

# APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

*A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS*

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### *Executive Summary*

Organizational development methods are used in many organizations as tools to remedy the broad spectrum of problems including issues in the area of structure, operations and human capital in an effort to effect positive change with the goal of that change having an effect on the organization's culture and profit. Since the first studies organization development, theorists and practitioners have addressed human capital issues by increasing benefits or addressing human capital management related problems and seeking to resolve or eliminate them through a problem solving process. However, Appreciative Inquiry, an organizational development a change method created by David Cooperrider, asserts that focusing on the positive aspects of an organization rather than its problems is a more effective way to make organizational improvements. While there is abundant research that upholds the positive effects of high employee engagement and satisfaction on an organization, there is limited targeted information on the most effectual ways to increase those areas. The purpose of this constant comparative grounded theory research study is to understand the relationship between the appreciative inquiry organizational change method and employee engagement. This qualitative study was performed using a three-phased content analysis by examining literature, research and case studies related to appreciative inquiry as an organizational intervention method and employee engagement in the workplace to examine the interrelationship of two topics.

*Keywords:* appreciative inquiry, employee engagement, grounded theory, content analysis, self-efficacy, energy, involvement

The author acknowledges this document was completed in the spirit of the Trinity Washington University policy regarding academic honesty.

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## Introduction

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Employee engagement has become an increasingly prominent issue in the area of organizational development (OD) likely as a result of the growing body of research surrounding the positive correlation between employee engagement and organizational performance, including profit margin. Organizational leaders have solicited the guidance of organizational development experts and practitioners both internally and externally, in order to implement the most effective strategies to increase engagement and ultimately their bottom line. There are numerous organizational change methods that OD practitioners utilize to increase and sustain employee engagement. Each of these methods varying in terms of cost and time commitment with no certainty of success. This uncertainty presents a substantial challenge in selecting methods with a worthy return on investment. Historically, since the earliest studies of management and organizational behavior, theorists and practitioners alike have gone about the organizational change process by utilizing a traditional problem solving methodology that begins with identifying the problem and ends with a proposed resolution. The problem is that using this method of problem solving has not proven to be a consistent in realizing positive results in employee satisfaction or engagement.

In recent years, OD practitioners have begun to experiment with strength-based as opposed to weakness or problem-based methods, diverging from the traditional problem solving process. These methods take on a more positive approach to improving external and internal performance; one of the most popular of those methods being appreciative inquiry. For the purpose of this study, I will examine the affect of appreciative inquiry, a strength-based organizational development method, on employee engagement. The outcomes of this study will provide OD practitioners and organizational leaders with more pointed information on what drives employee engagement.

## Statement of the Problem

Studies show that the American workforce is not engaged. According to a 2013 study by Gallup Inc., 70% of US employees are actively disengaged, meaning they are very likely underperforming and thus undermining organizational performance. This deficit also has implications at a wider level. The same 2013 Gallup study also reports that disengaged employees "...cost the US \$450 billion to \$550 billion in lost productivity" (Gallup, 2013, p. 12). As the US economy trends upward from recession, it becomes increasingly important that organizations in all sectors focus on successful performance to sustain a healthy job market and promoting economic stability at both the micro and macro level. While there is ample research around the positive influence of employee engagement on organizational performance, there is much less so on the most effective ways for organizations to

increase the engagement of their workforce. There is significant research surrounding the success of strength-based methodologies but there is a lack of synthesis between the two.

## **Objective**

The aim of this study is to provide some clarity and understanding for practitioners and organizational leaders on how to influence engagement in the work environment. As the traditional problem solving methodology has not proven to be dependably successful, the objective of this study is to examine the inverse; a positive approach in the appreciative inquiry method to understand what influence it has on employee engagement. If the appreciative inquiry method is shown to positively influence employee engagement, practitioners and researchers will be able to take a more targeted approach to employee engagement. If it is found to have no or a negative impact on employee engagement, it will provide an opportunity to improve the appreciative inquiry methodology or evade the potential risk of lost investment in resources. The outcomes of this study will have implications for all organizational stakeholders, including employees who also benefit from engagement.

