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## Abstract

This review serves to examine The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change by Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten - Bloom (2010). It will introduce the topic of Appreciative Inquiry, giving supporting information from the book, and discuss its adaptability. The authors discuss Appreciative Inquiry as a positive approach to change, introduces the 4D cycle associated with it, and uses it to explain how Appreciative Inquiry is carried out in many capacities at the organizational level. Furthermore, this review includes a look into the basic premise of Appreciative Inquiry and how this premise alone affords this Appreciative Inquiry process to be used outside of the business and organizational realm, particularly with families and individuals.

## Keywords

Appreciative Inquiry, Human Systems, Change, Positive, Family

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In *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change,* a second edition revised and expanded publication, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) introduce Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a positive approach to change that gets away from focusing on deficit based thinking. The rationale seems to be that focusing on deficit based thinking will not lead to effective solutions, but will only keep the system stuck in the problem. Although deficit based thinking may lead to change in one regard,  AI is introduced as a process that will lead to not only short-term change, but the discovery of a larger vision which continues to produce life sustaining measures and outcomes in that system.

To better set the stage for understanding not only what it is but the "why" behind Appreciative Inquiry, I want to include the definition of  AI provided by the authors, which is, "the study of what gives life to human systems when they function at their best" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). I think this short definition speaks volumes about the power of a process. The authors make it a point to explain that AI is not a method, but a process (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010) that takes many forms due to its adaptability for each organization's specific use. This alone makes AI innovative in that it does not require each group to follow a strict set of guidelines, but instead offers a guide that can be adapted to fit specific needs. Appreciative Inquiry, according to the authors, takes into consideration the essence of any organization, which they explain to be its positive core, and states that this core is a unique set of skills, strengths, resources, and assets that every person, group, organization, and community possesses (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

Shortly into the book, the authors introduce the 4D cycle that is utilized in carrying out the AI process and discusse each phase in detail in the following chapters. Understanding each phase of the 4D cycle is essential to understanding the notion of AI, its intended use, and expected outcomes. The 4D cycle is the process that is used as the guide to facilitate the needs of an organization. It is so called the "4D cycle" or process because it is four phases all beginning with the letter 'D.' The four stages of the cycle include discover, dream, design, and destiny (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). There is nothing negative about these words, right? This is exactly the purpose of this 4D process and the overall notion of AI. Each of the phases is centered on one or more questions, but not just any question, a positive question. The authors stress the importance of questions to the overall AI process stating that not only

having a question, but that the nature of the question is what is most important (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). It is pointed out that because organizations move in the direction of what they question, the more affirmative the question, the more hopeful and positive the response (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

To help understand the process that creates an AI experience the authors discusse each phase of the 4D cycle in detail. The first phase, the discovery phase, centers on appreciative interviews (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). It is in this stage that participants of any number, participating in the inquiry, starts the appreciative questioning process by telling stories, interviewing other participants, and providing examples of answers to questions of focus. This process is centered on discovering the best of what is and what has worked about the organization (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The second stage of dreaming is centered on utilizing what was discussed in the discovery phase to imagine and envision a better future (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). This allows them to imagine the good being even better and this sets the stage in them finding out how to make that happen. This stage of the process goes along with the AI principle that states organizations grow in the direction of the images held about their future (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The third stage is the design phase. It is in this phase that what was discovered as good and envisioned as being better, is made more practical by focusing on a plan of action to make it happen (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The third phase allows ideas to be constructed to build on. Lastly, the fourth stage is the destiny phase that centers on implementing what has been discovered and putting plans into action (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

Although the 4D cycle is provided to help facilitate the process, it's important to consider the approach you will use to engage in this process. This requires keeping in mind three approaches to AI: (a) change agendas – what you need AI to do for your organization, (b) forms of engagement – a way of carrying out the process, taking into consideration time, resources, and etc., and (c) inquiry strategy – a carefully thought out plan for the way an initiative will unfold over time to achieve the change agenda, laying out the who, what, where, why, and when (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The authors explain eight change agendas, eight forms of engagement, and the rationale behind creating an inquiry strategy. Keeping in mind these approaches to the process will ensure that when the 4D process is started, it's carried out as fluidly as possible.

Throughout the book the authors share examples of how organizations have utilized Appreciative Inquiry to bring about positive change. Of the many examples, I was particularly interested in their example of the utilization of the process with underperforming high school students. I think I was more interested in this example because although it is not your typical "family" this example took the process of AI outside of the traditional business and organizational world, where much of the original use of AI, and the majority of the examples included in the book derives from. The authors describe how one high school in Cleveland utilized AI during a three week summer camp where students were allowed to interview academically and professionally successful individuals, who had the effect of inspiring and shaping their outlook, vision, and goals for the future, resulting in better school performance to help reach these goals (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). In talking about the provided examples of its use, I think it is important to point out that the authors also credit its origins by discussing the early development of the AI process. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) further explain AI by giving attention to how it was developed by David Cooperrider, along with his advisor, while a doctoral student at Case Western Reserve University, while focused on research analyzing factors that contributed to the effectiveness of the Cleveland Clinic medical organization (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). After its initial inception, Cooperrider and others continued to utilize AI in organizational development and expanded on its theory, process, and use.

