

An Appreciative Inquiry Workshop
for Prodigious
November 15, 2013



Pepperdine University
MSOD
San José, Costa Rica
November 2013

(Manual adapted from Appreciative Inquiry: Theory and Practice, compiled by
Jane Magruder Watkins and Ralph Kelly, 2011)

The Process – The 5–D Cycle of Appreciative inquiry



SUMMARY OF THE FIVE D'S CYCLE

DEFINITION PHASE: During this first phase, the AI process is defined and the process to be implemented is agreed upon by the consultant and the client. Together, they decide what the system wants to learn about and create an Inquiry Process that is appropriate to their organization. During this phase, a typical process includes (1) Introducing AI to the client; (2) Establishing a guidance and support structure within the client system; (3) Creating a customized interview guide for the inquiry process; (4) Creating a plan for the interview process.

DISCOVERY: in the Discovery phase, a group of people who have worked with the AI consultant to create the process and the interview guide conducts

interviews. Once the interviews are completed, the group has dialogue about what they discovered, assemble the stories and key ideas that come out of the inquiry, and agree upon the major themes that emerge from the interviews.

DREAM: Once the themes are identified, the group generalizes those themes into an image of how the organization would function if those key topics and ideas were fully alive in the organization in the present. The image is put into words that create a “macro possibility statement” – a verbal description of the whole organization at its best.

DESIGN: Using the images and possibility statement as a guide, the group develops ideas and images of how the organization could be structured (the organization’s socio-technical architecture) to reflect the best of what has been discovered and created in the previous phases.

DESTINY/DELIVER: To complete the circle, the whole organization begins to innovate to align the organization’s structure with the proposed socio-technical architecture that came out of the Dream and the Design phases. At the same time, this phase focuses on building AI learning competencies into the system so that the AI process is imbedded in the fabric of the organization and becomes “the way we do our work.”

“ Greatness lies not in being strong, but in the right using of strength.”

— *Henry Ward Beecher*

This Workshop

Focus of the inquiry: Improving collaboration at Prodigious

Task 1: Appreciative Interview



Appreciative interviews differ from traditional interview. The questions are sequenced from past to future and they invite the interviewee to delve into the most creative, exciting, life-giving experiences of life and work. It is less important to get through all the questions than it is to tell a complete story. Try to evoke the situation, complete with details of what happened and the feelings involved. The interviewee's role is to help the interviewer experience the situation you are describing. The interviewer's role is to listen actively, occasionally prompting the person to be more descriptive and to enlarge the story.

During the next 40 minutes, you will conduct an appreciative interview. Select someone who you don't know very well, or who you would like to know better. Decide who will interview whom first. Interview your partner for 20 minutes then switch roles so that your partner interviews you. Use all the time available for these interviews. They will form the basis for everything that comes after.

As you interview, take notes of words, phrases, quotes and ideas that seem emotional and important. It is not necessary to take detailed notes, just enough to be able to remember the whole story and to be able to retell it later. You can use whatever space you like for this interview. Please be back in this room at the time we indicate.

Why start with a story?

The story is a powerful tool for the construction of meaning. Stories lead to real discovery. They are less predictable and more grounded, because they are based in lived experience.

"Stories have the felicitous capacity of capturing exactly those elements that formal decisions methods leave out. Logic tries to generalize, to strip the decision making from the specific context, to remove it from subjective emotions. Stories ...encapsulate, into one compact package, information, knowledge, context, and emotion."

Daniel Pink, quoting Don Norman, "A Whole new Mind"

Appreciative Interview Protocol

1. Best experience: Tell me a story about the best experience you ever had collaborating - a time when you were involved in something really important and exciting. Describe that time in detail. What were you doing? Who was involved? What happened? What was the outcome? How did your work make a difference?

2. Value: What do you value about what you did in collaborating that you told about in your story? What do you value about collaborating itself and your contribution to it?

What do you value about yourself as a person in all aspects of your life – family, as a friend, in your work, etc.?

3. Core value: As you think about collaborating, what do you think is the **core value**? What is it that makes it unique and special?

4. Wishes: You have three wishes that will make Prodigious the best, most exciting and effective company you have been part of in your life. What are they?

INTERVIEW NOTES

Task 2: Sharing stories

Stay with your partner and form groups of 6 (three pairs). In these groups, take turns sharing the highlights of your partners' stories. As you share stories around the circle, take note of the themes that you identify in these stories. A theme is a phrase, concept, idea, behavior, or significant factor that captures what is important in the story shared. Don't try to identify the "correct" or common themes. Rather take note of what you find to be important, significant or original in your own perspective in each of the stories.

Themes:

Task 3: Identifying common themes

Share all of the themes you identified and generate a complete list as a group. Discuss them and, as a group, identify the themes that are common or particularly important. Which of these themes represent the most important factor collaboration at Prodigious? Which do you want more of at Prodigious?

From your **group's list**, come to agreement on 3–5 themes for your group. As a group, select the themes you believe are most important for creating effective and exciting collaboration at Prodigious. Write the 3-5 themes on the sheet provided. Post your sheets on the wall. (Try to be sufficiently descriptive to communicate the meaning for other groups).

Task 4: Prioritizing themes

In this task, the whole group will create a scatter-gram to identify the themes of highest energy.

Each of you has 3 “dots” to use on the lists of Themes listed on the charts displayed on the wall.

Individually read the charts and decide on 3 of the themes that you personally feel you would MOST like to have as a part of Prodigious. Use only 1 “dot” per theme and place it next to the theme.

