

## **Appreciative Inquiry: Creating Spiritual Resonance in the Workplace**

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Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has been described as an invitation to a positive revolution in the field of human and organization change management (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005). The purpose of this paper is to suggest that it is also a vehicle for creating spiritual resonance and enhancing performance in the workplace.

Since its origin in the mid 1980s at Case Western Reserve University, Appreciative Inquiry (Srivastva and Cooperrider 1990) has been used to create positive change by thousands of change agents and leaders – in businesses, government agencies, health care systems, educational institutions, religious organizations and communities – around the world (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2003; Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros 2008). In the early years of Appreciative Inquiry as a social innovation managers and leaders called its viability as a process for large-scale change into question. As the new kid on the practice field AI repeatedly prompted questions such as, “Isn’t it naïve to ignore problems and only focus on the positive?” “If we take a fully affirmative stance what happens to the problems?” Experience has proven these questions unwarranted.

Now, twenty years later, the positive impact of Appreciative Inquiry on organizations and on the field of organization development, from which it emerged, is clearly recognized (Cameron, Dutton and Quinn 2003). Notable AI initiatives are now well documented. Consider large-scale culture transformation at GTE, now Verizon, and at Hunter Douglas WFD (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2003); process improvement at John Deere, HP, and Green Mountain Coffee Roasters; strategic planning and direction setting for Nutrimental, Brazil, and Roadway Express, enhanced customer service in Native American Casinos and at British Airways (Ludema, Whitney, Mohr and Griffin 2003). Appreciative

Inquiry has come of age and has contributed significantly to the positive revolution that has helped transform organizations, communities and the field organization development (Bushe and Marshak 2009).

With the success of Appreciative Inquiry another set of questions – with spiritual portent – have emerged. “Is Appreciative Inquiry a spiritual process?” “How does Appreciative Inquiry create such positive energy?” “What is it about Appreciative Inquiry that enables us to talk about what is really meaningful to us?” Repeatedly, in the course of leading or facilitating an Appreciative Inquiry process or other AI activities a conversation such as this occurs:

Participant: “Is Appreciative Inquiry a spiritual process?”

DW: “I would not describe it as an explicitly spiritual process but I believe it does create spiritual effects. Why do you ask?”

Participant: “While my partner and I were talking about the organization and who we are at our best at work we had a very deep and meaningful connection. It was spiritual.”

DW: “It sounds like you had a great interview experience.”

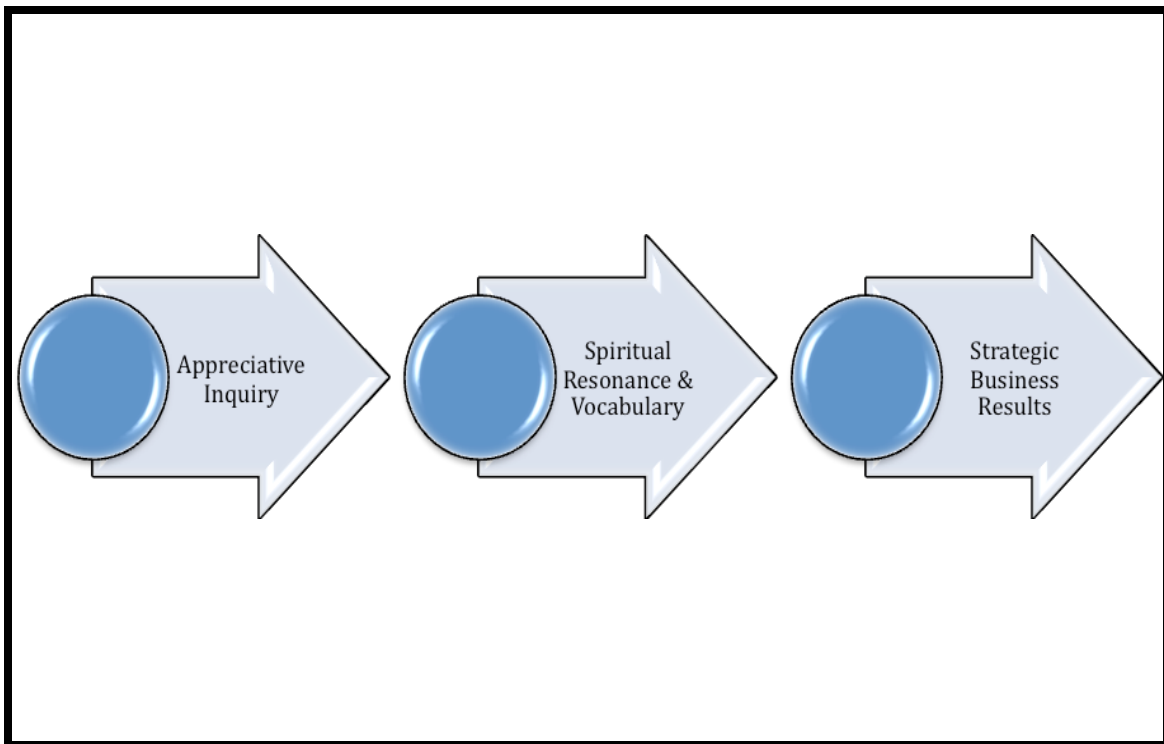
Participant: “Yes, how does this happen? I want to create more of this at work and at home.”

