



Appreciative Inquiry Prospectus

Overview

Introduction – what is it?

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a way of achieving dramatic and radical change in organizations and businesses. In one sense it is a form of team coaching. It is also a perspective transforming tool. The aim is to completely alter the way that team members look at what they are trying to achieve and how they work to achieve it.

Put simply, it is a way of finding out what works well in the business and then building on it.

The building blocks for better outcomes may be improved relationships, planning from the bottom up and involving all the stakeholders, finding novel ways of doing things. The key is that there will be a very clear vision, understood values and great energy toward completion of a project. There will be *ownership* built in.

The basic set of assumptions:

Appreciative Inquiry embraces a set of assumptions. These are:

- § In every organization or group, something works.
- § What we focus on becomes our reality.
- § Reality is created in the moment- the here & now.
There are multiple realities.
- § The act of asking questions of an organization, or group, in itself, influences the group in some way.
- § People have more confidence to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
- § If we carry forward parts of the past, they should be the things that are best about the past.
- § It is important to value differences.
- § The language we use creates our reality.

These are taken from *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry* by Sue Annis Hammond.

These statements may seem obvious taken one by one. But they are the foundation of an approach to improvement that is radically different to the conventional wisdom. *Usually* we start trying to improve our business by looking for what isn't working and then asking how to fix it.



Here we are saying find out *what is working* and do more of it.

Coaches soon discover the impact of finding the right questions when working with groups of people.

If we focus on difficulties in the past, people may become self defeating and negative. They feel that trying to improve things is hopeless.

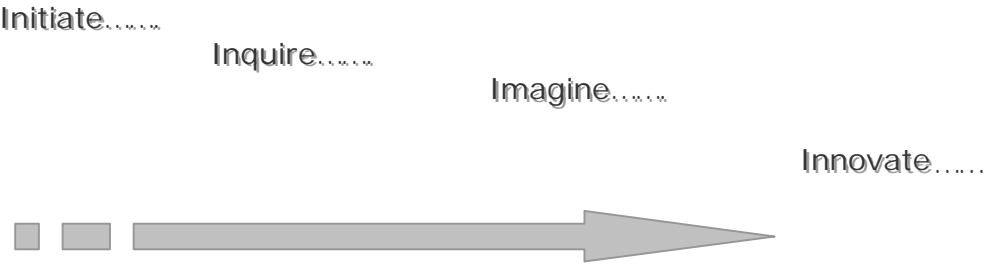
When we ask them about their successes, they become enthusiastic and start to think more positively.

The 4-I model and the '4-D' Cycle

There are several models that are used by AI practitioners. They all involve the same five key processes. These two are the simplest descriptions. I will use the 4-I model as the language is more direct and understandable.

There are 4 stages that we go through to complete the AI process.



This is the 4-I model and the table shows the correspondence with the 4-D cycle



Initiate (Discovery)	The AI approach to change is to begin by looking for what is working - <i>appreciating</i> the best of our experience.
Inquire (Dream)	This is to consider what might be - <i>envisioning the outcome we want.</i>
Imagine (Design)	How do we achieve this ideal? The team <i>co-constructs</i> a plan for change.
Innovate (Deliver)	How to empower, learn and adjust or improvise ie how do we keep change momentum going - <i>sustaining change.</i>

The inquiry process generates a tangible result.

We end up first with a series of statements that describe where the person or organization wants to be.



They also declare how they will get there and how they will deal with maintaining the change. These statements are based on understanding of the high moments of team experience and serious development of the ideas into a course of action.

Because these statements are grounded in real experience and the history of this particular group, people *know* how to repeat their success.

Examples where Appreciative Inquiry has been used

Appreciative inquiry has been used to help people develop their preferred future in companies, governments, and organizations in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and North and South America.

In-house staffs and consultants use Appreciative Inquiry to address major organizational problems. Examples include poor internal communication, absent leadership, and a failure of either individual or group effectiveness.

Examples of good outcomes might be:

- faster adjustment of managers dealing with a new role (various organizations in public and private sector).
- increasing the effectiveness of a department team (such as in a Social Services department)
- improved communication between board members who have varying experience (eg Housing association).

AI is also being used for mediation in the voluntary sector, international conflict resolution, city-wide activities like Imagine Chicago, and various community initiatives.

Summary

The purpose of AI is to enable the participants to reconnect with the life giving forces in a business. A focus on what is currently working well allows the group to go beyond *what is* to *what could be*. The process has an inbuilt momentum and a mechanism to ensure that change both happens and sticks.

Because it is a *co-creation* of the team concerned everyone is highly motivated to see that it succeeds and gain high levels of satisfaction from their involvement.