

Chapter 6

The Appreciative Inquiry Methodology as an Instrument for the Analysis of the Sustainability of Companies

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ABSTRACT

There are currently various social innovation practices and efforts to address sustainability and its impact on the world. One of them is the use of the appreciative inquiry methodology (AIM), which results in applying a SOAR analysis focused on sustainability and discovering the strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results of a company. Thus, the company plays a fundamental role through corporate social responsibility (CSR) that seeks to carry out concrete actions that benefit society. This chapter will define what this methodology consists of, its scope, uses, and initiatives that have adopted it as part of their practices for the measurement and promotion of sustainability. One of the main results of using this methodology is to share success stories about innovations that meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through organizations such as AIM2Flourish and B Corp.

INTRODUCTION

A healthy organization, in turn, involves two implicit concepts: organization and health. On the one hand, “organization” generally refers to how work processes are structured and managed, including job design, work schedules, management style, organizational effectiveness, and corporate strategies to help employees adapt. In that sense, “the positive power of AIM with its concepts of the more fully human organization — a collaborative, intrinsically motivating system capable of liberating the human spirit without reverting to tired, old, command-and-control forms of bureaucracy” (Stavros, Torres, & Cooperrider, 2018, p. 4).

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It is essential to use innovative tools such as the Appreciative Inquiry Methodology (AIM), focused on sustainability, and analyze examples of organizations that promote global benefit by promoting acceptable practices through various initiatives. Furthermore, based on what was stated by Laszlo & Sorum Brown (2014), it is essential to redefine sustainability as flourishing, because in their words, “sustainability has run out of steam, we need not only a better meaning but a better world, one that points to fresh practices and the possibility of far better results—flourishing at all levels-individual, team, organizational, and global. Think of flourishing relationships, radiant health, thriving enterprises, and humming communities” (p. 9).

In companies, it is common to think or believe that something must change, or we must solve a “problem”. However, organizational development has been evolving and presents an intervention alternative that is the AIM. Kuzmina & Lindemane (2017) affirm that “there is a general impression that management should look beyond traditional financial metrics to include CSR– related factors because several groups are led by different motivations and expectations” (p. 40).

In that sense, AIM looks for what works in an organization; in other words, it is focused on the highest points. Since claims are based on experience and history, people know how to repeat their success (Hammond, 2013).

BACKGROUND

Dr. David Cooperrider and Dr. Ron Fry developed AIM at Case Western Reserve University in the late 1980s. Their work helped create a positive revolution in organizational change and built a framework used by organizations worldwide to flourish (AIM2Flourish, 2021).

Subirana and Cooperrider (2017) defined the five phases that AIM goes through, which according to their analysis, is a cyclical process.

- **Define:** The explanation of the topic is crucial; there are guidelines for designing appreciative, powerful, and generative questions.
- **Discover:** To identify what is life-giving in the organization and appreciate the best of “what is”.
- **Dream:** To visualize the results of what drives us forward (purpose, strategic focus).
- **Design:** To plan the ideal situation or organization to achieve dreams.
- **Destiny:** To ensure that dreams can come true.

To understand AIM, it is essential to define what it is. Based on Grieten, Lambrechts, Bouwen, Huybrechts, Fry & Cooperrider (2018), “AIM is a collaborative and constructive inquiry process that searches for everything that gives life to organizations, communities, and larger human systems when they are most alive, effective, creative and healthy in their interconnected ecology of relationships” (p. 1). Thus, through this methodology, the strengths and what is already working in an organization are discovered, instead of traditional approaches focusing on problems.

Appreciative Inquiry first emerged in the early 1980s. David Cooperrider conducted an organizational diagnostic of the Cleveland Clinic to determine what was wrong with the way the organization was operating. He found that an “appreciative” approach was being used that was causing a powerful and creative stir within the organization. He realized when he asked about what was working that the dynamics of the conversation completely changed (Watkins, Mohr, Kelly, 2011). David Cooperrider

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