

Appreciative Inquiry

Or ...

How Aging Futures went from
Frail to Hale

Appreciative Inquiry

AI ... 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.

Appreciative Inquiry

AI is founded on 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.

Building on Strengths

AI builds on strengths, not weaknesses

Replaces SWOT with the 4 D's

- **Dream**
- **Discovery**
- **Design**
- **Destiny**

The 4 D cycle unleashes the energy for the positive core for transformation and sustainable success.

Affirmative Topics...

... begins with thoughtful identification of what is to be studied:
affirmative topics.

The choice of what to study—what to focus organizational attention on—is essential and strategic.

Tell the Stories

Topics provide a framework for

- Collecting stories
- Discovering and sharing best practices
- Creating a knowledge rich work environment

They become an organization's agenda for learning and innovation.

Topics should be affirmative, such as "inspired leadership" or "culture as competitive advantage."

Discovery

Discovery: Diligent and extensive search to understand the best of what is and what has been. It begins with the collective act of crafting an appreciative interview guide.

Questions 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.

Results of Discovery

Results of **Discovery**:

- 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

Dream: Exploring “what might be”. A time for people to explore their hopes and dreams for their work, their working relationships, the organization and the world at large. Time to engage in and out of the box thinking. The intent of this 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

Design: Begin making choices about “what should be” within an organization or system. Allying the positive past (discovery) and highest potential (dream) with systems, structures, strategies, processes and images.

Destiny

Destiny: Inspired actions that support learning and innovation -or- “what will be”. This phase 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 services systems
- Work processes and structures

Seasons of Change

The 4 D cycle is continuous and ongoing.

At the center of **Appreciative Inquiry** is that people are people and not machines.

- 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 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.