Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială

Review of Research and Social Intervention

Revue de Recherche et Intervention Sociale

www.asistentasociala.ro

Chandi Prasad CHAPAGAIN, Gana Pati OJHA

Appreciative inquiry for enhancing individual and organization capacity

Secțiunea: Realitatea pe masa de disecție

Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială

Prezentări organizaționale

Appreciative inquiry for enhancing individual and organization capacity

PhD Chandi Prasad CHAPAGAIN[1]
Human Resource Development Coordinator,
Plan Nepal Country Office
Kathmandu, Nepal.
PhD Gana Pati OJHA[2]
Board member, Imagine Nepal,
Kathmandu, Nepal.

Abstract

Organizations having more individuals with positive attitude and behaviour are more capable of achieving developmental goals than organizations having more individuals with negative traits. The underlying major factors that makes an individual as a positive contributor for organizational development are identified as appreciative attitude and behaviour, self-motivation, learning attitude, enabling self and others to learn, openness, inquisitiveness for searching strengths and successes, optimism, creativity, and exploring beyond the immediate need. To attain the afore-mentioned positive traits appreciative inquiry (AI) has been found better than the problem solving approach. These are the major findings of a comparative study conducted with 111 experienced officials of 57 organizations of different types at different levels in Nepal. The implications of this study are (1) AI can be used as a research methodology, (2) AI has wider scope for using in different areas of capacity enhancement, (3) organizations should create environment for positive interactions.

Key terms: Appreciative inquiry, human resource development, capacity building

Received: 2008, January, 30.

---

1 Human Resource Development Coordinator, Plan Nepal Country Office, GPO Box 8980, Kathmandu, Nepal. Tel +977-1-5535560, Fax +977-1-5536431, Email: *chandi.chapagain@plan-international.org*

2 Board member, Imagine Nepal, P.O.Box 8031, Kathmandu, Nepal. Tel.: +977-1-5551458, +977-1-4289827; Fax: +977-1-5551458; Email: *gpojha@gmail.com*

> *"All that we are is the result of what we have thought."*
>
> *Buddha*

Introduction

Development activities have been implemented primarily with the problem inquiry or deficiencies based approach. Consequently, the impacts of the executed activities have been being evaluated by the same approach. Such problem spiralling culture that generates problem-posing recommendations is gradually pushing the development actors into a desperate condition (Chapagain 2004). Contrary to this, the human society needs an innovative perspective having a visionary and positive outlook, possessing the capability to generate positive communication, culture, attitude, behaviour, values and beliefs in order to create human resources of such calibre as desired by the post modern-epoch (Chapagain 2006).

A positive inquiry approach referred as the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has been evolved and is being practiced since 1986 in the US (Cooperrider 1986 & Odell 1998) and 1992 in Nepal and gradually over 30 other countries in the world (Chapagain 2004). This approach which is considered effective in changing the negative attitudes of individuals besides inculcating a power of positive thinking in the human heart, mind and thought, has proved itself to be unique and reliable (Chapagain 2007).

Proponents of appreciative inquiry label it as the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them (Cooperrider -1999). To them, it involves systematic discovery of what gives "life" to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, most constructive, and most capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential (Whitney 2002). It centrally involves the mobilization of inquiry through the crafting of the "unconditional positive question" often-involving hundreds or sometimes thousands of people. In AI, the arduous task of intervention gives way to the speed of imagination and innovation; instead of negation, criticism, and spiralling diagnosis; there are discovery, dream, design and destiny. AI seeks fundamentally, to build a constructive union between a whole people and the massive entirety of what people talk about as past and present capacities. AI deliberately, in everything it does, seeks to work from accounts of this "positive change core" - and it assumes that every living system has many untapped and rich and inspiring accounts of the positive. Link the energy of this core directly to any change agenda and changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized (Cooperrider

and Whitney 2001:7-8)[3]. The unique feature of the Appreciative Inquiry approach is its commitment to seeking and drawing upon the root causes of success rather than those contributing to failure. It makes people more inquisitive, and more intensely interested in learning more about how to use their intrinsic and instrumental power (Chapagain 2004).

