This chapter addresses the third use of Appreciative Inquiry within an evaluation context—using AI to develop evaluation systems. As a whole-systems approach, AI helps align evaluation activities with an organization’s mission and performance goals. All too often, evaluations are conducted as intermittent, standalone, disconnected studies. This chapter first discusses the need for evaluation systems and what elements make up such systems. It then explains how Appreciative Inquiry can be used to design evaluation systems and provides two cases as illustrative examples.

As our world has become increasingly interconnected and the pace of change has quickened, organizations have employed a variety of strategies to develop ways of detecting, understanding, and adapting to shifting internal and external requirements. These include

- Investing in monitoring and evaluation activities in order to assess and support continuous progress, to provide ongoing feedback to leaders and funders, and to learn from the experiences of organization members
- Developing knowledge management systems and increasing technology access and connectivity
• Providing learning opportunities using blended methods of classroom training, eLearning, mentoring, and communities of practice
• Strengthening leadership capacity through programs that develop organization members’ emotional intelligence
• Aligning organizational structures and processes to adapt to evolving goals and customer needs and expectations

Within this context, Appreciative Inquiry has much to offer organizations as they strive to remain relevant, competitive, creative, and socially responsible. In particular, AI has a unique role to play in supporting an organization’s efforts to build and sustain evaluation systems. As organizations continue to build their internal evaluation capacity and become committed to ongoing and embedded evaluation practice, it becomes ever more critical that they develop evaluation systems that organize, guide, and communicate their work. At an organizational level, designing and implementing an evaluation system ensures that all evaluation activities contribute to continuous learning, informed decision making, and the use of evaluation findings. Such a system also reinforces the likelihood that

• Evaluation activities relate to and contribute to the organization’s strategic plan, vision, and mission
• Evaluation results are fed into decision-making systems and structures
• Evaluation activities are integrated and connected and, as a result, maximize resources
• Organization members learn from each evaluation experience and share that learning

At the individual and group levels, the development of an evaluation system helps organization members understand how

• Evaluation affects all programs and processes in the organization
• Different parts of the evaluation system work together
• The findings of one evaluation may influence the design and implementation of future evaluations
• Evaluation is everyone’s responsibility
• Evaluation is integral to operational management and decision making

Ultimately, the establishment of an evaluation system communicates an organization’s long-term commitment to inquiry as a means of achieving its goals and objectives. This chapter describes how Appreciative Inquiry can be used to help organizations develop evaluation systems regardless of how much experience they have had with evaluation.
Designing an Evaluation System

Simply stated, a system is “a set of components that work together for the overall objective of the whole” (Haines, 2000, p. vi). Thus, an evaluation system is a means for identifying, developing, implementing, and sustaining those things that support evaluative inquiry. What follows in this chapter is an example of an evaluation system that has grown out of our evaluation work with numerous U.S. and international public, nonprofit, corporate, government, education, and healthcare organizations. In our view, an evaluation system is made up of five essential components (see Figure 5.1).

1. Leadership Commitment
2. Evaluation Vision and Philosophy
3. Evaluation Strategic Plan
4. Evaluation Design and Implementation Requirements
   • Evaluation Plans
   • Technology Resources and Infrastructure
   • Communication Systems
   • Flexible and Responsive Evaluation Practices
5. Personnel and Financial Resources

When each component is fully designed and implemented, the evaluation system should work efficiently and effectively—it should provide useful, timely, and cost-effective evaluation results. If, for any reason, the organization chooses not to include one or more of the system’s components, it is important to understand that the overall system’s effectiveness will likely be compromised. That is, each of the system’s elements is related and interdependent with the others; a change in (or exclusion of) one component will ultimately affect the quality and impact of the remaining components—that is, the evaluation process and its outcomes.

