



IMAGE: THINKSTOCK PHOTO

Appreciative Inquiry

All questions will be open-ended and will always focus on positive aspects. The questionnaire will also have a section dealing with the dreams of how the company can be.

The results of these questionnaires will then be used to build a transformational change or development plan for the organisation.

AI mainly results in a transformational rather than an incremental change in that it replaces most of what exists now; especially the thoughts that people have about their organisation.

The most interesting fact about AI is that it is not only the final plan, once implemented, that facilitates change. It is the entire process, including the questionnaire completion activity that, often at a subconscious level, enables people to transform their views and consequently their actions.

The main focus of AI is on what is life giving, well and effective. It is not about what is bad and wrong or ineffective and inefficient. It is about efficiency and effectiveness and about dreaming. It is about building consensus that the future can be bright.

An explanation of the differences between AI and traditional OD approaches

The following table summarises some of the differences between AI and the traditional OD approaches. (Watkins & Mohr, 2001: 42)

Attachment A has two sketches that most adequately describe the difference between AI and traditional OD approaches the best way and can be summarised as follows:

Traditional Approach:

It starts with a vibrant group who goes through a "no fun, hard work" process where the problem is defined and failures analysed. This usually only involves top or senior management. The focus is on what is

Radical circumstances require radical action. This piece of knowledge has been quoted and re-quoted in recent years. This is especially true for the tough times the world has experienced in the past 24 months.

Common wisdom prescribes that it is during these difficult times that companies must focus on their core business, shed unnecessary costs and transform the organisation into a "lean, mean, surviving machine".

To achieve this, companies use a mixture of organisational development (OD) tools that have been used time and again by OD consultants. After all, these methods worked in the past, why will they not work again? But maybe the time has come really to consider radical action and not only change a company, but totally transform it.

To this end, managers should consider a new and exciting OD tool, called Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an OD tool that focuses on the positive, life-giving factors in an organisation. It is used to help organisations change by focusing on what has worked well for them in the past. A simple concept, but quite at odds with most approaches that focus on "problem solving". The amazing thing about focusing on what is working, is that people already know how to do it.

This article describes the AI model and compares it with traditional OD methods.

What is Appreciative Inquiry?

There are two sayings that hugely influence the way companies and consultants deal with problems. The first is: "If you can measure it, you can manage it" and the

second is "In order to improve (grow) you need to know what is wrong and then focus on fixing it"

These sayings are in direct contradiction to the "logic" behind Appreciative Inquiry.

The most outstanding aspect of AI is the fact that it focuses on the positive side of matters. This includes the positive stories of how it has been at the best of times, as well as the positive dreams of what it could be like.

AI is by its very nature not a specialist consultation process, where the consultant has all the answers, which he or she suggests to his/her client. AI is a consultation process where the company (client) discovers for itself how well it has been and how great it can become.

The nature of AI is not a pure analytical and/or mathematical approach. It has at its core a huge portion of psychology, as the process of obtaining data affects the way people think about their company or organisation.

In simple terms, AI is a mind adjusting or changing tool. It works in the following way: A project will be launched that will, for example, focus on the culture of a company. Note that it will not focus on the problem with the culture, as that will be negative, but it will focus on the positive. Hence even the project name will be a positive one.

A questionnaire will then be drawn up and through interviews, employees will complete it. The questionnaire will typically ask questions such as: "Tell me about your most positive experience while working for this company" or "What positive things about this company made you decide to join?"



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wrong and very often results in “pity parties,” i.e. sessions where people sit and complain about all that is wrong. Mostly they will leave these sessions very negative.

The outcome of these processes is very often a lengthy document that soon becomes a SOTS document (SOTS = Strategy On Top Shelf). It is very difficult to convert this into a solution that lives in the hearts and minds of all members of the organisation.

AI Approach:

This also starts with a vibrant group, but this time it includes people from all levels, if not all, in the organisation. They go through a positive, “search-for-what-works” process. They focus on what was best, and what can be the best future. The nature of these

sessions leads to positivism, creativity and a new hope for the future.

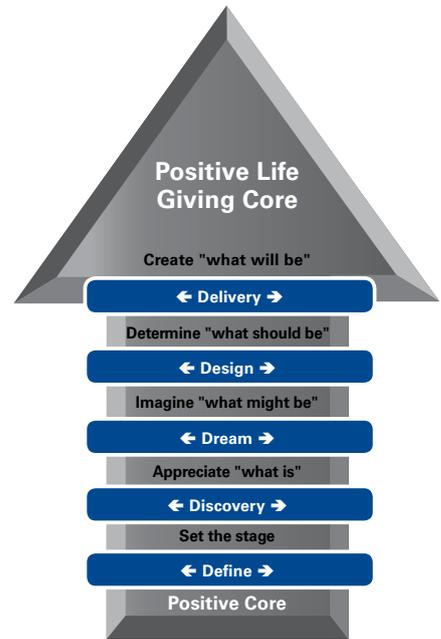
Here management does not need to sell the outcome (to get employee buy-in), as the employees already own the outcome.

This approach also creates increased levels of energy and very often not only change people's views of their organisation, but also changes their attitude towards life in general.

Considerations in the designing of AI approach to change management (OD)

The AI approach can be described as a five-D, which forms the basis of the theoretical and practical considerations of AI as an organisational intervention. This is depicted in the following diagram:

Phases of appreciative inquiry – 5 D model.