Appreciative Inquiry, a shifts from problem-focus to success-focus interactions, when properly structured, is far more than a public relations, or 'feel good' approach and it simply follows the 4-'D' cycle. Using a logically sequenced process, AI takes participants from a 'discovery' of their best, through a 'visioning/ dreaming' of better and 'design' necessary to get there and finally to the 'delivery' of an action plan or the step to get it moving (see the AI 4-'D' cycle below).

Figure 2: Appreciative Inquiry (AI) 4-D Cycle
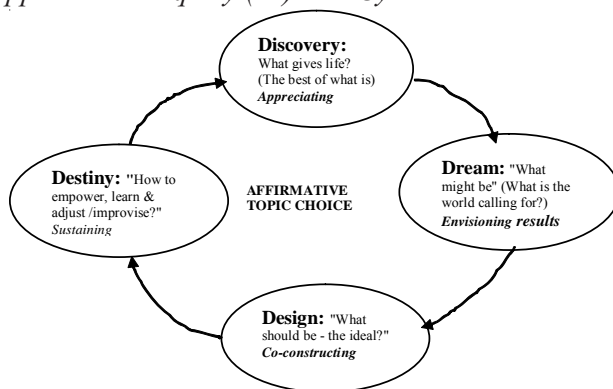
Source: David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, The Positive Revolution in Change: Appreciative Inquiry (2001:9).

AI energizes and empowers people and organizations to take independent action. The approach has been found to boost human resource (HR) capacities, organizational development, self-confidence, and pride, mobilizing institutions towards the achievement of their developmental goals or of visions as the saying, 'creators work intuitively allowing their subconscious to integrate evidence that not even their conscious minds grasp immediately' (Chapagain 2004).

In Nepal, AI has been gaining popularity among dozens of organizations belonging to public, civil society and private sectors (Chapagain 2007). Though there have been sporadic claims that AI approach is better than problem solving approach (PSA) in enhancing the human capacity and producing better organizational results, systematic study in this area is rarely done in Nepal (Chapagain 2004).Within this context, this study is conducted in Nepal with a major question "Is appreciative inquiry approach better than problem solving approach in enhancing human capacity and organizational growth?" Along this major question,

---

[3] Cooperrider, D. L and Diana Whitney (2001), *A Positive Revolution in Change: Appreciative Inquiry* CASE Western Reserve University and Taos Institute.

the study explored the factors that made the AI approach better contributing than PSA to enhance personal and organizational capacity.

Methodology

The study collected both primary and secondary data. An interview schedule was used to collect the primary data. The data collection was done with 111 highly qualified and experienced professionals of 57 organizations belonging to non-government organizations (NGOs), International NGOs, UN systems, bilateral organizations, academic institutions, public and private sectors. Of them, 15% were female respondents. Most of the respondents were from Kathmandu with a few exceptions. The respondents were familiar to different inquiry approaches including appreciative inquiry and problem solving. The study used qualitative research method with purposive sampling to get expert opinion.

Findings and discussions

A. Personal and Organizational Changes Attributable to Appreciative Inquiry in Human Resource Capacity Building

1. Changes in personal attributes after exposure to Appreciative Inquiry.

An attempt was made to measure the changes at individual level upon their exposure to the appreciative inquiry. Change was measured on the basis of 19 personal attributes that are related to knowledge, skills, aspiration, practice, leadership development and others. It was found that the change was dependent on the depth of exposure to the AI process. Those who have gone through several activities of AI have demonstrated greater level of change than those who have simply participated in the lesser number of events and for a short period. Among the 111 participants, 25 had have simply participated in AI general sharing; and they were not able to identify what changes had occurred in them. With others, there were expressed changes. Most importantly, the respondents expressed that they had developed positive attitude in them and had shown positive behaviour in action. They started appreciating the team members, developed learning attitude, designed group work and improved communication and commitment. There had been increase in the level of skills related to programme planning and imple-mentation. Likewise, there was also the skill enhancement in partnering and negotiations thereby contributing to the empowerment and overall leadership (Table 1).

Table 1. Changes in personal attributes after exposure to appreciative inquiry process.