System Component 1: Leadership Commitment

Successful evaluation practice is highly dependent on how effective leaders (at all levels within the organization) are at communicating the belief that evaluation is a meaningful and important activity, and that evaluation is about building on the organization’s strengths as well as identifying areas for improvement. Thus, leaders must consistently communicate the importance of evaluation for decision making, and encourage a culture of inquiry.
based on asking questions, reflection, and dialogue. Leaders who support evaluation

- Provide resources (financial, time, personnel) for conducting quality evaluations
- Demonstrate the value of evaluation by using evaluation findings to make decisions
- Encourage organization members to participate in evaluations and use their findings
- Use evaluation findings to make improvements to the organization’s programs, processes, policies, products, and systems
- Use evaluation findings to share lessons learned
- Celebrate and communicate an evaluation’s findings and how those relate to the future of the organization
- Frame negative findings as opportunities to improve, learn, and grow

Because organization members are acutely attuned to the actions of its leaders, they know when the organization is sincerely committed to an effort, and when it is not. In other words, the organization’s leadership must walk the talk of evaluative inquiry every day. Leaders must be champions of evaluation—they should be able to recognize good evaluation practice, they should model data-based decision making, and they should expect that all members will engage in evaluative inquiry as part of their jobs.

System Component 2: Evaluation Vision and Philosophy

Having a clear articulation of the organization’s vision and philosophy about evaluation and its role in the organization is critical for supporting ongoing evaluation work. This information not only helps guide the system’s development, but it also educates members about the value of evaluation and the nature of a successful evaluation system.

A vision statement for evaluation describes the organization’s values and beliefs regarding evaluation practice. It communicates the role that evaluation plays in organizational decision making, why evaluation is important, and how evaluation contributes to the future of the organization. The vision statement should be communicated throughout the organization in a variety of formats and should form the basis for all evaluation work. Once the vision statement has been developed, it should be revisited annually to determine if any changes are warranted.

Related to the vision statement is a statement of evaluation philosophy. This statement communicates the organization’s preferred model or
approach (not methods or design) that will guide evaluation practice. It is important to communicate the organization’s evaluation philosophy in a number of ways so that all members understand the purpose of evaluation and its role in the organization. For example, the evaluation philosophy statement could be communicated through

- An email message to organization members prior to the beginning of any evaluation
- Posters or flyers displayed throughout the organization
- An evaluation column in the organization’s internal newsletter
- Verbal statements made at staff meetings or other opportune times
- A footnote in every evaluation report
- Brochures that are used to market various programs and services

The following illustrates one organization’s evaluation vision and philosophy:

We are deeply committed to using a collaborative, participatory, and learning oriented approach to evaluation. Evaluation is often most successful when it is conducted by teams of organization members (perhaps including external constituents) who have different experiences and responsibilities relative to the program or service being evaluated. Working collaboratively on an evaluation enables employees to

- Pool their collective knowledge and skills regarding the program being evaluated as well as the practice of evaluation
- Make public particular biases that can be acknowledged, and managed
- Build their evaluation capacity
- Increase the credibility and quality of the evaluation
- Share their learning about the evaluand and evaluation with others in the organization
- Appreciate the work of others in the organization
- Develop new insights into their work and the work of the organization
- Complete the evaluation in a more timely and cost effective way

An evaluation philosophy statement could also convey the organization’s beliefs about the use of evaluation findings and its commitment to the ethical and professional conduct of evaluation by grounding all evaluation activities in the Program Evaluation Standards and the American Evaluation Association’s (AEA) Guiding Principles (see www.eval.org for more information). The following statement reflects this promise:
We are dedicated to conducting quality and useful evaluations and believe that both internal and external evaluators must act ethically and professionally. Therefore, evaluation practice should, at all times, reflect the standards and principles of the evaluation profession. When questions arise concerning the “right thing to do,” these standards and principles should be consulted.

An organization that wishes to ground its evaluation philosophy in Appreciative Inquiry might also include the following statement:

_Evaluations conducted in this organization will ensure the study of successful practices and the alignment of evaluation with the vision of the organization. Whenever appropriate and feasible, appreciative questions will be included on surveys and interview guides when implemented for evaluation purposes._

Regardless of how the statement is worded, the power and influence of having an evaluation vision and philosophy statement made explicit and public cannot be overestimated.

