

Overview

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry:

“The systematic study of what works – what gives life, health, and vitality to organizations when they are at their best in both financial and human terms.”

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a positive approach to leadership and organizational change that is used to help organizations of all sizes move strategically toward a shared vision for the future by positively engaging all the organizational stakeholders.

AI distinguishes itself from other organizational visioning and change models by focusing on the best of what currently exists, and using this as a platform to envision future direction for the organization. While traditional methods may begin with a problem to solve, Appreciative Inquiry asks stakeholders to consider the successes already existing within the system. Because of this positive approach, participants find themselves energized and ready to engage.

The Stages of Appreciative Inquiry: the 4-D Process

The AI process takes participants through four distinct phases, called the 4-D Process:

- *Discovery*: participants explore “the best of what is,” identifying the organization’s strengths, best stories, and sources of energy and vitality.
- *Dream*: participants envision a future where the organization is fully engaged and successful around the identified core objective.
- *Design*: participants use the best of what has been and the powerful vision of the future to design strategies that move the organization in the right direction.
- *Destiny*: participants put the strategies into action, revising as necessary.

How Appreciative Inquiry is used in Organizations

AI is most frequently employed over the course of several months. A trained organizational change consultant will work with the organization’s project team to identify a compelling question around which to organize the inquiry. Initial interviews with stakeholders will help clarify the question.

Once the question is clear, the organization will host an AI Summit; this event brings together stakeholders for a 2 to 4-day high-energy gathering. During the summit, participants actively engage in the 4-D Process through 1:1 interviews and small and large group discussion. By the conclusion, a strategic plan will be determined, with wide stakeholder support and energy aligned around the shared vision of the future.

Who has used Appreciative Inquiry?

AI has been used globally by public and private organizations of all sizes, including to address sales growth at Merck; to improve customer service at British Airways; to pursue sustainable value creation with Wal-Mart; to develop leadership in the United States Army; to redesign organizational divisions at World Vision; and to improve cost, quality and cycle time at John Deere.

Appreciative Inquiry Leadership

AI consultants with the Center for Values-Driven Leadership are led by Dr. Jim Ludema, a pioneer in the field of Appreciative Inquiry and co-author of *The Appreciative Inquiry Summit* (2003).