

# Liberating Thinking: Mini Appreciative Inquiry



## Mini Appreciative Inquiry Practical Planning

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## Introduction

Appreciative Inquiry is a positive strengths-based change process. Appreciative Inquiry changes how we start the 'change conversation' by asking what's working instead of what's broken. At its heart, AI is about the search for the best in people, their organisations and the strengths-filled, opportunity-rich world around them. AI is not so much a shift in the methods and models of organisational change but is a fundamental shift in the overall perspective taken throughout the entire change process to 'see' the wholeness of the human system and to 'inquire' into that system's strengths, possibilities, and successes.

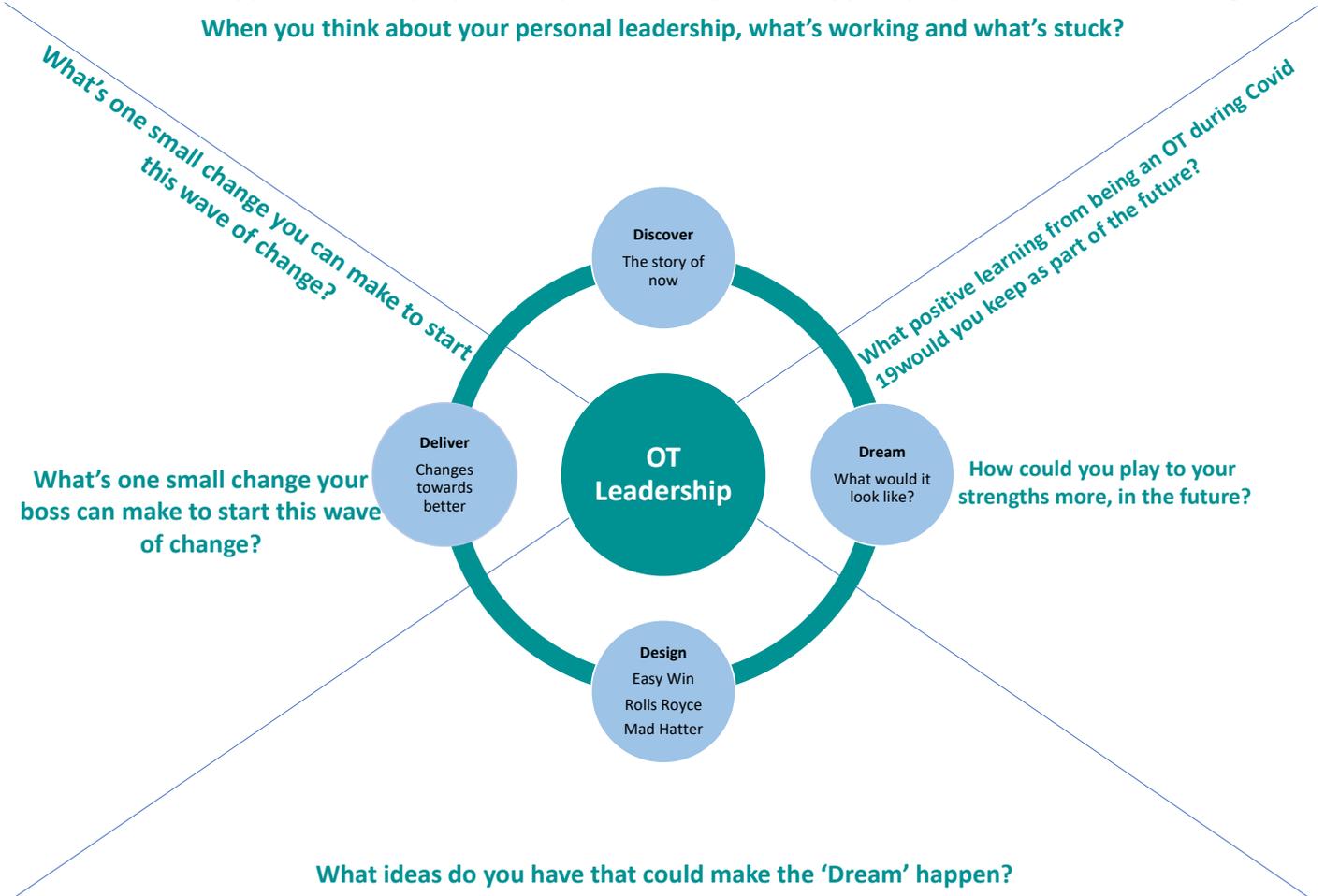
Appreciative Inquiry has a process that helps to guide the conversation called the 4D process.

## Topic for the Appreciative Inquiry

The topic for this inquiry example is linked to personal leadership during the pandemic. The questions, of course, could easily be adjusted to another topic. You would replace 'your personal leadership' with whatever topic you want to explore.

