



Explore Appreciative Inquiry concepts and their practical application in your role as a Leader/Change Maker

# Appreciative Inquiry – an Introduction

## A Brief History

It helps to know a bit about scientific management and ‘Taylorism’ to see how and why AI came to be. Most organisational leaders and managers will already know about scientific management, but for those who aren’t familiar, this was a school of thought that rose to prominence in the late 19th Century. The goal of Scientific Management was boosting the efficiency of workflows by looking at them analytically and eliminating waste.

At that time, Frederick Taylor, an American engineer, was inspired to apply rigorous scientific techniques to break down and improve how people worked. Broadly, this was through timing, simplifying and standardising tasks. The resulting approaches have been criticized heavily for promoting the view of firms as machines, rather than entities of people. Another nice parallel is that it placed emphasis quite squarely on the *resources*, rather than the *human* part of human resources. A direct quote from the man himself gives an example:

*“In our scheme, we do not ask the initiative of our men. We do not want any initiative. All we want of them is to obey the orders we give them, do what we say, and do it quick.”* (Taylor, 1919)

In reaction to this perceived overemphasis, AI has emerged as an alternative approach to organizational change and development; an affirmative approach that focuses inquiry on what’s right, what’s working, and how to work toward a desired vision (Davidcooperrider.com, 2019).

The Appreciative Inquiry Model is, as noted, based on the principle that positive organizational futures can be reached through collective involvement and methods that “affirm, compel, and accelerate anticipatory learning” (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

## Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry was developed by David Cooperrider and his colleagues at Case Western University about 25 years ago as an alternative way to change organisations, teams and individuals. This framework builds on strengths, believes that everyone has greater potential that they currently display, including the potential to be creative with ideas for improvement. There are numerous examples of where Appreciative Inquiry has been used in a Healthcare setting and there are some references at the end of this section.

# Appreciative Inquiry – an Introduction

## Appreciative Inquiry invites us:

- To recognise the best in people and the world around us
- To perceive those things which give life, health, vitality, and excellence to living human systems
- To affirm past and present strengths, successes, assets, and potentials
- To increase our own value and the value of others by doing more of what works

## The philosophy is built on the following principles:

- The Constructionist Principle
- The Poetic Principle
- The Simultaneity Principle
- The Anticipatory Principle
- The Positive Principle

## Constructionist Principle

An understanding that we make meaning through the conversations we have with each other, and subsequently we develop agreements about how we see the world, how we will behave, and what we will value. **We do not see the world as it is, but as we are.**

### What does this mean for you as a Leader/Change Maker?

In the traditional organisation, a premium is placed on individual expertise. The ideal change maker should possess full knowledge, sound ideas, and clarity of expression. However, in a world of multiple opinions, reasons, and value, such singularity of expression is problematic. In contrast, conversational partnerships are encouraged by approaching relationships in a posture of “not-knowing”, not-knowing means employing a stance of genuine and intense curiosity and interest in the ideas of others.

**Question: “What are you seeing and experiencing that I need to understand?”**

### How does this benefit the organisation?

The organisation requires the flow of resources across its traditional boundaries to be developed, to enable it to flourish and make the best of its wider connections.

The organisation can increase cross-boundary connections by opening multiple channels of communication, nurturing positive conversations, framing fruitful questions; and creating open communication. Potential antagonisms may be defused through joining in collaborative efforts. Sharing stories of success can be effective in building trust and optimism. Internet communications are also vital in building knowledge webs that span space and time limitations.

***“In order for collaboration to occur there must be a means of bringing together, valuing and aligning the diversity of experiences, strengths and ideas that will inevitably exist among all the relevant stakeholders.” – David Cooperrider***

# Appreciative Inquiry – an Introduction

## Poetic Principle

The value of storytelling as a way of gathering knowledge about the organisation, including the emotional experiences of its participants. **We all have a story to share and those stories have value and possibility.**

### What does this mean for you as a Leader/Change Maker?

Appreciative change makers is earmarked by forms of collaboration that expand participation in all aspects of organisation change. Appreciative change makers makes use of people's capacities to create value-filled visions of the future. Around the globe, people hunger for recognition. They want to work from their strengths on tasks they find valuable, where they can connect to their core purpose and values and make a difference.

