The only real voyage of discovery exists, not in seeing new landscapes, but in having new eyes.

—Marcel Proust

Asking questions is fundamental to organizational learning, growth, change, renewal, and success. The kinds of questions we think matter most are those that are learning oriented—questions that challenge our assumptions, affirm each others’ strengths and gifts, help us reflect on past successful experiences, foster creativity and innovation, and stimulate curiosity and excitement. For organizations and communities to move forward, to reach their goals in an unpredictable and chaotic world, it is critical that we begin to ask more questions. The questions that will help us achieve our future are not those that accuse, find fault, and condemn, but those that create energy, hope, and motivation. This chapter introduces the reader to an organizational development and change process called Appreciative Inquiry (AI). In addition to describing the history and underlying assumptions, principles, and practices of Appreciative Inquiry, it includes two case examples of how AI has been applied to designing and facilitating organizational development and change.

Defining Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is a group process that inquires into, identifies, and further develops the best of “what is” in organizations in order to create a better future. Often used in the organization development field as an
approach to large-scale change, it is a means for addressing issues, challenges, changes, and concerns of an organization in ways that build on the successful, effective, and energizing experiences of its members. Underlying AI is a belief that the questions we ask are critical to the world we create. In so doing, “organizations move toward what they study” (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003, p. 29). As Watkins and Cooperrider (2000) explain, Appreciative Inquiry seeks what is “right” in an organization. It is a habit of mind, heart, and imagination that searches for the success, the life-giving force, the incidence of joy. It moves toward what the organization is doing right and provides a frame for creating an imagined future that builds on and expands the joyful and life-giving realities as the metaphor and organizing principle of the organization. (p. 6)

Thus, AI is both a philosophy and a process for creating the kinds of organizations in which people want to work, and a world in which they wish to live (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). As an organizational change approach, however, Appreciative Inquiry addresses organizational issues in a significantly different way. Instead of focusing on problems and what is not working and why, Appreciative Inquiry asks organization members first to discover what is working particularly well and then to envision what it might be like if “the best of what is” occurred more frequently. Based on their images of what can be that are born from the best of what was, organization members design and implement the desired changes. As Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) note, “Appreciative Inquiry borrows from the strengths of many other practices in the field of organization development” (p. 10). These include Open Space Technology (an approach to self-organizing), whole scale change (facilitating large-scale meetings), organizational learning (valuing inquiry, dialogue, and reflection), and Future Search (bringing stakeholders together to create the future). Yet, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom propose that AI is distinctly different from other organization development approaches because it is (a) fully affirmative, (b) inquiry-based, and (c) improvisational (p. 10).

Since the late 1980s, Appreciative Inquiry has been used in a wide variety of organizations and for many different purposes. It has been applied to strategic planning, culture transformation, increasing customer satisfaction, organization redesign, and leadership development. It has also been used to integrate organizations after a merger, to build alliances and union-management partnerships, for peace building, and for implementing educational reform and economic development efforts (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Appreciative Inquiry has also been used to help organizations improve more effectively through “discovery and valuing, envisioning, dialogue and co-constructing the future” (Ashford & Patkar, 2001, p. 4). Furthermore, AI supports generative learning within
organizations—learning that “emphasizes continuous experimentation, systematic rather than fragmented thinking, and a willingness to think outside the accepted limitations of a problem” (Barrett, 1995, p. 36). This learning culture enables organization members to challenge underlying assumptions, raise fundamental questions regarding organizational life, and reframe what has been taken for granted (van der Haar & Hosking, 2004).

To understand better why Appreciative Inquiry is successful, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) interviewed people who had participated in AI workshops and activities. The data from their interviews indicated six reasons why Appreciative Inquiry works (pp. 20–21):

1. It builds relationships enabling people to be known in relationship, rather than in role.
2. It creates an opportunity for people to be heard.
3. It generates opportunities for people to dream and to share their dreams.
4. It creates an environment in which people are able to choose how they contribute.
5. It gives people both discretion and the support to act.
6. It encourages and enables people to be positive.

What makes AI unique as an organizational development and change process is its attention to (a) being purposefully positive, (b) building on past successes, (c) emphasizing a grass roots and top down approach, (d) being highly participative, (e) stimulating vision and creativity, and (f) accelerating change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2002). Not wanting to dismiss all problem-focused approaches to change, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) explain, “in our experience, deficit-based change can work—it has for years, just not as effectively as positive change” (p. 16).

As the definitions of the words appreciate and inquiry imply, Appreciative Inquiry is about recognizing the best in people; acknowledging those things that give life; affirming past and present strengths, successes, assets, and potentials; and asking questions, studying, and searching, exploring, and investigating.

A Movement Toward Appreciative Language

The words we use in our normal daily discourse matter. How and what we choose to communicate reflects not only how we think and behave, but it also affects how those around us respond to what we say. According to Elliott (1999), “what the appreciative approach seeks to achieve is the
transformation of a culture from one that sees itself in largely negative terms—and therefore is inclined to become locked in its own negative construction of itself—to one that sees itself as having within it the capacity to enrich and enhance the quality of life of all the stakeholders—and therefore moves toward this appreciative construction of itself” (p. 12; emphasis in the original). The negative terms to which Elliott refers are reflected in the deficit-based vocabularies that are often used in our personal and professional lives. For example, the language frequently used to describe organizational deficits includes organizational stress, work alienation, role conflict, defensive routines, bureaucratic red tape, turfism, groupthink, burnout, neurotic, and dysfunctional organization. Words to describe human deficit include depressed, anti-social, paranoid, mid-life crisis, controlling, obsessive-compulsive, anal, and identity crisis. Appreciative Inquiry practitioners believe that this language not only creates images that restrict creativity, hope, and success, but that if you look at problems, you tend to find and create more problems. Conversely, if you look for success, you are more likely to find and create more success.

In search of a more productive and effective way to work with students, clients, customers, colleagues, and community members, various professions have eschewed the use of deficit-based language where terms such as broken, dysfunctional, sick, problem, defensive, disability, neurotic, incompetent, and burnout are used to describe why things are the way they are, or why things will not change. As a result, interest in asset-based and strengths-based approaches to addressing issues in communities and organizations has been increasing over the last several years. The following are some examples.

Community Development

The field of community development has been adopting an asset-based approach to its work for several years. John Kretzmann, of The Asset-Based Community Development Institute based at Northwestern University’s Institute for Policy Research, believes that the focus on identifying community needs in the last few decades has been costly, ineffective, and even counterproductive. Kretzmann and McKnight (1996) suggest that people working with community development projects have taken one of two paths. The first path has focused on determining a community’s needs, deficiencies, and problems. This path, they say, has been the “most traveled.” The second path—one that they strongly advocate—focuses on “beginning with a clear commitment to discovering a community’s capacities and assets” (p. 23). Kretzmann and McKnight suggest that the first path has led to the development of a language of deficit, which in turn has led to a plethora of deficiency-based policies and programs. As a result of the underlying assumptions of problem-focused services,
community residents begin to see themselves as “people with special needs that can only be met by outsiders” (p. 23), thus further enabling the “dependency syndrome” that often characterizes such systems. However, using an asset-based approach empowers communities to make the most of what is working well and helps them allocate new and existing resources more effectively. As Kretzmann and McKnight explain, “This community development strategy starts with what is present in the community, the capacities of its residents and workers, the associational and institutional base of the area,” and builds on the relationships already in place in the community (p. 27). An asset-based approach also acknowledges that not all communities are the same—that each has different strengths and interests and thus different strategies will work with different communities based on their internal interests and capacities.

