

The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change

by Diana Whitney & Amanda Trosten-Bloom

Review by Carol Horner

The Appreciative Inquiry theory and process has been an area of interest and study of mine since I first heard of it in the early 90's. Originated by David Cooperrider in 1985 it has grown into a very innovative and powerful approach to change.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is basically the polar opposite of how we typically look at change and problem-solving. Instead of focusing on what's wrong that needs to change it focuses on what's right that needs to be grown. Of course it's not quite that simple or easy for that matter.

The foundation of Appreciative Inquiry is based on certain beliefs about human nature and how humans organize. These beliefs include: all individuals have unique contributions, organizations are human social systems and unlimited in capacity; words create worlds/reality, what you focus on grows, and the images we hold about the future serves as the guide for our actions.

AI has a 4-D Cycle. The D's are Discovery ("Appreciate what is"), Dream ("Imagine what might be"), Design ("Determine what should be"), and Destiny ("Create what will be"). The main methodology for implementation (and truly where the power arises) is that of asking affirmative/appreciative questions to find the positive core of the organization and the possibilities for the future. This is done through appreciative interviews and lots of them. This all sounds very "touchy-feely" but it creates staggering bottom-line results. The authors share some hard statistics of a company that within 6 months of engaging in AI saw a 400% increase in profitability and a 95% employee satisfaction rate.

While AI is a process that has application in all aspects of human organization, Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, both colleagues of Cooperrider and experts in their own right on AI, have written this book focusing on corporate change. The book is amazingly written with both a step-by-step guide to the practice of AI and at the same time a call for innovation, creativity and flexibility in thinking and using AI. They also run parallel to the step-by-step process a very thorough case study of their work with Hunter Douglas. This book is full of examples of each of the steps, I found that incredibly valuable in growing my understanding of AI.

Cooperrider writes in his forward that this is a book that you smile all the way through. When I first read that I thought, "That's kind of mushy." When I completed the book I realized he was absolutely correct, I smiled the whole way through. There are not too many books you can say that about.