**Question: "What story of hope and possibility can you share about....?"**

### How does this benefit the organisation?

In our own work, we have observed a falling away from old world change makers practices. We have watched as change makers invite their whole organisation/function/team as well as customers/service users, into processes of inquiry and conversation designed to foster collaborative planning and action. Collaborative participation is becoming more and more the norm in hospitals, schools, charitable organisations, and government agencies as well as business worldwide. As discussed in the earlier part of the book this connecting and engaging improves health, wellbeing, the desire to learn and performance.

***"After nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world." — Philip Pullman***

# Appreciative Inquiry – an Introduction

## Simultaneity Principle

A realisation that inquiry is change; the questions we ask are fateful. The organisation, the team or the individual will turn their energy in the direction of the question, whether positive or negative; as a result, the seeds of change are embedded in the formulation of a question.

**We can create powerful positive questions that will unlock powerful positive stories.**

### **What does this mean for you as a Leader/Change Maker?**

Inquiry refers to the acts of exploration and discovery. The spirit of inquiry is the spirit of learning. It implies a quest for new possibilities, being in a state of unknowing, wonder, and a willingness to learn. It implies an openness to change.

**Question: “How far can you go with your own thinking, before you need mine?”**

### **How does this benefit the organisation?**

The act of inquiry requires sincere curiosity and openness to new possibilities, new directions, and new understandings. Change makers cannot have “all the answers,” “know what is right,” or “be certain”.

Inquiry is a learning process for organisations as well as for individuals. To continue to succeed, organisations need more inquiry. They need less command and control by a few and more exploration of possibilities among many. This creates greater capacity to sense and adapt quickly as their world changes.

Questions must be affirmative and focused on areas valuable to the people involved and directed at topics, projects, and targets central to the success of the organisation.

Appreciative Inquiry turns command and control cultures into communities of discovery and cooperation, and this in turn can turn around organisations.

***“Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers.” — Voltaire***

# Appreciative Inquiry – an Introduction

## Anticipatory Principle

Decisions and actions are based not only on past experiences, but also on what we anticipate, what we think or imagine will happen in the future. **We can imagine more than is currently real, tapping into imagination gives us more to think about.**

### What does this mean for you as a Change Maker?

Imagine what would change if you changed your thinking about your change maker role and encouraged others to do the same. What if you just decided that you would talk about the future as much as you talk about the present or the past?

**Question: “What would you do to move this forward if you knew you couldn’t fail?”**

### How does this benefit the organisation?

Two of the most common findings of research that support the Anticipatory Principle are the Placebo Effect and the Pygmalion or Galatea Effect. The first of these informs us that what we believe to be true affects our well-being and ability (to heal). For years, doctors have known that under certain circumstances giving a patient a placebo (a pill made from sugar or an inert substance) can cure an illness simply because the patient believes it will. Double-blind studies have further documented that if the physician also believes the pill will cure the patient, the patient is even more likely to be healed. This is known as the Pygmalion Effect and it tells us that what others believe about us affects our well-being and ability to succeed. (It also tells us that our beliefs about others affect their ability to achieve). The power of belief is very strong.

What you believe about yourself and your capabilities impacts on your willingness to try, to stretch, to reach your dreams. What you believe about your children, your partner, and your colleagues impacts how you interact with them, which in turn informs their beliefs about themselves.

***“The best way to predict your future is to create it” – Peter Drucker***

# Appreciative Inquiry – an Introduction

## Positive Principle

A belief that a positive approach to any issue is as valid and as fruitful as a basis for action as a negative approach; taking the positive stance is an antidote to cynicism and defeatism. ***We can choose to have conversations about a positive future.***

### What does this mean for you as a Leader/Change Maker?

Appreciative Inquiry gives change makers a way of really motivating and engaging individuals in owning their own future. It alters who is involved and who has access to information – from some of the people to all of the people. It alters the results – from a best solution to the problem, to the boldest dream of positive possibility. Finally, it shifts the capacity gained in the process – from the capacity to implement and measure a specific plan, to the capacity for on-going positive change.

