THE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY SUMMIT

A Practitioner's Guide for Leading Large-Group Change

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this material has been excerpted from

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by James D. Ludema, Diana Whitney, Bernard J. Mohr & Thomas J. Griffin
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PREFACE

Every once in a while a client or a colleague will ask a question that surprises us. This happened a couple years ago when Gina Hinrichs, an internal OD consultant at John Deere Harvester Works, came to us with the following story. "I've used appreciative inquiry for years with individuals and teams, and I've seen impressive results. But now I want to take it to the level of the whole system. Our new Business Unit Leader for header manufacturing, Andy Gianulis, wants to boost our competitiveness by reducing costs, improving quality, and speeding up new product cycle time. And he wants to do it *immediately*. My question is: What would an Appreciative Inquiry Summit process look like if it were perfectly designed to produce fast bottom-line business results in a large unionized manufacturing plant?"

Wow, what a question! Over the years, we had used the Appreciative Inquiry Summit (AI Summit) approach with many organizations in a variety of applications, but nothing quite like this. The plant had been in operation for over seventy years. Many employees had been working together for more than twenty years. Processes were highly routinized and patterns of relationship were deeply engrained. Was it really reasonable to expect this plant to produce significant, lasting change in the mere three to five days of a typical AI Summit? How would we involve everyone? How would we come to agreement on a clear purpose and task? How would we create conditions of cooperation and trust? How would we get our arms around the enormous complexity of designing, manufacturing,

and marketing the precisely engineered header products?[1] It was an exciting but daunting challenge!

Nevertheless, with the full and courageous support of Andy, the union leaders, and John Munn of Product Engineering, and along with Gina and a group of her highly skilled "process pros," we took the whole system (wage employees, management, customers, suppliers, dealers, and representatives from corporate—about 250 people in all) off site for five days and worked through the appreciative inquiry 4-D process.[2] By the end of the week, the group had launched ten cross-functional strategic initiatives to decrease costs, increase quality, improve product cycle time, and enhance working relationships.

As a result of the AI Summit, the plant experienced many successes, including a significant reduction in product cycle time. This provided John Deere with an immediate savings of more than $3 million and projected earnings and millions more in new market share. But perhaps the most significant results were the transformed relationships, particularly between labor and management. Many participants shared that this was the first time that they had the opportunity to sit down as equals with management to plan for the future. They talked about how searching for the best in themselves and others allowed them to feel validated and gave them a whole new perception of the gifts, strengths, and humanity of their colleagues. They said that in the summit they learned more and made more progress in five days then they typically do in five years. One participant said that this was the first time in over twenty years that he had hope for the future.

BENEFITS OF THE AI SUMMIT

The John Deere case is just one example of the Appreciative Inquiry Summit methodology in action, but its results are becoming increasingly familiar. We have used the AI Summit with dozens of organizations in every sector of society, and over and again we see an immediate and sustained boost in levels of cooperation, innovation, and bottom-line results. When we ask ourselves what makes AI Summits so much more effective than traditional approaches to change, six factors keep popping up:

- **They are quicker.** They accelerate change because they produce a "critical mass" of involvement throughout the organizational system. They

speed up the change process by directly engaging the entire organizational system in envisioning, designing, and implementing the change.

- **They build organizational confidence.** AI Summits begin by inviting people into a deep exploration of what we call the organization's "positive core"[3]—its greatest strengths, assets, capacities, capabilities, values, traditions, practices, accomplishments, and so on. Access to the positive core bolsters courage and fuels bold innovation throughout the system.

- **They provide immediate and broad access to information.** In any organization, knowledge and information is widely distributed, and people at multiple levels throughout the organization have the information most critical to organizational success. AI Summits, by involving a broad spectrum of people, allow access to a wide range of ideas and information that enrich organizational learning and spur inventiveness throughout the system.

- **They promote a "total organization mindset."** In order to support intelligently the success of the entire enterprise, organizational members need a clear understanding of how their individual contribution fits into the big picture. Rather than relying on the slow and disjointed process of passing this information up and down the chain of command, AI Summits create a forum in which organizational members gain a direct and immediate connection to the "logic of the whole."

- **They result in inspired action.** As Marvin Weisbord writes, people support what they help to create.[4] When everyone is involved in the innovation process, it is implemented with more passion and less resistance. It is not necessary to tell, sell, or force change on organization members.

- **They provide the means to sustain positive change.** For any change to have an enduring impact on an organization, it must be built into the organization's "social architecture"—its systems, structures, strategies, and culture. The AI Summit process supports and energizes enduring change by involving organizational members in designing high-performing systems.

PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

The purpose of this book is to invite you into the experiment with us, to spark ideas that will help you bring the principles and practices of "whole-system positive change" to your organizations and communities. In this book we provide a framework for understanding and applying the Appreciative Inquiry Summit as a methodology

for positive change. We discuss the theories of organization change and large-group processes on which the AI Summit is based; we walk you step by step through the process of planning, conducting, and following up on an AI Summit; we provide a series of case studies of the AI Summit process in action; and we share essential success factors—what we have learned in our work with AI and large-group processes that contributes to success in large-scale efforts.

This book is written primarily for practitioners (internal and external organization change consultants) who want a practical guide to help them plan, design, and facilitate AI Summits. It is also useful for executives, leaders, and managers in organizations who want a primer on the summit methodology and who want to use it to support a process of positive change in their organizations. Finally, it will be of value as a textbook in undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs that offer courses on organization change, appreciative inquiry, or large-group interventions.

To make it easy to use, we have written the book in a conversational style and have included many tables, illustrations, case examples, and practical tools (designs, worksheets, etc.). Our highest hope is that the book becomes a regular companion and good friend to practitioners, a resource to which they turn regularly as they explore the exciting frontier of the AI Summit methodology.

