

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

An Overview

Compiled by Kendy Rossi 1998

From various sources on the Internet

Definition/Primary Purpose

A strategy for intentional change that identifies the best of "what is" to pursue dreams and possibilities of "what could be"; a cooperative search for the strengths, passions and life-giving forces that are found within every system and that hold potential for inspired, positive change.

A process of collaborative inquiry, based on interviews and affirmative questioning, that collects and celebrates "good news stories" of a community; these stories serve to enhance cultural identity, spirit and vision.

A way of seeing which is selectively attentive to -- and affirming of -- the best and highest qualities in a system, a situation, or another human being; an appreciation for the "mystery of being" and a "reverence for life."
(phrases from Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987)

Potential Uses

- Mission Statement/Vision Development
- Strategic Planning
- Organizational/System Redesign
- Process & Service Enhancement
- Improvement Initiatives
- Group Culture Change
- Civic/Community Development
- Umbrella for Multiple Change Initiatives in a System

Ideal Conditions for Use

Identified need or desire for: Heart-felt inquiry, discovery & renewal
Positive, grass-roots revolution

Systems & situations in which there is (are):

- Support for full voice participation at all levels
- Commitment to change as an ongoing process, not a one-time event
- Leadership belief in the positive core and affirmative process as a viable change driver
- Structures/resources to encourage sharing of "good news stories" and to support creative action

Times to Avoid Use

Situations in which: Predictable, linear process & outcomes are required
Problem-identification/problem-solving is the preferred method for change
There is lack of support for passionate dreaming & inspired self-initiative

Potential Outcomes

Change in basic orientation from problem-focused to possibility-focused
Clarified or enhanced sense of identity, shared values & culture
Established climate of continual learning & inquiry
Renewal of group energy, hope, motivation & commitment
Increase in curiosity, wonder and "reverence for life"
Whole system changes in culture & language (increase in cooperative practices & decrease in competition; increased ratio of positive: negative comments; increase in affirmative questions and/or narrative-rich communication)
Improved working relations/conflict resolution
Decrease in hierarchical decision-making; increase in egalitarian practices & self-initiated action
Successful achievement of intents listed above (see "Potential Uses");

Key Principles & Assumptions

Every system works to some degree; seek out the positive, life-giving forces and appreciate the "best of what is."
Knowledge generated by the inquiry should be applicable; look at what is possible & relevant. Systems are capable of becoming more than they are, and they can learn how to guide their own evolution -- so consider provocative challenges & bold dreams of "what might be."
The process & outcome of the inquiry are interrelated and inseparable, so make the process a collaborative one.

Four Guiding Principles:

About Reality...

We co-create reality through our language, thoughts, images and beliefs about reality.

The act of asking a question influences the system's reality in some way (i.e. questions are a form of intervention).

The types of questions we ask determine the types of answers we receive; and "the seeds of change are implicit in the very first questions we ask."

We manifest what we focus on, and we "grow toward what we persistently ask questions about." (both quotes from Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999)

About Problem-Solving... AI is distinctly different from problem-solving: AI focuses on a desired future or outcome, built on strengths/passions of the past and present. Problem-solving attempts to analyze deficits, identify root causes, then fix problems or correct errors; because it searches for problems, it finds them. AI doesn't ignore problems -- it recognizes them as a desire for something else, then works to identify & enhance the "something else."

Theory & Other Influences

Constructionist Principle: we construct realities based on our previous experience, so our knowledge and the destiny of the system are interwoven.

Principle of Simultaneity: inquiry and change are simultaneous.

Poetic Principle: the story of the system is constantly being co-authored, and it is open to infinite

interpretations.

Anticipatory Principle: what we anticipate determines what we find.

Positive Principle: as an image of reality is enhanced, actions begin to align with the positive image.

Other related research/theory:

Sports psychology re: visualization; educational research re: Pygmalion effect; medical research re: mind/body health, placebo effect, etc.; spiritual practices of meditation and visualization.

Story, metaphor, image, and dialogue are powerful change agents.

AI reveals common ground (shared values & dreams).

AI reveals higher ground (the most compelling, desirable possibilities).

Affirmative competence (ability to recognize & affirm the positive) is a skill that can be practiced and learned.

Process -Steps of Implementation

The process usually takes participants through the stages of

The 4-D Cycle: Discovery -- Appreciating & Valuing the Best of "What Is"

Dream -- Envisioning "What Might Be"

Design -- Dialoguing "What Should Be"

Destiny -- Innovating "What Will Be"

AI Principles are adapted and customized to each individual situation; the

Full AI process typically includes:

Selecting a focus area or topic(s) of interest

Interviews designed to discover strengths, passions, unique attributes

Identifying patterns, themes and/or intriguing possibilities

Creating bold statements of ideal possibilities ("Provocative Propositions")

Co-determining "what should be" (consensus re: principles & priorities)

Taking/sustaining action

Creator(s) & Creation Date

David Cooperrider, Suresh Srivastva in 1987

with colleagues from Case Western University & Taos Institute

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