Following appreciative interviews, which are the starting point in an AI process, participants are asked to share a word or two that describes their experiences doing the interviews. They respond with words such as: informative, fun, positive, enlightening, spiritual, bonding, universal, caring, validating, safe, meaningful, hopeful, in common, compassionate, educational, inviting, engaging, connected, authentic, and provocative. As these words suggest, there is indeed much about AI that strikes a spiritual cord. Their comments reflect the four dimensions of spirituality as an organizing principle described by Whitney (1997): spirit as energy, spirit as meaning, spirit as epistemology, and spirit as sacred. Something about Appreciative Inquiry leads people to call it spiritual, to describe their experiences as deeply meaningful, energizing

and connected to something grander and more universal than themselves.

However, while AI does have a significantly positive impact on business results we seldom hear the interview process described using business terms such as results oriented, strategic, efficient, or effective. This leads me to conclude that it is the spiritual vocabulary and spiritual resonance created by AI that leads, in part, as shown in Chart 1, to the beneficial results that organizations and communities experience when engaging in Appreciative Inquiry. In essence, I believe that it is the spiritual nature of Appreciative Inquiry that contributes to the results achieved when it is used.

*Chart 1  
The Spiritual Nature of AI: A Contribution to Strategic Business Results*



And so I too wonder, how does this occur? What is it about AI that when people are invited to talk with one another, about their work, their organization or community, that they experience it spiritually and the organization moves toward its most desired strategic results? How does

AI create both a positive collective consciousness – what I call a spiritual resonance and positive business results?

This paper is organized into four sections. First, I offer a brief overview of Appreciative Inquiry. Second, I put forth the concept of spiritual resonance. Third, I suggest a framework for spirituality at work as a lens through which to understand how Appreciative Inquiry creates spiritual resonance. And fourth, I offer a set of Appreciative Inquiry based activities – daily practices – to enhance spiritual resonance in organizations and communities.

### **Appreciative Inquiry: Philosophy and Process for Positive Change**

AI as a philosophy for human and organizational change is based upon a set of life affirming beliefs about human nature and human organizing (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2003, 2).

