the positive core more fully into focus. The results of Discovery include:

- The formation of new relationships and alliances, that bridge across traditional barriers.
- A rich description or mapping of the organization's positive core.
- Organization-wide sharing and learning from stories of best practices, golden innovations and exemplary actions.
- Greatly enhanced organizational knowledge and collective wisdom.

These results, in turn, inspire the emergence of organic, unplanned changes - well before implementation of the more "planful" phases of the 4-D cycle.

Dream: The Dream phase is an energizing exploration of "what might be:" a time for people to explore their hopes and dreams for their work, their working relationships, their organization, and the world at large. It is a time for groups of people to engage in thinking big, thinking out of the box, and thinking out of the boundaries of what has been in the past.

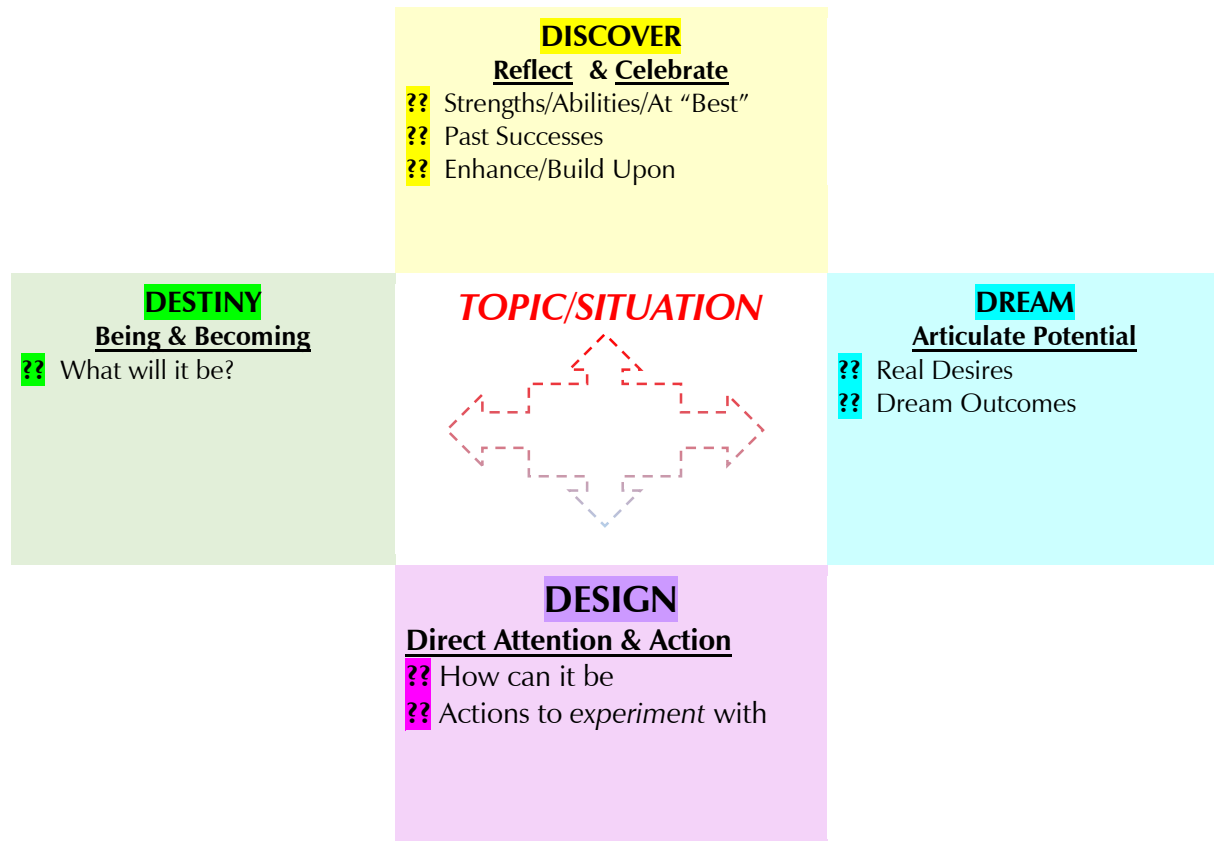
The intent of the Dream phase is to identify and spread generative, affirmative, and hopeful images of the future. Typically this is accomplished in large group forums, where unusual combinations of stakeholders explore:

- Creative images of the organization's most positive potentials
- Innovative strategic visions
- An elevated sense of purpose.

Design: The Design phase involves making choices about "what should be" within an organization or system. It is a conscious re-creation or transformation, through which such things as systems, structures, strategies, processes and images will become more fully aligned with the organization's positive past (Discovery) and highest potential (Dream).

Destiny: The Destiny phase initiates a series of inspired actions that support ongoing learning and innovation - or "what will be." Since the entire 4-D Cycle provides an open forum for employees to contribute and step forward in the service of the organization, change occurs in all phases of an Appreciative Inquiry process. The Destiny phase, however, focuses specifically on personal and organizational commitments and paths forward. The result of destiny is generally an extensive array of changes throughout the organization in areas such as:

- Management practices
- HR processes
- Measurement systems
- Customer service systems
- Work processes and structures



Purpose

- Assists groups to explore collaboratively the systemic nature of problems/ dilemmas.
- Builds leader/team capability to use dialogic skills to collaboratively explore different perspectives of challenges/dilemmas they face: personally, professionally, organizationally.
- Raises assumptions/mental models that might need to shift to support innovation/transformation.

