The Essentials of Appreciative Inquiry:
A Roadmap for Creating Positive Futures

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"The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them." —Albert Einstein

For much of the last four centuries, humans have sought to improve the world through modern Western science, with its focus on linear logic and dissecting things to understand them. When we've applied this approach to technical challenges, such as the need to share information with people on the other side of the globe, we've been highly successful. Nevertheless, despite dramatic developments in technological systems, our progress in developing human *systems, such as families, work teams, community groups, corporations, and nations has been much slower. Many people wonder why we can succeed so well in one sphere and have such difficulty in another.*

People interested in improving human systems often assume that organizational change is sequential: We first ask about how an enterprise functions and then take steps to change it based on our findings. However, a growing number of social scientists are coming to recognize that the process of studying a phenomenon actually changes *that phenomenon—in effect creating a new reality during the process of inquiry. In the early 1920s, renowned physicist Werner von Heisenberg articulated this principle for the physical world. For example, the act of inserting a thermometer into a glass of water to determine the water's temperature will change that temperature. By extension, we can infer that studying a company or community changes that entity. Researchers have found that this influence begins from the first questions that leaders, consultants, or others ask during the inquiry process—and that the images evoked by their questions have an almost magnetic pull.*

As a result of this new thinking, some have begun to question the focus *of what we typically study in organizational life. Rather than concentrate on breakdowns and malfunctions, we've begun to ask: If the act of studying a system alters it, why not do so in ways that create movement toward peak experiences or successes? Posing this query can open our eyes to the enormous potential of the positive question.*

Contents

The Power of the Positive Question

In 1982 researchers at the University of Wisconsin conducted a study of the learning process by videotaping two bowling teams during several games. Later, members of each team studied a copy of the video of their efforts in order to improve their skills. But the copies were edited differently. One team received a video showing only the times when its members made mistakes; the other team's video included only the times when members performed well. After the bowlers studied the videos and acted upon what they had learned, what happened? Both teams did improve their game, but the team that studied its successes improved its score twice as much as the one that studied its mistakes.

Learning from moments of excellence serves as the foundation of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is an emerging approach to organizational transformation based on a deceptively simple premise: that organizations grow in the direction of what they repeatedly ask questions about and focus their attention on. Why make this assumption? Sociological research has shown that when people study problems and conflicts, the number and severity of the problems they identify actually *increase.* But when they focus on human ideals and achievements, peak experiences, and best practices, *these* things—not the conflicts—tend to flourish.

By encouraging a broad range of stakeholders both within and outside the organization to ask certain kinds of questions, make shared meaning of the answers, and act on the responses, AI serves as a wellspring for transformational change. It supports organization-wide learning and renewal in the following ways:

- Through widespread inquiry, it helps participants perceive the need for change, explore new possibilities, and contribute to solutions.
- Through customized interview guides, it focuses on moments of high performance in order to ignite transformative dialogue and action within the organization.
- Through alignment of the organization's formal and informal structures with its purpose and principles, it translates shared vision into reality and belief into practice.

Clearly, the process of collecting information about our experiences, and analyzing and acting on our interpretations of it, does not represent a new idea. But we believe that being intentional about the data we focus on—that is, choosing to learn from moments of joy, wonder, and excellence—is a radical departure from previous methodologies and can be unusually effective in improving our organizations and communities.

Origins of AI

AI first arose in the early 1980s, when David Cooperrider, then a graduate student at Case Western Reserve University, was hired to conduct an organizational diagnosis of the Cleveland Clinic to find out what was wrong with the way the organization was operating. During his research, he was amazed by the level of cooperation, innovation, and egalitarian governance that he observed within certain parts of the medical facility. In response to these observations, Cooperrider refocused his research to study the causes of such excellence. He soon found that this "appreciative" approach was causing a powerful and creative stir within the organization. As he began to formalize a theory based on his findings, clinic leaders asked him to help them create a practice based on positive inquiry. Soon Cooperrider began to see broader possibilities for applying this emerging philosophy to guide change in other organizations.

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The Holistic Nature of Self

Cooperrider's work is part of a larger shift in Western thinking, particularly in the fields of medicine, cognitive psychology, cultural sociology, and athletics. Since the mid-1950s, Western medical science has become increasingly influenced by an age-old concept grounded in Eastern cultures—that the mind has the power to heal the body. This principle stands in stark contrast to the concept of a split between mind and body, first articulated by the ancient Greeks, that has dominated Western thought and behavior ever since. In the last 50 years, however, as interest in understanding the integrated nature of "self" has become more widespread, major scientific research institutions and mainstream media have begun to document stories and studies supporting a holistic view of thought, conversation,

and action. Below are examples of this research:

The Placebo Effect: The Power of Our Own Images of Ourselves. Undertaken in the mid-1950s, these once controversial experiments show that from one-third to two-thirds of all patients will show marked physiological and emotional improvement in symptoms simply by believing that they are being given an effective treatment. Their improvements are even greater if the doctor prescribing the medicine or treatment also believes it will help (Beecher, 1955; White, Turks, and Schwartz, 1985).