What strikes you about the way the points were distributed? What aspects seem particularly important to this group? What concepts are emerging as personally important for you?

Multi-voting Technique

When confronted with a number of good options, a multi-voting process helps to get a quick read of where a group has the highest energy. This method has the advantage of being quick and visual.

Be careful not to assume that the option with the most votes is, automatically, the preference of the group. The differences between 24 and 22 votes are not statistically significant, they simply show a roughly equal proportion of energy for those options. .

Source: Sure Fire Meetings, Valerie Uccellani, Global Learning Partners globallearningpartners.com

Task 5: Creating visual images and possibility statements



Form new groups of _____ people. Discuss the themes that emerged and chose the 3 to 5 themes your group agrees are the most important to be present in Prodigious. Write these on chart paper.

Part 1: Create a visual image of collaborating at Prodigious when all of these themes are fully present and fully expressed. You will be presenting your work to the whole group.

(Your group can create a picture, create other images, “perform” an image, etc. Be as creative as you like!) Use materials at hand, and others you might discover.

Part 2: As a group, create a possibility statement, that converts your image into words. Review the guidelines and a few examples on the following pages.

Remember: a possibility statement is not a marketing slogan. It is a rich description of the future you will create.

Write your possibility statement on chart paper and prepare to present your statement and image to the whole group.

Why use a visual image?

Images are glue for ideas and concepts in the human brain. The act of creating an image taps into your creativity and demands the level of creativity necessary for the work in the Design phase, the work of co-creating the change within the organization. The conversations about the image are more important than the artistic quality of the visual.

Appreciative Inquiry is, in part, the art of helping systems create images of their most desired future. Based on the belief that a human system will show a heliotropic tendency to move toward positive images, AI is focused on the generative and creative images that can be held up, valued, and used as a basis for moving toward the future.”

Watkins, Mohr, “Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination” p. 30

A possibility statement makes a bridge between the best of what is, and the vision of what could be. It is a positive description of a new future that challenges the status quo and inspires action. It is written in the present tense as if it describes the current reality.

As we create possibility statements we clarify our shared vision of the future, we create a focus, a set of distinctive phrases that paint a picture of what this group imagines for its most desired future. This provides a clear and shared direction to guide activities.

Criteria for good possibility statements:

1. They are provocative. They stretch, challenge and interrupt the status quo.
2. They are real. There are examples that show how the ideal is a real possibility, even though it is still beyond what is in place today.
3. They are desirable. If the statement could be fully implemented, the organization and YOU would want it.
4. Language is bold and affirmative.
5. Language is sufficiently descriptive to serve as a guide for the group and for individual stakeholders.

Adapted from *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination*, Jane Watkins. Bernard Mohr. 2001

Examples of Possibility Statements

“To us, customer service means satisfying the internal customer. Purchasing is a service organization that must meet the requirements of all customers, whatever and however differently they might be from one to another.

“We encourage open communication with our customers and specifically ask they how we are doing. Our customers have a pleasant experience when they talk to us. We anticipate their needs and have the information available when they call. We work through the information in an uninterrupted sequence and they talk to only one person. The information we need to answer their questions is available to us with a touch of the finger. We devote time to learning more so we keep our expertise current. We do our best and know that our decisions are appreciated by others. We feel comfortable providing extraordinary service for our clients because we know that is why they choose us. We continually learn as we work. We feel the support of our other organizational members and are confident we all know extraordinary service is how we help people. Our business provides an important service to our customers. We are proud to be a part of this organization.”¹

Our company is poised for a positive future because partners at all regions share a basic common vision in relation to the firm's core missions, intent, and direction. It is an exciting, challenging, and meaningful direction that helps give all partners a feeling of significance, purpose, pride, and unity. The firm uses whatever time and resources are needed to bring everyone on board and thus continuously cultivates “the thrill of having a one firm feeling”, of being a valued member of one outstanding national partnership. “We have created an organization where everyone experiences themselves as owners of the business-- where everyone at all levels feels the organization is theirs to improve, change, and help become what it can potentially become. (Our company) recognizes there is a big difference between owners versus hired hands. Ownership at our company happens in three way: (1) on an economic level it happens when everyone is a shareholder and shares in the profit; (2) on a psychological level it happens because people are authentically involved; and, (3) on a business level it happens when the “big picture” purpose is shared by all, and all take part at the strategic level of business planning.”

“Walking into our facilities you can feel the energy.

a) We build upon each other's strengths.

b) We respond to the unpredictable with balance and passion. c) We nurture each other with challenge and understanding. d) We step out of defined roles to pursue the extraordinary. e) We seek places never imagined possible.

We build for the future while living in the present and being grounded in the past.”

¹ Source: OMEGA POINT INTERNATIONAL, Inc. info@omegapoint.net Adapted from training provided by The Taos Institute.

TASK 6: Presentations of Images and Statements

Each group presents its visual image and Possibility Statement to the whole group. The whole group then discusses commonalities and ideas that will be important to include in planning for improved collaboration at Prodigious. These ideas will be guidance for the next task.



for

TASK 7: Design – what will we do to be sure this happens?

Just what it looks like and how a design is created and implemented will depend in large measure on the organization. Most important in an Appreciative process is that the design and plans are made and implemented by those who “are in the room and engaged in the process.” Any plans made that involve others outside are to include, example, ways to get those people engaged, etc.

To conclude our workshop:

Think about this shared image of improved collaboration at Prodigious. What is one commitment you will make to bring this image to life?