Evaluation, Exploration, & Empowerment: A “Gentle” Strategy of Inquiry
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Abstract
Appreciative Inquiry (AI) addresses evaluation challenges with a “gentle” strategy of inquiry. AI combines evaluation, exploration, and empowerment that engages stakeholders and contributes to social justice. New applications of AI also reduce time and resource constraints. AI provides a flexible and contextual evaluation tool.

Evaluation Challenges
- Lack of expertise
- Time constraints
- Fear of negative results
- Irrelevant to organizational goals

AI Advantages
- Grounded in stakeholder meaning
- Directly tied to organizational goals
- Depth in narrative data
- Positive organizational culture
- Transferrable to context
- Supports evaluation interest

Traditional AI Disadvantages
- Time Intensive (several days)
- Resource Intensive (ALL stakeholders)
- Expertise (consultants & trained groups)
- Not Inclusive for marginalized groups

Empowerment & Social Justice
- Inclusive, expands stakeholders
- Cooperative
- Provides continuous evaluation
- Includes positive vision
- Encourages evaluation interest

Exploration & Inquiry
- We live in a world our questions create.

Appreciative Inquiry Steps
- Affirmative Topic Choice
- Discover: Peak Successes
- Dream: Future Wishes
- Design: Action Steps
- Destiny: Create Change

New Adaptations
- Timely, Short Duration
- Expands stakeholders
- Scaffolded to Abilities
- Familiar & Easy – No expertise
- Continuous Evaluation
- Results useful for multiple contexts (evaluation, planning, marketing)
- Institutionalizes evaluation

Use a culture built on positive accounts of peak performance & demonstrated strengths. The culture provides “self-driving” & continuous evaluation stories AND builds organizational enthusiasm.

Instead of fixing problems - Dream Possibilities