The Pygmalion Studies: The Impact of Another's Image of Us. These studies of classroom behavior demonstrate the power that another person's image of us can have in shaping our performance. Researchers discovered that teachers' responses to individual students reflected what they believed about each child's potential and ability (Jessum, 1986; Rosenthal and Rubin, 1978). Furthermore, they demonstrated that the teacher's image of the student was a more powerful predictor of his or her performance than IQ scores, home environment, or past performance. Long-term follow-up showed that this judgment affected the students far into the future. So damaging were these experiments to the children labeled poor performers that the scientific community discontinued them.

Internal Dialogues. Evidence suggests that we can create positive images of ourselves through our own internal conversations. Norman Cousins popularized the notion that a person's mental state affects his or her health. In his book *Human Options* (Berkley Books, 1981), he writes of the therapeutic value of

hope, faith, love, will to live, cheerfulness, humor, creativity, playfulness, confidence, and great expectations, all of which contribute to the body's healing. Bill Moyers created a series for PBS on the power of the mind to heal the body. And Jack Nicklaus's *Golf My Way* (Simon & Schuster, 1974) argues that positive internal affirmations ("I'm going to hit it down the middle of the fairway" rather than "Don't hit it into the woods") cause the entire body to respond to what the mind imagines is possible.

In the healthcare community, James and Stephanie Simonton documented an unusually high rate of recovery from what was diagnosed as terminal cancer by patients who worked to resolve their psychological issues and practiced positive imagery (1981). In other studies of people facing major heart surgery, behavioral scientists recorded a two-to-one recovery rate of those who approached the operation with confidence compared to those who approached it with fear and concern (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1990).

Rethinking Our Approach to Organizational Change

With such scientific evidence emerging, many of us are rethinking our approach to organizational change. For example, the Pygmalion experiments suggest that a supervisor's focus on an employee's shortcomings during performance appraisals will adversely affect that employee's future performance. The studies on positive imagery imply that

employees who hold self-images of competence and success are more likely to achieve high levels of performance than those with poor self-esteem. If we accept that we have the power to create what we imagine, then an organizational process that seeks to achieve positive change would consciously focus on empowering employees to believe that they *can* make a difference; reward leaders who know how to empower others; and direct the energy of the system toward the generative and creative forces that give life and vitality to the work.

Championed by organization development (OD) practitioners, these ideas have undergone continuous innovation and have been adopted by groups and institutions around the world. Some have mistaken these new ideas for merely "positive thinking" or as just another technique for facilitating organizational change. Nevertheless, many practitioners are increasingly coming to understand AI to be an overall organizational *philosophy* that ultimately transforms our approach to the whole field of OD, including knowledge management, joint ventures, post-merger integration, customer service, diversity, business process innovation, strategy development, evaluation, capability development, and much more.

Why Questions Matter: The Power of Image

"Imagination is more important than knowledge." —Albert Einstein

AI is based on the power of positive inquiry. But how can a simple question nudge a whole company in a productive new direction? Organizations are manifestations of the human imagination. That is, no organization could exist if one or several individuals hadn't envisioned it first (even if that vision was sketchy or incomplete). The learnings that surface through the AI process begin to shift the collective image that people hold of the organization. In their daily encounters, members start to create compelling new visions of the company's future together, grounded in their understanding of past successes. These visions initiate "ripples" in how employees think about the work they do, their relationships, their roles, and so on. Over time, these ripples turn into waves; the more positive questions people ask, the more they incorporate the learnings they glean from those questions into daily behaviors and, ultimately, into the organization's infrastructure.

To see how we might start to frame such questions, let's suppose a team's performance has fluctuated for a while and its members are now experiencing conflict and low productivity. Which of the following sets of questions is likely to give us information that will generate forward momentum?

What's wrong with the people in this group?

Why isn't this team doing better?

What's causing this conflict and who is responsible?

Or

Think of a time in your history as a team when performance was high and you felt engaged and valued. Tell me a story about that time. What were you and the others doing?

What external/organizational factors were present that supported these moments?

