

**Inquiry into the Appreciable World:
Toward a Theory of Positive Organizational Change**

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With increased focus on Positive Organizational Scholarship, new ways of understanding the processes and dynamics of positive outcomes in organizations are rapidly emerging. The practice of organization development and change is on forefront of this shift in direction, moving from traditional change methods to approaches that feature Appreciative Inquiry. In the past, organizational interventions typically focused on error detection, gap analysis, and fixing problems. Today there are more applications that examine what contributes to the best of organizational life—as a starting point for change.

In this chapter, we discuss how Appreciative Inquiry, an organizational development and change process, contributes to Positive Organizational Scholarship. We begin with a review of the technique's history and relate it to traditional practices. We then outline a theory that explains the understructure of Appreciative Inquiry, offering propositions to suggest how this process fosters positive organizational change. Drawing from work in the field, we use examples from religious, military, and corporate settings to create a model that describes our observations (Cooperrider, 2001).

The Field of Organizational Development and Change

Organizational development is an applied field, often focusing on organizational change. It took root in the 1960s and has grown continuously (Bennis, 1963; Chin & Benne, 2000). For the most part the interventions in organizational development are problem focused or deficit-based. They start with the question, “What is wrong?” It is assumed that a problem must be identified and then the appropriate intervention can be applied to “fix” the issue. In short, it is not exaggeration to say that most change efforts emerge from deficit-based inquiry.

Tracing the contours of this approach, scholars like Gergen (1997) and Weick (1984) have articulated some of the unintended consequences of deficit-based conversation, including how we limit ourselves by the way we frame and commonly make sense of the world. “It seems useful,” writes Weick, “to consider the possibility that social problems seldom get solved, because people define these problems in ways that overwhelm their ability to do anything about them” (p. 40). Deficiency focus, root cause analysis, remedial action planning, machine metaphors, and intervention are all means designed to fix broken systems.

Management scholars also write about how to change organizations. Kotter, a leading expert in this area, writes about the essence of deficit-based change theory (1998). He advises executives to communicate negative information broadly and to even manufacture crisis, “...when the urgency rate is not pumped up enough, the transformation process cannot succeed and the long-term future of the organization is put in jeopardy” (p. 3-5). Since deficit-based inquiry is so widely accepted, few people think to question this advice. While researchers have demonstrated the potential for increased organizational understanding when members focus on opportunity rather than threat (Jackson & Dutton, 1988), nevertheless, deficit inquiry continues to guide many in their quest for change. There is, however, an alternative way to think about change.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is a process of search and discovery designed to value, prize and honor. It assumes that organizations are networks of relatedness and that these networks are "alive." The objective of Appreciate Inquiry is to touch the "positive core" of organizational life. This core is accessed by asking positive questions. Humans have a

tendency to evolve in the direction of questions that are asked most often. Appreciative Inquiry operates from the premise that asking positive question draws out the human spirit in organizations. In a self-organizing way, the organization begins to construct a more desirable future. This is a key objective of the technique. It is accomplished by bringing forth the positive change core of the organization, making it explicit and allowing it to be owned by all. It tends to follow a four-step process.

Step 1: Discovery. The assumption is that human systems are drawn in the direction of their deepest and most frequent explorations. The discovery phase, designed around an interview process, is a systematic inquiry into the positive capacity of the organization. Interestingly, the interviews are not conducted by outside consultants looking to define problems, but by they are conducted by members of the organization. This often occurs with a majority of the membership and stakeholders participating. In other words, there is a system-wide analysis of the positive core by its members. The argument is that as people throughout the organization become increasingly aware of the positive core, appreciation escalates, hope grows and community expands.