If you are new to appreciative inquiry or new to the field of organization change, you may be wondering, "Is this book for me, or is the AI Summit a more advanced topic?" Our answer is "Yes!" Certainly, to lead an AI Summit requires an understanding of appreciative inquiry and of basic organization change processes. Consequently, we have designed this book to include both an introduction to appreciative inquiry and an explanation of the core organization change principles that give the AI Summit methodology its power. It is an excellent starting point for further exploration.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS BOOK

The book is divided into five sections designed to help you understand and implement the AI Summit process.

Part I, "Understanding the AI Summit," provides an introduction to AI and to the AI Summit methodology (Chapter 1), an overview of the AI Summit process from start to finish (Chapter 2), and ten essential conditions for AI Summit success (Chapter 3).

Part II, "Before the Summit," gives an in-depth look at how to prepare for an AI Summit. In our experience, more time is spent in planning for a summit than in actually conducting it. This section covers three important phases involved in getting ready: building sponsorship for the AI Summit (Chapter 4), planning it (Chapter 5), and creating a powerful design for it (Chapter 6).

Part III, "During the Summit," walks you through the process of conducting an AI summit, using the appreciative inquiry 4-D model. It provides descriptions of the discovery (Chapter 7), dream (Chapter 8), design (Chapter 9), and destiny (Chapter 10) phases. This is followed by a discussion of the art and practice of facilitating an AI Summit (Chapter 11).

Part IV, "After the Summit," offers a variety of approaches for implementing and supporting the changes that are initiated in the summit process. It includes specific ways to follow up immediately after the summit (Chapter 12) and our dream of the appreciative organization (Chapter 13).

Part V, the Appendix, contains a sample participant workbook. It includes a number of practical tools and worksheets you can use or adapt for your own applications.

Understanding the AI Summit

Tony Burman, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) chief journalist and executive director of CBC Television News—an 1,100-person global unit responsible for news and current affairs programming—wanted to create a vibrant culture of change. He had already begun a process of renewing his department through working committees. But he wanted a change movement that was more inclusive, more pervasive and ongoing. Tony decided to hold an AI Summit. He believed that bringing together reporters, cameramen, journalists, producers, managers, and hosts to invent new ways of collecting, editing, producing, and evaluating the news was the way to engage and ignite employees.

Some were skeptical about bringing together staff without a clear vision of the end game by senior management. Some journalists were wary of a process that adopted an affirmative approach. But Tony, his team, and the Learning and Development Department were confident about the summit's positive potential. Following the three days of intense dialogue, debate, creative dreaming, invention, and planning, they could not

have been more pleased. The group presented their initiatives to the Executive Vice President of Television, Harold Redekopp. Harold responded, "In all my years at CBC I've been trying to explain what deep organization transformation is really about. This is the first time I have really seen it in practice—we have done it and we should all be very proud of ourselves."

As the CBC case illustrates, the AI Summit process creates conditions to enable deep transformation in people, organizations, and communities. It does this by bringing members of the "whole system" together to learn from their strengths, envision new possibilities, and co-create the future. It is based on the simple yet profound assumption that human communities enable extraordinary performance when they combine and develop the capacities of every member in service of the whole.

The first part of this book provides a brief overview of how and why the AI Summit process works. We share stories and learnings from early experiments with the AI Summit. We connect it to other approaches of whole-scale change. We walk through a summit from start to finish. Finally, based on our and others' experience and on leading-edge organization change theory, we offer ten essential conditions for AI Summit success.

WHAT IS THE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY SUMMIT METHODOLOGY?

Whenever we introduce the Appreciative Inquiry Summit methodology, people have questions. What is appreciative inquiry, and precisely what is an AI Summit? How does the AI Summit process relate to other ways of using appreciative inquiry, and how does it relate to other large-group processes, such as Future Search, Open Space Technology, Whole-Scale Change, Real Time Strategic Change, the Search Conference, and the Conference Model?

In this chapter, we respond to these questions by looking at the emergence and key characteristics of the AI Summit methodology. First, we introduce appreciative inquiry and its various forms of engagement. Second, we provide a brief definition of the AI Summit methodology. Third, we offer a short history of the AI Summit methodology and highlight some of its central characteristics. Finally, we compare the AI Summit with other large-group processes.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Appreciative inquiry got its start in the early 1980s when David Cooperrider, then a doctoral student in organizational behavior at Case Western Reserve University, and his faculty mentor,

Suresh Srivastva, were doing an organization change project with the Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland, Ohio. They found, first of all, that when they used the traditional organization development (OD) approach of problem diagnosis and feedback, it sucked the energy for change right out of the system. The more problems people discovered, the more discouraged they became; and the more discouraged they became, the more they began to blame one another for the problems.

Second, they discovered that their work as an intervention was more powerful when they let go of the very idea of intervening. Instead of *intervention* they framed their task as *inquiry*—simply to be students of organizational life, to learn, to discover, and to appreciate everything that gave "life" to the system when it was most vibrant, effective, successful, and healthy in relation to its whole system of stakeholders. In their analysis of the data, Cooperrider and Srivastva engaged in a radical reversal of the traditional problem-solving approach.

Influenced by the writings of Schweitzer[1] on "reverence for life," they focused on everything they could find that appeared to empower and energize the system, everything contributing to excellence and high performance at the clinic. Even though, in the early stages, they still asked some very traditional diagnostic questions (such as "Tell us about your largest failure as a chairman of your department"), they decided later, in preparing their feedback report, to include analysis of all the generative themes: moments of success; experiences of high points; and stories of innovation, hope, courage, and positive change. Instead of doing a root-cause analysis of failure, they let go of every so-called deficiency and turned full attention to analysis of root causes of success.

