

# Liberating Thinking: Appreciative Inquiry

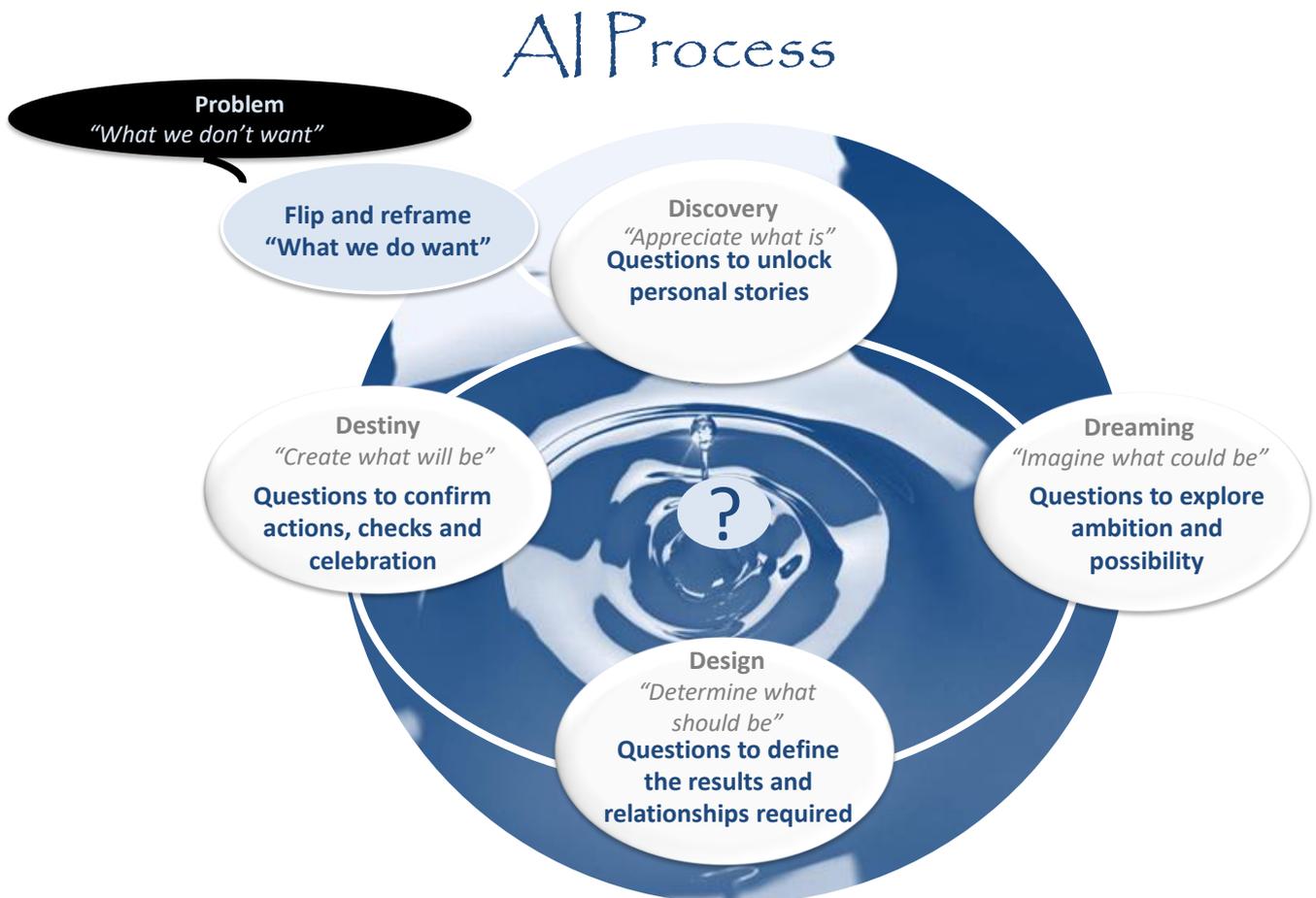


## Appreciative Inquiry Practical Planning

# Liberating Thinking: Appreciative Inquiry

## Appreciative Inquiry – The 4D Model

To enable practical application of the philosophy, Cooperrider and his colleagues created the **4D Model**. This is a simple model that can be used for a whole system inquiry, a team inquiry, a topic-driven inquiry with a small group of people or indeed as a framework for one-to-one development or supervision conversations.