Step 2: Dream. Appreciation becomes a form of power that attracts people into a transformational state. As they come together, they are asked to share their findings. As they describe the actual, the potentials, or possibilities, invariably emerge in the dialog. Positive feedback loops begin to occur and a dream begins to form. It is usually stated in terms of three elements: (1) a vision of a better world; (2) a powerful purpose; and (3) a compelling statement of strategic intent. As Quinn describes it, "...people are beginning to envision a productive community—deeply connected people who tightly hold a passionate purpose" (2000).

Step 3: Design. Once the dream is in place, attentions are directed toward how we would ideally redesign the organization to fully realize the dream. In normal change processes people tend to greatly resist any redesign. When they share a vivid dream of the potential of their organization, they are far more likely to cooperate in designing a system that might make that dream a reality. In fact, Cooperrider and his colleagues assert that in their experience, every time an organization has been able to articulate a dream, they have been immediately driven to create a design for that dream.

Step 4: Destiny. In the initial work on Appreciative Inquiry, the fourth step was called "delivery," and it emphasized typical notions of planning and implementation. Over the years, experienced practitioners in the technique realized that the process is really about the transformation of existing paradigms. As their cognitive and conversational scripts change, people discover that how they interpret the world makes a difference. They see that we actually do create the world in which we live! So instead of emphasizing planning and implementation, Appreciative Inquiry practitioners now emphasize giving the process away. Give it to everyone, and then step back. This sounds like, a recipe for chaos. It is instead a recipe for self-organization and the emergence of the transformational process.

Appreciative Inquiry accelerates the nonlinear interaction of organization breakthroughs, putting them together with historic, positive traditions and strengths to create a "convergence zone" facilitating the collective re-patterning of human systems. At some point, apparently minor positive discoveries connect in accelerating manner and quantum change, a jump from one state to the next that cannot be achieved through incremental change alone, becomes possible. What is needed, as the 'Destiny Phase' of AI (Appreciative Inquiry) suggests, are the network-like structures that liberate not only the daily search into qualities and elements of an organization's positive core but the establishment of a convergence zone for people to empower one another - to connect, cooperate, and co-create. Changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically

mobilized when people constructively appropriate the power of the positive core and...let go of accounts of the negative (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999).

Appreciative Inquiry is credited with having a revolutionary impact on organizational development (Quinn, 2000, p. 220) Ironically, the technique was never meant to revolutionize anything in the area of intervention practice. Instead, Cooperrider and his colleagues were searching for ways to enlarge the generative potential of grounded theory. It was first used in one of world's leading hospitals, where the idea was to build a theory of *the emergence of the egalitarian organization*. That is, logic that seeks to create and maintain organizational arrangements that heighten ideal situations for all members in a given organization (Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1999).

The enactment of the study itself, however, created one change after another. Those engaged in the process began to realize what now seems obvious; inquiry itself can be an intervention. Inquiry *is* agenda setting, language shaping, affect creating, and knowledge generating. Inquiry is embedded in everything we do as managers, leaders, and as agents of change. Because of the omnipresence of inquiry, we are often unaware of its presence. Nevertheless, *we live in the worlds our inquires create*. These experiences suggested that the best intervention might be to simply be an inquirer, seeking to understand organizational life and to create a spirit of inquiry that invites others to collaboratively do the same. Inquiry itself *intervenes*.

Moments of Change

Appreciative Inquiry has helped foster positive change in a range of unlikely situations. With observations from the field, we create a theory to describe the process of how relating emerges in a way that seems to help participants generate energy, life, and

creativity. We believe there is a human desire to gain a deeper understanding of one another's strengths. Our experience demonstrated that when individuals explore the best of humanity, it draws them to seek further inquiry. To set the stage for presenting the underlying theory, let us consider the process in action.

Early in the 1990s on his first visit to Jerusalem, His Holiness the Dalai Lama proposed that if the leadership of the world's religions could get to know one another, the world would be a better place. To forward this goal, a series of planning meetings were convened where religious leaders with representatives from Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and other spiritual traditions came together. The hope was to create a home for conversation between the world's religious leaders—a secure, private, small and relatively unstructured forum where leaders could talk with one another, know one another in mutually respectful ways, and reflect on challenging world issues without binding any institution to another. Appreciative Inquiry was selected as the method used to conduct the meetings and was later credited with creating many favorable outcomes (Cooperrider, 2000).

