

## Appreciative Inquiry - summary

*“At its best, Appreciative Inquiry is serious, deliberate, rigorous research into the root causes of success”*

David Cooperrider

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach and philosophy to organisational and community development which focuses on a strengths based approach rather than on a deficit one. It is about focusing on the positive and encouraging *generativity* - supporting people and organisations to see actions arising out of new possibilities, and to then co design and co create their futures. AI draws strongly on social constructionism and Ken Gergen’s work on **Generativity**

**A useful AI definition is:** *“Appreciative Inquiry is a process for engaging people in building the kinds of Organisations and a world they want to live in. Working from peoples’ strengths and positive experiences, AI co-creates a future based on collaboration and open dialogue.”* David Cooperrider, founder of Appreciative Inquiry

Developed by David Cooperrider in the late 1980s at Case Western University, USA, and now used all over the world, AI is a collaborative and participative, system-wide approach to organisation and community development. It identifies and enhances the ‘life-giving forces’ in a team, organisation, or business working at its best. It is a change process focusing on strengths – rather than weaknesses – and encourages active and effective staff and community participation. The resulting strategies are based on reality, and ‘owned’ by the participants, so are much more likely to be deliverable.

It is important to realise that it is NOT a set of techniques, but **a way of working** from an appreciative, positive and strength-based standpoint - it is a philosophy and an approach. AI can be easily adapted and used in traditional organisational and community development approaches – it’s exceptionally flexible, and looks simple in many ways, but is very subtle. AI is used in government, aid agencies and in the voluntary sector all over the world – from small villages in Nepal to multinational organisations. It can also be used in coaching and in personal development.

**Five core principles** underpin all AI practice. Their inclusion is a key element in AI training, and a process can’t be considered ‘truly AI’ without having reference to each of these principles:

- The constructionist principle** - Words create worlds
- The simultaneity principle** - Inquiry is change – the first question is fateful...
- The anticipatory principle** - Image inspires action
- The poetic principle** - What we focus on grows
- The positive principle** - Positive questions lead to positive change

Further information about the AI principles can be found in the resources section of [www.appreciatingpeople.co.uk](http://www.appreciatingpeople.co.uk)

There are three tools that support the AI approach and principles:

### 1. AI conversations/interviews – developing questions

AI interviews – sometimes called appreciative conversations – are at the heart of AI. They can be used in many parts of the AI process. Essentially, they are a structured conversation, and normally called protocols – a useful bit of jargon! ‘Protocol’ is the term AI practitioners use to describe the sequence and focus of questions in an appreciative conversation – they can vary in length from three to six questions.

### 2. The 5D cycle - Definition, Discovery, Dream, and Destiny/Delivery

#### I. Definition

This phase involves choosing the right area, theme or concern to inquire into matter. They should stretch and challenge the status quo.

## II. Discovery

Essentially this phase is based on dialogue and structured conversations. In depth investigation of 'what works' rediscovers and remembers the organisation or community's success, strengths and periods of excellence.

## III. Dream

This phase is highly practical because it's grounded in the organisation or community's history (rather than unbounded vision making). It is a description of where the organisation, group, community wishes to be.

## IV. Design

In this stage, the stories and the best work from discovery are combined with the imagination and creativity from dream, to create the structures and working arrangements to move things forward.

## V. Destiny/Delivery

Builds on the dream and design process to create the future arrangements to maintain momentum and generate actions. Engages personal commitment to ensure 'buy in' across the organisation.

It is important to remember that AI is not just the 5D process but is about the principles, generativity, and asking the right questions

### 3. SOAR™ (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results/Resources)

SOAR is the Appreciative Inquiry contribution to strategic planning, and a '*generative*' alternative to a SWOT analysis. As an alternative to the dominant threats and weaknesses elements of SWOT, the SOAR approach encourages a more innovative and positive approach to asset-based strategic planning. It generates enthusiasm and creates positive momentum. Focusing on strengths and opportunities for individuals and organisations is much more powerful and effective than dwelling on deficiencies.

These descriptions are drawn from the popular AI resource pack *A Taste of Appreciative Inquiry- a simple and practical guide to AI* which is available at [www.appreciatingpeople.co.uk/ai-essentials/](http://www.appreciatingpeople.co.uk/ai-essentials/) or directly from [suzanne@appreciatingpeople.co.uk](mailto:suzanne@appreciatingpeople.co.uk) Discounts are available for bulk orders.

### Some helpful hints about using AI

- Re-emphasize the point that it is not just about positive thinking. AI is the first cousin of positive psychology
- Its about a way of being and working from the principles
- It does not ignore problems but looks at them from a different perspective
- At its best it is generative, a game changer and transformational
- Ideally before using it, take some AI training to feel comfortable and fluent with the approach. If that is not possible then 'start small' by asking different and appreciative questions
- Practice using AI interview questions.
- AI will be particularly useful where learning and sharing of best practice is a key objective
- Taking time on the Definition stage from the 5D model is useful in defining a topic for the inquiry

### When to use caution.....

AI is very flexible and even a small intervention - such as reframing the questions and working from success and strengths - will produce benefits on a number of levels. The tools provide a framework, but it is about first asking the "right" question and there are some setting/situations where caution is advised:

- Unavailability of quality facilitation and group work skills
- In a "command and control" organisation
- If there is no "buy in' or understanding at the top of the organisation

### What are the essential benefits?

There are a number of well documented benefits of using AI, most notably:

- ✓ The principles, its generativity, the emphasis on 'building on what works' and on people's strengths.
- ✓ The way it encourages co-creativity and co-design, and is whole system.
- ✓ Fostering solutions and actions that are "owned".
- ✓ It encourages people and organisation resilience and well- being.

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