**System Component 3: Evaluation Strategic Plan**

An evaluation strategic plan describes how, when, by whom, and to what extent various programs, processes, products, policies, and services will be evaluated. Decisions regarding when to evaluate may depend on various factors including (a) the length of time the program has been in operation, (b) how the findings will be used—what kinds of decisions need to be made, and (c) how often the program is offered. Having an evaluation strategic plan ensures that

- Organization members integrate evaluation into their day-to-day work
- There are sufficient resources for evaluation activities
- There is little to no duplication of evaluation efforts
- Important aspects of the program or organization are periodically evaluated
- There is some degree of coordination and collaboration between and among various evaluation efforts
- There may be learning across evaluation teams.
- There is responsible use of resources

An evaluation strategic plan is an excellent tool for communicating the ongoing progress and outcomes of various programs and processes within
the organization. As a result, the information gathered from evaluations may also provide invaluable feedback for reviewing and revising the organization’s strategic plan.

**System Component 4: Evaluation Design and Implementation Requirements**

To ensure that the evaluation system is implemented in ways that reflect professional evaluation practice, it should include guidelines for designing and implementing credible and useful evaluations. The following describes four requirements that contribute to successful evaluations.

**Evaluation Plans**

For every evaluation conducted, regardless of its scope and cost, an evaluation plan should be developed. As described in Chapters 2 and 3, an evaluation plan, at the very least, communicates the evaluation’s purpose, key questions, stakeholders, design, data collection and analysis methods, timeline, budget, and other project management information. The evaluation plan is a means for establishing the evaluation team’s role and responsibilities, and for communicating with others the purpose of the evaluation and the intended uses of the evaluation’s results. Included in the evaluation plan should be a logic model of the program being evaluated.

**Technology Resources and Infrastructure**

In the last several years, technology has been playing an increasingly important role in the design and implementation of evaluation studies. For example, evaluators are

- Using concept mapping tools for developing evaluation logic models
- Using groupware to conduct interviews
- Designing and implementing online surveys
- Conducting interviews over the Internet or Intranet
- Using voice-recognition software for transcribing interviews
- Using qualitative analysis software packages
- Using quantitative analysis software packages
- Using the organization’s Intranet or the Internet to store and distribute evaluation findings
• Developing knowledge management systems in which evaluation processes and findings are stored
• Using project management software to track evaluation activities
• Discussing evaluation findings and recommendations for action in online chat rooms

In order to fully maximize the use of technology in evaluation practice, it is essential that the evaluation system incorporate guidelines for developing a technology infrastructure that (a) supports the purchase of computer hardware, peripherals, and software, (b) establishes and maintains network accessibility, and (c) supports the hiring of individuals who can develop and sustain the use of various technologies. A review of the organization’s larger technology infrastructure may also provide ideas for how evaluation activities may tap into the organization’s existing databases.

Communication Systems

An evaluation system should include the means for communicating and reporting an evaluation’s progress and results. Not only should those involved in conducting the evaluation be apprised of the evaluation’s findings and recommendations, but the stakeholders should also be provided with some form of communication that summarizes the evaluation’s purpose, key questions, design, and results. If the organization wants to build the evaluation capacity of its members, then it must commit to sharing what is being learned from its evaluation work. In addition to the typical lengthy final report, there are many ways in which evaluation processes and findings can be communicated and reported. These include executive summaries, newsletters, posters, flyers, email messages, written memos, verbal presentations, Web pages, press release, video/DVD, and working sessions. (For more strategies on communicating and reporting, see Torres, Preskill, & Piontek, 2005.)

Flexible and Responsive Evaluation Practices

Because all evaluation contexts and conditions are different, evaluation practice should not reflect a “one size fits all” approach, nor should it be rigid in its design and implementation. Rather, evaluation needs to be both flexible and responsive to organizations when they experience things such as (a) unanticipated organizational changes (e.g., change in leadership, mergers, lay-offs, closings), (b) federal and state regulations and requirements, and (c) political agendas and pressures. Many evaluators have been called on to change an evaluation question, to redesign the data collection plan, or to work with a new stakeholder, all as a result of unanticipated changes in the organization. In terms of developing an
evaluation system, being flexible and responsive means designing each evaluation according to the stakeholders’ needs for information, choosing an evaluation design and data collection methods that will credibly answer the key questions, and taking care to perform evaluation in accordance with the profession’s code of ethics and values. This ultimately involves understanding a range of evaluation models, approaches, and techniques (see Chapter 2 for a list of evaluator competencies).

