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## What is Appreciative Inquiry Cooperrider

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The following practice-oriented definition of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is provided by David L. Cooperrider:

Appreciative Inquiry is about the coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives “life” to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. It centrally involves the mobilization of inquiry through the crafting of the “unconditional positive question” often concerning hundreds or sometimes thousands of people.

In AI, the arduous task of intervention is replaced by the speed of imagination and innovation; instead of negation, criticism, and spiraling diagnosis, there is discovery, dream, and design. AI seeks, fundamentally, to build a constructive union between a whole people and the massive entirety of what people talk about as past and present capacities: achievements, assets, unexplored potentials, innovations, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, benchmarks, high point moments, lived values, traditions, strategic competencies, stories, expressions of wisdom, insights into the deeper corporate spirit or soul - and visions of valued and possible futures. Taking all of these together as a gestalt, AI deliberately, in everything it does, seeks to work from accounts of this “positive change core” - and it assumes that every living system has many untapped and rich and inspiring accounts of the positive. Link the energy of this core directly to any change agenda and changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized.

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

### **Cooperrider mentions 5 basic principles of Appreciative Inquiry**

**1. Constructionist Principle.** Simply stated: human knowledge and organizational destiny are interwoven. To be effective as executives, leaders, change agents, etc., we must be adept in the art of understanding, reading, and analyzing organizations as living, human constructions.

**2. Principle of Simultaneity.** Here it is recognized that inquiry and change are not truly separate moments, but are simultaneous. Inquiry is intervention. The seeds of change - that is, the things

which people think and talk about, the things which people discover and learn, and the things that inform dialogue and inspire images of the future - are implicit in the very first questions we ask. Our questions are influencing what we “find”. And what we “discover” (the data) becomes the linguistic material, the stories, out of which the future is conceived, conversed about, and constructed.

**3. Poetic Principle.** A metaphor here is that human organizations are much more like an open book than, say, a machine. An organization’s story is constantly being co-authored. Moreover, the past, the present, or the future is an endless source of learning, inspiration, or interpretation. Precisely like, for example, the endless interpretive possibilities in a good piece of poetry or a biblical text. The important implication is that we can study virtually any topic related to human experience in any human system or organization. We can inquire into the nature of alienation or joy, enthusiasm or low morale, efficiency or excess, in any human organization.

**4. Anticipatory Principle.** The infinite human resource which we have for generating constructive organizational change is our collective imagination and discourse about the future. One of the basic theorems of the anticipatory view of organizational life is that it is the image of the future, which in fact guides what might be called the current behavior of any organism or organization. Much like a film projector on a screen, human systems are forever projecting ahead of themselves a horizon of expectation. In their talk, in the metaphors and language they use. This brings the future powerfully into the present as a mobilizing agent.

**5. Positive Principle.** This last principle is not so abstract. It grows out of years of experience with appreciative inquiry. Most simply, it is our experience that for building and for sustaining change momentum, large amounts of positive affect and social bonding are necessary. Things like hope, excitement, inspiration, caring, camaraderie, sense of urgent purpose, and sheer joy in creating something meaningful together. What we have found is that, the more positive the question we ask in our work, the more long lasting and successful the change effort will be. It does not help, we have found, to begin our inquiries from the standpoint of the world as a problem to be solved. We are more effective the longer we can retain the spirit of inquiry of the everlasting beginner. The major thing we do that makes the difference, is to craft and seed, in better and more catalytic ways, the unconditional positive question.

### **Origin of the Appreciative Inquiry method. History**

AI has been described by observers in a myriad of ways: as a paradigm of conscious evolution geared for the realities of the new century (Hubbard, 1998); as a methodology that takes the idea of the social construction of reality to its positive extreme - especially with its emphasis on metaphor and narrative, relational ways of knowing, on language, and on its potential as a source of generative theory (Gergen, 1996); as the most important advance in Action Research in the past decade (Bushe, 1991); as offspring and “heir” to Maslow’s vision of a positive social science (Chin, 1998; Curran, 1991); as a powerful second generation OD practice (French and Bell, 1995; Porras, 1995; Mirvis, 1993); as model of a much needed participatory science, a “new yoga of inquiry” (Harman, 1991); as a radically affirmative approach to change, which completely lets go of problem-based management, and in so doing vitally transforms strategic planning, survey methods, culture change, merger integration methods, approaches to TQM, measurement systems, sociotechnical systems, etc. (White, 1997); and lastly, as OD’s philosopher’s stone (Sorenson, et. al 1996).

## Steps in the Appreciative Inquiry. Process

- 1. Discovery.** Mobilizing a whole system inquiry into the positive change core;
- 2. Dream.** Creating a clear results-oriented vision in relation to discovered potential and in relation to questions of higher purpose, i.e., “What is the world calling us to become?”
- 3. Design.** Creating possibility propositions of the ideal organization, an organization design which people feel is capable of magnifying or eclipsing the positive core and realizing the articulated new dream; and
- 4. Destiny.** Strengthening the affirmative capability of the whole system enabling it to build hope and momentum around a deep purpose and creating processes for learning, adjustment, and improvisation like a jazz group over time

Organizations, says AI theory, are centers of human relatedness, first and foremost, and relationships thrive where there is an appreciative eye. When people see the best in one another, when they share their dreams and ultimate concerns in affirming ways, and when they are connected in full voice to create not just new worlds but better worlds. The velocity and largely informal spread of the appreciative learnings suggests, we believe, a growing sense of disenchantment with exhausted theories of change. Especially with those wedded to vocabularies of human deficit. AI suggests a corresponding urge to work with people, groups, and organizations in more constructive, positive, life-affirming, even spiritual ways.

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