How might this team function if we could expand the conditions that led to past successes?

Both sets of questions will generate data that will begin to shift the team's dynamics, but only the first will lead to the blame, fatigue, and resistance that typically accompany problem-focused analyses. Uncovering and supporting people's passions, skills, knowledge, experience, and successes excite and mobilize them to implement innovations they never before thought possible.

An Invitation to Change

Unlike many behavioral approaches to change, AI does not focus on *changing people.* Instead, it *invites* people to engage in building the kinds of organizations and communities that they want to work and live in. AI thus involves *collaborative discovery* of what makes an organization most effective—in economic, ecological, and human terms. From there, people weave that new knowledge into the fabric of the firm's formal and informal systems, such as the way they develop and implement business strategy or organize themselves to accomplish tasks. This process represents true learning and change.

For instance, in Curitiba, Brazil, the food manufacturing company Nutrimental lost a major long-time customer and teetered on the edge of financial disaster. In response, it shut down for a day so that all 700 employees could talk together about how to beat the stiffening competition that faced the company. David Cooperrider (currently a faculty member at CWRU) facilitated the process. He invited employees to identify "the factors and forces that gave life to the company when it was most effective, most alive, and most successful as a producer of high-quality health foods."

After the first day, a smaller group of 150 stakeholders—employees from all levels, suppliers, distributors, community leaders, financiers, and customers—began a four-day strategy session to articulate a bold, new corporate dream. Six months later, sales reached an all-time high and profits rose 300 percent. Using the short-term results as a springboard, within the next two years, the company completed implementation of a radical restructuring, giving employees much greater influence on a day-to-day level. That empowerment in turn enabled the company to execute three new strategic initiatives, which led to even greater income and profitability.

As this example shows, the AI process enables human systems to engage in continuous learning and translate that learning into ongoing innovation. Organizations then become so agile that they are capable of thriving even in the midst of volatility and changing at the speed of imagination.
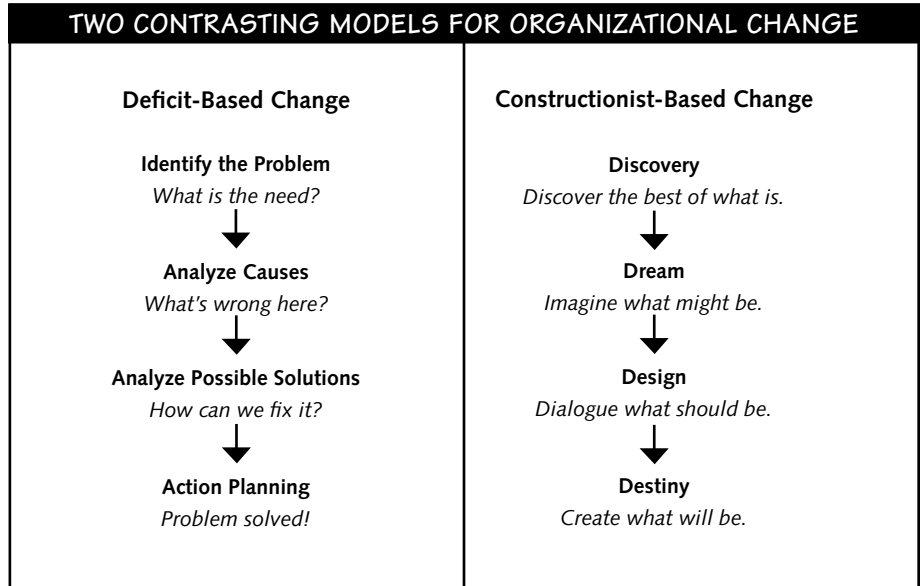
How AI Works: Five Generic Processes Guided by Five Core Principles

The AI philosophy is captured by five core principles that serve as the foundation for AI's five generic processes:

- *The Constructionist Principle:* Our organizations evolve in the direction of the images we create based on the questions we ask as we strive to understand the systems at work.
- *The Principle of Simultaneity:* Change begins the moment we ask questions.
- *The Anticipatory Principle:* Our behavior in the present is influenced by the future we anticipate.
- *The Poetic Principle:* Just as poets have no constraints on what they can write about, we have no boundaries on what we can inquire and learn from.
- *The Positive Principle:* The more positive the questions used to guide a change process, the more long-lasting and effective that process will be.

