



APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AND URI

Summary*

Ap-pre'ci-ate, v., 1. *valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems* 2. *to increase in value, e.g. the economy has appreciated in value. Synonyms: VALUING, PRIZING, ESTEEMING, and HONORING.*

In-quire' (kwir), v., 1. *the act of exploration and discovery.* 2. *To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities. Synonyms: DISCOVERY, SEARCH, and SYSTEMATIC EXPLORATION, STUDY.*

Appreciative Inquiry is about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives “life” to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. It centrally involves the mobilization of inquiry through the crafting of the “unconditional positive question” often-involving hundreds or sometimes thousands of people. In AI the arduous task of intervention gives way to the speed of imagination and innovation; instead of negation, criticism, and spiraling diagnosis, there is discovery, dream and design. AI seeks, fundamentally, to build a constructive union between a whole people and the massive entirety of what people talk about as past and present capacities: achievements, assets, unexplored potentials, innovations, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, benchmarks, high point moments, lived values, traditions, strategic competencies, stories, expressions of wisdom, insights into the deeper corporate spirit or soul-- and visions of valued and possible futures. Taking all of these together as a gestalt, AI deliberately, in everything it does, seeks to work from accounts of this “positive change core”—and it assumes that every living system has many untapped and rich and inspiring accounts of the positive. Link the energy of this core directly to any change agenda and changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized.

* *Excerpt from, A Positive Revolution in Change: Appreciative Inquiry by David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney*

URI Meets AI

By Sally Mahé, Director of Organizational Development

In the URI context, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has proven itself, again and again, to be a powerful tool for bringing people together from diverse backgrounds. Grounded in a belief that calling a group to focus on a problem creates a practice of deficit thinking and ties people to what has failed in the past, AI asks people to recall and share the best of their past experiences. At the start of regional gatherings and global summits, participants were invited to form pairs and engage one another in conversation. Each pair were given questions and asked to interview one another. Interviews take about 30 minutes per person. Sample questions are:

We have all been part of efforts where we have joined with others and brought dreams of a better world into being. For the moment I would like you to reflect on a "high point" in your life experience--a time when you were involved in something significant or meaningful. Reflect on a time when perhaps...

- *your deepest energies were called upon;*
- *you gave your whole best self to something;*
- *you were listening, perhaps with a spiritual ear, to what the world was calling for from you and others;*
- *whole new paths or possibilities emerged;*
- *changes, small or large, were made that at first seemed impossible;*
- *visions of a better world were actually brought into being.*

Please share with me the story and how it unfolded. Without being too humble, please share what you contributed to this effort. Are there lessons that might be brought to this gathering?

Each of our communities of faith has special gifts—traditions, beliefs, practices, values—to bring to the arena of interfaith cooperation and action. As you think about your community of faith, what are some of its most positive qualities or gifts that make it capable of working cooperatively with others of different faiths to create a better world for all people?

- *Are there special texts or passages or quotes that stand out for you?*
- *A story or parable?*
- *Historical experiences?*
- *Capabilities, commitments, or values?*

The personal experiences and the valuing of our diverse traditions such questions evoke, and the relationships that are created as the answers are shared in one-on-one interviews and then in small groups, provide a foundation of trust, mutual respect and a recognition of common ground in the midst of diversity. They create a climate of careful listening and a spirit of cooperation and inquiry. Building on this foundation, participants co-create a positive vision of a shared future powerful enough to motivate the cooperative action necessary to transform the past. In discovering Appreciative Inquiry, the URI found a process for creating an organization that reflected the values we felt the organization should embody. At the center of those values was a belief in the essential nature of interfaith cooperation that honors, indeed celebrates, diversity and yet constantly strives to discover common vision leading to shared action for a better world.

For a full story of how URI integrated AI into its organizational life, see [The Birth of a Global Community, Appreciative Inquiry in Action](#), Gibbs and Mahé, 2003, Crown Publishing.