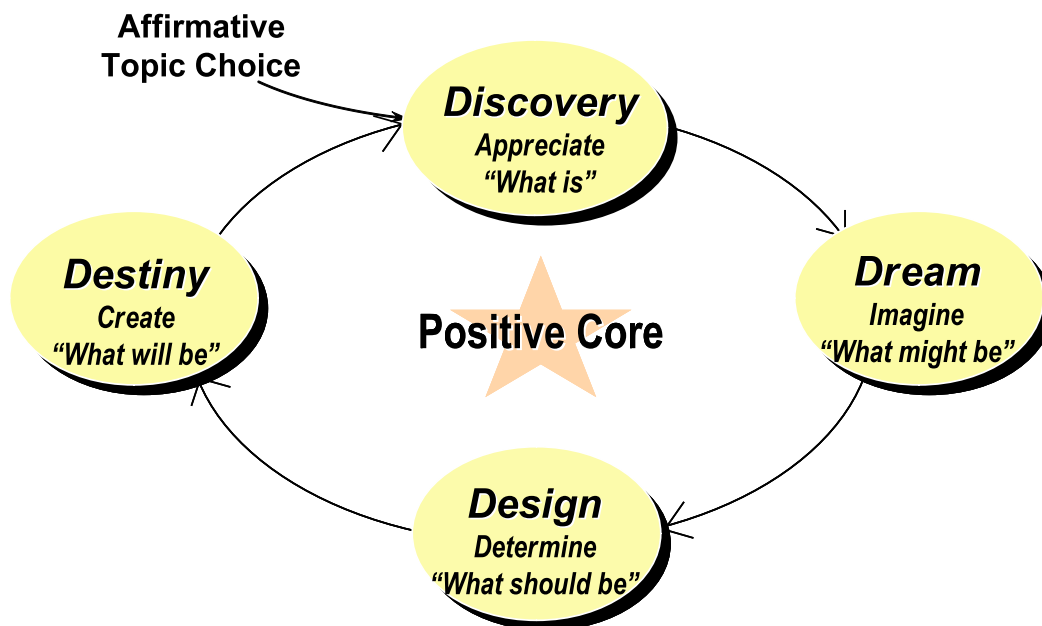
1. People individually and collectively have unique gifts, skills, and contributions to bring to life.
2. Organizations are human social enterprises, sources of unlimited relational capacity, created and lived in language.
3. The images that we hold of the future are socially created, and once articulated, serve to guide individual and collective action.
4. Through human communication (inquiry and dialogue) people can shift their attention and action away from problem analysis to lift up worthy ideals and productive possibilities for the future.
5. The questions we ask are fateful. They determine what is learned and they set the agenda for action.

The foundational assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, 1990) have been substantiated by the research and writing in the growing field of positive psychology (Fredrickson 2009; Keltner 2009; Ben-Shalhar 2007) and the booming strength based movement in leadership (Buckingham and Clifton 2001; Cameron 2008). AI, positive psychology and the writing on strengths all suggest that focus and inquiry into human capacities, potentials and dreams more readily lead to high performance and the achievement of desired results than do

more traditional, deficit based, approaches to change management. This shift from “focus on problems” to “focus on life affirming potential” is a keystone of Appreciative Inquiry and one of the ways it invites and creates a spiritual sensibility.

Appreciative Inquiry is a viable high engagement process for positive change (Cooperrider and Sekerka 2003). It enables large numbers of diverse stakeholders to join with each other in dialogue about their strengths and their ideal futures for their organization (Gergen, Gergen, Barrett 2004). It is a practice that amplifies and magnifies the most positive life giving possibilities for the future. (Whitney, Cooperrider, Trosten-Bloom and Kaplin 2002, vii). As a process Appreciative Inquiry invites the best of people individually and collectively. When this happens people experience a kind of epiphany at work that they most frequently describe as spiritual.

*Chart 2*  
*The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Process*



Appreciative Inquiry is most often applied in what has come to be known as the AI 4-D Process shown in Chart 2. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) provide an in-depth explanation of the 4-D Process along with step-by-step guidelines for applying it in organizations and community settings.

As a fully affirmative action research process AI begins with the identification of affirmative topics and moves through four phases of inquiry and dialogue: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2003, 7). AI is the study and exploration of what gives life to human enterprises when they function at their best. It does not claim that human enterprises are always at their best. What it does presume is that the best way to learn, develop and change is by studying what works well when people, teams and organizations are at their best. And so the starting point for AI and positive change is the selection of affirmative topics for inquiry. Topic selection requires the articulation of what is wanted, what is valued, what is most essential to success.

Topic selection invites a spiritual vocabulary and in so doing creates the field for spiritual resonance. Participants in an AI process are guided by the notion that “words create worlds.” They are asked to select topics that describe what they want more of, rather than what they don’t want. One of the ways that managers unintentionally keep people in the dark is by giving directions about what they don’t want.

Consider for example, the project team for a medical school curriculum redesign. When asked to describe the desired new curriculum, their most frequent responses were what they did not want: fewer large lectures, less separation of professions, no more having weeks between a subject in the class room and clinical work. Their vocabulary was problem oriented. They knew how to talk about what they did not want. They did not realize the value of and the need to speak in the affirmative. When it was suggested that their wants described the problems they wanted to avoid rather than designs for a new curriculum a light bulb went on. They were then easily able to describe what they really wanted: an interactive pedagogy, smaller classes, more clinical experience and inter-professional education. Once they described what they wanted they were able to create an interview guide

and study times and situations when it was at its best, in their university and at others.