Five generic processes comprise an "AI cycle," which most people use when integrating AI practice into their organization (see "Five Generic Processes"). Whether you're an external consultant, an internal organization development professional, or a line manager, you can consider these processes a roadmap

TWO CONTRASTING MODELS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

| Deficit-Based Change	Constructionist-Based Change
Identify the Problem *What is the need?*	**Discovery** *Discover the best of what is.*
↓	↓
Analyze Causes *What's wrong here?*	**Dream** *Imagine what might be.*
↓	↓
Analyze Possible Solutions *How can we fix it?*	**Design** *Dialogue what should be.*
↓	↓
Action Planning *Problem solved!*	**Destiny** *Create what will be.*

rather than a prescription for applying AI. You should customize them to fit each situation, with its unique opportunities and constraints. Further, with only small modification, you can use these processes with teams, families, communities, and other groups. [*Note:* Literature about AI often refers to the 4D cycle: Discovery-Dream-Design-Destiny, which also emphasizes addressing problems through inquiry into and learning from exceptionally positive moments rather than analyzing breakdowns (see "Two Contrasting Models for Organizational Change"). However, our experience with AI led us to reword the 4D cycle into the five generic processes to simplify understanding of how AI works.]

FIVE GENERIC PROCESSES

1. Choose the positive as the focus of inquiry
2. Inquire into exceptionally positive moments
3. Share the stories and identify life-giving forces
4. Create shared images of a preferred future
5. Innovate and improvise ways to create that future

AI

1. Choose the Positive As the Focus of Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry begins when the organization consciously chooses to focus on the positive as the basis for learning and change. The first step includes educating key stakeholders—such as senior management, unit leaders, union leaders, and employee groups—about the AI process, philosophy, and supporting research; providing an opportunity for them to collectively decide whether AI is applicable to their organization; and, if they choose to implement the AI process, identifying a core team to develop a customized interview guide and oversee the interview process. You might ask these stakeholders questions such as:

- Does the AI approach feel right for you and this situation?
- If so, what will the topic of inquiry be? How will we phrase the topic to focus on the positive as a core value?
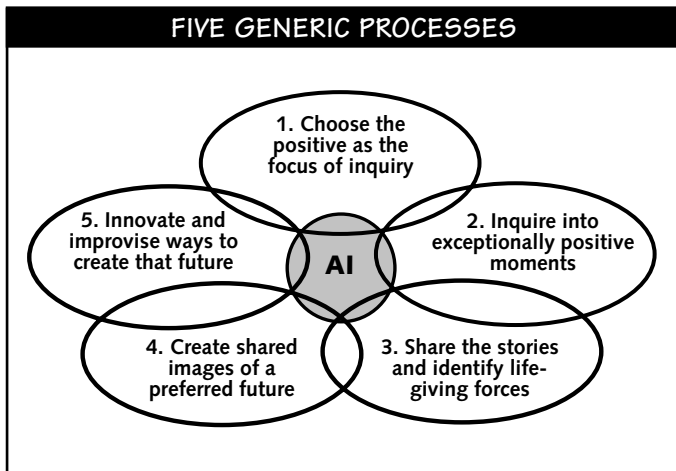
- What learnings from our organization's most successful past change processes can we apply to our current change effort?
- How can we create a customized interview guide and plan the overall inquiry strategy in a way that values all the voices in the system from the very start?
- Should there be a core team? If so, what group in the organization will guide and support the core team's work?

Since organizations or teams move in the direction of the questions they repeatedly ask, the topic of inquiry and its related questions are the most important decisions stakeholders make in this process. For example, the leverage in studying "luggage lost by the airline" versus "exceptional customer-arrival experiences," or "causes of discrimination against women" versus "exceptional cross-gender partnerships in the workplace" is markedly different.

To figure out the focus of inquiry with a small group such as a team, you might suggest, "Let's spend some time exploring moments in our past when we were particularly effective so that we can identify some specific topics for deeper inquiry." Larger, more complex groups of stakeholders often need many discussions to clarify and agree on the topic. In a medical facility, the focus might be examples of outstanding collaboration between specialists; in a business, it might be moments of exceptional customer service or unusual speed-to-market of a new product; in a family, it might be times when members creatively resolved differences.

2. Inquire into Exceptionally Positive Moments

In this phase, as many organization members as possible collect stories from throughout the organization, customers, and even other companies about moments when the organization has reflected the desired characteristic. Researchers using traditional methods of data collection seek to do just enough interviews for the results to be statistically reliable. In AI, questioners reach as many people as possible, because the more people engaged as interviewers and interviewees across organizational boundaries, the more the collective imagination of the organization becomes ignited, building momentum for transformative change.