The results were immediate and dramatic. Relationships improved, cooperation increased, and measurable business performance hit an all-time high. When Cooperrider and Srivastva presented the outcomes of the inquiry to the clinic board, the report created such a powerful and positive stir that the board asked to use the method with the entire organization of 8,000 people. They called the approach "appreciative inquiry," and the term first appeared in a footnote in this feedback report to the members of the Cleveland Clinic board. A few years later they published their classic article "Appreciative Inquiry into Organizational Life,"[2] articulating the theory and vision of ap-

preciative inquiry as an exciting paradigm shift for the field of organization development and change. It was a call, as they wrote, "for a scholarship of the positive."

Toward a Positive Revolution

Since the early 1980s, AI has grown extensively around the world. It has been used by thousands of people and hundreds of organizations in every sector of society to promote transformative change. For example, it has been used in a variety of applications by:

- Major corporations such as Avon Mexico, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Boeing, Bristol Myers Squibb, British Airways, BP, British Telecom, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Cap Gemini Ernst & Young, DTE Energy Services, GE Capital, GlaxoSmithKline, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, Hunter-Douglas, John Deere, McDonald's, Motorola, Nutrimental Foods (Brazil), Roadway, Square D Corporation, U.S. Cellular, USG Corporation, Verizon, and Wendy's.

- Government organizations such as the Canadian Department of National Defense, City of Berkeley, City of Denver, City of Minneapolis, Hampshire County Council Social Services Department (UK), Inner London Magistrate's Courts Service (UK), NASA, Nevada Child Welfare Services, the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre (Canada), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.S. Navy, and the U.S. Postal Service.

- Health care institutions such as Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Cleveland Clinic, Consorta, Eau Claire Family Medicine Clinic, JCAHO, Lovelace Health Systems, Methodist Medical Center, North Berkshire Health Systems, Park Center Inc., Riveredge Hospital, Texas Health Resources, Trinity Health System, and Wheaton Franciscan Services.

- Institutions of higher education such as Benedictine University, Case Western Reserve, Front Range Community College (CO), University of California–Berkeley, University of Minnesota, and University of Wisconsin.

- School systems such as Cleveland Public Schools, National Association of Independent Schools, Northeast Catholic High School (Philadelphia), Sacred Heart Griffin High School (Springfield, IL), and West Springfield (MA) Public Schools. Recently AI consultant Marge Schiller launched an initiative called the Positive Change Corps designed to promote transformation in school systems across the United States.[3]

- Religious and spiritual organizations such as the United Religions Initiative, the Episcopal Church, Spirit in Business, the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual Organization, and many local congregations.
- Social service and community development organizations such as American Baptist International Ministries, the American Red Cross, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, the GEM Initiative, InterAction, Lutheran World Relief, the Mountain Institute, MWENGO (East Africa), MYRADA (India), PACT, UNDP, UNICEF, Save the Children, TechnoServe, United Way, World Vision, andWilgespruit Fellowship Centre (South Africa).

Appreciative inquiry has also given birth to a variety of public-dialogue projects to engage a broad range of people in imagining and enacting their desired futures. For example, in the mid-1990s, Bliss Browne launched Imagine Chicago, a citywide inquiry designed to promote civic discourse and innovation.[4] Since then, similar inquiries have emerged in locations around the world: Imagine Dallas, Imagine Gotland (Sweden), Imagine Nagaland (India), Imagine South Carolina, and Imagine Western Australia.

In 1999, under the leadership of Judy Rodgers, the center for Social Innovations in Global Management (SIGMA), the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual Organization, and the Visions of a Better World Foundation launched Images and Voices of Hope, a worldwide inquiry to strengthen the role of media as agents of world benefit.[5] Since 1999, conversations have opened in over twenty cities on five continents.

In 2001, David Cooperrider began Business as an Agent of World Benefit (BAWB), a world dialogue designed to engage executives, thought leaders, and change agents in reflecting on and convening around the subject of how the business sector might put its extraordinary imagination, capacity, and resources to work on behalf of the world.[6] These public-dialogue projects are intended to last many years and to include millions of people in rethinking and acting to heighten the positive potential of citizens, the media, and business as forces for world benefit.

Appreciative inquiry is also quickly developing a robust theoretical foundation. A variety of master's-level programs in management, organization development, education, and social change have incorporated AI into their coursework. At least two Ph.D. programs in organization development/behavior, at Benedictine University[7] and Case Western Reserve University,[8] have made AI a cornerstone of their curricula. A growing number of master's theses

and Ph.D. dissertations are devoted to appreciative methodologies and applications, and scholarly papers on AI have received awards from the Academy of Management, the International Management Association, the Organization Development Network, the Organizational Development Institute, and the American Society of Training and Development. Emerging movements in positive psychology[9] and positive organizational scholarship[10] provide additional theoretical grounding to appreciative inquiry.

