What Appreciative Inquiry can do for community engagement

Granicus

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Appreciative Inquiry …

- … involves the systematic discovery of what gives "life" to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms.

- …involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential.

Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry

- In every society, organisation, group something works

- What we focus on becomes our reality

- Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities

- The act of asking questions of an organisation or group influences the group in some way (our questions are fateful)

- People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known)

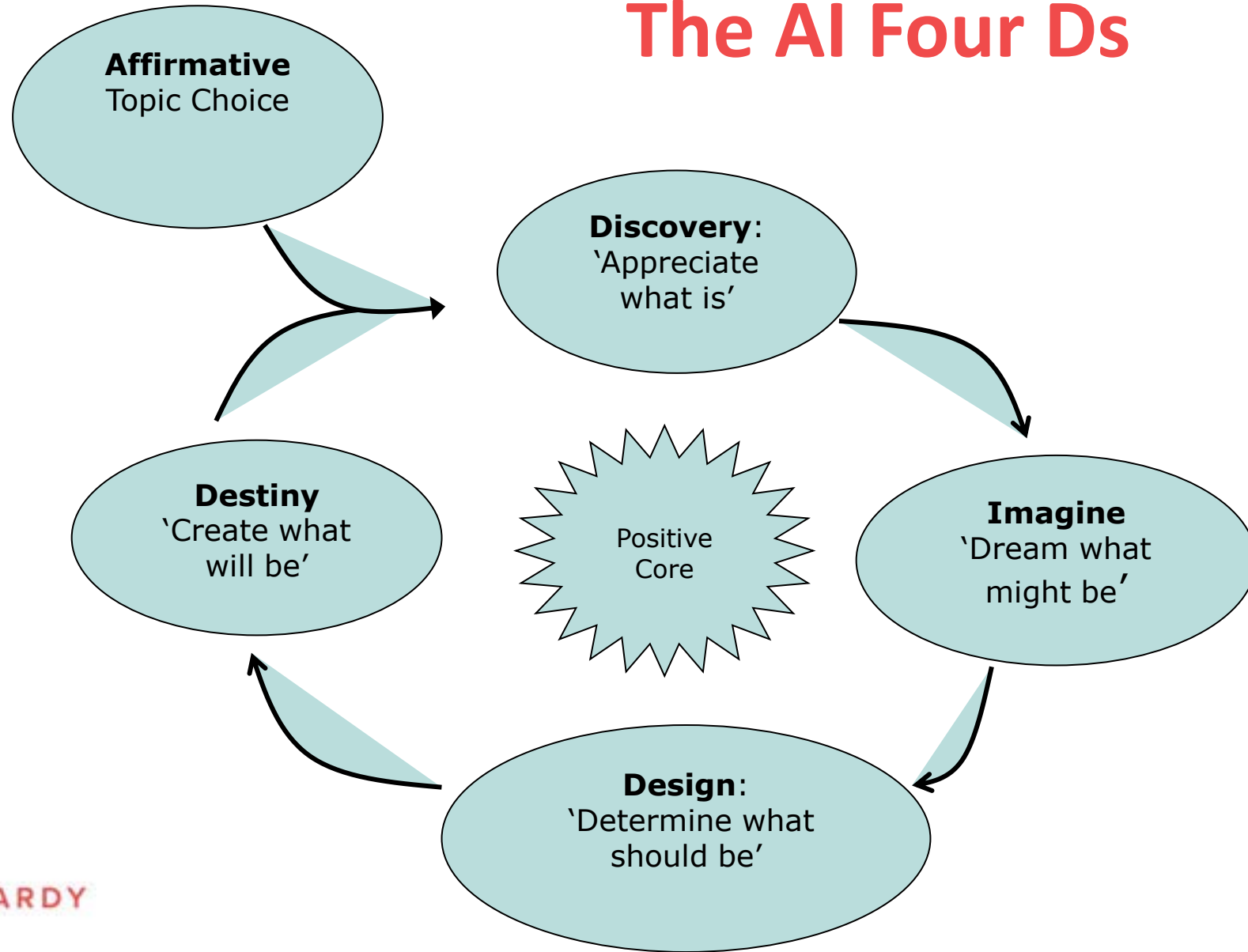- If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past

Inquiry and change are not truly separate moments, but are simultaneous. Inquiry is intervention. The questions we ask set the stage for what we "find", and what we "discover" (the data) becomes the linguistic material, the stories, out of which the future is conceived, conversed about, and constructed.