**Question: “If you were to flip this on its head and make a success of it what happens next?”**

### How does this benefit the organisation?

Current research in the field of Positive Psychology is finding that focusing on what is wrong in an effort to fix it actually narrows our thought repertoire, thereby restricting our access to the very skills that we need for creativity and critical thinking. Engaging in activities, thoughts and behaviours that produce positive emotions, actually expand our mental repertoire and increase creativity. Greater capacity for change, growth, learning and solution finding is the outcome.

***“It is more productive to convert an opportunity into results than to solve a problem - which only restores the equilibrium of yesterday.” – Peter Drucker***

## What about problems?

This is one of the most frequently asked questions about Appreciative Inquiry. We are not saying deny or ignore problems, or that problems don't exist. What we are saying is that if you want to transform a situation, a relationship, an organisation, or community, focusing on strengths is much more effective than focusing on problems for all of the reasons we have already explored. We often work in situations where there is anxiety, tension, stress, apathy, and low morale and motivation. Frequently, when we invite people to turn their attention from what is wrong, to when they are at their best, conflict can turn to co-operation, and a willingness to move forward.

### For example:

*Susan has a problem with confidence when presenting. Do we spend hours trying to understand why and reinforce the negative self-talk, or do we get her involved in a conversation about areas in her life where she is confident?*

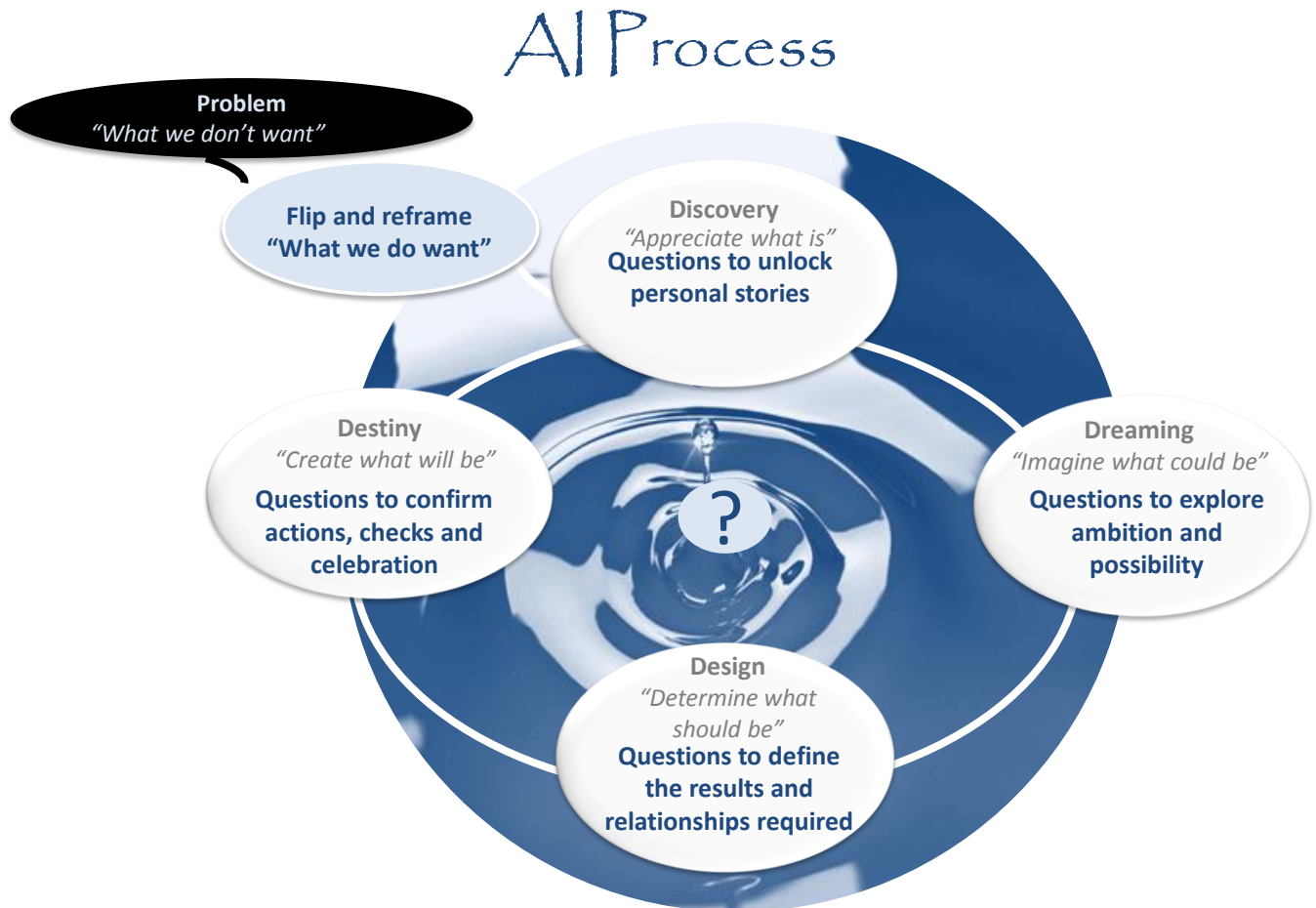
*A team is in a serious conflict situation that is affecting the care provided; do we use blame and criticism to deal with the situation or do we start a conversation where we ask the team what would be happening if there was no conflict and we were providing the service we would wish our customers to receive?*