Following the above described “4-D cycle” (i.e., discovery, dream, design, and destiny), the first session began with dyads randomly formed across religious lines. Picture a Greek Orthodox Priest in an appreciative interview with a Muslim Imam, or a sage from Hindu background with a Rabbi. Within an hour, participants were working together to explore each other's experiences in shared dialogue. To foster the conversation, participants were asked:

One could say a key task in life is to discover and define our life purpose, and then accomplish it to the best of our ability. Can you share a story of a moment or a period of time where clarity about life purpose emerged for you—for example, a time where you heard your calling, where there was

and important awakening or teaching, where you felt the touch of the sacred, or where you received some guiding vision? Now, beyond this story, what do you sense you are supposed to do before your life, this life, is over?

After the interviews, participants introduced their partners to the larger group using conversational discoveries about their strengths, personal meanings, and visions of a better world. During this process, the interpersonal chemistry in this interaction was spontaneous; the positive emotions of excitement were palpable. Despite the short-term nature of the meeting, its impact proved to be far-reaching. The vision generated by this group was for a global United Nations-like organization to sustain an enduring dialogue between people of all faiths. The hope was to end religious violence in the world and to bring the strengths of wisdom traditions to bear on our common global agendas for change. In their logic for such an entity, they quoted theologian Hans Kung who said, “There will be no peace among nations until there is peace among religions, and there will be no peace among religions until there is dialogue” (1996). The appreciative conversations fostered by this inquiry led to the creation of a UN among the world’s religions, a global organization called the United Religions Initiative. A charter to instill this organization was signed at Carnegie Music Hall in June of 2000 and, to date, there are over 100 centers located worldwide.

Beyond the small conversational setting, Appreciative Inquiry can also be deployed in a summit forum using a whole-scale methodology. Here, a systems approach is undertaken, bringing all of the organizational stakeholders together to conduct the inquiry. Groups of 100 to 2000 people have gathered to advance Appreciative Inquiry initiatives in medical centers, universities, communities, educational systems, and in companies in a variety of industries (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000). For example, the US

Navy recently held several summits where the CNO and hundreds of seamen, admirals, and individuals from all levels and functions of the system were engaged.

Full participation inspires the breakdown of communication barriers and becomes a process that engenders the full voice of the organization from every level. At Roadway Express, for example, dockworkers, senior executives, customers, truck drivers, teamsters, and other representatives of the system met in a series of summits across the country. Results from their Akron, Ohio terminal produced an abundance of transformational innovations including immediate cost saving ideas and new visions for their shared future. The stories of cooperation, trust, and breakthrough thinking shared at their summits became “news” that reverberated across their 37,000 employee-wide system. This ignited a program called “leadership as storytelling,” creating a learning culture that now calls for the spread of innovation and good news narratives on a sustained basis, throughout the company.

The process of inquiring appreciatively seeks to build union between people as they talk about past and present capacities. The focus is on achievements, assets, potentials, innovations, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, benchmarks, high point moments, lived values, traditions, strategic competencies, memorable stories, and expressions of wisdom. In sharing these appreciative reflections, members are led to insights into the corporate spirit and visions of valued and possible futures. Taking the positives into a gestalt, Appreciative Inquiry operates from the system’s core, with the assumption that everyone has untapped inspiring accounts of the positive.

When the energy of people’s collective relationship is linked to their positive core, it is possible to connect this awareness to any change agenda, and positive change is

then suddenly and more democratically mobilized. What's more, these changes are often beyond what was thought possible. Conspicuously absent from this process are the vocabularies of deficit-based change (e.g., gap analysis, root causes of failure, unfreezing, defensive routines, variances, diagnosis, resistance, and flaming platforms). Yet, there is change! We ask, "How can the power of non-deficit positive change in organizations be explained? How is valued change experienced and realized?" To address these questions, we propose a new theoretical framework is required.

