

Change management: making use of appreciative inquiry

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Introduction

Nursing managers and unit managers (management) often need to introduce changes within hospitals and units. The usual way of doing so is to hold a meeting in which strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis is performed during brainstorming sessions. However, management may experience resistance and negativity by personnel to the proposed changes. However, a method, known as appreciative inquiry (AI), can be utilised when introducing change.

History of appreciative inquiry

AI is not a new concept. Change management was developed in 1980 by David Cooperrider when studying organised dynamics for his doctorate.¹⁻⁷ As AI developed, Cooperrider founded the Taos Institute in cooperation with other AI practitioners.^{1,5,8} The Taos Institute assisted training various organisations, consultants, educators and family therapists.^{1,3,6,8} Therefore, the use of AI is applicable in various institutions and businesses.

Definitions used in appreciative inquiry

Individual words must be defined to assist with a complete understanding of the definition of AI. To be “appreciative” is defined as “acknowledging with gratitude”.⁹ Making an “inquiry” is defined as “seeking information, asking about or investigating”.⁹ Differentiation is made between the two words in an effort to provide a better understanding of the meaning of the concept of AI.¹⁰ Furthermore, authors are of the opinion that being “appreciative” refers to “recognising value and showing gratitude”. In addition, being “appreciative” also refers to “the act of recognition with valuing and gratefulness”. The authors also argue that

“inquiry” is an “act of exploration” and “discovery”, involving a search for new potential. Therefore, AI is defined as a “group process” in which the best of “what is” within an organisation is “sought, identified and developed”.⁵

Principles of appreciative inquiry

AI is based on eight core principles which focus on positive change within an organisation.⁵ These principles are briefly summarised in Table I.

5-D Cycle

The evolution of a three-dimensional (3-D) cycle led to the development of the 5-D cycle used today.⁸ However, there is a move towards a sixth dimension which has not been covered in the literature.¹³ The 5-D cycle is based on a five-phase process which is built around a positive core, and guides conversation within a group or meeting. The phases are illustrated in Figure 1. Each phase is discussed.

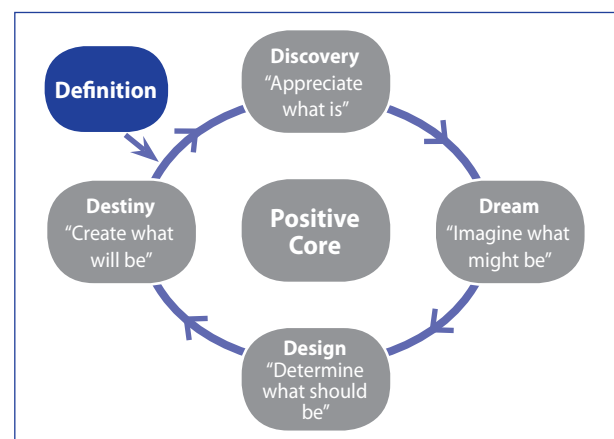


Figure 1: The 5-D Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry

Table I: Core principles of appreciative inquiry^{2,5,6,8,10-12}

Principle	Summary
Constructionist principle	Social knowledge and organisational destiny are linked. Therefore, what is known is what is done
	Potential is constructed by the questions that are asked
	Conversation is encouraged and communication created
	Different stories are shared, which can have the effect of shaping and reflecting the thoughts and actions of people about events in the past, present and future
	It is accurate and honest, and influences the way in which people react to and approach change
	Social creation results through language and conversation
The principle of simultaneity	The fact that inquiry and change do not accurately take apart moments is recognised
	Inquiry and change should be carried out concurrently. Inquiry is intervention
	Questions are asked about what is still to be “discovered”, and this leads to dialogue on how to create the future
	Change occurs at the time that the questions are asked
The poetic principle	An organisation is described as an “open book”
	Co-authors are involved (people involved within the organisation, as well as those outside it) who interact with the organisation
The anticipatory principle	Shared, unrestricted imagination and communication about the future
	Current action and success is guided and inspired by images of the future
	An organisation's existence is supported when its members share organisational functions, goals and a vision of the future
	Imagine what may be
The positive principle	The drive for change requires optimism, reassurance, sharing in one another's happiness and being productive
	A positive image creates positive action
	Positive aspects are focused upon, in order to move towards a desired future
The wholeness principle	The best in people or an organisation is encouraged and developed
	Includes all stakeholders in a group practice as this inspires ideas and results in cooperative ability
	The “whole story” is shared, leading to a more focused attention span and the discovery of understanding, as well as acknowledgement and respect for one another's differences
The enactment principle	Be the change that is desired
	Transformation occurs by living the way that is desired in the future
The free choice principle	Better performance and commitment can be expected if freedom of choice is permitted
	Decide how, when and what should be added when participating in a discussion
	Supports the belief that free choice encourages organisational excellence and positive change

Positive core

The positive core is central to the 5-D cycle as AI is based on the assumption that there is something of merit, and which works well, within every organisation.³ According to Reed,⁷ the positive core is based on three elements, namely strengths, goals and achievements. Therefore, the 5-D cycle allows access to, and mobilisation of, the positive core.