TRADITIONAL OD APPROACH	AI APPROACH
Organising is a problem to be solved “Felt need” identification of the problem Analysis of causes Analysis of possible solutions Action planning	Organising is a mystery to be embraced Appreciating – “Valuing The Best Of What Is” Envisioning - “What Might Be” Dialoguing - “What Should Be” Innovating - “What Will Be”



UJ QE pass rate increases despite overall decrease

The results of the Part 1 of the SAICA Qualifying Examination (QE1) towards the professional qualification of Chartered Accountants in South Africa, released on Friday 28 May 2010, shows the outstanding success of the University of Johannesburg (UJ) Department of Accountancy’s academic teaching programmes.

Whilst the national pass rate declined in 2010, the UJ pass rate increased to 87%.

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The steps are followed in a linear mode:

- Define** – Awareness of the need for development. Preparing for an appreciative process. Committing to the positive.
- Discover** – “What on earth is going on in this company?” This is the interview process and gathering of life-giving experiences within the company. Valuing the best of what is.
- Dream** – “What could our company look like? What would it look like in five years time?” This stage is about developing common images of the future. Visioning the ideal.
- Design** – Aligning values, structures and mission with the ideal (dream). Developing achievable plans and steps to make the vision a reality. Dialoguing what should be.
- Deliver** – Reaching your goal. Co-creating a sustainable and preferred future. Who, What, When, Where, How? Innovating what will be.

The following should be taken into consideration when designing an AI questionnaire:

AI Specifies that all questions should be open-ended. Questions should also always be positive, i.e. never focus on the wrongs or problems in the organisation. On a practical level, questions should also focus on the central theme; otherwise you will get good stories, but not related to any specific theme.

The value of AI approach

Strengths

- AI is an exceptional way of dreaming, designing and discovering the positive life-giving aspects of an organisation.
- The positive approach of AI really stimulates a positive attitude among employees, which assists in creating a very positive dream.
- AI assists in uncovering previously hidden resources, such as creativity, in people. It also stimulates their imagination.
- AI can be used for many aspects such as vision and mission determining, strategic planning and company culture changing.

Weaknesses

- AI is not a good tool to look for solutions to a specific problem.
- Due to its unstructured nature, very little is known if you're on the right track. This is confirmed by Golembiewski (1998: 32)
- When using AI, one has to first determine a specific theme (Define). This might lead to tunnel vision, i.e. any solution outside this theme will not get listed.
- Golembiewski (1998: 11-20) lists the

following shortfalls (that can also be construed as disadvantages) :

- AI dwells on instrumental-values rather than end-values. Other approaches to planned change provide rules to deal with these conflicts.
- Conventional OD is seen as a three-legged stool: the character and quality of interaction; policies, procedures and structures for organising work and workers. AI is a one-legged stool for good or ill.
- AI has developmental inadequacies both from an individual perspective and a group perspective.
- AI has inadequacies as an interaction-only, which means AI rejects two realities in conflict. AI also handles team conflict poorly, whereas historic action research focuses on differences and disagreements. That is differences in perceptions, preferences and priorities that cause dysfunctions in the way people deal with each other.

Advantages

- AI results in a positive mindset and energy rather than a blaming culture.
- AI creates a learning environment where self-driven learning is the norm.
- AI gets people to think and dream about how good it has been and how good it can be.

- It is a process that generates positive relationship building in organisations. Members require the best of each other.
- It is a regenerating process that is life-giving rather than life-draining during a change process.

Disadvantages

- AI is not a good process for pre-judged outcomes. This is confirmed by Rossi (1999: 2) when he says “where predictability and a linear process and outcome is required, you need to avoid AI”.
- It is a time consuming process compared to other interventions.

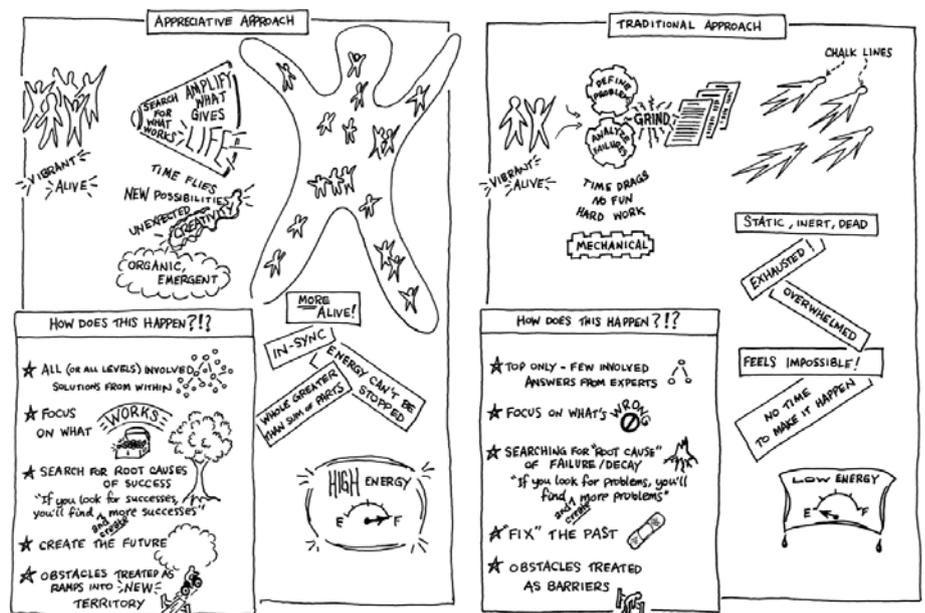
Attachment A summarises well the whole AI approach as compared to the traditional approach. [asa](#)

For further reading and reference please go to www.accountancysa.org.za

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Source: Golembiewski, R.T. 1998. Appreciating appreciative inquiry: Diagnosis and perspectives on how to do better. Research organisational change and development. Vol. 11:1-45.

Attachment A



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