Changes in	Values	Ranks
Positive attitude	170	1
Positive behaviour	169	2
Positive team perspective	157	3
Learning attitude	155	4
Ability to work in group	155	5
Communication	153	6
Planning skills	150	7
Commitment level	150	8
Training/workshop facilitation skill	150	9
Appreciative leadership	150	10
Level of empowerment	148	11
Level of awareness	141	12
Collaborative management	141	13
Implementation skills	139	14
Creativity	132	15
Monitoring/evaluation	132	16
Partnering skills	129	17
Negotiation	124	18
Knowledge	111	19

(Source: Chapagain 2004)

This is a remarkable conclusion of AI playing a vital role in changing human attitude that serves as the basic foundation for building knowledge, skills, and practice, ultimately to lead towards capacity building and achieving developmental goals.

> **Basis used to calculate the values occurred after the application of Appreciative Inquiry at individual level:**
> *a. (highly improved) x 3*
> *b. (somewhat improved) x 2*
> *c. (same as earlier) x 1*
> *d. Value = a+b+c*

2. Changes at organizational level After the Application of AI Approach in Human Resources Capacity Building and Program Planning, Implementation and M&E.

The study measured organizational change using 15 variables after the exposure of staff to appreciative inquiry. Many respondents expressed that their organization had gone to participatory decision-making, developed learning and sharing culture due to the influence of colleagues' participation in AI training courses.

There had also been increased teamwork as a result of mutual respect and cooperation among the staff. Realizing the positive outcome of providing staff with exposure to AI process, the organizations placed higher values for staff development through such activities as coaching and mentoring, awareness raising, social mobilization, and power sharing. The participants reported that organizations were able to provide quality service more effectively and efficiently. They also mentioned that there had been more outputs generated while improving planning, implementation, monitoring, and relations with clients. They also mentioned the improvement in the overall impact of the organization.

Table 2. Changes after the Application of AI Approach at Organization Level

What improvements resulted in the following areas as a consequence of AI application	Values	Rank
Participatory decision making	144	2
Learning and sharing culture	141	3
Team work/cooperation	139	4
Planning	123	5
Coaching/mentoring practices	121	6
Overall impact	120	7
Quality of services	118	8
Productivity/output	116	9
Social mobilization	116	10
Implementation	114	11
Partnering relation	109	12
Monitoring	106	13
Power sharing	101	14
Time management	99	15
Cost effectiveness	98	16

(Source: Chapagain 2004)

The findings show significant changes taking place. A participatory decision making occurred at organizational level after using AI.

The findings give basis to conclude that *positive attitude* of individuals enhances their capacities to influence organizations to use participatory decision-making leading to achieve developmental visions effectively.

B. Comparing Appreciative Inquiry and Problem Solving Approach

Respondents were asked to caste their vote either for appreciative inquiry or for problem solving approach on 31 positive and negative characteristics of human resource capacity building such as thinking, attitude, knowledge, skills and action (Table 3). Many respondents cast their vote to appreciative inquiry for positive attributes. Similarly, problem-solving approach received higher number of vote for negative attributes. The former got higher score for such attributes as positive attitude and behaviour, self-motivated participation, learning and reflection,

enabling/encouraging, searching for 'what works', inquiry of strength/ successes and their causes, community empowerment, innovation of potentialities, possibilities and hopes, optimism and creativity. The problem solving approach, on the other hand, received higher score than appreciative inquiry for searching of 'what does not work, blaming, discouraging, pessimism, expert based, inquiry of failures/problems and their causes, stressful, reactive, rigid, and mechanical.

Table 3. Characteristics of Appreciative Inquiry and Problem Solving Approach

Area (Character)	Number of responses/respondents	
	Appreciative Inquiry Approach	Problem Solving Approach
Positive attitude and behavior	100	1
Appreciative	100	
Self-motivated participation	99	1
Learning and reflection	98	1
Enabling/encouraging	98	1
Searching for 'what works'	98	2
Inquiry of strength/successes and their causes	96	3
Community empowerment	96	2
Innovation of potentialities, possibilities & hopes	95	5
Optimistic	95	2
Creative/generative	95	2
Convert the problems into opportunities	93	7
Immersion (harmony building)	93	1
Co-creation	91	3
Flexible	89	3
Sustainable	88	4
Humanitarian	85	7
Easy	82	8
Mysterious/miracle	68	19
Subjective	51	36
Objective	48	40
Expert based	8	90
Mechanical	5	85
Reactive	4	89
Rigid	3	88
Inquiry of failures/problems and their causes	2	98
Stressful	2	89
Searching for 'what does not work'	2	96
Pessimistic	1	92
Discouraging		92
Blaming		93