Asset-based approaches recognize the value of the social capital present in relationships and interactions between community groups and individuals. An example of such an asset-based community development effort is The Connecticut Assets Network (CAN; http://www.ctassets.org/about/index.cfm), a grassroots nonprofit network of citizens that promotes the integration and successful use of asset-based strategies to community development. The organization believes that community members should be networking and engaging in conversations “to develop asset-rich relationships where people discover their many gifts, talents, and capacities for mutually beneficial problem solving.” To emphasize the importance of asset-based language as a foundational principle, CAN has developed a vision, mission, values, and goals that illustrate the affirmative philosophy that guides their work (see Figure 1.1).

Asset-based community development is based on a belief that individuals have had many difficult experiences and, as a result, have summoned a variety of resources to survive and even thrive.

Social Work

Similar to the asset-based approach to community development is the strengths perspective being applied in the social work field. According to Roff (2004),

The strengths perspective encompasses an approach to social work practice that emphasizes the strengths and resources of people and their environments, rather than their problems and pathologies . . . with its emphasis on fostering the innate problem-solving capacities of individuals, families and communities, [a strengths perspective] provides social workers with a framework that moves away from pathology and towards development and growth. (pp. 203–204)
Vision:
The Connecticut Assets Network envisions people living in communities where everyone is a resource and makes a difference.

Mission:
The Connecticut Assets Network promotes the integration and successful use of asset-based strategies to build healthier communities, where people discover and share their many gifts, talents, and capacities.

Values:
We believe:
- Communities support neighbors in meeting and respectfully working with one another.
- Neighbors participate in discovering each other’s abilities (connectedness).
- Individuals, associations, and institutions contribute time and abilities in supporting and caring for their community (cohesiveness).
- Local partnerships promote responsibility in decision making and community building.
- Business, government, faith, and nonprofit organizations advance integrity in local governing boards.

Goals:
Leadership: To develop local and state leadership in the area of asset-based community development.
Resources: To develop asset-rich relationships locally that result in connections for mutually beneficial support and community building.
Strategies: To integrate strategies that promote community connectedness/cohesiveness resulting in citizen development and contribution as the foundation for sustained solutions to challenges.
Education: To promote accountability to funders and communities through tracking outcomes that leads to participatory planning.

In 1992, Saleebey published what has become a widely referenced book on the topic of using a strengths perspective in social work. In this book he and others argue that the majority of social work theories are filled with the language of pathology and problems, which only reinforces individuals’ low self-perceptions of worth and dignity. As Cohen (1999) explains, this can become, or feed, a self-fulfilling prophecy.

To refer to a human being as a paraplegic, a manic-depressive, an unmarried mother, an addict, an offender, a borderline personality, a sexual psychopath, a bag lady, a pre-orgasmic or a post-traumatic is to elevate the deficit of deviance to the status of dominant identity of that person. (p. 461)

According to Saleebey (1992), the strengths perspective in social work is based on a core set of ideas and themes that include empowerment, membership, regeneration, synergy, dialogue, and suspension of belief.
Implementing this philosophy shifts the social worker’s efforts “from professional work as the exerting of the power of knowledge and/or institution to professional work as collaborating with the power within the individual (or community) toward a life that is palpably better, and better in the client’s own terms” (p. 13). The critical point here is that the future and how to achieve it is determined by what has worked for the individual client based on his or her own strengths and assets, and not by someone who knows little of that person’s lived experiences or context.

Those who work in the mental health and social service arena are also using a strengths-based philosophy and approach in their work. Powell and Batsche (1997) explain that traditional models of human services have been based on an expert identifying and treating an individual’s problem and then recommending a treatment to restore the individual to a normalized state. They write, “sometimes referred to as deficit models, traditional approaches were characterized by paternalistic values and hierarchical behaviors in which things were done ‘for’ or ‘to’ clients” (p. 2). However, using a strength-based approach focuses instead on the unique knowledge, competencies, capabilities, and resources of individual family members as well as the family as a whole...a strength-based philosophy does not focus on the past or place blame on the parent or family for causing problems. A different approach to problem solving is utilized—one that asks what strategies and resources families currently use to solve problems and that seeks to build the family’s capacity to resolve current problems and minimize future ones. (p. 3)

Education

Strengths-based approaches are also being applied within K–12 schools. For example, in an alternative middle and high school setting with chronically disruptive students, Carpenter-Aeby and Kurtz (2000) found that a strengths-based portfolio assessment “provided a framework to organize educational and social interventions for students to take responsibility for their actions, for students and families to create new healthy narratives for school and home, and for documenting students’ hard work” (p. 229). Those who work with school populations argue that for too long youth have been treated “as ‘predators,’ their families ‘dysfunctional,’ their communities as ‘blighted’” (Osher, 1996, p. 26). It is no wonder, Osher says, that many of our interventions fail. He believes that deficit-oriented approaches that lead to “victim-blaming” only serve to reinforce research, policies, and practices that focus on deficiencies. In the end, the use of such language isolates “the client and the problem from the context in which the problem developed” (p. 27). Many are beginning to advocate that assets-based and strengths-based approaches serve as a foundation of
hope, and only with that hope can we then “look at communities as more than a nest of problems” and implement interventions that work (p. 28).

Positive Organizational Scholarship

A movement within the organizational and social sciences called Positive Organizational Scholarship is also focusing on how an affirmative stance influences and guides individual and organizational behavior. Cameron and Caza (2004) explain that

Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) focuses on the dynamics leading to exceptional individual and organizational performance such as developing human strength, producing resilience and restoration, and fostering vitality. ... POS investigates positive deviance, or the ways in which organizations and their members flourish and prosper in especially favorable ways. (p. 731)

While Positive Organizational Scholarship involves studying positive phenomena, it “does not ignore the presence of negative, challenging, or contrary aspects of organizations” (p. 731). Rather, this approach seeks “to study organizations and organizational contexts typified by appreciation, collaboration, vitality, and fulfillment, where creating abundance and human well-being are key indicators of success. It seeks to understand what represents the best of the human condition in organizations” (Cameron, Dutton, Quinn, & Spreitzer, 2004). Ludema, Wilmot, and Srivastva (1997) further suggest that “the purpose of social and organizational science ought to be to create textured vocabularies of hope—stories, theories, evidence, and illustrations—that provide humanity with new guiding images of relational possibility” (p. 1016; emphasis in the original). Those who take a positive approach to studying organizations address a wide variety of organizational issues. They include research on organizational design and structures, leadership, organizational change, work design, organizational errors and tragedies, social networks, and community building (Cameron & Caza, 2004).

Interests in positive and affirmative ways of knowing are not new, nor are they unique. The examples presented above illustrate a growing interest and commitment to using assets-based and strengths-based approaches to inquiry in several different disciplines. In the next section we describe the origins of Appreciative Inquiry and the theories on which it is based.