## **Research Questions**

This research will attempt to answer the following through a qualitative data collection and analysis to gain understanding on appreciative inquiry's influence engagement.

### **Research question one (RQ1):**

What factors influence employees to feel engaged?

The purpose of this question is to uncover what themes or factors lead to employee engagement.

### **Research question two (RQ2):**

How does appreciative inquiry influence employee engagement?

The purpose of this research question is to understand the effect of the appreciative inquiry method on employee engagement.

## **Design**

To effectively address the central issues of the study, I will utilize qualitative research methods as I aim “to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). To effectively infer a relationship between two topic areas utilizing multiple sources of data, the constant comparative grounded theory analysis was performed an advocacy and participatory worldview; an approach was taken to provide clarity and understanding in order to effect change in the engagement of the United States workforce (Creswell, 2008). Creswell (2008) states that the advocacy and participatory worldview is meant to free “...people from the constraints of irrational and unjust structures that limit self-development and self-determination. The advocacy/participatory

studies aim to create a political debate and discussion so that change will occur (p. 10).” For the purposes of this study, the “people” Creswell refers to, are the stakeholders within organizations who would benefit from increased employee engagement and the “political debate and discussion” this research aims to provide better understanding and alignment among organizational development theorists, practitioners and leaders on how to realize desired outcomes in this area.

The two distinct concepts of appreciative inquiry and employee engagement are researched to gain a clear understanding of their foundations and applications and analyzed, through the constant comparative method of grounded theory, to address the study’s research questions and the research problem. When trying to effect change through qualitative research, constant comparative analysis might be used in an effort to illustrate the relationship between multiple concepts in order to develop a model to guide that change (Merriam, 2009). Case studies, peer reviewed scholarly journal articles along with related literature and data were examined and evaluated and then coded to ensure the relevancy and integrity of the study. Based on Corbin and Strauss’ model for constant comparative grounded theory, a three phase coding process (open, axial and selective) will be used to analyze the documents (Merriam, 2009).

### **Data Sources**

The data sources utilized in this research were in the form of purposefully selected documentation related to the topic areas. These documents were selected based on their relevance and significance to research problems, mainly focused on employee engagement and the factors that influence it and appreciative inquiry as a theory and it’s role as an organizational development intervention method in organizations and it’s outcomes related to employee engagement. The documents included were primarily public included, books, case studies, scholarly and peer reviewed journals and trade journals. Documents were sourced using electronic databases housing business related to business topics, specifically EBSCO HOST and ABI Inform. Keywords used in the search for these articles included *appreciate inquiry, employee engagement factors, and appreciative inquiry outcomes*. The following are examples of search results:

Bhuvanaiah &Raya (2014). Employee engagement: key to organizational success. *SCMS Journal Of Indian Management*.

Goldberg (2001). Implementing a professional development system through appreciative inquiry. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*.

Watson (2013). Who owns the gap? (part two): the application of Appreciative inquiry to evaluation. *Industrial & Commercial Training*.

From the search results, documents were first selected based on their discussion of the theories and principles related to the topic areas; these included primarily scholarly publication articles and were reviewed and evaluated to form the research problem and research questions. Secondly, other documents were selected based on their discussion of appreciative outcomes in the workplace, specifically involving employees who had experienced an appreciative inquiry process or activity at their place of employment. These included scholarly and trade journals as well as case studies, and were the documents coded and analyzed to address the research the problem and answer the research question.

Both appreciative inquiry and employee engagement are relatively contemporary topics in organizational development only being introduced in 1987 and 1990, respectively, and as such, the documents used in this research were limited in their time span. The earlier works in these areas were utilized as to gain an understanding of the core theories and principles in order to build upon them. Examples of these include Srivastval and Cooperrider's (1986) article published on appreciative inquiry and the egalitarian organization, and Kahn's (1990) work on employee engagement. To capture the evolution and progression in these concepts, more contemporary research was examined to ensure a practical and applicable model was constructed from the review; Maslach, Schaufelli, and Leiter (2001) built upon Kahn's (1990) dimensions by categorizing employee engagement and disengagement. Cooperrider built upon his own work, along with Whitney by developing the 4-D appreciative inquiry cycle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2007). Results from the Gallup Inc. survey, a widely utilized survey tool that measures the engagement of US employees was also reviewed as it provides relevant and timely data as it relates to the state of engagement in the US workforce.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

