



# APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

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## Inspired changes happen if people access innate needs for dignity and meaning

A worldview, a theory, a mindset, and an approach: Appreciative Inquiry is an articulated concept that reinforces the habit of mind that moves through the world in a generative frame, seeking and finding images of the possible rather than scenes of disaster and despair.

The 21st Century habit of mind, heart and imagination in Western thought reaches the depths of cynicism. Metaphorically, in much of the world today, the glass is half empty. Indeed, cynicism is considered reality so much so that the terms “unrealistic,” and “naive” are used to describe those who approach life from the perspective of the glass as half full.

Used in place of the traditional problem solving approach—finding what is wrong and forging solutions to fix the prob-

lems—Appreciative Inquiry seeks what is “right” in an organization, its success, its life-giving force. This focus generates tremendous positive energy for organizational learning and creation of an imagined future.

### What it achieves

Appreciative Inquiry is an effective process for organizations that are looking to engage in developing their strategic future. Organizational members quickly establish a vision that is grounded in their past successes and passions; they find themselves galvanized into action by the energy that springs from the process.

We have applied Appreciative Inquiry to do envisioning, strategic planning, business development, team building, developing performance systems, for monitoring and

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evaluation purposes, in cultural change programmes and for leadership development. The range of possible applications is seemingly unlimited.

The concept has been used by any type of thinkable organisation, from large business corporations to small NGOs to government agencies and the UN, on all continents.

and finding the generative rather than the destructive image appears to have far more power than simple peace of mind. There is much research going on today that suggests that we human beings create the future that we imagine. As leading nations of the world more and more imagined terrible destructions, each armed itself to the edge of financial collapse. Images of violence, collapse and destruction became the organizing principle of society.

## WHO APPLIED IT?

A sample of clients where Perspectivity worked with Appreciative Inquiry :

- Radio Netherlands World Broadcasting (Tanzania)
- East Africa Community (Uganda)
- Parliament of The Netherlands – Department for Communication and Information (Netherlands)
- Young in Prison (Various countries)
- CADER company (Jordan)
- IKV Pax Christi (Netherlands)
- Caritas (Egypt)
- BPC fashion (Netherlands)
- Care International (Kenya)
- Agro Eco (Netherlands)
- City of Arnhem (Netherlands)
- Afghan Women Resource Center (Afghanistan)

### Why do it?

Appreciative Inquiry is described in the work of Dr. David Cooperrider and his colleagues at Case Western Reserve's school of Organization Behavior and currently one of the most acknowledged and ground breaking approaches for organizational change.

Why do we need to look for the positive, for the life-giving forces, for those moments of joy and satisfaction? The habit of seeking

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***‘Thanks to the dialogue sessions, people spontaneously reached out to each other...’***

### Participant

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There is, however, an opposing force, a shift in the wind. Appreciative Inquiry as a system of thought is based on social science research that affirms these trends and movements by demonstrating the power of generative images to create a world of hope and possibility. This is not about denying the negative and destructive. It is, rather, about focusing on the positive and the creative as a force for building a more positive future.

The knowledge base that supports this approach comes from widely diverse fields such as medicine, sports, behavioral science, anthropology. With this kind of scientific evidence emerging, it makes sense to rethink our approach to organization development. The power of the Western way of knowing is not in dispute. What is up for examination is the limitations of that approach....

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Appreciative Inquiry provides an intellectual construct and practice that gives organizations an expanded way of viewing reality and a practical rationale and method for creating a desired future.

## How it works

Because Appreciative Inquiry calls for a sea change in attitude and thinking patterns, it is far more than a technique or methodology for “fixing” organizations. As a concept, it requires an organization to make a commitment to continuous learning, growth, and generative change. Step one must always be an internalization of the theory and concepts of this worldview. Once that is achieved, organizations have the ability to apply the concepts in innovative ways to achieve a healthier and more creative environment.

Inquiry. This is often followed by a dialogue process with members of this group interviewing each other as well as other members of the organization asking questions that elicit the creative and life-giving events experienced in the workplace.



Cordaid - Barometer for Women's Peace and Security

## INSPIRING QUESTIONS

The dialogues often begin with three or four general questions such as:

1. Looking at your entire experience with the organization, remember a time when you felt most alive, most fulfilled, or most excited about your involvement in the organization.
2. What are things you value deeply; specifically, the things you value about yourself, about the nature of your work, and about this organization.
3. What do you experience as the core factors that give life to this organization? Give some examples of how you experience those factors.
4. What three wishes would you make to heighten the vitality and health of this organization?

To get started, a small work-group might gather to study the concepts in order to gain an in-depth understanding of Appreciative

The interviews are not soliciting facts and opinions so much as examples, stories, metaphors. In the search for the generative moments, the interviewer elicits the particular rather than the general. The purpose is to find those moments, events, stories of the best there is. Using the data from these original dialogues, the workgroup looks for the themes and topics that run through the experiences. These topics become the focus of a more specific interview protocol that seeks to enlarge and learn more about the chosen topics.

For example, if the original data suggests that COMMITMENT is an important factor in many of the stories about the best of times in the organization, then the workgroup might choose to ask more questions from others in the workplace about their experiences with commitment.

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The second round of interviews produces information about four to six topics that become the basis for building “Possibility Propositions” that describe how the organization will be in the future. Each topic or theme can be fashioned into a future statement and become an integral part of the vision for the organization. Often, this process is completed with a future search conference that uses the Appreciative Inquiry data as a basis for imagining a positive and creative future for the organization.

## Getting started

In case of interest, we can provide presentations, a short experiential orientation or a mini appreciative inquiry. We assist in designing the process, finetuning the focus, forming the planning group, creating a work flow that fits your desire.

There is no right or wrong method, no perfect process. The work of the consultant is to help the organization find its own way, its own path. Appreciative Inquiry is an inquiry process, a continuous learning paradigm

that seeks the most creative and generative realities.

The key to the successful use of Appreciative Inquiry is not to say that the current way of seeing the world is wrong; rather, it is to help people realize that we can be limited and constrained by our inability to see larger and more expansive realities that are often right under our noses. It is no longer new news that we simply don’t see what doesn’t fit into our concept of what is real or true. Appreciative Inquiry is about freeing ourselves to explore beyond what we already know and understand. Such freedom can feel threatening and frightening. But once embraced, it is often thrilling.

## REFERENCES

Appreciative Inquiry Handbook, For leaders of change, 2nd ed., Diane Witney & David Cooperrider (Berrett-Koehler, 2008)

Appreciative Inquiry Commons: [appreciativeinquiry.case.edu](http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu)

## ABOUT PERSPECTIVITY

Perspectivity builds inspiring collaborations for sustainable growth. We work with groups and individuals to address complex realities in organisations and communities. In current times of increasing complexity, blue prints have become obsolete. As Perspectivity, we dare to look at the world upside down. We bring a fresh perspective!

We engage people from all walks of life, people with differing interests and perceptions. We help them to find common ground to work productively together towards shared goals, even when differences seem impossible to bridge. We help people and organisations to match values to purpose.

Perspectivity  
For the love of complexity

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