Origins of Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry was born out of the doctoral work of David Cooperrider in 1980 when, as a student at Case Western Reserve University,
he began his research focused on the question, “What’s wrong with the human side of the organization?” As he conducted his interviews he “was amazed by the level of positive cooperation, innovation and egalitarian governance in the organization” (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 15). He found that when he asked questions that were problem focused, people lost energy and became less engaged with the interview. However, when he asked about why things succeeded, the interviewees’ level of interest and energy increased. The power of this finding caused Cooperrider to shift his focus to analyzing the factors that were contributing to the effective functioning of the organization (in this instance, The Cleveland Clinic). The term Appreciative Inquiry was first used only as a footnote in the feedback report to the clinic. However, “the report creates such a powerful and positive stir that the Board calls for ways to use this method with the whole group practice” (Watkins & Mohr, p. 16). Cooperrider completed his doctoral dissertation in 1986 and in it he presented a set of AI principles, AI logic, and four AI phases (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny). He then began to present and write about his findings and approach in a variety of venues.

In 1990, Cooperrider along with Diana Whitney, Ken and Mary Gergen, Sheila McNamee, Harlene Anderson, and Suresh Srivastva (Cooperrider’s dissertation advisor) founded the Taos Institute (http://www.taosinstitute.com), which hosts workshops on Appreciative Inquiry and related topics, and publishes books on dialogue, social constructionist thinking, and social change. During the 1990s Cooperrider and others facilitated several large-scale Appreciative Inquiry Summits throughout the world, and published several books on AI. In 1997, the AI listserv was initiated, and it currently serves as a forum for AI practitioners to share their experiences and lessons learned (see the Appreciative Inquiry Commons at http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu for how to access this listserv). And, by the end of the 1990s, an electronic AI newsletter had been launched (AI Practitioner, http://www.aipractitioner.com). Over the last few years several books and articles have been published on AI, an increasing number of presentations describing how AI has been used in a multitude of contexts have been made at professional conferences, and numerous workshops on AI have been offered around the world.

Core Principles and Underlying Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry

AI researchers and practitioners have developed eight principles that serve as the foundation for understanding how Appreciative Inquiry is implemented, and why so many believe it works. Although Cooperrider identified the first five of these principles in his original work, the addition of principles six through eight are evidence of the continuing evolution of this approach (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003; Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003).
1. **The Constructionist Principle:** Social knowledge and organizational destiny are interwoven. This means that reality “is constructed during the social interactions of people, rather than in the mind of the individual” (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 195), and that knowledge is an evolving construct that is shaped by the experiences and conversations we have with each other. As such, the language we use, and the relationships we have with each other, create our future.

2. **The Principle of Simultaneity:** Inquiry and change are not separate; they can and should be simultaneous. All forms of inquiry should be thought of as interventions. As soon as individuals ask questions and engage in conversation, they may begin to change the way they think and act. Thus, the questions one asks set the stage for what is found and what is discovered. These data form the stories in which the future is conceived, discussed, and constructed.

3. **The Poetic Principle:** Human organizations are open books—endless sources of learning, inspiration, and interpretation. An organization’s story is continually being co-authored by the people within it as well as by those outside who interact with it; it is like a narrative, a grand story, co-authored by its various stakeholders. We can choose what we study in an organization—the choice of the inquiry influences the direction of the organization.

4. **The Anticipatory Principle:** The most important resources we have for generating constructive organizational change or improvements are our collective imagination and our discourse about the future. That is, our image of the future is what will guide us in determining how we will achieve the future. The more positive and hopeful the image of the future, the more positive the present-day action.

5. **The Positive Principle:** Momentum for change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding, attitudes such as hope, inspiration, and the sheer joy of creating with one another. People and organizations move in the direction of their inquiries—positive image results in positive action.

6. **The Wholeness Principle:** Wholeness brings out the best in people and organizations. Involving all of the stakeholders in a large group process stimulates creativity and builds a collective capacity. It is related to understanding the whole story, engaging with the whole system, and sharing one’s whole person.

7. **The Enactment Principle:** To really make a change, we must “be the change we want to see.” Positive change occurs when we have a model of the ideal future and are living examples of this future. We must be fully present and live the way we want to be. The future is now. We create it in the moment with our words, images, and relationships.
8. The Free Choice Principle: People perform better and are more committed when they have the freedom to choose how and what they contribute. Free choice stimulates organizational excellence and positive change and liberates both personal and organizational power.

As Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) write, “taken together, the eight principles of Appreciative Inquiry point to one simple message—Appreciative Inquiry is about conversations that matter” (p. 78). Summarizing these principles, Hammond (1996, pp. 20–21) offers the following:

- In every society, organization, or group, something works.
- What we focus on becomes our reality.
- Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities.
- The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way.
- People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
- If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what are best about the past.
- It is important to value differences.
- The language we use creates our reality.

These eight principles are born out of several theories and related research studies that have focused on the effects of positive image and positive thinking. First is the placebo effect, which has been an area of significant study in the medical field ever since researcher H. K. Beecher published his paper, “The Powerful Placebo,” in 1955. After analyzing data from 26 studies, Beecher concluded that 32% of the patients had responded to a placebo. Described as the measurable, observable, or felt improvement in health not attributable to the treatment, the placebo effect has been subject to a great deal of interest. The effect has typically been studied in situations where one group of individuals was provided real medication and a control group was given a sugar or dummy pill or other “fake” therapy. Many studies have found that between 35%–75% of the patients who received the placebo felt better, or their medical condition improved. Increasingly, researchers are suggesting that the placebo effect is a result of both psychological and physiological factors. Providing that “the mind is a product of the brain, and the brain and the body are intimately connected by a network of nerves and by hormones and other molecules that mediate any physiological functions,” it is possible that one’s beliefs (or mind-set) stimulate changes in one’s neurochemistry, which, in turn, produces a change in one’s physical being (Groopman,
2004, p. 163). For example, some researchers are finding that the anticipatory reality that occurs through suggestion plays a central role in how one responds to certain stimuli. And some have found that when sick people are shown care, compassion, and affection, it triggers a physical reaction in the body, which then prompts healing (Talbot, 2000).

Related to the placebo effect is the well-known and highly researched phenomenon called the Pygmalion effect, which is often referred to as the “self-fulfilling prophecy.” Put simply, the Pygmalion effect reflects the idea that what we expect to happen will happen when we have certain expectations that are projected onto another person. Although the origin of this social construct began with Merton (1948) and was considered by educational researchers in the 1950s and early 1960s, the phenomenon struck a chord with the now classic 1968 Pygmalion study by Rosenthal and Jacobsen. In their research conducted at the “Oak School,” they tested the non-verbal IQ of students in grades 1–6 and randomly labeled 20% of them as “intellectual bloomers” to their teachers. The students were again tested at the end of the year. The researchers’ results indicated strongly that children from whom teachers expected greater intellectual gains showed such gains” (Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1968, p. 184). This meant that the teachers developed positive or negative images of their students that translated into expectations for their students’ performance. Of course, what the teachers didn’t know was that the students had been randomly assigned to one of the two treatment groups, and all of the student groups were equivalent in terms of their potential performance. Set against the backdrop of the 1960s and with great concerns about the education of minority students, the research was lauded and highly publicized. Over the next 17 years, however, more than 300 reports were published that discussed, critiqued, and reviewed Rosenthal and Jacobsen’s work (Meyer, 1985). While many of the criticisms were well founded, most agree that the Pygmalion effect does exist in educational settings, although it is a much more complicated concept than originally thought.

While research on the idea of self-fulfilling prophecy was being conducted in schools, it was also being studied in work settings. Several studies have focused on how subordinates’ performance is influenced by their managers’ expectations (Berlew & Hall, 1966; Livingston, 1969). Study after study has supported the concept of the Pygmalion effect by illustrating that when employees are perceived to be low performers or to have less developed skills, they tend to perform in a manner consistent with these expectations.