As a current first year doctoral student, my interests in AI came about as a result of a class assignment relating to methods of qualitative research. Of those listed I was particularly interested in finding out more about AI due to my lack of exposure to and knowledge about that specific method. I had heard and read of most of the others, but not of AI. Upon my initial research, I was immediately taken with AI because of its focus on human systems, and not just on human systems, but about the positive and what is right with them. After having taught a Positive Psychology class for over two years, I was astounded by, and appreciated its similarity to this rapidly growing field. Before even reading about confirmation of their relation, I could immediately see their resemblance in the basic premise of AI focusing on the positives of human systems and the basic assumptions of Positive Psychology focusing on the positives of human nature.

As mentioned previously in this review, AI's fundamental focus is on the positive functioning of human systems. I can't mention this without also mentioning the principles on which AI is based. The authors discuss eight principles. The first principle is the constructionist principle which suggest that communication and language is at the center of our ability to change and that our words create the world we live in, therefore, they should be positive (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The second principle is the simultaneity principle which states that change begins the moment we ask the question, that inquiry and change are simultaneous (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). This is why the power of the question is so important in the AI process. The third principle is the poetic principle which states that organizations are like open books, endless sources of learning that is based on what we choose to learn, because we will only discover what we choose to learn (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The fourth principle, the anticipatory principle, is based on the notion that images inspire action and that human systems move in the direction of their images; it states that images of the future guide and inspire present day actions and achievements (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The fifth principle is the positive principle which simply state that positive questions lead to positive change, and therefore, the momentum of the organization will be inspired by or directly related to and impacted by these questions (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The sixth principle is the wholeness principle and states that the experience of wholeness, being fully attuned to others and understanding their perspectives and differing views, brings out the best in people, organizations, and communities (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The seventh principle is the enactment principle, which states that transformation occurs by living in the present what we most desire in the future, and builds on the notion that we must "be the change that we want to see" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Lastly, the eighth principle is the free choice principle, which suggests that people in organizations are more committed and perform better when they have more freedom and input on how and what they contribute (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

When reading about the fundamental concepts of AI, what caught my attention was the focus on the beliefs about human nature. These beliefs are that people, individually or collectively have unique gifts and skills to offer; organizations are human social systems of unlimited capacity centered in their creative and lived language; the images we hold of the future are socially created and the language we use to fashion them guide our actions; and through human communication which includes inquiry and dialogue, people can shift their ideas and thinking from problem focused to future productive possibilities (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). With all of the examples of how businesses have used AI with employees, I began to think that if AI is based so much on human nature, then why can't other human systems use AI just as effectively as businesses and organizational structures? Upon further research and reading about AI, I realized that I was not alone in my thinking. Jacqueline Kelm writes at great length about "Appreciative Living" and utilizingthe principles of AI in our individual lives. She proposes a three step process of accepting what is,

imagining the ideal, and acting in alignment with these images (Kelm, 2008). I admire her work and agree wholeheartedly. However, I also wondered about using AI with other groups such as the family, and how the AI principles can be applied. Many times families enter into therapy due to operating out of dysfunction, which usually centers on a certain problem. They may not realize that they are operating from a state of dysfunction, but may only know that there is a problem that they want to make better. I feel that effectively utilizing the strategies of AI can help this social structure just as it could any other system. By discovering the best of what makes the family whole, complete and functional, dreaming about or imagining that helping them to create better opportunities for the future and healthier relationships, designing a way to make that happen, and striving toward their destiny by putting this plan into action, families can effectively utilize this process for positive growth. Several people co-authored a book that utilizes AI questions to help bring out the best in families (Cooperrider-Dole, Silbert, Mann, & Whitney, 2008). The book, aside from explaining its focus on AI, utilizes several familiar family scenarios and provides previously constructed questions as an example of how appreciative questioning serves to create what its title suggests, which is positive family dynamics (Cooperrider-Dole, Silbert, Mann, & Whitney, 2008). I appreciate this book of scenarios and questions, and look forward to more theory being constructed around AI and its use with the family system.

I find the strengths and weakness of this book to be interrelated. I found the book's explanation of the functionality of this process to human systems well written and thoroughly explained, but wondered why more discussion of its use with other human systems was not included. I understand that attention was particularly given to the origin of the process, which was specifically used for organizational change, but would have appreciated more comparative views to individuals and families seeing that these are the human systems those of us in the marriage and family therapy and professional counseling programs are primarily focused on.

For anyone interested in AI as a qualitative process, understanding its origins is very important. I think this book is a great resource that helps with that understanding. The authors discuss every facet of the approach, from how it was developed, what it is, why it works, how it's carried out, and how it can help in various situations and circumstances. What I like most about the book, which also has a lot to do with the underlining concept of the AI process itself, is its focus on the human component of any organized system or institution. Businesses, organizations, communities, school systems, churches, families, and any and all other organized groups are all made up of people. The interaction of those people within that system will greatly affect its purpose, its mission, its progress, its outcome, and its future. I find the fundamental principles of Appreciative Inquiry to be greatly related to this latter notion.

In this review I attempted to examine the authors' views of AI through discussing their expert knowledge of this process as they explain it in their book. The focus of this review was to explain AI from the author's perspective while at the same time exploring the application of its core principles and assumptions to other human systems. In this case, the human system of focus was the family. Utilizing this book alone for the purpose of using AI for qualitative research would probably not be as helpful as it would in using it for organizational development. However, using it to help understand and apply the principles of AI is helpful when including other supplemental material.

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