

Appreciative Inquiry as an Evaluation Method

Charlotte N. (Lani) Gunawardena, Ph.D

Distinguished Professor

Organization, Information, & Learning Sciences Program

University of New Mexico

ECHO Learning Community

UNM Evaluation Lab

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What is Appreciative Inquiry?

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry “is the study and exploration of what gives life to human systems when they function at their best. This approach to personal change and organization change is based on the assumption that questions and dialogue about strengths, successes, values, hopes, and dreams are themselves transformational. Appreciative inquiry suggests that human organizing and change, at its best, is a relational process of inquiry, grounded in affirmation and appreciation.” Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003, p. 1)

Appreciative Inquiry as an Evaluation Strategy

- “Appreciative Inquiry...inquires into, identifies, and further develops the best of ‘what is’ in organizations in order to create a better future” (Preskill and Catsambas, 2006, p. 1)
- Emphasizes social constructivism - participants learn and grow together through asking questions, reflection, and dialogue
- Stakeholders’ engagement in the inquiry process allows them to construct new meanings, which in turn creates a greater level of understanding about themselves, each other, and the focus of the inquiry.
- Appreciative Inquiry and naturalistic, ethnographic, and case study approaches to evaluation use interviews as a primary data collection method.

Appreciative Inquiry as an Evaluation Approach

- Enables a client-centered approach for communication with clients
 - Example – collaborative development of logic models
- Supports consideration of the demographic, socio-cultural, socio-economic, and historical contexts within which the programs are implemented

Appreciative Inquiry as an Evaluation Approach

- Ability to incorporate indigenous perspectives on health education and the impact on how well a program is accepted in the communities served
- Opportunity to showcase positive aspects of projects serving communities where research data is usually misrepresented
- Provides a conceptual framework for planning, conducting, and communicating the evaluation in culturally responsive ways

Case Study - NARCH

- Goal 1: Encourage research on health disparities affecting American Indian (AI) people
- Goal 2: Increase the number of AI scientists, students, health professionals and organizations
- Goal 3: Build the capacity of AAIHB to work in partnership to reduce distrust by AI communities and people toward research

The “4-I” Process model

Developed by EnCompass, LLC, and adapted by Preskill and Catsambas (2006)

Phase 1: *Inquire*

Appreciating the best of “what is”

Phase 2: *Imagine*

What might be?

Phase 3: *Innovate*

What should be the ideal?

Phase 4: *Implement*

Navigate the change

Sample Interview Questions

Phase 1: *Inquire*

Appreciating the best of “what is”

Were there times when you said to yourself, “this is working, this is working!” What was happening during those times?

What were the major milestones?

What have you learned?

Phase 2: *Imagine*

What might be?

If you could transform the ways in which you do your work, what would it look like, and what would it take to happen?

Phase 3: *Innovate*

What should be the ideal?

What was challenging for you?

How would you do things differently?

Can you talk about community perspectives on the cultural appropriateness of your work?

Phase 4: *Implement*

Navigate the change

What are some ways in which you can implement these strategic directions?

What have you produced that you will leave behind for the future?

What recommendations would you like to make?

Appreciative Inquiry as a Statement of Philosophy/Ideology

- It is grounded in story telling, views inquiry as ongoing, iterative, and integrated into community life, values dialogue, and strives to be inclusive of many voices, recognizing the impact language has on the process of inquiry
- It introduced a level of trust so participants could share stories
- Introduction of the evaluator to NARCH participants and partners created awareness of the evaluation philosophy and process, and connection with community members
- Helped address external evaluator's "privilege of power"

Appreciative Inquiry as an operational strategy

- Developed positive communication between the evaluator and the stakeholders
- Able to accommodate a diverse group: students, community members, and administrators of the program
- Once trust was established, and the evaluation process was accepted, participants opened up and shared their stories.
 - Example: A researcher's growth in a CBPR project

Appreciative Inquiry as an Intervention

- Stakeholders' engagement in the inquiry process allowed them to construct new meanings, which in turn created a greater level of understanding about themselves, each other, and the focus of the inquiry. This increased ownership of the evaluation results
- Utilized evaluation recommendations for improving projects in the subsequent year. Example: Internship
- The formative evaluation process established trust in the AI approach, which provided an avenue for more candid sharing during Year 4
- Culturally appropriate method to understand program processes and impacts.

Challenges of Appreciative Inquiry as an Evaluation Method

- Difficult to address project failures and problems directly
- Evaluators overcame this by addressing challenges indirectly by including the following questions during the Fourth Year:
 - If you could transform the way you do your work, what would it look like and what would it take to happen?
 - What was challenging for you?
 - How would you do things differently?
 - What have you produced that you will leave behind?
- Important to have administrative support to make the appreciative inquiry process work
- Tracking and documenting changes to the project as the evaluation provides input for necessary changes (eg: re-designing logic models)

References

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