A Theory of Positive Organizational Change

Our process begins with an assumption that organizations are centers of human relatedness. The model of positive organizational change involves three stages, moving from: (1) *Elevation of Inquiry*, to (2) *Fusion of Strengths*, to (3) *Activation of Energy*. Each stage is triggered by increases of *Inquiry into the Appreciable World* and the expansion of *Relatedness to Others* (see Figure 1). Organizations move through these stages in vivid form and in a wide range of diverse settings.

Insert Figure 1 about here

As in theories of group development, general stages in the process of positive change are discernable. There are movements toward inclusion and intimacy, as well as changes in affect, language, and awareness. New patterns of communicating and relating emerge, which appear to eclipse and dissipate prior means. As participants let go of the problem focus, there is room for positive conversation. This is especially notable when

people collaboratively create a new vision, name their idea, and map out how it can come to fruition. Individual, group, and organizational strengths become stronger through heightened narrative, and a build-up of group receptiveness through ritualizations. As a result, both the organizational real and ideal become a part of lived experience.

As individuals work together to look deeper into what they value most, an expansion of relatedness occurs. Our contention is that this experience generates positive emotions, which helps broaden and build resources needed to motivate, create, overcome adversity, and transform. Here Fredrickson's "broaden-and-build" theory (1998) is used as a framework, taking it from the individual to organizational level of analysis and highlighting new dimensions of elevation and extension. A choiceful act of inquiring appreciatively is elevated by positive emotion, coupled with the use and development of positive language and the creation of valued images of the future. Taken together, these components set the process of positive organizational change into motion. As depicted by the horizontal axis in our model, this process simultaneously works to extend positive relating between organizational members.

Organizations reflect our deepest assumptions about humanity. As such, our view is that they are living centers, alive with the capacity to create connections. Given this postulation, organizational development is a process where living human systems extend, differentiate, and create mutually enriching relationships, creating alignments of strength from the local level, expanding to the whole. The more extended these intimacies grow, through sharing and amplifications of strengths, virtues, resources, and creative capacities, the more developed the organizing becomes. As Wright suggests with his research on non-zero-sum approaches, the benefits are revealed as individuals move to

accept the whole as a part of oneself (2001). We contend that as members engage in this process, they become aware of larger webs of relatedness.

Elevating Inquiry

When individuals reflect on a time when they were valued or appreciated, they experience a variety of positive emotions. Prior research links positive affect with broader thinking (Isen, 1987) and associates positive emotions with improved psychological health (Fredrickson, 2000; 2001). For instance, coping strategies related to the occurrence and maintenance of positive emotions (e.g., positive reappraisal or infusing ordinary events with positive meaning) serve to help buffer against stress (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). These types of strategies help individuals handle crises with effective coping, sustain closer relationships, and hold a richer appreciation for life—all of which predict increased psychological well-being (Fredrickson et al, 2000; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2002).

Given these findings, *Inquiry into the Appreciable World* is a vehicle for creating and developing positive change, not just within the present moment, but also over time. To further support this idea, Haidt's research on experiences of elevation reports that individuals are "surprised, stunned, and emotionally moved" when they see or experience unexpected acts of goodness (2000, p. 2). He suggests that witnessing good deeds influences individuals' thinking and behavior. The admiration and affection triggered by this experience seems to make affiliative behavior more likely, beyond the momentary experience. This helps to explain what occurs when members reflect on the goodness of organizational life—that a similar relational and prosocial orientation is produced by appreciation. If elevation is associated with future positive action, it holds great potential to favorably impact organizational communities. Interestingly, this emotion also appears

to increase the likelihood that a witness to good deeds will be moved to enact good deeds (Haidt, 2000). Our prediction is that organizational elevation is petitioned by Appreciative Inquiry and contributes to an upward positive emotional spiral for the organization, as similarly described for individuals (Fredrickson, 2000).

