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Description:

Appreciative Inquiry, here after called (AI), begins with the belief that we have a *choice* - that we can consciously choose (in the Gestalt sense) what we "see" and act upon. In both the personal and social realms, we can choose to focus on problems, needs and deficits -- the traditional problem-solving approach. Or we can choose to see possibilities, capabilities and assets -- the basis of AI.

By focusing on what's *right*, rather than what's wrong with an organization, an individual or even a society, AI gives us access to the kind of energy that can be transformative. AI is a generative process that gives us a way to bring possibilities to life and develop our capacities.

AI works on the assumption that whatever you want more of, already exists in all organizations. It is a complex philosophy that engages the entire system in an inquiry about what works. David L. Cooperrider, Suresh Srivastva, and team at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland Ohio developed the foundation work for AI in the 70's. The impetus for the present contribution grows from the exciting challenge that is implicitly if not explicitly posed by the social constructionist and mentalist paradigms: that to a far greater extent than is normally acknowledged, we human beings create our own realities through symbolic and mental processes and that because of this, conscious evolution of the future is a human option.

Three principles underlay the supposition that AI is the preferred approach to Organizational Development. (1) Organizations are products of the affirmative mind; (2) when beset with repetitive difficulties or problems, organizations need less fixing, less problem solving, and more reaffirmation - or more precisely, more appreciation; (3) the primary executive vocation in a post-bureaucratic era is to nourish the appreciative soil from which new and better guiding images grow on a collective and dynamic basis.

There are two areas of observation and research that strongly support the principle that we humans create what we envision.

1. Positive Imagery: Studies from medicine (the Placebo response), cognitive psychology, cultural sociology, and athletics (visualization).
2. Positive Construction of the Other: The Pygmalion dynamic. The key point is that all of our cognitive capacities - perception, memory, learning - are cued and shaped by the images projected through our expectancies.

AI is an extension of traditional Action Research as described by Cooperrider and Srivastva. They postulate that Action Research helps reinforce and perfect the status quo as it disregards theory-building as an integral and necessary component of the craft. Therefore, the generative nature of AI, which is based on theory rather than the problem-solving paradigm typical of Action Research, is a much more effective approach to OD.

Uses:

AI as a strategy is to be used in organizational, group, or individual settings where the basic assumption is that an organization is a mystery to be embraced rather than to be solved. When you are looking for:

- Appreciating and Valuing The Best of "What Is"

- Envisioning "What Might Be"
- Dialoguing "What Should Be"
- Innovating "What Will Be"

...then you will want to use AI.

Materials:

Allow enough time for set up of the conference room. Your conference room must have extensive wall space and be large enough to accommodate the size group with which you plan to work and have the flexibility to accommodate small breakout sessions of pairs, small group work, and large group work. You will need:

For Room Set-up

- Tables that can be easily moved to allow small group break out. Each table is set with:
 - Water-soluble magic markers
 - One roll of masking tape
- Two boxes of water-soluble magic markers for the facilitators.
- One roll of masking tape for the facilitators.
- Multiple flip-chart pads providing enough paper for extensive notes and two stands.
- Two rectangular tables for the facilitators.
- Name Badges for Participants

Instructions:

The AI process involves four basic steps in a cycle. However, be clear this is not a process built on a receipt, it is generative and creates itself as it goes. The four steps are:

1. **Discover** - people talk to one another, often via structured interviews, to discover the times when the organization is at its best. These stories are told as richly as possible.
2. **Dream** - the dream phase is often run as a large group conference where people are encouraged to envision the organization as if the peak moments discovered in the 'discover' phase were the norm rather than exceptional.
3. **Design** - a small team is empowered to go away and design ways of creating the organization dreamed in the conference(s).
4. **Deliver** - the final phase is to implement the changes.

As a facilitator, here are some details of what you need to insure:

1. First help organization define a clear topic. A clear topic definition is very important, because out of it come the questions necessary to find out what you want to know.
2. Create the questions to explore the topic. This is a generative process as we stated above so questions help explore the topic.
3. Split the group up into pairs, and have them ask each other the questions developed in step 2 above. Make sure detailed notes are taken, as these positive statements will be shared with the whole group.
4. In the whole group, have each pair share the most exciting ideas generated.
5. The group will now create Provocative Propositions which are symbolic statements that have meaning well beyond words, reminding us of what is best about the organization and how everyone can help to create more of it.
6. The next part of the process is to let it emerge spontaneously. Let action and innovation occur in the moment.

Tips:

This is a process that truly is generative in nature and can evolve as you and your group evolve. It would be helpful to read the references and case studies so that you can have a better feel for the process before plunging in. You may also want to start small in a more manageable and safe group even though this is a large group process. Try, experiment, get a mentor, and work with someone else so that you are not out there by yourself. This is a very positive process and once you get the hang of AI, most relationships in your life can improve. Support and believe in these assumptions:

1. In every society, organization, or group, something works.
2. What we focus on becomes our reality.
3. Reality is created in the moment and there are multiple realities.
4. The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way.
5. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
6. If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what are best about the past.
7. It is important to value differences.
8. The language we use creates our reality.

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