Appreciative Inquiry:
An Action Research Method for Organizational Transformation and its Implications to the Practice of Group Process Facilitation

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We all know that the only thing we can be sure of is… change.

As we are people deeply involved with facilitating or planning change in organizations, we also know that there is a second thing we can be sure of… there will be resistance to change.

And, therefore, enabling our organizations and their members to get around, over, through resistance to change is our greatest challenge.

A quick example of why typical change engenders resistance:

> *The shop supervisor is returning from his first meeting with the new quality improvement team in his area:*
> *"How did it go Stan?"*
> *"Oh just great, John… the team is all excited because they did a needs assessment workshop and have found 60 things in our area that can be fixed or improved."*
> *"So why aren't you smiling, Stan?"*
> *"Well, it makes me feel – look like – a first class dummy of a supervisor. Sixty things, I should have already fixed, improved, or at least known were problems."*

This approach almost always engenders resistance by supervisors and managers, as well as causes a riff between line and management. But that is the way nearly all change programs begin… with looking for problems, mistakes, errors, things to be fixed. However innocent or pure intentioned, the assumption that a change effort begins by looking at how the organization is deficient assumes from the outset that the efforts that brought the organization to its present state are – to some degree – the reasons why something is not working in the present.

There is another way of beginning an organizational change effort, one that has as a basic principle, affirmation. It is called "Appreciative Inquiry."

"Appreciative Inquiry" is a research method that:
1. Sets out to discover the elements and factors in an organization that enabled it to achieve success in the past, and;
2. Then builds upon those elements and factors to help the organization create a positive future.

Appreciative Inquiry looks for what has made an organization vital and vibrant and then attempts to build upon those life-giving forces to create a positive vision of the organization's future.

Note: This article draws heavily upon my own experiences with this research method and the writings of David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva, two of the key architects of the Appreciative Inquiry approach as designed and implemented by the staff of the Weatherhead School of Management's Department of Organizational Behavior at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio.

In the film "Lawrence of Arabia" just before heading off for Arabia, the T. E. Lawrence character, played by Peter O'Toole, is asked what he will do when he gets there, how he will get the warring tribes of Arabia to join together to fight the Turks, Britain's enemy in the Middle East during World War One. In the film, Lawrence says: "I will appreciate the situation." If you have seen the film and still recall it to mind, you should be able to see how the theory of Appreciative Inquiry matches up against the intuitive and contextual approach of Lawrence.

> *Appreciation*
> 1. A feeling or expression of gratitude
> 2. A favorable opinion of something
> 3. Recognition and liking of something's qualities
> 4. A full understanding of the meaning and importance of something
> 5. An increase in value, especially over time
>
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The "what's and how's" of Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry uses "understanding-through-empathy" during first-hand interviews with stakeholders of the organization. Its bias is toward the direct interaction with and observation of the people in an organization rather than a detached analysis of facts, figures, charts, benchmark comparisons, and discussions with executives only.

It is a case study and contextual method explicitly aimed at attempting to isolate, magnify, and document the "life-giving forces" involved in the cooperative action and collective existence of an organization.

> *Life giving forces are the unique values, structures, and processes that make the very existence of an organization possible. They are both the élan vital – the energy that gives an organization breath and an organization's building blocks that give it form and substance — ideas, beliefs and values, as well as structures, practices or procedures.*

It is "appreciative" because it looks for what has enabled an organization to exist and thrive rather than to look for problems or weaknesses — to identify what is not working in order to fix it.

Instead of seeing the organization in some way being deficient, faulty or in some way defective, AI researchers look at the organization as being already full and complete and having the wherewithal to complete its mission.

It is an "inquiry" because it relies heavily upon close collaboration with the organization's members as the primary source of information by drawing out people's stories of "work life" within the organization. Then, following that inquiry, by portraying the reoccurring themes collected from interviews, and immersing oneself into the life of the organization, a researcher is able to detect patterns and properties of the organization that have kept it alive and provide a basis for vitality for its future.

"Appreciative Inquiry" as Action Research

Appreciative Inquiry is a form of action research of organization and social life. Researchers and open systems theorists Eric Trist, Fred and Merrelyn Emery, Russ Ackoff, Chris Argyris, and many others have documented action research's capacity to transform the objects of its research. The Tavistock Institute in London became famous for its development of action research from the 1940s onward.