By talking about and describing what is wanted managers and leaders unleash a tremendous amount of life affirming energy and provide clear guides for performance. When managers and leaders talk in the negative people feel blamed and shamed. And more significantly, good people who want to contribute and succeed cannot understand how to do so. The capacity for appreciative intelligence (Thatchenkery and Metzker 2006), the ability to see the implicit positive potential in a situation, is at the heart of Appreciative Inquiry as well as effective management and leadership.

The 4-D Process enables members of an organization to discover their shared foundation of strengths – the positive core of the organization (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005). By doing this before envisioning the future (dream), articulating designs for change (design), and establishing a path forward (destiny) they create organization wide confidence and hope for the future. Individuals experience pride and recognition as they share their unique stories of success, and hear others build upon them and weave them into dreams for the future. When people engage with each other in conversations about what works well, they learn each other's capabilities and they gain tremendous confidence in their collaborative capacity for achievement. They create a spiritual resonance that fosters human well-being and contributes to strategic business results.

### **Spiritual Resonance**

Often when people work well together a kind of communion occurs, a spiritual resonance. Described by Briskin, Erickson, Ott and Callanan (2009, 20) as collective wisdom, a palpable sense of connection to each other and to larger forces, it is more than just collaboration.

Spiritual resonance occurs when people working together share a purpose that is at the same time both task oriented and spiritually oriented. It occurs when people truly honor each other as well as nature as living beings, and when they do their best to care for all life. It

occurs when people recognize vulnerabilities and strengths and work in ways that bring out the best of people, personally and collectively.

Most significantly, spiritual resonance is a collective spiritual experience. Most understandings of spirituality at work are individualistic. The most comprehensive explanation of spirituality in the workplace, the ten dimensions of spirituality identified by Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003, 8) describe the various aspects of spirituality in personal terms: “capacity of individuals...growth and self-actualization...pervades a person’s entire being...individual’s expert knowledge...whatever a person considers to be more than oneself as an individual with reason.” When people talk about the spiritual nature of Appreciative Inquiry they are describing a collective experience. I believe they are describing a relational experience akin to being in the flow together (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) or a mutual tapping into a morphic field (Sheldrake 1981; McTaggart 2002). Whatever the experience it is deeply relational, mutually meaningful and highly valued by participants.

Spiritual resonance is talked about in the plural and reflects an awareness of “withness” and co-creation. It carries with it a sense of the whole, a sense of implicit interconnectedness and a sense of hope for the future base upon trust in relational capacities. Performance soars and endures in the presence of spiritual resonance. When people work from their strengths and seek to understand and support others working from their strengths a seamless flow of activity and results occurs, and people consider themselves part of a unique and powerful “we.” Spiritual resonance in organizations and communities creates an implicit safety net that invites creativity and innovation. It fosters high collaboration, that is collaboration for the greater good, rather than simply collaboration to get the job done. It is a key success factor in an organization’s capacity to balance the triple bottom line: people, profit and planet and to be an agent of sustainable world benefit.

Appreciative Inquiry makes a positive difference by deepening relatedness, fostering a positive emotional climate, and by creating spiritual resonance in the workplace. It provides opportunities for people to explore and share with one another what gives energy, meaning and a sense of sacredness to their lives.



## **Spirituality in the Workplace**

There have been many definitions and understandings of spirituality in the workplace put forth over the past two decades. They range from a definition of Dharmic management as the fusing of spirit, character, human values and decency in the workplace and in life as a whole (Hawley 1993, 1) to a conceptualization of spiritual intelligence as the ability to behave with wisdom and compassion while maintaining inner and outer peace regardless of the circumstances (Wigglesworth 2004). Based upon a review of literature Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003, 7) offer a representative sampling of definitions of spirituality. All have something to offer our understanding of spirituality at work. And all are part of what is now a significant field of research, writing, teaching and practice.

To more fully understand how AI creates spiritual resonance I believe it useful to consider it through the lens of spirituality in the workplace. For this purpose I turn to a dialogic framework of spirituality (Whitney 1997). It suggests that spirituality in the workplace is evident and talked about in four ways; that within the workplace there are four primary conversations about spirituality: Spirit as Energy, Spirit as Meaning, Spirit as Sacred, and Spirit as Epistemology.

The four conversations, adapted from an earlier work by Whitney (1997) are briefly portrayed below; along with some of the ways they are generated through the practices of Appreciative Inquiry.

1. For many people spirituality in the workplace is about energy. *Spirit as Energy* conversations are those in which people describe the feel of the place, the vibrations, the emotional tone, and what it evokes in them. The energy of a workplace may be positive or it may be negative. The way people talk about their workplace not only describes the energy it also creates it. When people say things like, “It is a drag to work here,” “Regularly, I go into a staff meeting happy and I come out depressed,” “People give each other the cold shoulder around here. No body even stops to say

good morning” they are reflecting and contributing to spiritually negative energy.

When on the other hand people describe their workplace with comments such as, “I like my job,” “I had more energy at the end of the day than I did when I came to work today,” “The best thing about working here are the people, they care and it shows,” they are reflecting and contributing to a spiritually positive energy.

Lakota Sioux Holy Man, Howard Bad Hand, says that spirituality is about living and working in the energetically positive. *Spirit as Energy* in the workplace can be assessed as the ratio of positive to negative conversations in the workplace. The more positive the conversations among organization members with each other, and about each other and their organization, the more positive and life affirming the spiritual resonance of the workplace.

Appreciative Inquiry with its unconditionally affirmative stance transforms negative conversations into positive life affirming conversations and in so doing releases a gust of spiritually positive energy throughout the organization. This happens at many points in an AI process. It begins with the selection of a compelling change agenda, a set of affirmative topics and the crafting of appreciative questions. When describing the AI Positive Principle, Cooperrider and Whitney (2005, 53) state, “The more positive the questions we ask, the more long-lasting and successful the change effort...We no longer need to be hesitant about bringing affirmative language into business...It is a much healthier and more effective way of approaching change management.”

The language used in an AI process stimulates positive energy and emotions. So too does the relational connections that are made. Appreciative interviews are most often conducted in “improbable pairs.” People are guided to use the interview as an opportunity to meet and talk with someone who is different from them self, who works in a different function, level or department of the organization. When people seek out someone different and interview them about their strengths, hopes and dreams a strange

thing happens. They discover and often describe with excitement and surprise that they have a great deal in common! During a recent AI meeting in a university health center a physician and a nurse who were at the center of a cross departmental dispute discovered that they were both organists at their respective churches. Instantly, as if an invisible hand stirred the air in the room, they became respected colleagues and role models for positive change.

Appreciative Inquiry deepens relationships in a way that creates an environment of safety, curiosity, respect and innovation. All of which increases the ratio of positive to negative conversations in the workplace. Cooperrider and Sekerka (2003, 232) suggest that these two factors 1) inquiry into the appreciative world and 2) deepening of relatedness, when occurring together, as in AI, create an activation of energy.

2. A second kind of conversation often heard in the workplace reflects the need for meaning in life. *Spirit as Meaning* relates to purpose, principles and values at work. Central to understanding *Spirit as Meaning* is the recognition that people want more from work than a paycheck. The quest for meaningful work is heard in many varied conversations in the workplace. The frequently expressed desire for work and family balance is the tip of the iceberg in terms people wanting and expecting their work to support them in creating a deeply meaningful life. The search for meaning in life, which was once a philosophical or religious question, is now central to conversations about quality of work life, job assignments and career paths; and even the business of the business.

People want to be engaged in work with a worthy purpose that is congruent with their most closely held values. Even now, in the midst of economic depression and uncertainty, organizations lose bright and committed people when they do not find meaning at work. A young graduate of Harvard's Kennedy School recently left her "dream job" because the meaningfulness she sought by working for an organization dedicated to human rights, was compromised by the way people were treated.

*Spirit as Meaning* calls managers and leaders to attend to the alignment of values and work. If there is anything that unites the multiple generations in the workforce today it is the dedication to business as an agent of world benefit, especially environmental sustainability. People of all generations, roles and functional responsibilities are expecting and even demanding that their companies and communities attend to global environmental wellbeing. People want work that is both meaningful to them personally and that contributes products and services that enable wise stewardship of resources – human, natural and financial. Conversations that reflect *Spirit as Meaning* place a priority on “the good of the common” as a path for contributing to the triple bottom line – the quality of human life, environmental sustainability, and business success.

To appreciate is to value. In its simplest sense, AI is a process for studying what is valued, for inquiry into the appreciable world. The AI Simultaneity Principle (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005) states that change begins the moment we ask a question; that the questions we ask are fateful – they determine what is learned. Consider the case of Connie, a customer service manager, who prior to learning about Appreciative Inquiry began staff meetings by engaging everyone in setting an agenda of problems and issues to discuss. Her staff meetings were boring to everyone, including herself. She commented at one point, “We never got around to talking about the good stuff, what we really wanted to share and talk about. All we ever had time for were the problems. Staff meetings were not fun.” Her staff meetings were not meaningful to her or to her staff. After she learned about Appreciative Inquiry she began an experiment. She started each staff meeting with a question about one of her values as a manager: delighting the customer, cost containment, new business, exceptional teamwork or shared leadership. She was surprised with the results. People loved the questions. They found them meaningful. And they found them helpful in understanding what was expected of them and how they could improve. To everyone’s surprise staff meetings became a meaningful time to share what was happening in the

business and to learn from each other's successes how to do things better.

Like Connie, managers and leaders set the conversational agenda for their organizations by the questions they ask. AI is a way that they can lead from their values.

The overall AI 4 – D Process generates organization wide alignment about purpose and meaning as people move through the phases of discovery, dream, design and destiny. The AI Constructionist Principle (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005) positions AI as a process of social construction. It states that meaning is made in relationships; that words, language and dialogue are the tools of meaning making. AI is a high engagement process, inclusive of all of an organization's stakeholders. It operates on the principle that all of the people whose future it is need to be in the conversations creating the future (Whitney, 2008).

Meaning making in Appreciative Inquiry is a collective process. Interviewers meet with stories, quotes and dreams for the future that they collected during the interview process. They share success stories and analyze them to identify strengths and best practices. As they do so, the positive core of the organization emerges – a composite of all that is meaningful to members of the organization when they are at their best. The discovery and mapping of the positive core creates a collective consciousness, a sense of collective identity and a positive spiritual resonance.

3. For some people spirituality is a sacred promise. When they talk about spirit at work they reflect an implicit understanding that all life is imbued with a spiritual presence, a potential awaiting discovery and emergence. *Spirit as Sacred* conversations are about the essential life force that flows in, around and through all. Spirit is not something separate from mind, body, or action but is indeed an integral quality of being. Indeed, it is spirit that is the organizing force of all life. *Spirit as Sacred* acknowledges what Alexander (2002, 31) calls a broad conception of life when he says, “each thing – regardless of what it is – has some degree of

life. Each stone, rafter and piece of concrete has some degree of life. The particular degree of life which occurs in organisms will then be seen as merely a special case of a broader conception of life.” Recognizing that everything has life invites us to consider that everything also has unique gifts to offer the whole. *Spirit as Sacred* conversations are those in which we seek to understand the uniqueness of each person, their gifts, abilities, hopes, dreams and callings. They are conversations that are sincerely respectful of diversity and seek to bring out the best of all people. They are also conversations rich in a human vocabulary. They speak of support and compassion in the workplace, positive emotions and human flourishing, and the cultivation of human potential and spiritual resonance.

*Spirit as Sacred* acknowledges the essential connection of all life such that actions of the part affect the whole. With this comes a deep reverence for relationship and wholeness. Integrity, an espoused value in most organizations generally refers to honesty, authenticity, and truth telling. Discussions about integrity in organizational life seldom evoke the meaning of integrated or whole. Organizations today suffer under the modern fiction of fragmentation, functionalism, and division of labor. *Spirit as Sacred* places relationships at the center of social organization. It calls for a radical relational perspective, one that not only honors all life and relationships, but also honors the whole and its collective wisdom.

Appreciative Inquiry seeks to understand what gives life to organizations and communities when they are at their best in terms of human, environmental and economic dynamics. It seeks to understand and bring out the best of people, personally and collectively. The four questions often used at the start of an AI initiative (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2003) clearly illustrate its life centric nature:

- a. Tell me about a high point experience, a time when you felt most alive, vibrant and engaged at work.
- b. Tell me what you most value about yourself, your team and your organization.

- c. What is the core factor that gives life to your organization?
- d. Imagine that you have three wishes to enhance the vitality and wellbeing of your organization. What are they?

AI is based on the assumption that human systems move in the direction of what they study. The questions managers and leaders ask direct the discussion, learning and action of the people with whom they work. When managers and leaders repeatedly ask questions about problems people become problem pros. They become proficient in the vocabulary of cause, effect and blame. On the other hand, when managers ask questions about strengths, and best practices people develop a vocabulary of capacity and the knowledge of how to succeed by bringing the best to life.

In the practice of Appreciative Inquiry the word positive is somewhat of a code word, standing for all that is life affirming, good, true and beautiful. The Appreciative Inquiry Poetic Principle (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005) encourages us to choose our words and metaphors carefully. It suggests that we replace the mechanistic and militaristic metaphors we use for organizations; that perhaps we stop talking about bullets and deadlines and instead find a more human and life affirming language. It proposes that we consider organizations as texts, always open to interpretation. And most significantly, it offers, that managers and leaders can choose the lens they use for interpretation. They can choose to study what gives life to people and organizations, their root causes of success; or they can choose to study problems and roots causes of failure. The choice to apply Appreciative Inquiry is a choice for the energetically positive, a choice to inquire into the appreciable world, to learn about human strengths and capacities, and to organize around what gives life. This is the implicitly spiritual nature of AI.

- 4. *Spirit as Epistemology* is reflected in conversations about the source of knowledge in the workplace, about what constitutes valid and useful knowledge. It is a conversation that awakens when managers and leaders open to explore of the processes and potentials of both quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis, of both facts and stories, of both empirically generated knowledge

and experientially generated knowledge. Whenever multiple ways of generating knowledge are considered spiritual potential is stirred. Some of the most impactful physical and social scientists, including Einstein and Jung, attribute their scientific discoveries to wonder and the workings of spirit, the mysterious or God as known to them.

The conversation of *Spirit as Epistemology* moves deeper with considerations of the role of alternative realities, intuition, psychic knowledge, and faith in the workplace. Ways of knowing that validate and affirm subtle presences, invisible yet known influences, and the relationship of intention, action and faith create a palpable spiritual resonance.

Globalization and diversity in the workplace create an imperative for managers and leaders to draw upon and honor alternative, spiritual ways of knowing along with scientific, rational ways of knowing. Diversity in the workplace means including people with different ways of knowing as well as different styles of working, making decisions, speaking, thinking, celebrating and relating. The benefits of diversity can only come when managers and leaders discover and liberate the capacity of multiple ways of knowing – from the rational, to the intuitive, to the spiritual.

AI is an invitation for all of an organization or community's stakeholders to tell their story, in their own way, and to be heard. It is an open invitation for the wisdom of the organization to be informed and created by sharing among diverse people, with diverse ways of knowing. In this way it is an invitation for people to meet and get to know the logos and pathos of others who are different from them. Through the affirmative process strangers and/or estranged colleagues become friends, strengthen collaboration, and build capacity to align strengths for results.

Consider a recent AI Summit dedicated to enhancing educational opportunities for students who are deaf and blind. Among the 160 people who were in the room, there were deaf students and adults, there were blind students and adults, there were sign interpreters, Braille recorders, parents, teachers, administrators,



representatives from the governor's office, state legislators and leaders and members of advocacy groups. There were also guide dogs in the room. It was a highly diverse mix of people, all committed to the same compelling cause and yet with many differing opinions and ways of knowing. During the course of the three day meeting everyone was able to participate, first in one-on-one interviews, then as a member of a small table group, and finally as a member of the plenary decision making body. Everyone was able to express themselves in ways that were appropriate to their skills and abilities. Everyone was able to participate in crafting the future and putting forth recommendations to the state board of education. Appreciative Inquiry generated a safe space for diverse people with diverse ways of knowing and communicating to come together. Through AI they created a vision and made a number of agreements about the future of education for students who are deaf and blind. At the end of three days the result was a euphoric spiritual resonance pulsed throughout the room. Everyone felt it and smiled.

