



## Knowledge to lead

## ■ Appreciative Inquiry

*"No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it. We must learn to see the world anew" – Albert Einstein*

Appreciative Inquiry is an organizational development process or philosophy that engages individuals within an organizational system in its renewal, change and focused performance. Its assumption is simple: every organization has something that works right – things that give it life when it is most alive, effective, successful, and connected in healthy ways to its stakeholders and communities. The basic idea is to build organizations around what works, rather than trying to fix what doesn't.

The Appreciative Inquiry (AI) methodology was developed by Dr. David Cooperrider from a study in Organizational Behaviour at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH (U.S.A) in the middle of the 1980s. Primarily used to help corporation and institutions to improve their competitive advantage or organizational effectiveness, the AI has been recently applied in strategic planning for public policies, including a number of sustainable development projects. Within the UN system the AI was employed when the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan convened the Global Compact Leaders Summit at the UN Headquarters in June 2004. In the event over 500 CEO leaders from around the world gathered to explore the global struggle for corporate responsibility using AI's cyclic process.

The unique feature of the AI approach is its commitment to seeking and drawing upon the root causes of success rather than those contributing to failure. The objective is to find and emphasize the positive successes and strengths as a means to empower communities, groups and organizations, to plan and manage development and conservation. AI promotes the search for the best in things, for what "gives life" to a system when it is at its most effective and capable state, in economic, social, environmental and human terms.



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AI provides an environment for the development of stimulating creative dialogues amongst stakeholders from cross-sectoral areas. It gathers group thoughts, creating a shared vision with the power to mobilize society through individual communication and relationships. It is a method that allows for collective construction and for boosting actions toward a common ideal. Thus, it favors genuine participation and a strong feeling of ownership towards a common and shared vision.

AI is a process of learning and action intended for discovering, understanding, and fostering innovations and transformations in human social system. It does not depend on a standard training manual. It is flexible and innovative and can be used to approach any issue in any group of stakeholders or community. The entire process remains grounded in the actual experiences of individuals. AI motivates the community for interactive participation and self-mobilization.

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## Positive Inquiry

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AI's primary tool is positive questioning. It asks questions that strengthen the capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. It seeks to demonstrate a constructive perspective of what people talk about as past and present capacities: achievements, assets, unexplored potentials, innovations, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, benchmarks, values, traditions and strategic competencies.

The positive inquiry makes the group feel proud of their own skills, resources, vision, commitments and action. Through a carefully developed set of questions and a process of dialogue, stories of "peak experiences" are uncovered. As these stories come to the surface, new images and possibilities can emerge and become realities in new and unforeseen ways. People begin to see themselves differently and act differently. This story-telling contributes to the development of mutual trust, transparency and institution building.

The process evolves into a participatory search for questions arise that none of the stakeholders can satisfactory answer alone. The positive questioning inspires collaboration and consensus building, initiating discovery through developing shared images of a mutually agreed ideal. The process helps to develop the energy and empowerment that are needed to create sustainable change.



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## Protocol of Interview

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The interview protocol entails asking positive questions, seeking what works, what empowers, seeking the best, seeking successes and identifying their causes. It is used as a major tool to stimulate story-telling among the participants. The protocol employs a common language for promoting rich and structured discussions.

The main objective of the protocol is to recall and reinforce good things that happened in the past, thus reinforcing successes and demonstrating that there are many resources available. People have skills, experiences that can be used to increase commitments towards intended objectives.

The interviews will reflect some common grounds which will work as a roadmap that smoothly conducts the participants for action and progress based on a shared and agreed view of a desired future. They will reflect and discuss on their previous experiences and strengths, creating a high level of interaction that will contribute to the productivity of the whole group.

As a result of joint reflection, a unique knowledge appears, whose value is not in the information it contains, but in its creative character. The value of this knowledge is strengthened by participant's interactions and reflections and their joint movement in some singular directions with the goal of realizing a shared vision.

## The AI 4-D Model: Discovery, Dream, Design and Delivery

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Appreciative Inquiry uses a planning and management cycle of **Discovery**, **Dream**, **Design** and **Delivery** that builds upon the root causes of success and motivation among participant as individuals and groups. The AI 4-D Model can smoothly guide a group of stakeholders to construct a shared vision of a desired future, design feasible and realistic action plans and create commitment for its implementation.

### **Discovery – Finding the positive building blocks and root causes of success**

Through interviews and story-telling stakeholders are asked to share their stories of accomplishments, and then to look at the factors, resources and competencies that led to the successes. These could be: successful leadership, relationships, technologies, values, learning processes, external relationships, planning methods, etc.



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Stakeholders follow the interview protocol and conduct one-one interviews. The pairs then reconvene into groups to share highlight stories and search for patterns and "root causes" of past successful actions and experiences.

The groups synthesize their patterns into a creative metaphor to communicate their concept of a "positive core" to the plenary. The discovery constitutes an appraisal phase that will lead to the stage of planning and defining objectives to achieve a common vision for the future.

### **Dream – visualizing a common future**

The achievements identified in the discovery phase are used to visualize a desired future. This is a particular feature of the appreciative inquiry methodology. When "the best of what is" has been identified and valued, the mind naturally begins to search beyond; it begins to envision new possibilities.

The dream phase involves challenging the status quo by envisioning more valued and vital futures. The images that emerge are grounded in history, and as such represent compelling possibilities. To create a clear results-oriented vision in relation to the discovered potential stakeholders provide answers to questions such as: *What are those things that no matter how much the world changes, we want to keep in our new future?*

With this new knowledge they develop an image of how an ideal future will look like at some point ahead. Setting-up a vision entails a creative process of visualizing a dream-image about what could be possible to achieve.

Stakeholders work in small groups that share the images of an ideal future and visualize how the situation is presented then. The image should be translated into realistic broad objectives, asking the question "*Where do we want to go?*" Groups create a collective image and write a headline, creating the priority elements of a cover story for the press and present it to the plenary.

### **Design – creating possible propositions of the ideal framework**

In the next step, a realistic design and planning on how to reach the future vision are made. Future visioning requires the development of processes that will bring the group from its current state to its desired state. The key is the description of what the intended outcome should look like and how it might function.

Stakeholders create provocative propositions of the ideal framework – a design which they feel they are capable of realizing. The design phase is the creation of the social and technical architecture that is responsive to the stakeholders dream.



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This stage is intended to be provocative – participants develop, through consensus, concrete short and long-term goals to achieve the dream. Stakeholders are involved in brainstorming sessions to identify interesting activities; then they will briefly screen the feasibility of the proposed activities and prioritise them, identifying what needs to be done to achieve the vision.

### **Destiny – creating commitment for implementation**

The **destiny** is the construction of the future through innovating an action. The first three steps are designed to establish a momentum of excitement. Since the group have been involved in a valuing, envisioning, and dialoguing process, they are committed and have a clear sense of where they are headed. In the destiny phase, participants take full responsibility for their own innovation and they show commitment with the implementation of the actions.

Stakeholders act on their provocative propositions, establishing roles and responsibilities, developing strategies, forging institutional linkages and mobilizing resources to achieve their dream. New project plans are developed and initiated, new relationships are established and the group will proceed with vision and a renewed sense of purpose. The momentum and potential for innovation is extremely high at this last stage because of the shared positive image of the future.

AI recognizes that every organization is an open system that depends on its human capital to bring its vision and purpose to life. AI encourages people to work together to promote a better understanding of the human system, the heartbeat of the organization. The outcome of an AI initiative is a long-term positive change in the organization.



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