Finally, the community of AI practitioners around the world is growing dramatically, and an increasing number of resources are being made available. Benedictine University, Case Western Reserve University, NTL,[11] and the Taos Institute[12] offer a variety of training programs for AI practitioners. Appreciative Inquiry Consulting, LLC (AIC),[13] a global network of AI consultants, was launched in 2001 to advance AI, create transformational business and philanthropic opportunities, and promote rapid learning on AI. The AI Listserv[14] allows anyone interested in AI to engage in online dialogue with others. AI Practitioner is an up-to-the-minute quarterly journal that features new advances in the practice of AI from around the world.[15] Appreciative Inquiry Resources (AIR) is an online "market" that offers a range of products on appreciative inquiry and positive change, including books, manuals, videotapes, and DVDs.[16] The AI Commons website[17] is a free, open-access resource bank at Case Western University that includes all things AI. As University of Michigan professor Robert Quinn writes in his book *Change the World,* AI is "revolutionizing the field of organization development."[18]

The Power of Appreciative Inquiry to Transform

At its core, appreciative inquiry is the study and exploration of what gives life to human systems when they function at their best. It is based on the assumption that every living system has a hidden and underutilized core of strengths—its positive core—which, when revealed and tapped, provides a sustainable source of positive energy for both personal and organizational transformation. David Cooperrider and Leslie Sekerka relate this to the concept of *fusion energy* in the sciences.[19] Fusion is the power source of the sun and the stars. It results when two positively charged elements combine into one. In organizations, when joy

touches joy, strength touches strength, health touches health, and inspiration combines with inspiration, people are liberated and empowered to create ascending spirals of cooperative action. According to Cooperrider and Whitney, "Link the positive core to any change agenda, and changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized."[20]

The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle

As an approach to organization change, AI involves the cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. This is significantly different from conventional managerial problem solving. The key task in problem solving is to identify and remove gaps or deficits. The process usually involves (1) identifying problems, (2) analyzing causes, (3) searching for solutions, and (4) developing an action plan.

In contrast, the key task in AI is to identify and leverage strengths. The steps include (1) discovery, (2) dream, (3) design, and (4) destiny (see Exhibit 1.1).

Exhibit 1.1

The "4-D" Cycle
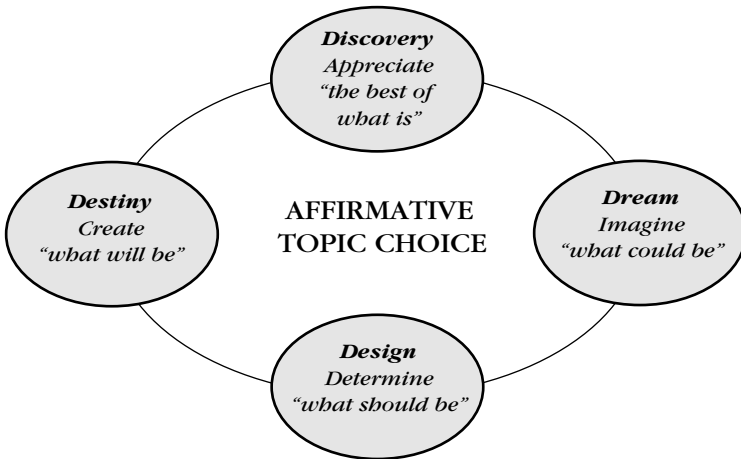
The purpose of the **discovery** phase is to search for, highlight, and illuminate those factors that give life to the organization, the "best of what is" in any given situation. The list of positive topics for discov-

ery is endless: high quality, integrity, empowerment, innovation, customer responsiveness, technological innovation, team spirit, and so on. In each case the task is to promote organizational learning by sharing stories about times when these qualities were at their best and analyzing the forces and factors that made them possible.

The second phase is to **dream** about what could be. When the best of what is has been identified, the mind naturally begins to search beyond this; it begins to envision new possibilities. Because these dreams have been cued by asking positive questions, they paint a compelling picture of what the organization could and should become as it conforms to people's deepest hopes and highest aspirations.

The third phase is to **design** the future through dialogue. Once people's hopes and dreams have been articulated, the task is to design the organization's social architecture—norms, values, structures, strategies, systems, patterns of relationship, ways of doing things—that can bring the dreams to life. It is a process of building commitment to a common future by dialoguing and debating, crafting and creating until you get to the point where everyone can say, "Yes this is the kind of organization or community that I want to invest my energies in. Let's make it happen." The key to this phase is to create a deliberately inclusive and supportive context for conversation and co-creation.

The final phase, **destiny,** is an invitation to construct the future through innovation and action. Appreciative inquiry establishes momentum of its own. People find innovative ways to help move the organization closer to the ideal. Because the ideals are grounded in realities, the confidence is there to try to make things happen. This is important to underscore because it is precisely because of the visionary content, placed in juxtaposition to grounded examples of the extraordinary, that appreciative inquiry opens the status quo to transformations in collective action.

Forms of Engagement of Appreciative Inquiry

The AI Summit is one of many different ways to use appreciative inquiry to promote positive change in organizations and in communities. Each AI process is designed to meet the unique needs and goals of the people, organization, or community involved. Table 1.1, adapted from Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom's book *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry,* contains a brief description of the core forms of engagement of AI.[21]

Table 1.1

Forms of Engagement of Appreciative Inquiry

AI Summit: A large group of people (30–3,000) participate simultaneously in a three- to five-day AI 4-D process.

Whole-System 4-D Dialogue: All members of the organization and some stakeholders participate in an AI 4-D process. It takes place at multiple locations over an extended period of time.

Mass Mobilized Inquiry: Large numbers of interviews (thousands to millions), on a socially responsible topic, are conducted throughout a city, a community, or the world.

Core Group Inquiry: A small group of people select topics, craft questions, and conduct interviews.

Positive Change Network: Members of an organization are trained in AI and provided with resources to initiate projects and share materials, stories, and best practices.

Positive Change Consortium: Multiple organizations collaboratively engage in an AI 4-D process to explore and develop a common area of interest.

AI Learning Team: A small group of people with a specific project—an evaluation team, a process improvement team, a customer focus group, a benchmarking team, or a group of students—conduct an AI 4-D process.

Progressive AI Meetings: An organization, small group, or team goes through the AI 4-D process over the course of ten to twelve meetings that are each two to four hours long.

Although there are many different ways to use appreciative inquiry, for us and for many other AI practitioners the AI Summit is rapidly becoming a methodology of choice because of its power to get everyone involved, strengthen relationships, and quickly produce remarkable results.

