

Variations on a Theme: Capacity Building With the Four D Model

By Ada Jo Mann

Appreciative Inquiry has been commonly defined as the “art of discovering and valuing those factors that give life to an organization, community or group.” As a capacity-building approach, Appreciative Inquiry supports innovation and change by translating images of possibility into reality and beliefs into practice.

One framework for applying Appreciative Inquiry is called the 4-D Model and includes these four interrelated steps:

Discover: what gives life to an organization; what is happening when the organization is at its best?

Dream: what might be; what is the world calling the organization to be?

Design: how can we create the ideal as articulated by the whole organization? and,

Deliver: How can we continue to learn, adjust and innovate?

This is not some static solution, but rather a dynamic process of continuous change that has been adapted and applied to a myriad of settings in many countries around the world.

AI has been used in a number of change efforts in its twenty years of existence. It was the key change strategy for the Global Excellence in Management (GEM) Initiative of the Weatherhead School at Case Western Reserve University where it was developed.

The GEM Initiative was designed to conduct capacity building programs that promote organizational excellence. Through the work of the GEM Initiative the 4-D Model has been used by Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs) and Non-governmental Organiza-

tions (NGOs) as an approach to strategic change, as a process for creating authentic organizational partnerships, and as a framework for creating organizational, transboundary networks. Here’s a brief overview of how the 4-D Model was used in each of three applications.

Application 1. In the Organizational Excellence Program application, PVO and NGO management teams participate in an organization-wide process of strategic change. During the preparation period a representative team from the organization creates a customized interview guide which will be widely used throughout the organization and among

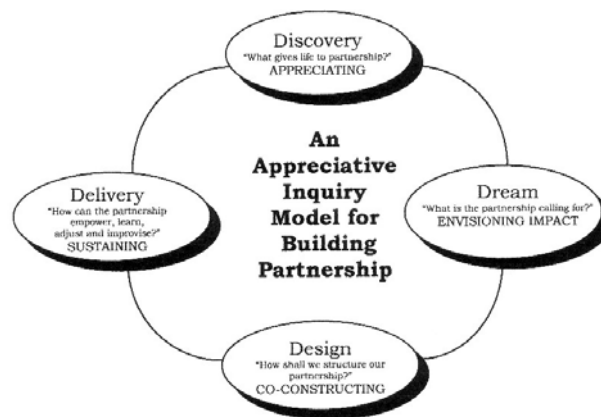
its stakeholders.

This interview guide is then used by the core team to gather stories or data during the **Discovery** phase. From the stories, common themes are developed.

Next, during the **Dream** phase, these common themes will serve as a launching pad for creating powerful future visions of the organization that can be articulated in possibility statements.

During the **Design** phase, a new social architecture is created combining the best of the past with the shared vision of the future. Finally, it is through the **Delivery** phase that processes for system-wide learning and innovation are introduced and nurtured.

Application 2. In the Appreciative Inquiry Model for Building Partnership, the 4-D Model follows a similar path, however, this time the focus is on inter-



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organizational excellence. The purpose of the process in this case is to create dynamic relationships that grow out of a shared vision and authentic dialogue.

During the Discovery phase the partners inquire into what gives life to their partnership. They are especially looking for what unique gifts each of the partners brings to the partnership.

In the Dream phase the focus is on creating a shared vision by dreaming together the impact this partnership can have on their joint enterprises.

It is through the Design phase that decisions are jointly made about how they will operate together and what implications there are for change in each of their organizations. Again, the Delivery phase becomes a time for reflection, adjustment and innovation as the partnership seeks to learn and grow together.

Application 3. The third application of the 4-D Model involves the creation of a “network” of organizations. A group of NGOs from three neighboring countries wanted to explore the potential for forming a network in order to build each other’s technical and organizational capacity. They had heard about Appreciative Inquiry and asked GEM for assistance.

In this instance the 4-D Model was used both to help these organizations decide whether they wished to form a network and then to design and launch it.

During the Discovery phase, the participants inquire into the qualities that are found in effective networking as well as, their individual hopes for forming such a network.

In the Dream phase they incorporate their findings from the inquiry as they move together to envision the “ideal” network. At this point a go-no go decision is made.

Having decided in the affirmative the Design phase represents an opportunity to create the charter for the network to include such aspects as purpose, principles, structure, membership, etc. Finally, during the Delivery phase the network is launched and the joint activities begin.

These three examples demonstrate the flexibility and adaptability of the 4-D Model. In addition, it has been used in employee performance evaluation, with village development committees, and in program assessment, just to name a few

more applications. We know there are many more possibilities yet to be discovered. ☪

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