

Appreciative inquiry: A crucial issue in an organization



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Abstract

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an organizational development process or philosophy that engages individuals within an organizational system in its renewal, change and focused performance. It is now a commonly accepted practice in the evaluation of organizational development strategy and implementation of organizational effectiveness tactics. Appreciative Inquiry is a particular way of asking questions and envisioning the future that fosters positive relationships and builds on the basic goodness in a person, a situation, or an organization. It enhances a system's capacity for collaboration and change. Appreciative Inquiry utilizes a 4-stage process focusing on:

1. DISCOVER: The identification of organizational processes that work well.
2. DREAM: The envisioning of processes that would work well in the future.
3. DESIGN: Planning and prioritizing processes that would work well.
4. DESTINY (or DELIVER): The implementation (execution) of the proposed design.

Apply of appreciate inquiry in an organization

Appreciative inquiry is about the 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, and finding the most effective and most constructively capable in economic, ecological and human terms. Appreciative inquiry involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend anticipate and heighten the positive potential. Principally, it gives way to speedy imagination and innovation; instead of negation, criticism and spiralling diagnosis, there is discovery, dream and design.

An organization is a group of people intentionally planned to accomplish an overall, common goal or set of goals. There are several important aspects to consider before setting the goal of an organization. These features are explicit - deliberate and recognized - or implicit - operating behind the scenes. Ideally, these features are carefully considered and established, usually during the strategic planning process.

In Nepal, many organizations including government organizations, NGOs, projects, community-based organizations and other groups have used appreciative inquiry successfully.

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Some of them are: Capital College and Research Centre (CCRC), CARE Nepal, Centre for Victim of Torture Nepal, Habitat for Humanity-Nepal, Karuna Management, Kathmandu, Mountain Spirit, National Appreciative Inquiry Network Nepal, Nepal Safe Motherhood Project, Nepal-UK Community Forestry Project, PACT Nepal, PLAN International, Pragma Management, SAGUN, the Department of Agriculture, The Mountain Institute and UNICEF-Women's Right to Life and Health Project.

Nepal Administrative Staff college and workshop on Appreciative Inquiry

Nepal Administrative Staff College (2007) had conducted a workshop on "Leadership for change: Unfolding the positive potential" for senior officials of the Nepal Government in the context of appreciative inquiry. Generally, appreciative inquiry is based on the principle that the job of the leadership is to create the conditions for an organization to develop affirmative competence to move in the direction of a positive future.

The traditional approach to change is to look for the problem, do a diagnosis and find a solution. The primary focus is on what is wrong or broken. Since we look for problems, we find them. By paying attention to problems, we emphasize and amplify them. Inquiry focuses on the positive aspects of our lives and leverages them to correct the negative.

Usually, appreciative inquiry is a theory and practice for approaching change from a holistic framework. Based on the belief that human systems are made and imagined by those who live and work within them also, it leads systems to move toward generative and creative images that reside in their most positive core □ their values, vision, achievements and best practices. In practice, appreciative inquiry can be used to co-create the transformative processes and practices appropriate to the culture of a particular organization.

In the appreciative inquiry approach, a maximum number of people are involved in a process that goes through what is called the 4-D cycle: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. Appreciative inquiry has been successfully applied in a variety of settings and organizations - from small community groups in Nepal to other developing societies. Its applications have ranged from strategy formulation, vision creation to customer surveys, new employee orientation and evaluation of projects.

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 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

In many cases, the 4-D Cycle provides the framework for ongoing activities. Thus, the cycle begins again . . . and again . . . and again.

Appreciative inquiry has seen success largely because it believes in people. It really is an invitation to a positive revolution in an organization. Its goal is to discover in all human beings the exceptional and the essential. The outcome of an appreciative inquiry initiative is a long-term positive change in the organization. It encourages people to work together to promote a better understanding of the human system.

Appreciative Inquiry (often known as AI) is based on the principle that ‘organizations change in the direction in which they inquire. So an organization which inquires into problems will keep finding problems, but an organization which attempts to appreciate what is best in itself will discover more and more that is good. It can then use these discoveries to build a new future where the best becomes more common.

Appreciative inquiry identifies the strengths of individuals and organizations and uses them to increase and sustain their respective levels of well-being. Therapists, counsellors and various other psychological professionals use appreciative inquiry methods and techniques to build and broaden the lives of individuals. Also the appreciative inquiry technique helps in resolving conflict in an organization. A conflict that occurs in an organization need not be destructive, provided the energy associated with the conflict is harnessed and directed towards problem-solving and organizational improvement. However, managing conflict effectively calls on all the parties to understand the nature of the conflict in the workplace.

Appreciative Inquiry and social system

Appreciative inquiry a theory of organizing and method for changing social systems is one of the more significant innovations in action research in the past decade. Those who created action research in the 1950s were concerned with creating a research method that would lead to practical results as well as the development of new social theory. It was hoped that action research would be an important tool in social change. A key emphasis of action researchers has been on involving their “subjects” as co-researchers. Action research was and still is a cornerstone of organization development practice.