**System Component 5: Personnel and Financial Resources**

Evaluation systems will only succeed in serving the organization if there are adequate resources dedicated to designing and conducting quality evaluations. In terms of personnel, this translates into having enough people to implement evaluations as called for in the evaluation strategic plan and provide for hiring outside consultants to train and facilitate certain evaluation-related tasks of the evaluation if necessary. If the goal is to build the capacity of organization members to conduct evaluations, then employees should also be encouraged to participate in evaluation-related studies, workshops, and university courses. (For more information on evaluation workshops and courses, see American Evaluation Association, www.eval.org; The Evaluator’s Institute, www.evaluatorsinstitute.com; and Claremont Graduate University, www.cgu.edu/sbos. An evaluation system also requires the allocation of financial resources so that employees may conduct quality and timely evaluations. These resources may result in hiring more internal staff; reallocating work loads; purchasing software and other technologies; paying for travel, materials, telephone, and duplicating; and hiring external consultants. This might mean establishing a line item for evaluation in every department’s budget.

Developing an Evaluation System

**Using Appreciative Inquiry**

The process of developing an evaluation system is inherently a strategic planning process applied to evaluation. Using Appreciative Inquiry in this context is particularly valuable because it

- Enables organizations to build on their success, create visions, think innovatively, and develop bold plans for achieving those visions
- Clarifies desired outcomes from evaluation practice
• Identifies organization members' values concerning the role of evaluation in the organization

• Clarifies the relationship between evaluation, learning, and decision making, and how the program or organization can benefit from such inquiry

• Is a whole-system process that facilitates the inclusion of many stakeholders

Because of Appreciative Inquiry's flexibility, it can be applied in various ways to develop any or all of the evaluation system's components. Using AI for this purpose is most effective when large numbers of stakeholders are involved, and the organization's leaders are fully engaged in the process. The extent to which, and how much, AI is used to develop each component of the evaluation system may depend on how much time is available and the organization's experience with evaluation. For example, the process may differ depending on whether organization members have significant experience using evaluation in the conduct of their work, or whether it is a new activity that is being added to their current work processes and job requirements. If the organization already has experience with evaluation and wants to develop an evaluation system, the topic of the AI would be evaluation. Since organization members have evaluation experiences from which they can discuss peak experiences, the information they provide can form a solid foundation for developing the new evaluation system.

On the other hand, if organization members have little experience with evaluation, focusing the AI on evaluation might not produce useful or relevant information for developing an evaluation system. In this case, the evaluator might be more successful by first focusing the AI on organization members' exceptional experiences related to the work of the program or organization. Following the paired interviews and sharing of stories, participants could then consider how evaluation might support the themes that emerged from their reflections on peak work experiences (Inquire). This discussion would likely result in a vision of what constitutes meaningful evaluation practice (Imagine). Figure 5.2 outlines these two strategies for developing an evaluation system in organizations with differing levels of evaluation experience.

The major difference between these two approaches is the focus of the inquiry. For organizations that have little to no evaluation experience, the AI process helps them articulate their views of excellence for the organization overall. Once participants are grounded in stories of success, it is easier to move them toward focusing on how an evaluation system would further contribute to the organization's effectiveness.
Examples of Using Appreciative Inquiry to Develop an Evaluation System

The two case examples that follow illustrate each of these organizational contexts. In the first case, Sandia National Laboratories had significant experience in conducting evaluations of their training and organization development efforts, but they lacked an integrated approach that was cost effective and user-friendly. In the second case, which highlights the World Bank’s Conflict Resolution system, the organization had little evaluation experience. This case describes how a newly emerged system of five offices had just developed a strategic plan and had participated in the annual staff survey. Although one office had some experience using exit surveys, as a whole, the group had not designed or conducted any evaluations. Each of these case examples illustrates how Appreciative Inquiry was used to develop their respective evaluation systems.
The mission of the Corporate Education, Development, and Training (CEDT) Department at Sandia National Laboratories (SNL) is “Leading the creation and implementation of a full range of results-oriented development and training solutions that contribute to Sandia’s mission success. Our competent innovative experts partner with customers to excel in a complex business environment.” Toward those ends, CEDT offers an extensive array of learning opportunities delivered through instructor-led classroom training, Web-based and computer courses, self-study, coaching, mentoring, and consulting on a wide variety of topics.