WHAT IS AN
APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY SUMMIT?

The Appreciative Inquiry Summit is a method for accelerating change by involving a broad range of internal and external stakeholders in the change process. It is typically a single event or series of events that bring people together to (1) discover the organization's or community's core competencies and strengths; (2) envision

opportunities for positive change; (3) design the desired changes into the organization's or community's systems, structures, strategies, and culture; and (4) implement and sustain the change and make it work. AI Summits vary in size anywhere between 30 and 1,000 people, and could include more.[22] Most of the summits we have conducted have been in the 100–500-person range. Our experience has been that because of the power of wholeness, the closer we get to including every member of the system, the more dramatic and sustainable the impact.

The AI Summit methodology represents a radical shift away from traditional change management approaches that put the responsibility for change in the hands of just a few individuals and are based on the assumption that the best way to move forward is to solve problems. The Appreciative Inquiry Summit begins with the premise that organizations change fastest and best when their members are excited about where they are going, have a clear plan for moving forward, and feel confident about their ability to reach their destination. In other words, quick and effective organization change is a product of having the "whole system" aligned around its strengths and around ideas that generate energy for action.

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY SUMMIT

The seeds of the AI Summit methodology were planted in the mid-1980s when John Carter, David Cooperrider, and Mary Ann Rainey, all doctoral students at Case Western Reserve University, were asked by Touche-Ross Canada to lead an important strategic planning process. Two key executives were close to retirement, and they wanted to empower a culture of co-leadership throughout the organization before stepping down.

Based on their growing interest in the appreciative approach, John, David, and Mary Ann created a set of positive questions designed to identify and highlight everything that gave "life" to Touche-Ross when it was most successful and most capable in terms of co-leadership. But instead of using the traditional OD approach of doing the interviews themselves, they trained 40 junior partners to go out and interview the other 310 partners in offices around the country. Junior partners interviewed senior

partners to promote dynamic cross-generational learning. The logic was that if indeed the 350 partners were the future leadership of the organization, who was there better to understand at a deep level the forces and factors that support organizational excellence at Touche-Ross?

Once the interviews were completed, John, David, and Mary Ann brought together the 40 junior partners to develop a set of "provocative propositions"[23] that represented the collective image of the ideal organization. A month later, all 350 partners met to validate the provocative propositions and to develop a plan to put them into practice. They called this event the Partners Roundtable because it was a fully participatory, open, dialogical process. Every partner was an equal participant in the co-creation of the future. The Partners Roundtable was the first experiment in large-group, "whole-system" appreciative inquiry, and many valuable lessons were learned.[24]

The first lesson was simply the remarkable power of a process that invited full participation and full voice on the part of organizational members. Both junior and senior partners said they accelerated their learning and experienced immediate growth in their effectiveness by being able to interview each other across the "generational divide." Similarly, in a matter of two short days, the partners developed a comprehensive strategic plan that engaged their energies and redirected the focus of the organization.

Second, John, David, and Mary Ann were amazed by the power of storytelling at the Partners Roundtable. When people shared stories of peak performance and extraordinary contribution, not only did it delight the listeners, but it promoted learning by revealing the root causes of success. It also made the seemingly impossible, suddenly possible. If they did it very well once, they could do it even better the next time.

Third, they discovered the power of a positive guiding image of the future. When the partners wrote their provocative propositions, they were in essence writing a set of comprehensive design principles that would shape the future of their organization. Taken together, these design principles constituted a robust, practical image of the future. It described their commitments around systems, structures, strategies, organizational culture, approaches to leadership, and so on. It set the stage for concrete action in the organization.

Today, a large-group appreciative dialogue with 350 people seems almost ordinary. It happens consistently and frequently. In the mid-1980s, however, it was a bold new invention. According to David Cooperrider, "John Carter was, and continues to be, one of the most creative consultants in the field of OD. Much of the early innovation with what eventually became the AI Summit methodology, grew out of John's courage and belief in people in large-group dialogues."[25]

The Organizational Excellence Program (OEP)

Another important moment in our learning process around large-group AI took place in the early 1990s when the Global Excellence in Management (GEM) initiative was launched with a large six-year grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) by David Cooperrider, Ada Jo Mann, Claudia Liebler, and others at Case Western Reserve University.[26] One of GEM's most successful initiatives was the Organizational Excellence Program (OEP), a five-day residential institute for executive teams of international development organizations. The OEP was offered twice a year, included anywhere from 30 to 100 people each time, and was designed according to the appreciative inquiry 4-D model. Its purpose was to allow senior executive teams to come together to discover their strengths, build a compelling vision for the future, share best practices, and launch action initiatives to enhance the effectiveness of their organizations. Those of us working with the OEP were amazed by its success. The amount of learning that took place during the events as people shared their experiences and wisdom was astounding.

When we asked participants what made it a great learning experience, they zeroed in on three things:

- **The appreciative approach.** The participants said that by focusing on examples of success, they had more fun, learned more, and strengthened their organizational capacity more effectively than they had in previous experiences. Many of them talked about it as the most important "paradigm shift" of their career.
- **The combination of in-group and cross-group learning.** Participants said that the work they did in their own executive teams was essential because it allowed them to focus on specific opportunities and actions for their organizations. At the same time, the "knowledge exchanges" in mixed groups were enriching because they allowed them

to learn from the best experiences of others, see things in new ways, and understand their organizations in a broader context.

• **The amount of progress made in just five short days.** The combination of having the key people in the same room face to face, taking the time to work through complex issues, and following through on the entire 4-D cycle, allowed participants to walk out of the OEP with fully developed plans for implementation.

