

Revolutionizing Public Universities of Ethiopia through Appreciative Inquiry Approach: A Case Study of Jigjiga University, Ethiopia

Mohammed Jemal Ahmed^{1,*}

¹Lecturer and Researcher of History and Tourism, Wollo University, Ethiopia

*Correspondence: Lecturer and Researcher of History and Tourism, Wollo University, Ethiopia. E-mail: mojem12@gmail.com

Received: March 26, 2018

Accepted: April 11, 2018

Online Published: April 13, 2018

doi:10.5430/mos.v5n2p7

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/mos.v5n2p7>

Abstract

Appreciative inquiry is a qualitative approach focusing on discovering and appreciating potential strengths and the core value of organizations. This article has tried to explore the potential of appreciative inquiry to bring a positive change in Jigjiga University of Ethiopia. The paper starts with the description of appreciative inquiry and the 4 “D” (Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny) model of appreciative inquiry. It has also tried to appraise the effectiveness of appreciative inquiry approach and design in bringing about change in the management system of Jigjiga University. The study is a case study of Jigjiga University within a context of higher education using appreciative inquiry to assess the need for change and make recommendations on this basis. The author has four year experience as academic staff, manager and lecturer in Jigjiga University. Hence, besides to the literature, the data have been drawn from his own practical experience. Moreover, researches that have been done by Jigjiga University Anticorruption Directorate and various annual reports of Jigjiga University have served as a main source of data concerning Jigjiga University management status. The author has tried to appraise the gaps of problem solving approach to transform Jigjiga University. The potential of the appreciative inquiry approach to bring sustainable change in the University has also been highlighted. The purpose of this study is, therefore, to appraise the feasibility and potential of appreciative inquiry approach to bring recommendable changes across several departments of Jigjiga University.

Keywords: *appreciative inquiry, change, Jigjiga University*

1. Introduction

In this part, various definition of appreciative approach; the four “D” model of appreciative inquiry; historical development of appreciative inquire and a comparison of problem solving versus appreciative inquire approaches have been presented and analyzed.

1.1 Definition of Appreciative Inquiry Approach

First, it is essential to see the literal and contextual meanings of each word: appreciative and inquiry. The literal meaning of the term “appreciative” includes value, prize, esteem, and honor. In the context of this article, it refers to value; recognize the best in people or the world around us; affirm past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life to living systems. In another expression, it refers to increase in value of something. The dictionary and literal meaning of the term “inquiry” is discovered, search, systematically explore, and study. “Inquire” in the context of this paper refers to explore and discover, to ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities (Yee Leng EOWa, Wan Ali WAN ZAHb et.al, 2010).

The concept of appreciative inquiry has been defined by various scholars such as Bushe (1995), Liebler (1997), Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987), Head and Young (1988) and others. Even though these scholars have defined appreciative inquiry in different ways, the central points of their definition have similar concepts.

Appreciative inquiry has been defined as the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations and the relevant world around them (Attiah 2015; Cengiz, 2010; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). James (1999) expressed it as follow: Appreciative Inquiry uses "understanding-through-empathy"

during first-hand interviews with stakeholders of the organization. Its bias is towards the direct interaction with and observation of the people in an organization rather than a detached analysis of facts, figures, charts, benchmark comparisons, and discussions with executives only. Appreciative inquiry involves focusing on positive elements already existing in a given situation, appreciating and building on them (Hargis, 2004). According to Rainey (1996, as cited in Hargis 2004), "Appreciative Inquiry is a selective perceptual process, which apprehends 'what is' rather than 'what isn't. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is both theory and practice (Whitney & Trosten, 2003). As a theory, AI offers perspective, a set of principles, model, and beliefs about how human systems function. In terms of practices, AI is a transformative agent that recognizes the best in people and helps them moving towards using their potential positively. It is a co-evolutionary search for the best in people and the relevant world around them (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). It is called "appreciative" because it looks for what has enabled an organization to exist and thrive rather than to look for problems or weaknesses. It is an "inquiry" because it relies heavily upon close collaboration with the organization's members as the primary source of information by drawing out people's stories of "work life" within the organization. Appreciative inquiry involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen organizations capacity to exploit positive potentials (Cooperrider, & Srivastva, 1987, as cited in Cengiz, 2010).