Again, based on the size of the group, the specifics of this phase vary enormously. In a small group, interviews with everyone may be possible. These might take the form of team members conversing over coffee or lunch, or one-on-ones between members of the core group and other members of the enterprise. In a large organization, 500 to 1,000 representatives may come together for three to five days, divide up in pairs to do the interviews, and complete the process during that time. In all cases, however, the participants use stories to generate comprehensive and compelling descriptions of what is working well, what gives life to the organization, and what they wish for in the future.

GENERIC INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Best Experience: Tell me a story about the best times that you have had with your organization (team, family, community, network, or other group). Looking at your entire experience, recall a time when you felt most alive or excited about your involvement. What made it an exciting experience? Who else was involved? Describe the event in detail.

2. Values: What are the things you value about yourself, your work, and your organization?

- *Yourself:* Without being humble, what do you value most about yourself—as a human being, friend, parent, citizen, and so on?

- *Your work:* When you are feeling best about work, what do you value about it?

- *Your organization:* What is it about your organization (team, family, community, network, or other group) that you value? What is the single most important thing that your organization has contributed to your life?

3. Core Life-Giving Factor: What do you think is the core value or factor that allows the organization to pull through during difficult times? If this core value/factor did not exist, how would that make your organization totally different than it currently is?

4. Three Wishes: If you had three wishes for this organization, what would they be?

A group can use a generic interview guide (see "Generic Interview Guide" on page 6) or customize the questions to focus on the particular interests of its members. On the right is an example of a customized interview guide. It was created by a core team at a middle school dealing with the fallout from a merger that had angered and alienated many of the staff.

3. Share the Stories and Identify Life-Giving Forces

In this phase, interviewers share their findings with the rest of the organization so that many people can collectively make meaning of the data, identify learnings about the organization's positive core and the conditions that support moments of high performance, and develop ideas for what does not exist that needs to be created, as described in the "wish" questions. An organization has several options for deciding how to share the stories and information and for selecting who will do the analysis (or "sense-making") to identify the life-giving forces. Sometimes a small group makes sense of the data on behalf of the larger organization. Whenever possible, though, it is desirable to have everyone involved review the interview results, for example, through an AI Summit, video conferencing, regional meetings, and so forth.

A major part of the sense-making work is to identify themes, or important threads, gleaned from the interviews. Themes are the short answers to the question: "What do we hear people describing in the interviews as the life-giving forces in this organization?" They become the basis for collectively imagining what the organization would

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SAMPLE CUSTOMIZED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR A SCHOOL MERGER

1. In each of our lives, there are special times when we just know that we have made the right career choice—moments when we feel really good about the work we are doing and what we are contributing to others. As you think back over your last four or five years at this or another school, can you *tell me a story* about one of those special moments when you felt that your teaching was really alive and meaningful for your students—a time when you felt particularly excited about your involvement in your field, when you were affirmed in your commitment to being part of the teaching/learning field? *(Use the questions below to probe more deeply, to help your interviewee expand his or her story.)*

● What made it a peak experience? What was happening at that time in your life?

● What were the students doing?

● How were you interacting with them?

● What was it about the learning climate and task that sparked their engagement?

2. Without being humble, tell me what you value deeply about yourself as an individual? as an educator?

3. In planning this process, the sponsor team has said that one of the things that enable great teaching/learning is when people in the school "feel connected," when they feel "part of a family." Thinking back over the last few years, can you *tell me a story* about a time when you felt that sense of connectedness, that sense of family? *(Use the questions below to probe more deeply, to help your interviewee expand his or her story.)*

● What role did you play?

● What did others contribute?

● What other factors in the situation, in the environment, contributed to this connectedness?

4. With the hectic pace of today's world and the need to juggle lots of different balls at once, feeling valued and supported by the people around you can make a big difference. Would you *tell me a story* about a specific time, an experience when, as a professional, you felt genuinely supported and/or valued by students? by your peers? by the administration?

5. In your view, what are the community and societal expectations of this school for the future?

6. What is the *core factor* that gives vitality and life to the school—the one thing that is important for us to retain, to bring with us as we move into the future?

7. What three wishes do you have for this school—things that would enable it to become even more vibrant and truly the sort of place in which great learning and teaching take place on a daily basis?

be like if the exceptional moments that we have uncovered in the interviews became the norm. Themes also provide the link from this step in the process to the next one, in which the group creates a shared image of their preferred future. To see how the first three phases interact together to assist the group in articulating their preferred future, see "Making Sense of the AI Interviews."

4. Create Shared Images of a Preferred Future

In the fourth process of the AI cycle, participants articulate a shared image or dream of the most desired future for the entire organization. Doing so involves inviting organization stakeholders to engage in "possibility conversations" about the organization's position, its potential, its calling, and

the unique contribution it can make to global well-being.