The organization’s programs and services were primarily evaluated through pre- and post-class assessments and post-course reaction surveys. With the large number of courses offered, CEDT employees have found it difficult to identify exactly how data are collected throughout the organization and how to systematically collect valid and usable data that reflect the effectiveness of their programs and services. In addition, employees have not been able to “roll up” data across types of delivery systems and report information regarding their effectiveness to all organization members.

In order for the CEDT Department to develop an evaluation system that provides valid, useful, and ongoing evaluation information, the evaluators were contracted to conduct a needs analysis of the existing evaluation deployment of CEDT and non-CEDT courses. The product was to be a user-friendly report that included (a) a framework for a comprehensive evaluation system, (b) a review of their current evaluation process strengths and weaknesses, (c) suggestions for possible software tools and techniques to collect online data, and (d) a set of recommendations for improving the current evaluation processes and system.

During a 7-hour meeting, 43 of the Department’s 52 employees (83%) participated in an Appreciative Inquiry process. Participants were told that based on their previous evaluation experiences they would be asked to provide information that would be used to develop an evaluation framework and system.

Beginning with the Inquire phase, participants, in pairs, interviewed each other for ten minutes (each). They were asked to consider the following:

Think of a time when you knew that a CEDT evaluation process was working well. You were confident and excited that important and useful data were being collected and you felt energized about the evaluation process. What was happening? Who did it involve? What made this evaluation process (or outcome) so successful? Why was it successful? What was your role? What value did you add to this evaluation process?

After 20 minutes, the pairs were asked to join two other pairs to form a group of six. In this group they were to tell the highlights of their partner’s story (2 minutes each), and then to look for themes across the group’s stories. As the themes emerged, they wrote them on flip-chart paper (an easel with paper was placed at each table). Each group was then asked to share its themes with the larger group. The following is
A sample of its responses to the questions that asked them to reflect on the aspects of the evaluation process that were working well and what made the process so successful.

- We analyze data
- Use data for improvement, decision making
- Ability to summarize data
- Evaluation was specific to what was evaluated (course or program)
- Immediate feedback to instructor(s), course manager, participants
- Information beyond test scores/performance tests
- All course evaluations measure against SNL competencies, which are incorporated into course objectives
- Multiple means/venues of data collection
- Funded enough $$ to conduct evaluation
- Customer involvement/buy-in/funding
- Resulting data/findings are trustworthy, useful, and used

After a brief discussion about the similarities and differences between the groups (there were many commonalities among the lists), the Imagine phase of the AI process was initiated. Participants were asked to work with their groups of six and to discuss the following question (30 minutes). They were also instructed to write the themes of their group’s visions on flip-chart paper.

Imagine that you have been asleep for 5 years, and when you awake, you look around and see that the CEDT Department has developed a comprehensive, effective, and efficient evaluation system. This system provides timely and useful information for decision making and action relative to the programs and services the Department provides in the areas of education, development, and training. The evaluation system has been so successful that the United States Secretary of Energy has announced that the CEDT Department will be receiving an award for outstanding evaluation practice. As a result, the Albuquerque Journal is writing a story about your evaluation system.

You agree to be interviewed by one of the newspaper’s reporters. In your interview you describe what this evaluation system does, how it works, the kinds of information it collects, who uses the information, and how the information is used. Discuss what you would tell the reporter.

The following is a sample of what participants identified as a vision for what evaluation would look like in five years:

- Stakeholders are engaged and 100% onboard
- Processes and procedures are well documented, understood, and readily available

(Continued)
We’ve won the Baldridge award
Qualitative data are easily captured/compiled, interpreted
We report meaningful data that prove our effectiveness and worth to SNL
We are a universal corporate benchmark
Evaluation is embedded in everyday work
Evaluations are specific to the intervention
Evaluation processes are well managed, funded, and part of corporate business process
Data was collected by 100% of participants because of our easy to use system
Data are reviewed regularly by stakeholders and acted upon—plan of action
Data are interpreted accurately

The groups spent approximately 20 minutes sharing their themes and discussing the ideas generated from this phase. As participants left for lunch, the conversation was lively and upbeat. The department manager commented that she thought this process was a great way to get everyone involved and engaged. Some participants were also overhead saying, “This process is energizing,” “It’s refreshing to be looking at all the things we do well,” and, “Thank you for including me in this meeting; I feel like I’m contributing.”

