



**Appreciative Inquiry:** This is a whole-systems approach for organizations that originated out of David Cooperrider's and others' work in the eighties and has since been evolved into different blends. One recent flavour is W-Holistic Appreciative Inquiry, developed by Chris Laszlo and Judy Sorum Brown, which focuses on the whole human being within the frame of systemic transformation.

Fundamentally, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a living-systems inquiry approach rooted in positive questioning and collaborative inquiry. It is 'appreciative' in that the line of inquiry is about recognizing the best in people and our context, affirming past and present strengths, successes and potentials, while recognizing the things that enhance our vitality and excellence. It is an 'inquiry' as an act of exploration through questioning in an open, appreciative way. Through this inquiry we seek new potentials and possibilities. It is a systemic discovery of what gives 'life' to the living system of the organization; an exploration into sharing the stories of when the organization is most alive, most effective and constructive (economically, socially, ecologically). It is the art of asking positive, open questions in a way that reveals the greatest potential of the organization. David Cooperrider provides a couple of framing questions that point to the overall spirit of AI:

'What would happen to our change practices if we began all of our work with the positive presumption that organizations, as centers of human relatedness, are 'alive' with infinite constructive capacity?'

'How can we better inquire into organization existence in ways that are economically, humanly and ecologically significant, that is, in ways that increasingly help people discover, dream, design and transform toward the greatest good?'

There are four stages to AI: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny

**Discovery** is the stage where we gather stories and insights from across the business and wider stakeholder ecosystem. This can be through hundreds of interviews framed through open, positive questions with interviewers who have been trained in the art of AI; this way we start to discover the potential, and art of the possible, within the organization. Here are a couple of example Discovery questions taken from work at GTE, a 67,000 employee telecommunications company: 'Obviously you have had ups and downs in your career at GTE. But for the moment I would like you to focus on a high point, a time in your work experience here where you felt most alive, most engaged, or most successful. Can you tell me the story? How did it unfold? What was it organizationally that made it stand out? What was it about you that made it a high point?'

The act of undertaking these interviews and people sharing positive stories has a transformative effect in its own right. It is 'generative' in that the very undertaking of this intervention helps move people forward, generating the future as we go. As David Cooperrider notes, 'As people throughout a system connect in serious study into qualities, examples, and analysis of the positive core – each appreciating and everyone being appreciated – hope grows and community expands.'



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by Giles Hutchins



**Dream** is the stage where all the insights and stories are gathered together and themes or examples are shared so that we can start to tune into any themes about what makes the organization alive. Areas of visionary propositions are developed and form threads within an interwoven 'convergence zone' forming the 'positive core' of the new dream to be realized by the organization. Again, the undertaking of this process further enhances and enriches collaboration amongst different stakeholders across the organization, who start to develop a widening and deepening awareness of the new world emerging. Then we ask questions about this emerging future, such as: 'What is the world calling us to become? What are those things about us that no matter how much we change, we want to continue into our new and different future?'

Typically about four days of workshops on appreciative analysis, planning and articulation of the different business directions is undertaken; from this, a vision of a better world for the organization, and a powerful purpose and statement of strategic intent forms.

In the **Design** stage we start to plan the redesign of the organization through prototyping and future search planning. A good question to ask here is, 'What would our organization look like if it were designed in every way possible to maximise the qualities of the positive core and enable the accelerated realization of our dreams?' We start rapid prototyping of the new ways, innovating and collaborating as we go and people vote with their feet, joining in on innovations which they are passionate about, prototyping through co-creative processes.

In the **Destiny** stage we focus on how we deepen the chosen prototypes into full scale across the organization, what the implementation plan is, and the governance and task forces needed to make it all happen.

Laszlo and Brown have enriched this AI approach with contemplative and artful activities to ensure personal and organizational gnosis deepens through the process. This is called W-Holistic AI, where additional emphasis is placed on cultivating our soulful awareness within each stage. By example:

Discovery – at the beginning of each interview or group gathering of stories (e.g. Story Café or World Café) a few minutes are dedicated to contemplative presencing, such as conscious breathing and silent reflection. Then the interview or sharing is undertaken with deep listening exercises to deepen the soulfulness of what emerges.

Dream – We explore our soul-purpose by inquiring into what is our deepest and most profound personal goal of 'what I live for' and then apply what comes from this to the emerging themes and future scenarios we wish to create for our organization.

Design – Expressive artful exercises are undertaken where we express moments of creativity and aliveness in our lives by sharing these experiences through dance or drawing, and then share this in the debrief, and apply this creativity to how we approach the design phase.

Destiny – Contemplative explorations into how our ways of being need to relate with and enrich our ways of doing in the new world of our organization. We explore what our personal and organizational gnosis 'looks and feels' like, exploring how we maintain this gnosis, what regular practices and artful undertakings, group activities and off-site sessions, etc. we need to factor into our ways of working and governance approaches.

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