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# Appreciative Inquiry: How do you do it?

## Introduction

So far we have talked about the nature of conversation based change processes such as appreciative Inquiry, and how they differ from other change interventions, particularly those based on a mechanistic understanding of organisations. For us, appreciative Inquiry along with other processes such as World Café, Future Search and Open Space can be grouped within this emerging field. To help us understand the difference between these approaches better, we want to explain one particular approach, Appreciative Inquiry, in some depth.

This chapter aims to provide an introduction to the core Appreciative Inquiry method. We make the point throughout this book that Appreciative Inquiry is less a process and more of a way of being which guides the practitioner. However, we also recognise that the journey towards this state of being an Appreciative Inquiry practitioner involves doing Appreciative Inquiry processes. In this chapter we aim to describe the Appreciative Inquiry model under its familiar four D headings; Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. We will review each of the four elements in turn and offer action steps for each stage. Prior to this we will review the selection of topics and consider how the inquiry question can be phrased.

## Preparing for change

Before embarking on any change programme we would advocate that the organisation needs to answer for itself a series of questions. This is not an exhaustive list but these are the types of questions we ask when invited to talk with clients about a change plan:

### **(a) Is Appreciative Inquiry right for us?**

Appreciative Inquiry invites a different way of thinking about change. It replaces the model of undertaking an organisational analysis, implementing a plan and then managing resistance, with a focus on identifying and growing what is already giving life to the organisation. While more traditional methodologies call for stakeholder mapping, risk registers and benefits realisation plans, Appreciative Inquiry focuses on the language, discourse and stories within the organisation. Such a change in style and focus can feel unsettling for the organisation by virtue of its unfamiliarity. It can also have an effect on the existing patterns of interaction and discourse, which is again unsettling for the organisation. For these reasons an organisation needs to consider carefully the benefits of this approach against the capacity of the organisation to accept, tolerate or work with significant difference.

### **(b) What are we trying to do?**

In many change plans there is a lack of clarity about what the Board or top team wants to get out of the process of change. Change has come to be seen as a sign of good management, sometimes without adequate thought as to what the process of change will deliver. This has most frequently been seen in structural changes, and emanates from a belief that changing lines of accountability and areas of responsibility will lead to fundamentally different outcomes. Rarely is this the case. We would advocate that in any change process those commissioning the change are clear about what outcomes they are seeking. This can be expressed as a list of

measurable outcomes in the benefits realisation plan or can be more intangibly expressed as a vision for the new organisation or new state.

**(c) What new skills or knowledge do we need to do this?**

Change in all forms often demands new skills. This may be new skills in project management, or new skills in spreadsheets to manage the risk register. Appreciative Inquiry is no different. For Appreciative Inquiry the skills required are more in understanding the process and in undertaking some of the technical components such as writing interview questions and undertaking the interviews in a way which stimulates new thinking rather than one which produces only well rehearsed stories. We will explore these skills more in the next section.

**(d) Will we do this in-house or work with an external facilitator?**

As consultants there is an assumption often made by clients that change always requires an external facilitator. We don't hold that view. What we do say is that organisations need to have thought through the implications of managing a process in-house as well as of commissioning outside help. Both have their advantages and disadvantages.

We have summarised some of our thinking on the advantages and disadvantages in Table 1.

**(e) How urgent is this?**

The top team also need to give thought to how urgent is the change plan. Is the organisation facing a crisis that needs to be addressed within weeks or months? Or is the change plan part of a continual process of changing and evolving as the organisation adapts and responds to wider changes in its environments; from customers, competitors and regulators. The answer to this question will have a direct impact on the steps involved in the process. It will also impact on who and how many will be involved in the process and on the resources which the organisation aims to commit.

**(f) How will we introduce Appreciative Inquiry to our organisation?**

The commissioning team also need to give thought to how they will introduce the process. The context in which the process is introduced can have a significant affect on how people across the organisation respond to it. The introduction of the process thus needs clear communication both around what Appreciative Inquiry is, and why the organisation wants to begin a process or change initiative.

