

Module: Start with what's working – An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry

Module in Communication Skills for Supervisors

What is Appreciative Inquiry (AI)?

Appreciative Inquiry is a strengths-based approach to creating change. Rather than identify a problem and look at how to solve it, Appreciative Inquiry involves exploring what is already working and how to build on that. It is used to support organisational and individual change. 'In AI, intervention gives way to inquiry, imagination, and innovation. Instead of negation, criticism, and spiralling diagnosis, there is discovery, dream and design.'¹

It was developed in the 1980s by Professor David Cooperrider and his mentor at the time, Suresh Srivastva, following some action-research where Cooperrider and colleagues discovered that asking positively framed research questions positively impacted the research results².

Appreciative Inquiry is seen as a philosophy as much as an approach to use.

The 4Ds of Appreciative Inquiry

A central tenet of Appreciative Inquiry is the idea of a Positive Core. In the case of an organisation or team this refers to positive aspects such as its strengths, achievements, best practices, positive emotions, core competences and resources. In Appreciative Inquiry there is exploration of this positive core using a process of positive questions focused on the following four themes, known as the 4Ds:






Asking questions focused on these themes is used to generate positive change.

1. Discover

The discovery phase is about exploring what is currently working, what are the strengths, what gives life to an individual or organisation at their / its best.

2. Dream

The dream phase is about imagining a positive vision of what could be, exploring possibilities individually and collectively where relevant.

3. Design

The design phase is about debating possibilities that have been created in the dream phase and how they could be made real.

4. Destiny

Is about exploring what changes can be made, what actions will be taken and how change can be sustainable. This is moving into action.

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Appreciative Inquiry and trainees

This approach could be useful to use when trainees are dealing with challenges where some positively focused creative thinking could be helpful. Perhaps where a challenge has been around for some time, or where a trainee is feeling hopeless about a situation. It could also be used with groups of trainees who could explore something together.

It is an approach that can empower individuals, teams and organisations to make sustainable positive change.

Example Appreciative Inquiry questions and prompts:

Discover

Tell me about a time when you felt at your best?

What was happening? How did you feel?

What was it that made you feel like your best?

What's most important to you about being a trainee?

What's the best thing about working here? / about training?

Can you think of a time when you overcame a big challenge?

What happened? What part did you play?

What was that like for you?

Can you think of a time when you felt happy to be part of a group?

What was happening? What was it like for you then?

When you get on well with others, what feels good about that? What part do you play to make that happen? What part do others play?

Dream

Imagine things are working exactly as you'd like them to, what might be happening?

What would you be saying? What would others be saying?

What would you be doing? How might it feel to you?

What would be the most exciting thing that could happen here?

What story might you be telling?

What story would you love to be telling about this?

What impact might this sort of change have on your training / team / colleagues?

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Design

What can you take from your previous experiences that might be useful here?

What possibilities can you see now for the current situation?

When you think about how you'd like things to be now, what might need to happen to get a little closer to that?

How could you use your strength of (based on Discover and Dream responses) in this situation?

What steps might you / we need to take?

What would be the best thing to do here?

What might make it easier to make this change happen?

Who else might want or need to be involved in this?

What part might they be able to play?

Destiny

Now you've created some possible ways forward, which step(s) feel most compelling to you?

Where could taking that step take you?

Who could you work with on this?

Which strengths will you use?

What will be most important to you about taking this step?

When can you take this step? / make this change?

What could keep this change in place?

Trainer Reflective Exercise:

1. Think of a trainee who you think could benefit from making a change. What questions could you ask them using the 4Ds approach?
2. How could you use this approach with groups or teams?

Further reading and resources:

1. David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry – A Positive Revolution in Change*; Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc (2005).
2. Sarah Lewis, Jonathan Passmore, Stefan Cantore, *Appreciative Inquiry for Change Management: Using AI to Facilitate Organizational Development*; Kogan Page Ltd, (2nd Edition 2016)
3. For more on Appreciative Inquiry here is a video introduction: [Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry and the Cooperrider Center at Champlain College SD](#)
4. For more about Appreciative Inquiry and questions to use: <https://positivepsychology.com/appreciative-inquiry-questions/>