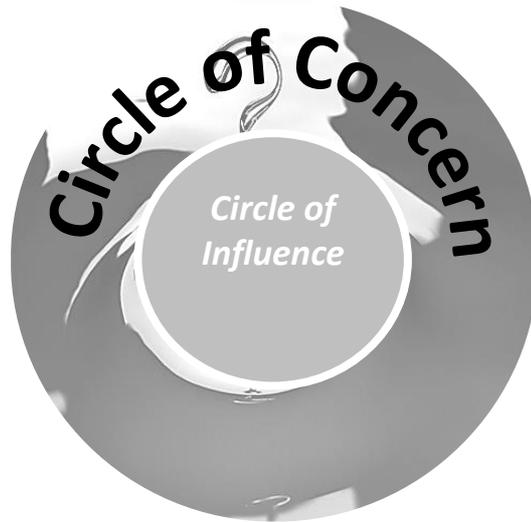


# Liberating Thinking: Appreciative Inquiry

## Creating your own Appreciative Inquiry

Using Appreciative Inquiry enables change-makers to approach problems and challenges from a different perspective, asking different questions and opening up different conversations, decisions and futures.

Appreciative Inquiry supports engagement and even if the “what” and “why” are outside your circle of influence, the “how” in terms of engaging the people is not. Appreciative Inquiry invites change-makers to put 80% of their energy into thinking and acting on what is within their circle of influence. So why, as a change-maker, would you choose to be negative, deficit-based and disengaged? Do what you can in a positive way, where you can and watch engagement flourish and your circle of influence expand.



Your reasons for beginning this adventure in thinking should have integrity, positive intent, and a real desire to discover new stories and experiences. Equally, there needs to be a valid reason why this approach will support organisational or team development; the conversation does not happen in a vacuum. This is true with any **Affirmative Topic Choice** for inquiry.

## Affirmative Topic Choice

Whilst many Appreciative Inquiry Processes will result from something not being/behaving as it should, the first and fundamental point of the process is to step away from opening conversations about what is not working. Whatever you put your energy into grows. Whatever you ask about, you get more stories about it. So, the first key stage is to reframe the area of inquiry in the affirmative. **What you want** as opposed to **what you do not want**. An easy way to think about this is like flipping over a coin. The table below shows some examples of Problems reframed into Affirmative Inquiry Topics.

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## Powerful Questions

Powerful Questions are one of the central features of Appreciative Inquiry and Appreciative Change-makers. Powerful questions are provocative queries that put a halt to evasion and confusion. They are how we open up new and different conversations, unlock the stories, create energy for the ideas, and get accountability for the actions.

**Powerful questions have legs;** they travel well and may end up taking you somewhere you never expected. **Powerful questions lead us to the future.**

**Powerful questions have heart;** they get to us at our values base, connecting with stuff that really matters to us as individuals. **Powerful questions motivate fresh thinking.**

**Powerful questions have hope;** they are about the possibility and potential in any given set of circumstances. **Powerful questions are a window into creativity and insight.**

**Powerful questions have power;** they can shift thinking and behaviour that has been stuck. **Powerful questions challenge outdated assumptions.**

*“Where can I get a good hamburger on the road?”* motivated Ray Kroc to create MacDonald’s, the global fast-food chain. Similarly, when James Watson and Francis Crick considered *“what might DNA look like in 3D form?”* led to the discovery of the double helix, which was ground-breaking in the world of science.

## Constructing Powerful Questions

The art of creating powerful questions is one worth mastering in your role as a 21<sup>st</sup>-century change-maker for all of the reasons we have already touched on. These questions come from your curious Natural Child/Adult State and will enhance your circle of influence and engage people. Whether the questions are about people and their values or new ways of doing things, you will learn more than if you hadn’t asked!

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## Scope of Powerful Questions

The scope of the question is the membrane or the boundary within which the responses can be made. So, if the question is about eliciting stories of compassion at work in a particular team, then that needs to be explicit in the question. Equally, depending on the Affirmative Topic and the direction of travel, a wider Discovery question about compassion could also work. You just need to be clear when you set out, as all roads lead back to the question.

## Assumptions

All questions hold assumptions, and the language we use has a huge impact. The difference with Powerful Questions is that they are designed explicitly with a positive assumption. They assume there is a positive story to be shared, an idea to be explored or a decision that can be agreed upon. So, “Why does it matter to you...?” assumes that it does matter, “What if you could turn this situation around...?” assumes that you can, and “What would you do now if you had no fear?” assumes that you have ideas that could be valuable.

## Using Powerful Questions

Powerful Questions are helpful in almost any situation. We encourage you to try them anywhere and everywhere. If you are faced with silence and a puzzled expression, then you are on the way. You will need to manage silence, wait with interest, and listen with appreciation and ease. On no account, interrupt or disagree. Just listen and learn and then ask, “What more do you think or feel or want to say...?”

## Powerful Questions and Conversations

Powerful Questions and the resulting conversations are at the heart of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). The following pages outline some thoughts, ideas, and activities to get you thinking about Powerful Questions and Conversations.

