THE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY SUMMIT: An Emerging Methodology for Whole System Positive Change

–**Diana Whitney, Ph.D.**
–**David L. Cooperrider, Ph.D.**

> "It is instructive to consider that the word 'health' in English is based on an Anglo-Saxon word 'hale' meaning 'whole': that is, to be healthy is to be whole. . . All of this indicates that man has sensed always that wholeness or integrity is an absolute necessity to make life worth living."
>
> David Bohm
> <u>Wholeness and the Implicate Order</u>

Ever since Marv Weisbord (1992) issued the call to "get the whole system in the room" OD practitioners around the globe have been experimenting with large group interventions. In the past 10 years the capacity for large group meetings and large-scale change has been advanced by developments in Future Search (Weisbord & Janoff, 1995), Open Space (1992), Real Time Strategic Change (DannemillerTyson, 1994), The Conference Model (Axelrod, 1993) and other processes too numerous to describe here. [For a great overview of current change management methodologies and their application to large-scale change read *The Change Management Handbook*, Holman & Devane, 1999]. According to Barbara Bunker and Billie Alban (1992, 1995, 1999) who have taken the lead in tracking the development of large-scale interventions, the growing use of large-scale work is an indicator of the contemporary requirements of organizational life.

Those of us involved with the innovation and application of Appreciative Inquiry to large system transformation took Marv's call to heart. And indeed we began exploring ways of bringing Appreciative Inquiry, social construction theory and a philosophy of positive change to large-scale interventions. We collaborated with Marv, Harrison and others who were breaking ground in large group methodologies. And we have clients such as Nutrimental, Hunter Douglas, GTE, Red Cross, British Airways and The United Religions Initiative, who have been willing to embark on the adventure of positive change along with us. The result of our experiments is The Appreciative Inquiry Summit (AI Summit), a methodology for "whole system positive change."

While still in its infancy, as a large group process, the Appreciative Inquiry Summit methodology has advanced several major initiatives with great success. The benefits of the experience of "whole system positive change" range from building relationships and partnerships to building businesses and global organizations.

Appreciative Inquiry Summits have been conducted at medical centers, universities, consumer products, and high technology companies. They have been used to craft an innovative union-management partnership, to form a strategic business alliance between two high technology companies, to do annual companywide strategic planning, and as a forum for culture change.

In Brazil companies such as Nutrimental and Dia have used AI Summits to gather all employees along with customers, vendors and community leaders – such as mayors, environmentalists, city planners, and educators – for strategic visioning and planning. In each of these companies the results have been surprising. Revenue increases have surpassed 200%, turnover has decreased at equally significant rates.

Leadership in all sectors of business recognizes the benefits of "whole system positive change". When the Financial Manager of a family medicine clinic was asked by the Director if they could afford to close the clinic for two days and bring all personnel together for a meeting his answer was, "We cannot afford not to do it. We need to get everyone involved in crafting our future if we want them on board making it happen." And so, for the first time in its 30-year history the clinic was closed and all 100 personnel, along with patients, patient advocates and community members gathered to chart the course of the clinic's future.

Since its inception in 1995, Appreciative Inquiry Summits have served as the global organizing forum for The United Religions Initiative. We have collaborated with the design and facilitation of 4 annual global summits and approximately 10 regional summits. All have been focused on the creation of the United Religions – a global interfaith organization, or as we fondly call it an "organimovement". In June 2000 the annual global summit will serve as the center of a worldwide charter signing. At this time, around the world, The United Religions will come into being as a legally chartered organization.

The purpose of this writing 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 paper we provide a framework for understanding the Appreciative Inquiry Summit as a methodology for positive change. We outline a typical AI Summit; and we share success factors – what we have learned in this early work with AI and large group processes that contributes to success in large-scale efforts.

The Experience of Wholeness

What is it about the experience of "Wholeness" that brings out the best in people, teams and organizations?

This question has been with us since the inception of The Appreciative Inquiry Summit as we have watched over and over again, tension turn to enthusiasm, cynicism to collaboration and apathy to inspired action. We began wondering and asking people what happens when the whole system is in the room? When posed to clients, workshop participants and colleagues the answers typically include:

- It evokes trust. When everyone is there you don't have to feel suspicious about what the others will do – there are no others.
- It lets people see and experience a purpose greater than their own or their departments.
- You get the sense that you are connected to a goodness that comes from the power
of the whole. You realize you really need one another.
- It satisfies the human need to be part of a larger community. It taps into our tribal consciousness. You feel like you belong
- It establishes credibility in the outcomes. When everyone is part of the decision you know it will stick. Public commitments engender responsibility.
- New norms form quickly. You start to value relationships and getting the "whole story."

- People transcend the "I" and become a "We". What's common becomes apparent.
- It eliminates false assumptions about other people and other groups. When you get to know someone you realize they aren't exactly what you imagined them to be. You develop compassion for different people instead of judgements.

According to Jim Ludema (2000), "having the whole system in the room also brings an ecological perspective: all the pieces of the puzzle come together in one place and everyone can gain an appreciation for the whole. The unique perspective of each person, when combined with the perspectives of others, creates new possibilities for action, possibilities that previously lay dormant or undiscovered."

For people in large organizations, the experience of "wholeness" is akin to John Glenn's spiritual experience as he looked upon the whole planet earth from outer space. When the "consciousness of the whole" is evoked in us, we human beings want to organize our life and our work to serve the highest good of humanity. In large scale meetings, like the Appreciative Inquiry Summit getting the whole system in the room brings out the best in people, its facilitates the "whole story" coming together and it inspires highly committed actions on behalf of the whole.

Participation at an AI Summit

Getting the whole system in the room becomes a bit of a challenge when working with organizations of thousands of people, whole communities and global initiatives. To date we have facilitated AI Summits ranging in size from 100 to 2500 people. We, along with others (Lukensmeyer, 1999), have hosted multiple site meetings using video conferencing technologies. Much to our surprise the relational connections, the expression of emotional affect and the commitment to follow on, was as high during multiple site meetings as it was when the whole system was literally in the same room at the same time. Discussions are now underway for an on-line interactive process that will allow thousands of people to participate in an "eSummit."

The participants' list for an AI Summit is by design diverse and inclusive of all the organization's stake holders - employees, customers, vendors, and community members. Ideally all members of an organization, and a selection of stakeholders attend the Summit. When we do a stakeholder analysis we consider the five I's – everyone who is *interested*, has *influence*, has *information* or access to it, may be *impacted* and has an *investment*. We seek full voice, multigenerational, participation in the co-creation of the organization's future.

In Brazil a company of 600 was closed for 4 days while all employees participated with approximately 150 customers, vendors and community members, in their AI Strategic Planning Summit. Among the outcomes of the meeting were three decisions. The company decided to hold an annual, all employee, summit with the topic changing each year as needed for organization development. The mayor of the town, who came as a participant, decided to host a summit for envisioning the future of the community. And, one of the company's key suppliers, also a participant, decided to involve his entire organization in an AI process to radically re-envision the business and its contribution to the world.

Getting the whole system in the room may mean, all stakeholders; or it may mean, "getting the whole story" in the room. By mass mobilizing appreciative interviews throughout the organization in advance of the summit the ideas, wishes and dreams of all members and stakeholders can be brought into the room. In an instance of a much larger organization, all 2500 employees were involved in the inquiry through the mass mobilization of Appreciative Interviews; 500 employees, leaders and stakeholders attended the organizations' AI Summit.

AI Summit Design - A Starting Point for Making it Your Own

While each Summit is uniquely its own design, there are some common aspects in the design of successful AI Summits. A summit generally takes from 2 at the absolute minimum, to 5 days. We strongly support Marv Weisbord's notion of at least 2 overnights. This allows much needed time for personal reflection, informal dialogue and whole group synthesis.

An AI Summit is designed to flow through the Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Process of Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. A brief outline follows as an illustrative sample of a four-day AI Summit design. It is offered only as a starting point. Each Summit draws people together for a unique purpose and task focus. Each organization has a unique set of relationships within the company and among stakeholders. Each organization has a unique and diverse cultural and geographical mix of people. And each organization has its unique ways of expressing its most precious values, of honoring relationships, of making meaning and decisions. Each of these uniqueness' must be considered in the design of an AI Summit to ensure resonance, engagement and collaboration among participants.

Day I - Discovery

Focus of the first day is on the discovery of many facets of the organization's "positive change core." (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). The focus on discovery includes: Who are we, individually and collectively; What resources do we bring; What are our core competencies; What hopes and dreams do we have for the future; What are the most hopeful macro trends impacting us at this time; and What ways can we imagine going forward together?

Specific activities include:
- Setting the Task Focus - brief introduction to the context and purpose of the meeting.
- Appreciative Interviews - all participants engage in one on one interviews organized around the topics of the meeting.
- Who are We at Our Best - small group recollection of highlight stories and best practices discovered during the interview process.
- Positive Core Map – large group process to illustrate all of the strengths, resources, capabilities, competencies, positive hopes and feelings, relationships, alliances, etc. of the organization.
- Continuity Search - large group process to create organization, industry and global time lines in order to identify factors that have sustained the organization overtime and are desirable in the future.

Day II - Dream

The second day is a day of envisioning the organization's greatest potential for positive influence and impact in the world. Dialogues are stimulated by questions such as: We are in the year 2010 and have just awakened from a long sleep. As you wake and look around, you see that the organization is just as you have always wished and dreamed it might be. What is happening? How is the organization different? Another dream question is: Imagine it is 2010 and your organization has just won an award for outstanding socially responsible business of the year. What is the award for? What is said about your organization as the award is presented? What are customers saying? What are employees saying? What did it take to win the award?

Specific activities include:
- Sharing of Dreams - small group discussions of dreams collected during the interview process.
- Enlivening the Dreams -small groups discuss specific, tangible examples of their dream and create.
- Creative, metaphorical presentations.
- Enacting the Dreams - group presentations of dramatic dream enactments to the large group.

Day III - Design

During day three participants focus on crafting an organization in which the positive change core is boldly alive in all of the strategies, processes, systems, decisions and collaborations of the organization. Provocative propositions (or design statements as some clients have called them) are crafted. They are affirmative statements of the future organization, stated in the present tense, that stretch the organization toward its dreams. While they are not statements of specific actions to be taken, they are actionable. A sample provocative proposition might be, "At Xyz Company people have widespread access to knowledge with liberty to make decisions." Such a statement, while highly desired, will take action to fulfill. It represents the organization's commitment to move in that direction.

Specific activities include:
- Creation of the Organization Design Architecture - large group identifies organization design architecture best suited to their business and industry.
- Selection of High Impact Organization Design Elements - large group draws on interviews and dreams to select high impact design elements.
- Crafting of Provocative Propositions for each Organization Design Element - small groups draft provocative propositions (design statements) incorporating the positive change core into the high.

Day IV - Destiny

The final day is an invitation to action inspired by the prior days of discovery, dream and design. For some this is the day they have been waiting for, a time to finally get to work on the specifics of what will be done! At this point we seek to invite personal and group initiative and self-organizing. We seek to demonstrate the large group's commitment to action, and support for those who choose to go forward working on behalf of the whole.

Specific activities include:

- Generation of Possible Actions – small groups brainstorm possible actions and share with the large group.
- Selection of Inspired Actions – individuals publicly declare their intention for action and specify cooperation and support needed.
- Emergent Task Groups Form – open space groups meet to plan next steps for cooperation and task achievement.
- Large Group Closing.

Conditions for Success

The Summit is a unique and growing application of Appreciative Inquiry to large-scale meetings. It is continuously evolving as we learn in practice. It has evolved through the collaboration of many people learning from other large group processes and integrating Appreciative Inquiry. The conditions for a successful AI Summit are continually enriched through experiences with efforts of increasing size, complexity and diversity. The eight conditions for success that follow, serve as a minimum set of requirements. All eight are relevant and applicable to most any approach to large-scale meetings.

1. Clear Task
2. Whole System in the Room
3. Spacious and Gracious Setting
4. All Voices Valued – All Data Public
5. Minimum Facilitation
6. Full Attendance Over the Entire Session
7. Strategic Use of Electronic Technologies: Video Conferencing; Group Ware Polling; Intra and Internet Conferencing, etc.
8. Design Flow: Review the Past; Map the Present; Focus on the Future; Identify Common Ground; Move to Action.

In addition to these eight conditions for success we would add the following insights. Some serve to elaborate on the above; others serve as additions to the list.

9. A Holographic Beginning with Appreciative Interviews
10. Continuity Scan – History as Positive Possibility
11. Appreciative Dislodgement of Certainty
12. Narrative Rich Environment
13. From Common Ground to Higher Ground
14. Inspired Action

Clear and Central Task Focus - Summits have been organized for a variety of purposes such as: launching the new union-management partnership throughout GTE; whole system strategic planning at Nutrimental; for culture change at Hunter Douglas and in numerous organizations in health care, government and consulting services; for economic development in a region of the country; for city-wide community development and for drafting the charter for the United Religions Initiative.

In our experience, it is absolutely essential that the task be clear, simply articulated and adhered to during the time of the summit. Human systems – communities and

organizations – move in the direction of what they study. During an AI Summit the task focus serves to organize inquiry and dialogues, and hence to establish direction for the organization's transformation. A clearly stated task and a process designed to keep the group on task are essential to a successful Summit. In general, we like the task to be clearly stated in the title of the meeting. Some examples of AI Summit tasks and titles include:

- A Time for Action: Discovering the Steps for a United Religions Charter
- Focus 2000: A Working Session to Create our Future
- Partnership: Creating the Principles and Practices that Align our Strengths
- From Vision to Strategy: Planning for 2005

In organizations where we have worked over several years, the task for each year's successive summit changes to meet the evolving needs of the organization. At Nutrimental three annual summits have focused on visioning, strategic planning and process improvement. At Hunter Douglas summits have been used for culture change, strategic visioning and strategic planning. And with the United Religions Initiative annual summits have taken the organization from: Discovering the Steps; to Visioning; to Drafting the Purpose and Principles; to Living into the Organization Design; to now in 2000, Charter Signing. Each year, or each successive summit, serves as a forum for inquiry and dialogue into the organization's most emergent task.

When the task at hand is complex, multi-cultural and requiring unprecedented levels of cooperation an AI Summit can serve the purpose. At GTE, an Appreciative Inquiry 4-D process was used to bring 200 union leaders (CWA and IBEW) and management leaders together to commit to and co-create a companywide union-management partnership. Appreciative Inquiry enabled participants to focus on the significant task of creating positive partnerships throughout the company while at the same time fostering reconciliation within previously antagonistic relationships. The meeting started with palpable tension among participants - most of it unspoken; and it ended with a resounding vote and call to include Appreciative Inquiry Training for every employee in the company as part of the partnership initiative (Whitney, Cooperrider, Garrison & Moore, 2000).

Holographic Beginning – Appreciative Inquiry Summits begin with Appreciative Interviews into a set of topics to be discussed over the course of the meeting. The entire agenda is foreshadowed within the first hour or so of the four-day meeting. This process, known as a holographic beginning allows everyone participating to express their ideas and share their greatest hopes and dreams for the organization early in the meeting. The best Appreciative Interview questions generally invite discussion about past and future, dreams and actions, possibilities and specifics. Participants, who are action oriented and usually have to patiently wait the action-planning phase of a meeting, get their ideas into the conversation early. Everyone sees the flow of the meeting and gets a clear understanding that what matters to them is important to the whole group's process. The link between discovery, dream, design and destiny is established as the path forward for the meeting and for the organization's future reveals itself in the initial interviews.

Appreciative Interviews set the stage for a full voice meeting. Everyone has an opportunity to tell his or her stories about the organization – past, present, and imagined

futures. Immediately people feel that they are listened to and that they and their ideas are valued. Information, ideas and stories that are generated during the interviews are referred to throughout the meeting. According to Gurudev Khalsa, "the holographic appreciative interview process serves several purposes: 1) it gives everyone equal voice from the beginning; 2) it establishes a model of both sharing and listening in a deeply focused way; 3) it offers every participant a chance to explore his own thinking in the relative safety of a one-on-one dialogue; 4) it quickly generates a deep sense of connection among participants; and 5) it draws out the appreciative foundations of the work to be done."

Appreciative interviews are not icebreakers. They do much more than simply set the tone of the meeting. When the interview protocol is well crafted, an appreciative interview invites inquiry into the issues most at the heart of the task and most in the hearts of the participants. Appreciative interviews allow participants to get to know one another and to quickly feel themselves as part of the larger group. In our experience, when 200 or more people have the experience of being listened to by another for an hour or more each, the sense of inclusion is palpable in the room. The feeling of being attended to heard and respected carries over from the interview to the large group.

Over and over again, participants have told us that conducting an appreciative interview had as much, or more, impact on them as being interviewed. We have been told that once you interview someone they are forever apart of who you are. Meeting another person and hearing their story via and appreciative interview creates a sense of mutuality. An appreciative interviewer feels responsible to ensure that the ideas, values and deepest concerns of their partner are considered in the larger group. The appreciative interviews create a deep and abiding sense of cooperation, based on knowing and respecting the interests and differences of another. In addition to establishing relationships, and creating a safe environment for open exchange and dialogue, the holographic beginning foreshadows the content of the meeting.

Continuity Scan – Organization change efforts most generally focus on the problems of the past, why things must change, the desired future and how to attain it. The past is viewed as the necessity for change. As a result organization members often interpret change efforts to mean that what they did in the past was of no value. Just at the time when employee enthusiasm is most needed morale drops and commitment to the company 's future flounders.

Appreciative Inquiry suggests an alternative approach. Recognition that an organization's history can be a powerful source of positive possibilities for the future is central to Appreciative Inquiry. Successful change initiatives balance inquiry into Novelty – new and innovative possibilities for organization action; Continuity – those qualities, processes or practices that an organization wishes to maintain as it grows in relation to our global wellbeing; and Transition – the specific and tangible practices that will change.

During an AI Summit participants conduct a Continuity Scan – times line of the organization, industry and world that provide a vivid picture of the organization's strengths and historical core capabilities. The questions for discussion include: what are all the qualities of your organization, the processes, systems, products, services, or general ways of doing things that have contributed to your organization's success in the past? Of these, which must be maintained, to assure continued success as we move forward into a new era of doing business?

The continuity scan enables large groups of people to co-create an image of their organization. In the process everyone learns and the collective intelligence of the organization expands. Excitement is generated as people make connections about the organization's history. As history is brought into focus and becomes meaningful people are more able to imagine possibilities for their collective future.

The continuity scan allows an organization to honor its elders, the successes of the past and to grow upon a foundation of positive potential. When dreams and designs for the future are grounded in stories of past successes energy and enthusiasm opens for cooperation, change and continued success.

The continuity scan serves to jog the organization's memory and to help members recall long forgotten successes, strengths and dreams. It serves to enrich the conversational field for decision making about the future. In one exemplary situation, the Taos County Economic Development Summit, the time line and continuity search created such a positive learning community among the 200 government, business, environmental, educational and social service leaders gathered that they proposed it tour the schools and then be hung in a local museum. Their ability to see on one very large sheet of paper the multicultural history of the community, and to engage with one another in inquiry about significant historical turning points set the stage for the co-creation of the county's first collaborative economic development plan.

The Appreciative Dislodgement of Certainty – Maureen Garrison, Manager of OD at GTE describes change as "a process of having answers questioned, rather than having questions answered." Her comment serves as a warning that change requires a willingness to let go of certainty and to go into the unknown. Change, be it personal or organizational, does indeed require the dislodgement of certainty. To change we must be curious and open to new possibilities, to new ways and to different approaches. In a hallmark project called "Imagine Chicago," consultants, executives, educators and students conducted appreciative interviews. The best interviews by far were those conducted by the students. The children, it seems, are natural "Agents of Inquiry" (Cooperrider, 1996). The lesson is clear to those who would be leaders of change: approach the task with a child's sense of wonder and curiosity. Be open to having your answers questioned.

Appreciative Inquiry differs from other approaches to change in that it is energetically, relationally and effectively positive. Key to the success of the AI Summit is the appreciative dislodgement of certainty. Clients often ask, "don't we have to make the case for change by portraying our problems?" Our answer is clearly "no," the case for change comes through the discovery, dream and design of positive possibilities that are so inspiring that they energize and provoke action in their direction. Positive images lead to positive actions (Cooperrider, 1990). During an AI Summit certainty is disturbed through affirmative and generative interview questions, bold envisioning of the organization's most promising future, and creating provocative propositions describing the desired organization design. In an AI Summit certainty is dislodged and replaced with potential actions grounded in the organization's positive change core –v its sense of positive possibility. The organization's positive change core is reflected in stories and dialogues throughout the process. Great stories make impossible actions seem possible and provide impetus for change.

Narrative Rich Environment – Organizations do not exist separate from our images of them. They are made and imagined in conversation. They are carried and

conveyed in the stories we tell. Tom White, a GTE executive, describes organization culture as "the stories we tell about ourselves and our organization and then forget they are stories." According to William Berquist (1997), "Organizations can be characterized as a series of concurrent and sequential conversations between people. These conversations (oral and written) may lead to the purchase or distribution of goods or to the initiation of machine based production processes. However, the goods and machines are parts of the organization, whereas conversations are the essence of the organization."

The forms of communication predominant in an organization inform its capacities and potentials. When negotiation is the dominant form of communication within a human system an environment of separateness and fragmentation is created. People talk and act as if they must each look out for their own interests. Information is withheld and people seldom know what is happening in other parts of the organization. Few, if any people, have a sense of the whole. Everyone is busy trying to make sense out of different bits of information; and trying to determine what matters most. Cooperation and teamwork suffer as people experience a need to protect their place, their ideas and their identities.

In contrast, narrative forms of communication – rich in story telling – create environments that are inclusive and invitational. They allow values to be expressed, explored and adapted. They ignite the human spirit of curiosity and creativity. They contain seeds of wisdom grounded in experience. Jim Ludema (2000) suggests that organizations have "dominant storylines" that shape their perceptions and determine their patterns of action.

The AI Summit emphasizes narrative forms of communication. Story telling as a means of expressing ideas and interests is highlighted over lists of facts and information, data presentations and either/or descriptions. Meaning is made among people, not among facts and data. Stories provoke the collective imagination and liberates people to choice fully create the future. Summit participants are guided to attend to "rapport talk" rather than "report talk." and to listen for stories, told by others that best highlight their hopes and dreams. The Summit process is rich with storytelling as the vehicle for making meaning among a large polyphonic group of people.

Action follows story telling in uncommon ways. As Ludema (2000) puts it, the more we share stories of positive possibilities, the more adept we become at translating those possibilities into reality. Among the significant transformations catalyzed through Appreciative Inquiry is that of the Cathedral Foundation. Through the AI process, the organization re-envisioned itself from an organization that cared for the elderly by providing meals and home services to an organization dedicated to changing the way their community and the world thinks about and images aging. This dramatic transformation came as they conducted interviews throughout their community and heard story after story about people not wanting to get old, not appreciating our elders and not understanding the significance of intergenerational relationships. The stories they heard served as a catalyst to launch a long-term inquiry into positive images of aging. Believing that human systems move in the direction of what they study, the Cathedral Foundation is committed to a world where aging and the role of elders is again revered in stories and in action.

From Common Ground to Higher Ground – The focus of an AI Summit is not common ground. While a "sense of the meeting" does emerge it does so as conversations are focused on higher ground – those ideas and possibilities that excite, inspire and compel action. In one on one interviews, small group discussions and the whole group dialogues

participants are encouraged to seek the most moving, the most innovative, the most meaningful ideas; not the most frequent or most common.

The logic is that if people get excited and inspired talking about something, they will be excited and inspired to do it. The goal is to highlight affect, affinity and meaning in organizational decision-making. As an element of strategic planning Summit participants are often invited to assess both the market value (What is the potential for positive financial gain?) and the affinity value (Why do you like this idea? Does it excite you and call you to action? Will it inspire pride in you, the organization and among stakeholders?) of a proposed strategy. Resulting decisions reflect the organization's potential as well as its motivation.

Successful AI Summits focus attention on what gives life, what energizes and inspires the whole system. As facilitators we help participants tell stories of their organization at its best, to discover the resources – relational, intellectual and technical – within the organization, and to create new and renewed images of the organization in the future. We challenge participants to transcend the boundaries of the organization, to think beyond we/they, and to discover bold, innovative and profitable ways to positively contribute to the wellbeing of our global village.

Inspired Action – Highly committed action flows from participation in the summit. AI Summits, however, do not result in a prioritized list of action items or an action plan signed off by all participants. The process of focusing on action commitments flows from the earlier processes of discovery, dream and design. During the destiny phase of the summit, open space processes serve to invite self-selection and self-organization of action agendas. The whole group gathers to discuss the path forward. Individuals are asked to step forward with their interest and proposal for action. Others of like mind and interest join them and action teams are formed to carry on work in the service of the whole. Whatever is offered up determines what will be done. It is an emergent, self-organizing process for setting the organization's action agenda for going forward. Enthusiasm runs high as people give voice to their commitment to the organization's future.

In each organization, the actions that emerge from the AI Summit are chosen and carried out by summit participants. As a result each set of actions is tailor made to the unique needs of the organization. For example, during the United Religions Initiative Global Summit participants discovered roots of cooperation within their own traditions, dreamed of possibilities for a United Religions Organization and designed components of a charter. The question for action was: what Research & Development needs to occur, in the coming year, to be able to draft a charter for the United Religions? Participants then identified R & D areas, self selected into R & D groups and organized for a year of inquiry and experimentation. In a business case, the attendees at the Hunter Douglas Focus 2000 Summit self-organized into groups: to create a mentoring program, to redesign the employee orientation, to establish a Hunter Douglas University, to spread Appreciative Inquiry throughout the organization, to maintain communication among all levels, shifts and departments, and to conduct a high involvement strategic planning process.

When to Host an AI Summit

An AI Summit is the intervention of choice when _the task requires high levels of participation and cooperation._ The ratio of monologue to dialogue during a Summit is about

10 % monologue to 90% dialogue among participants. There are no formal leadership presentations. Everyone who attends comes with equal voice. There is not a separate leadership group who gets the 2-hour briefing while everyone else attends the full meeting. All stakeholders attend the meeting and are mixed into discussions that span boundaries. The AI Summit is a high participation, full voice process.

The Summit works best when there is a need _to accelerate the process of change_. It can serve to launch an initiative such as the GTE union management partnership or the United Religions Initiative. It can serve to accelerate culture change or business development as in the case of Nutrimental. In the six months following the first whole company AI Summit, sales increased 300%. The capacity to bring large numbers of people together in a participatory process enables change to occur rapidly and successfully.

Through experience _with highly diverse and at times conflicting groups_, we have discovered the Summit's capacity for building and nurturing relationships and cooperation among diverse groups of people involved in high stake, high innovation work. Participation in a Summit affords opportunities for relationship building across functions, shifts and levels in the organization as well as with customers, vendors and community interest groups. The Summit provides a rich field for informal conflict resolution and reconciliation as people work affirmatively together toward the task focus. The Summit is a prime vehicle for merger and acquisition integration. Sharing stories, getting to know each other's hopes and dreams and working affirmatively together build relationships that endure. Relationships made during a Summit frequently lead to ad hoc cooperation for the good of the organization. Enhanced cooperation is an outcome of most AI Summits.

Organizations today often face the task of _integrating and making sense out of a wide range of change initiatives_. Appreciative Inquiry serves well as the umbrella process for integrating multiple change efforts. As a philosophy and methodology it provides a set of principles and practices that when enacted can enhance employee participation and hence commitment to change. Culture change, for example requires a phased process weaving new ways of relating and working throughout the organization. When all changes occur via Appreciative Inquiry, the process has integrity and makes sense. The Summit serves as an integrating event. It is a time for envisioning the organization in the future and for putting order into all of the change initiatives underway.

Conclusion

The new millennium brings with it a context of globalization and a demand for organization development processes that engage large numbers of people, on line, and in person simultaneously in the co-creation of our shared future. Modern behavioral science, small group theory and systems theory served us well as foundations for organization development principles and practices to date. A new generation of organization practices is being evolved as we enter the twenty-first century. This new generation of practice will be appreciative in nature, rather than problem oriented. It will be radically participatory as it invites a cornucopia of diverse voices to be expressed and heard. And it will lead to the co-creation of higher ground for the future of our global village.

Central to this new generation of practice is the Appreciative Inquiry Summit. It is a whole system positive change process for moving an organization toward its highest potential - the highest ideals imaginable among its members and stakeholders. It is an

invitation for participants to discover what gives life – to themselves and their organization. It is an opportunity for participants to dream of what might be possible if their most cherished values are enacted as organizational realities. And it is a time for the members of an organization to engage with one another in meaningful ways, so that today's interactions, conversations and stories become the seeds of a well-lived destiny.