

Sharing strengths, developing communities - promoting strength-based learning across societies for the future

Grundtvig project 2013-2015

Resource pack to support Working from/building on strengths

Introduction

A part of the Czech Republic, Italy and United Kingdom Grundtvig project was to provide an online resource guide providing information on the strength based approach, underlying methodologies, and practical activities that were used and developed as part of the project.

The pack provides a range of exercises and activities that provide practical tools for adult educators to use.

Included also is further information that was shared during training and development sessions.

All the activities and exercises were used during the various visits including Prague, October 2013, Liverpool July 2014, Turin Nov 2014 and Prague May 2015.



The pack is in 4 sections -

1. **Section one Underpinning methodology**
Information on Appreciative Inquiry and Positive Psychology
2. **Section two- Activities and resources**
Exercises and activities used in the programme in an easy to use format
3. **Section three- thanks and acknowledgements** *Thanks to the individuals from Italy, Czech Republic and UK who provided the information for this resource guide*
4. **Section four – further reading** *This section provides a reading list for further study with some additional advice and recommendations*



Section one - Underpinning methodology

Appreciative Inquiry and positive psychology were the underpinning methodologies to the project and resource pack.

"At its best, Appreciative Inquiry is serious, deliberate, rigorous research into the root causes of success"
David Cooperrider

Summary information on these methodologies can be found in the Appendices of **How to be more Awesome** - www.bemoreawesome.net/ a young person's resource guide produced during the exchange programme and used by a number of the learners. Copies are available on www.appreciatingpeople.co.uk

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach and philosophy to organisational and community development which focuses on a strengths based approach rather than on a deficit one. It is about focusing on the positive and encouraging *generativity* - supporting people and organisations to see actions arising out of new possibilities, and to then co design and co create their futures. AI draws strongly on social constructionism and Ken Gergen's work on **Generativity**

A useful AI definition is: *"Appreciative Inquiry is a process for engaging people in building the kinds of Organisations and a world they want to live in. Working from peoples' strengths and positive experiences, AI co-creates a future based on collaboration and open dialogue."*

David Cooperrider, founder of Appreciative Inquiry

Developed by David Cooperrider in the late 1980s at Case Western University, USA, and now used all over the world, AI is a collaborative and participative, system-wide approach to organisation and community development. It identifies and enhances the 'life-giving forces' in a team, organisation, or business working at its best. It is a change process focusing on strengths – rather than weaknesses – and encourages active and effective staff and community participation. The resulting strategies are based on reality, and 'owned' by the participants, so are much more likely to be deliverable.

It is important to realise that it is NOT a set of techniques, but **a way of working** from an appreciative, positive and strength-based standpoint - it is a philosophy and an approach. AI can be easily adapted and used in traditional organizational and community development approaches – it's exceptionally flexible, and looks simple in many ways, but is very subtle. AI is used in government, aid agencies and in the voluntary sector all over the world – from small villages in Nepal to multinational organizations. It can also be used in coaching and in personal development.

Five core principles underpin all AI practice.

Their inclusion is a key element in AI training, and a process can't be considered 'truly AI' without having reference to each of these principles:

- The constructionist principle** - Words create worlds
- The simultaneity principle** - Inquiry is change – the first question is fateful...
- The anticipatory principle** - Image inspires action
- The poetic principle** - What we focus on grows
- The positive principle** - Positive questions lead to positive change

Further downloadable information about the AI principles can be found in the resources section of www.appreciatingpeople.co.uk

There are three tools that support the AI approach and principles:

1. AI conversations/interviews – developing questions

AI interviews – sometimes called appreciative conversations – are at the heart of AI. They can be used in many parts of the AI process. Essentially, they are a structured conversation, and normally called protocols – a useful bit of jargon! 'Protocol' is the term AI practitioners use to describe the sequence and focus of questions in an appreciative conversation – they can vary in length from three to six questions.

2. The 5D cycle - Definition, Discovery, Dream, and Destiny/Delivery

I. Definition

This phase involves choosing the right area, theme or concern to inquire into matter. They should stretch and challenge the status quo.

II. Discovery

Essentially this phase is based on dialogue and structured conversations. In depth investigation of 'what works' rediscovers and remembers the organisation or community's success, strengths and periods of excellence.

III. Dream

This phase is highly practical because it's grounded in the organisation or community's history (rather than unbounded vision making). It is a description of where the organisation, group, community wishes to be.

IV. Design

In this stage, the stories and the best work from discovery are combined with the imagination and creativity from dream, to create the structures and working arrangements to move things forward.

V. Destiny/Delivery

Builds on the dream and design process to create the future arrangements to maintain momentum and generate actions. Engages personal commitment to ensure 'buy in' across the organisation.