The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC)

The remarkable results of the OEP aroused our curiosity about what it would be like to use a similar approach with a single organizational system focused on a single change agenda. Would the learning and successful change be multiplied if not only the executive team but the whole organization were focused on a common purpose or task? With this question in mind, in 1994 we took the AI large-group approach "on the road." A group of us were working with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC), an international development organization based in the United States and Canada, to develop an appreciative approach to building and measuring organizational capacity. At the time, CRWRC worked in partnership with over 120 local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) worldwide, and we, along with many CRWRC field staff, felt that because the new capacity-building system would be used by them, it was essential to engage all of the NGOs—the whole system—in developing the final product.

To accomplish this, we designed a three-year global learning process that consisted of four large-group AI meetings per year, one in each of four regions of the world: East Africa, West Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Heavily influenced by Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff's work on Future Search,[27] we created a design for the meetings that blended Future Search with AI and called the meetings Appreciative Future Search Conferences.[28] The results from the conferences were powerful. Over the three-year period, CRWRC and its partners improved their working relationships, created an appreciative capacity-building process that was "owned" by the entire system, and launched hundreds of new initiatives to strengthen performance through training, consultation,

advocacy, new sources of funding, coalitions, and access to global markets.[29]

We learned many valuable lessons from CRWRC about what it takes to make appreciative large-group processes successful, but three in particular stand out.

- **The importance of wholeness.** As stated in the Preface, AI Summits provide a direct and immediate link to the "logic of the whole." For example, many community development organizations promote small business formation in the communities they serve, but because these businesses have few links to sources of capital or to markets beyond their local area, they flounder. CRWRC included business leaders in the AI Summit process, and as a result, a new organization called Partners for Christian Development was created that links established entrepreneurs with small businesses to provide loans, management consulting, and development of new markets. Having businesspeople, an essential part of the "whole system," present at the summits opened up a whole new world of possibilities for participants.

- **The value of a relevant, clear, and compelling task.** The topic for this series of summits was "partnering to build and measure organizational capacity." It was selected by the project's planning team, which was composed of people from around the world to represent the "whole system." They selected this topic because it was relevant to them at a deep strategic level. It would allow them to grow and to better accomplish their missions as organizations. This singular focus allowed all 120 organizations to learn more about building capacity than they ever imagined possible. And because of its attractiveness as a topic, it enabled them to align their actions and sustain their energies for many years.

- **The power of high-quality connections.** Recent research by Jane Dutton and Emily Heaphy at the University of Michigan suggests that high-quality relationships boost performance for both individuals and organizations.[30] They provide an exchange of resources; contribute to the growth, learning, and development of those involved; and lead to cooperative action. We saw this distinctly in the CRWRC summits. The appreciative focus created the possibility for participants to discover and affirm the best in each other. This set the stage for new levels of trust and a willingness to risk and to collaborate around previously unexplored initiatives.

The United Religions Initiative (URI)

The name Appreciative Inquiry Summit was coined by David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney in 1995 in the process of working

with Bishop William Swing of San Francisco on a five-year project to create the United Religions Initiative (URI), a global organization dedicated to promoting interfaith cooperation, peace, and healing.[31] It was selected to communicate the idea that large-group AI meetings are intended to help human systems reach the highest level attainable on change agendas of essential importance to them. They enable organizations to achieve peak performance in pursuit of elevated purposes.

From 1995 to 2000, we along with many others collaborated on the design and facilitation of five global summits and approximately ten regional summits of 100 to 250 people each to draft a preamble, purpose statement, set of organizing principles, charter, and plan for the global evolution of this newly emerging organization. In June 2000, the global summit served as the center of a worldwide charter signing, through which the URI came into being as a legally chartered organization.

The URI added enormously to our understanding of what makes the AI Summit methodology work. We mention here three lessons of particular importance.

- **Appreciative dislodgment of certainty.** Change requires a willingness to let go of certainty and head into the unknown. The AI Summit, because it invites and rewards curiosity, builds confidence in people to step courageously forward. This was certainly true in the case of the URI. To create a brand new global organization that crossed boundaries of all kinds, especially those of faith tradition, required enormous amounts of openness and trust, and a willingness to explore. Muslims, Jews, Christians, Buddhists, and a host of others came to know and appreciate each other in new ways that opened up the potential for new forms of cooperation. Together they also left behind the certainty of traditional organizational forms and created a global alliance like the world had never seen.

- **Holographic beginning.** A good AI interview guide touches on all four D's: discovery, dream, design, and destiny. We call this a holographic beginning because it allows people to anticipate the entire summit within the first hour or so of the four-day meeting. We learned in the URI process that this is important. First, it allows all participants to express their ideas and share their hopes for the organization early in the meeting. Second, it appeals to all learning styles; people who like to reflect on the past can reflect, those who like to dream can dream, and those who are hungry for action can jump quickly into design and destiny. Third, a holographic beginning allows everyone to see the flow of the meeting. The link between dis-

covery, dream, design, and destiny is established as the path forward for the meeting and for the organization's future.

• **Leadership levels the playing field.** By design, AI Summits are intended to be a dialogue of equals. This is based on the idea that people will give their best effort and most energy when they are full co-creators of their common future. In an AI Summit, there are few if any presentations by "experts." People sit at round tables of six to eight with a mix of functions, levels, and areas of expertise. Leaders are expected to join in as peers. We learned the power of this from Bishop Swing. In all of the URI summits, he would kick things off by standing up at his table, welcoming everyone in the room, and then saying, "Let's get to work." For the rest of the time, he participated as a fellow inquirer. This allowed the will of the group to emerge and gave the URI a "collective power" that would not have developed had Bishop Swing or others imposed a personal agenda.