In particular the name Appreciative Inquiry has led us in some projects with clients to re-title Appreciative Inquiry as 'Re-motivate' or 'Imagine'. This reflects our own wish to respond to the needs of the client and a desire to reflect local language, rather than stay pure in our use of the model.

**Table 1: In-house & external managed change**

Method	In-house	External advice/assistance
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the organisation.</li> <li>• Lower cost.</li> <li>• Are building in-house skills for the future.</li> <li>• Can be there around the clock.</li> <li>• Take a long term view of change.</li> <li>• Ensure change fits with other organisation needs.</li> <li>• Build relationships through the process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the process &amp; have done it several times before.</li> <li>• Can call upon more resources as needed during peaks and troughs of change.</li> <li>• Can link project team into wider network.</li> <li>• Bring an external perspective.</li> </ul>
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity cost in using staff on change rather than on their core tasks.</li> <li>• Can lack a balanced perspective</li> <li>• Takes more time as learn mistakes as going along &amp; time is shared with other tasks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More costly than in-house</li> <li>• Can be short term focused</li> <li>• If problems occur after have left can be difficult to resolve as skills have walked out the door.</li> <li>• Can miss internal tricks as don't see the connections between plans outside scope of project.</li> </ul>

### Define

Before the change process can start the organisation needs to define the focus of the inquiry or the type of change required. We would argue firstly that Appreciative Inquiry as a strategy for change is well suited to emergent change, where the answer and possible the future state is unclear. Secondly, it is more suited to long-term change where there is time for whole system involvement, rather than in a turn-round situation requiring emergency management and radical action. In such situations plans are often driven by the change agent with limited consultation and with decision-making on financial and operational decisions controlled by the centre of the organisation (Slater & Lovett, 1999).

Defining the change is a key component of the process and could be seen as stage one of assignment. The commissioning team may wish to focus on five criteria in drafting the definition for change.

- (i) Keep it open: the process needs to let the issues unfold as the inquiry proceeds, so high level objectives at this stage are better than SMART goals set by the Management Team.
- (ii) Be open-minded: the team needs to retain an open mind about the actions which can follow.
- (iii) Outcome focused: the process needs to focus on an outcome, even though this may be vaguely defined and thus allow room for development and refinement during the process.
- (iv) Positive phrasing: the outcome needs to be positively orientated, or at least be capable of being positive for all involved in the change process.
- (v) Start involvement at the start: involve stakeholders from across the system in defining the focus of the inquiry.
- (vi) Exciting: lastly we would advocate that the topic selection should excite stakeholders. It should be provocative and encourage people to want to talk about it. Sometimes this can be down to phrasing.

Clients tend to think in terms of problems and so present their issues in terms of problems. A key skill for an Appreciative Inquiry practitioner is be able to 're-cast' their initial labelling of the issue into one more appreciatively phrased. For example in one case the organisation wanted to address sickness and absenteeism. These are both important issues for organisations, and in the case of this organisation the problems were threatening the organisations future, as long term sickness in one team meant the whole team was off sick ! Rather than focusing on 'reducing work absence', the focus of the inquiry was cast as 'creating a work environment where what we do everyday matters to our clients'. In this case the organisation was working with disabled and disadvantaged people, but this focus on the clients needs had been lost in disputes between groups within the organisation (Passmore, 2003).

Careful thought and reflection needs to go into the framing of the final topic and of the initial question. As Cooperrider Whitney & Stravos (2005) note "the seeds of change are implicit in the first question asked".

## **Discovery**

The discovery phase is about discovering the organisation's key strengths and appreciating the 'best of what is'. This phase is about understanding what gives life to the organisation and what has brought it this far or to this point in its history. The discovery phase is about exploring and uncovering the unique qualities of the organisation; its leadership, history, reasons for existing, or values, which have contributed to its life and success. During this phase the members of the organisation have the opportunity to come to know the history of their organisation as a history of positive possibilities rather than problematic past events, crisis and forgotten or

irrelevant events. In this way it is about connecting today to the history that is the life blood of the organisation.

