



“Applying Appreciative Inquiry (AI) in Organization Development (OD)”  
在企業發展中運用肯定式探詢

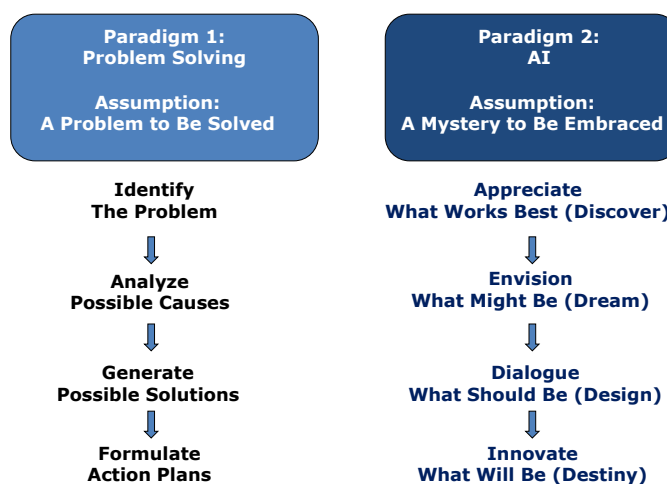
**Introduction**

“Emotion”, “Change” and “Organization Development” how do they relate to each other? To a certain extent, emotion plays a critical role in the process of changes. Regardless of whether they are positive or negative, emotions have impact to the change. For example, mergers are seen as difficult emotional experiences because they often create uncertainty, anxiety, insecurity, stress, and feelings of loss. Radical organizational change could therefore be a very emotional event. Increasing levels of negative emotions such as frustration and anxiety will be experienced as long as ongoing changes occur. If the emotional experience of the change processes is stereotyped negatively as being irrational, the change process could be painful and causes strong resistance. From my years of experience in organization development, interventions during the change process tend to be carried out with big obstacles, when the impact of emotions is underestimated. Leaders should understand emotions and engage both the heart and the mind of change efforts to succeed in organizational change. One of the most effective interventions is Appreciative Inquiry (AI).

**AI Focuses on Positive Voices, Minds and Hearts**

According to The International Association of Facilitators (IAF), “*Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a management philosophy and a methodology founded on the principle of esteem. The objective of the AI methodology is to identify those factors in a group which already work well or those factors in a whole organization which are working and the ways and means in which everyone can contribute to enhancing and maximizing these elements to produce additional benefits. With this fundamental approach, the group can realize its potential and highlight for everyone those successes and victories, thereby enabling complex development and change processes within large groups.*” In a nutshell, AI focuses on positives rather than negatives in conversational processes, which offers new patterns of discoveries, encouragement, and support between individuals, teams, departments and the whole organization. AI shifts the assumption from “a problem to be solved” to “a mystery to be embraced” during the process of organization development.

**Organization Development**



**AI as a Large Group Intervention in Organization Development (OD)**

A common metaphor describes organizations as open books, which are continuously in the process of being co-authored by organizational stakeholders. As a socially constructive process, AI provides a real-time platform for a large group of organizational stakeholders to exchange ideas and feelings. AI dialogue process create an open environment for them to affirm each other's ideas and emotions, share visions, and create a ground for collaborative exploration of how they envision their the organizational future. The act of affirmation in the generative dialogue helps organizational members to appreciate each other's point of view, and co-create meaning from differences. Taking an appreciative view towards change, AI avoids negative feelings in the change process. Thus, AI effectively develops consensus on what organizational members want to commit.

Typically in an organizational change process, a series of meetings adopting AI will be facilitated to a collectively define where-to-be and how-to-get-there. The 4-phase AI intervention to drive the organizational cultural change is suggested. **Phase (1) – Discover (What Works Best).** Organizational leaders and members interview each other to share their past success stories that made them feel most alive and proud of. In groups, they identify what they value most in their organizations as the critical success factors that will drive organization forward. They appreciate each others' contributions, see diversities as strengths, discover what people value, and share best practices to identify opportunities to breakthrough. **Phase (2) – Dream (What Might Be).** Based on the rich positive voices in the discovery phase, members built a common ground of possibilities towards the change. They develop common vision to co-create the image of the change. They share dreams for work, relationships, behaviors, values that best represent their desirable organizational future. **Phase (3) – Design (What Should Be).** Members co-create the vision of change to challenge current assumptions or routines, to stretch the status quo, and brainstorm what attitudes, behaviors & circumstances should change in order to realize the dream. **Phase (4) – Destiny (What Will Be).** The vision is ready to put into actions. Members communicate with each other regarding their desire & commitment to the change. They create a list of items that can be changed immediately. They work out the plausible change roadmap with a predicted time-frame. They share how they may make use of their own strengths to contribute as individuals.

A successful organization development is about institutionalization and sustainability of the vision in the long run. Change is dynamical and cannot be totally predictable. Leaders play a significant role to keep the momentum and energy down the road, particularly, to manage employee resistance to change. On top of AI intervention, I would also recommend appreciative leadership to manage the change process. As an ongoing process to help employees adapt to the change, leaders should engage employees with positive conversations of possibility and opportunity with a focus on the employees' most positive attributes. Cross-level and cross-divisional processes as a whole system should be developed to invite all organizational members into regular dialogue. This ongoing leadership effort is able to achieve a higher level of commitment for change implementation.

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### **Conclusions**

Every change effort involves emotion; and lasting large-scale change is only possible by aligning emotions. Many studies have shown that different organizational members are likely to have a wide range of resulting emotions. To plan change interventions, management could identify the negative feelings but focus should be on the positive ones.

Adopting AI as a large group intervention offers the OD architect and facilitator a positive approach to drive organizational change. Acknowledging emotions is much better than keeping emotions down during change. Change is not necessarily a painful process. In this kind of setting, organizational members would be engaged in positive and generative conversations, which encourage imagination, creation and movement towards the direction of the shared vision of what could be and what should be.

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