We propose that inquiry into the positive, naturally occurring or deliberate, is a source of positive change as it elevates and extends the best of what is present in the organizational system. The foundation of positive change rests on elevation of inquiry into our strengths. Our theory suggests that inquiry and change are a simultaneous event, for the seeds of change are implicit in our questions. Our proposition is that human systems move in the direction of the questions they create, ask, and address in collaboration. More specifically:

Human systems grow in the direction of what they persistently ask questions about. This propensity is strongest and most sustainable when the means and ends of inquiry are positively correlated. The single most prolific thing a group or organization can do, if its aims are to liberate the human spirit and consciously construct a better future, is to make the positive core the common and explicit property of all.

The Stages of Positive Organizational Change

Elevation of Inquiry. Both the vertical axis and first stage of the model are inquiry into the positive. As individuals come together, there is ever-widening capacity commensurate with how the world is viewed. As described earlier, when viewing both self and other in an appreciative light, relationships are generated based upon shared discovery. This leads individuals to work together to seek out the best in the entire system. As with experiences of elevation (Haidt, 2000), life-generating potentials emerge as organizational members share awareness of commonalities, beauty, and virtue found outside the self. In organizational research, leading thinkers such as Cameron (2002) and

Khandwalla (1998) have proposed dimensions that depict organizational greatness. For our purposes, what is most relevant are that conceptions of elevated states are locally emergent through elevated inquiry, where the good, better, or possible are explored in and through an expanding web of relatedness. In practice, this elevated form of inquiry, in a socially constructive sense, replaces absolutist claims or the final word. It is an ongoing collaborative quest to understand and construct options for better living (Gergen, 1997). When exchanging stories of change, hope, courage, compassion, strengths, and creativity, organizational members are observed to experience mutual appreciation and surprise, as well an eclipse of self-focusedness. As a result, an unexpected bonding between individuals often emerges.

Relatedness to Others. The horizontal axis of our model is *Relatedness to Others*. The most powerful starting point for positive change involves a significant extension of organizational connectivity whereby the accessible strengths, opportunities, and potentials for development are multiplied from the local to the whole. This extension involves the creation of a field of relations across familiar contexts. Like a series of interconnected and expanding webs, it moves from the micro-system (face-to-face interpersonal) to the meso-system (a cluster of microsystems involving two or more organizations) to the macrosystem (societies, cultures, and global connections). In ideal form, these relations, from the local to the whole, move in the direction of non-zero-sum dynamics (Wright, 2001).

Within the three-part series of these stages, there is an initial burst of *elevation and extension* in stage one. Beginning with Appreciative Inquiry at a micro level, a positive dialogue of understanding evolves. As with the initial meeting with the inter-

religious group, when the process commences with positive-based questions, narratives of hope and strength lend to the depiction of human strengths and virtues. Participants in the inquiry begin to name and honor one another's uniqueness and specialties, which generates a process of language development and continued sharing. As a reservoir of stories and knowledge of specialties increase, our theory suggests that individuals experience specific positive emotions such as: 1) admiration and appreciation; 2) interest, curiosity, and surprise; and 3) humility. In group dynamic terms, the inquiry magnifies the specialties of each (an in-depth valuing of diversities and multiplicities) and establishes a climate of safety and rich inclusion and respect.

Fusion of Strengths. With the initial phase of questioning, *Inquiry into the Appreciable World* and *Relatedness to Others* are elevated and extended. Organizational members seem to share a newfound mutual access to a world of strengths. However, our theory of non-deficit positive change must answer challenging questions such as, "What about our problems? If we ignore what is wrong in our organization, it merely postpones addressing the issue." Others may ask, "If dissatisfaction is not aroused and the tension not high enough, if we do not perform a diagnosis, how can we expect significant and lasting change to occur?" Our answer to these questions, is to pose one of our own. Could it be that positive human experiences are not only indicators of well-being, but also generative sources of change?