1.2 The Four "D" Model of Appreciative Inquiry

The appreciative inquiry process follows what is known as the 4-D Cycle of Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. The Discovery phase aims to identify the "best of what is" by asking and capturing stories about positive aspects of the current situation through interviews and observations. The central aim during this phase is to search and appreciate what gives life and energy to a person (Haar, & Hosking, 2004). The Dream phase focuses on "what might be." Plans are important and are the realm of envisioning and planning for any organization as it provides a sense of purpose or mission for the organization (Attiah, 2015). This is when the mind naturally begins to search in-depth and envisioning new potentials (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2005). In the design phase, "provocative propositions" or design statements are articulated that capture the vision of the Dream phase. Finally, the Destiny phase yields action plans that define "what will be" to achieve the design statements. It focuses on the sustaining of the development and innovation experienced in previous stages.

1.3 Historical Development of Appreciative Inquire

Appreciative Inquiry (often known as AI) is recent phenomenon in business literature. The concept of appreciative inquiry originated by Cooperrider and Srivastva in 1980s through a dissertation study conducted within the Weatherhead School of Management, Case Western Reserve University (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008; Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Even though, appreciative inquiry is new philosophy, several researches have been conduct on the feasibility of this new theory. Most of the researchers have appreciated the philosophy of appreciative inquiry. Much more organizations have found it important tools to a achieve organization development and therefore, many managers have been applying appreciative inquiry in order to revolutionize their organizations (Hargis, 2004).

1.4 Problem Solving versus Appreciative Inquire Approaches: A Comparison

Appreciative inquiry differs from the traditional approach to organizational development and transformational change in several ways (Cengiz (ed.), 2010). Firstly, the traditional view of the organization assumes that organizations are overwhelmed by a complex problems and waiting for solutions whereas AI assumes that the organization is a source of infinite capacity and imagination. The traditional view tends to keep the organization at or close to its existing capabilities as it merely seeks to find out problems and no attention for organizations core potentials, however, AI seeks to build and expand organization positives in ways that allow for ingenuity and initiative. The traditional view is negative in nature as it is concerned with problems, symptoms, causes, solutions, action plans and interventions (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). AI on the other hand is a positive focus on the true, the good, bettering and possibilities. The basic assumption of problem-solving methodologies is that people and organizations might face obstacles and need to be fixed. The process usually involves: (1) identifying the key problems; (2) analyzing the root causes; (3) searching for possible solutions; and (4) developing an action plan. In contrast, the underlying assumption of appreciative inquiry is that people and organizations are full of assets, capabilities, resources, and strengths that can be located, affirmed, leveraged and encouraged (Attiah, 2015). The Appreciative Inquiry (AI) model is based on the assumption that the questions we ask will tend to focus our attention in a particular direction. Unlike AI, traditional or problem solving approach focus on assessing and evaluating a situation and then proposing solutions are based on a *deficiency* model. Such models ask questions such as "What are the problems?", "What's wrong?" or "What needs to be fixed?" Fitzgerald, Murrell and Miller described problem

solving approach as lowered an individual's energy and creativity. On the other hand, by focusing on what is desired, constructive, and possible, AI will shift a person's perception and effectiveness towards positive direction (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). In contrast to traditional approach, appreciative approach inquiry is complicated philosophy that questions the whole system by asking and inquiring what works instead of focusing what are the problems (Hammond, 1998, as cited in Cengiz (ed.), 2010).

Table 1. Traditional vs. Appreciative Inquiry Approaches

Traditional Approach	Appreciative Inquiry Approach
Apprehends 'what is?'	Apprehends 'what is no?'
seeks what is "wrong" in an organization	seeks what is "right" in an organization
"Felt Needs"-Identification of Problems	Appreciating and Valuing the best of "What is"
Analysis of Causes of the problem	Envisioning "What Might Be"
Action Planning (Treatment)	Dialoging "What Should Be"
Basic Assumption: An Organization is a Problem to be solved	Basic Assumption: An Organization is a Mystery to be Embraced

Source: Modified from Attiah, 2015: 92

2. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to assess various literatures and researches of appreciative inquiry that have been done in various originations and to determine whether appreciative inquiry can serve as an effective transformational tool to revolutionize Jigjiga University. Hence, the recommendations of this study will help managers of Jigjiga University or other concerned stakeholders to consider appreciate inquiry as best alternative tool to solve the existing problems of Jigjiga University and to revolutionize the University forward. As noted previously, research on appreciative inquiry has been conducted in various organizations, businesses and education; but as far as my knowledge, there were no researches that have been conducted in Ethiopian higher in general in Jigjiga University in particular. Therefore, this particular study will also fill the existing literature gap to some extent.

3. Research Method

To conduct this particular study, qualitative research method has been used. The data were collected from secondary sources mainly from annual reports of Jigjiga University, researches conducted on Jigjiga university management system, researches conducted in similar organizations and various literatures. However, primary data have also been gathered through participant-observation. As the author was an academic member of Jigjiga University as both managerial and non-managerial staff from 2012-2016 for 4 years, he had an opportunity to see the situation of Jigjiga university management system as eyewitness. Therefore, primary data were also incorporated from his personal experience and participant observation. Finally, information gathered through literature reviews and participant-observation were incorporated into subtitles and analyzed accordingly.

4. Revolutionizing Jigjiga University through Appreciative Inquiry Approach

Jigjiga University is one of the public higher institutions that were founded in March 2007, along with the Second-Generation universities in Ethiopia. It is located in the emerging town of Jigjiga, the capital city of Ethiopian Somali regional state; found 635 kilometers away from Addis Ababa. The University officially started its service with 712 students, 66 and 99 administrative in three faculties in 2007. In the recent years, the intake capacity is increasing from year to year. So currently (2017), it has about 21,554 students studying in 57 various academic programs and 627 post-graduate students pursuing in six academic programs. These programs are operating under eight Colleges, three Schools and an Institute (<https://www.jju.edu.et/> Accessed on October 25/2017).

The findings of the research conducted by Anticorruption Directorate Office of Jigjiga University [JJUACD] (2016) reveal that there were serious administrative and managerial problems in Jigjiga University. The author was a member of Jigjiga University from 2012-2016. In these years, the author had been working as both managerial and

non-managerial staff and he has had practical experience in both cases. In addition to the findings of JJUACD (2016), the author has also witnessed the staff members' dissatisfaction, anxiety and discomfort with existing system of Jigjiga University. The voices' of non-managerial staff and first line managerial staff were not heard by the university top managers (JJUACD, 2016). The University deployed rigid top-down highly autocrat leadership and directive approach where top managers of the University have imposed various task without the consent of the first line managerial staff and non-managerial staff. Most of the directions given by the top managers were politically motivated and irrelevant to realize the mission of the University (JJUACD, 2016). Jigjiga University has three main objectives: teaching, research and community services (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2012). All of them highly demand creativity and motivation of practitioners and managers. However, in contrary, there is no any kind of means that appreciate creativity and innovations in the working environment of Jigjiga University. Almost there is no any kind of rewarding mechanism for staff members so that the staffs are not motivated to explore their potential to achieve the objectives of the university (JJUACD, 2016). According to annual report of history and heritage management of department of Jigjiga University [HIHM] (2015), the University top managers have been giving a due attention for "what are wrongs"? They were very curious and busy in searching the wrong sides of the university whereas the core values and the potential area of the organization have been marginalized. They have given a due attention to search for mistakes and to punish accordingly. Innovation and creativity which should have the high place in the university have been disregarded. The organizational culture of the university reveals that identifying faults, searching responsible bodies for those faults and penalizing those staff members who made the mistake are the mechanism to achieve the objectives of the organization (HIHM, 2015). Hence, personnel have never dared to take risk in their jobs and organizational development and transformation became stagnant or negative in the university. Moreover, there is high staff turnover in the University (Jigjiga University Annual Report, 2016). A study conducted about staff turnover of Ethiopian Universities by Madawalabu University of Ethiopia revealed that bad working environment was the most frequently cited reason for leaving of (71.3%) followed by poor management and leadership at department, school, college and university level 63.4 (Ibrahim, Rahil & Gemechu, 2017). The study conducted in Jimma University of Ethiopia also revealed that seventy percent of study participants' reported that they were not recognized for good achievement (Workneh, 2010). An extended and unnecessary bureaucracy was another main obstacle to transform Jigjiga University (Annual Report of Jigjiga University, 2016). The University managers always try to solve some problems by using the conventional problem solving approach (Ministry of Education, 2012). They have focused on assessing and evaluating a situation and then proposing solutions are based on a deficiency model. Such models ask questions such as "What are the problems?", "What is wrong?" or "What needs to be fixed?" For instance, at the end of each semester there is performance evaluation through questionnaires for the staff members to identify problems. Based on this survey, the staff have been criticized and punished accordingly but there is no any reward. The survey questions prepared only to indicates problems (JJUACD, 2016). The potential and core values of the university never include in the survey. A study conducted in Lebanon (UNDESA, 2003) indicates "performance evaluation may cause tremendous and anxiety for both the manager and the employee being appraised; in most of the cases, the employees don't perceive the appraisal as fair. Performance evaluation may have a negative impact on motivation and satisfaction if they are poorly designed or administered; if evaluations are not perceived as being conducted fairly and consistently, it might not expect to reach a high level of employee satisfaction toward the performance appraisal system. Most people have three kinds of needs to their organizational existence: a need to be rewarded for what they achieve; a need to be accepted as a unique person and a need to be appreciated not only for the function performed but also as a human being. None of these things are effecting in Jigjiga University. Kotter (1995) concurred and added, "Good leaders recognize and reward success, which not only gives people a sense of accomplishment but also makes them feel like they belong to an organization that cares about them". Hence, Jigjiga University is in urgent need of revolutionizing the existing working environment. As many studies conducted in similar setting and organizations shows that appreciative inquiry is an appropriate tool to solve the existing multifaceted problems and transform Jigjiga University.

The main objective of this paper is, therefore, to assess the potentials of appreciative inquire as a reliable tool to revolutionize Jigjiga University. A general hypothesis guiding this investigation was, "Is the appreciative inquiry process in a higher education setting specifically in Jigjiga University an effective and reliable tool and does it make employees feel appreciated? To answer this, a lot of literatures have been analyzed and seen in the context of Jigjiga University. In addition, the research findings of Jigjiga University's sub-organ Anticorruption Directorate; annual reports of various units of the University, the author's personal experience as participant-observer and as a practitioner in the University are important inputs of this paper.

As appreciative inquiry literature reveals that many universities have become fruitful through applying appreciative

inquiry approach. For instance, one university of higher education, Benedictine University, described an attempt to initiate culture change in their faculty utilizing appreciative inquiry as the intervention (Hargis, 2004). The university explained how through the appreciative inquiry process, university core values were developed and adopted. From their research, “the successful engagement of their faculty in the AI process and the subsequent core values document gave evidence of a culture which can once again anticipate a more vibrant future through a shared language of affirmation” (Head & Young, 1998). Another study on appreciative inquiry at the higher education level was a study on the Internet in which another university, Merritt College, in January 2002, hosted the start of the “Campus Wide Appreciative Inquiry Process.” The college assembled administrators, staff, students, and faculty who identified their top values for Merritt and small actions. The values and actions they discovered were to improve the campus and encourage them to adopt the values and actions as their own (Merritt College, 2002, as cited in Hargis, 2004). These studies reveal an interesting clue as the AI approach can serve as an effective change tool in Jigjiga University too.

Problem-talks are usually anchored in frustration, despair and impotence; while they evoke certain kinds of relationships. AI can be used to solve problems; it just approaches problem solving with a different perspective. Traditional problem solving looks for what is wrong and “fixes” it, thereby returning the situation to the status quo. Appreciative Inquiry solves problems by seeking what is going right and building on it, thereby going beyond the original “normal” baseline (Watkins and Mohr, 2001, as cited in Hargis, 2004). This indicates that to solve the existing problem of Jigjiga University appreciative inquiry is an appropriate tool. As Kolb (1984) states, “appreciation is a process of affirmation. Unlike criticism, which is based on skepticism and doubts, appreciation is based on belief, trust, and conviction. If appreciated and encouraged staff members of Jigjiga University will become more innovative and able to achieve the mission and the vision of the University. The University should recognize that rather than using a top-down, highly directive approach to faculty development, appreciative inquiry is identified as a best tool that would recognize what instructors will do well and give them opportunities to share best practices.

The results of many studies conducted in similar context shows that achieving organizational objectives is not searching what the problems with this organization are, but rather, what are its gifts - the building blocks of the organization. They may be ideas, beliefs or values as well as structures, practices or procedures by providing a structured opportunity for university to share best practices, to be engaged in the larger change program, and to take an active and direct role in determining future professional development. By its very nature appreciative inquiry is inclusive, consultative, generative and energizing. Hence by implementing appreciative inquiry, it is possible to transform Jigjiga University within a short period of time.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Appreciative inquiry is the paradigm shift from focusing on problems to focusing on strengths and to seeking what is “right” in an organization. It intends to explore the potentials of the organization to achieve their goals. It is more an inclusive and democratic style by its very nature. Though it emerged in business literature in recent time in 1980s, a lot of researches have been conducted on the feasibility of appreciative inquiry. Many organizations have been also effectively implementing and transforming through it. Among many others, universities are among such organizations that implement appreciative inquiry and enjoy appreciable changes. The experiences of many universities show that appreciative inquiry is enabling them to bring a positive change and organization development within a short period of time. The problems that have been experiencing Jigjiga University also seem to be solved by implementing appreciative inquiry approach. The nature the problems that Jigjiga University encountered will not be solved through the conventional problem solving approach rather appreciative inquiry approach is reliable asset to transform the University to the better position. Hence, the author would like to recommend that Jigjiga University should implement appreciative inquiry approach so as to revolutionize the University within a short period of time.