The phase revolves around the capturing of this information initially through conducting interviews, then mapping the elements that emerge from the interviews to identify common themes and stories and from here communicating these stories and their meta themes back to the wider group.

The discovery phase can be planned over weeks or months. It can equally be undertaken in a single day if all of the key stakeholders can be brought together in a room. If all of the stakeholders are not present, or if the initiative is being undertaken in a large system, involving hundreds or thousands of people, decisions will need to be made over the timing of the interview process and the logistics of collating and communicating stories. We suggest a six-step process based on our experience which typically involves working with a group in a single room for a single day. This is summarised in Table 2. It forms the first day of the 4-day process that we use to explain our approach throughout this chapter.

**Table 2: The AI Summit: Discovery**

Day	Phase	Activities
1	Discovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreeing the focus for the inquiry – Introduction to context, purpose of meeting &amp; how to undertake interviews</li> <li>• Planning the interview – small group activity to write the interview questions.</li> <li>• AI interviews – all participants engage in 1-1 interviews organised around the topic.</li> <li>• Collecting – small group collect key stories discovered during process which demonstrate organisation when it is at its best.</li> <li>• Mapping – large group process to map the findings around themes which may include resources, capabilities, relationships, partnerships &amp; positive hopes.</li> <li>• Enduring factors – large group process to identify factors that have sustained the organisation over time from the larger map above.</li> </ul>

Our six key elements is not the only way to do this but we have found this works for us with groups of a dozen to 200 people.

### **Agreeing the focus for the inquiry**

The starting point, assuming pre-event communications have taken place about the day or series of days, is to welcome people to the event and communicate some key elements. This scene setting communication is likely to pick up and build upon the earlier communications. It is an opportunity to explain the background in more detail, particularly why change is felt to be needed and why Appreciative Inquiry is an appropriate way forward. We also find it useful to tell a few stories about interviews, which communicate to the group how to do an interview. Stories seem to work better than a full set of slides with does and don't. In story telling about interviewing the main themes to communicate are: preparing, selecting a good place to have the conversation, giving people time to talk so they feel listened to and respected, using active listening skills of nodding, verbal attentions and summarising to check understanding, and feeding back the best bits you heard.

**Table 3: Defining the topic: Moving to the positive**

Change agenda suggested by the board	Positive focus to the topic
Addressing poor quality customer service	Delighting customers each and every time
Tacking poor staff attendance and high turnover	Creating a happy and rewarding place to work
Building strategic advantage	Being simply the best
Increasing profit margins	Retaining existing customers and finding new customers

### **Planning the interview**

The core element to planning the discovery phase is getting the questions focused on the agreed topic. The planning process may take place before the day, with a small group drawn from across the organisation invited to undertake some preparation work. Doing it in this way reduces the risk of interviewers not knowing what to ask or stimulating problem-solution focused conversations. It also ensures better designed questions. Groups sometimes pilot the interviews, reducing the final number of questions from their original pool of 12 to 6 or 8.

In designing the interview thought needs to be given to two parts; the overall structure and the questions within the structure. The structure of the interview needs to provide space at the beginning to get the person talking. For some people this is not a problem and they will happily start telling stories and sharing their views from the first question. Other people need time to warm up and develop a relationship with the person they are talking to. No two people are alike and the interviewer needs to make a judgement about when to move from relationship questions to process questions. Typically 3 or 5 relationship questions are useful to have in an interview guide, but the interviewer does not need to use all of them. The relationship

questions are likely to be about the person's role in the organisation and what they value about the organisation or their role. As the interview moves into exploring organizational process the focus shifts to the organisation as people experience it. The aim in this part is to draw out stories and experiences about the organisation and the person at their best. As the person talks the interview should aim to crystalize the stories. The aim is to get to the heart of the story, what factors made the difference or created the feeling. This process involves skills in questions, and we discuss questions form and style later.