It is important to remember that AI is not just the 5D process but is about the principles, generativity, and asking the 'right questions'

3. SOAR™ (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results/Resources)

SOAR is the Appreciative Inquiry contribution to strategic planning, and a 'generative' alternative to a SWOT analysis. As an alternative to the dominant threats and weaknesses elements of SWOT, the SOAR approach encourages a more innovative and positive approach to asset-based strategic planning. It generates enthusiasm and creates positive momentum. Focusing on strengths and opportunities for individuals and organisations is much more powerful and effective than dwelling on deficiencies.

These descriptions are drawn from the user friendly AI resource pack *A Taste of Appreciative Inquiry- a simple and practical guide to AI* available at www.appreciatingpeople.co.uk/ai-essentials/ Discounts are available for bulk orders.

Some helpful hints about using AI

- Re-emphasize the point that it is not just about positive thinking. AI is the first cousin of positive psychology
- Its about a way of being and working from the principles
- It does not ignore problems but looks at them from a different perspective
- At its best it is generative, a game changer and transformational
- Ideally before using it, take some AI training to feel comfortable and fluent with the approach. If that is not possible then 'start small' by asking different and appreciative questions
- Practice using AI interview questions.
- AI will be particularly useful where learning and sharing of best practice is a key objective
- Taking time on the Definition stage from the 5D model is useful in defining a topic for the inquiry

When to use caution.....

AI is very flexible and even a small intervention - such as reframing the questions and working from success and strengths - will produce benefits on a number of levels. The tools provide a framework, but it is about first asking the "right" question and there are some setting/situations where caution is advised:

- Unavailability of quality facilitation and group work skills
- In a "command and control" organization
- If there is no "buy in' or understanding at the top of the organization

What are the essential benefits?

There are a number of well documented benefits of using AI, most notably:

- ✓ The principles, its generativity, the emphasis on 'building on what works' and on people's strengths.
- ✓ The way it encourages co-creativity and co-design, and is whole system.
- ✓ Fostering solutions and actions that are "owned".
- ✓ It encourages people and organization resilience and well- being.

Positive Psychology

Positive Psychology is the scientific study of positive aspects of human life, such as happiness, wellbeing and flourishing. It looks at how these qualities develop and grow and how can we maintain them. Professor Martin Seligman is the founding father of Positive Psychology and a major figure in the wellbeing movement. He believes that a happier society requires us to pay more attention to the quality of our inner life, and to use proven methods to improve it. That is what Positive Psychology is about – it goes beyond the treatment of depression and anxiety to ways we could all lead more rewarding lives. The exercises and approach it offers include the systematic practice of kindness, gratitude to others, counting your blessings and exploiting your strengths rather than attacking your weaknesses. It also teaches resilience and optimism. Positive

Psychology is one of the newest branches of psychology – the first World Congress was held in 2009.

Some Positive Psychology research findings:

- People are generally happy
- Money does not necessarily buy wellbeing: but spending money on other people does
- Some of the best ways to combat disappointments and setbacks include social relationships and character strengths
- Work can be important to wellbeing, especially when people are able to engage in work that is purposeful and meaningful
- While happiness is influenced by genetics, people can learn to be happier by developing optimism, gratitude and altruism.

Have you ever wondered why the world seems more inclusive and open when you're in a good mood, and why your circumstances seem so narrow when you're feeling down? How can you nurture the good feelings so they last longer and have more powerful effects on your life? **Dr Barbara Fredrickson** is an author (*Positivity* and *Love 2.0*) and leading scholar in the area of positive psychology. Her '**Broaden-and-build**' theory explains why positive emotions change your perspective on life and how they can help you develop valuable emotional resources, like resilience and mindfulness. She has found, in over 20 years of research, that individuals need to keep a certain ratio of positive emotions to negative ones in order to flourish. The video ***Positive Emotions Open Our Mind*** highlights her work – you can watch it on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7dFDHzV36g

Three particularly notable things about positive emotions are:

- They help us be more open. For example, a number of experiments have been done where giving students a gift of sweets before an exam helps them feel more positive before they start and they then do better in the exam
- They help people find better 'win-win' solutions
- They help people be more resilient

Martin Seligman and his colleagues at Penn State University have developed a range of wellbeing programmes for schools, the military and hospitals.



Section Two Activities and resources

The exercises and activities provided in this section can be used and adapted in a variety of learning situations and as part of strength based programme or process. The exercises are set out to a common format (purpose, task, materials, debrief advice and learning points). In the second part are examples of protocols that were used during the programme. Exercises and tasks are not provided in a logical sequence. They there to be adapted and utilized in a way appropriate for each situation.

All exercises have been used in our Grundtvig programme - *Sharing strengths, developing communities - promoting strength-based learning across societies for the future*



Exercise: Engaging your left brain – the creative side

Purpose

This exercise teases out learning from the process of asking and answering questions, supporting people to reflect not on the content, but the process. It helps people to connect with story, emotion and creativity.

Task

In pairs, find some space and agree for one of you to be A and one to be B.

Take two minutes each way to ask the following questions (so you've got a total of six minutes per person), and answer each question sequentially. Practise no interruptions, no follow up questions – try and listen very carefully without adding your story!

Q1: Share something you really enjoyed in your childhood or early life – something that stood out for you – tell it as a story...

Q2: What is the one thing you do that you really enjoy doing?

Q3: In all your life experience, travels, and places that you've been, what one thing caused you to go 'WOW'? (Share what it is and what happened - it can be small or major and very simple... A beautiful sunset, a child's hand or a great cup of coffee.)

Materials Participants require a pen and paper if they want to take notes, and the questions need to be provided on paper for each person.

Debrief

Depending on the size of the group, use either a 'talking piece' or just ask for answers around the group (see talking piece section):

Q: How was the experience?

Q: What was challenging and why?

Q: What happened in your head while listening and while answering the questions?

Q: What thoughts did it cause, if any?

You can write up responses on the flipchart and/or use Post It notes...

Learning point: The aim is to connect with the process rather than content, and for people to consider their own creativity and emotions

Exercise: Importance of story

'If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten' Rudyard Kipling

Purpose To connect with story, capturing information and eliciting more information plus helping people to record and feedback in a lean way.

Task

In pairs, tell a story about someone who has helped you make a difference in your life. Give emphasis to the recording of the story and its impact. The interviewer can ask questions to clarify and encourage, like 'tell me more', 'what happened next?' and 'who was involved?' This helps people to go deeper and encourage better dialogue.

The recipient of the storyteller needs to record the highlights and key points, practising being lean. When you've completed the story, feed back to each other the key points...

Materials

Participants will only require a pen and paper. Use a flipchart to record large group comments.

Debrief

In the large group, debrief by asking the following questions. Encourage people to practise lean feedback by using no more than three words in response...

Q: What stood out for you hearing the story?

Q: How did it make you feel telling or hearing the story?

Q: What did you want to know more of?

Learning point: The aim is for people to understand the value and importance of sharing stories. Noting the personal impact not only on content but the internal effects

Exercise: Lean questions and responses

Purpose Creating lean questions and answers; practising no interruptions and learning to listen more effectively...

Task In pairs, agree who's A and who is B and then identify a talking piece. For ten minutes, A will ask simple questions; they need to be lean and could be about personal interests like favourite films, colours, food etc. B answers in no more than three words. The exercise should be undertaken at a fast pace, and there should be no interruptions /clarifications etc.
Follow the 'talking piece' guidance in the exercise section.

Materials A simple object that can be used as a talking piece (it can be a ring, a coin or a pencil; a small pebble. For a workshop carry a bag of pebbles and give one to each pair. Pebbles work particularly well as they are tactile and simple to use.)

Debrief Discuss how hard was it to ask and answer questions; did people get 'leaner', and did questions go deeper? Was it hard to just listen? How did the talking piece affect the exercise and conversation?

Learning point The act of delivering quick questions fosters creativity and dialogue. This exercise is fun and enjoyable, and often the process encourages deep conversations and connectivity. The discipline of three word answers is a challenge at first, but provides the opportunity to learn simplicity and clarity.

Exercise: The skills of quality conversation

Purpose To identify the personal skills of quality conversations through group discussion

Task In small groups (by combining the pairs from the previous pair exercise into fours or sixes), discuss and then come up with the five elements of a great conversation. This refers to 'the skills you need...', rather than the topic of a conversation,

Materials Flip chart paper and pens for each small group

Debrief Share each group's top five skills across the whole group on a flip chart, to compile a composite list. The best way to do this is for the first group to share their first five. Then the remaining groups add to the list, adding a tick to the original five if they've got the same answer. Then compare the completed composite list with the active listening advice and look for similarities/differences.

Learning point Demonstrate how people already know what useful conversation skills are – they may just need to practice them more...

.....

Exercise: testing appreciative conversation protocols

The first section of this exercise provides the opportunity to co-design a protocol, test and fine tune the process and practise the approach and model appreciative.

The following exercise provides the opportunity to design and use simple questions to start a conversation and to reinforce conversation skills. In recent workshops we've found participants may respond better to the term 'framework' instead of 'protocol'.

Purpose To experience a protocol and a group debrief, to explore how the questions work, fine tune the questions and look at the different ways they can be delivered in pairs, groups meetings etc.

Task 'Fine tune' the draft protocol: in pairs, complete and practise the draft protocol. Then consider how the questions worked: how could they be improved? How could they be tweaked and their impact increased?

Materials You'll need an example of a draft protocol and writing material to record responses. If you're exploring audio/visual recording methods, such as Flip cameras or phones, then provide the necessary equipment and an opportunity to experiment with their use.

Debrief The debrief needs to focus on the experience: how could questions be improved or tweaked? Feed back on the experience of being interviewed and any challenges in asking questions...

Learning points The process provides the opportunity to experience an appreciative conversation protocol from both sides and to learn about 'tweaking' and adapting questions.

Examples of appreciative question protocols

Below is an Appreciative Conversation protocol developed by 50 participants on the *Imagine Anfield* project, during their appreciative conversation training. As part of the workshop process they co-designed and co-created the conversation protocol. Other examples can be found on the AI protocol card [X](#) and useful questions can be found on the AI conversation questions cards.

Imagine Anfield protocol

Q1: Can you tell me about a time when someone helped you? Who was it and what happened?

Q2: Can you share a story or experience where you have either helped local people or supported someone or something? What was it and what happened?

Q3: What do you think is one of the strengths of this community (it could be local people and organisations)? Please give an example...

Q4: What are your ideas about what local people could do to make a difference (it can be simple or difficult) to help this community flourish?

Q5: What one small thing could we do to make a difference to help Anfield flourish?

Note: When using a protocol in a community setting it can be useful to identify respondents by gender, age band and post code. This provides useful information and the ability to map geographical spread and make sure you're covering all elements of the neighbourhood population.

Exercise: using and valuing the simultaneity principle and creating opening questions

Purpose This exercise concentrates on the idea that the 'first question is fateful' and is to be used if a conversation protocol is not being considered..

Task

In either pairs or small groups, think of a couple of situations in your work, volunteering or personal life where the opening questions are really important. For example - where a person is nervous, lacks confidence or faces a difficult situation, or a first meeting, and you want to put someone at their ease. Firstly, describe and name the situation. Then create a couple of opening questions.

When that's completed, consider in the group or pair the quality of the questions and their impact. Alternatively test the question in pairs, noting their impact.

Materials You'll need pens and paper for the paired conversations, plus flip chart and marker pens for any feedback process.

Debrief In a large group, debrief by exploring the challenges and successes in designing the questions and the experience in using them. Ask people about their internal reactions and feelings.

Learning point The aim is to understand the importance of the first questions and to build skills and experience in designing questions - especially questions that will support 'great conversations'.

Useful resource – Using a 'Talking piece' in circles

To support and help both in practising conversation skills and ensuring maximum engagement, form a circle and introduce the idea of a talking piece.

Talking Piece Council is a formal method of conducting a meeting, which involves passing permission to speak from person to person, using a 'talking piece'. The purpose is to hear each voice, garner insights, and seek collective wisdom.

Use of a talking piece slows down dialogue and interaction, fostering a deeper understanding. A talking piece can be any object chosen by the facilitator or the group – whoever holds it has the right to speak without interruption. Objects may be selected that reflect the setting and personality of the group and the purpose of circle process.

The use of a talking piece fosters deeper conversation. It's passed from hand to hand with the understanding that the holder has the right to speak. Whoever holds the talking piece can speak while everyone else listens, without interruption or commentary. *The use of a talking piece controls the impulse to comment on what a person is saying, to interrupt with jokes or additions, or to ask diverting questions. It's a powerful experience to listen to one another in this way – talking pieces have been used in this way since ancient times.*

There are many examples of talking pieces - a simple object or something of significance to the group. Appreciating People may use a stone or a koosh ball. The stone passed from hand to hand allows time for reflection and slow conversation, while a koosh ball can be thrown around. Source: *The Circle Way - a leader in every chair* (Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea Berrett: Koehler Publishers Inc 2010)

Useful hints and guidance for 'Quality Conversations'

- Supporting and encouraging quality conversations takes time and practise
- It may seem counter intuitive, but periods of silence can help the conversation flow
- AI conversation cards provide more helpful hints on appreciative and great conversations
- Remember – the first question is fateful!
- Emotions and feelings are OK
- All change starts with a conversation
- When using protocols, provide the interviewer with a briefing note setting out the context and purpose and some helpful hints to help the process
- The protocols can be used in a variety of formats, including the one used below, and can be written on postcards
- If you're using a script, don't hand them out in advance - surprising people often gives better results
- Group conversations can be greatly helped by using a talking piece and, in some contexts, it can be crucial to good dialogue
- Try and use 'and' instead of 'but'
- Try and answer questions by starting with an 'I' statement

Exercise *Creative Thinking* cards

Purpose An opportunity to connect with peoples creative side and explore imagery plus a bit of fun and play

Task

Pick from the displayed cards one card that describes how you feel coming into the session/workshop and one card that describes how you hope to feel at the end of the session/workshop. Then share with all participants why you have picked the cards. An additional element is to at the end of the session/workshop ask participants to share any reflections on whether the choice of the second card was helpful.

Materials A pack of post cards of paintings, images, animals and scenery

Debrief Ask participants to identify how choosing the card impacted on their thinking

Learning point

Importance and value of engaging with imagery and creativity

Exercise *glove puppets sharing your strengths*

Purpose Using a playful and fun approach to both identify strengths, and share stories

Task

Pick a animal glove puppet that best describes your strengths and share why it was picked and a story about how you have utilized the strength. Be prepared for fun and for participants to keep holding conversations using the puppet. Participants need to share their reasons and the story whilst using the puppet

Materials

Depending on the group size you will need a number of glove puppets. For a group of up to 12 puppets you will need about 20 puppets. You will need animal ones and it is suggested you have a least two examples. Useful ones are dolphins, lions, deer, camels, lions, fish and whales.

Debrief

Ask people why they choose the particular animal and how they felt sharing the story. Note the energy in the space and the fun people are having.

Learning point It's a useful way to release creativity and get people to have fun together. People often find it easier to share their strengths this way

NOTE: Marcus Buckingham in his book "Now **Discover Your Strengths**" states that any organisation is only using 20% of the skills of 80% of its staff.

Exercise- *Great fire starter* *exercise

Purpose Help participants to begin to identify their strengths. Can be used as part of team building project.

Task

1. Each participant to write down in either one word or short statement the top or most important strength or skill they have.
2. On the second nametag write one word or short phrase the top strength or skill your family, friends, and/or work colleagues think you have. Participants are then asked to place the nametags on their

bodies in a place others can read them! (It is perfectly OK to allow people to contribute minor strength)

3. After a few moments of reflection to go into pairs or threes to each share a story, which highlights the listed strength/skills
4. Ask people in the wider group to share their stories.
OR ask people to answer either verbally or on post it notes the answers to questions such as
“what surprised you?”
“What did you learn?”
“How did it make you feel?”
5. Ask people to wear their labels for a designated time and to use them as a means to having conversations with other participants
6. Finally, in the large group list on a flipchart the group’s total skills - pointing out the range of talent in the room and strong foundations available for development.

Materials

Flipchart paper is required to set out the questions and record feedback. Two sticky labels for participants

Debrief

After completion of the exercise ask participants to consider questions such as what surprised you, what did you learn and what was challenging?

Learning Point

- The challenge of identifying and value of identifying strengths
* the term fire starter is an alternative to using the term icebreaker



Personal SOAR Exercise - A SOAR is the strength-based alternative to a SWOT analysis.

The Framework consists of four elements:

Strengths - *What you are good at?*

Opportunities- *what is out there for you?*

Aspirations- *where will you want to be ?*

Results- *how will you know you have got there?*

What Resources will you need?

Working in pairs and taking time on your own when you need it, please go through the 4 phases of your personal SOAR. To help in the process each stage contains mini exercises and questions.

SOAR Quadrant At this stage it might be helpful to set out a SOAR Quadrant. Take a piece of paper and mark out four squares and then set out the SOAR elements in each quadrant. For each element take notes or scribble down comments, which can be used to create the SOAR framework.

Treat it like a circle rather than a linear process, and feel free to revisit any stage as you learn something new in a later stage.

Strengths-what you are good at

Using all the information you have gained so far - strengthsfinder, your mind map, and the appreciative conversation, discuss and agree with your partner the top 10 skills and strengths that could help support you. Coach each other to ensure you have identified as many as possible.

To help with the process use questions such as.....*What makes me unique and special, and what do I do best?*

Opportunities-what is out there for you?

An opportunity could be something you've always wanted to do but not yet explored. It could be enhancing or increasing existing skills or strengths.

Sometimes more opportunities can be seen after you've done your aspiration section.

Using a paired conversation, consider the following questions:

1. *How do your strengths and skills fit in with the opportunities out there?*
2. *In the challenging circumstances you are facing what are the opportunities for you and your future- the things you have may have always wanted to do?*
3. *Given no restraints what would you do?*
4. *If you were to take a risk what would it be?*
5. *What are the smallest opportunities you could utilize and the most radical opportunity to explore?*

Take a few minutes to think about the key elements, and then through discussion with your partner summarise the main opportunities you have.

Aspirations- where will you want to be

Read to yourself the following statement and make some personal notes

It is now the autumn of 2016 and you have been invited back to meet with participants from the Grundtvig Programme to see what has happened. Describe in detail the achievements, successes, steps taken, challenges dealt with, and issues resolved. You are looking back from this period, and, staying in that moment of 2016, using such language as - "this has happened....."

- ❖ First take a few moments on your own to reflect on what has happened. Write down on a post it note the most important thing that emerged- it can be minor or major/personal/work related.
- ❖ Then with your partner, share as much detail as you can. To help with the process consider this question-
What has happened, and what are you doing differently?

Resources – what do you need to get there?

Results - how will you know you have got there?

Using all the information gained at each stage of the SOAR process, what meaningful measures, milestones, and actions will you put in place to achieve your vision? Consider *how you will get there*.

To help with the process consider the questions:

1. *What resources are needed and what decisions must be taken to implement our actions and milestones?*
2. *What is the first thing I need to do?*

The final stage of the process – if there is time

Use all the work you have done to create an image for your personal SOAR. This can be done in a variety of ways. It can be a visual map, a sketch, drawing, mind map, an action plan, etc. Use whatever system works for you – it's great to experiment with different mediums!

At the end of the process there will be an opportunity to share the results if you want to. Or you may prefer to keep it private.

Metaphorical Walk (Metawalk)

Purpose Guided reflection, integration of mind and body-work, sharing of images, paired interview in an unusual context

Task To provide the opportunity to walk and talk, answer questions, reflect and share either in pairs or small groups

Materials This exercise to be conducted in either a urban or rural situation where there are a range of landmarks and places of interest There are two options -

- A guide accompanies the group and presents appreciative questions connected to images found along the way
- An interview guide integrated into a map/instruction sheet is prepared and participants find the marked sites

Debrief (if required)

Two debrief options - one do a short review session periodically during the journey, or a final debrief after the entire walk. There is a third option to do both.

Learning point

- Noticing otherwise „non-visible“ places, details, images
- Integrating mind and body-work
- Reflecting, use of intuition and work with images
- Sharing while walking

Appreciative conversation protocols

This section includes a range of conversation protocols that were used throughout the programme plus guidance on interview questions



AI conversations/ interviews – developing questions (1)

Appreciative interviews are at the heart of the AI philosophy. Often they're the most important part of the AI process. The AI principles are central to crafting great, generative questions. This card gives practical advice on developing questions and card 11 (AI conversations 2) provides some examples.

"There is no more powerful way to initiate significant change than to convene a conversation."
Margaret Wheatley

AI essentials www.appreciatingpeople.co.uk

AI conversations/interviews – developing questions

AI interviews – sometimes called appreciative conversations – are at the heart of AI. They can be used in many parts of the AI process. Essentially, they are a structured conversation, and normally called protocols – a useful bit of jargon! Remind those asking the questions to practise active listening.

AI conversations focus on what's good, positive, what worked and how it made you feel. They generally prompt a new insight as the speaker reflects.

Questions should

- Be surprising
- Touch peoples' heart and soul
- Encourage sharing and listening to stories and experiences that enhance relationships
- Force us to look at reality a little differently

Tips for interviews

- Use the protocol as your script – and it's OK to change some of the language, just don't lose the meaning.
- It's helpful to ask supplementary questions like 'who else was involved?', 'how did it make you feel?' and 'why did it work?'

- It's fine to miss a question and then go back later, as some people find the process challenging and need time to respond.
- Be a great listener. Let the interviewee tell his/her story – please don't tell yours, nor give opinions or go off at tangents. It's very easy to do!
- In your notes capture key words, themes and quotes, and listen for great stories
- Be genuinely curious; allow for silence and thinking time.

Examples of 'open' questions that can be useful in many situations

- Q. What would be the best thing to do now?
- Q. Given no constraints, what would you do?
- Q. What is great about what you do?
- Q. So what will you do that will work?
- Q. What is the best question I could ask?
- Q. What do we need to do differently?
- Q. What is the smallest thing, and/or the most radical thing, that would make a difference?
- Q. Isn't that interesting? Tell me more...

Helpful hints in designing and using protocols

Use the term appreciative conversation if the word 'interview' could alienate people – this might be especially useful in community settings.

Allocate plenty of time to craft and pilot questions

Use a variety of formats like social media and group interviews – it's about what works in the culture.

You will know the right questions to ask

They're great at the **definition** stage, or to give people a simple AI experience

The **simultaneity** and **poetic** principles (cards 5 and 7) are very evident in these conversations



AI conversations/ interviews – developing protocols (2)

This card provides two examples of protocols that have been used in a variety of situations.

'Protocol' is the term AI practitioners use to describe the sequence and focus of questions in an appreciative conversation – they can vary in length from three to six questions. The key thing is that whoever asks the questions is prepared to listen deeply.

"If we were meant to talk MORE and listen LESS we would have two mouths and one ear."

Mark Twain

AI essentials

www.appreciatingpeople.co.uk

AI conversations/interviews – developing protocols

Normally appreciative conversations are paired conversations, but they can also be carried out in a group. Creating protocols and designing questions is, in some ways, an art form, and takes practise.

Example of a fairly standard protocol

Q1: Share a story about a time or experience when you were proud of what you achieved and when you've made a difference. What was successful about it and what did you achieve...?

Q2: Describe your top five strengths and share an example in your present role of when you've successfully used one...

Q3: What are the things you value deeply: specifically, the things you value about yourself and the successful things you've done...?

Q4: We're meeting on this day next year and reviewing the progress this company has made. What would be its successes, what would be different and how have the challenges been resolved?

Q5 (a): What are one small step and one large step that could be taken by the organisation that would make a difference?

Q5 (b): An alternative to this question is 'what are your three wishes?'

Alternatively, a protocol can be just three questions on one side of a postcard (the other side could have positive images of the community or organisation), like:

1. What is good about living/ working in... ?
2. What one small thing and one big thing would you change to make a difference?
3. What can you do to support... ?

Helpful hints

Collect protocols – adapting from existing good practice saves time.

When asking the questions be prepared for people who want to stay with the problems and be negative. Allow them some space, rather than close it down – try and help people to see the learning, or notice elements that demonstrated strength and resilience.

In some places the 'three wishes' question (Q5) is a great question; in others it is a turn off. Find out what works for you and your situation.

Protocols have a rhythm and flow – opening questions encourage stories and sharing of experience, later ones cover topics and intent.

"In true dialogue, both sides are willing to change."

Thich Nhat Hanh

You'll know it's a good protocol when people say 'WOW – that's an interesting question'.

Conversations will vary in length but be prepared for them overrunning

Remember the principles



Encourage storytelling and sharing of experience

In some situations confidentiality is essential prior to agreeing what can be shared or any emerging common shared themes.

"When you are listening to somebody, completely, attentively, then you are listening not only to the words, but also to the feeling of what is being conveyed, to the whole of it, not part of it."

J. Krishnamurti



These cards are taken from the *Creating Great Conversations* pack www.appreciatingpeople.co.uk/creating-great-conversations-cards/ - launched at the Prague Grundtvig visit October 2013

Example protocols

Appreciative Interview/conversation dealing with change/taking new steps

An effective way of identifying the importance and value of your own skills and finding out about other people's is an Appreciative interview. These type of interviews are different from traditional interviews in that the questions concentrate on "what works" - looking at problems and issues from a different perspective, and focusing on the creative. (Use active listening)

An example of a possible preamble..... For many of us, we chose our work from a limited range of options. The older ones amongst us were privileged enough to enjoy the choices of occupations available during times of full employment. Many of us, however, either fell or were nudged into certain occupations. When we were younger and those decisions were happening, we were different people. Few of us had time to notice who we were. And now we are facing the opportunities posed by a life changing transition and must rely on our best knowledge and experience....."

1. Tell me a story about your best experience of dealing with change in your life – personal or family or work, what resources did you notice in yourself at the time.
2. What support were you able to access from elsewhere? What enabled you to identify what would be most useful to you and to reach out for support when you needed it?
3. What resources do you think you have now?
4. Tell me about your skills and strengths, and share an example where you have used them to good effect?
5. Imagine that this is *2 years from now* and we are meeting again to catch up on what's happened. Describe in detail what you are doing, how things have changed, and how the challenges have been overcome. Give as much detail as you can - talk in the present and use phrases such as "I did this", I am living in this way, I enjoy my working life because....
6. Describe 3 wishes that you have for the next 12 months of your life?

Torino Visit paired conversation questions 26/11/2014

1. Name one of your strengths that you have (or that friends and family would say you have); And give an example of when you have used it.
2. Tell me about how you have asked a question or done something to amplify the 'positive core' of your organisation/community/self ?

AND

1. Tell me about something that you would like to get out of today's time together?
2. Consider how to formulate an appreciative questions to ask after the presentation today – one which can prompt our hosts to elaborate on their core strengths and/or achievements - or on how they have overcome challenges

For example - tell me about a time in your working life when you successfully faced a challenge: what happened? What was your role? What did you learn from that that is still helpful for you now?

Briefing note and advice

Introduction

This briefing note were shared as part of the AI workshops on the first Prague exchange

Note on intentions

Intentions are excellent replacement for the traditional aims and objectives model. Creating intentions at both a personal and organisational provide an excellent framework to build on identified strengths. The briefing below helps to explain its purpose and vale

Intentions come from the idea of **Commander's Intent**, a military term used to describe what a successful mission looks like, and it's not about having a plan and sticking to it. It's about having an intention.

Commander's Intent fully recognizes the chaos, lack of a complete information picture, changes in enemy situation, and other relevant factors that may make a plan either completely or partially obsolete when it is executed. The role of Commander's Intent is to empower subordinates and guide their initiative and improvisation as they adapt the plan to the changed battlefield environment. Commander's Intent empowers initiative, improvisation, and adaptation by providing guidance of what a successful conclusion looks like. Commander's Intent is vital in chaotic, demanding, and dynamic environments.

If we **transpose the word 'successful leader' instead of commander's intent**, it reads

A successful leader fully recognizes the chaos, lack of a complete information picture, changes in situation, and other relevant factors that may make a plan either completely or partially obsolete when it is executed. The role of a successful leader is to empower others and guide their initiative and improvisation as they adapt the plan to the changed environment. A successful leader empowers initiative, improvisation, and adaptation by providing guidance of what a successful conclusion looks like. A successful leader is vital in chaotic, demanding, and dynamic environments.

