Appreciative Inquiry & Evaluation: Strengths & Challenges

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Appre’ci-ate, v.,

1. valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems

2. to increase in value, e.g. the economy has appreciated in value.

• Synonyms: VALUING, PRIZING, ESTEEMING, and HONORING.
In-quire’ (kwir), v.,

1. the act of exploration and discovery.

2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities.

• Synonyms: DISCOVERY, SEARCH, and SYSTEMATIC EXPLORATION, STUDY.
What is Appreciative Inquiry?

- An approach to organizational analysis and learning.

- Intended for discovering, understanding and fostering innovations in social organizational arrangements and processes.

- A form of transformational inquiry that selectively seeks to locate, highlight and illuminate the “lifegiving” forces of an organization’s existence.

- Based on the belief that human systems are made and imagined by those who live and work within them.

- Seeks out the “best of what is” to help ignite the collective imagination of “what might be”.
Origins of Ai

- **1980 - Cleveland Clinic Project is initiated.** The birthplace and co-founding of AI happened in the doctoral program in Organizational Behavior at Case Western Reserve University in the collaboration between David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva in 1980.

- **1986 - Cooperrider completes his doctoral dissertation** "Appreciative Inquiry: Toward a Methodology for Understanding and Enhancing Organizational Innovation" at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio.

- **1987 - The Roundtable Project** at a Canadian accounting firm (with John Carter as the external lead) becomes the first large-scale change effort in which AI is conceived of as a comprehensive intervention framework from data gathering to implementation.
Appreciative Inquiry: Principles

- **The Constructionist principle** – what we believe to be real in the world is created through our social discourse.

- **The Simultaneity principle** - Inquiry is change. The first question we ask is fateful in that the organization will turn its energy in the direction of that first question.

- **The Poetic principle** – stories (like all good poetry) can be told about any aspect of an organization’s existence.

- **The Anticipatory principle** – behavior and decisions about actions are based not only on what we were born with or learned from our environment, but also what we anticipate, what we think or imagine will happen in the future.

- **The Positive principle** – a positive approach to any issue is just as valid as a basis for learning and that it is just as contagious as a negative approach.
The Questions we ask are fateful…Compare!

- What are the big problems in this organization?
- Why have systems and procedures not worked?
- Why do we not see eye to eye on important matters?
- Why don’t they get it?
- What are the underlying causes for your failure?
- Under what circumstances is this organization most effective?
- What systems and procedures are most effective?
- Under what circumstances are we all on the same page?
- What solutions would have us both win?
- What possibilities exist that we have not yet considered?
A Few Propositions to Consider

- You create more effective organizations by focusing on what you want more of, not what you want less of.
- Whatever you want more of already exists, even if only in small quantities.
- It’s easier to create change by amplifying the positive qualities of a group or organization than by trying to fix the negative qualities.
- Through the act of inquiry we create the social realities we are trying to understand.
- Getting people to inquire together into the best examples of what they want more of creates its own momentum toward creating more positive organizations.
Enlarging the Way We See the World.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Current Paradigm (Newtonian Mechanics)</th>
<th>The Emergent Paradigm (Quantum Physics, chaos theory, complexity theory)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We search for a model of objectively perceiving the world.</td>
<td>We accept the complexity and subjectivity of the world.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We believe that change in human systems occurs as a direct result of force exerted from one person to another – cause and effect</td>
<td>We understand that change in human systems occurs at so many places and times at once that direct cause and effect linearity have limited explanation power.</td>
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<td>We engage in complex planning for a world expected to be predictable.</td>
<td>Planning is understood to be a process of constant re-evaluation.</td>
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<td>We believe in reductionism – that things can best be understood when they are broken into parts.</td>
<td>We seek to understand wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things.</td>
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<td>We engage in dichotomous thinking.</td>
<td>We search for harmony in our dialogue.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We live in a linear and hierarchical world.</td>
<td>We live in a circular world of relationships and cooperation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We believe that there is only one truth for which we must search.</td>
<td>We understand truth to be dependent upon the context and the current reality.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We see information as power.</td>
<td>We see information as a primal creative force.</td>
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| We understand language as the descriptor of reality.  
“I'll believe it when I see it.” | We understand language as the Creator of Reality.  
“I'll see it when I believe it.” |
The “New” Sciences and AI