Their work has revealed that action research has a "generative capacity," a "capacity to challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary social life, to foster reconsideration of that which is 'taken for granted' and thereby furnish new alternatives for social actions" (Gergen, 1978). Appreciative Inquiry has this capacity in that organization members – through in-depth interviews – are given the opportunity to retell the story about their organization and its future directions.

Part of the task of action research is to produce a theory of change, which emerges from the change process itself. Appreciative Inquiry is "grounded theory building" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) in the sense that the operating framework and images of the future of the organization emerge from the stuff of the organizational life itself.

While most organizational members are not consumed with the theoretical base of their group, they have nonetheless, formed - consciously or unconsciously - a contextual framework with certain assumptions about the world and its needs, a series of operating values that guide their thinking and acting, an "in-house" language that allows them to communicate with ease, as well as a vision of the future. This framework supports the corporate culture of the organization. Appreciative Inquiry can surface the underlying non-negotiable values that hold an organization together and point it towards its future.

Guiding Perspectives of Appreciative Inquiry

The perspective that guides Appreciative Inquiry begins the with the notion that every organization operates out of an image - a mental picture or model - of itself, of the world around it and of the future. Sometimes these images are conscious, but often they are not. When an organization is founded, the images are clear. During the growth of an organization, the images generally remain clear. In established organizations, frequently the image becomes murky.

Members may have lost their anticipatory memory of why they are in being, their initial calling. Their original allure may have become opaque in the struggles for survival. Unfortunately new members are rarely provided access to the founding images of the organization.

To paraphrase Fred Polak (1973), the rise and fall of images of the future precedes or accompanies the rise and fall of organizations. As long as an organization's image is positive and flourishing, the flower of the organization is in full bloom. Once the image begins to decay and lose its vitality, however, the organization does not survive long.

> **A change in perspective example:** During the 1950s and 1960s Cleveland, Ohio was a vibrant, vital industrial city with a positive view of itself. During the 1970s and 1980s the onslaught of the success of Japanese autos, the rising costs of fuel, and cutthroat competition in steel, meant the loss of thousands of jobs in Cleveland. It became to itself and the nation – the "Mistake on the Lake." In the early 1990's people in Cleveland began to change their view of themselves and their city. It may not be San Francisco, LA, or New York but it has again become a vibrant city where performers and visitors to its Rock and Roll Hall of Fame enjoy staying an extra day.

Appreciation —Kolb (1984) states, "Appreciation is a process of affirmation. Unlike criticism, which is based on skepticism and doubts, appreciation is based on belief, trust, and conviction. And from this affirmative embrace flows a deeper fullness and richness of experience."

Therefore, what the researcher looks for first in analyzing organizational life is not what are the problems with this organization, but rather, what are its gifts - the building blocks of the organization. They may be ideas, beliefs or values as well as structures, practices or procedures.

What you see is what you will work toward manifesting — Relying then upon these gifts as energizing capacity, the research extends into the future what the organization might look like. This has been termed the activity of crafting provocative propositions. Envisioning provocative new futures for an organization relies upon that assumption that human systems are largely belief or vision fulfilling in character, meaning, "they exhibit an observable and largely automatic tendency to evolve in the direction of positive anticipatory images of the future" (Cooperrider, 1990).

"The spirit of Appreciative Inquiry is to be found in one of the most ancient archetypes or metaphorical symbols of hope and inspiration that humankind has ever known - the miracle and mystery of being.... In the same way that birth of a living, breathing, loving, thinking human being is an inexplicable mystery, so too it can be said in no uncertain terms that 'organizing is a miracle' of cooperative human interaction, of which there can never be final explanation… the action researcher is drawn to affirm, and thereby illuminate, the factors and forces involved in organizing that serve to nourish the human spirit" (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

In other words, Appreciative Inquiry is grounded in an "organizational theory of affirmation" which, paraphrasing Cooperrider (1990), has as some of its key elements the following:

1. When it comes to understanding organizational existence, there is no better clue to the organization's overall well being than its guiding images of the future - its vision of itself and the world. Organizations exist because its stakeholders that govern and maintain them carry in their minds and hearts some sort of shared positive projection about what the organization is, how it will function, and what it might become.
2. No matter what its previous history is, virtually any pattern of organizational action is open to alteration and reconfiguration.
3. To the extent that an organization's imaginative projections are the key to their current conduct, organizations are free to seek transformations of themselves by replacing current images with images of a new and better future.
4. Organizations are heliotropic in character. That is they grow toward the light, toward a positive vision of the future. Positive imagery and hence heliotropic movement is endemic to organizational life. Consequently, organizations have the capacity to create their own realities and their own futures.
5. Conscious examination, recall, and creation of positive imagery are viable options for organizations. The more an organization focuses on positive imagery, the better it will become; there is an observable self-reinforcing, imaginal educative effect of affirmation. Affirmative competence is the key to the self-organizing system.
6. The key to an organization having a hope-filled future is to be perpetually self-reaffirming. The challenge to organizational transformation is to discover the processes through which an organization's declarations of its past can be left behind and better ones for the future be developed. The process of visioning is more important than the content of the vision.
7. Every organization needs constant reaffirmation. Frequently the stakeholders of an organization have become unconscious to that which has made the organization vital. The original vitality needs to be awakened by a process of affirmation through a stance of appreciative cognition. Somehow the "immensity of the commonplace" (Bruner, 1986) needs to become transparent to all the stakeholders in order for them to believe in themselves again.
8. Creating the conditions for organization-wide appreciation is the single most important measure that can be taken to ensure the conscious evolution of a valued and positive future. Through appreciation of organizational life, members of an organization learn to value not only the life-enhancing organization itself, but also learn to affirm themselves.

Appreciative Inquiry and its process of building on the vibrant life-giving forces of an organization, which are discovered in interviews and story telling of its members, allow them to relate "optimal" experiences at work, similar to those researched and documented by Professor Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi's in his book, *Flow*. A Dutch collaborator of Csikszentmihalyi, Frank Heckman has shared this example of flow in a book he co-authored with Ned Hamson (*After Atlantis: Working, Managing, and Leading in Turbulent Times*). A technical support group from a large consulting firm said of their flow experience:
> *"We had ten weeks to complete the project, and started two weeks late. Our objectives*
> *were quite clear and through the high level complexity of the project our group was forced*

into a continuous learning and solution seeking mode. Despite the tremendous pressures, we were pretty soon in the groove of collaboratively and effectively deciding on all sorts of issues all the time, moving through and around the obstacles with great conviction and a sense that nothing could stop us. We came to call our project 'mission impossible,' and upon completion, many of us confessed that this had been one of the most exciting and best experiences in our professional life." (Page 51)

The Process of Appreciative Inquiry

The appreciative mode of inquiry is a way of living with, being with, and directly participating in the varieties of social organization. The consultant/researcher walks in with the stance of "appreciative objectivity" - value-laden with the assumption that whatever one finds, one will gravitate toward embracing it as inherently good and in so doing will be able to recognize its latent possibilities for the future.

The process of Appreciative Inquiry can be simply stated in two basic steps:

1. The research task is to identify and value the best of "what is" within the organization. In the first step the purpose of valuing is to tap into the key themes and forces important to the organization.
2. The research task then envisions what "might be." When the best of what is has been identified and is valued and the values are recounted, the mind naturally begins to search beyond this; it begins to envision new possibilities. Valuing the best of what is leads to envisioning what might be. Envisioning means allowing oneself to be inspired by what one sees.

Appreciative Inquiry looks for those peak moments in organizational existence when the individuals felt most alive, effective, and potent. Then, by building on these experiences, it describes the ideal-type ideas of what can be produced which challenge the organization to become more than they are at their current level by visioning from the best of what already exists. The theory behind provocative propositions is that change comes from doing more of what you are already doing when operating at one's best. Preoccupation on the organization's blocks, problems, weaknesses and barriers may undermine the process of identifying the positive energy that is required to enable the organization to move to a new level of operation.