When participants returned from lunch, they began the *Innovate* phase where they were asked to develop concrete statements that describe a current desirable state. During this phase, participants, in their groups of six, developed provocative propositions that addressed the organization’s structure, culture, policies, leadership, management practices, systems, strategies, staff, and resources when it was involved in effective evaluation practice. The following are some of the provocative propositions they developed:

- Evaluation findings are commonly used for decision-making purposes
- All evaluation data are managed by our technical system that provides easily accessible reports to the desktop
- We use evaluation tools that collect reliable and valid data
- There is a database structure of meaningful core questions and the flexibility for customized questions for each product deliverable
- Data are automatically analyzed and “fixes” are suggested
- Reports may be generated using parameters such as course, session, date, and anything else that returns appropriate reports to the person requesting the information
- CEDT employs a full-time in-house evaluation team (n=5; including team lead) as a corporate resource for all types of interventions/assessments/evaluations
- “Evaluation” is socialized as a common language across Sandia
- Results are reported monthly through multiple channels
- The system accommodates both quantitative and qualitative data

(Continued)
We send evaluation data to the managers who sent employees to a course to show the effectiveness, what we have learned, how we're changing in response.

CEDT management creates a business case with return on investment to secure funding and full-time equivalents.

Since the evaluators were contracted to develop the evaluation system, the fourth and final phase, Implement, was modified. Participants were asked to do the following in their original pairs:

Review the provocative propositions and develop three to five recommendations for what would need to happen to make any of these provocative propositions come true. Join the other two pairs you have been working with and share your recommendations. Summarize your group’s recommendations on a piece of flip-chart paper.

This activity was important because it prepared participants to consider what would need to be done after the final report was delivered.

At the end of the day, participants were asked to reflect on their experience. They offered the following comments:

- The day was worthwhile.
- I loved this process, this was great, we should use this more often.
- It’s such a good idea to get a broad spectrum of ideas and this process did that with minimal effort.
- It seems like the only limitation to this process may be the participant’s own ability to imagine.
- It’s amazing how creative we can be when we’re asked.
- I’d like to use this process more often and with other projects.
- I was inspired by the process and the fact that the managers supported this day.

As was requested by the client, a final report and executive summary were written. The report included a matrix describing all of the current forms and methods that were being used to collect evaluation data, a list of survey software vendors that the CEDT Department might want to consider, a model of an effective evaluation system, and eleven recommendations for implementing the evaluation system.

Shortly after the evaluators delivered the executive summary and final report, the CEDT Department formed a four-person evaluation team that was made up of representatives from each of the three divisions and the manager of Technical and Compliance Training. Their first task was to carefully review and discuss each of the recommendations contained within the report. After considering these recommendations and the CEDT comprehensive evaluation system, the CEDT evaluation team identified four areas on which to focus their next steps:

1. Education
2. Process/systems/technology

(Continued)
(Continued)

3. Strategic planning
4. Evaluation success/completion criteria

Each member invited others to be part of a sub-team to design and implement initiatives related to their particular focus area. As a result of the team’s efforts, the CEDT Department has

- Implemented a requirement that evaluation sub-teams report on their progress at quarterly Department meetings
- Conducted an analysis of the capabilities of various software packages in an effort to find one that has advanced capabilities such as online delivery, database methodology, skip logic, and optical character recognition
- Purchased an online survey software system that met selected criteria
- Trained 10 individuals within the CEDT to use the new survey tool and assist with the pilot
- Conducted two focus group interviews, inviting all CEDT members to assess the need for data collected through end of course surveys
- Developed a revised end of course survey form to be used with all classroom-based courses
- Hosted a full-day online evaluation forum for the entire department on how to measure the value of online learning
- Developed an online evaluation course that is aligned with American Evaluation Association and International Society for Performance Improvement evaluation standards

In the end, the evaluators believe that using Appreciative Inquiry turned out to be not only an extremely cost-effective means for identifying and designing the system’s essential elements, but engaging most of the department’s members in the AI processes both reflected, and contributed to, the organization’s desire to be a learning organization. Feedback from the department’s leadership indicates that the evaluation system is being used and other Appreciative Inquiries are being implemented.