THE RAPID GROWTH OF THE AI SUMMIT METHODOLOGY

Since the early 1990s, hundreds of organizations worldwide in the corporate, nonprofit, government, and community sectors have used the AI Summit methodology. Examples include McDonald's, John Deere, U.S. Cellular, GTE (Verizon), British Airways, British Telecom, Hunter-Douglas, Roadway Express, Vermont Coffee Roasters, Nutrimental, Avon Mexico, U.S. Navy, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Canadian Department of National Defense, World Vision, American Red Cross, United Way, United Religions Initiative, and dozens of NGOs and communities around the world.

These organizations have employed the AI Summit methodology to address a variety of agendas, including leadership development, strategic planning, organization design, culture transformation, business process redesign, brand building, vision and values clarification, customer service, knowledge management, labor-management relations, quality, safety, the formation of partnerships and alliances, and the integration of mergers and acquisitions. Some organizations—such as Hunter-Douglas, Nutrimental, and Syntegra, a division of British Telecom in the Netherlands—have begun to use the AI Summit as an ongoing way of managing. They hold regular AI Summits to address

specific topics, pursue new business opportunities, or realign the organization along a common strategic direction.

We have learned much from these organizations and the courageous experiments they have done with the AI Summit methodology. Throughout the rest of the book, we will share many of these stories in detail, highlight what we learned, and take you through a step-by-step process of how to plan, conduct, and follow up on an AI Summit. But before we do this, we want briefly to draw a link between the AI Summit and other large-group processes.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE AI SUMMIT TO OTHER LARGE-GROUP PROCESSES

In his book *Productive Workplaces,* Marvin Weisbord shows how managing has evolved from experts solving problems *for* other people toward everybody improving the whole system.[32] In the early 1900s, Fredrick Taylor had "expert" consultants solving organizational problems using principles of scientific management. In the 1950s, Kurt Lewin's followers involved organizational members in solving their own problems—participative management. In the mid-1960s, experts discovered systems thinking and began improving whole systems *for* other people. Finally, in the late twentieth century, managers and OD practitioners began to experiment with getting everybody involved in improving whole systems.

This participatory whole-system approach gave rise to a variety of large-group intervention methodologies, including the Search Conference,[33] Future Search,[34] Open Space Technology,[35] Whole-Scale Change,[36] Real Time Strategic Change,[37] the Conference Model,[38] and others. For excellent reviews of large-group interventions, see Bunker and Alban's *Large Group Interventions*[39] and Holman and Devane's *The Change Handbook*.[40]

The AI Summit builds on these methodologies but breaks new ground by stressing the relational nature of innovation and by highlighting the power of the positive to unleash extraordinary organizational performance. The AI Summit is based on

the understanding that the future is truly unknown and un-knowable, and that people in organizations are continuously in the process of building something new. When they are most alive and most vital, they are not simply improving systems, they are jointly inventing surprising new ways of organizing. This perspective is particularly important in today's world, in which vigorous global competition, instantaneous electronic communication, and the elimination of previously polarizing political, cultural, and geographic boundaries are rapidly re-configuring the social and economic landscape. As Gary Hamel recently put it in his book *Leading the Revolution,* "The world is increasingly divided into two kinds of organizations—those that can get no further than continuous improvement, and those who have made the jump to radical innovation."[41]

To extend Weisbord's model, we are now in an era that calls for methods of organization change that allow everybody to in-novate for extraordinary performance. The AI Summit is de-signed to meet this challenge. Exhibit 1.2 illustrates the evolution of thought on managing change that has prepared the way for the AI Summit methodology.

Exhibit 1.2
Evolution of Thought on Managing Change[42]

1900: Experts solve specific problems	**1950:** Everyone solves specfic problems	**1965:** Experts improve whole systems	**1980s:** Everyone improves whole systems	**2000+:** Everyone innovates for extraordinary performance

Common Features

Although it is important to distinguish the AI Summit from other large-group processes, we have drawn on these processes in many ways for ideas and inspiration. We have been particularly influenced by the work of Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff on Future Search, Harrison Owen on Open Space Technology, Kathleen Dannemiller on Whole-Scale Change, and Robert Jacobs on Real Time Strategic Change.

The AI Summit shares the following common features with these pioneering approaches.

- **The importance of getting the whole system in the room.** When people see interconnections among departments, processes, people, and ideas, they know better how to participate and therefore are able to make commitments that were previously impossible or unlikely. If anyone is missing, there is much less potential for new discoveries and innovative action.
- **A focus on the future.** Ronald Lippitt and Eva Schindler-Rainman,[43] in their work with community futures conferences, concluded that problem solving depresses people, whereas imagining ideal futures creates hope and energy. In all large-group interventions, the focus is on helping people generate energy for action by imagining the future rather than focusing directly on problems.
- **Dialogue, voice, and the search for common ground.** When people are free to listen to each other and to share their unique experiences, they get a much clearer picture of one another's perspectives and are more likely to build shared understandings. They are also more likely to discover common dilemmas and shared aspirations that are larger than their own agendas, which leads to common ground.
- **A commitment to self-management.** People will invest huge amounts of energy into real business issues that are of passionate concern to them. Shared self-management contributes significantly to the amount of work people do, the quality they produce, and the high degree of implementation that follows large-group interventions.

How the AI Summit Adds to the Field of Large-Group Processes

Although the AI Summit has much in common with its peers, it is distinctive in five important ways: its social constructionist assumptions, appreciative approach, commitment to continuous inquiry, search for higher ground, and attention to values-based organization design.

Social Constructionist Assumptions

The concept of *social constructionism* sounds complex in theory, but in practice it is really quite simple. The idea is that the future of our organizations and our communities has not yet been invented. Within reason, we can make of them anything we want. When we engage in meaningful conversation with others, we can

"socially construct" them in the direction of our ideals. For example, in the John Deere case introduced in the preface, on the first day of the AI Summit nobody believed that they could create new ways of relating or invent new approaches to improving business results. As one participant told us, "You're nice people and everything, but this isn't going to work. We've been through it all before, and nothing ever changes."