A corollary to both the placebo and the Pygmalion effects is the concept of positive images. For example, Cooperrider et al. (2003) point out that various Western civilization scholars have noted that the “fundamental images held by a civilization or culture have an enormous influence on its fate... when there is a vision or a bright image of the future, the people
flourish” (p. 11–12). Often referred to as the heliotropic principle, the underlying assumption of positive images is that organizations operate like plants; they move toward what gives them life and energy, similar to how sunflowers grow toward the sun (Elliott, 1999). As a result, organizations and communities grow toward the images they hold. Thus, if organizations and communities share positive images of their future, they will be able to develop the programs, policies, processes, systems, and products to achieve that future.

The notion of positive images also plays a role in the narrative of stories that people share in organizations and communities. It is through the stories people tell in their appreciative interviews that the process of recognizing elements of success, positive experiences, and connections with others begins. As Witherell and Noddings (1991) write,

> Stories and narrative, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging in our lives. They attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, character, and even advice on what we might do with our lives. (p. 1)

Throughout the ages, stories have been “vehicles for making sense of our experiences, but they also help practitioners to determine a course of action to influence others” (Abma, 2003, p. 223). Stories have the ability to transfer cognitive, social, and cultural knowledge in ways that can be understood by a variety of listeners. Within the context of Appreciative Inquiry, this “narrative-rich environment” creates data that provide the means for analyzing high points and successes from which to build more positive experiences in the future (Ludema et al., 2003, p. 210). And perhaps most important of all, when people tell stories that remind them of hope, joy, and excitement, they often feel safer, are more collaborative, and, ultimately, they become more engaged in the change process.

Also fundamental to the concept of AI is the notion of inner dialogue. As research in the fields of medicine and mental health has shown, the voice we hear in our minds is a strong determinant of what we ultimately say or do. This voice projects both positive and negative images, and the outcomes are often related to the image projected by the inner dialogue. Bushe (2000) suggests that the “inner dialogue is mainly carried through the stories people tell themselves and each other to justify their interpretation of events and decisions” (p. 104). He further asserts that to change the organization, one has to change the inner dialogue; changing the inner dialogue then changes the stories and conversations people have with one another, and how people work together.

One influence on our inner dialogue comes from how we think about ourselves and what we know and how we learn—known as metacognition or “thinking about thinking.” Metacognition refers to one’s own
thoughts about what we know or don’t know and regulating how we go about learning (Huitt, 1997; Livingston, 1997). It is about people’s awareness and abilities to predict their performances on various tasks and to have insight into how one thinks. For example, metacognition includes asking ourselves questions such as the following: What do I know about this subject, topic, or issue? Do I know what I need to know? Did I understand what I just heard, read, or saw? Do I know where I can get some information, knowledge? (Huitt, 1997). According to Cooperrider (1999), the relationship between metacognition and Appreciative Inquiry lies in the question, “is it possible to develop our own metacognitive capacity and thereby choose between positive and negative ways of construing the world?” (p.113). Citing examples from the world of sports, Cooperrider asserts,

The best athletes are as successful as they are because of a highly developed metacognitive capacity of differential self-monitoring. . . . this involves being able to systematically observe and analyze successful performances (positive self-monitoring) or unsuccessful performances (negative self-monitoring) and to be able to choose between the two cognitive processes when desired. (p. 113)

The implication for organizations and communities is that if we can learn about how we think, question how we come to know, and ultimately choose images of a positive future, then we will be able to realize the future we want.

Theories of motivation are also critical to understanding how and why Appreciative Inquiry works. Research conducted over the last 20 years has found that people will have more intrinsic motivation to act and change when they focus on past successes and use positive images to create a desired future. In particular, studies have shown that “intrinsic motivation is positive, internalized, self-owned, high-quality motivation that promotes higher quality learning, better task performance, reduced stress and tension, more productive adaptive approach to challenge, and increased relatedness to others” (Hardre, 2003, p. 61). On the other hand, “extrinsic motivation is externalized, other-caused, low quality motivation that does not consistently facilitate those valued outcomes” (p. 62). If this is true, then Appreciative Inquiry stimulates individuals’ intrinsic motivation because they are able to focus on their own positive experiences and work toward creating more of them.

As discussed in this section, Appreciative Inquiry is grounded in several different theories and research studies. While AI principles and practices are drawn from a variety of disciplines, together they suggest that when people ask affirmative questions, reflect on and share past successful experiences, and use strengths-based language, they will have more energy, hope, and excitement about creating their desired future.
Appreciative Inquiry Models

Cooperrider and several of his colleagues developed the 4-D model to describe each phase of the AI process. The four phases are *Discovery, Dream, Design,* and *Destiny* (Cooperrider et al., 2003). Based on their own experiences and feedback received from clients, some AI practitioners have chosen to use a different set of labels that they believe are more accessible and/or descriptive of the four Appreciative Inquiry phases. The labels selected and used throughout this book are from the EnCompass model (see Figure 1.2). They are *Inquire, Imagine, Innovate,* and *Implement.*

![The EnCompass Model of Appreciative Inquiry](image)

*Figure 1.2  The EnCompass Model of Appreciative Inquiry*

Source: Encompass LLC, Potomac, MD. Reprinted with permission.
What follows is a description of each of the four Appreciative Inquiry phases. It is important to note, however, that one of the benefits of AI is that it can easily be adapted to a particular culture, context, and environment. The choice of topic, the content of the questions, and how many of the phases are implemented all depend on the particularities of the organization and the purpose of the inquiry.

Phase 1: Inquire—Appreciative Interviews

To begin the process, participants are asked to get into pairs, preferably with someone they interact with the least, and to interview each other based on a prepared interview guide. This guide typically includes a variation of the following generic core questions:

- **Peak Experience:** Think back on your experience with the XX program, and remember a time when you felt most energized and most proud to be part of this program. Tell a story about that time. What happened? What were you doing? What were others doing? What contributed to the success you experienced? Tell the story giving some detail.

- **Values:** Without being modest, what do you value most about yourself?... About this program?... About the work you do in this field?

- **Wishes:** If you had three wishes for this program to make more of these exceptional experiences possible, what would they be?

The facilitator instructs participants to interview each other for about 10–20 minutes each, although in some cases interviews may last for up to 2 hours. Participants are asked to pay close attention when listening and to assume they are listening to a great story, to help their interview partner recount more details of the story being told, and to listen for their partner’s enthusiasm in telling that story. Under no circumstances are participant-listeners to interrupt the story with comments or a story of their own. After the allotted time, the facilitator signals the dyads to switch roles; the listener now becomes the interviewee and tells his or her story.

There may be times when variations to the appreciative interview questions need to be made. For example, if there is not enough time to use all of the core questions, a shorter version can be developed that might mean eliminating some or all of the *values* questions. Or, if there are special issues that need to be addressed by the inquiry, stories might be solicited on more than one topic.

The paired interviews allow for several things to occur:

- They begin the inquiry in a non-threatening, engaging, and interesting way.
- They help participants listen to the other person’s story of success as defined by that person’s values.
• They help participants get to know one another better.
• They serve as the foundation for determining the future success of the program.

If paired interviews are not possible, then individuals may tell their stories to the whole group. (See Chapter 4 for more information on various ways of conducting appreciative interviews.)