This research is evaluating appreciative inquiry and its influence on engagement of employees. The concept of both appreciative inquiry and engagement might be applied to other areas outside of the employment environment but this study focuses on that setting. These choices were made in order to narrow the focus of the research with the intention of collection of more complete and quality data. In grounded theory, it is understood that the researcher serves as both the investigator and the instrument for analysis, which naturally subjects the study to the potential bias and knowledge limitations of the researcher. To reduce this risk, concepts were studied, examined and re-examined at length to gain an extensive understanding and a diverse perspective on the principles and concepts related to this study.

Content analysis was used in place of other research methods as a result of difficulty locating relevant participants that have had direct Appreciative Inquiry experiences.

While the intention of the study is to provide clarity and guidance on helping organizations in the United States to be more successful in achieving increased engagement, this study has its limitations. The principal objective is to promote understanding, and discussion in order to effect positive change within the US economy in the current state of unengaged and actively disengaged employees. However, because of limited research directed specifically toward the US operated organizations in appreciative inquiry and employee engagement, this study also carefully considers research related to global and foreign operated organizations. This study carefully selects guiding principles based on relevant related research but it does not attempt to construct a “one size fits all” approach to organizational success nor does it attempt to respond to the issue of conflicting research among studies in the respective research area. As a result, the study may not garner unanimous support in the academic or professional community.

Unlike the other areas of research, there is far more agreement in the area of employee engagement and its relationship with organizational performance. Scholars and practitioners alike support the positive correlation between employee engagement and organizational success (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Macey et al., 2009; Saks, 2006). Macey et al. (2009) along with Gallup (2013) have done extensive surveys across various industries supporting the link between a highly engaged workforce and organization success. As a result of the abundance of research and consensus in this area, this study accepts that a positive correlation exists between the two concepts. For the purpose of this study no further examination in this area is required. This research attempts only to examine the connection between the appreciative inquiry concept and employee engagement.

## Theory

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The purpose of the qualitative research in this study is to examine the relationship between appreciative inquiry and employee engagement. The theories underlying this study include Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2007) and Maslach's (2001) Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS). Appreciative Inquiry is a method for organizational intervention and change; the study will evaluate and analyze purposefully selected content related to organizational results in this area by searching for key terms and descriptors that result in positive outcomes in the dimensions of employee engagement developed from a thorough review and examination of the literature. Those dimensions are energy, involvement, and efficacy (Maslach, 2001).

### Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an intervention theory and methodology that focuses on the positive aspects of a system to incite change. Cooperrider first introduced appreciative Inquiry in 1987 at Case Western University and the Taos Institute (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2007). It has been described in many different ways but at its most basic level it is a philosophy, a way of thinking that brings about positive change from the affirmative. The name Appreciative Inquiry stems from *Appreciate*, which is to highlight and value what is thought to be positive or good, and *Inquire*, which is to be curious about or investigate. So in its essence, the philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry is investigating what is good (Martinez, 2002). In terms of organizational change and improvement, however, it is using the philosophy of evaluating and appreciating what is good, and using it as a means for bringing forward what is good about a system and transforming an organization by perpetuating its strengths. Appreciative Inquiries are often conducted in a series of phases known as the 4 Ds, or Discover, Dream, Design and Destiny.

**Discovery.** The discovery phase of the cycle includes the appreciative interview, which is where the positive core is first introduced. Members of the organization are interviewed and asked what the best aspects of the current state of the organization are. This beginning phase examines the best of what is (Sharma, 2008; Subramanian, 2003)

**Dream.** The dream phase of the cycle is also included in the appreciative interview and asks members of the organization, through interview, in considering the best of what is, how can that be used to create an even better or ideal future state. This phase examines the best of what could be (Sharma, 2008).