(Source: Chapagain 2004)

The findings show that the Appreciative Inquiry approach is encouraging whereas problem solving approach is discouraging and is designed by experts for others. The Appreciative Inquiry approach is based on the dream and continuous design, redesign and reflection to fabricate the destiny of the self, organization or society.

As per the Table 1, 2 & 3, AI has yielded high scores in all positive aspects as compared to the PSA. All these show that AI has immense scope for enriching human hopes and possibilities for human resources and community development towards productive direction.

C.   Importance of Appreciative Inquiry in Human Resource Capacity Building

1. Characteristics of an Appreciative and a Non-appreciative Person in Relation to HRCB

A human being basically thinks and acts in two ways: either in an appreciative way or in a problem centred way (Chapagain 2004).Considering this logic, a query was made with two distinct sets of characteristics seeking the opinion of the respondents. Out of the 109 respondents 106 (97%) favoured the flow of appreciative/ positive path. Only 3 (3%) respondents opted for the problem inquiry perspective. This shows that human beings immensely favour appreciative characteristics to build their capacities and achieve their vision of development. But, a crucial question crops up as to 'why most of the people from scientific community to laymen basically behave negatively even though they willingly acknowledge the significance of positive characteristics and methodological flow of capacity building'. This might be probably due to the early socialization and the bringing-up of human being in a problem centred and depreciative culture (Chapagain 2004).The implication of this logic is that human beings are in need to revolutionize their ways of thinking and doing and transform themselves from depreciative base to appreciative base with linguistic distinction to enhance their capacities and fulfilling development needs as indicated in the PhD study of Chapagain 2004.This might probably be helpful to emancipate the human beings from misery, tension and depreciation, bestowing self-respect, confidence, sense of justice, a feeling of compassion and tolerance towards others.

The above findings reveal that people mostly prefer the appreciative sets of characteristics and success-based approach to build their capacities and fulfil developmental needs.

Table 4. Comparison of Two Sets of Characteristics in Relation to Human Resource Capacity Building

Appreciative sets of characteristics	Depreciative sets of characteristics
→ Success thinker	→ Problem thinker
→ Optimistic	→ Pessimistic
→ Open	→ Reserved/structured
→ Visionary/dream based	→ Limited to seek solutions of existing problems
→ Imaginative	→ Framed idea based
→ Creates new pattern of work	→ Work within the set pattern
→ Inquisitive mind towards causes of success	→ Inquisitive mind towards causes of failures/problems
→ Quest for 'What works'	→ Quest for 'What does not work'
→ Creative	→ Curative
→ Generator	→ Monitor
Number of respondents responded – 106 (97.25%)	*Number of respondents responded* – 3 (2.75%)
Number of those who did not respond – 2 (2%)	

(Source: Chapagain 2004)

D. Human Resource Capacity Building through Appreciative Inquiry Approach in Achieving Developmental Goals

1. Usefulness of Appreciative Inquiry Approach in Achieving Human Resource Capacities and Development Goals

In an attempt to measure the degree of usefulness of AI approach in achieving human resource capacity and development goal, respondents were asked to rate through a four-scale instrument. Out of 111 respndents, 107 people responded to the query. Among the respondents, 31 (28%) responded as it being 'strongly useful' followed by 39 (35%) who stated it as being 'useful'. The remaining 37 declared 'same as earlier' or 'no idea' and four out of the total did not respond at all. This indicates that AI is useful in building human resource capacities and fulfilling developmental goals.