Current research theorizes that positive emotions have the capability to alter the harmful impacts from negative emotions because they "broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires *in a manner that is incompatible with the continuance of negative emotion*" (Fredrickson, 2000, italics added). Just like turning on a light in a

room is incompatible with the darkness, the undoing capacity of emotions like contentment (incompatible with anger), awe or surprise (incompatible with boredom) have broad transformational potential because a person's response cannot easily be simultaneously broad and narrow. It may be, that building empathy between people and groups works to reduce prejudice, aggression, and violence because it taps into the broadening effects of appreciation and care, helping to create social bonds. Likewise, invoking amusement and laughter may work to de-escalate anger and interpersonal conflict as well as to combat stress and illness, tapping into the broadening effects of joy, which helps to build coping resources (Cousins, 1989). Could it be that finding ways to cultivate positive emotions will more quickly forge paths towards positive change and serve prominently as active ingredients in an upward spiral toward organizational well-being?

With this précis in mind, we are now positioned to better understand the movement of positive change from stage one, the *elevation of inquiry*, to stage two, a *fusion of strengths*. Returning once again to our scenario of the inter-religious gathering, remember that their goal was to create a home for united conversation among all religions. In a span of four years, thousands of people shared a vision and worked together to create the United Religions. Working on all continents and across different cultures and faiths, those of differing spiritual traditions experienced unprecedented levels of cooperation in an inclusive, nonhierarchical, and decentralized organizational form. The participants characterized their experience through the distinct emotions of interest, awe, and curiosity and new relationships based upon a growing respect, openness, presence, and deep listening. Diverse stories of strength, achievement, and

innovation were shared among conversations rich with language of life and creativity. Perhaps most salient, was an honoring and proliferation of diversities, uniqueness, and specialties.

The relational energy obtained from the diversity of strengths in this group was enormous. Our theory proposes that participants' *Inquiry into the Appreciable World* leads to an *Elevation of Inquiry*, which contributes to an expansion of *Relatedness to Others*, that creates a *Fusion of Strengths*. Inquiry was pressed forward among the religious leaders by the experience of positive emotions, which helps individuals to draw upon their combined strengths. As a result, the positive energy is much greater than what was available before participants began the process. In Appreciative Inquiry, movement within the technique (i.e., from discovery to dream) involves cultivating narrative rich environments, reenactment of stories of human cosmogony, analysis of interdependent causes of success, relating to history as a positive possibility, metaphoric mapping or symbolizing of the system's positive core, and the enactment of visions of a valued future that people want to create. The aim is a fusion of strengths that connect organizational members to their shared positive core.

Exciting research opportunities exist as scholars work to understand the emergent capacities in groups and organizations, investigations that go beyond the individual level of analysis. For example, it appears there is an almost natural development moving from appreciative awareness to an expanded cooperative awareness, which emerges as a shared realization of collective empowerment. Likewise, a new set of distinct emotions evolve with different action tendencies, beyond what was experienced in the initial stage. Here, emotional resources are viewed in a cooperative sense, where individuals become sources

of contagious emotion, sharing and amplifying mutually felt inspiration, hope, and joy (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). These specific emotions appear to help move the process forward, and are particularly predominant in stage two. Hope, for example, relates to the action tendency to join with others and to create anew (Ludema, Wilmot, & Srivastva, 1997). Inspiration is associated with the building of commitment and sense of purpose (Kast, 1994). Joy connects with creativity, liberation, gratitude and an increasing propensity to serve (Fredrickson, 2000).