Four Operating Principles of Appreciative Inquiry

From the above, the, four principles of Appreciative Inquiry as a form of action research can be stated as such (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider, 1989):

1. Appreciative
This principle assumes that every social system "works" to some degree that it is not in a complete state of entropy. The primary task of research, then, is to discover, describe, and explain those social gifts, talents, innovations, however small, which serve to give "life" to the system and activate members' competencies and energies.

2.   Applicable

Appreciative Inquiry is pragmatic. Its results are concretely beneficial to the organization under review. An applicable organizational analysis leads to new understandings that can be used, applied and thereby validated in action.

3.   Provocative

Appreciative Inquiry holds that an organization is, in fact, an open-ended indeterminate system capable of:
- Becoming more than what it is at any given moment, and
- Learning how to actively take part in guiding its own evolution.

Appreciative knowledge of what is suggests what might be, and such knowledge can be used to generate images of realistic developmental opportunities that can be experimented with on a wider scale. In this sense, Appreciative Inquiry can be both pragmatic and visionary.

4.   Collaborative

Since the intent of Appreciative Inquiry is to identify the life-giving forces, by working with its members, and becoming deeply familiar with the organization can it illuminate significantly those very products of the research quest.

Members of the organizations need to be seen and treated as co-researchers. Every step in the research should be done as jointly and consensually as possible. By doing the research in a collaborative fashion, the other three principles are more possible to fulfill.

Hope, Challenge and Energy for Change:
Applying Appreciative Inquiry with The Institute for Cultural Affairs

I participated in an "Appreciative Inquiry" research project in 1989, as a staff member of the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA).   The Chicago office of the ICA, which serves the Midwest, had been selected to be a case study for a research project designed and managed by the Department of Organizational Behavior at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

Phase 1: The ICA (Reluctantly) Joins in the AI Project

Case Western researchers, Suresh Srivastva, David Cooperrider, and Tojo Thachankary visited with staff of the ICA in Chicago in April of 1989. Their purpose was to acquaint ICA with the project and gain staff support for moving ahead with ICA as one of the case studies.

The Social Innovation in Global Management Project

Researchers at Case Western University, in 1989, designed an imaginative scheme to investigate "global social change organizations" to create a database on innovative management techniques and as a means to focus attention on the appreciative inquiry approach. David Cooperrider, noted in his March 2, 1989, letter: ". [O]ur studies are meant to include many diverse forms of organized action (social movements, networks, global projects, interorganizational partnerships, transnational professional associations, etc.) that have, as their primary task, a commitment to serve as an agent of change in the development of a healthier, peaceful world."

Four organizations were selected to be in the project's initial pilot phase. In addition to The Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA – see box below), they were:
The International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, who, after being in existence for five years, were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985 for their efforts in raising awareness about the medical consequences of nuclear war.
The Hunger Project, established in 1977 and active in over 20 countries, and whose purpose is to transform the prospect of ending hunger from a possibility into an opportunity that can be realized.
The Nature Conservancy (Latin American Division), which has as its principle mission the global preservation of natural or biological diversity.

The research process itself lasted for approximately 9 months of 1989 beginning in March. It culminated with the presentation of the case studies to a "Social Innovations in Global Management." conference convened by Case Western.

> Note: Global social change organizations were defined as non-profit organizations organized to promote the well being of the entire planet with an international focus.

We were impressed with the appreciative inquiry's philosophy since it mirrored ICA's organizational philosophy but hesitant about participating since as staffers and as organizational consultants it was hard for us to believe that anyone "outside" using methods different than ours could offer anything of value to us. We were also afraid the project would eat up staff time and perhaps give us a product with little relevance or value for our future. In short, our reaction was similar to that of most organizations that are not very interested in change. However, the allure of the method's philosophy moved us to give them a tentative "yes," subject to our reactions to an initial round of staff interviews and briefings on how much of our time we might be committing to the project.

Tojo Thachankary and Xiaoping Tian, both then doctoral candidates at Case Western, conducted a first round of interviews in May 1989 to get an idea of ICA's life giving forces and to increase the level of receptivity for the research project. They conducted about 20 individual interviews and asked each person three primary questions and each person was asked to draw a picture or image of ICA:

1. *What was your personal high point with ICA?* A peak experience? (When did you feel most alive or most a part of the ICA? What was your most rewarding experience?)