Table 5. Usefulness of Appreciative Inquiry Approach in Achieving Human Resource Capacities and Development Goals

Usefulness of Appreciative Inquiry in achieving HRCB and development goals	Number of Respondents	%
Strongly useful	31	28%
Useful	39	35%
Same as other approaches	16	14%
No idea	21	19%
No response	4	4%
Total	111	100%

(Source: Chapagain 2004)

2. Contribution of Appreciative Inquiry Approach to Achieving Human Resource Capacities and Developmental Goals.

In soliciting the comparable views on human resources capacity building and organizational learning for achieving developmental goals through Appreciative Inquiry approach and problem solving approach; respondents were asked to rate the degree of contribution of each of the approaches. There were 87 respondents giving their views in this query. An analysis made on the basis of their expressed opinion showed that 64% of the achievement is possible through Appreciative Inquiry and 36% through problem solving approach. These opinions were expressed by qualified and experienced professionals indicating that there is a great scope for AI approach in building human resource capacities and in attaining developmental goals.

Table 6. Estimation of Human Resources Capacity Building and Organizational Learning in Achieving Developmental Goals through Appreciative Inquiry Approach

Human resources capacity building and organizational learning in achieving developmental goals that takes place	Average Percentage	Number of Respondents	No Response
Through Appreciative Inquiry approach	64%		
Through problem solving approach	36%		
		87 (78%)	24 (22%)

(Source: Chapagain 2004)

Conclusion

The overarching conclusion of the findings of this research is that exposure of individual to appreciative inquiry develops positive traits in individual and cumulative efforts of such individuals make organizations responsive to the change towards participatory decision-making,   Positive/appreciative thought and behaviour are the fundamentals of human life not only for building capacities but also building peace and attaining developmental goals. Positive thought leads towards positive inquiry and action, love, peace, freedom and eventually brings institutional changes in human system and in the society. All these positive actions gradually replace the terror, hate and facilitate the creation of a human friendly society.

The inferences of this study contribute to fulfil the dearth of the 'theory of capacity building'. Appreciative Inquiry as such is not only an approach, but also a broad framework, a positive revolution, a way of life, a technique of thinking and doing that generates power to the organization and individuals by enhancing their capacities. So, it is logical to postulate that 'human resources having positive/ appreciative attitude and behavior are more capable than the negative ones'. Similarly, it can be inferred that this 'Appreciative Theory of Human Resource Capacity Building', has been corroborated by different means of this study. Appreciative tips are the building blocks of capacity building. No one can build his or her capacity without encouragement, appreciation, enthusiasm and commitments, which is possible through a continuous evolution of positive revolution.

Bibliography

Chapagain, Chandi P.(2004) *Human Resource Capacity Building Through Appreciative Inquiry Approach in Achieving Developmental Goals*, Ph.D. Thesis, Human Resource Management, Madison University, USA.

Chapagain, Chandi P. (2006) "Appreciative Inquiry for Building Human Capacities and Achieving Development Missions", *The Organizations, A Practicing Managers Quarterly*, Vol.9, Issue 2, Appril-June 2006.

Chapagain, Chandi P. (2007) "Appreciative Approaches to Community Empowerment and Peace Building, Sustainable Development in Conflict Environments: Challenges and Opportunities", Proceedings of the International Conference, Center for International Studies and Cooperation, Chapter 13, 16-18 January, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Cooperrider, D. L. (1999), *Organizational Dimensions of Global Change, No Limits to Cooperation*, SAGE Publications, International Educational and Professional Publishers, Thousand Oaks, London New Delhi.

Cooperrider, D. L and Diana Whitney (2001), *A Positive Revolution in Change: Appreciative Inquiry,* Case Western Reserve University and Taos Institute.

Cooperrider, David L. (1986) Appreciative Inquiry: Towards a Methodology for Understanding and Enhancing Organizational Innovation**,** submitted in fulfillment for the requirements of Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Organizational Behavior, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, USA.

Odell, Mac (1998) "Appreciative Planning and Action, Experience from The field"**,** in *Lessons From the Field, Applying AI*, Editors – Sew Annis Hammond, and Cathy Royal.

Whitney, Diana and David L. Cooperrider et.al. (2002) *Encyclopedia of Positive Questions, volume-1, Using Appreciative Inquiry to bring out the best in your organization,* Lakeshore Communication, Inc, Euclid, Ohio, USA.