Defined

- Teaches the skills of inquiry and dialogue
- Reframes issues and looks at them from a more appreciative perspective
- Provides opportunities to consider different points of view
- Probes views, examples, thinking process
- Encourages challenge
- Promotes collaboration
- Builds relationships of trust
- Broadens skills and ability to work with diverse perspectives and a wide-range of people
- Provides a dialogic approach to conflict resolution

Uses

- Discussing a dilemma
- Exploring conflicting ideas
- Creating new/innovative ideas
- Determining the best path forward
- Team development

Skills

- Listen for assumptions
- Ask open ended questions to clarify, challenge assumptions, spark new thinking
- Engage with the person, the dilemma, and in the conversation
- Avoid giving advice/solving the problem

Leadership Qualities

- **CURIOSITY.** Relentlessly seek new ideas, ways of thinking, new solutions. Become a World-Class Learners, with curiosity at the heart of learning.
- **HUMILITY.** Be approachable. Be willing to be changed through the process... by others & their ideas.
- **OPTIMISM.** Show up with optimism in order to see the possibilities. Optimism creates positive energy, nurtures dreams and dreamers and creates the conditions to solve problems. It is a force multiplier.
- **SUBORDINATION.** Subordinate personal beliefs/assumptions for greater good/higher purpose.

Team Learning

- Listening for understanding & willingness to be influenced
- Creating space for appreciating different points of view
- Respecting others' positions
- Asking questions to challenge collective assumptions
- Saying what needs to be said

Employee Engagement: Path to Sustainability

- Learning as an organizational capability
- Business case for employee engagement
- Engagement is about respect and relationships
- Shift more focus to relationships

Organization Culture

- What processes are in place that enable people to talk together about what is important?
- How vulnerable will the organization allow itself to be?
- How do leaders show they care?
- What actions are people taking that can be turned into stories that show the heart of this change?
- How can the leadership team demonstrate its own culture change?

The Ladder of Inference

I take **ACTIONS** based on my **BELIEFS**

I'll make sure the report has no benefit to him.

I adopt **BELIEFS** about the world

He has never liked my ideas. He's power-hungry & views me as a threat.

I draw **CONCLUSIONS**

The CFO discounted my work & thinks I'm incompetent because when I finished he asked for a full report.

I make **ASSUMPTIONS** based on the **MEANINGS** I added

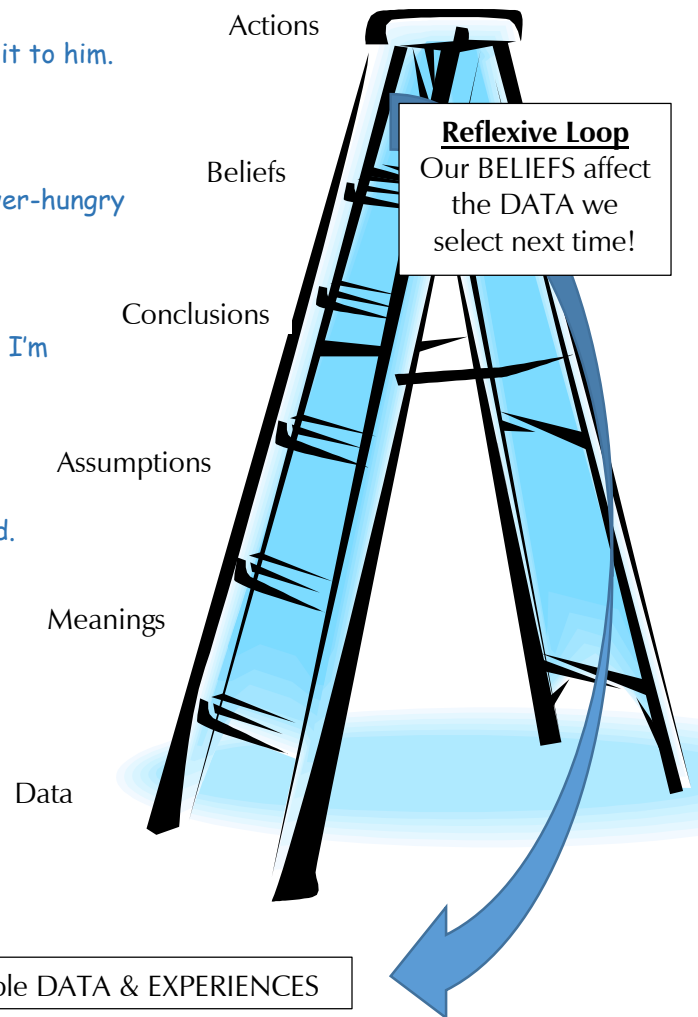
The CFO seems bored & disinterested.

I **add** **MEANINGS** (cultural/personal)

All except the CFO are engaged & alert.

I **select** **DATA** from what I observe

I am presenting to the C-Suite.



Practice

- Point person shares a dilemma for the group inquiry (3 min.)
- Participants raise questions to clarify the dilemma (10 min.)
- Point person and participants write down their assumptions. (5 min.)
- Participants continue to ask questions which challenge assumptions and provide insights. Point person takes notes only. (10 min.)
- Point person shares insights from the process and group continues in an open dialogue about how to work with the dilemma. (5 min)