

Managing change in your school: The appreciative inquiry (AI) approach

Overview description

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is used widely as a methodological process for organisational change and development. It is a collaborative, participatory approach to organisational change and research that focuses on what is working well and how successes can be built upon. This strengths-based approach encourages questions like:

Q. What have been your best experiences working in your school/organisation?

Q. What do you value about yourself, your role, your school?

Q. What achievements are you (and your team/department) proud of?

Q. Apart from money, what makes it worth coming into work?

Educational organisations can use the principles of AI such as establishing what works well, being focused on positive aspects, aiming to create appreciative dialogue and sharing best practice. AI focuses on illuminating and affirming personal success factors or factors within an organisation.

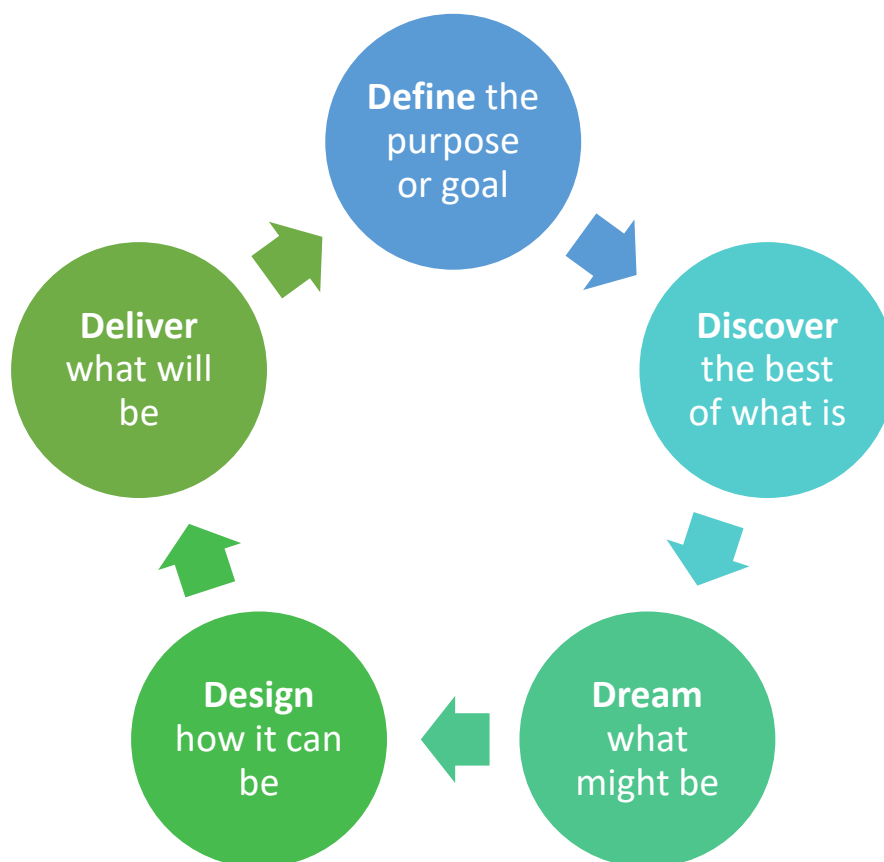
Problem solving approaches vs appreciative inquiry

Problem solving	Appreciative inquiry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What to fix 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What to grow
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinks in terms of problems, symptoms, causes, solutions, action plans, interventions and all too often blame. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinks in terms of good, better, possible.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaks things into pieces leading to fragmented responses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AI keeps the big picture in view, focusing on an ideal and how its roots lie in what is already working.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow pace of change requiring a lot of positive emotion to make real change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quickly creates a new dynamic with people united around a shared vision of the future.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assumes an organisation is made up of a series of problems to overcome, creating a deficit culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assumes an organisation is source of limitless capacity and imagination, creating an appreciative culture.

There are five principles of appreciative inquiry which have been summarised by Kelm (2001 p.166):

1. The constructionist principle suggests that every analysis we make is informed by what we know from the past.
2. The principle of simultaneity proposes that the inquiry and change are simultaneous.
3. The poetic principle postulates that we can find whatever we want in an organisation, because organisations and human systems are like open books or poetry, they are open to infinite interpretations.
4. The anticipatory principle suggests that what people anticipate determines what they will find.
5. The positive principle highlights the importance of viewing organisations and people from a positive perspective.
6. the importance of viewing organisations and people from a positive perspective

The stages of appreciative inquiry: 5 D stages (adapted from Hammond, 2013)



How could you implement this in your school/college?

Stage	Action
1. Define the purpose or goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Agree a shared question and area of focus.</i>
2. Discover the best of what is	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct interviews asking children, families, staff and external stakeholders about what is working well.
3. Dream what might be	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify themes in the interview responses.• As a group, come up with statements of the ideal possibility. Write these in the affirmative, as if they are already true, for example: Families choose to send their children here because of our reputation for exceptional pastoral care. We have excellent support systems in place for children at risk of exclusion and good partnerships with parents. All children feel safe and a sense of belonging at our school/college.
4. Design how it can be	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decide which of the ideal statements is possible.• Create a clear action plan to make the statement a reality.
5. Deliver what will be	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Follow through on the agreed action plan.• Assign 'champions' to the ideal statements, with a role for implementing, monitoring, and reporting back on progress.
6. Start again	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revisit the ideal statement and check back in with the interviewees to see whether new ideal statements are needed.

Useful Resources/References

Kelm, J. (2001) Introducing the Appreciative Inquiry Philosophy. In S.A. Hammond and C. Royal (eds) *Lessons from the field: applying appreciative inquiry*. Plano: Thin Book Publishing Co.

Hammond, S.A. (2013) *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*. Bend, OR: Thin Book Publishing.