## Powerful Questions and the 4D Model

### Discovery – The best of now and the recent past – Unlocking stories

**Discovery** questions need to be specific enough to make a difference linked to the Affirmative Topic being explored and generic enough for everyone to engage with them.

**You might ask yourself:** *What question(s) will help to discover/explore **real** positive stories from people about the affirmative topic?*

#### **Examples:**

***Can you give me an example of how you currently use your strengths to support the team with xxx?***

***Tell me about a time when you were able to make a real difference around xxx?***

The question must enable people to share real stories; theoretical responses don't connect with values and don't provide the richness needed to move to the next part of the process.

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## Dreaming – What could be – Ambitious visions of possibility

Dreaming questions are expansive and provocative.

**You might ask yourself:** *What question(s) will help to discover/explore dreams and ambitions **based on what you have found out at Discovery**. How could a greater connection to the **Discovery themes** make a significant difference to them/their team/their customers/their business?*

**Examples:**

*What is the story about xxx within the organisation that you would like to be telling 12 months from now?  
What if that kind of feeling was prevalent across the organisation?*

The question must be expansive and allow a creative response. The main thing is that the dream is built on what came out of **Discovery**. It is not a blue-sky conversation separate from the positive stories that have emerged.

## Design – what should be – Big Ideas

**Design** questions encourage Big Ideas in line with the outcome of the **dreaming** conversation and are generally concerned with the framework of organisational purpose, relationships, results and customers.

**You might ask yourself:** *What question(s) will help to discover/explore positive and creative ideas from people about what would need to be in place in terms of relationships and behaviours/purpose and practice/process and procedure to make the **Dream and Ambition** real?*

**Examples:**

*What Big Ideas do you have about how the dream could become a reality in terms of relationships with external providers?*

*What Big Ideas do you have about improving cross-functional team working to make the dream real across the organisation?*

## Destiny – what will be – Turning Big Ideas into action

**Destiny** questions can be quite generic as they are about turning the “Big Ideas” into action. The picture of success has already been agreed upon at **Dreaming** and the detail at **Design**.

**You might ask yourself:** *What question(s) will help to gain commitments and measures from people about what they will do to turn the **Design into Destiny**?*

**Examples:**

*Of all the Big Ideas, which three will have the most significant impact?*

*How will you collectively take it forward/who has responsibility for what?*

*How will you monitor progress and measure impact?*

*What is the commitment and action required from senior change makers/others?*

*Where do we need to get support/resources?*

*How will we share learning/with whom/for what purpose?*

*It is quite easy to learn the basics of crafting powerful questions. As your questions become broader and deeper than before, so does your experience of life. There is no telling where a powerful question might lead*

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*you. Transformative conversations can result from posing a simple question such as, "What questions are we not asking ourselves about the situation we face?"*

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## Conversations and the 4D Model

A core aspect of the change maker's new work involves creating multiple opportunities for learning conversations around powerful questions and to facilitate working conversations in a way that enhances trust and engagement. This is true of specific Appreciative Inquiry 4D conversations and other parts of the change maker's role where a conversation would serve them, their people and the system better than a meeting, an email, or an instruction.

### Some small changes that make a big difference:

- Creating a climate of discovery
- Suspending premature judgment
- Exploring underlying assumptions and beliefs
- Listening for connections between ideas
- Encouraging diverse perspectives
- Honoring everyone's contributions
- Articulating shared understanding
- Harvesting and sharing collective discoveries

These skills and the behaviours that demonstrate they are genuine are especially important in situations where there are no simple answers; finding creative paths forward can make a positive difference. Change-makers become connectors – of both people and ideas. Diverse voices and new perspectives that aren't limited by traditional boundaries play an increasingly important role in personal and organisational development and growth. The connections among these diverse voices and perspectives allow people to fruitfully explore critical strategic questions, to build and encourage personal relationships through networks of collaborative conversations.

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## Bringing together a plan for an Appreciative Inquiry

This is a collaborative process; it takes time to plan and patience to host.

### 1. Topic for Inquiry

Your reasons for beginning this adventure in thinking should have integrity, positive intent, and a real desire to discover new stories and experiences about the topic. There needs to be a valid reason why you are using this approach. **Reframe the issue or problem in the Affirmative.**

### 2. Create, develop and test the questions

You will need to design and develop your powerful questions and try them out with a selection of people. This is not to see what “answers” you get, more to get a sense of how the questions feel and how effective they are at unlocking positive stories – plenty of “how-to” in the previous section.