Definition

The definition phase is viewed as an external and first phase to the 5-D cycle, which involves planning and the development of goals.⁸ Set goals include an explanation of the questions, the inquiry method and the approach and task management.

Furthermore, the definition phase can be viewed as critical to the process, and includes the definition of topics.¹⁴ Withers¹³ argues that the definition phase establishes positive focus, and assists in the determination of which particular issues need to be addressed further. It is ideal to allocate the task team who will assist in the co-design and directing of the strategic planning process, as well as to gather relevant information and viewpoints during this phase.¹⁵

Discovery

The inquiry begins during the discovery phase, when it has been determined “what is”. This sparks the dream of “what might be”.^{4,10,11}

Appreciative inquiry versus traditional thinking

If the literature is considered, there is a definite difference between AI and traditional problem-solving. Problems are usually resolved with problem-solving methods. Therefore, the focus is on something being “broken” and in need of being “fixed”.^{2,11} Therefore, the authors are of the opinion that if members of an organisation know what is “broken”, they also know how to proceed to remedy the situation too. Furthermore, it is believed that traditional problem-solving methods produce conflict and resistance as they are perceived to incorporate “blaming” and to threaten what was “good” in the past.¹⁶

The focus is on development and success with AI. Therefore, it is vision led (“what could be”).² In other words, recognition of existing strengths, hopes and dreams, and positive potential is the focus of AI.¹⁰ It can also be viewed as an energetic process in which the future is co-constructed through thinking. The contrast between AI and traditional problem-solving is illustrated in Table II.

Table II: The differences between appreciative inquiry and traditional problem-solving^{2,16}

Appreciative inquiry thinking	Traditional problem-solving thinking
<i>Development focused:</i> The foundation for success is discovered	<i>Problem focused:</i> The key problem is identified
Vision led	Problem driven
New possibilities for the future are visualised	The root causes of the problem are analysed
The organisation is designed for excellence through conversation	Possible solutions are sought
The future is co-constructed	An action plan is developed
The glass is half full	The glass is half empty
Procreative thinking (language) is applied	Critical thinking is applied and analytical (data) used
Energy	Resistance
Facilitated and internal	Directed and external
Learned	Taught

Application in nursing

While the AI method has not been widely used in nursing, there is proof that it has been used with great success to improve nursing practice and patient care. Nurse leaders were involved in a project to improve communication and teamwork in nurses to increase their involvement in decision-making, and to improve cultural considerations and understanding. According to Havens et al,¹⁷ change occurred successfully using AI, and led to change in

other departments and disciplines as well. AI was also implemented for the purposes of leadership transition.¹⁸ AI was used in South Africa when a pre-hospital learning environment for students enrolled in an emergency nursing programme needed to be evaluated, and also to determine the supervisory relationship of the research supervisor.

It may be ideal to make use of the AI principle when a unit manager or nursing manager wishes to introduce new systems or protocols into a unit or hospital. Furthermore, AI may be very helpful in changing the behaviour of staff with regard to absenteeism, as absenteeism has been linked to poor motivation.

Benefits of appreciative inquiry

The benefits of AI are now discussed. AI:^{5,10,12,19}

- Creates discussion through the engagement of employees (participants)
- Builds relationships through improved communication
- Guides rapid change, even in complex situations
- Creates a mutual ground image for the future
- Creates an opportunity for employees (participants) to be heard
- Creates recognition and mutual respect
- Increases the morale and confidence of employees
- Unites the workforce and management
- Creates an opportunity for knowledge sharing
- Improves performance, productivity and employee satisfaction
- Increases communication
- Results in a decline in staff turnover
- Promotes ownership and teamwork
- Embraces diversity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, AI may be used with great success to introduce change to a unit, hospital or organisation. It has been used since 1980 with great success to improve nursing care, as well as in other fields, so why not in nursing management?

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