



## & The Business Shed

- A Creative Initiative

### Appreciative Inquiry Basics

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**Appreciative Inquiry (AI) begins an adventure – an adventure to a positive revolution in change.**

So, just what is Appreciative Inquiry?

#### **Appreciate**

Etymology: Late Latin *appretiatius*, past participle of *appretiare*, from Latin *ad-* + *pretium* price

Date: 1655

*Transitive verb*

**1 a:** to grasp the nature, worth, quality, or significance of < *appreciate* the difference between right and wrong >

**b:** to value or admire highly < *appreciates* our work > **c:** to judge with heightened perception or understanding : be fully aware of < must see it to *appreciate* it > **d:** to recognize with gratitude < certainly *appreciates* your kindness > **2:** to increase the value of *intransitive verb:* to increase in number or value

#### **Inquiry** (from Inquire / Enquire)

Etymology: Middle English *enquiren*, from Anglo-French *enquerre*, from Vulgar Latin *\*inquaerere*, alteration of Latin *inquirere*, from *in-* + *quaerere* to seek

Date: 13th century

*noun*

**1** : examination into facts or principle **2** : a request for information **3** : a systematic investigation often of a matter of public interest

#### **Inquire**

Date: 15th century

*transitive verb*

**1** : to ask about < some kindred spirit shall *inquire* thy fate — Thomas Gray > **2** : to search into *intransitive verb* **1** : to put a question : seek for information by questioning < *inquired* about the horses > **2** : to make investigation or inquiry —often used with *into*

Thanks to Merriam-Webster on-line for that ([www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com))!

AI is a process which turns the traditional problem solving methodology on its head. Instead of finding ways to solve a problem, AI identifies and builds on the best of what already exists and takes this on into the pursuit of dreams and the possibilities of what could be.

AI is about the search for the best in people, in the places where they work and in the relevant world around them. In broad terms it involves the systematic discovery of what gives life to a “system” when this system is the **most alive, most effective and most capable.**

AI at its core is about the art and practice of asking questions (inquiring) that strengthen the ability to be proactive. Instead of negative criticism and downward-spiralling diagnosis (what’s wrong?), there is discovery, dream, design and destiny AI builds a connection between people and possibilities – some of these possibilities have already been achieved and by inquiring into them, AI extracts the positive core of the person and of the organisation.

It is a known fact that human systems grow in the direction of what they persistently ask questions about. If you constantly ask what’s wrong type questions a culture of negativity will proliferate. By constantly asking what’s right, dreams become realities. There is truth in the power of positive thinking.

The “old” way of “Problem Solving” was a need to identify the problem, analyse the causes, analyse possible solutions and put those solutions into practice. The basic assumption is that an organisation is a problem to be solved.

AI suggests appreciating and valuing the best of what is, envisioning the “what might be” and dialoguing “what should be”. This holds the assumption that an organisation is a mystery to be embraced.

AI does not focus on changing people – rather it invites people to engage in building the kinds of organisations and communities that they want to work and to live in. AI thus involves collaborative discovery and from there people weave that new knowledge into the organisation's formal and informal systems (and into their lives).

At the start of an AI workshop, positive core questions are asked, such as: "Tell me about a peak experience or high point in your professional life – a time when you felt most alive, most engaged, or really proud of yourself or your work."

AI also allows people to dream – imagine asking every employee what they would wish for if they had three wishes for the organisation.

The basic 4 D cycle of AI is:

Discovery – what gives life (the best of what is) – appreciating

Dream – what might be (what is the world calling for) – envisioning results

Design – what should be the ideal – co-constructing

Destiny – how to empower, learn, and adjust/improve – sustaining

Isn't it interesting to note that the AI process contains a lot of "co" and empowerment? There is no "it was your plan / fault / ..." blame game going on.

AI is a highly adaptable philosophy and process for getting people to build the organisation that they want to work in. AI assumes that every living system (household, community, church, organisation) has untold (and thus untapped) stories of excellence and that when these stories are told and shared there is a release of positive energy.

As Albert Einstein said: "Imagination is more important than knowledge."

These web sites may also prove useful:

[www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu](http://www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu)

[www.appreciativeinquiry.org](http://www.appreciativeinquiry.org)

[www.new-paradigm.co.uk/appreciative.htm](http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/appreciative.htm)

Appreciative Inquiry requires a champion (sponsor) to work really effectively (I know because I was once just that sponsor) and some dedicated time from the team involved in change – but if you want to have fun, excitement and create possibilities, look at running an AI workshop when next you are faced with change or wanting to look at how you can do things better.

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## *Creating Possibilities and Finding Solutions*

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