A Positive Revolution in Change: Appreciative Inquiry
David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, 2003

The AI Four Ds

Affirmative
Topic Choice

Discovery:
'Appreciate what is'

Imagine
'Dream what might be'

Positive Core

Destiny
'Create what will be'

Design:
'Determine what should be'

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Traditional vs Appreciative Inquiry

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Traditional Process

- Define the problems and study them

- Fix what is broken

- Focus on decay

- *"What problems are you having?"*

AI Process

- Search for solutions that already exist

- Amplify what is working

- Focus on life giving forces

- *"What is working well around here?"*

Areas where AI can make an obvious difference

- How we scope issues for engagement
- How we undertake stakeholder mapping – the questions we ask
- How we approach 'risk analysis'
- How we develop a culture that is conducive to engaging the community constructively
- Helping leaders to support CE processes

Framing questions as 'appreciative' dilemmas

- A way of making space for 'grown-up' conversations.

- A way to embed various tensions and different values.

- Encourages people to have dialogue about interests as opposed to debating positions.

- Promotes creativity and acknowledges trade-offs.

- Easy to understand

Example

A question for a **debate** *(win/lose)*

- What's more important? Protecting national parks or allowing people to enjoy them?

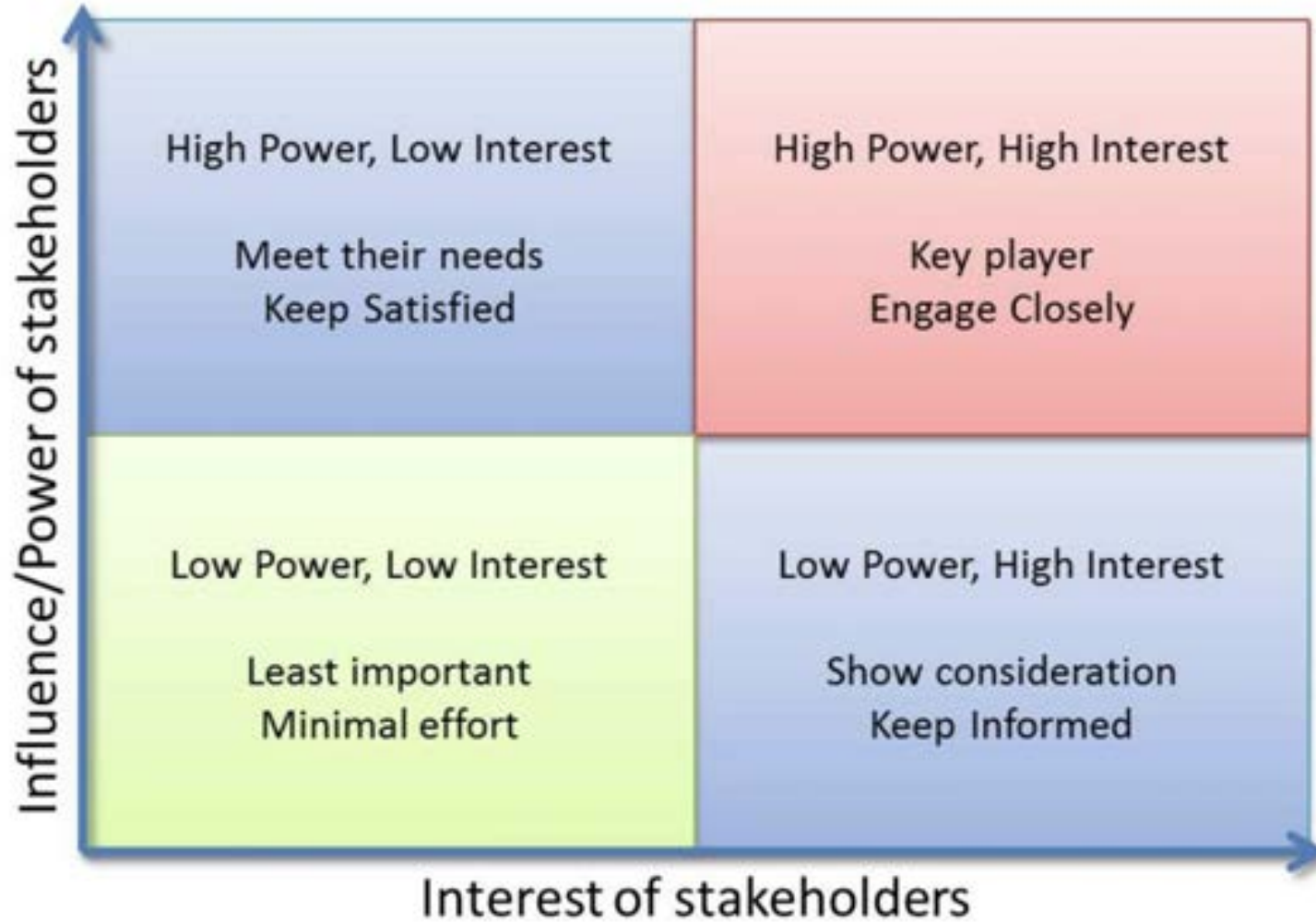Alternative way to frame *(compromise)*

- How can we balance the need to protect our parks whilst enabling easy access to them?

A better way to frame *(appreciative/creative)*

- How can we maximise enjoyment of national parks and improve our protection of them?

The classic influence/ interests matrix, aka Mendelow's Matrix

Hardy's Matters/ Brings Matrix

So, about community engagement ... what would you like to see more of?

- What does healthy community engagement mean for you?
- What has been your very best experience with community engagement?
- Instead of spending time studying the problems, what if, instead, we tried to understand what makes it work, when it works extremely well?