**Design.** This phase begins the planning process for designing a practical plan of action to guiding the organization in a positive direction. It involves collaboration and participation from all

members involved in the appreciative inquiry process. This phase is meant to allow for buy-in amongst members not only in the change but also in ownership of the organization's future (Drew & Wallis, 2014)

**Destiny.** The final phase of the appreciative inquiry cycle is destiny phase, which ultimately determines the direction of the organization. This phase is the call to action; it involves all stakeholders and leadership in determining the best route to realizing organizational improvement (Watson, 2013).

### **Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement has become a more prominent topic in recent years as practitioners and theorists have become more aware of its potential outcomes related to both the individual employee and the employer organization. From a historical perspective, Kahn (1990) is cited as the originator of the employee engagement or personal engagement concept. Kahn focused on the psychological concepts that contributed to the personal engagement or personal disengagement of an employee including meaningfulness, safety and availability as it relates to self. Kahn's work was groundbreaking in a time where little to no academic research was available and still serves as the foundation of the even the most recent research in employee engagement. From a research perspective, the challenge is to distinguish amongst the abundance of information published by trade journals consultants and academics to decipher what is relevant, valid and reliable. The purpose of the review of the research in this area is to organize examine concepts that can be used to identify employee engagement to then analyze it against the concept of appreciative inquiry.

Despite the prevalent data stemming from Kahn's work, there is little consensus among the research on the definition of employee engagement. Kahn (1990) defines personal engagement as the degree to which "people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694) and personal disengagement as "the uncoupling of selves from work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances" (p. 694). One limitation of Kahn's study as he notes in recommendations for future research is that he does not examine external or environmental factors that can lead to engagement or disengagement. This does not give organizations much information on how his concepts can be applied practically to improve engagement as they have little readily available insight on the psychological conditions of their workforce.

The evolution of the engagement construct can be seen in the definition by Maslach et al. (2001) that engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy, the antithesis of three burnout dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy based on the Maslach Burnout

Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS) (Maslach et al., 2001). Kahn's (1990) dimensions evolved into Maslach's categories of *energy, involvement and efficacy*, which provide a more comprehensive and clear illustration of the intrinsic and extrinsic components employee engagement and as such, will be used as the factors of analysis for this study (Maslach, 2001).

**Energy.** Energy is a factor appearing in much engagement research including Maslach's study (2001) and Macey et al. (2009) uses energy to define engagement stating that engagement relates to an "individuals sense of purpose and focused energy..." In a study of employee engagement as it relates to organizational success, Bhuvanaiah and Raya (2014) explain the energy of engagement as the *enthusiasm* and *focus* an individual invests in accomplishing a purpose. Those terms and ones similar will also be used to identify energy in the analysis of the data.

**Involvement.** The concept of involvement or more specifically, job involvement appears in some form across many studies as a factor of employee engagement and a predictor of increased job and organizational performance. Much of the research to some extent describes involvement as the degree to which an employee has a personal investment in their job tasks and performance. Maslach et al. (2001) proposed "when employees engage job involvement; the job performance is positively related to both self representation and self esteem (p.19). In research around job involvement, the terms *commitment, participation* and *ownership* were used with some degree of interchangeability and as such, these terms will also be analyzed in the data.

**Efficacy.** Bandura (2001) defines self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capacities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments." In addition to Maslach et al's (2001) work, there is a strong prevalence of research and findings surrounding self-efficacy and its positive correlation with worker engagement. In a recent study on the German healthcare system, it was found that there was a strong correlation between self-efficacy and worker engagement (Mache, 2014). Evaluation of the research documents showed terms like *resiliency* and *optimism* to be related to efficacy as well.

The progression and integration of the employee engagement concept in the United States can be seen through Gallup's (2013) annual survey and publication that report out the results of engagement of the US workforce. Although Gallup is not a scholarly, peer-reviewed entity, their research is widely accepted in practical and academic communities. Their study examines and measures employee engagement in the United States across all sectors and even regions allowing for insight into the engagement dilemma. Since this study aims to provide clarity and understanding in this area, I will utilize Gallup Inc.'s categorization of employees in the highest category of engagement, which is labeled *engaged* versus the lowest category *actively disengaged*. Engaged

indicates positive sentiments and outcomes in *energy, involvement, and efficacy*. In contrast actively disengaged indicates sentiments and outcomes in exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy (Gallup, 2013).