The first part of this process usually focuses on descriptions of the organization's culture, the ways in which people relate to one another, and the overall feel of the organization. The following questions can be useful for initiating dialogue:

- What is the world calling for our organization to be?
- What are the most enlivening and exciting possibilities for our organization?
- What is the inspiration that supports our organization?

These paths of inquiry generate an overall "macro" vision for how the group wants the organization to function—a short narrative description of the desired future written in the present tense.

Participants in the AI process present this vision—or "provocative proposition"—to the larger organization first creatively and metaphorically (through songs, skits, collages, and so forth) and then in writing. For example, at a consumer products firm, participants came up with the following macro vision: "Our company is a learning organization that fosters the cross-fertilization of ideas, minimizes the building of empires, harnesses the synergy of group cooperation, and cultivates the pride of being a valued member of one outstanding corporation."

The second part of this process involves the participants in producing a more specific, detailed vision for how the organization might function. This "micro" vision describes the structures, mechanisms, technologies, processes, and strategies that will help make the desired future a reality. Ideally, this activity engages as many people as possible and emerges directly from the interviews and resultant themes. The consumer products firm mentioned above identified 20 elements that they felt could be infused with the power of their vision for a new corporate culture. Their micro vision for the strategy development process was: "Our company accelerates its learning through an annual strategic planning conference that involves all 500 people in the firm as well as key partners and stakeholders. As a setting for strategic learning, teams present their benchmarking studies of the best five other organizations, deemed leaders in their class. Other teams present an annual appreciative analysis of our company, and together these databases of success stories (internal and external) help set the stage for our strategic, future-search planning."

MAKING SENSE OF THE AI INTERVIEWS

In the middle school previously described, interviewees identified the following themes—that is, conditions that were present in the past that led to moments of excellence in teaching, learning, and quality of work life.

- Authentic learning experiences
- Collaborative efforts between teachers, students, and parents, and between teachers and administrators
- High standards of classroom dialogue
- Positive climate, including ongoing support and effective communication among staff, colleagues, students, and administration
- Sense of community and connectedness at different levels, with feelings of appreciation and kindness
- Time to connect with kids and colleagues at different levels
- Purposeful planning and work
- Parent involvement
- High teacher energy

5. Innovate and Improvise Ways to Create That Future

The final process seeks to engage as many members of the organization as possible in bringing to life, on a daily basis in every locale, the new images of the future articulated in the previous steps. At this stage, the momentum and potential for innovation are extremely high. Some people in the organization might form "initiative" groups around implementing the micro visions, supported by ongoing inquiry into how the new changes are working.

In another variation, each person has the opportunity to publicly state a *simple commitment,* make an *offer*, or articulate a *request* about which parts of the dream he or she wants to bring to life. A *simple commitment* describes actions that can be taken easily, typically within one to two weeks and within the existing authority and resources available to the person making the commitment. An *offer* is a kind of "gift" that can come in any form. For example, a participant may offer access to a database she controls; someone else may offer financial assistance to get a project started; another person may offer his help in response to a request for collaboration. A *request* articulates what one person or group needs from another person or group; for example, "The western region call center requests a meeting with the chief information officer to explore upgrading our e-mail system."

The key to sustaining this momentum is to build an "appreciative eye" into all the organization's systems, procedures, and ways of working. Best practices for doing this include continuing inquiry into key business issues, updat-

ing the micro and macro visions, and conducting appreciatively based evaluations of progress toward the vision—especially with new members of the organization. Organization members are thereby involved in continuous learning, adjustment, and improvisation as they experiment with different ways of carrying the vision forward.

AI Principles in Practice: Three Stories From the Field

Customer Service Improvement in an HR Division

In this company, two groups within the human resources function, separated by cultural and organizational boundaries, did not communicate effectively, resulting in frustrated clients who received conflicting advice. Over a period of weeks, through multiple dialogues between consultants and key stakeholders, the departments reframed their issue "internal conflict and lack of cooperation" from the inquiry "Service Without Boundaries." They formed a core group with representatives from all the stakeholder groups and trained them in AI. This core group then developed an interview guide and planned a three-day, 300-person meeting called an "AI Summit." The executive vice president served as the project sponsor.