- If we focused on that, researched that, might we not influence our discourse and our reality?
- Might community engagement become healthier as we seek to understand and build on the root causes of success!

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Benefits

- AI rests on the premise that 'the more you focus on what you want the more likely you are to get it'

- *'What you focus on, grows!'*

- The better we understand problems the more likely to give life to them – the more we focus on strengths, assets and aspirations the more likely we are to give life them!

Organisational assumptions

The community:

- *cannot grasp complex issues*
- *is easily influenced by the media*
- *views are shaped by narrow concerns*
- *doesn't appreciate the constraints of the process*
- *or, is mostly apathetic*

and therefore ...

it is futile and hazardous to involve the community

TRUST & DIALOGUE BARRIER

Community assumptions

The organisation:

- *has ignored us in the past*
- *has already made up their mind what they want to do*
- *will not be influenced by the views of the community*
- *are selectively deaf and unscrupulous*
- *or, has better knowledge on which to base decisions*

and therefore ...

our efforts are a waste of our valuable time

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Organisational assumptions

The community:

- **can grasp** complex issues given the opportunity
- **can see** through simplistic solutions and assessments of the issues
- **can make** well informed judgments through deliberation
- **can appreciate** the constraints of the process
- and, **engage thoughtfully** when genuinely invited to collaborate or provide input

and therefore ...

it is crazy **NOT** to involve the community

T R U S T   &   D I A L O G U E   B U I L D E R

Community assumptions

The organisation:

- has **valued** our involvement in the past
- is **genuinely open** about finding the best solution to this challenging issue/project/plan
- will **be influenced** our thoughtful contributions
- is **honest**, decent and trustworthy
- and, is willing to share their useful knowledge with us

and therefore ...

any efforts on our part will be a **VERY** satisfying and a good use of our valuable tim

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