### Theoretical Construct

The aim of this study was to understand the relationship between Appreciative Inquiry and employee engagement. The theory and application of Appreciative Inquiry in an employment setting was researched and studied to understand the experience and its outcomes. AI research and case studies suggest that there are many different outcomes experienced by organizations and their environments, some reporting increased profits, improved production times and improved customer feedback. However, this study aimed to target the outcomes related to the organization's employees and their engagement. To accomplish this, an understanding of the factors that contribute to employee engagement is important. Extensive research of the historical as well as evolving dimensions of employee engagement led to the use of three factors, *energy, involvement and efficacy*. To make the connection between the Appreciative Inquiry experience of employees and employee engagement, Appreciate Inquiry outcomes were analyzed against the aforementioned engagement factors to understand the way that appreciative inquiry influences those factors and subsequently, employee engagement.

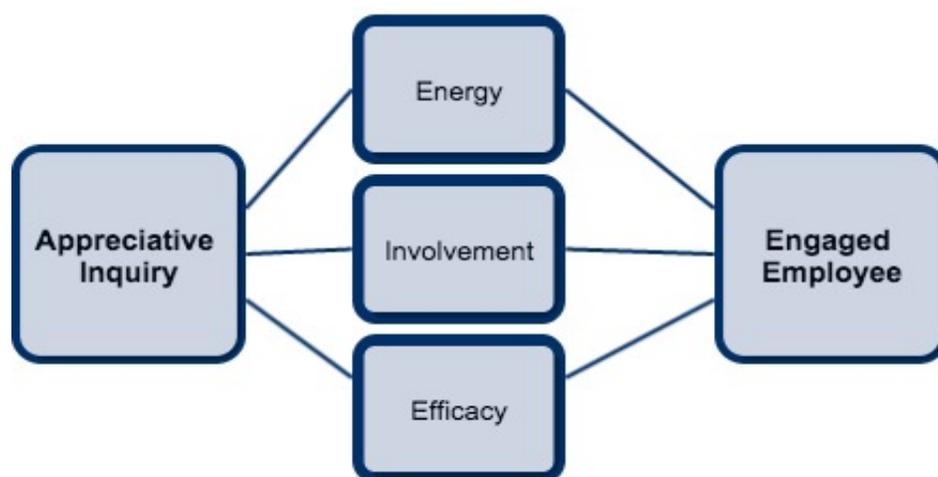


Figure 1, The theoretical model of appreciative inquiry to employee engagement.

## Analysis

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Grounded theory analysis, first introduced in 1967 by sociologists, Glaser and Strauss is qualitative research method that utilizes the researcher to collect, interpret and analyze data, much like other qualitative methods. However, grounded theory differs in that it also relies on the researcher to examine the data in order to establish a connection or build a theory from the analysis (Merriam, 2009). The purpose of this section is to document the data analysis process and to ensure the trustworthiness of the research.

## Sample

The research sample included five data sources that were selected included case studies and scholarly journal articles as discussed in this section. Documents were evaluated and vetted based on their relevancy to the appreciative inquiry as an organizational change intervention and employee engagement and their inclusion of documented outcomes to be analyzed. The specific selection criteria used in the forming the sample included 1) a group of individuals, identified as having some work or employment relationship with the host organization experienced an explicitly identified Appreciative Inquiry process 2) the outcomes or result of that experienced were presented in the document. Although there were no sources available that required this exclusion, there was a third criteria, 3) that would exclude documents that solely focused on Appreciative Inquiry and employee engagement factors to ensure the integrity of findings.