Activation of Energy. While many go through life accepting the status quo, arrangements or presets as givens, and social structures as norms, *Elevation of Inquiry* and a *Fusion of Strengths* persuades us otherwise. In this stage there is a liberation of energy, once the relational construction of our world is jointly owned. Through mutually experienced appreciation and story sharing, there is an emergence of innovation, challenge, change, and breakthrough. An intensification of the relational resources of imagination and mutual support is observable, and people begin to view their world not as static constraint, but as mobilized energy.

As members experience the activation of group energy, they leave their perceptions of constraint behind. For example, when representation from the entire organizational system of Roadway Express came together to map their positive core, a process of creativity and innovation jettisoned forward. Ideas and bold discoveries emerged, in real time with major immediate ramifications. Such as their garage team coming up with a million dollar annual cost saving idea as a result of their summit experience! In his analysis of creativity, Grudin (1990) likens this activation beyond the status quo to abandonment and transcendence. He writes, “it is like leaving the world of

effort and abandoning oneself to an irresistible flow, like a canoeist drawn into the main channel of a rapids, or a bodysurfer who catches a fine wave just below the crest” (p. 10).

To foster this surge of creative strength, we propose there is an experience that occurs between the appreciative reflection and the imagined future. It is here, in this synergistic moment of empowering continuity and novelty, that boldness emerges alongside of abandonment, and any sense of resistance evaporates. The result is a combination of courage and surrender, key elements in the study of creators (May, 1975). As scenarios in the fusion stage were marked by shifts in inspiration, hope, and joy, a shift is again fueled by the elicitation of specific positive emotions. In this phase, the process moves participants toward readiness for the task of creating.

Our contention is that these experiences contribute to courage, an acting from the heart and feeling of boldness which tells us to push forward when circumstances might otherwise frighten (Cavanagh & Moberg, 1999; Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1998). In addition, there is an abundance of excitement and enthusiasm, an energized force of interest, determination, and the desire to put one’s passion into motion. During the *Activation of Energy* there is a sense of affection and attraction that moves people to give beyond themselves, immerse themselves into the process, and join into caring relation with the world and others (Schneider & May, 1995).

Finally, there is a radical organizational re-structuring from the entire process. From the *Elevation of Inquiry*, to the *Fusion of Strengths*, toward the *Activation of Energy*, not once during the positive change process have groups envisioned or called for increased command and control hierarchy. What always happens, without exception, is movement toward greater equalitarian relationships and self-organizing structures. These

organizational forms are much like those described by Hock, in his work on bridging chaos and order (1999). One feature of this chaordic form of organizing, like in nature, is that it connects infinite diversity in a liberating environment with pattern and coherence at the level of the whole. Our theory suggests that as people touch each other at their positive core, searching for the best in each other and life's offerings, the energy leads to self-organizing units. When ignited through elevated inquiry, unions emerge (Hubbard, 1998). Even in the Navy, one of the most command-and-control bureaucracies, participants created a web-like meta-structure of self-organizing groups to carry out the hundreds of projects envisioned in their Appreciative Inquiry summits.

So, what does the positive organizational change look like as it emerges in this stage? At the United Religion's global summit, one participant used the analogy of Indra's net, which is a mythological story about the cosmic web of inter-relatedness extending infinitely in all directions of the universe. Every intersection of the intertwining web is set with a glistening jewel, in which all parts of the whole are reflected. Imagine an organization where the reflections that comprise each entity are an endless amplification of the positive, mirroring one another, sparkling and reverberating every strength.

