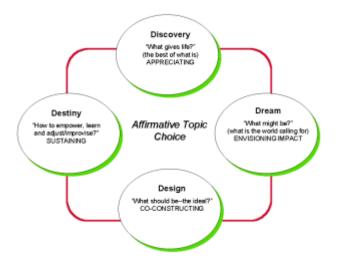# Appreciative Inquiry Basics

Purpose

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is based in asking possibility-oriented questions that focus on what is working and what is possible to inspire collaborative and wise action.

Number of participants: 6-thousands
Typical Duration: 1 hour to 3 days
More information: appreciativeinquiry.case.edu

Principles

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 system's story is constantly coauthored and 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.

Phases of an AI Process

Discovery—Mobilizing a multiple stakeholder inquiry into the positive core of a system.

Dream—Creating a results-oriented vision based in discovered potential and questions of higher purpose, such as "What is the world calling us to become?"

Design—Creating possibility-oriented design propositions of the ideal organization or community. Articulating a design capable of drawing upon and magnifying the positive core to realize the newly expressed dream.

Destiny—Strengthening the affirmative capability of the whole system. Enabling it to build hope and sustain momentum for ongoing positive change and high performance.

At the center of this cycle is Affirmative Topic Choice**.** It is the starting point and most strategic aspect of any AI process. AI topics become an agenda for learning, knowledge sharing, and action. They get written into questions for Discovery interviews, and serve as seeds for Dreams, as arenas for crafting Design propositions, and for taking action in the Destiny phase.

Adapted from Holman, Peggy. (2010). *Engaging Emergence: Turning Upheaval into Opportunity*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

The Steps in Brief

Setup: Space for paired conversations and groups of 4-6

Before the meeting
- *Select the focus area or topic(s) of interest*
- *Identify participants*
- *Develop an interview guide and interview strategy*

Sample Meeting
1. **Set the stage.** Welcome participants, speak to purpose and who is involved.
2. **Conduct interviews.** Invite people to find an interview partner, ideally someone they don't know well, provide the interview guide, along with some coaching on doing an interview (emphasis on listening, curiosity, drawing out the other person).
3. **Reflect on discoveries**. In groups of 4-6, identify interview highlights, patterns, themes, and intriguing possibilities.
4. **Imagine a desired future**. In groups of 6-8, use a "right-brained" activity like drawing, skits, clay sculptures to act out ideas that emerge from the discoveries.
5. **Create bold statements of aspirations** (provocative propositions). Ask each person to write a single statement that emerged from their experience. Cluster them and edit to develop guiding principles.
6. **Determine actions** to bring the principles to life. Self organize around ideas in the group.
7. **Organize to support action**. Make agreements about commitments, time frames, communication.
8. **Wrap up**. Invite closing reflections from participants.

Appreciative questions are...
- *Affirmative*
- *Personal* -- not abstract -- drawing from experiences and dreams
- *Open-ended,* not yes/no, either/or

They...
- Are an invitation to tell a story
- Are often ambiguous
- Invite fresh thinking/feeling
- Convey unconditional positive regard
- Evoke essential values, aspirations and inspirations
- Draw out the whole person, head, heart, thoughts, feelings, values
- Follow the energy and don't judge
- Seek a constructive arc, following a common rhythm: vent, aspire, act
- Frame options through values, not conflicts

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- Are questions for which you don't know the answer and are genuinely curious about.

Who to interview is as important as the questions asked.

For More Information

The Appreciative Inquiry Commons — The "AI Commons" is a worldwide portal devoted to the fullest sharing of academic resources and practical tools on Appreciative Inquiry and the rapidly growing discipline of positive change.

Cooperrider, D. L. (2000). Positive Image, Positive Action: The Affirmative Basis of Organizing. *Appreciative Inquiry: Rethinking Human Organization Toward a Positive Theory of Change*, 29–53.
Dense with insight, a classic article articulating foundational ideas of Appreciative Inquiry.

Holman, P., Devane, T., & Cady, S. (2007). ***The Change Handbook: The Definitive Resource on Today's Best Methods for Engaging Whole Systems*** (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
Describes sixty-one change methods for engaging whole systems.

Whitney, D., & Trosten-Bloom, A. (2010). ***The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change*** (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
An overview of AI's process and principles using stories to illustrate its use and benefits in organizations. Purpose of Appreciative Inquiry: To enable full voice appreciative participation that taps the organization's positive change core and inspires collaborative action that serves the whole system.

Adapted from Holman, Peggy. (2010). *Engaging Emergence: Turning Upheaval into Opportunity*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.