Case Study 14

Building an Evaluation System for the Conflict Resolution System of the World Bank Group³

The World Bank Group (WBG) has in place a Conflict Resolution System (CRS) that is comprised of five offices: Office of the Ombudsman, Office of Ethics and Business Conduct, Office of Mediation, the Appeals Committee, and the Administrative Tribunal. The first two offices (Ombudsman and Mediation) are responsible for
informal resolution processes, the Office of Ethics addresses both informal and formal processes, and the Appeals and Tribunal offices deal with more formal conflict resolution processes. This approach to conflict resolution emphasizes informal, non-adversarial, problem-solving mechanisms with multiple channels and entry points focused on prevention and conflict resolution by first parties. The primary mission of the CRS is to promote constructive means of conflict resolution, ensure employees understand their ethical obligations, and expand the skills of the employees to address these issues at the WBG.

CRS employees’ experience with evaluation was mostly limited to participation in a lengthy Annual Staff Survey, which covered a wide range of staff issues. This survey included questions regarding the use of and satisfaction with CRS services. One of the CRS offices had also been regularly implementing an exit survey of its users. The CRS offices were now interested in creating an evaluation system that could be implemented consistently across the five offices, while enabling each office to tailor evaluation activities to its specific needs and requirements. A lot of work had already gone into developing a case tracking system, which included a typology of cases, so they could track the different types of cases that came to the CRS. Consequently, the CRS managers had already been thinking about defining their work in ways they could use for evaluation purposes, so they could report to the WBG staff and Board about their work.

To begin developing the evaluation system, the evaluator planned and facilitated a 4-hour meeting with the five managers of the five CRS offices and a representative from the Human Resources Vice President’s Office in order to explore the potential scope of the evaluation system (e.g., what types of evaluation activities might be included, what aspects of the CRS might be evaluated, what data collection methods might work most effectively with the CRS population and its constituents, and how evaluation activities might be sequenced). The meeting’s agenda was as follows:

- AI into exceptional experiences of the CRS (Inquire)
- Stakeholder analysis
- Vision for the CRS (Imagine)
- Desired outcomes of the CRS
- Desired knowledge from the evaluation
- Elements of the evaluation system

During the AI in exceptional experiences, the evaluator asked the managers to interview each other in pairs on the following question (Inquire):

Reflect on your work experience at the CRS and remember a high point or peak experience you have had in your office—a time when you felt most alive, most engaged and excited about what you were doing. Tell me a story about that experience. What happened? What was your role? What role did others play? What made this possible? What were the key factors of success?

What do you most value about yourself? About the work you do? About the CRS?

(Continued)
If you had three wishes for the CRS that would make more of these exceptional experiences possible more of the time, what would they be?

The managers interviewed each other for a total of 30 minutes (15 minutes each) and shared their stories of excellence, core values, and wishes for what would create more exceptional service provided by the CRS. The group then articulated the themes that were emerging from the discussion. Notable among the themes was the importance of having WBG staff understand the role and services of the CRS, and WBG staff’s trust in the confidentiality and independence of the CRS.

This was followed by a conversation to identify CRS stakeholders. The group discussed special issues that concerned each stakeholder group, their expectations of the CRS, and the ways in which the CRS could assist them, and the organization, to develop great “conflict competence.” Next, the managers developed a vision of the CRS in response to these questions (Imagine phase):

Imagine that it is two years from now and you have just been recognized for the CRS’ outstanding service at the WBG. What is going on that makes your services worthy of an award? What are staff saying about the CRS? What is happening within the CRS? What are you doing that makes this possible?

Participants reflected individually and then shared their ideas in plenary. Reporting on this question created a multi-dimensional vision that covered many CRS functions and services, and represented a variety of perceptions and accomplishments. The managers were then asked (Innovate phase):

What are the key building blocks to work on in order to make the elements of this vision possible?

In response to this question, the group articulated the core functions and goals of the CRS in a way that clearly set out the linkages between these functions and goals with the overall mission of the CRS and stakeholders’ needs. Their responses served as a prelude to the final part of the meeting, which focused specifically on evaluation.