At the AI Summit, participants interviewed each other in pairs using the customized interview guide. Groups of six then analyzed the stories and collated themes/life-giving forces for inno-

Rather than considering the change process a one-time event, the organization now sees it as the normal way of doing things.

vations in customer service work processes, roles, and relationships. Report-outs took the form of an "art gallery walk"—a tour of each group's flip charts displayed around the room. Next, groups of 12 created pictures, skits, and songs of the ideal future organizational culture and systems, which they presented to the other groups. Participants then organized themselves into self-selected task groups to create visions for key organizational elements, such as leadership, work processes, reward systems, information systems, and so on.

Over the next year, Summit participants returned to their regional offices throughout the country to engage colleagues in implementing changes at the local level. One year later, an appreciatively based evaluation process was used to measure progress. The 600-member HR division and some of its clients identified approximately 300 stories of improvements and innovations. This data formed the basis for yet another three-day Summit, at which the following questions were discussed: What have we accomplished? What's working well in our change process? Where do we want to move to now? How do we build on the best of our success to get there?

Additional staff members have been trained in AI, particularly those in the organization development function, which has grown tremendously in personnel and financial resources to support ongoing AI practice. Rather than

considering the change process a one-time event, the organization now sees it as the normal way of doing things—engaging in a continuous cycle of learning about what works and why, creating shared images of the future, and inventing novel ways of achieving these goals. In addition, the organization is publishing a book that highlights stories of the successful changes that they have accomplished.

Post-Merger Integration of Three Cultures into One at a Primary School

When three schools were forcibly merged, almost all of the teachers felt angry and disenfranchised. These feelings had a negative impact on their teaching ability. An internal leadership team met with a consultant for four hours to learn about AI. Based on this session, the members produced a plan to engage faculty, children, parents, and school board members in an inquiry of "Building on the Best of the Past." Via e-mail, the consultant and leadership team developed three separate interview guides for teachers, students, and other stakeholders.

In a series of three two-hour meetings held six weeks apart, teachers and teachers, teachers and parents, teachers and children, and teachers and administrators conducted paired interviews. They identified life-giving forces, created shared images of the ideal school culture, and came up with action commitments.

One week after the first meeting, people's focus had shifted away from problems and feelings of isolation to successes and collaborations for realiz-

ing future possibilities. Two months later, after the third meeting, team leaders used AI to design more effective work structures for the following year, including a new reporting system and staffing arrangements. At the beginning of the school year, faculty focused on embedding AI into their daily teaching with the goal of raising students' writing performance. The school continues to revisit the ideas, hopes, and energy shifts from their AI work, and fifth-grade students are now a core part of the interview process for AI-based strategic planning—not just for the this school but for the entire school district.

AI assumes that every living system has untapped stories of excellence and that these stories release positive energy.

Leadership Development Among Top Managers of an R&D Division
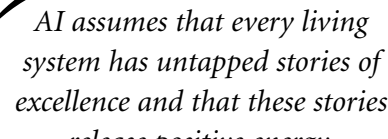
A survey of the work climate in this R&D division revealed that the top 70 managers were not leading well, resulting in employee dissatisfaction. In response, the senior VP of the division, along with his direct reports, decided to sponsor a process for leadership development, based on the assumption that there were stories of exceptional leadership within their own ranks from which lessons could be drawn. An appreciative inquiry into their own best leadership practices was conceived. After sending five of the managers to a one-week AI workshop, the division formed a core group. This group formulated the inquiry topic "Passionate Leadership," developed a customized interview guide, and planned a one-day AI mini-Summit for all 70 managers.

At the Summit, the managers paired off and interviewed each other using the customized interview guide. Small groups of eight analyzed the stories for the life-giving forces that were present when they experienced passionate leadership, compiled compelling themes, and identified wishes for the future. Each group reported out through overhead presentations.

Over lunch, an executive from another industry shared how his company had used AI to develop leaders.

Groups of eight then drew pictures describing the themes and wishes that came out of the earlier session. They created metaphorical images of ideal future leadership roles and activities and shared them in a gallery walk. Small groups then wrote macro and micro visions, translating their metaphors into narrative descriptions of how they would like to lead in the future. At the end of the day, the participants came together as one large group and concluded by describing the two or three things that required collective action (systems, policies, and so on) and that would give them the greatest leverage in achieving their vision. Each participant also made a commitment to take one simple action within his or her sphere of authority.

About three weeks later, the senior VP responsible for the division e-mailed people, asking for stories about how they had implemented the vision and provocative propositions. A torrent of stories flowed back to him, which he then shared with the division. These narratives often prompted additional

action, as people became inspired by how their colleagues were moving forward. The organization has since created an internal positive change network of people trained in AI basics, and the division is applying AI to performance management, innovation, safety, office design, knowledge transfer, strategy implementation, and other areas.