As indicated earlier, the core questions can be modified and adapted based on the participants’ characteristics, the focus of the inquiry, and the time available. The following are sample alternative questions that could be used in this phase of the inquiry:

• As you reflect on your experience with the program, tell me a story about a highpoint.
• At what point in time did you feel most alive?
• When did you know it was working? How did you know it?
• When did you feel most successful in terms of your contributions to the project?
• Thinking about your department’s contribution to the mission of the organization, what have you done to make the biggest difference?
• What are the most outstanding moments/stories from this organization’s past that make you most proud to be a member of this organization?
• What are the things that give life to the organization when it is most alive, most effective, most in tune with the over-arching vision?
• What are we doing that should be preserved as we make changes?
• What were major milestones along the way?
• What kept you going and what was nurturing to you?
• Were there times when you said to yourself, “this is working, this is working!” What was happening during those times?
• If you could have waved a magic wand, and the project would have turned out exactly as you had planned, what would it have looked like?
• Describe a time when someone went out of his or her way to do something for you. What made it possible?
• If you could transform the ways in which you do your work, what would it look like and what would it take to happen?

It is important to understand that the telling of stories is not just to make people feel good and warm about themselves and each other. The power of the stories is in their ability to remind us of what success looked like and felt like—to relive the event and the feelings it generated; to remember that we can be successful, things can work, and that we have the capacity to bring life
and energy to our work. They reinforce the notion that as co-contributors to the organization’s goals, we often have more in common than we think. Most importantly, stories are useful data about dynamic moments of excellence that will provide the foundation for further analysis.

**Sharing Stories, Values, and Wishes**

Following the paired interviews, participants share their stories in groups of six to eight, unless the group is too small. If this is the case, stories are shared with the large group. Notably, participants do not share their own story; rather, they tell their interview partner’s story. Listening to one’s story told by someone else celebrates the participant’s experience and deepens one’s own understanding of the experience as it is listened to while told by someone else. Participants are instructed to listen for themes as they hear the group’s stories. If there is time, it is preferable that each small group might share some of the stories told at its table with the whole group. This would depend on the size of the group and the time available. The stories shared contain important information for the inquiry. Specifically, they

- Include information regarding how success is defined relevant to the topic being discussed.
- Provide information about how stakeholders have experienced the program.
- Articulate how the organization’s systems operate in reality and not in the manuals.
- Illuminate the culture of the program and/or organization.
- Provide stakeholders a chance to reflect on and co-construct a larger story of the program and the organization.
- Allow shared realities to emerge, while also inviting isolated experiences and perspectives to be articulated and preserved.

The sharing of stories is a prerequisite for beginning the organization’s reflection regarding its successes and strengths. It launches the inquiry with a celebration and the emergence of a vision of what the program or organization looks like when at its best. According to Liebler (1997), “The process of doing the appreciative interviews is as important as the data collected, for it is through the doing that the internal conversations within organizations are changed” (p. 33).

Once participants have told their stories, they are asked to describe the themes that emerged from their stories. If the group is large, participants might do this in small groups and record and report out their top five themes. Asking participants to derive themes from their stories is a means
for initiating group reflection. These themes might be seen as “causes of success” that will be used throughout the next phases of the inquiry.

After participants reflect on the themes from the stories, they share the values and wishes that came from the interviews. As participants share the values, two things tend to happen: (1) they identify shared values and appreciate others’ ideas about how to fulfill those values in the workplace; and (2) they are exposed to others’ values that may not be a priority for them and see what others need if they are to excel. Sharing values makes explicit the fundamental motivation of those who are part of a program or organization. It also clarifies the standards people use to judge their experiences—the way they understand purpose, performance, and impact. These values are fundamental to the later phases of the inquiry process.

Participants’ responses to the wishes question may later become translated into recommendations, as they tend to reflect participants’ intimate knowledge of the program or organization. Participants’ wishes also reveal their beliefs regarding

- Aspects of the program or organization that need improvement
- Aspects of the program or organization that stakeholders would like explored with more attention
- The potential benefits of the inquiry process

In many ways, the appreciative interviews are the heart and soul of the AI process. Consequently, they contribute to the inquiry’s success in a number of ways:

- They ground participants’ “success” in a real experience as opposed to an opinion of what is positive in the program.
- They require that “success” be a personal experience, thus making the participant both excited to tell it and directly knowledgeable about it.
- They make the values of the storyteller explicit, giving internal consistency and alignment of the subjective criteria based on which the storyteller considers this story a success.
- They require participants to reflect on the causes and contributing factors for that “success” highlighting systemic and unusual factors, and personal strengths leading to that success. This enables participants to begin thinking more positively about what needs to be present to ensure “success” for the subject of the inquiry. For example, participants may begin to wonder: Are there some elements that are always present, but are not integrated consistently in the project? Are there elements that are unusual or were present by chance, but might be built in?
- They generate recommendations from the three wishes question that flow from the analysis of the successful experience and will later be used to develop future actions.
Phase 2: Imagine

The next step in the Appreciative Inquiry process is developing a vision for the future of the program or organization. Participants are first invited to reflect individually on a question such as the following:

Imagine that it is 2–3 years from now and you are preparing for an awards ceremony to celebrate the program’s excellence. The New York Times wishes to write an article on this exceptional program. You are so proud to be part of this program. What is happening to make you proud? What are people saying? What is happening internally in the program or organization? What changes and/or events made this success possible?

In the instructions, participants are encouraged to be bold but realistic and to stretch their imaginations. After quiet reflection, individuals or small groups (or all together if the group is small) develop visions of a successful future of the program or organization. After the visions are developed individually and in small groups, they are shared and discussed with the large group. Groups may also be invited to draw pictures of their visions. These images are particularly effective at tapping into an individual’s or group’s creative energy. And, for some, drawing images may be more effective than words in conveying an idea or concept. This visioning exercise helps participants think about what they need to help them construct a positive future, and prepares them for implementing the results of the inquiry. It is important to select a point in the future that is far enough away that people are able to be daring but close enough so that they can see it as a future that builds directly on the actions of the present. In general, two to three years is a reasonable target; however, one can vary that number depending on the particular circumstances of the inquiry and participants’ cultural perceptions of time.

Phase 3: Innovate

It is during the Innovate phase of AI that participants’ past successes and visions for the future become concrete actionable possibilities—it is when participants recognize how change can occur and what needs to happen to make it a reality. The Innovate phase begins by having participants identify one of the themes that emerged from their interviews and visions. Participants can work on more than one theme, but it is useful if they work on one theme at a time. Once they have selected a theme, they are asked to develop provocative propositions (also called design statements, opportunity, or possibility statements). These statements, which are always written in the present tense and are affirmative, are intended to bridge the best of “what is” with participants’ visions of “what might be.” They should stretch the imagination, go beyond the obvious, and ultimately represent
elements of the organization’s social architecture. The social architecture represents those things in an organization that are needed to support the implementation of the future desired state. Cooperrider et al. (2003, p. 144) suggest that the following be considered and represented in participants’ provocative propositions:

- Business processes
- Communication systems
- Culture
- Customer relations
- Education and training
- Leadership
- Management practices
- Policies
- Shared values
- Social responsibility
- Strategy
- Structure
- Systems
- Technology
- Beliefs about power and authority
- Relationships
- Staff/people
- Governance structure
- Knowledge management system
- Practices and principles

Guidelines for developing effective propositions can be seen in Figure 1.3.