2. *What for you are the basic values that you cherish most* (hold most dear) *that continue to give life to the ICA?*

3. *What do you want the ICA in the future to be?* If you could enhance one thing for further development of the ICA as an organization, what would it be?

Each interview (nearly 140) was taped. Later, about 100 were transcribed.

About the Institute of Cultural Affairs: The Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) is a world-wide private, non-profit organization. Its aim is to develop and implement methods of individual, community, and organizational development. Its programs are highly participatory and are often conducted in collaboration with other public, private, voluntary, or local community organizations.

Its activities include community meeting facilitation, educational research and training, organizational transformation, youth and women's programs, sustainable rural development symposia and projects, leadership training, personal development workshops, strategic planning seminars, conference facilitation, documentation and evaluation.

Note: The author was an ICA staff member from its founding in 1972 until 1996.

Personal Reflections of my interview:

I remember my first interview – with Tojo Thachankary - because of my apprehension and guardedness going in. What was he going to ask me and how would I respond? I didn't want to reveal "too much." However, his first question completely overwhelmed me - I was awestruck. I don't remember exactly what I said but I talked and rambled for about half an hour. Tojo seemed completely absorbed in all that I was saying, only interrupting to gain clarity. His second question seemed even more thought provoking and I talked for far longer than either of us had imagined I would. By the time we got to the third question, Tojo was far behind in his interview schedule and I was surely missing something important as well but I felt a rush giving another response.

I still remember the feeling I had when the interview was over: someone affirming and appreciating my involvement with the ICA exhilarated me. I had a chance to recall, to retell my story about what ICA had meant to me, just me. And I had been provoked into thinking about our future in a profound sort of way.

Irish poet, John O'Donohue expresses much better than I what appreciation and affirmation (love) calls forth in these passages from his book *Eternal Echoes* (pp. 11-12):

> *"One of the deepest desires in the human heart is to be loved for yourself alone... Like someone who has been lost for years in a forgotten place, you*

rejoice in being found. When you are discovered, you then discover yourself. This infuses your whole life with new vigor and light…You discover your creative force.”

Other colleagues reported they had had a similar kind of response. Clearly, appreciative inquiry had tapped a deep wellspring in all of us. After about two days of interviews, Tojo and Xiaoping had interviewed enough people to warrant meeting with all those interviewed to give us feedback.   They noted that "life giving forces" and other themes were emerging from the interviews. Tojo wrote these on the board.

We were struck at how well these two "outsiders" had so quickly and accurately grasped the nature and spirit of our organization - not just what we do, but who we were. We also shared with one another our deep appreciation for "the interview" itself. Each said how the interview had been a personal affirmation, as each had had the opportunity to tell "their story" of what the ICA meant to them.

We quickly agreed that the interviews alone had value for the organization and that we wanted to proceed with the full project. Since the appreciative inquiry approach requires the process be collaborative, we formed an Appreciative Inquiry Team (AI Team) involving eight staff members and the Case Western researchers.

Tojo and Xiaoping then "trained" the team - of which I was a member - in how to do the interview. It is important that the interviewer be non-judgmental regarding responses given and to only ask follow-up questions to gain clarity. This technique was well received by us since it mirrored one of our basic techniques - the "Conversation Method" (See Spencer, 1989).

Phase II: Expanding the Field of Inquiry

When Tojo and Xiaoping returned to start the phase two of the project, they and the AI Team interviewed every ICA staff member as well as several volunteers and Board members. This gave us a total of about 50 completed interviews. While the interviews were being transcribed, the AI Team met to more sharply define the draft of the ICA's "life giving forces."

Each team member then worked on the themes from the preliminary interview data and identified what he or she thought were ICA's life giving forces. The team then pooled the individually refined life giving force themes looking for similarities and dissimilarities among them. The "card technique" outlined in the ICA's Technology of Participation book (Spencer, 1989) was used to finally refine the life giving forces. The five life giving forces identified of the ICA at this point were:

1. The "Faith Stance" of the ICA - of being open and affirming all of life;

2. The "Decision-Making Process of Consensus" the ICA employs;

3. The "Communitarian" nature of the ICA that binds its people together as a form of extended family;

4. The "Missional" character of the organization seeing itself as service to the world;

5. The ongoing "Learning Community" nature of the organization.

The AI Team then formulated several questions to probe, during new interviews, different aspects of each life giving force. A format was piloted, refined, and then finalized. We also decided that to gain the most out of this process, we needed to include as many ICA stakeholders as possible. This meant that more people and time would be involved than first planned for.