When at a loss about the questions to ask there are a couple of very helpful guides worth consulting. The most useful is *Encyclopaedia of Positive Question* (Whitney, Cooperrider, Trosten-Bloom, & Kaplan, 2004). The other useful guide in the area is the *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook* (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stravos, 2005). We have drafted some sample questions to give an example of what the Interview guide might look like.

**Table 4: Sample Interview Questions**

Topic introduction	At <i>Advocacy for Health</i> we offer a wide range of services to people who find it difficult to speak up for themselves. Our experiences of working over the past ten years have contributed to advocacy becoming an important part of health care. The topic we are looking at today is how we make the organisation a great place to work as well as one which does great work for others.
Relationship questions	What have you been looking forward to about the day?  Tell me what your role is at <i>Advocacy for Health</i> ?  What is the best part of your role?
Process questions	Describe a time when you have found working at <i>Advocacy for Health</i> exciting and uplifting?  When the organisation is at its best why do people come and work for <i>Advocacy for Health</i> ?
Possible probe questions to be used alongside process questions as required	What was it that made a difference?  Tell me more about X?  What did it feel like?  Who else was involved?  What happened next?

### **Appreciative Inquiry interviews**

The aim for the interview phase is to ensure all participants are engaged in 1-1 interviews. During the course of the session it's helpful to get everyone to both be interviewed and to interview someone. This means during a whole system event allocating time, maybe 30 minutes for each interview, before people change partners. While its possible to get people to interview each other, we believe that moving to a new pairing works best, and ensure the pairs say focused on the task and start afresh with the relationship and process, rather than skipping bits having done them before in the first interview.

### **Collecting**

Once the 1-1 interviews have been completed there is a mass of data and this stage aims to collect the key stories before starting to group them. Inevitable in all group discussions people have gone off task, or have told 2 or 3 stories that cover the same theme. An activity that draws out the main themes is helpful at this stage. This can be undertaken in small groups of 4-8 people, with the groups reviewing the stories told and identifying collectively which ones should go forward to a mapping stage.

The key skill involved at this stage is for the facilitators to set up an exercise which encourages the group to focus on the stories which will contribute towards the heart of the inquiry. The larger the group the longer the exercise will take.

### **Mapping**

Once the small groups have reviewed on their tables the stories from 4 – 8 people, the task becomes to bring these together in some way to capture the wider large themes in the room. One way of doing this is to start by trying to identify 6 -12 high level themes through a facilitated discussion and to map these on the wall using post-it notes and a long roll of paper. Our experience is that people can tend to handle 6 – 12 themes, less than 6 means that items don't get separated out sufficiently, more than 12 and people struggle to remember what the themes were.

What's important is that the group identify these themes rather than the facilitators having a set of themes that they have prepared earlier. This process may mean that the themes emerge during the exercise. If groups experience difficulties in identifying themes, we might offer as a starting point some high level themes like financial resources, staffing capacity, staff capabilities or skills, internal relationships, external partnerships, regulation and inspection, positive feelings, positive hopes and use of technology.

With the themes established the large group can move to the process of mapping the stories against the high level themes.

### **Enduring factors**

The final phase of the discovery phase is to identify the enduring themes. These are the factors that have sustained the organisation over time. The activity can be done in a large group either as an open discussion with the key themes emerging. Another method is to have an open discussion and at the close of this to allow people to vote for the enduring factors through putting ticks or stars next to the themes which they consider to have been most important. The voting process both brings energy into the room as people need to stand and walk round the room to the maps on the walls, and also gives a sense of democracy in action with clear outcomes emerging in real time.

As people leave for the day or at the close of the session there is a clear sense of both a chance for everyone to have had a say and for even those who are quiet and less openly engaging in a large form to have equally influenced the outcome. The outcome of this phase is an extensive collection of stories of what gives life and the identification of common themes.