### *Berrisford, S. (2005). Using appreciative inquiry to drive change at the BBC.*

This sample was a case study highlighting the results of an Appreciative Inquiry intervention that took place at the British Broadcasting Company, BBC. At the time of the Appreciative Inquiry intervention, the organization was experiencing problems in culture of their work environment. In the study Berrisford explains employee perceptions as a place that is “difficult to be creative, where teamwork is low and leadership is poor (p. 22).” This study was selected as a sample because without explicitly discussing engagement, the objective of the AI intervention at BBC was to accomplish a transformational change in culture – one where the pre-intervention employee population could be described as disengaged. The AI intervention proved highly successful according to Berrisford and employee reports resulting in many positive engagement factors like communication, teamwork, job involvement and teamwork.

***Conkright, T. A. (2011). Improving performance and organization value through a virtual appreciative inquiry summit.***

Conkright took a slightly different approach in his analysis of Appreciative Inquiry by examining AI as a virtual organizational intervention method. Conkright illustrates the execution of an AI virtual summit as both the investigator and facilitator of the intervention. The purpose of the study was to analyze and uncover any potential differences between a virtual summit as compared to in-person. However, in doing so it touched on the outcomes of the intervention that were consistent with those of the other samples in this study in that the AI experience in the workplace resulted in employee engagement factors like job involvement, teamwork, energy and efficacy.

***Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service.***

This study performed on employees of an Educational Psychology Service, examined the appreciative inquiry process and its outcomes on the employees of schools and other local authority institutions where educational psychologists were employed. The study took the participants through each of the four phases of AI and closely examined the outcomes of the group noting individual as well as group experience and outcomes. The study found that as a result of the AI process, positive outcomes were present in terms of employee development, communication and collaboration within a team and an enhanced feeling of “agency and control” or ownership in their jobs. It was also noted that stress, job security and workload in the work environment played a part in the appreciative inquiry process outcomes. The results of this study provided insight on the application of the AI process, factors related to engagement at the individual employee level, highlighting their experience through and after the process completed. It also presented insight on the influence of external factors on the outcomes of the AI process.

***Peelle III, H. E. (2006). Appreciative Inquiry and Creative Problem Solving in Cross-Functional Teams.***

In this comparative, quantitative study, Peelle (2006) measured the reported outcomes of the Appreciative Inquiry change process against the outcomes of the traditional problem solving methodology. Six groups of participants or “teams” were given the same task, three of those groups went through a creative problem solving or CPS process and in contrast, three groups went through the Appreciative Inquiry process. The results of the study showed that the AI group reported higher levels of group identification and group potency. The terms group identification and group potency were not included in the initial review of employee engagement literature, however, Peelle defines group identification as the degree to which teams have “...shared sense of teamwork and

cohesiveness... (p.9)” and attach themselves to their work and group potency as collective efficacy which is related to perseverance and motivation; these factors are indeed related to and mentioned in employee engagement literature and research.

*Richer, M., Ritchie, J., & Marichionni, C. (2009). 'If we can't do more, let's do it differently!': using appreciative inquiry to promote innovative ideas for better health care work environments.*

In this case study, Richer and Marichionni examined the use of appreciative inquiry as an organizational change intervention method aimed to increase innovation in health care organizations. The study reports the outcomes of an Appreciative Inquiry process with the employees of a large university affiliated health care organization in Quebec, Canada. The results of the study showed that through the appreciative inquiry process, innovative ideas and other factors related to innovation emerged. Outcomes from the AI process included innovative, action oriented plans for positive change were developed by the employee participants, showing that the AI process encouraged them to take ownership in the improvement of their environment. The study also noted that it is important for management to engage in the AI process by support the initiatives presented by the staff and providing the necessary attention and resources. This study was relevant to the research study here in that it provided evidenced outcomes from an appreciative inquiry study as well as factors related to employee engagement of healthcare workers.

*Saenghiran, N. (2013). Towards enhancing happiness at work: A case study.*

This study examined how to increase happiness at work by measuring the effect of an Appreciative Inquiry as an organizational development intervention method on employee happiness and job satisfaction. Employees of a university in Thailand experienced an Appreciative Inquiry workshop focused on increasing happiness in the workplace in four dimensions: spiritual, intellectual, physical and social/emotional. The study measured the Appreciative Inquiry experience outcomes but administering pre and post AI questionnaires. The post AI survey results showed that employee satisfaction increased in the areas of job satisfaction, job responsibility, management relations and employee creativity and optimism. The results also showed the ability of AI to transform negative attitudes and discourse into positive. The outcomes of Saenghiran’s research were important to the this study because it quantitatively measured engagement related factors as a result of the Appreciative Inquiry experience as an organizational development methodology.