You may not recognize yourself as a leader, especially if you are not employing others in your business. But you are – **you are the leader of your own organization**, even if it is just yourself you are leading. Remember Louise L. Hay, founder of Hay House Publishing, who was 88 just the other day. She began by self-publishing her 'Little Blue Book' way back in the early seventies and running her first workshop for a handful of people in her living room. She started leading herself, and slowly and steadily, step by step, employed others to help her get her message out to many more people.



So do you have an intention for your business, or do you have a plan? Perhaps you have neither, of course. The only challenge with neither is that it is very easy to get distracted with tempting opportunities that may lead to you never completing anything, not following up with someone, or ending up wandering around with no sense of accomplishment or purpose. Not that that is bad, of course, but it may be

But a plan according to Appreciating People is at the other end of the spectrum, and too limiting. However, **an intention allows for flexibility, clarity of purpose and simplicity.**

Example Appreciating People's (AP) Intentions

In autumn 2011 – conscious that Appreciating People did not have a full business plan and also aware of some internal resistance to creating a business plan – AP decided to explore the concept of company intentions with a annual review cycle. Previous resistance had raised the view that they were out of date as soon as they were written, so, in a 30 minute think and writing exercise, the following intentions were identified and agreed:

- ✓ AP would develop its Appreciative Inquiry training work and build a relationship with a university for a certificate in professional development programme and design and develop high quality Appreciative Inquiry training resources
- ✓ AP would undertake Appreciative Inquiry work internationally
- ✓ AP would establish locally an Imagine AI project in a community setting
- ✓ AP would develop its AI hostel programme

No timescales or resources were allocated as it was agreed that delivery could be dependent on circumstances, relationships, opportunity and resource availability. As of Summer 2013 the intentions met are:

- ✓ The training work has taken place with four AI training programmes delivered, with a CPD certificate, plus five more are in planning. University relationship have been established and two training resources published (Food For Thought – our gratitude journal, and AI essentials), plus two more publications by summer 2014
- ✓ In December 2012 AP delivered an AI training course in Prague and in July 2014 received approval for Czech Republic, Italy and UK Grundtvig international adult learning project for two years
- ✓ In December 2012 the Imagine Anfield project with consortia funding started

Lessons learned

Whilst the majority of intentions have been fully met in this two year process, two of them had to be adapted, including the hostel programme – which has been altered to support healthcare in UK prisons – and there is a change in the university relationship. A central learning element has been the regular opportunity to check any new work against the agreed intentions and if they did not fit then they were not undertaken. This has allowed both clarity of purpose, the capacity to develop and evolve and to celebrate success and achievement.

Think of your organisation or company: it doesn't matter whether it's large or small.

Take no more than ten minutes and first think about your intentions – no more than five. Write them down and then talk them through with a couple of friends or colleagues. Following the conversations make any changes and then leave them alone for a month then revisit

- What has happened?
- How do you feel about it?
- Is there clarity and purpose and are they flexible and adaptable?

Section Three Thanks and acknowledgements

Thanks to all the partners for contributing ideas and practical exercises especially Helen, Lucie, Francesca and Suzanne

Section Four Further reading

- *Appreciative Living: the principles of Appreciative Inquiry in personal life* Jackie Kelm: Venet (2005)
~ An excellent resource to explore AI in personal and family life. This book made a made major contribution to the production of *Food for Thought*.
- *Appreciative Inquiry: change at the speed of imagination* (Second edition) Jane Magruder Watkins, Bernard Mohr and Ralph Kelly Pfeiffer (2011)
~ Recommended first AI textbook, with a great chapter on AI
- *AI essentials – a practical, straightforward and easy to use guide to Appreciative Inquiry*: Wordscapes (2013) ~ Produced by Appreciating People, these cards provide more practical AI information...
- *Food for Thought: a journal for appreciating daily life*: Wordscapes (2012)
~ Another AP product that can help you develop your own internal appreciative self, with great questions and tasks you can use to support appreciative conversations. Contains useful exercises and questions for people working community and organisation settings.
- *Developing Mental Toughness and Young People; Approaches to achievement, wellbeing and positive behaviour*: Doug Strycharcsk and Peter Clough, Karnac Books 2014
~ Useful chapter on the Knowsley experience on Mental Toughness
- *Creating Great Conversations*: Useful practical exercises and information on conversation skills
Tim Slack: Wordscapes (2013)
- *Flourish: a new understanding of happiness and wellbeing – and how to achieve them* – Martin Seligman: Free Press, 2011 Useful description of wellbeing, positive psychology and the importance of resilience.
- *Positive Psychology at Work: how positive leadership and Appreciative Inquiry create inspiring organisations*: Sarah Lewis: Wiley Blackwell (2011)
~ Full of valuable evidence on the evidence of strengths and positive psychology in practical settings
- <http://www.centreforconfidence.co.uk/flourishing-lives-young-people.php>

Further information about Appreciative Inquiry can be found on www.appreciatingpeople.co.uk