- Placebo Studies - *believing as a power*
- Pygmalion Studies – *expectation as a predictor*
- Health Studies - *therapeutic value of hope*
- Sports Psychology - *inner dialogue*
- Visioning - *bowling, basketball, golf*
A Choice

We can choose the view that either:

1. Human systems are primarily problems or deficits to be analyzed and overcome;

2. Human systems are made-up of positive life-giving forces to be understood and developed.
Common Criticism of AI

- It ignores or even denies problems!
- Too soft, stories??
- Doesn’t dig deep enough!
Jane Watkins & Bernard Mohr

- Intervention in any human system is fateful and that system will move in the direction of the first questions that are asked.

- We are all connected, as the ‘new sciences’ demonstrate, suggesting that there is no such thing as an objective observer.

- There is no implication that the past is deficient or wrong, simply that we look back for those life-giving forces, those moments of excellence in which we can take pride, and use those as guidance to move us into a positive and generative future.
Deficit Problems Affirmative Topics

- Sexual Harassment → Positive Cross-Gender Working Relationships
- Lack of Commitment → Creating and Sustaining Positive Energy
- Root Causes of Failure → Root Causes of Success
- Low morale
- Inter-unit conflict → Moments of high enthusiasm
- Poor Communications → Examples of inter-unit cooperation
- Compelling Communications
"4-D" Cycle

Affirmative
Topic Choice

Discovery
“What gives life?”
(The best of what is)
Appreciating

Destiny
“How to empower, learn, and adjust/improvise?”
Sustaining

Design
“What should be—the ideal?”
Co-constructing

Dream
“What might be?”
(What is the world calling for)
Envisioning Results

Positive Core
The 4-I Model

Initiate → Inquire → Innovate → Imagine → Initiate
Initiate

- Introduce key stakeholders to Ai theory and practice
- Create temporary project structures (core evaluation group, sponsor team) and educate in Ai theory
- Determine overall project focus or topic
- Develop preliminary project strategy – timing, participation, resources.
Inquire

- Conduct generic interviews
- Develop customized interview protocol; pilot and revise protocol with core evaluation group
- Interview maximum number of system members and stakeholders.
Imagine

- Collate and share interview data and pull out themes (life-giving forces)
- Develop provocative propositions (a grounded version of the desired future)
- Consensually validate provocative propositions with as many members of the system as possible
Innovate

- Engage maximum possible number of organization members in conversations that enable exploration of and commitment to whatever new actions, roles, relationships, or design modifications (the social architecture of the organization) are seen as important to support implementation of the provocative propositions
- Implement design changes using and AI-based progress review process
Dr. Hallie Preskill

- Ai is an overarching approach that guides the entire evaluation.
  - To develop a program’s logic model.
  - As a method to focus the evaluation with stakeholders.
  - As a means for designing effective surveys and interview protocols.
  - To develop an evaluation system within an organization.
Examples of Appreciative Inquiry used in Organization Evaluations

- Withdrawal Management Services
- Homelessness Initiative
- Tenant Participation System
- Building Community Capacity in Youth-led Organizations
Service Users Introduction

- During your time with this agency, I’m sure you’ve had some ups and downs, some peaks and valleys, some successes and disappointments.

- I’d like you to reflect for a moment on a peak experience, a time when you felt that the program was most beneficial to you and you gained the most.

- Think back…
Service Users Appreciative Interview

- Now, tell me a story about a time that you found the program to be a powerful support to you personally?

- What really made the experience so good for you?

- If you had a magic wand that allowed you three wishes to improve the program, what would your wishes be?
Questions

- What is the potential role of AI in evaluations?
- In what ways does AI constitute an overall approach to evaluation?
- In what ways is AI better construed as a data collection method?
- What impact does using AI have on the use of evaluation processes and findings?
- What contextual factors or conditions make the use of AI in evaluation appropriate?
- To what extent and how does AI in evaluation address program issues and problems if its focus is on what is working well?
- What are the challenges in using AI in evaluation?
Literature


http://appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu/