**2**

# THE TENETS OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY (AI) is an energizing approach for sparking positive change in people, groups, and organizations. It focuses on what is working well (appreciative) by engaging people in asking questions and telling stories (inquiry). The shift in focus to the positive and what is working well generates energy within the group or organization, allowing it to move more effectively toward its goals. As well as a process for facilitating positive change, AI is a way of being and seeing the world every day. Its assumption is simple: every human system (individual, group, organization, community) "has something that works right—things that give it life when it is most alive, effective, successful, and connected in healthy ways . . ." (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003, p. xvii). AI begins by identifying this positive core and connecting to it in ways that heighten energy, sharpen vision, and inspire action for change.

Appreciative Inquiry developed in the 1980s through David Cooperrider's doctoral dissertation research in organizational development at the Cleveland Clinic (Cooperrider, 1986). Although he began with organizational problem-based analysis, he moved to a different kind of analysis when he realized how well the clinic staff worked together. So rather than identifying problems, he shifted his focus to an analysis of the factors that contributed to the highly effective functioning of the clinic. In his dissertation, he articulated the grounding theory and methodology of AI. Many others have built on this work, developing further theory and models, and AI has been used to bring about collaborative and strengths-based change in communities and organizations worldwide.

In this chapter, we present some of the underpinnings of AI: the principles and methodology. We provide a brief overview to ground this book based upon the many thought leaders who have developed

and expanded AI theory and practice. Throughout, we illustrate with examples of AI in higher education.

## Appreciative Inquiry: A Paradigm Shift

Appreciative Inquiry is a paradigm shift in approaches to human system change that moves away from problem solving and a focus on the deficits in a system (what is wrong about or lacking and the root causes of the problem). A problem-solving paradigm works well when dealing with nonhuman systems, for example, when fixing a computer. However, when people are primarily viewed as problems to be fixed, they get demoralized. Rather than focusing on deficits, AI begins by examining the strengths and successes. The key question to examine is "What is working well in the organization?" In this appreciative paradigm, people focus on the root causes of success and then build on these to create future successes. The organization is viewed as "a mystery that should be embraced as a human center of infinite imagination, infinite capacity, and potential" (Cooperrider and others, 2003).

For example, an English department wanted to make some dysfunctional working relationships within the department more positive and effective. Unfortunately, when people are told that they are not working well together and need to change based on the analysis of the problem, they get demoralized, thinking that they are bad and wrong. They often blame each other instead of working together. In this case, AI engaged them in finding out what gave life to their departmental group, what they valued—effective communication, sharing ideas, and collaboration. They built on those life-giving factors to get more of them and in doing so shifted to more effective working relationships. Using an appreciative paradigm allowed the department members to work together to discover what was working well, however small, and to pay attention to that in order to get more of it. When people are recognized for their strengths, successes, and effective work, they are energized into doing more of that instead of being discouraged by the focus on their weaknesses and failures.

Table 2.1 indicates the difference in two paradigms for organizational change.

In higher education, the problem-solving paradigm is the predominant paradigm. People working in higher education have arrived there by going through higher education themselves. They have honed the skills of research, problem solving, and writing and continue to use all these abilities and skills and to teach others how to use them. This is a good thing and not something to be abandoned. Problem solving is a useful

**Table 2.1. Two Paradigms for Organizational Change**

| Paradigm 1: Problem Solving | Paradigm 2: Appreciative Inquiry |
|---|---|
| "Felt need" Identification of the problem | Appreciating "Valuing the best of what is" |
| Analysis of causes | Envisioning "What might be" |
| Analysis of possible solutions | Dialoguing "What SHOULD Be" |
| Action planning (Treatment) | Innovating "What will be" |
| *Organizing is a problem to be solved.* | *Organizing is a mystery (infinite capacity) to be embraced.* |

*Source:* Cooperrider and others (2003), p. 15.

skill. Where AI works well is when igniting and enhancing human relationships, people's imagination, institutional futures, team engagement, planning, and so on that are core to the success of the organization. People are inspired by inquiring into the best of what is rather than demotivated by looking at what's wrong. This inspiration is essential to the ability to create a positive future. AI does not ignore the problems. It suggests that it is better to surface the desire behind the problem or reframe it as what is wanted, for example, good communication rather than poor communication. By beginning with what is wanted and finding out where it already exists, however small, people get grounded in their successes and therefore become more confident that they can do more and build their ideal futures. They shift their paradigm, and by doing so shift their future. John Wade of Emporia State University provides an example of how he contributed to this shift:

> At my previous job at a university counseling center, the clinical training and supervision program was an integral part of both our mission and daily work life. Each year we would get a new cohort of graduate students, and during the several-day orientation period, the policies and rules were explained in exacting and sometimes eye-glazing detail. Long sessions were held on workplace violence, rules against sexual harassment, what to do if sexually harassed, et cetera. All of this is important and necessary information, however, during the crucial "setting the tone" period, the balance of attention was very heavily weighted to what not to do versus how to be successful. It was as though our graduate students were expected to somehow deduce how to be successful merely by knowing the policies and what not to do.

This ran counter to the Appreciative Inquiry approach, which I try to infuse into my work both as a practicing psychologist and an educator. I raised these concerns to administration, who agreed to allow me to add a training workshop very early in the orientation process to provide research-based information and practical suggestions to the students for how to have a rewarding and growth-filled training experience. The "Priming the Pump for Success" workshop was well received by students.

## Principles

A brief introduction to the principles of AI is important in order to understand that the methodology and processes have theoretical bases. These principles underpin the methodology of AI (Cooperrider and others, 2003; Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003), and the practice of Appreciative Inquiry in daily living (Kelm, 2005; Stavros & Torres, 2005). The five basic AI principles (Cooperrider and others, 2003; Watkins, Mohr, & Kelly, 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003) that underpin the methodology are

1. Constructionist
2. Simultaneity
3. Poetic
4. Anticipatory
5. Positive

AI practitioners, as part of the evolving work of AI, have added the following principles: awareness (Stavros & Torres, 2005); narrative (Barrett & Fry, 2005); wholeness, enactment, and free choice (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). The principles are interrelated in how they apply to the practice of AI and should be examined as a whole.

THE CONSTRUCTIONIST PRINCIPLE.   The most fundamental principle is the constructionist principle, which Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) describe briefly as "Words create worlds" (p. 54), that is, people create their understanding of their worlds socially, "through language and conversation" (p. 54). Reality is not separate from the people who are constructing it. People construct realities, good or bad, together. Higher education institutions are great examples of people constructing their worlds through words in the process of working and learning. Higher education is complex because each person in the institution comes in with a different lens that has developed over his or her lifetime, based

on many factors, such as socioeconomic background, race, gender, class, ability, education, personality style, organizational position, and so on. Learners, faculty, staff, and administrators see the world from different viewpoints, and within these groups there are many different individual viewpoints. When people interact with each other, they often think that everyone is seeing the world in the same way that they are. This is usually the underlying cause for interpersonal conflict in higher education.

Within higher education institutions, there are many different groups whose worlds are based in their cultures, their own ways of seeing meaning. In a college or university there are multiple cultures—including an overarching institutional culture and subcultures such as departmental cultures—because of the many teams and groups that form and reform over time. Different groupings within the institution construct their own realities and cultures. Multicampus colleges are a good example of multiple cultures, with clear distinctions among the campuses. Even within a single campus, the departments, faculties, and schools usually have distinctive cultures that construct their realities based on the discipline, work responsibilities, nature of students, backgrounds of staff and faculty, and so on. For example, the realities of a college automotive department, a nursing department, an English as a Second Language (ESL) department, a mathematics department are distinct from each other and from other departments, although they all exist within the same college. Similarly, for universities, institutes, and polytechnics, the content areas drive specific cultures. Each department has a common desire to serve its students well, but departments construct their realities of how to do that differently because of their mandates, perspectives, outcomes, and people. But it is possible for very different groups to share ideas and construct meaning together across these differences. For example, Jeanie was a mathematics department head in a college with many students for whom English was a second language. Jeanie invited faculty from an ESL department to meet with mathematics faculty to discuss how each department engages students in learning. The ESL instructors were surprised that they had so much in common with the math instructors. The discussions allowed them to construct a shared understanding of engaging learners by co-constructing strategies that could work for students in both of their departments. Even though this was before Jeanie had heard of AI, it was an example of how an appreciative stance can help construct a positive reality.

THE SIMULTANEITY PRINCIPLE.  The principle of simultaneity states, "Inquiry creates change" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 54). Inquiry and change are not separate from each other. As soon as questions

are asked, change happens. Traditionally, higher education institutions undertake research for various purposes to inform change, such as for academic planning, human resource strategies, policy creation, curriculum development, and so on. They do this using a designated method or a variety of methods such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Once the information is gathered, plans for designing the change can begin. Change begins as soon as people reflect on the questions and the issues that arise. So it is important to ask the kind of questions that will create the change desired. Asking about problems leads people to focus on the deficit, on what is not going well. This makes it difficult to create a desired future. In contrast, AI focuses on what is working well, the best of what is, in order to create a preferred future. Asking questions about what is working well, the strengths and successes, changes the focus and does so in a way that can spread throughout the organization. For example, one college started with training AI facilitators and then used AI in designing a leadership program. Other colleges have used AI in strategic planning, and as they engage with exploring the "best" of the institution, they also begin to use AI in other processes, such as employee evaluation and strengths-based approaches with learners. Just by participating in AI and being part of the inquiry, positive organizational change begins to spread. "Inquiry creates change."

THE POETIC PRINCIPLE.    The poetic principle states, "We can choose what we study" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 54). In reading poetry, people interpret the words in different ways, choosing to focus on what is meaningful to them. In higher education, people can also choose what to focus on. In many cases the choice is predominantly focused on what is wrong with the institution, with little time spent on focusing on what is right and good, the best of what is. The impact of this predominantly deficit-based focus is negative morale, frustration with trying to make positive change, no positive change, or recycling of problems over and over rather than moving to better futures, that is, generative and positive change. Through the poetic principle AI challenges this focus and suggests that people choose to concentrate on the best of what is in their institutions in order to build their preferred futures. Using AI does not mean ignoring the problems. This would be dangerous. It is important to acknowledge what needs to be changed because it is a problem. With human systems, AI assumes that behind any problem is a desired state and that somewhere the desired state already exists. Identifying the desired state requires the ability to reframe the problems, gaps, issues, and needs. For example, a college library technical services department wanted to solve the problem of interpersonal conflict in their

group. They engaged in an Appreciative Inquiry session with the purpose "to work creatively and collaboratively to restructure some areas of responsibility in Technical Services." They illustrated the poetic principle by focusing on being creative and collaborative instead of focusing on what they didn't want (interpersonal conflict).

THE ANTICIPATORY PRINCIPLE.    The anticipatory principle suggests that the images people hold for the future drive their actions in the present to get to that future. "Image inspires action" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 54). This principle suggests for AI practice that "the more positive and hopeful the image of the future, the more positive the present-day action" (p. 54). Sports psychology illustrates this principle by having athletes hold images of success as one way to prepare to succeed. The actions they undertake to get that success are inspired by those images. Throughout higher education, this translates to a focus on strengths and successes as the images to hold to inform actions. For example, at Dalhousie University, the Faculty of Dentistry engaged faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, and students in an Appreciative Inquiry into the "Faculty of Dentistry at its best." They told stories of their best experiences in the faculty, elicited themes (strengths and successes), and from these created visual and word images that guided their actions for academic planning. This Appreciative Inquiry led to a very powerful and positive strategic vision for their academic plan.

THE POSITIVE PRINCIPLE.    The positive principle underpins all the other principles of AI. It states, "Positive questions lead to positive change" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 54). So the more positive an inquiry is the more positive its results. All parts of the AI methodology are influenced by the positive principle from the topic selection to the question development to the images created and to the strategies designed to move into the desired future. For example, the initial planning group, called the "Plan to Plan" group, at Northern Essex Community College began their discussions about strategic planning by doing an Appreciative Inquiry into highly effective planning. Their previous strategic plan had been done using AI, and one key result was a shift to a more positive college culture. They wanted to continue to build on this shift and to use AI for the next plan. They began by asking everyone at the college what was the best about the previous plan in order to build on it. From the strategic themes that came from that data they asked what were the strengths of each of those themes. All the way along, they asked positive questions, engaging people in positive change.

**THE WHOLENESS, ENACTMENT, AND FREE-CHOICE PRINCIPLES.**   In the "Power of Appreciative Inquiry" Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) add to the five basic principles three more principles: the wholeness principle, the enactment principle, and the free-choice principle. They state that "wholeness brings out the best in people and organizations" (p. 55). This principle in action means that "bringing all stakeholders together in large group forums stimulates creativity and builds collective capacity" (p. 55). For example, we facilitated an Appreciative Inquiry with all the staff (450) of Quinsigamond Community College to explore together how they all practiced one of their strategic goals, "Students first." The tables were mixed so that people from different parts of the college could share their stories. At one table a human resource person told the others that she didn't work with students so couldn't tell a story to illustrate putting students first. A faculty member at the table said to her that she could tell a story of how she helped the faculty who do work with students, suggesting that her story of helping people who work with students ultimately helped students and so was part of the strategic goal of "Students first." The power of the creative whole emerged through their images that lined the walls of the college's gymnasium and their parade of provocative propositions. These images of their preferred future inspired them all to share ideas across all parts of the college about how to make this happen.

The enactment principle, "Acting 'as if' is self-fulfilling" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 55) suggests that people and organizations act *as if* the change they want has already happened. For example, Jeanie worked with a university library department who told her for the AI all-day session on planning there would be five people coming who caused a lot of problems at department meetings. They gave her the names of these people. She didn't check on who the five were until after the session. She facilitated the day assuming that everyone would be engaged fully in the process. This acting "as if" worked well. Only one person from the list of five was challenging and likely would have been so in any situation. Some people are not ready to engage. The other four were highly engaged in the process, and the day was a huge success. As AI practitioners, the enactment principle comes into play when we trust the process and encourage those engaging in the process to do the same.

The free-choice principle states, "Free choice liberates power" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 55). Power through an Appreciative Inquiry lens is the ability to make things happen, to influence positive change, both individually and organizationally. "People perform better and are more committed when they have freedom to choose how and what they contribute" (p. 55). Their power to engage in and enact change is enhanced by their choice to participate and contribute. In higher education institutions, there are people who choose to get

involved, for example, by volunteering to be on committees. Often these are the informal leaders who use their positive influence or power to contribute beyond their formal role. The more employees make these choices to contribute, the more the institution succeeds. Using Appreciative Inquiry in higher education provides a means for people to choose to engage, and through their creativity, collaboration, and goal achievement, enhance their whole institution's power. For example, at Northern Essex Community College, many people chose to volunteer for the strategic planning committee—a big commitment. They contributed fully to the very successful planning process.

In Chapter Four, "Critical Appreciative Inquiry," we examine the notion that everyone does not have the same freedom to make choices because of systemic discrimination and differences in positional power. Systemic discrimination may be based on race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, gender, or other factors. Positional power can also affect how much people feel free to make choices. For example, Jeanie worked with an aboriginal school on a reserve where systemic discrimination and positional power were both evident. At this school, those with positional power, the teachers, were 75 percent nonaboriginal. Those with less positional power, the teaching assistants, were all aboriginal. All the staff of the school participated in an Appreciative Inquiry on how they could become a highly effective team. All were free to participate in the two-day event, and all did. Although everyone was free to participate, it took longer for the teaching assistants to feel comfortable doing so. In the opening circle, they were sitting behind it in another room peeking out. By the end of the second day, they were participating more fully. One aboriginal woman who was a teacher said at the closing circle that for the first time she felt safe to speak her mind. In the six-month follow-up session, the teaching assistants were actively speaking and contributing their ideas. The AI engaged them in a way that allowed them to feel freer to choose to contribute and by doing so, their power increased. They showed this through their increased level of confidence in speaking and articulating their stories, opinions, and strategies to the rest of the group.

THE NARRATIVE AND AWARENESS PRINCIPLES.   The narrative principle, "As we weave stories, so we create lasting bonds" (Barrett & Fry, 2005, p. 49), captures how important the use of storytelling is in order for people to see each other for who they are. By seeing each other, they enhance the ability to engage successfully in AI to build futures on their collaborative strengths, even when they come from different and often conflicting perspectives. When people with different perspectives tell each other their stories of best experiences, they can see how much they have in common rather than focusing on their differences. If the focus for the

storytelling is "Tell me about one of your best experiences at this college," the stories shared highlight the best of what is from both perspectives. Seeing the best from a person who is different or who holds a different viewpoint can challenge how people see each other. Often conflict is based on seeing only the conflicting view and making assumptions and judgments of the other person based on that. The AI stories surface the goodness of the other person and allow all to see that they care about the college and share similar values. For example, Bow Valley College held a large gathering of students, faculty, staff, and administrators using AI for their strategic planning, Vision 2020. At tables of eight, mixed from different stakeholder perspectives, more than 1,200 participants told stories of the college at its best. The stories created powerful learning across these perspectives as all participants became aware of what the best meant for each of them. (This case is fully described in Chapter Nine.)

Being aware is an important part of AI. Stavros and Torres (2005) suggest the principle of awareness is necessary in order to fully apply the basic AI principles: "To experience dynamic relationships in the appreciative paradigm, you need to practice living the AI principles with self-reflective awareness of the significance of not only your actions and the actions of others, but also the many possibilities for how the interactions can play out" (pp. 78–79). Interactions are informed by our assumptions and perceptions. The principle of awareness suggests the skill of self-reflection and assessment of one's attitudes and behaviors and their impact on relationships. For example, as a college mathematics teacher, Jeanie often had to practice the principle of awareness to keep an appreciative paradigm in her classroom when a student was not paying attention or doing the exercises assigned. If she took the time at a class break to ask the student how he was doing, she would often find out that his disengagement in class was due to reasons other than his interest in mathematics. Usually, it was because of lack of sleep because of other life responsibilities, such as taking care of a sick child all night.

All the AI principles affect both the practice of living Appreciative Inquiry and using it as a methodology for institutional change. In the next section of the chapter, we look at the methodology of Appreciative Inquiry.

## Methodology

There are many ways to engage in Appreciative Inquiry, including specific events of anywhere from a few hours to several days; inquiries that include data gathering via interviews and focus groups; training a core team to do interviews and data analysis; and combining AI with other
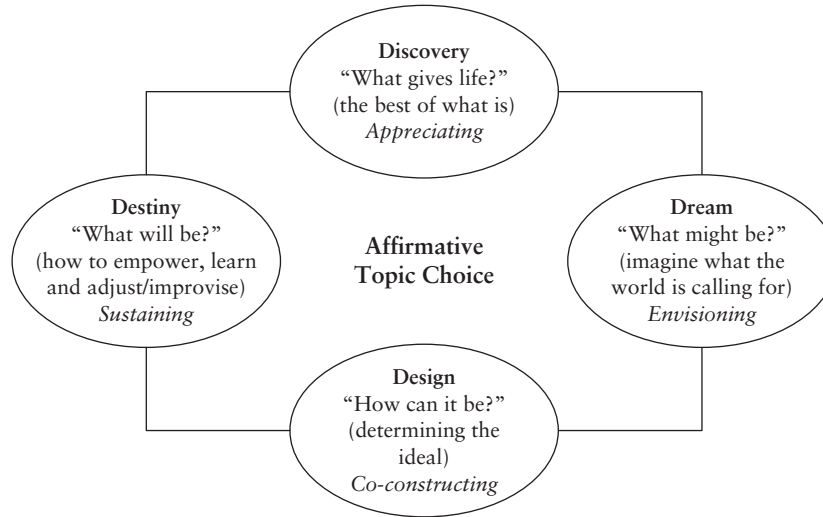
methodologies. All AI frameworks provide opportunities for people to engage in storytelling, dialogue with others, and opportunities to collaboratively co-create their futures. Because of the engaging and collaborative nature of AI, what occurs through the inquiry is emergent. The basic framework is an emergent design with minimal structure, to allow the wisdom of the people involved to surface in order to co-create their future together. *Emergent design* means that the process follows the energy of the group and flexes and evolves as the process continues. For example, in Bow Valley College's large strategic planning process, the opportunity for input, change, and innovation was left open until the very last approval moment. This was done to ensure that energy continued to spark innovation through the process. The emergent design can cause the steps in the process to flex, the amount and quality of input to change as it follows the energy of the process.

The most common AI model is the 4-D cycle (Cooperrider and others, 2003) and built from that are the 5-D model and the "five generic processes" (Watkins and others, 2011). There are many other models, including SOAR—Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009)—for strategic planning (see Chapter Eight). AI practitioners create variations of the models to adapt them to particular contexts and the language of those contexts. In this section we focus on the 4-D cycle and the five generic processes and how they apply in higher education. Throughout the book we illustrate how to use these for particular purposes.

### *The 4-D Cycle in Appreciative Inquiry*

The 4-D cycle is based on the AI paradigm shown in Table 2.1. *Discovery* is the first step of "appreciating, valuing the best of what is" (Cooperrider and others, 2003, p. 15) and engages people through interviews, storytelling, and sharing emergent themes. *Dream* is the second step of "envisioning what might be" (Cooperrider, p. 15) and engages groups in creating visual and word images for their ideal futures. *Design* is the third step of "dialoguing what should be" (Cooperrider, p. 15), and participants co-construct their ideal futures by coming up with strategies to get there. *Destiny* is the last step of "innovating what will be" and continues on after an AI event. People find ways to sustain the changes they have co-constructed and to co-create more, celebrating successes along the way. Sometimes this final D is called *Delivery* or *Deliver* or just *Do It!* The key is that all these steps are focused around the affirmative topic that is chosen at the beginning of the process and focused on throughout the inquiry. Figure 2.1 depicts the 4-D cycle.

**Figure 2.1. Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle**



**Discovery**
"What gives life?"
(the best of what is)
*Appreciating*

**Destiny**
"What will be?"
(how to empower, learn
and adjust/improvise)
*Sustaining*

**Affirmative
Topic Choice**

**Dream**
"What might be?"
(imagine what the
world is calling for)
*Envisioning*

**Design**
"How can it be?"
(determining the
ideal)
*Co-constructing*

*Source:* Cooperrider and others (2003), p. 5.

### Five Generic Processes of AI

The five generic processes of AI (Watkins & Mohr, 2001) are a very practical way to move through the phases of AI; the five steps take each of the 4-Ds into account and include a fifth D, *Definition,* to become a 5-D model (Figure 2.2). The Definition D emphasizes the importance of taking the time needed to develop the topic that will fit the purpose of the inquiry and engage everyone involved. We illustrate the use of the five generic processes of AI or 5-D model in various sections of the book, illustrating how it can be applied in multiple processes.

DEFINITION.   Step 1, "Choose the positive as the focus of the inquiry" (Mohr & Watkins, 2002, p. 5), is the most important one because it guides the inquiry all the way through. In this Definition step, by choosing to focus on the positive, the problems are reframed into what is wanted, the affirmative topic—that is, what is working well already—the strengths and successes. AI recognizes the power of grounding the organizational preferred future in the best of what already is. The power comes through the storytelling of the best of what is and, through that, people's belief in their ability to make positive change and build an even better future together. AI suggests that what is wanted already exists to some extent. When the purpose is large, such as strategic planning, it's best to have a

**Figure 2.2. Five Generic Processes of Appreciative Inquiry**
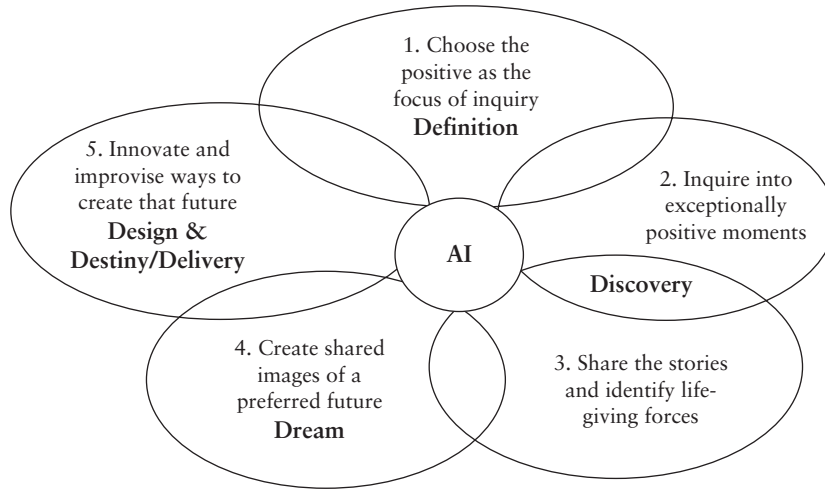


*Source:* Mohr & Watkins (2002), p. 5.

very broad topic such as "the institution at its best." Narrow topics are useful when the purpose is more specific; for example, in a department that is having communication problems and conflict, these issues could be reframed to the topic "communicating at our best" or "working highly effectively with conflict." The serious issues are reframed into what is wanted. Some groups start with the general Appreciative Inquiry "being at our best" to determine their positive topics for inquiry rather than starting with issues and reframing them. The determination of topics is dependent on the context and purpose for the inquiry. In situations where there are a lot of issues, it is essential for the participants to feel heard by airing their issues before focusing on the positive and reframing to what they want. AI practitioners need to be sensitive to the needs of the organization and people that they are working with to facilitate the choices at each step of the inquiry.

Sometimes there is one clear issue. For example, Jeanie facilitated a session at a national conference of college and university financial aid administrators. The organizing committee met with Jeanie to plan the AI. They started by identifying the big issue as 20 percent of students defaulting on their loans. They wanted to fix that problem. So Jeanie suggested that if 20 percent defaulted, then 80 percent paid back their loans and asked the planners what they thought were the reasons those 80 percent were successful. After much discussion, they agreed that the key

to success was student engagement with the financial aid process and the active role financial aid offices took in promoting student engagement. So the affirmative topic agreed upon was "promoting student engagement." Through the Appreciative Inquiry, they discovered ways that they were helping students, shared these ideas, envisioned more possibilities, and designed strategies to make them happen.

DISCOVERY.    Discovery encompasses two steps of the five generic processes: Step 2, "Inquire into exceptionally positive moments," and Step 3, "Share the stories and identify life-giving forces" (Mohr & Watkins, 2002, p. 5).

Once the topic is defined, then the Discovery process starts, with developing the interview questions. We use and adapt Mohr and Watkins' (2002) generic interview guide that explores the best of what was and is through stories, values, core life-giving factors, and wishes for the future. The generic questions work well as a base for a particular application and organization and can be easily adapted to meet the needs of higher education settings:

- *Best experience*. Tell me a story about the best times that you have had with your organization (team, family, community, network, or other group). Looking at your entire experience, recall a time when you felt most alive or most excited about your involvement. What made it an exciting experience? Who else was involved? Describe the event in detail.

- *Values*. What are the things you value about yourself, your work, and your organization?

  - *Yourself*. Without being humble, what do you value most about yourself—as a human being, friend, parent, citizen, and so on?

  - *Your work*. When you are feeling best about work, what do you value about it?

  - *Your organization*. What is it about your organization (team, family, community, network, or other group) that you value? What is the single most important thing that your organization has contributed to your life?

- *Core life-giving factor*. What do you think is the core value or factor that allows the organization to pull through during difficult times? If this core value or factor did not exist, how would that make your organization totally different than it currently is?

- *Three wishes*. If you had three wishes for this organization, what would they be? (Mohr & Watkins, 2002, p. 6).

These questions can be easily modified based on the affirmative topic and the specific organization. Questions can be added if there is time and deleted if time is limited. Here are the questions developed around the topic of "promoting student engagement" for the college and university financial aid administrators in the example noted previously:

❍ *Best experience*. Think about the best times that you have had working as a financial aid administrator, especially when working with students who were engaged in and responsible for their student loan process. Recall a time when this process worked really well. Tell me a story about that time. How did you contribute to the process? What did the student do? Who else was involved? What made it successful and rewarding? Describe the event in detail.

❍ *Values*. What do you value about yourself and your work as a financial aid administrator?

❍ *Three wishes*. If you had three wishes for student engagement in financial aid processes, what would they be? (modified from Mohr & Watkins, 2002).

These questions are used in Step 2 of the five generic processes to "inquire into exceptionally positive moments." In this part of Discovery, people pair up to interview each other using the questions that they have developed based on the definition of the affirmative topic. The essential question is the first one: the best experience. It is the one that strongly brings in the narrative—it is a story that is to be elicited, not a generalized list of what makes the experience best. Those generalizations come later, when themes are drawn out of the stories. The questions flow from the past experiences to looking inward at values and life-giving factors to moving toward the future through expressing wishes. We examine storytelling and interviewing further in Chapter Seven.

After the interviews, the pairs join other pairs to form groups of four to eight. These groups engage in Step 3 of the five generic processes of AI. They "share the stories and identify life-giving forces" (Mohr & Watkins, 2002, p. 5). In these groups, the interviewers share highlights of what they heard from the interviewees; then the groups identify themes from the interviews. If there is more than one group, each group collaboratively selects about five themes to share with the rest of the groups. From considering all the themes, each group selects one theme or cluster of themes to use in the next step of the AI, the Dream. If time is limited, the selection of themes to take into the Dream step is done in the individual groups rather than sharing with the whole. All the themes can be captured and collected as data that inform the preferred future.

DREAM.    In Step 4 of the five generic processes, the Dream, the groups "create shared images of a preferred future" (Mohr & Watkins, 2002, p. 5). Guided by a Discovery theme or cluster of themes, the groups come up with two kinds of images for their preferred futures: a visual image and a word image. The visual image can be a diagram on a flip chart, a skit, song, body sculpture, clay model, or other form. Participants use their imaginations to symbolically create an image for the future based on their theme. Their metaphorical image then inspires the creation of their word image. The word image or provocative proposition is like a vision statement. It provokes action. It is written in the present tense because it's grounded in what is already working. For example, the Dalhousie University Faculty of Dentistry engaged in a two-day AI into "Dalhousie University—Faculty of Dentistry at its best" to launch their academic planning with about sixty faculty, staff, administrators, and students. They came up with some wonderful visual images, including a fun skit of student graduation, and provocative propositions that then became part of their strategic vision for their academic plan. The final academic plan document, the Strategic Vision 2011–2021, included their mission, vision, strategic goals, and guiding principles. The provocative propositions became part of the plan, either as guiding principles or strategic goals, along with others that arose during the plan development process. For example, one of their provocative propositions, "We provide a welcoming and supportive environment that encourages faculty and staff retention," translated and expanded into one of their six strategic goals with its particular subgoals.

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**Goal D: Environment**
*Provide a Welcoming and Supportive Environment*

❍ Provide facilities that optimize the quality of oral health education, research, and patient care.

❍ Engage students, faculty, and staff in a manner that encourages retention, satisfaction, and personal growth.

❍ Evoke in our students, faculty, staff, and alumni their innate enthusiasm for discovery, new knowledge creation, curiosity about best practices, and social responsibility.

*Source:* Dalhousie University Faculty of Dentistry (2011).

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Another of the original provocative propositions, "We innovate and collaborate to ensure a balanced student-centered learning environment,"

became one of the ten guiding principles in the Strategic Vision document, which all began with "Together we . . ." and followed with "innovate and collaborate to ensure a balanced student-centered learning environment, grounded in the best available research and technology."

**DESIGN AND DESTINY/DELIVERY.** These images of the preferred future created in Step 4 are the basis for Step 5 of the five generic processes, Design and Destiny/Delivery, through which the groups "innovate ways to create that future" (Mohr & Watkins, 2002). In Part One of Step 5, Design, the key question is "How are we going to make this preferred future happen?" Design is about creating an individual and/or collective intention and action plan. This is a very concrete and outcomes-based part of Appreciative Inquiry. These Design plans can be created in various ways depending on the time available, the context, and the purpose. For example, groups could discuss strategies for making their provocative propositions a reality and create a plan together. Another example is the groups using a planning template that could include such questions as:

- ○ What actions are you proposing to make the preferred future happen?
- ○ Who needs to be involved?
- ○ What resources are required?
- ○ What are the timelines?
- ○ What can groups and/or individuals offer and commit to?

The format of the plan is driven by the purpose of the process. For example, if the process is about team building, the Design might identify key agreements for working together effectively. If the process is academic planning, the Design will reflect the goals and outcomes in the format required by the institution.

If there isn't time in the AI session for groups to create action plans, the provocative propositions can go forward to working group sessions that design the details of the next steps. In some large all-college staff sessions with limited time frames, we have had the groups discuss Design and then reflect and write down personal commitments to take forward. For example, Quinsigamond Community College's all-staff engagement used AI to create a shared vision for one of their strategic goals, "Students first." After creating images and provocative propositions for their preferred future, in the Design phase the small groups discussed ways to make it happen. Then each person wrote down responses to "What can you do to make the preferred future happen?" The answers to this question were intentions for moving forward and included commitments, offers,

and requests (Mohr & Watkins, 2002, p. 9). Commitments are actions each can do; offers are resources given to others; and requests are needs that others can provide. These 450 people then stood and simultaneously read aloud what they had written. It was a way to put this energy for creating their future into the room. And it was private, because nobody could hear each other. It was profound, a whole group simultaneously stating intentions. They all took their written intentions with them in order to do personal follow-up on commitments, offers, and requests.

From the Design step, the intention and action plans, both individual and collective, go forward to Part Two of Step 5, that is, the Destiny/Delivery phase. This phase is making the Designs happen by delivering on the intention and action plans. Delivery is very practical and means implementing the strategies and actions. Some people call this the "Do It" phase. Destiny is another way of describing the last D. Destiny means living the ongoing creation of the future and recognizes that as plans are implemented there is a continual need to rediscover, redream, redesign as change happens, a continued emergent design for the preferred future. Futures are continually being created, and the key to sustaining the AI energy is to engage in ongoing learning, improvising, celebrating, and practicing the AI principles daily (Kelm, 2005; Stavros & Torres, 2005), which we describe in other sections of the book.

In higher education institutions, Destiny often involves using AI in many ways and using it with other strengths-based strategies. For example, Northern Essex Community College used AI to do their strategic plan in 2007 for 2008–2011, after which they had nine people trained to be AI facilitators. These people then facilitated a variety of AI sessions, engaged in the actions to live the preferred future of the plan, and became part of the planning group for the next version of the strategic plan (2012–2015). This group affirmatively chose to continue to use AI in their planning and began by doing an AI into highly effective planning. One of the first actions from this was to celebrate the 2008–2011 plan with two hundred faculty, staff, and administrators. During this celebration, participants used AI interviews and small-group discussions to share stories of experiences with the core values and the strategic plan in action; to suggest new strategic directions; and to express their wishes for the college. We expand upon this example in Chapter Eight, in which we discuss planning.

## Doing AI

The 5-Ds and the five generic AI processes are very practical ways to engage in the methodology of AI to generate and build futures on what is working well already. The structure of the Ds creates a container for

groups to work through steps to generate positive futures. This structure is a minimal flexible structure that allows for other processes within it. It is a structure that can be trusted to create the opportunity for creativity, innovation, and dialogue to emerge throughout. It is an emergent design, a process that evolves as people engage together. AI is like any research or inquiry in that what arises and evolves through the process is what is meaningful to the people who are part of the process. And, sometimes beginning to use AI can be through just starting with Discovery questions to engage a group, as in the example from Byrad Yyellend at Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar.

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### Kicking Off a Semester with AI

We begin each month at our campus with a meeting of all faculty and administrative personnel. These meetings are run by our dean and typically involve information sharing. I had asked for twenty minutes in the January meeting to add something new to the format, a discussion about teaching. Just prior to this meeting I took the Appreciative Inquiry Facilitator Training, and this inspired me to shift my focus to a more inclusive (our administrative personnel do not teach) process that would kick the semester off on a positive note. I modified the Generic Interview Guide to ask about personal values and a peak experience during one's time at our institution, printed off enough copies for everyone, and placed one on the seat of each chair before the meeting. As people arrived they picked up the paper and began to read, which saved some of my introduction time.

Time was tight, so all I did was say that we've all had wonderful experiences at our institution and it would be great to begin the semester by taking a few moments to celebrate these experiences. I asked everyone to pair up and take turns being the interviewer and interviewee. I called "time" at five minutes, so they could switch roles and at ten minutes to conclude. Participants were invited to leave their papers behind for collection, and the dean is preparing a presentation of their comments. We finished within the allotted time.

The exercise created a tremendous buzz of energy, and many people later told me they had thoroughly enjoyed the exercise. They felt good beginning the semester in such a positive manner. One team leader asked if I could do a more in-depth session with the members of her department, and we are now planning a session for her.

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AI is an opportunity, sometimes rare, to interact dynamically with others—co-creating, sharing stories, collaboratively engaging in processes that focus on their best in order to be even better, and coming up with very concrete ways to do this. Keeping these concrete methods in action requires ongoing focus on what is working well and how to do more of that. These fundamental AI principles and methodology underpin the higher education work described throughout this book.