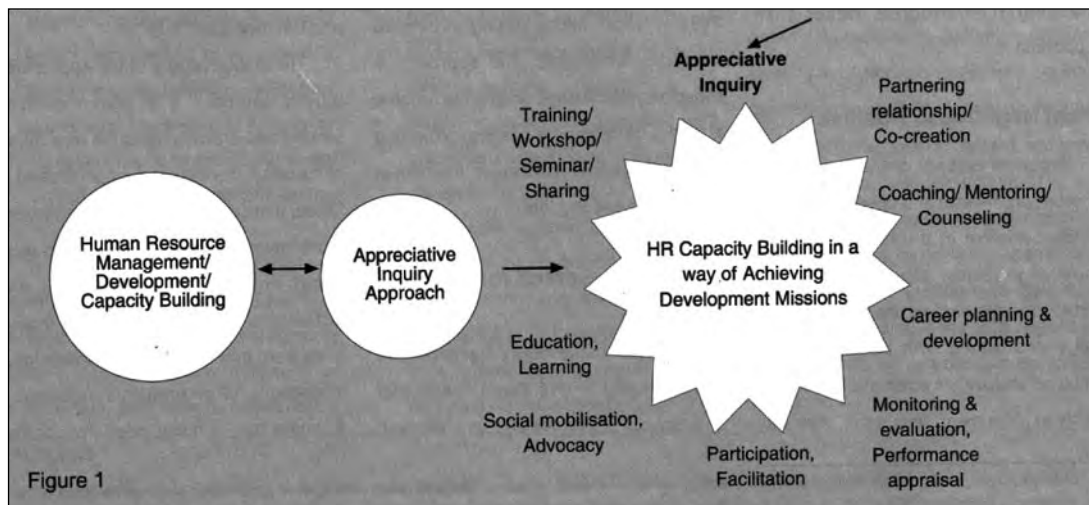
Appreciative Inquiry is the study of what gives life to human systems when they are at their best. It is an organization development methodology based on the assumption that inquiry into and dialogue about strengths, successes, values, hopes and dreams is it transformational. It is founded on the following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

Linkage between Appreciative Inquiry and Human Capacity building in achieving development mission

The linkage between Appreciative Inquiry and human capacity building in achieving developmental needs can be seen in figure 1.

Capacity building is not a separate entity or an assignment isolated from our vision and mission. It is always associated with day-to-day action to fulfil our developmental mission and vision (Chapagain, C., 2006). Capacity building is a neutral process that applies for any human being and organization as needed, however, it advocates more towards the disadvantaged and most needy sectors of the society. Capacity should be responsive towards changes that occur in the individual, organization, and society. It should aim to capacitate the human resources to become able to achieve their developmental goals and to respond to changing scenarios.



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Role of human communication in Appreciative inquiry

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.

Appreciation: Recognition and Value Added

Appreciation has to do with recognition, with valuing and with gratitude. The word “appreciates” is a verb that carries a double meaning. It refers to both the act of recognition and

the act of enhancing value. Definitions include:

- To recognize the best in people and the world around us;
- To perceive those things which give life, health, vitality and excellence to living human systems?
- To affirm past and present strengths, successes, assets and potentials;
- To 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 the 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" also a verb means:

- To ask questions;
- To study;
- To 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.

Appreciative inquiry and socio-rationalist paradigm

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.

Appreciative inquiry, however, is a product of the socio-rationalist paradigm (Gergen, 1982, 1990) which treats social and psychological reality as a product of the moment, open to continuous reconstruction. Researchers argue that there is nothing inherently real about any particular social form, no valid principles of social organization to be exposed. While logical positivism assumes that social phenomena are sufficiently enduring, stable and replicable to allow for generalizations, socio-rationalism contends that social order is fundamentally unstable. "Social phenomena are guided by cognitive heuristics, limited only by the human imagination: the social order is a subject matter capable of infinite variation through the linkage of ideas and action.

Appreciative inquiry “...refers to both a search for knowledge and a theory of intentional collective action which are designed to help evolve the normative vision and will of a group, organization, or society as a whole. Appreciative inquiry, as a method of changing social systems, is an attempt to generate a collective image of a new and better future by exploring the best of what is and has been. These new images, or “theories”, create a pull effect that generates evolution in social forms.

Although Appreciative inquiry originated in the field of organization development, it soon became clear that appreciative inquiry represented a new way of seeing the world -- a new way of thinking, acting and being. In the words of its primary originator, David L. Cooperrider of Case Western Reserve University, Appreciative inquiry asks us to pay special attention to “the best of the past and present” -- in order to “ignite the collective imagination of what might be.”

Seeing strength and potential

Appreciative inquiry is about seeing what others may not see. It’s about heightening our awareness of the value, strength, and potential of ourselves and others -- and overcoming the limits that we impose, often unconsciously, on our own capacities.

Most of us have had glimpses of these possibilities. And yet, the pervasive “background music” of our culture seems to draw us all into a chorus of hopelessness, irony and negativity. There is something of wonder we find when we shift our gaze to the vital core that gives life to the human system.

Organization and strategy

When an organization needs to fine-tune its strategy or troubleshoot organizational issues, the best problem-solving solution may have little to do with the problem itself. A host of organizations, including British Airways, Verizon, and NASA, have embraced Appreciative Inquiry (AI), a strategy based on the idea that focusing on what’s working is a better way to fix what’s wrong. Despite the esoteric-sounding name, AI is gaining real traction at companies that need to make big or complex organizational changes.

Popularized by Dr. David Cooperrider, a management professor at Case Western Reserve University, AI consists of a series of discussions and brainstorming sessions designed to tap into the existing strengths of an organization and to figure out how to perpetuate them. More importantly, AI proponents claim that the positive approach is the antidote to one of the most vexing problems that nearly every organization faces: resistance to change.

Concluding Remarks

Appreciative inquiry is about the 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, and finding the most effective and most constructively capable in economic, ecological and human terms. Appreciative inquiry involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend anticipate and heighten the positive potential... Principally, it gives way to speedy imagination and innovation; instead of negation, criticism and spiralling diagnosis, there is discovery, dream and design.

Appreciative inquiry helps businesses focus on long-term goals, and by bringing people together in a positive atmosphere, it reduces dysfunction.

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