

Appreciative inquiry: background, aim and principles

With a focus on workplace health promotion and management

This document gives summarized information about:

- Definition and principles of appreciative inquiry
- Aim of appreciative inquiry
- Methods of appreciative inquiry
- The rationale for appreciative inquiry (background)
- The relationship with workplace health promotion and salutogenesis

Definition of Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

"Appreciative Inquiry is the cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves systematic discover of what gives a system 'life' when it is most effective and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to heighten positive potential. It mobilizes inquiry through crafting an "unconditional positive question' often involving hundreds or sometimes thousands of people."

Source: Cooperrider, D.L. & Whitney, D., "Appreciative Inquiry: A positive revolution in change." In P. Holman & T. Devane (eds.), The Change Handbook, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., pages 245-263.

In short: It is an organizational development method that seeks to engage all levels of an organization (and often its customers and suppliers) in its renewal, change and improved performance.

The key principles of Appreciative inquiry (AI) are:

- Accentuate the positive: when focusing on what works, it is very inspiring to people. And accentuating the positive points enhances the result of positive effects
- Using methods that are focusing on possibilities and challenges instead of problems
- It works for all businesses: profit and not for profit, public and private

The aim of appreciative inquiry:

The aim is to give your organization a boost by leveraging the good ways of working by using AI. In the field of workplace health promotion it will reveal the strengths in your organization for the attention for the health of employees and employee involvement in the business process. And it will give insight in which topics further improvements can be made.

The methods of appreciative inquiry:

By AI the 4 D technique is used, consisting of: Discover, Dream, Design and Destiny:

1. Discover the good assets, the strengths of an organization
2. Dream of the future result: what would the organization like to achieve
3. Design of steps to undertake and the priorities to reach the envisioned result
4. Create a Destiny based on the envisioned future and involve people in this design and plan of action

Source: this is an edited version of the method described by Harvard Business School, Working Knowledge <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/>

AI implies a particular way of asking questions in the way for enhancing the capacity for collaboration and change of people. It focuses on strengths, on good practices on possibilities instead of problems or risks. Examples of questions are: What is working well? And why? What are good practices in your organisation? Where are you proud of? What are challenges?

Another aspect is that it focus on involvement, in participation and in commitment of all people in an organisation. The methods resembles the principles of **action research**.

The rationale of appreciative inquiry

David Cooperrider is seen as the founding father of the AI approach. Cooperrider is an American Professor of Organizational and Professor of Social Entrepreneurship. Also known of his research in the field of stress, workload and coping. In his research in the mid 80's he started an experiment, doing one part of a research in the traditional way and the other part with an action research approach. The traditional part focuses on the problems of the clinic and the causes of these problems. The action research part on factors contributing to the effectiveness and success of a clinic. To their surprise, the action research approach focusing on the success factor led to better results than the traditional way. The underlying explanations of the better results were:

- The success stories helped employees of the clinic not only to see the successes and good aspects of working in the clinic, but also to reflect on their negative views on the clinic and to review them in the light of the successes;
- Employees started to exchange their good experiences instead of focusing on the problems and complaining about these problems. This started a change in the way of working.

This experiment is seen as the basis for more research on organization change with a more positive, action research approach: the appreciative inquiry approach.

Source: Masselink et al. (2008). *Waarderend organiseren*. Gelling Publishing/Reed Business

AI, workplace health promotion

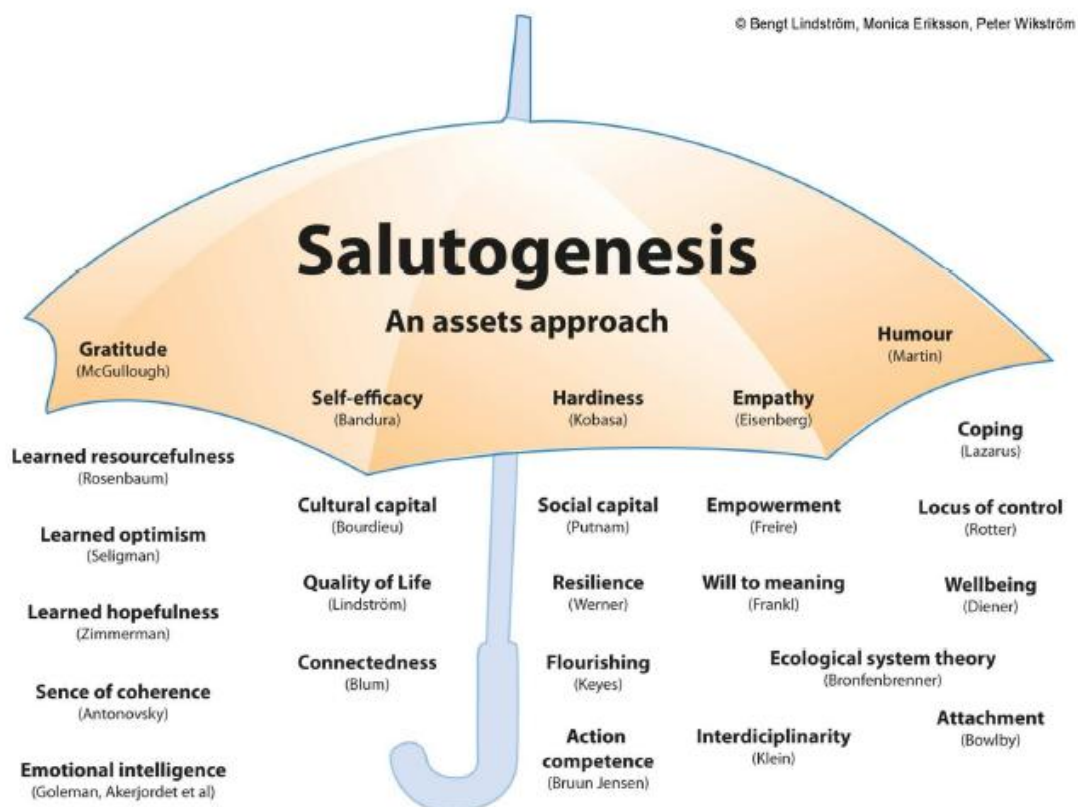
AI is also known as an "asset-based" or "strength-based" approach. The definition of AI shows similarities to definitions of workplace health promotion and salutogenesis:

Salutogenesis:

Salutogenesis from the Greek salus (=health) and genesis (= origin), means the origin of health. The salutogenic approach rather focuses on resources for health than on risks for diseases. It is the opposite of the pathogenic concept where the focus is on the obstacles and deficits. Salutogenesis is a way of thinking, being, acting and meeting people in a health promotion manner.

source: Eriksson M (2007). *Unravelling the mystery of salutogenesis*. Folkhälsan Research Center. Research report.

Salutogenesis is also described as an asset approach. See the figure below.



Workplace health promotion (WHP)

Workplace health promotion is the combined effort of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work. www.enwhp.org



Definition WHP

Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) is the combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work.

This can be achieved through a combination of:

- improving the work organisation and the working environment
- promoting active participation
- encouraging personal development

The combined principles of AI, salutogenesis and workplace health promotion are combined in the work of BaartRaaijmakers and in their co-operation with partner such as [iHMQ](#) (international Institute for Health Management and Quality) and [Center Work health](#).

Sources:

- Cooperrider DL, Whitney D (draft). A Positive Revolution in Change: Appreciative Inquiry <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/whatisai.pdf>
- Harvard Business School, Working Knowledge <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/>
- Masselink et al. (2008). Waarderend organiseren. Gelling Publishing/Reed Business
- The European Network around Appreciative Inquiry www.networkplace.eu
- Western Reserve University, the Weatherhead School of Management Ohio <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>