### 3. Prepare those invited

Engage with them before the event by issuing a warm invitation and an overview of the purpose and process. We do not recommend sending the questions in advance. To make it meaningful the number of people involved need to be representative of the whole, and they need to understand why they are being invited to share their thinking. You will need support and connectedness from senior change-makers; having them, their thinking and their visible commitment will make a real difference. Their alignment to the outcome of the conversation means that the next stages have an increased chance of success.

### 4. Timing – General

Like many things in organisations that take time, there is never a good time, enough time or the right time. It is up to you as the host to create a space where people have the time to think and to contribute in a way that is meaningful and has a lasting impact. From an organisation or team perspective, there might be a specific point in a wider change or development process where this type of conversation makes a real difference. We think about three hours for an initial inquiry with up to 10 people.

### 5. Timing – Specific

A session plan is really important when timetabling each of the sections. Please arrange a call and we will support you with this within the time you have available.

### 6. Venue

The space matters. You will not get the best from people when they are surrounded by equipment, seated in uncomfortable chairs or unable to get a cup of coffee. It is like hosting a party or get together. The way it feels will have a direct correlation to the quality of the conversation. Prepare the environment to maximise the success of the conversation; visual themes, flowers and good coffee all help. If you want it to be something different, it needs to be something different.

### 7. Resources

There are lots of ways to use resources as part of an Appreciative Inquiry. We recommend big, themed visuals and the use of coloured card and poster-size flipchart.

### 8. Hosting

The fundamental role of the host is to hold the meaning of the conversation as it develops; this is an intuitive process where the host is completely present, bringing their experience, core values and assumptions about what will happen. Your role as a host will be slightly different at each of the four stages of the 4D model.

At **Discovery**: to listen with intent to stories and gather themes, this could be on a 1-1 basis as part of Appreciative Interviews or with a small group as part of an Appreciative Conversation

At **Dreaming**: to encourage creativity in the development of the dream; a visual can be helpful here

At **Design**: to get under any generalisations and get real detail around the relationships and results required to deliver the **Dream**. You could use brainstorming to get the ideas out and then invite people to choose their top three Big Ideas under each section and work from there. This could be either three or four small groups taking one area of the **Design** each to scope out, or it could be a response from the whole group depending on the number of people who have been involved. These design statements

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underpin the delivery of the **Dream** and will have momentum in moving the area of inquiry into the relationships and results in the wider organisation in the future.

**At Destiny:** to keep the energy going and get real commitments from the people involved to actions. Getting good quality commitment statements is crucial in terms of the people taking personal responsibility and ownership of the conversation and how it will develop when they return to their role. The challenge here is that these statements need to be grown from the core material and not be developed due to another separate conversation disassociated from the record of the story so far. You also need to have real clarity around how you will monitor these commitments and measure the impact. These statements should not be directives for others or based on the organisation or a line manager doing something first; it's about ownership.

## **9. Host/facilitate intuitively**

Make sure you outline the process and Rules of Engagement. This will include information on timings, process, intent and outcomes. Patience may be required, especially if, as a host, you have a preference for extroversion and find it hard to manage silence! Use the facilitation skills you have to field things if they keep coming back to you, so deflect questions back to the group and open it up by asking how others feel about what has been said, etc. Be in the space, present and aware of what you are noticing going on around you, reflect observations that you think will be helpful, and ask supplementary questions to get depth and difference at each round.

## **10. Challenge “straying” from the question**

All roads lead back to the question. That is what the inquiry/conversation is about on the day at the table, at the time.

## **11. Look for collective intelligence, not consensus**

This is not about gaining agreement as part of the conversation rounds, and therefore the role of the host is not to facilitate a specific outcome. The main thing the host needs to do is to be aware of all the stories that are available, recognising that each has value. This is one of the underpinning beliefs about this way of working that everyone has a voice, it can be heard verbally and visually, and whatever they offer in response to the question is real and important for them.

## **12. Support the identification of key themes at each round.**

This can be as simple as making a one or two-word note at the end of each contribution, and when you have heard from everyone, ask them in turn what seems really significant to them and make some observations. “What are the diamonds from that round of thinking?” is a question that really focusses on people. Once you have the themes, the group collectively agrees to how these will be formed into a response to the question. That set of theme statements should then be recorded in a way that makes them visible to everyone as the process moves on to the next question and conversation.

## **13. Let people know what is next**

After people have had an opportunity to view all the commitments, it will be the responsibility of the host or a senior change-maker from the business to talk about what's next and to reaffirm that the commitments start with them, in the here and now, as they return to their teams with what they have agreed to. Be clear about accountability and support. Clearly, it is not your role as the host to make everything happen, but you will need to ensure there is the structure in place to make sure everything does happen. It is always useful to get the same people back to the table in, say, four weeks to check progress and share success stories and unexpected learning.

***I will be happy to provide feedback on questions, advice on structure and format, and creative ideas that have worked for us.***