We do not dismiss conflict, problems, or stress. We simply do not use them as the basis of conversations about the future. We listen when they arise, validate them as lived experience, and seek to reframe them. There is **always** another way of looking at things and all Appreciative Inquiry does is ask you to start the conversation about the future from a place that believes that people want something better and given the chance will step up and make that happen. This is likely to be more sustainable than management-led problem solving that can be deficit based and blame orientated. People may do what is asked of them in that situation but only because they have been “told” not because they have the desire or the ownership of the future.

# Appreciative Inquiry – an Introduction

## 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 framework for one to one development or supervision conversations.



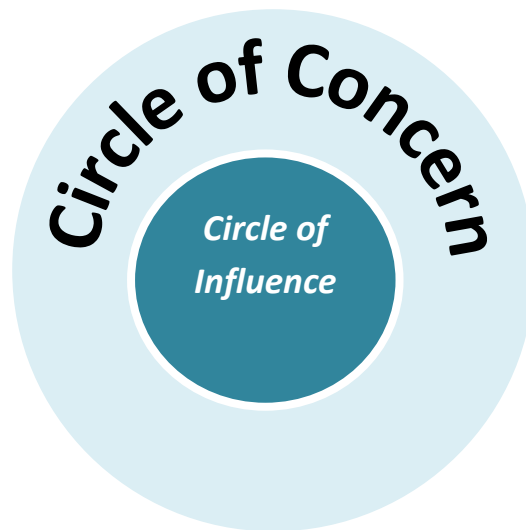


# Appreciative Inquiry – an Introduction

## 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 be the result of 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. So the first key stage is to reframe the area of inquiry in the affirmative. **What you want** as opposed to **what you don't 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.

# Appreciative Inquiry – an Introduction

## Powerful Questions

***"The important thing is to never stop questioning." A. Einstein***

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 the way that we open up the 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 that 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 a 3D form?"*** this led to the discovery of the double helix which was ground breaking in the world of science.