## Dream

The dream phase is about bringing out the dreams people have for their future within the organisation and also their dreams about the organisation's future. The research evidence from positive psychology (Seligman, 2006; Martin, 2006) shows how talk affects behaviour and outcomes. The research evidence has shown the more positive the language used by the individual, in terms of its personal, pervasive and persistent elements, the more likely it is that successful outcomes are achieved. This external use of language reflects the inner dialogue that all humans have, and the positive or helpless view which they hold of themselves in the world. Affecting the way people talk can affect the way they feel. By encouraging people to talk about positive experiences and dreams, Appreciative Inquiry encourages people to feel more hopeful and optimistic about the future.

**Table 5: Personal, Pervasive & Persistent**

Heading	Definition	Example
Personal	Relates to the individual	"I am so skilled"
Pervasive	Relates to different situations	"Whether its writing, presenting or just talking it goes well"
Persistent	Relates to both past, present and future	I know that tomorrows presentation is going to be as successful as the one which I did last week".

The Appreciative Inquiry process seeks to make use of the human tendency for dialogue. It seeks to create a positive belief in the future through the discovery of past successes. As we do so, this recognising of past success in turn facilitates a belief in our future potential. However, for organisation change to be successful stakeholders need to have the ability and the confidence to expand their horizons beyond their day to day, or month to month plans and strategies, and to dream; dreams which are not about who does what and when, but are about why they and the organisation are there. It's for this reason that we advocate using playful and creative processes during this phase, even more than at the discovery phase.

The dream phase is highly practical as it grounded in the organisation's history, rather than being unbounded thinking. It is also generative as it seeks to explore potential. The dreaming phase involves building on what people have discovered about the organisation at its best and projecting this into their wishes, hopes and aspirations for the organisation's future. The aim of the process is to amplify the positive core of the organisation and to stimulate a more energised and inspirational future. Such a process can be expressed in numerous ways from a rewriting of the organisation's mission to enacting the future of the organisation in a play or devising

a story about what the people in the organisation will be doing when it achieves its dream.

As with the discovery phase this can be managed over time and can involve large numbers of stakeholders from the organisation and beyond. It can equally be undertaken in a single day and we have set out our process for managing in this way. We suggest a five-step process. This is summarised in Table 6.

**Table 6: AI Summit: Dream**

Day	Phase	Activities
2	Dream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From discovery to dream – 1-1 interviews reconnecting to outcome &amp; discussing future</li> <li>• Dream sharing – a small group activity to talk about future dreams.</li> <li>• Bringing dreams to life – a small group activity to discuss specific dreams for the organisation.</li> <li>• Building a dream map – mapping the outputs from the small group activity through series of larger groups</li> <li>• Enacting dreams – groups act out the dreams.</li> </ul>

**From discovery to dream**

One way to start the day is to reconnect people with the stories and excitement from day 1. This can be achieved through 1-1 conversations. The conversations can be based on pre-designed schedules, or could simply invite people to ask questions around three themes; ‘What stories most resonated with them from the previous day about the organisation at its best’; Re-connecting to outcome & discussing future; and ‘What three wishes do they have for the future?’ This last question acts to generate accounts of dreams of the future. If the organisation has performed well and been praised, such as through a regulator visit or high annual profits report, then an additional question specific to their circumstances such as what led to this happening, might also be appropriate?

**Dream sharing**

Following the re-engagement at a 1-1 level the next stage which we use it is to encourage people to share these dreams with the wider group on their table. As they do so, we ask them to informally identify common dreams. This phase is helpful as the process helps individuals to shape and refine their own dreams as they listen to the dreams of others on their table.

### **Bringing dreams to life**

These two processes so far have helped people to generate, refine and clarify their dreams. They also help people move their dreams towards a consensus position. The next stage is to invite the table groups to talk about the dreams with attention to specific details. These details might be around the culture of the organisation, the ways people would behave towards each other, resources and technology available and the customers. These can be feedback to the larger group, if the numbers allow or can be left within the small groups. We talk more in chapter 10 about different ways of working in the dream phase.