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**Figure 1.3** Guidelines for Developing Effective Provocative Propositions

Source: Cooperrider et al., 2003, p. 148.
The *Innovate* phase is reportedly the most difficult part of the AI process. It is the time when participants get to work making visions concrete, deciding on how to shape their systems and relationships differently to move toward their vision. Action planning is hard work, regardless of what methodology is being used. It becomes easier, however, when the issues are fairly straightforward, and when participants are ready to move forward. Then, provocative propositions can be written with less difficulty and within a shorter time period of one or more meetings. In other cases, the *Innovate* phase may need to stretch over a period of weeks or months in order to gather more information and consult with others. For example, the *Innovate* phase of an Appreciative Inquiry on affordable housing in Dubuque, Iowa, took 1 year and two summit meetings of a representative stakeholders group, with the period in between summit meetings devoted to interviews of community participants, and researching key regulatory issues (Webb, 2000).

The following are examples of provocative propositions. Depending on the amount of time available and the topic of the inquiry, provocative propositions can be written as paragraphs or simple sentences.

**Inquiry Topic: Community/ Neighborhood Development**

- While all of our city’s neighborhoods are attractive, livable, well-maintained areas that accommodate the varied social, economic, and cultural groups that make up our community, our older neighborhoods are a unique economic and aesthetic asset preserved with particular vigilance by all. Regardless of location, neighborhoods are clean, well-lit, accessible, and safe, with adequate green space and other appropriate amenities.

- Constant attention to neighborhood health and development has resulted in a broad range of housing options ranging from subsidized and low-cost to the highest level of market value.

- Our community has an occupancy rate of 95% and provides opportunities for rental, owner occupied, transitional, special needs, and investor opportunities in housing development.

- Realizing that buildings and the infrastructure are only part of neighborhood development, our community has made *people issues* a priority. Cooperation and collaboration are invited and encouraged with and between neighborhood associations, human service agencies, city departments and commissions, churches, schools, families, and other organizations.
Inquiry Topic: Experiencing Passion in Our Work

Quality of Work Life

- We conduct an annual evaluation of the work environment.
- The workspace is physically designed to encourage communication and community.
- There are different kinds of opportunities for employees to socialize.
- Employees vote on how best to spend a portion of the budget (non-program) in ways that have a positive impact on the quality of employee life.
- The organization’s leadership models and supports family/workplace balance; we offer child care in multiple sites and offer flexible work schedules.

Employee Recognition

- We have monthly lunches where individuals and teams are recognized for their contributions to the organization.
- There is a bulletin board announcing employee news and accomplishments.
- We have a regular e-journal that highlights employees’ contributions, success stories, and program impacts.

Communication

- We maintain a Web-based clearinghouse of resources that includes best practices and lessons learned from various projects.
- Communication is clear, uses appropriate channels, and reflects the voices of customers and staff.
- We seek ongoing feedback from our internal and external customers.
- We look for opportunities to bring various internal customers together to talk about how we’re doing.

Inquiry Topic: Customer Satisfaction

- Our customers speak highly of our organization and recommend it to others. Seventy-five percent of our organization’s revenues come from repeat purchasers. Account managers work hard to develop personal relationships with each customer. We have a highly automated contact management database, which has three components:
  - Intelligent outbound identification and calling
  - Personalized Web transaction system customized to historical buying patterns
Highly targeted electronic marketing focused on buying patterns and vertical markets

- Our company name is a household name and our Internet address is bookmarked on every possible purchaser’s computer.

As indicated earlier, participants often find the Innovate phase to be somewhat challenging. In part this is due to the amount of conceptual effort it takes to translate their successful experiences and visions into clear and specific actions they would like the organization to take as part of the change effort. This process may also require a reciprocal, negotiated dialogue with large numbers of people about how they will get organized and what changes they will make to accomplish their vision. To assist participants in developing the provocative propositions, various group facilitation and design processes can be employed. For example, the facilitator might use the concept of the Deep Dive, which is a design process that promotes creativity and innovation by bringing together people with many different types of expertise and organizes them in an intensive collaboration that delves deeply into different areas of their design goal (Kelley & Littman, 2001). During this process participants may engage in brainstorming, discussions, additional research, or field visits; conduct interviews; administer surveys; or develop models and prototypes.

Another strategy would be to use De Bono’s (1985) Six Thinking Hats activity. This exercise is used to help groups experience several different kinds of thinking perspectives, such as considering information needs, bringing passion, caution and problem prevention, creativity and new ideas, alignment of definition, purpose and stocktaking, and values and appreciation. While there are many variations for using the Six Hats activity, one approach is to distribute hats to all participants with some possibly having the same hat depending on the group size, and the topic of discussion. The task is for participants to express their opinions on the topic quickly from their hat’s perspective. Then, the hats are exchanged, and the process is repeated for a new topic. A benefit of this exercise is that it invites a wider diversity of considerations in planning and decision making, in ways that result in deeper and more informed thinking.

Process mapping through the development of flow charts is another tool that can be applied in the Innovate phase. A flow chart helps clarify how things are currently working and how they could be changed to move closer to the theme of the Appreciative Inquiry. Developing a flow chart helps to create a common understanding about the process under review (Franco, Newman, Murphy, & Mariani, 1997).

Using Open Space technology is another way to engage participants in this phase. For example, Odell (2005, personal communication) explains that he asks each person to take a piece of paper and to create a “short, sweet advertisement with a picture, logo, and/or a few choice words” that will be used to “sell” their vision. Participants take turns “selling their ad,”
in an attempt to recruit others to join their effort. They then post these on the wall and collectively work out the clustering of ads where there are similar ideas or missions. These clusters become “dream teams” that go on through the next and final phase of the AI process.

**Phase 4: Implement**

This phase of the AI process represents taking action on the provocative propositions. When participants are ready to self-organize, they choose a topic based on their individual motivations, passions, and interests. They then publicly declare their intended actions to carry out the implementation of the provocative propositions (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). Participants usually select one or more of the themes identified during the inquiry and meet with others who have similar interests. As they reflect on and discuss the work that has been done on their chosen issue or topic, they make plans for how they can make the propositions become a reality. It should be noted that there may be times when the facilitator may need to help participants negotiate and mediate which, how, when, and where the provocative propositions will be implemented. Processes such as Future Search and Open Space are particularly useful when there are competing resources, limited time, and different ideas about what is important and what changes should be made. Implementing the provocative propositions may at times be simple and quick, but in others, efforts may last for months, depending on the complexity of the tasks. When the formal Appreciative Inquiry process has been completed, participants often “walk away with a sense of commitment, confidence and affirmation that they have been successful. They also know clearly how to make more moments of success” (Hammond, 1996, p. 7). More importantly, they continue to have different kinds of conversations and continue to use the Appreciative Inquiry language to do their work.

Describing this as the final phase of the AI process is rather misleading since, in fact, most proponents of Appreciative Inquiry suggest that it is critical to “keep the conversation going” even after an inquiry has been completed (Whitney, 2002, personal communication). However, the Implement phase invites participants to celebrate and act on the work they have accomplished through their engagement in the Inquire, Imagine, and Innovate phases. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) suggest that participants address the following questions:

- **How will we learn about the gains we’ve already made?** Surveys? Appreciative Inquiry? Open storytelling sessions?
- **How will we celebrate?** What needs to happen to keep people aware of and excited about ongoing innovations? How might recognition inspire ongoing action?
What are our parameters for self-organized action? Time? Resources? Domains?

How shall we self-organize? Should we engage existing work groups, or form separate AI Learning Teams?