Appreciative Inquiry produces a sublime spiritual resonance by positively impacting each of the four spiritual conversation arenas discussed. It fosters upward spirals of positive energy and emotions. It enables large numbers of diverse people to share what is most meaningful to them, in ways that make sense to them. It facilitates the collective articulation of an organization's positive core of strengths and embeds life-affirming language, metaphors and practices into it. Most significantly it liberates the hearts and souls of people by engaging them in story telling and creative enactments of their desired future (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2003) thus creating what Bright (2009) calls an appreciating life-enhancing dynamic.

### **Appreciative Practices to Enhance Spiritual Resonance**

Managers and leaders can enhance the spiritual resonance of the workplace through the application of AI and the use of daily practices derived from it. The following four appreciative practices can be used during informal conversations at work or during formal conversations such as staff meetings, coaching sessions, performance reviews and

team building retreats. They are a starting point for creating a culture of appreciation and enhancing spiritual resonance in the workplace.

1. Appreciative Check In is the practice of starting a meeting by asking people to check in with an appreciative story or comment. Whether it is a face-to-face meeting or a conference call, begin by asking people to share a stories about something that they feel good about, are proud of, are grateful for or value. It is a simple practice that makes a big difference. People warm up as they tell about their children’s activities, sports victories and graduations. They smile at each other as they mention awards and acknowledgments they have received. They relax as they tell stories of successful customer or client visits. The open invitation to share what you care about creates an appreciative dynamic at the start of the meeting and builds momentum for positive outcomes.
2. Strengths Spotting is the practice of seeing, articulating, and aligning strengths of people and situations. It has three steps: one, gathering information and stories about success; two, analyzing them to discover strengths and positive potential; and three, sharing the strengths and positive potential with the people involved. By asking people what they have done that gives them pride, about times when they have been at their best, or about how they have contributed to success, managers and leaders build their own capacity to strength spot, to see and hear high performance patterns. This is a call for managers and leaders to develop their appreciative eyes and intelligence – the ability to see the implicit positive potential in any situation, to shift from the language of failure and blame to the language of affirmation and potential; and to regularly tell people what they are doing well.
3. The Flip is the practice of talking about potential rather than problems, of inquiring into affirmative topics rather than deficit topics. Practice flipping problems to potential by asking: what is it that we really want more of in this situation? For example, a problem for many organizations is turnover. The flip, what is actually wanted is retention. The flip helps managers and leaders

express what they stand for and hope to accomplish. Consider another example, a director of education habitually asked why are 18 % of our students failing? By flipping her question to ask, what are we doing to help 82% of our students excel she, and her team, learned what was needed to help the failing 18%. By practicing the flip and speaking in the affirmative managers and leaders put forth positive images of possibility and inspire a compelling and contagious spiritual resonance.

4. The 4-D Meeting Agenda is the practice of using the AI 4-D process as a template for meetings. The 4-D process can be used in a phone call, for a two-day workshop or as the framework for a yearlong change initiative. When using it as template for a meeting agenda rather than list issues for discussion create your agenda by asking: What do we need to discover? What do we need to dream and envision? What do we need to decide and design? And what do we need to do? Using the 4-Ds in this way keeps your meeting focused in the affirmative. It also ensures that people with differing learning styles will find a topic and time to contribute.

## **Conclusion**

In the twenty years since its inception Appreciative Inquiry has come of age. Applications in fields ranging from business, to education, to health care and government show that AI is a viable process for large-scale change. In the course of this work the implicit spiritual nature of AI has emerged as a key success factor. Appreciative Inquiry, when applied, creates a life affirming collective consciousness, a spiritual resonance, which in turn contributes to the realization of strategic results in service of the triple bottom line.

Managers and leaders seeking to work from a consciously spiritual perspective can draw upon AI as a way of inviting spirituality to the workplace. Its unconditionally positive stance aligns with spiritual values and virtues, deepens relatedness and awareness of the interrelatedness of all life. Its focus on inquiry awakens a sense of awe, wonder and sacredness among people. Taken together the philosophy and practices of Appreciative Inquiry afford an evolutionary leap from

command and control leadership to appreciative leadership; from mechanistic models of organization to life affirming self-organizing; and from downward spirals of problems and performance to the co-creation of generative upward spirals of positive energy and performance.

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