Exploration of these topics from a strengths-based perspective will enable participants and their colleagues to define their current and desired state in terms of their Personal Leadership. Importantly this is not about line management or ascribed status, but about working and practising in alignment with personal values, supporting colleagues and informing the future.

This will build on the 'best of now', flag what's stuck, engage with untapped potential, and explore possibilities. This Appreciative Inquiry can help leaders to plan to support people well in the next stages.



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## Planning

It should not take more than two weeks from start to finish to plan, conduct and feedback on this inquiry. Don't make a meal of it! It's a light touch Appreciative Inquiry. The important part is to engage others. If you are not positive about it, you can't expect others to be. Use the AI template to give to people and to keep structure on the conversation.

**For the purposes of the Mini AI you can do this in a number of ways:**

- Get four of your colleagues together physically or virtually and ask them to give you three responses to each part of the question – remember this is about them and not their manager, the system etc.  
***This is the ideal***
- As well as four colleagues, you should involve your line manager or professional lead and ask them to respond from where they sit in the organisation
- Your role is to facilitate the conversation as a Thinking Space using the Rules of Engagement and the listening that you have learned from being part of the programme
- **With six people, this will take about 90 minutes**
- Or if you can't do it in a group, then on a 1-1 basis on the phone or in-person using the same format

**Here are the tips:**

### CHECKING-IN: SET THE SCENE & INTRODUCTIONS – 10 MINUTES

- Welcome everyone, introduce yourself and your thinking partner, and ask them to say a quick hello
- Why are we here; the team, space for individual reflection, surfacing the best from COVID, making recommendations back to senior leaders in the system – this could go on an invite beforehand, if so try and make it interesting by putting a photo in the body of the email or something to catch attention. Be clear about the fact that it will be **90 minutes** and you will send everyone the output. You could send them the slide of the image on p1 of this document.
- If you are in a room with people, give them a printed copy of the slide. If not, ask them in the introductory email to print it and have it with them when they join the call.
- Welcome everyone and state the Rules of Engagement: one voice, no interrupting, you expect to hear from everyone, focus on the question asked, no negative spirals.

### DISCOVERY: The best of now and identifying 'stuckness' – 15 MINUTES

- **Explain that this is about them, not about others**
- Ask the first question, give people **3 minutes** to make some notes for themselves on the diagram- explain that **2 or 3 thoughts** in each part of the question is plenty.
- Then go to each person, in turn, asking for their thoughts, explaining that they will have around **1 to 2 minutes each**. Start with someone you can trust to respond well.
- Make notes about what's working and what's stuck, keep an eye on the time, and thank each person for their input as it goes.
- **No more than 12 minutes**, including you, saying what you think the themes are in each area. Two or three is plenty in each category.

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## DREAMING: What could the Future look like – 15 MINUTES

- **Remind them this is about their ideas and experiences**
- Ask the second set of questions, give people **3 minutes** to make some notes for themselves on the diagram; explain that **2 or 3 thoughts** in each part of the question is plenty.
- Then go to each person, in turn, asking for their thoughts, explaining that they will have around **1 to 2 minutes each**. Start with someone different this time.
- Make notes about what they would keep and their strengths, keep an eye on the time, and thank each person for their input as it goes.
- **No more than 12 minutes**, including you, saying what you think the themes are in each area. Two or three is plenty in each category.

## DESIGN: Rapid ideation on delivering the Dream – 20 MINUTES

- Explain they will have **10 minutes** to come up with three ideas related to what they said in the last part of the conversation and building on the best of now from Discovery:
- **An Easy Win (EW) Idea** – this is already happening somewhere in their system and could be translated elsewhere
- **A Rolls-Royce (RR) Idea** – this will require greater planning and time but could make a real difference in the long-term
- **A Mad Hatter Idea (MH)** – it's the thing that makes you say.....that would never work here!
- Start with person 1 and take their EW, person 2 their RR, person 3 their MH, and so on until you have all the ideas recorded in the three categories. This should be fast and fun, and this is where the scribe is really important.
- **10 minutes** for the capturing

## DESTINY: Action, what can they change, what does the boss need to change – 15 MINUTES

- Ask the final set of questions, give people **3 minutes** to make some notes for themselves on the diagram; explain that **you are only looking for one thing in each category**
- Hear all the personal commitments first and record these
- Then all the 'asks' of line managers
- **About 10 minutes for the above**

## CHECKING-OUT: 10 MINUTES

- Thank everyone for their contribution
- Ask them what they have loved about the experience and what they have learned
- If they are physically in a room, ask for their notes. If they are virtually in a room, ask them to photograph their diagram and send it to you, explaining this will help you make sure that the themes, insights, ideas and actions are accurately recorded.
- Let them know that you will use the headers from the 4D areas to create a summary of the themes and insights that came back and that they will receive a copy of this.

This is not a verbatim report but themes that seem significant for everyone involved. Then send this to everyone that took part and to your line manager for consideration