Phase III: Further refining of the life giving forces of the ICA

The AI process really took off during Phase III. While the first round of interviews were about 30 minutes in length, the second round stretched to about 90 minutes. The intent was to enable each person to share fuller testimony to the power of the five life giving forces as they experienced them. In addition, because we were now sending members of the AI Team across the Midwest to visit colleagues, supporters, donors, Board members and former staff members who had not been in the first round, some of these interviews took nearly two hours. In a couple of cases, small groups of colleagues met in people's living rooms and did the interview process as a group endeavor. This proved to be nearly as effective as the individual interviews, at least for stakeholders who were less involved in ICA activities.

Over 100 people involved with the ICA had been interviewed when this phase had ended. All those were given the opportunity to tell their stories reported feeling profound appreciation. Rich material was collected, taped, and transcribed by AI Team members.

The affirming positive energy of the appreciative inquiry interviews had been released throughout the ICA Heartland network. The appreciative inquiry process itself gave the network a new sense of hope in the future. This was a period of decentralization for the organization and the appreciative inquiry process restored a sense of confidence in our ability to affect our destiny.

In retelling what had made us great, we rediscovered within ourselves the capacity to claim our greatness for the future, in new forms and manifestations.

Phase IV: Harvest time

It was now time of gleaning lessons and implications for the present and the future. We planned an *Appreciative Research Carnival* and scheduled it for early August 1989. In preparation, a flurry of transcriptions was completed and the AI Team met to review all of the work to date. We identified key quotes to illustrate each life giving force. The quotes were arranged under each of the life giving forces and further subdivided into eight "organizational factors":
1. Strategy and Task
2. Organizational Structure
3. Operational Practices
4. Leadership
5. Decision Making Processes

6.   Interpersonal Relations
7.   Basic Beliefs and Values
8.   Communication.

Every one who had been interviewed was invited to the Carnival - 30 staff and colleagues of the ICA from across the Midwest attended.

The Carnival's chief purpose was to gain consensual validation of the final draft of the ICA's Life Giving Forces and to identify "Provocative Propositions" for the future of each of them. During the second round of interviews, each respondent was asked to describe how they saw each Life Giving Force in the future. This was the basis of identifying the future of the ICA by extending the best of the past into the future.

The "Carnival" theme highlighted the celebration, affirming aspect of the research. During ICA's Carnival each participant was asked to read a sampling of interview transcripts through the screen of the 8 organizational factors and highlight what they found significant. Then, Carnival participants were divided into groups to work on a different Life Giving Force. Each group was further sub-divided into teams whose task was to draft final Life Giving Force statements. This was done to obtain clarity on the Life Giving Forces. The sub-teams then met, discussed similarities and differences, and came to agreement on "their" final draft. Under each category sample quotes were selected from the transcribed interviews to give "life and voice" to the Life Giving Force.

The next step during Carnival was to create the Provocative Propositions. A Provocative Proposition is a statement that bridges the best of "what is" with one's own intuition of "what might be." It builds on the Life Giving Forces and releases additional energy to make visions a reality. A minimum of 40 Provocative Propositions were written - at least one for each of the eight organizational factors under each of the five Life Giving Forces.

A Provocative Proposition contains three aspects of organizational life:

1.   Novelty: It should bring an element of surprise, challenge, and intrigue.
2.   Continuity: It suggests that whatever new strategies and changes are planned they must ensure that continuity from old to the new is maintained.
3.   Transition: It calls for making sure that there is a smooth transition from the familiar to the unfamiliar and that the change is not felt so abruptly that continuity or novelty is lost.

The mental/social point at which these factors intersect is where a true provocative proposition is most likely to emerge.