### **Building a dream map**

A map of the dreams can be the outcome from the small group feedback, alternatively the map can be produced through several smaller groups joining together to build a common map of the dreams. The later of these processes can help facilitators to ease the process of combining the dreams from multiple groups.

One mapping technique that we have used is to invite people to produce a montage of the organisation dream using pictures, stories and words cut out from old magazines. These visual representations taken from the magazines can then be posted on the wall for the groups to wander round like an art exhibition. To help others understand the dream maps created by each group, an interpreter placed by each map can help those viewing it get a better understanding of the contents and its meaning.

### **Enacting dreams**

This last activity can be real fun and acts as a good close for the afternoon event. Groups are invited to take their own dream maps and to produce a short play. These can be contained to an hour if the groups have used the art exhibition technique or can run over two hours as a major activity that leaves the group with a sense of energy to take into day 3. One of the most entertaining we have seen was based around the 'Walking In' scene to Reservoir Dogs! The outcome of this phase is a shared exciting vision or dream of how the future could be for the organisation, based on what we know we can already do, when we are at our best.

## **Design**

The design phase is concerned with making decisions about the high level actions that need to be taken to support the delivery of the dream. This involves moving to agree a common future dream and the actions to support this.

As with the previous phases this can be done initially with task groups, and then with engagement with the wider system over time through mini workshops or an on-line discussion group. Again our approach is based around the four-day systems wide event. Our experience offers one way to bring to life the design phase, but its only one way, and we encourage variety and diversity in applying the process. As we have said Appreciative Inquiry is not a process but a way of engaging with others to bring about change. We suggest four steps which we have summarised in Table 7.

**Table 7: AI Summit: Design**

Day	Phase	Activities
3	Dream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• From dream to design – small group discussions on the outcome from the dreams</li><li>• Organisation design – large group discussion to identify what groupings in the organisation are needed to bring the dream to life.</li><li>• High level plans – large group discussions drawing on interview results to identify key themes.</li><li>• Provocative propositions – small group activity to write design statements about what its is going to happen</li></ul>

### **From dream to design**

The first part of day 3 can be used to again reconnect to the activities from the previous day. We prefer to keep these as small group activities with the goal of enabling people to both re-connect to the past days discussions and also to start the process of turning the aspirations and blue-sky dreams into specific actions. They can use this early time to start to think about what needs to happen to enable the dream to become the reality for them and the organisation. This is done by an open table discussion without a requirement to feedback to the wider group, as the goal is more for the individual to reconnect to their process rather than an output to share with the whole group.

### **Organisation design**

One of the common themes to emerge from most group discussions is questions about organisation design; what does the organisation need in terms of organisation structure, style, collaborative working and communication, to deliver the dream? We tend to work at answering these questions through a further round of 1-1 interviews, with the core question framed as; what groupings in the organisation are needed to bring the dream to life. Within this we encourage the 1-1 interviews to both add to the core question and to probe it further, so more detail can be added to the dream.

### **High level plans**

The third step in the process is to draw the host of 1-1 interviews into the room and to cluster common themes to produce a high level plan. This involves a facilitated discussion in a large group drawing on the interview results. The facilitators then work to capture, cluster and map the outcomes from this full room discussion. This can be captured as a parallel map next to the organisational dreams. So by now the group will have a collection of stories about what gives life to the organisation, a shared dream of the future, and a shared idea of what needs to happen to help the organisation move towards its dream future.

### **Provocative propositions (Future Statements)**

The final process is to develop a series of statements about what it is going to happen. These are usual written as if the situation already obtained, so for instance

the expression of us at our best might be ‘ we give excellent customer service in every interaction’, rather than ‘we aim to give excellent customer service.’ These statements have become known as Provocative Propositions, which reflect the radical and visionary nature of the statements. The group should also be encouraged to make explicit links to the statements about what needed to happen which emerged and were mapped during the previous exercise. We would advocate undertaking the writing of these statements in small groups and each one being posted up next to the exercise statements to which they relate. The outcome of this phase is a series of statements that express how the organisation will be, and some initial ideas about how that might impact on the current organisational set-up

## Destiny

The destiny phase is concerned with planning, and forming action groups to take forward the actions identified during the discovery, dream and design phases. This involves a celebration of both the learning identified so far and of the start of a process to move forward. The development of detailed actions and the formation of groups is to help ensure the continuation of the process of real change begun in these four days.