Helpful Conditions for Implementing the AI Process

Though not an absolute prerequisite, we have found the following conditions to be helpful in implementing AI to achieve rapid organizational learning and change:

- *Humble beginnings:* The organization honestly acknowledges any current difficulties without assigning blame and invites co-construction of solutions that do not yet exist.

- *Congruence of means and ends:* The inquiry process itself and the end results are congruent. For example, an organization seeking to increase the meaningful involvement of minority groups in all aspects of organizational life must have significant participation from those groups in planning the inquiry, creating the customized interview guide, and developing the innovations that will be required.

- *History as a source of innovation:* Key leaders believe that the organization's history is a source of new possibilities and are intrigued with the notion that accessing its "positive core" can drive learning and change. They support participation of all voices at all levels and are open to the resultant innovation ideas.

- *Focus beyond the event:* Members of the organization see AI as a process for creating a culture open to learning, discovering new possibilities for organizing, and producing results in ways that raise the collective standard of living in the organization and the community, as well as on the planet. Learning and change are seen as ongoing processes rather than a one-time event that brings the organization to some final point of excellence.

- *Stories more than numbers:* The organization supplies the structures and resources needed to collect and distribute stories of "exceptional moments" and support creative action. Stories become valued for their ability to capture the wholeness of meaning.

Appreciative Inquiry is a highly adaptable philosophy and process for engaging people in building the organizations and world that they want to work and live in. AI assumes that every living system has untapped stories of excellence and that these stories, when systematically explored and shared, release positive energy. The AI process invites people to consciously choose to seek out and inquire into these forces in their own and other people's lives and to explore their hopes and dreams for the future. It then enables people to weave their discoveries into the fabric of the organization's formal and informal infrastructure, enabling the system to reconceptualize and transform its purpose, processes, and design in ways that support its most generative forces and ongoing success.

Suggested Further Readings

Anderson, Harlene, et al, *The Appreciative Organization* (Taos Institute Publishing, 2001)

Cooperrider, David, et al., *Appreciative Inquiry: An Emerging Direction for Organization Development* (Stipes Publishing, 2001)

Cooperrider, David, and Diana Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry: Collaborating for Change* (Berrett-Koehler, 1999)

Fry, Ronald, et al., *Appreciative Inquiry and Organizational Transformation: Reports from the Field* (Quorum Books, 2002)

Magruder Watkins, Jane, and Bernard J. Mohr, *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination* (Jossey Bass/Pfeiffer, 2001)

Schiller, Marjorie, et al., *Appreciative Leaders: The Eye of the Beholder* (Taos Institute, 2001)

Bernard J. Mohr is president of Innovation Partners International (Maine), co-orginator of People Powered Innovation Labs, and a leading practitioner and innovator in Appreciative Inquiry. Working primarily in healthcare, post-secondary education and scientific research, he provides the tools and methods for all stakeholders to co-create and implement new models of professional practice that are better for all concerned. For 50 years, throughout the USA, Central America, the Caribbean, Western Europe, Canada and the Middle East he has supported clients as a strategist and a "*role up your sleeves resource*" -- in organizations such as Baystate Health, British Petroleum R&D, Canadian Broadcasting Corp., Episcopal Church/USA, Exxon R&D, GlaxoSmithKline, Government of Trinidad and Tobago, Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, Novartis, Tufts Medical Center, University of Maine and the World Health Organization. He is past Dean of Complex Systems Change at NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science and adjunct faculty in organizational innovation at Concordia University (Montreal). Recent books include "*Appreciative Inquiry: Change At the Speed of Imagination*" (Jossey Bass), "The Appreciative Inquiry Summit: A Practitioner's Guide for Leading Large-Group Change" (Berrett-Koehler) and "Co-Creating Humane And Innovative Organizations: Evolutions in the Practice of Socio-Technical System Design" (Global STS-D Press). Designing Integrated Care Ecosystems (Springer, in press) Bernard holds a B.A. in psychology from the University of Waterloo, an M.Ed. in adult and organizational learning from OISE at the University of Toronto and a Diploma in organizational design and human resource management from Columbia University. He can be reached at +1-207-807-4974 or bjmohr@innovationpartners.com .

Jane Magruder Watkins, was a past chair of the board of the NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science, who worked in the field of organization development for more than 40 years. Since the mid-1980s, she pioneered the use of Appreciative Inquiry in corporate, nonprofit, and government organizations across the globe. She taught AI through the Taos Institute, NTL Institute, in client organizations, and for several university graduate programs. Jane coauthored *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination* with Bernard Mohr. She held an M.S. in organizational development.