

Appreciative Inquiry - A Brief Overview

Appreciative Inquiry (Bushe, 1995; Cooperrider, 1990; Cooperrider, 1998; Cooperrider & Whitney, 1998; Srivasta & Cooperrider, 1990) is an intervention designed to articulate and build on what is currently viewed as effective or exceptional within the organization. The focus is on "appreciating" what works and exploring pathways of greater effectiveness.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is based, primarily, on the work of Suresh Srivasta and David Cooperrider (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987) of Case Western Reserve University's Department of Organizational Behavior, but has also seen many derivations as the intervention has become more widely researched by scholars and used by practitioners. AI turns over the "traditional" problem-solving methodology used by the majority of organizations in the US today. In opposition to the traditional view, AI posits that organizations do not need to be "fixed"; rather, organizations are seeking to reaffirm, from an appreciative perspective, what is best. As Bushe notes, AI "is an attempt to generate a collective image of a new and better future by exploring the best of what is and has been" (Bushe, 1995, p. 15).

The objective of AI is not to eliminate the discussion of problems, but it does not feed energy into them either. Instead, the organization is a mystery to be embraced! It engages individuals in a process of uncovering self-limiting assumptions, and learning to discern, comprehend and amplify the energy-driving forces that are innate within them.

When used to determine strategy for the organization, Appreciative Inquiry proponents have set forth numerous designs for using AI to create positive change. One of the more noted designs is used, typically, for strategic planning processes. Called the 4-D Process, it includes the following phases:

1. **Discovery** - Appreciating What Gives Life
2. **Dream** - Imagining What Might Be
3. **Design** - Co-creating What Will Be
4. **Delivery** - Sustaining the Change

Other interventions that can be based upon the philosophical underpinnings of AI include improving feedback skills, personal/professional coaching, team building and leadership development. The approach has been used with positive results with a variety of organizations, including: NASA, Avon, DTE Energy Services, British Airways, Hunter Douglas, and others (Watkins, 2001).

References

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