How will we support success? What resources, support, and expertise do people need? Who are the best people to provide what’s needed? (p. 218, emphasis in the original)

To help participants answer these questions, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom offer the following steps for implementing this phase (p. 219):

- Review, communicate, and celebrate accomplishments
- Generate a list of potential actions
- Self-organize for inspired action projects
- Support success of self-organized projects
- Systemic application of Appreciative Inquiry

It should be noted that as various actions are taken to implement the group’s provocative propositions, additional Appreciative Inquiries should be initiated to monitor the effectiveness and success of these initiatives.

Appreciative Inquiry and “Problems”

When people first learn about Appreciative Inquiry, they often question what happens to the problems. A common first reaction is that AI’s focus on success means that the problems, issues, or challenges are ignored or even denied. However, this is fundamentally incorrect. Appreciative Inquiry does in fact address issues, challenges, problems, and conflict, but it does so by shifting the focus and language from one of deficits to one of hope and possibilities based on what has worked in the past. This reframing means that the spirit of the inquiry is not about “fault finding, harsh judgment, or culpability, but rather in the exploration of what might be if changes were made” (Elliott, 1999, p. 51; emphasis in the original). As Banaga (1998) further explains,

Appreciative Inquiry does not turn a blind eye on “negative” situations or “deficit-oriented” realities in organizations; it does not substitute a “rosy” and “romantic” picture for an “objective” and “realistic” one. It accepts these realities for what they are—areas in need of conversations and transformation. . . . But AI intentionally shifts the focus of the inquiry and intervention to those realities that are sources of vitality. (p. 263)
Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) add, “We do not dismiss accounts of conflict, problems, or stress. We simply do not use them as the basis of analysis or action” (p. 18). And, as Elliott (1999) reminds us, “it is deliberately called the appreciative approach, not the affirmative approach or the positive approach or the uncritical approach” (p. 10). What these writers suggest, then, is that problems do get addressed during an AI process, but not through traditional problem-solving approaches. Rather, Appreciative Inquiry solves problems by focusing on what to do more of based on what has worked, which translates into knowing what to do less of that has not worked.

Given how endemic problem-solving approaches are in organizations, and how difficult it is for some to believe that AI does not ignore problems, it is worth considering the underlying assumptions of problem-solving approaches when addressing organizational challenges and issues. According to Watkins and Mohr (2001, p. 196), these assumptions include

- There is some ideal way for things to be.
- If a situation is not as we would like it to be, it is a “problem” to be solved.
- The way to solve a problem is to break it into parts and analyze it.
- If we find a broken part and fix it, the whole will be fixed.

And, most problem-solving approaches involve

- Identifying what is wrong
- Analyzing the causes
- Deciding on goals to fix these causes
- Making a plan that will achieve the goals
- Implementing the plan
- Evaluating whether or not we fixed the problem

While the problem-solving approach may be effective in some contexts for particular kinds of problems, it is by no means the best or only way to address many of the critical issues facing today’s organizations. Cooperrider (quoted in Zemke, 1999) suggests that the problem-solving approach is painfully slow, asks people to look backward at yesterday’s failures and their causes, and rarely results in a new vision. He further asserts, “Problem-solving approaches are notorious for placing blame and generating defensiveness. They sap your energy and tax your mind, and don’t advance the organization’s evolution beyond a slow crawl” (p. 28). Reframing the problem-solving process using Appreciative Inquiry means (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, pp. 196–197)

- Looking at our experience in the area that we want to improve in order to discover the times when things were going well—times when we felt excited, successful, joyful
Collectively creating from these stories a description for what we want (our image of the ideal)

- Asking others how they have successfully dealt with a similar situation
- Sharing our images, discovering the images that others hold, and continually re-creating a generative and creative future throughout the system

When comparing these two approaches, two critical differences emerge: (1) the language used—deficit-based vs. affirmative, and (2) the fact that some problem-solving approaches do not take into account the whole system—parts vs. holistic. Some writers suggest that as people talk about problems using deficit-based language, the problem itself will grow in magnitude and detail and participants’ energy and hope will be exhausted. And when people fail to consider the whole system and only look at the parts, they will often draw the wrong conclusion about what’s going on and make decisions that do not solve the problem. Anderson, Gergen, McNamee, Cooperrider, Gergen, and Whitney (2001) suggest that “as the problem gains in dimension and implication, so can it seem more burdensome and intractable. Energies are drained, and the group meeting becomes a chore” (p. 31). While these authors do not advocate avoiding the discussion of problems, they recommend replacing problem talk with possibility talk. They argue that problems do not energize people, but, rather, it is their visions of possibilities, something valued or desired that motivates people to act. Barrett (1995) further suggests that an analytic problem-solving approach has serious limitations that include: (a) it is inherently conservative, (b) it furthers a deficiency orientation, (c) it furthers a fragmented view of the world, and (d) it results in further separation between stakeholders (pp. 37–39). Finally, focusing on problems has the tendency to oppress rather than encourage asking questions and it often leads to reinforcing defensive routines (see Hammond & Mayfield, 2004, for an excellent discussion on the topic undiscussables and what happens when people are afraid or uncertain about asking questions and engaging in constructive dialogue).

We do not believe Appreciative Inquiry should be thought of as a wholesale replacement of problem-solving or gap analysis techniques. Certain problem-solving approaches may need to be applied in specific contexts. As Hammond (in Zemke, 1999) explains,

If you are in an airplane with a sputtering engine or you are having a heart attack, you have a problem in need of solving. You don’t want someone asking appreciative-inquiry-type questions just then. You want fault-finding and fault-analysis and fault-fixing. (p. 32)

We would add, however, that the origin of the problem and how to avoid it in the future might be best explored through an AI approach!
Applications of Appreciative Inquiry in Organization Development

To illustrate how Appreciative Inquiry has been used for organizational development and change purposes, two examples that demonstrate AI’s flexibility and adaptability are provided in this book. The first example, presented in this chapter, describes a one-day Appreciative Inquiry that was conducted to increase the collaboration between two programs at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia. The second case example, which is full of rich details, is located in the appendix to this book. This case describes a whole-systems change process that involved the transformation of Evergreen Cove, a nonprofit organization that provides alternative health care to a rural community in Maryland. This transformation was accomplished over more than a year, and has spurred grassroots action, member activism making the center more accessible to those in need, and new alliances that have established funding sources that may not have been available to Evergreen Cove prior to the AI change process.

Case Study 1

Developing Successful Collaborations at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

An outside evaluator recommended that collaboration be improved between two programs at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that provide services to the same client population: the WISEWOMAN (Well-Integrated Screening and Evaluation for Women Across the Nation) program and the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP). Both programs serve low-income women, with WISEWOMAN screening for blood pressure and cholesterol and the NBCCEDP program providing free or discounted breast and cervical cancer screening, and follow-up and treatment. Both programs shared the goal of making services more convenient for women by providing multiple screening tests during the same health care appointment (“one stop shopping”). However, the CDC WISEWOMAN and NBCCEDP staff personally identified with one program or the other and focused on the health services provided by their own program rather than on all of the services available during the health care appointment. CDC WISEWOMAN and NBCCEDP staff resided in completely different organizational groups, worked in buildings about a half-mile apart, and functioned separately. Staff from the two programs indicated that they wanted health care delivery sites to coordinate services for women and hoped that collaboration would increase the efficiency of sites. Ironically, however the outside evaluator noted that some CDC staff felt that their own attempts at collaboration at CDC seemed to drain away both their time and energy needed to accomplish their work.