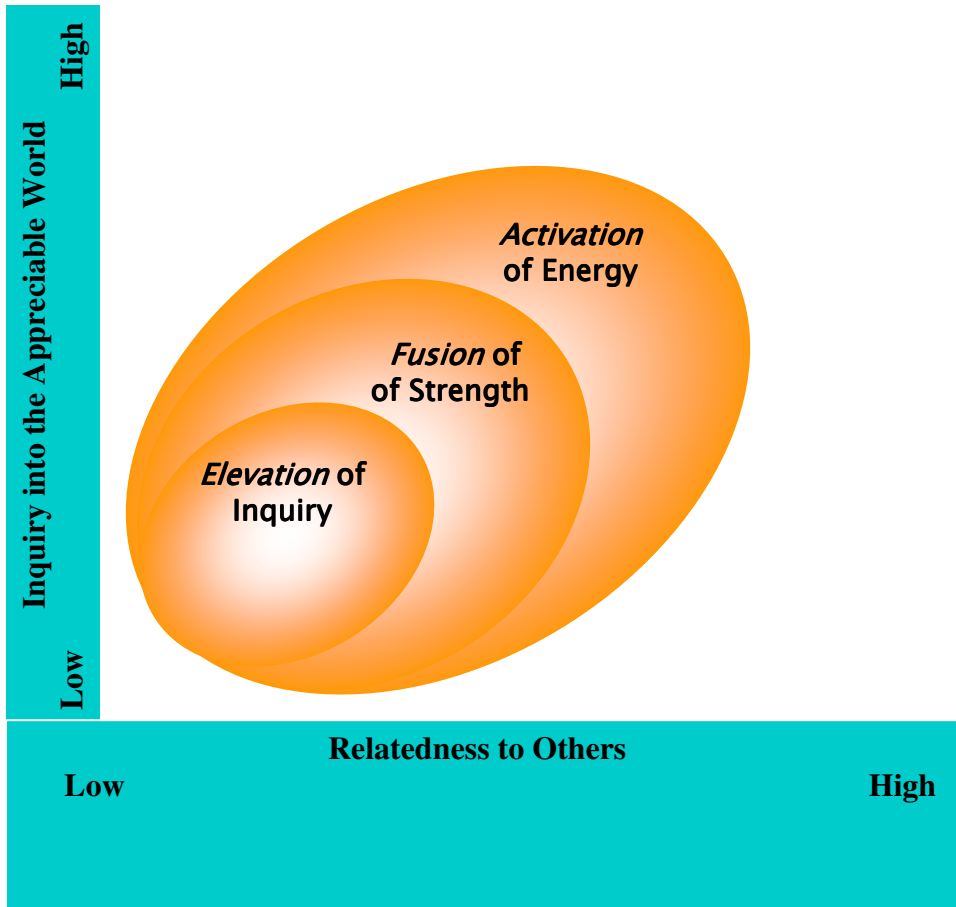
From the Local to the Whole

A truly elegant organizational form is one where relationships from the local to the whole allow for shared links to the essence of our appreciable world. It is one where there is an ongoing and open exchange of our unique and shared strengths between members. We propose that a focus on our best and on the positive features of our organizations, in relation to many change agendas, is all too frequently underestimated.

As a result of limiting ourselves, there is a tide of growing cynicism about our capacity for creating sustainable change in our institutions. While the description offered of positive change may seem an exaggeration, or perhaps a romantic view of the possibilities, there is a mounting wave of research from both the laboratory and field, inviting us to focus on these possibilities as avenues for further consideration and study.

Positive Organizational Scholarship has given us an opportunity for the creation of new knowledge, as researchers move to examine the best of organizational life. Our theory portrays positive organizational change can be understood as a progression through three movements. From the *Elevation of Inquiry*, to a *Fusion of Strengths*, to the *Activation of Energy*—change can extend in ways that have the capacity to create valued new futures. At the same time, the process plays a role in broadening and building our capacities, circumventing old patterns, and with the potential to create reserves for the future. Positive emotions are ignited, expanded, and edified in organizations where Appreciative Inquiry elevates further discovery and extends relatedness to others. This technique can illuminate an infinite array of strengths and capacities that are embedded in interrelationships, where the process of shared valuing and discovery leads to the creation of countless new connections in multiple directions. In summary, Appreciative Inquiry is a process that instills positive organizational change stemming from the local, expanding outward to the whole.

Figure 1: A Model of Positive Organizational Change



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