This can be done with task groups over a period of weeks or months. However to illustrate the process we describe our experience of working in the destiny phase during the four day systems wide event. We suggest a four-step process, which we have summarised in Table 8.

**Table 8: AI Summit: Destiny**

Day	Phase	Activities
4	Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From design to destiny – small group discussions on the outcomes from high level design.</li> <li>• Action plan generation – small group activity to generate specific actions to deliver outcomes.</li> <li>• Inspired actions – large groups activity with individuals declaring intentions to act and appeals for co-operation team.</li> <li>• Task groups form – the declared outcomes and co-operation team become a task group with responsibility for task and plan their next steps.</li> <li>• Review – closing of session with celebration.</li> </ul>

### From design to destiny

The first exercise of the day we suggest is a small group discussion around the themes that emerged from day 3. Our intention here is to help the group reconnect to the previous day and to start the process of planning. The discussions could be in groups of four around a question ‘What design themes (Provocative Propositions) excited you most from yesterday?’

### **Action plan generation**

We may continue this small group focus into the next activity, but with two smaller groups coming together into groups of eight. This aims to generate specific actions that will help move the organisation towards its desired future. At this stage groups could be self organising around the major design themes, and asked to work on the question; 'What specific actions or changes to processes will bring the ideas to life?' As with most goal setting the best contributions need to offer an organisational stretch, without creating an organisational strain.

### **Inspired actions**

To change the feel and pace of the event we like to return to a large group activity to report back the outcomes from each theme group. As the process moves from feedback from one themed group to another, we encourage individuals to declare their intentions to act to bring about the new processes and actions. These individuals then in turn appeal for assistance.

### **Task groups**

As this process moves forward task groups for each of the specific action are being formed. These new groups then meet for an initial discussion. This discussion should review the themes and provocative proposition alongside the actions and processes planned. The group's aim at this stage is to break the task down into a series of actions and form an initial plan about how the task will be actioned and by when.

### **Review**

As the event moves to its final session the objective is review the event and to achieve closure for everyone. We think the closure of the workshop needs to acknowledge the progress made and the efforts and energies committed by those involved in the process. It also needs to act as a point of encouragement with a continued commitment to action using Appreciative Inquiry as a way of moving forward. Days away discussing the future can be fun, so it can be good to acknowledge this.

### **Summary**

In this chapter we have briefly described the four D model of appreciative inquiry and offered a practical step-by-step approach that could be used as a design for an appreciative Inquiry event over one or more days. We have offered this as a starting point, and would always argue that Appreciative Inquiry needs to be tailored to the needs and time available, so a one day meeting or a 3 month process would be equally appropriate in the right context and right situation.

We hope that this chapter has clearly highlighted the importance of conversational processes to Appreciative Inquiry as a practice. While each phase has a specified outcome, the process of engagement by all is as important as the final result. Within the Appreciative Inquiry approach it is recognised that change happens as people meet and talk together, not just after. So although the event concludes with the production of an action plan that is not to say that nothing has happened until this point. The new relationships people have formed during their experience of the

event, and the different conversations they have had, are of themselves an important change in their experience of the organisation. The stories they have told that hadn't been told before, the dreams they have created of the future, the ideas they have developed of how things can be and what needs to be done have all acted to change their experience in the world and so have effectively changed the world. The energy generated by the event is supported by the action plans, it is a not a product of it.

In the next section we will be examining more closely the aspects of conversation that impact on the ability of an organisation to identify its life giving properties, and to use these to grow towards a positive future.