(Continued)
In response to the finding of the external evaluator, a NBCCEDP staff member was assigned as a liaison to help improve the way in which the two programs collaborate. Rather than viewing the need to improve collaboration as a problem, the liaison decided to take a more appreciative approach to find ways for increasing collaboration. With the help of an Appreciative Inquiry workshop facilitator, staff from WISEWOMAN and NBCCEDP were invited to participate in a one-day Appreciative Inquiry workshop on the topic of “Successful Collaboration.” Participants were told that during the day they would be identifying ways in which they could strengthen their collaborative efforts between the two programs.

All four phases of Appreciative Inquiry were used during the workshop. For the first phase, Inquire, participants were provided the following information:

Organizations at their best encourage exceptional partnerships and collaborations in which all parties have an equal voice and share a responsibility for creating communities and organizations of the future. Such collaborations require honesty, trust, respect, open communication, enthusiasm, and a common interest as well as the ability to agree to disagree.

Participants were then asked to form pairs and to interview each other for 10 minutes (each) using the following questions:

1. Best Experience: Reflect for a moment and remember a time when you were collaborating with others to accomplish a goal or task, and it was exciting, effective, productive, even fun! Describe this experience and the qualities that made it so satisfying and successful.
   - What was it about this collaboration that made it a peak experience?
   - What were the conditions that allowed this collaboration to be so productive?
   - What did you do to make it so successful? What did others do?
   - What do you think was the root cause of this effective collaboration?

2. Values: What do you value most about
   - Yourself, and
   - The ways you approach collaborating with others?

3. Three Wishes: If you had three wishes that would ensure more successful collaborations in your work setting, what would they be?

Participants interviewed each other, presented each other’s stories to two other pairs (small groups of six), and identified and wrote the themes from their stories on a flip-chart page.

In the second phase, Imagine, participants were asked to stay in their groups of six and to consider and respond to the following hypothetical situation:

Imagine that you have been asleep for 5 years and it is now 2009. As you awake, you look around and see that the NBCCEDP and WISEWOMAN program staff are the model of effective collaboration. Not only have they created strategies, tools, and systems for collaborating, but they also approach the
majority of tasks and challenges in a collaborative way. Collaboration has become the way work gets done.

Imagine that the two programs have been so successful in their collaboration efforts that they have received a congressional award for their efforts. Two weeks after receiving “The National Congressional Bipartisan Award for Excellence in Collaboration in Government” at a Washington ceremony, imagine that you receive a phone call from the producers of the Today show, who want you and your colleagues to appear on next Thursday’s show. With the award in hand, you arrive in New York and are escorted to the set.

Imagine that Matt Lauer begins the interview by asking you to describe what collaboration looks like and how it works. He further asks: How does collaboration happen? How do you sustain collaboration? What do people do when they collaborate? What does collaboration feel like? What is happening?

What does your team tell Matt Lauer?

Participants were also instructed to draw an image representing their idea of collaboration.

After each group shared the themes from their hypothetical interview with Matt Lauer from the Imagine phase and their visual representations, they then moved into the Innovate phase. Staying in their groups of six, they were asked to review the themes that emerged from their group’s discussions during the Inquire and Imagine interviews and discussions. Then, drawing on their insights from developing these themes, the participants were asked to create 3–5 provocative propositions. These were to be written in the affirmative and present tense, describing how the two programs “are developing and sustaining successful collaborations.” Participants were instructed that provocative propositions should reflect various organizational elements such as leadership, strategy, structures, systems, communication, management practices, internal customer relations, culture, people, values, competencies, roles and responsibilities, or work processes. Participants wrote their group’s provocative propositions on sticky notes and placed the notes on multiple pieces of flip-chart paper that were positioned along the room’s wall. They were then asked to post their propositions next to those from other groups that seemed to be similar in focus.

The final phase, Implement, is where participants have the opportunity to act on the ideas that they generated in the provocative propositions. Again, participants were asked to stay in their small groups and to

- Discuss the different provocative propositions.
- Identify one or two provocative propositions that appeal to you and that you might like to work on—either as an individual or as a group.
- Develop two or three action items you will commit to making happen in the next 6 months.

The workshop ended with each group reporting to the larger group what they were planning to do to implement the provocative propositions.

After the Appreciative Inquiry workshop, a majority of participants reported on a written evaluation of the workshop that they felt more confident that they could collaborate successfully with staff from the other program. Many indicated that they were
This chapter provided a historical and theoretical overview of Appreciative Inquiry and its application to organizational development and change. It has emphasized the need for organizations and communities to focus on planning to use Appreciative Inquiry in their work and/or with their families and religious groups. Positive feelings about the appreciative process were reflected in the following comments: “This was easier than I expected and not threatening.” “Nice to work as a group together. Sets a good precedent,” and, “We’ve made the first step!”

Symbolically, conducting a joint workshop with the two programs was the first effort toward greater collaboration. During the provocative proposition phase (Innovate), staff from both programs spontaneously formed a group that promised to meet at least monthly to exchange information on the programs’ activities. As a result of the AI workshop, this group has been meeting for over a year and is finding additional ways to work together. For example, staff have attended the annual meeting of each other’s program, and the managers of the two programs have initiated periodic meetings. In addition, program documents are now on a common computer network drive so that staff from both programs can share references and access information easily. Finally, having project officers from each program travel together to conduct joint site visits in places where both NBCCEDP and WISEWOMAN services are provided in the field has enhanced collaboration.

Government programs are often the subjects of external review. In this case, an external evaluator recommended that the two programs “must continue working to improve collaboration and create a more integrated approach.” By using the Appreciative Inquiry approach, the workshop experience built on the prior successes and existing skills of staff members as a means for improving collaboration.

**Case Study 2**

**Using Appreciative Inquiry at Evergreen Cove Holistic Health Center (Full Text Presented in the Appendix)**

This case study is an example of a full AI change process that was implemented over a period of almost two years. It is an excellent example of how deep and messy and creative and engaging AI can be, and it also shows how masterful the facilitator needs to be when taking on such a large-scale change process. This case study can help the reader appreciate that Appreciative Inquiry is not just about “technique,” it is also about a different and exciting way of seeing the world, embracing change, and seeking life-giving new direction for people and organizations. Because of its length, this case study is presented in the appendix of this book.

**Summary**

This chapter provided a historical and theoretical overview of Appreciative Inquiry and its application to organizational development and change. It has emphasized the need for organizations and communities to focus on
their assets and strengths versus their problems as a means for creating a better future. Organizations that embrace AI as an approach for change make a deliberate choice about discovering their path to change through an appreciation and exploration of their peak moments of success. The organization's members engage in very different kinds of conversations that enhance their sense of connection to their work, their colleagues, and the organization. Through storytelling, they increase their confidence to think and act creatively and to seek change that brings satisfaction, hope, and joy to their work. As a result, the organization becomes more open to becoming a “learning organization” that is better able to respond to continuous internal and external changes more quickly and successfully.

Notes

1. The fourth phase in Cooperrider’s original work was called Delivery. It was changed to Destiny because he felt it did not go far enough in communicating the liberating impact of AI work (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000, p. 15).
2. Contributed by Patricia Poindexter and Diane Dunet, CDC, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (NCCDPHP), Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity (DNPA), Chronic Disease Nutrition Branch.
3. Implemented by EnCompass LLC, Potomac, MD.