### **Data Analysis and Coding**

The constant comparative method is a grounded theory analysis strategy seeks to develop “substantive” theory, applicable in real world situations (Merriam, 2009). The constant comparative method of analysis will be used in this study as it aligns with the researcher’s advocacy and

participatory worldview in order to encourage change and better understanding as stated in previous sections of this report. In this strategy, the researcher must first collect the data based on the *theoretical sample*, meaning they seek out relevant data related to the research topic guided by an emerging theory (Merriam, 2009). In this study, I sourced data related to appreciative inquiry and employee engagement via business related databases like EBSCO host and ABI Inform as well as relevant trade and industry data from surveys and business case studies.

Next, the researcher must identify and execute a strategy to analyze the data and develop the theory or model. This begins with *core categories* that Merriam describes as “factors related to a phenomena (p. 200).” In this study, employee engagement and appreciative inquiry are the core categories with the employee engagement being the phenomenon or dependent variable as this study seeks to understand the influence of appreciative inquiry on the engagement of employees. After the *core categories* are defined, *properties* or “factors related to the phenomenon” must then be identified which in this case are *energy, involvement and efficacy* are the three dimensions related to employee engagement.

Finally, in order to develop the grounded theory, the researcher must compare these factors to the initial categories to make a connection or establish a relationship between the two (Merriam, 2009). As related to this study, the analysis will include making a connection between appreciative inquiry and employee engagement in order to develop a theory as to what influence appreciative inquiry category has on the employee engagement phenomenon. It is at this step that the researcher must code the qualitative data to establish that connection. In this study, through a three-phased coding approach recommended by Glaser and Strauss including open (primary), axial (secondary) and selective (trustworthiness) will be employed as explained in the sections that follow in this report.

### **Open coding**

Primary level coding as it relates to constant comparative grounded theory begins with *open coding* (Merriam, 2009) or *initial coding* (Saldana, 2013). This method was chosen based on recommendation from highly regarded texts by Merriam and Saldana as the best method for grounded theory analysis. In this phase I reviewed the documents related to appreciative inquiry as used in an organizational setting and record notes and memos as I interpret the data related to employee engagement outcomes. Once I downloaded the document from the source, I examined it for relevance and trustworthiness. For electronic data, I printed a hard copy for in-person review and direct note taking in the margins and in-text with a highlighter pen but also kept the electronic file for ease the transfer of important information. As the researcher, I had some prior knowledge of the research categories so I recorded notes in relation to the relative employee engagement properties. I also examined the data carefully and recorded any new or emerging thoughts. I finalized the open

coding by scanning the documents, taking mental notes of the frequency that terms related to employee engagement appeared, as well as any other emerging categories. Next, I selected the relevant data using Microsoft’s “copy/paste” feature to transfer the information into an electronic spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel, labeling the first column “author” that included the author and title of the referenced document and the second column as “primary level: open coding” that included all excerpts directly from the document. I identified the relevant properties within the excerpts of the open coded data by bolding and italicizing those words or groups of words related to engagement.

After the data was examined and re-examined to ensure all relevant information was included and relevant to appreciative inquiry outcomes and engagement. Because not all of the studies were directly related to employee engagement, the outcomes were examined closely to identify engagement outcomes using information from the review of employee engagement related research done previously in the study as a response to Research Question One. Upon re-examination some properties were included that were not identified before and some properties and excerpts were removed from analysis after it was determined that they were not directly related enough to outcomes or engagement. Ultimately from the six examined documents examined, 39 excerpts were identified in varying lengths. Examination revealed that there were many references to employee engagement dimensions and factors including *energy, efficacy and involvement* in addition to *collaboration, communication and management support*. Other factors emerged as well, including external, work environment factors related to *diversity, workload and stress level*, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Open coding

