

# Managing Workplace Fatigue- Appreciative Inquiry

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The accompanying video introduces the theory of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), including a brief description of the process, its application as a tool for strategic change in organizational development, within a variety of settings, and its potential use as an intervention for combating workplace fatigue among occupational therapists.

Appreciated Inquiry, developed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva, is a theory for analysis, decision-making, and creation of positive and strategic change that is used in organizational development (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). The process of AI provides a forum for bringing groups of people together to work toward making positive changes within an organization (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Application of AI requires facilitation by a group leader or manager who will guide the group through a series of 5 sequential phases so as to **reframe issues, problems and conflicts in terms of possibilities thinking**. During the 5 Phases strengths are identified and action plans developed.

## 5 Phases of Appreciative Inquiry

1. Inquire - Dialogue: What are STRENGTHS in the current system that we want? List the things we APPRECIATE that are needed future development.
2. Inspire – Discover: \*Tell some POSITIVE stories about how we have a meaningful impact on peoples lives; sort out patterns, trends, values and beliefs. Identify any “ELEPHANTS” or “ANTs” Outline any big conflicts, issues or problems we don’t usually talk about,...REFRAME into positive goals.
3. Imagine – Dream: Outline an ideal or perfect place to be...what it looks & feels like. List 3 - 5 BIG IDEAS or new capacities that need to be developed.
4. Innovate - Design: For each BIG IDEA, develop a provocative vision statement (Goal) to energize some direct action for growth. THINK creatively. Design some PDLR (Plan – Do – Learn – Reframe) pilot project(s). Let users test-out the ideas to learn what works. REFRAME as needed.
5. Implement - Deliver: What new goals, objectives, strategies, behaviors and processes grow out of the PDLR pilot tests? Explore creative ways to shift team thinking. Develop Action Plans and implement new projects or processes based on what’s learned in the pilot testing. REFRAME as necessary. (From J. Victory 2008 [www.calsilc.org/](http://www.calsilc.org/)).

Each phase poses questions to encourage positive thinking and group participation while working toward a change in the organization (Appreciative Inquiry, 2014). The purpose of AI is to shift the focus from looking at problems and deficiencies, like the traditional problem-solving approach, to **focusing, instead, on strengths and successes of the organization** (Moore & Charvat, 2007).

Evidence suggests AI has been successfully applied in the following organizations including: the business sector, health care, social non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and government operations (Mishra & Bhatnagar, 2012). According to Mishra and Bhatnagar (2012), AI was successful at: improving a low level of team work and poor leadership at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC); aiding the Office of Research and Development (ORD) of the Environmental Protection Agency in evolving and streamlining the process of selection of their top five research agenda; and developing a focused and enthusiastic group of individuals working toward a common goal for the Vancouver School District. In other

research, Moore and Charvat (2007) report the application of appreciative inquiry would be a useful tool for supporting health professionals in promoting health behaviour changes in their clients.

To date, there is a small but promising body of research applying AI to occupational therapists. For example, a study of an occupational therapy training program in the UK demonstrated that AKI can be incorporated into a problem-based learning curriculum and contributed to students thinking more positively and creatively about clients and themselves (Rubin, Kerrell & Roberts, 2011). A further study looked at using AI to enhance clinicians' experience with providing clinical placements to student occupational therapists (Clark & Thornton 2014). The evidence base for AI's congruence with occupational performance concerns and usefulness to promote coping skills in occupational therapists seems likely to grow.

A simple case study was used in the accompanying video to illustrate the theoretical application of AI as an intervention for combating workplace fatigue among occupational therapists. In this scenario, a clinical lead or department manager of occupational therapy services facilitated this process as a workshop series for occupational therapist team members. Each workshop session progresses through the 5 phases of appreciative inquiry with the clinical lead or department manager proposing questions at each phase to occupational therapists. Remember- in AI, we are not focussing on fixing the "problem" of workplace fatigue. We are identifying the positives and building upon them. An example would be for occupational therapists to focus on what they are already doing to support a healthy lifestyle for themselves and then strategize about how they would enhance opportunities to use these strategies in the workplace. Occupational therapists then work through the 5 stages to achieve and implement that positive change toward fostering a healthy lifestyle in the workplace.

### Key Resource

- Appreciative Inquiry Commons, "a worldwide portal devoted to the fullest sharing of academic resources and practical tools on Appreciative Inquiry" <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>
- Appreciative Inquiry details and resources- Champlain College, VT - <http://www.champlain.edu/ai-home/about-appreciative-inquiry/appreciative-inquiry-resources>

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