Carnival participants were given an opportunity to be bold, creative and inspiring about their visions for the ICA — the energy was high and this was the pay off for many. As a team drafted a Provocative Proposition, they evaluated it for:

1) The definition it provided;
2) The novelty-continuity-transition model; and
3) A checklist of ten criteria prepared, in advance, by the AI Team.

Then each group invited another group to look at the Provocative Propositions and comment on them based on the same criteria. This was done between groups and resulted in several revisions of the original drafts. Then, everyone read through all the Provocative Propositions and "valued" them according to a ranking system. Based upon this feedback, 78 Provocative Propositions for ICA's future were created.

Phase V: One ICA in many locations around the globe acting locally

Word of the enthusiasm created in the Heartland toward the appreciative inquiry process had spread to other locations of the ICA around the world. Tojo and I gave a report at the ICA International meeting in Brussels, Belgium in September 1989, during the opening session of the weeklong gathering. During the week, we interviewed another 30 ICA colleagues focusing on the non-American representatives. At the end of the week, Tojo addressed the group:

"I was struck by the similarities between the values stated in Chicago and those values that I see here. I expected there would be more differences because the locations are very different… But the interview data suggests that there is only one ICA" (Thachankary, 1989).

This came as a tremendous affirmation for all of us. We had just completed the decentralization effort as earlier mentioned and were wondering what was going to keep us together, what would be the glue? The AI process had identified our "glue."

The title of Tojo's talk and the name that came to be the title of our case study in the final report was "The ICA: the Hero with a Thousand Faces" as a take off from Joseph Campbell's book on the commonality of the world's mythologies. As Tojo said,

"I really feel that ICA is a hero with multiple expressions and manifestation. The hero has one body and one mind which consists of a set of non-negotiable values that are the core of who you are" (Thachankary, 1989).

Once again, in the form of feedback from the interview process, the colleagues of the ICA represented at this global meeting felt affirmed in the very nature and thrust of what we were doing through the process of appreciative inquiry. The same feeling of self-confidence felt by the ICA Heartland USA network had replicated itself globally.

Summing up

While the articulations of both the Life Giving Forces and the Non-Negotiable Values that Tojo listed in his Brussels speech were like a cup of fresh water for us helping us reclaim our greatness, we were disappointed in the final version of the Provocative Propositions. Since they

were largely the product of the Research Carnival, we felt like we needed to revisit the work of the Carnival and attempt again to distill them more succinctly into a handful of statements about our future rather than the 78 posited at the Carnival.

But apart from that, the question is, "Did the Appreciative Inquiry methodology revitalize the ICA?"

Perhaps it is not possible to make a clear, linear connection between the AI research and what happened afterwards. It is possible to state unequivocally that the ICA is alive and strong and remains a vibrant force for community and organizational development around the world. Its Technology of Participation approach to facilitation has been shared with thousands of people in training programs and direct organizational change measures. The ICA helped spawn the International Association of Facilitators, a professional organization servicing the growing industry of practitioners of facilitation. There now exist ICA offices in over 50 countries.

Implications of Appreciative Inquiry to the Field of Facilitation

It has been over ten years since I was introduced to Appreciative Inquiry and as an organizational development consultant I have greatly benefited from my experiences. The appreciative approach has found its way into my thinking and practice. While I might not always employ appreciative inquiry into every single engagement I have undertaken, its philosophy has guided them all.

One thing, for example, that I like to do when I begin a facilitation session is ask everyone in the group – as an ice-breaker exercise – "What is one thing you most appreciate about the organization you serve?" This signals several things. One, my approach is going to be affirmative. And another, their experiences are valuable. This sets a tone for the rest of our time together from which I build in further elaborations of looking at their organization –and their own experiences within – in a positive rather than critical light.

In summary, the lessons for the group process practitioner of how AI can be useful tool are:

- Undertaking the transforming of organizations is more possible out of an appreciative mode than out of a critical mode.

- The affirmative process of inquiry brings people together in a way that makes them more of a cohesive team and community, thus enabling the success of the overall endeavor.

- For "outside" researchers in appreciative inquiry, trusting the process of inquiry is more important than directing it as experts.

- Collaborative research efforts are successful to the extent that there is a match and compatibility between the values of the two parties involved.

- Making provocative propositions is an act of affirmation and faith in the organization.

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