References

- Attiah, Joseph. (2015). Appreciative inquiry: a tool for transforming the University for Development Studies. *Global Educational Research Journal*, 2(12), 185-194
- Bushe, G.R., & Coetzer, G. (1995) Appreciative inquiry as a team development intervention: A controlled experiment. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 31(1), 13-30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886395311004>
- Cengiz D., Umut C. O., & Hakal E. (2010). Appreciative Inquiry Approach: A Formative Approach in Management: In Cengiz (Ed.), *Contemporary issues in Management and Organizations: Principles and Implications* (pp.

- 249-266). Turkey: Ekin Yayinevi
- Cooperrider, D. L., & Srivastva, S. (1987) Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life. In Woodman, R. W. and Pasmore, W.A. (Eds.), *Research in Organizational Change and Development, Vol. 1* (129-169). Stamford, CT: JAI Press.
- Cooperrider, D. L., & Whitney, D. (2005). *A positive revolution in change: Appreciative inquiry*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Cooperrider, D. L., Whitney, D., & Stavros, J. M. (2008). *Appreciative inquiry handbook: For Leaders of change* (2nd ed.). Brunswick, OH; San Francisco: Brown.
- Doveston, M., & Keenaghan, M. (2006). Growing talent for inclusion: Using an appreciative inquiry approach into investigating classroom dynamics. *Journal of Research in Special Education Needs*, 6(3), 153-165. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2006.00073.x>
- Fitzgerald, S. P., Murrell, K. L., & Miller, M. G. (2003). Appreciative inquiry: Accentuating the positive. *Business Strategy Review*, 14(1), 5-7. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8616.00238>
- Haar, D., & Hosking, D. M. (2004). Evaluating appreciative inquiry: A relational constructivist perspective. *Human Relations*, 57(8), 1017-1036. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726704045839>
- Hargis, L. C. (2004). *Appreciative Inquiry in Higher Education as an Effective Communication Tool: A Case Study. School for Leadership Studies*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Regent University, Virginia, USA.
- Head, R.L., & Young M.M. (1988). Initiating culture change in higher education through appreciative inquiry. *Organizational Development Journal*, 24(2).
- History & Heritage Management Department of Jigjiga University (2015). *Departmental Annual Report of History and Heritage Management*. Jigjiga, Ethiopia: Jigjiga University.
- Ibrahim, Y., Rahel N., & Gemechu G. (2017). Academic Staff Turnover Intention in Madawalabu University, Bale Zone, South-east Ethiopia. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(3), 21-28. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v6n3p21>
- James, P. P. (1999). *Appreciative Inquiry: An Action Research Method for Organizational Transformation and its Implications to the Practice of Group Process Facilitation*. Retrieved from <https://www.nmaeyc.org/sites/default/files/files/Troxel%20Appreciative%20Inquiry8-02-1.pdf>
- Jigjiga University (2016). *Jigjiga University Annual Report of 2015/2016*. Jigjiga, Ethiopia: Jigjiga University.
- Jigjiga University Anticorruption Directorate (2016). *Challenges and Changes of Ethics and Good Governance in Jigjiga University*. Jigjiga, Ethiopia: Jigjiga University.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Kotter, J.P. (1995). Leading change: why transformation efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review*, 73, 59–67.
- Liebler, C. J. (1997). Getting comfortable with appreciative inquiry: Questions and answers: Global Social Innovations. *Journal of the GEM Initiative*, 1(2), 30-40.
- Ministry of Education [MoE] (2012). *Harmonized Academic Policy of Ethiopian Public Higher Education Institutions*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Ministry of Education.
- United Nation Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA] (2003). Organizational Performance Management and Measurement: The Lebanese Experience. *Dist Limited*, 5(16).
- Watkins, J. M., & Mohr, B. J. (2001). *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the speed of imagination*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer.
- Whitney, D., & Trosten-Bloom, A. (2003). *The power of Appreciative Inquiry*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
- Workneh, B. (2010). Academic Staff Reward System: A Case of Jimma University. *Ethiopian Journal of Education & Science*, 6(1).
- Yee Leng EOWa & Wan Ali WAN ZAHb et al. (20110). Appreciative Learning Approach: A New Pedagogical Option. S. L. Wong et al. (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 18th International Conference on Computers in Education*. Putrajaya, Malaysia: Asia-Pacific Society for Computers in Education.