

Powerful Research, Positive Change

On a
Shoestring Budget

Introduction

- Mark Alcorn, J.D., M.B.A
 - Association career
 - Association management consulting

- My Goal
 - To make this 90-minute session alone worth the time and resources you have expended to attend this conference

What We Will Accomplish

- Gain basic understanding of Appreciative Inquiry (A/I) and how it works
 - Some theory
 - Some examples from the field
- Provide tools and forms to conduct A/I research in your own organization
- Provide you with information to “sell” A/I to your board

Ground Rules

- I won't waste your time. Don't let me.
- Informal; ask questions any time.
- Feel free to challenge the ideas.
- Have fun.

About You

- Mini-survey
 - How many have never heard of A/I?
 - How many know a fair amount about A/I?
 - How many have conducted an A/I interview?
 - How many have managed A/I research?

Appreciative Inquiry

- A/I is a research technique
 - Compare to surveys
 - Compare to focus groups

Lexicon ~

Ap-pre'ci-ate



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1. Valuing: the-act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us: affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials.
 2. To increase in value ~ synonyms: *Valuing, Prizing, Esteeming, and Honoring*

Lexicon ~

In-quire'



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1. The act of exploration and discovery
 2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities.
Synonyms: *Discovery, Search, Systematically Explore, and Study*

The Founder

David Cooperrider

- Professor of Organizational Behavior at Case Western Reserve University

Suresh Srivastva

- Cooperrider's advisor at Case Western Reserve University

Basic Underlying Principles

Principle No. 1: What we focus on becomes our reality.

- For example
 - Pygmalion effect, halo effect, placebo Effect
 - Elite athletes
 - Focus is on perfect performance, not on avoiding mistakes

Basic Underlying Principles

Principle #2: Problem solving can be ineffective

- Important problems are rarely solved. Rather, it is outgrown and stronger interests come along to crowd out the problems. -paraphrased from Carl Jung
- We lack the knowledge and tools to effectively solve important problems. In fact, when we focus on problems we make them bigger, or inadvertently create other problems.
- When we are problem solving, we are NOT innovating, thinking of what *could* be, or cultivating long-lasting transformation.

Basic Underlying Principles

Principle #3:

In every society, group or organization,
something works

Basic Underlying Principles

Principle #4:

People will be more willing and likely to move forward to an unknown future when they carry forward parts of the past.

Basic Underlying Principles

Principle #5:

If we are going to carry parts of the past forward, those parts should be what is best about the past.

Basic Underlying Principles

- ❑ A/I accepts these principles and applies them to devise a new way of conducting organizational research.
- ❑ A/I accelerates organization breakthroughs.
- ❑ Organizational changes never thought possible suddenly are when people adopt the power of the positive and simply let go of the negative.
- ❑ Transformative change creates opportunities for giant leaps forward in capacity while enriching the quality of life of those in the organization.

A/I Steps

- ❑ Identify topics
- ❑ Devise questions
- ❑ Identify interviewees
- ❑ Conduct interviews
- ❑ Compile interview data
- ❑ Analyze, identify “themes”
- ❑ Devise “provocative propositions” for change

Identifying Topics

Choose topics to move the organization in the direction of its desired future

Notes:

- A topic might be "optimizing our organizational structure" or "becoming a better team"
- Involve a cross section of stakeholders in selecting topics
- Select topic with great care
- Limit to 2-3 topics

Devise Questions

- Create questions aimed at exploring the Topic
 - Questions should seek positive response:
 - Describe a time when you felt that your organization had done something really well. What were the circumstances?
 - Describe a point at which you felt connected to the organization. What happened? Why?
 - Describe an incident when you or someone you know went the extra mile to provide the member what they really wanted, when the really wanted it? What made that possible?

Identify Interviewees

Interviewees should come from all stakeholder groups, including known critics, happy members, involved members, uninvolved members, recent non-renewing members, new members, etc.

Notes: - The larger the number of interviewees, the better.
- Allow for about 50% success at conducting interviews.

Conduct Interviews

- ❑ Key involved leaders and staff should conduct interviews. Select carefully.
 - The experience is surprisingly rewarding for both interviewers and interviewees
- ❑ Train interviewers (see Cheat Sheet), provide tools (see Questionnaire)
- ❑ Allow two-week window
- ❑ Require submittal of interview reports to a consultant or staff member

Compile Interview Data

- ❑ Should be handled by consultant or senior staff member
- ❑ Look for common themes, unusual or innovative ideas
- ❑ Prepare categorized reports and statistics, if possible
- ❑ Use actual words of interviewees in the compilation to add credibility
- ❑ Distribute compilation widely

Identify Themes

- ❑ Use the compilations to identify key themes. For example:
 - ❑ Compiled data:
 - Identified an opportunity
 - Took responsibility
 - Had the authority
 - Had the data available
 - Had the expertise
 - Anticipated or articulated a need
 - Trusted that management would back them up

 - (continued on next slide)

Identifying Themes (Continued)

- The following Theme was culled from the compiled data:

Extraordinary service was provided and the customer was pleasantly surprised. The service provider felt useful and energized by the experience.

- This Theme could be the basis of a Provocative Proposition

Formulate Provocative Propositions

- Definition: An affirmative statement that describes an idealized future as if it was already happening.
 - Provocative Propositions are propositions for what “could be,” and which are based on reality. They describe an ideal state of circumstances that will foster a climate in which we can do more of what works best.

Steps:

- Identify examples of what is best about what we have done
- Determine what circumstances made the best possible (the more detail, the better)
- Use the stories to describe in write an affirmative statement about an ideal future.
 - Use "what if" statements to trigger affirmative statements: What if our member service department had the authority to address legitimate member complaints on the spot?

Sample Provocative Propositions

- We anticipate the needs of our members, and meet those needs as they arise.
- The information we need to answer member questions is available on the spot.
- Our organizational structure affords each and every member multiple opportunities to influence board decision making.
- Every volunteer leader and staff member organization share a single vision for the future of our organization.

Testing a Provocative Proposition

- ❑ Is it provocative? Does it challenge? Does it innovate?
- ❑ Is it grounded in real experience?
- ❑ Is it what we want? Will members and leaders get strongly behind it? Is it exciting?
- ❑ Is it affirmative and bold, and in the present tense (as if already happening)?

Pitfalls

- ❑ Less successful if organization is not open to experimentation and innovation
- ❑ Lack of commitment from organization leaders – inability to see through the deficit/problem-solving model common in organizations today
- ❑ Not interviewing an adequate number of people across the organization

“Whatever you can do or dream you can,
begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and
magic in it.”

- Goethe

What are you waiting for?

When to Use A/I

Samples of change stimuli

- ❑ Strategic planning
- ❑ Organization Design
- ❑ Organization Restructuring
- ❑ Diversity
- ❑ Evaluation (individual or Project)
- ❑ Process Redesign
- ❑ Coaching
- ❑ Teambuilding