The final set of questions that the managers discussed in plenary were:

- In order to move toward this vision, to create these building blocks, and to enable the CRS to create more exceptional experiences for the WBG, what questions does evaluation need to answer for you?
- What information should evaluation provide?
- What learning should evaluation support?

By this time, the participants were ready to discuss their ideas for an evaluation system. Although none of the managers had an evaluation background, the Appreciative Inquiry process and the spirited discussion that preceded these questions helped them create links between the evaluation system they were creating and CRS’
mission, goals, and services. As a result, the managers were beginning to view evaluation as a vehicle for learning about their own performance, and for reporting to their stakeholders. They also agreed on the values that needed to be honored by evaluation practice within the CRS: respect for confidentiality, transparency, accountability, constructive feedback, collaboration among CRS managers, and staying within the scope of CRS services. In particular, the managers wanted the evaluation system to

- Provide ongoing information about CRS services, including
  - Information on the use of CRS services by different client groups.
  - Timely feedback from users of CRS services on their satisfaction with the process.
  - Changes in staff awareness of CRS services.
  - Staff perceptions of CRS's effectiveness.

- Support the needs of CRS managers in their decision-making practices:
  - Determine the effectiveness of CRS's training, education, outreach, and awareness services.
  - Determine the extent to which WBG staff are developing conflict competence.
  - Determine the effect of pilot programs on staff and management.
  - Determine the evolving needs of WBG staff in their developing conflict competence and link it to the CRS strategic plan.

- Provide various means for reporting:
  - Weekly reports to the Board
  - Annual CRS Report
  - Periodic reports on special issues

- Provide regular reviews on the adequacy and appropriateness of the evaluation system.

Following this meeting, the evaluator drafted a strategic plan for the evaluation system that included

- A flowchart of CRS functions, processes, outcomes, and goals
- A matrix outlining the evaluation information that the CRS wanted its evaluation system to answer, how the system would provide the information, from which information sources, through what evaluation methods, and at what time intervals
- A methods matrix that presented the methods that would be used by each part of the information system

The evaluator then met with the group several times to review the strategic plan. The managers clarified the potential use and utility of each type of evaluation activity listed in the evaluation strategic plan, considered the cost of each evaluation activity, and then prioritized evaluation activities according to their importance, practicality, and cost.

(Continued)
Incorporating Appreciative Inquiry into developing the CRS' evaluation system added significant value to the process. AI helped to honor and respect the unique values of the CRS. It helped the managers think of evaluation as a constructive rather than punitive process. And, most of all, it created a link between the program's goals and desired outcomes, and evaluation, in a way that felt exciting, comfortable, and interesting for CRS managers. After the system was agreed to, two CRS managers and the evaluator presented their work at the Association for Conflict Resolution Annual Conference. Those present at the conference session commented that Appreciative Inquiry is philosophically consistent with the values of conflict resolution. This realization made evaluation even more attractive to them.

Summary

This chapter has emphasized that an organization will benefit most significantly from evaluative inquiry when there is a system to guide the design and implementation of all evaluation studies. Essential elements of an evaluation system include an evaluation strategic plan that articulates an evaluation vision and mission, the necessary financial and personnel resources, an evaluation plan for each inquiry, technological resources to support the collection of data and the dissemination of findings, and the leadership to support ongoing learning from evaluation. All of these elements contribute to obtaining useful and relevant information for organizational decision making. This chapter further described how Appreciative Inquiry can be used to help an organization design a functional and meaningful evaluation system. This is a particularly fitting application of AI because of its focus on whole-systems and strategic thinking. In addition, using Appreciative Inquiry to develop an evaluation system creates clear linkages between programmatic goals, desired outcomes, and the purpose and scope of the evaluation.

Notes

1. An earlier version was developed with Barbra Zuckerman Portzline, PRISM Evaluation Consulting Services, Albuquerque, NM. Reprinted with permission.
2. The evaluation was conducted by PRISM Evaluation Consulting Services, Albuquerque, NM. An earlier version of this case was published in an issue of the AI Practitioner, February 2005. Reprinted with permission.
3. The evaluation was conducted by EnCompass LLC, Potomac, MD. Reprinted with permission.