But once people began to talk to one another as equals and to co-construct new systems, structures, strategies, and processes to support innovation and healthy relationships, they made enormous progress toward their ideals. In essence, they socially constructed their destiny by engaging each other in meaningful conversation around topics that were important to them. The constructionist emphasis of the AI Summit is different from the "systems improvement" focus of other large-group processes because it takes seriously the idea that anything, including systems that seem fixed and immutable, are open to reinvention through purposeful conversation about our highest ideals.[44]

Appreciative Approach

Our observation has been that the fastest, most direct route to positive change is to learn from examples of the best. Illustrations of failure tell you what not to do, but they do not teach you how to succeed. For example, in the John Deere case, at a deep level everybody wanted to learn how to work together positively to produce significant results. We could have spent our time studying the root causes of low morale and poor performance and then trying to intervene to fix the system. But as Gina, the internal OD consultant, says, "If we had done that, I will guarantee you, we would never have gotten past day one!"

Not only would such an approach have further fragmented relationships, but it would have stifled creativity and created few new ideas for innovation. Instead, we mobilized a systemwide inquiry into moments of exceptional pride and performance and then invited organization members to co-create a future for their system that nurtures and supports even more pride and performance. The AI Summit is premised on the belief that it is much faster and more straightforward to go through the front door of extraordinary performance than to go around the block and through the back door of pitfalls and problems.

Commitment to Continuous Inquiry

One of the most important insights we have learned with AI to date is that the seeds of change are implicit in the very first questions we ask. According to Ludema, Cooperrider, and Barrett, "human systems grow in the direction of what they most persistently, actively, and collectively ask questions about."[45] In the case of John Deere, we worked with a planning team to develop a set of positive questions to guide the AI Summit process. One of the questions was this:

> *Describe an incident when you or someone you know went the extra mile to be responsive to a customer need, improve quality, cost competitiveness, or introduce a new product. What made it possible? What did you do? What did others do? What did the organization do to make it possible?*

This question (along with many others) was asked of all 250 people to bring forward best practices from across the plant. It unleashed systemwide learning about effective models of organizing and the forces and factors that made them possible. The AI Summit is based on the assumption that perhaps *the* most important thing a manager or change agent does is articulate questions. The questions we ask set the stage for what we "find," and what we find becomes the knowledge out of which the future is constructed.

Search for Higher Ground

The AI Summit is about action inspired by human hope and aspiration. Hope theory claims that people are energized to take action when they have (1) an elevating purpose, (2) a sense of collective confidence in their capacity to accomplish the purpose, and (3) a set of practical strategies for moving forward.[46] High hope, in turn, is related to a range of performance indicators, including more active visioning capacity; the ability to set, pursue, and achieve a greater number of goals; increased levels of creativity, persistence, and resilience in the search for alternative strategies; more adaptability to environmental change; a higher propensity to interact and collaborate with other people; better physical and emotional health; a greater sense of meaning; and even profitability and employee satisfaction and retention.[47] An essential resource for generating constructive change is our col-

lective imagination and discourse about our highest ideals for the future.

At the end of the second day of the John Deere summit, people shared their dreams of the ideal future. Of course, those dreams were filled with all kinds of ideas about product innovations that would thrill their customers and boost their profits, but more important, they were rich with imagery about their ideal workplace. They painted a picture of a community based on principles of pride, honor, respect, cooperation, and excellence. They held spirited discussions about how to shape pay systems, supervisory roles, and the assembly line floor to enact and support these principles. And they talked about how to create a dramatic shift in the "internal dialogue" of the organization from one of complaint, blame, and hopelessness to one of support, encouragement, and the search for positive alternatives.

This conversation was a watershed moment in the summit. Prior to it, people had little hope for change. After it, they shared a compelling image of what they wanted and where they wanted to go. This image, grounded in their principles of the ideal workplace, served ever so slightly to transcend animosities and to energize a willingness to act. One of the most important actions a group can take to liberate the human spirit and construct a better future is to embark on a continuing search for higher ground.

Attention to Values-Based Organization Design

One of the reasons it is important for AI Summits to be three to five days long is to provide time for values-based organization design.[48] Organization designs are expressions of values embodied in structures, systems, strategies, relationships, roles, policies, procedures, products, and services. If done well, they liberate cooperation, support the best in people, and sustain the principles and aspirations that are generated in the discovery and dream phases of the summit. In the John Deere case, the third and fourth days of the summit were dedicated exclusively to design.

One group worked on redefining the supervisor's role to allow greater self-management throughout the plant. Another group worked on revising the profit-sharing plan to support more cooperation and higher individual performance. A third group worked on redesigning the new product development process to make it faster without compromising quality. During this time,

each group also coordinated with other groups and individuals in the room, so that by the end of the fourth day, all of the groups had the support of the whole system to take action on their new designs. This unleashed unbelievable energy. Not only had the group discovered its positive core, not only had it strengthened relationships and invented new possibilities for the future, but it made those possibilities real and meaningful by designing them into the very fabric of the organization.

AN INVITATION
TO EXPERIMENT WITH THE AI SUMMIT

In this chapter we have provided a brief introduction to AI, a short history of the AI Summit, and a quick comparison of the AI Summit with other large-group processes. But the AI Summit methodology is still in its infancy. There is much to learn and many experiments to be done. We hope that you will join with us and with other practitioners around the world in taking the AI Summit to new heights and co-constructing it in ways that give it ever more potential to transform organizations and human communities.