Appreciative Inquiry: the principles

AppreciatingPeople

Five core principles underpin all AI practice:

CONSTRUCTIONIST ⊚ SIMULTANEITY ⇄ ANTICIPATORY ▶ POSITIVE ☀ POETIC 📖

These principles are woven into every stage of an AI process, and a process can't be considered 'truly AI' without consideration of each of the core principles.

The constructionist principle

Words create worlds

Multiple interpretations of what is real co-exist – We're constantly co-creating our reality with every conversation and social interaction. We create stories to make sense of things, but our stories are not the truth, just one perspective and interpretation.

· Notice the language you use and conversations you take part in, and how they impact on you and those around you

· Notice other people's language and images/ metaphors in conversations

· Remember that each person's reality is subjective. There is no right or wrong reality – just a difference of interpretation

Remember – we are never neutral observers

The simultaneity principle

Inquiry is change – the first question is fateful...

The moment we inquire, or ask a question, we initiate a reaction at many different levels of our consciousness. The language, tone and intention of the question determine the direction of the conversation. When you create your questions, consider what you're really seeking to learn more about, and how you can encourage the respondent to reflect on what is valuable and important. As the old adage goes, 'be careful what you wish for – you might just get what you asked for!'

Consider the path you'd like your dialogue to take. The moment you ask a question, you've started a narrative journey.

The anticipatory principle

Image inspires action

We all live in a future state to some extent, agonising over 'what will be'. We constantly look forward to what might be, prompting us to make decisions which influence our present condition and actions. Our future is a constructed reality, created by our present thinking and imagery.

When we create positive, uplifting images of our future we're more likely to make decisions and act to help us reach that desired future.

When we constantly anticipate the worst, we fill ourselves with a sense of foreboding, fear and limitation; we hold back and don't embrace opportunity, sending a powerful negative message to our minds. We're constantly bombarded with images of others via the internet and media – this can influence our thinking, so it's helpful to filter this and hold your own mental images of how and where we would like to be and travel.

The poetic principle
What we focus on grows

We make sense of our lives through the stories we tell and hear, and what our imaginations lead us to aspire to and innovate to achieve. Just as in a poem, painting or piece of music, there are endless meanings and interpretations.
Great poems, stories or art touch us on a number of sensory levels. In any moment we can choose to find bad, right, beautiful, ugly, perfection, imperfection, opportunity, or barriers.
· Be mindful of imposing your own assumptions and beliefs on what is positive, successful, and what matters
· Deliberately choose provocative language that questions people on a more than everyday basis, and touches people at their core

The positive principle
Positive emotions and actions lead to positive outcomes

The positive principle challenges us to look at and articulate when we feel positive, vibrant, vital, and empowered:

When we are exceptional and shine!

AI aims to establish the positive core of a person, organisation, or community. AI looks at key strengths/attributes that enable us to be resilient, open to learning and able to take action in a positive direction. Appreciative Inquiry is the cousin of positive psychology.

The five core principles should be seen as the building blocks of AI, with the constructionist principle as its foundation stone and the **poetic**, **positive**, **simultaneity** and **anticipatory** principles as rising pillars.

There are many theories and disciplines that have influenced the principles of AI, or are aligned with them. As the shift away from Newtonian thinking continues, and we embrace new thinking on our world and its systems, there's a plethora of related reading – Ken Gergen's writing on social constructionist theory (in which AI is very much rooted), amongst others; positive psychology (Martin Seligman and Barbara Fredrickson) and new sciences like chaos theory, complexity theory and quantum physics.

Jackie Kelm's work on Appreciative Living leads the field in the application of AI and its principles to personal life: **appreciativeliving.com**.

The emergent principles

As AI practitioners have refined their learning and experience (in keeping with AI philosophy), some 'emergent principles' have been added. These sit alongside the core principles, although some practitioners prefer to see them as 'intentions' for their work, rather than principles. They include the wholeness principle, the enactment principle and the awareness principle.

The wholeness principle
As described in the constructionist principle, we are neither defined nor exist in isolation, and are constantly influenced and influence a greater whole. Each of us has something to give.

The enactment principle
Enactment challenges us to be authentic; living with appreciative intent can help us create new and different actions and ways of being that align with the future we wish to create. Living in alignment with our desired future takes practise and perseverance before it becomes natural and effortless. Actions speak louder than words.

The awareness principle
The awareness principle proposes that when we're consciously and deliberately aware and reflective of our interactions, with both ourselves and others, we can use this insight to take full responsibility for how we relate to others, and utilise our learning and reflection to shift and reframe our actions.