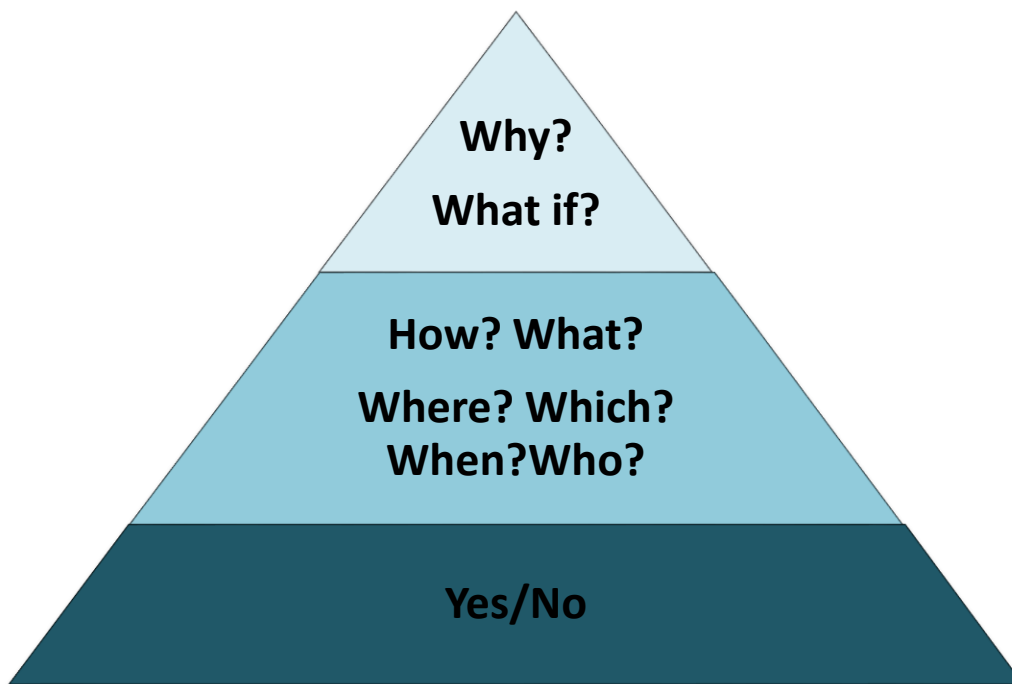
## Constructing Powerful Questions

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 that 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!

# Appreciative Inquiry – an Introduction

## Architecture of Powerful Questions

More Powerful



Less Powerful

As well as questions beginning with the words nearer the top of the pyramid, things like “Tell me about a time...”, “Tell me your best story of...” and “Talk to me about your thinking on...” work well too, especially at Discovery.

### 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 that 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. 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 and we will be looking in detail at their central role in Appreciative Inquiry and Appreciative Thinking Space. 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...?”

# Appreciative Inquiry – an Introduction

## 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 - 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 be able 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.

### 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.

# Appreciative Inquiry – an Introduction

## 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 the 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 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 of the Big Ideas which 3 will have the greatest 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 you. Transformative conversations can result from posing a simple question such as “What questions are we not asking ourselves about the situation we face?”*

# Appreciative Inquiry – an Introduction

## 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 in which 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, building and encouraging personal relationships through networks of collaborative conversations.

# Appreciative Inquiry – an Introduction

## 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 prior to the event, by issuing a warm invitation and an overview on the purpose and process. We do not recommend sending the questions in advance. To make it meaningful the numbers 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 makes 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. So 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 3 hours for an initial inquiry with up to 10 people.

### 5. Timing - Specific

A session plan for hosting a 3 hour initial inquiry is available at the end of this section. This is an example and not a direction. You do not need to do it exactly as we have it laid out, but we do think it's good not to have to start with a white piece of paper!

### 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 that you can 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 their assumptions about what will happen. Your role as a host will be slightly different at each of the 4 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 here to get the ideas out and then invite people to choose their top 3 Big Ideas under each section and work from there. This could be either 3 or 4 small groups taking one area of the **Design** each to scope out, or it could be a response from the whole group depending on number of people that have been involved. These design statements 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.

## Appreciative Inquiry – an Introduction

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 as a result of another separate conversation disassociated from the record of the story so far. You also need to have real clarity around how you will monitor progress on 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 the 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 that you have to field things if they keep coming back to you, so deflect questions back to the group, 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 which 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 of 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 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 people. Once you have the themes, the group collectively agrees the way in which 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 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 then your role as the host to make everything happen, but you will need to ensure that there is structure in place to make sure everything does happen. It is always useful to get the same people back to the table in say 4 weeks to check progress, share stories of success and unexpected learning.

**I am happy to provide feedback on questions, advice on structure and format and creative ideas that have worked in previous Appreciative Inquiry sessions.**