| Author   | Primary Level: Open Coding   |
|--|--|
| Berrisford, S. (2005). Using appreciative inquiry to drive change at the BBC.  | It set up a <b>willingness to be involved</b> which still permeates our workplace.   |
| Berrisford, S. (2005). Using appreciative inquiry to drive change at the BBC.  | Our people <b>generated powerful creative ideas</b> about our corporate values and how we could improve the BBC and make it a better place to work   |
| Berrisford, S. (2005). Using appreciative inquiry to drive change at the BBC.  | AI also provided, and continues to provide, a platform for <b>creative dialogue</b> .  |
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| Conkright, T. A. (2011). Improving performance and organization value through a virtual appreciative inquiry summit. | The <b>creativity, ownership, and accountability</b> that the AI Virtual Summit spurred have resulted in many positive outcomes  |
| Conkright, T. A. (2011). Improving performance and organization value through a virtual appreciative inquiry summit. | <b>Instead of waiting for leadership</b> to provide direction and solutions, the 12 individuals identified what they could do to support organizational objectives and <b>designed their own future</b> within the context of the larger organization. |

| Author  | Primary Level: Open Coding  |
|---|---|
| Konkright, T. A. (2011). Improving performance and organization value through a virtual appreciative inquiry summit.  | The pre-summit survey, peer-to-peer interviews, summit sessions, and innovation team collaboration <b>invigorated and empowered</b> the team.   |
| Konkright, T. A. (2011). Improving performance and organization value through a virtual appreciative inquiry summit.  | the team came away <b>energized and hopeful</b>   |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | take <b>ownership</b> of change in their practice;  |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | improve and/or 'action' the things they care about;   |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | AI was valued by EPs for two key reasons: enabling <b>ownership</b> of action;facilitating communication within the organisation.   |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | 'felt a bind when trying to fit in actions around day to day work'  |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | 'set aside more meeting time to work on follow-up activities in groups as it was <b>difficult to find time to meet</b>  |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | 81 per cent 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the related item, AI <b>'Gave me an increased sense of agency and control amidst wider LA restructuring'</b>   |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | enabled to communicate effectively with their service managers ('bottom-up' change process),  |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | <b>energy for change is high after the Design phase,</b>  |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | Each member of the group took responsibility for an action(s) they felt enthusiastic about.   |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | having frame- works for consultation; <b>being optimistic and solution-focused</b> ; having <b>curiosity and enthusiasm</b> ; demonstrating empathy and under- standing; re-framing situations and advocating for children; <b>taking risks and working in challenging situations (i.e. willingness to feel uncomfortable); and the importance of peer/colleague support enabling effective practice.</b> |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | EPs enjoyed <b>having a 'voice' at a time when they felt relatively powerless</b> in a context where decisions were being made by senior LA managers.   |
| Peelle III, H. E. (2006). Appreciative Inquiry and Creative Problem Solving in Cross-Functional Teams.  | Significant levels of posttask group potency (potency = collective efficacy)  |

| Author   | Primary Level: Open Coding  |
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| Peelle III, H. E. (2006). Appreciative Inquiry and Creative Problem Solving in Cross-Functional Teams.   | AI exhibited higher levels of group identification (higher than CPS, problem solving)   |
| Peelle III, H. E. (2006). Appreciative Inquiry and Creative Problem Solving in Cross-Functional Teams.   | higher potency from task initiation to task completion  |
| Peelle III, H. E. (2006). Appreciative Inquiry and Creative Problem Solving in Cross-Functional Teams.   | statistically significant levels of <b>group identity</b>   |
| Peelle III, H. E. (2006). Appreciative Inquiry and Creative Problem Solving in Cross-Functional Teams.   | The findings supported the <b>efficacy</b> of AI.   |
| Richer, M., Ritchie, J., & Marichionni, C. (2009). 'If we can't do more, let's do it differently!': using appreciative inquiry to promote innovative ideas for better health care work environments. | During the design phase, the group took <b>ownership</b> of this idea and <b>decided to propose a vision</b>  |
| Richer, M., Ritchie, J., & Marichionni, C. (2009). 'If we can't do more, let's do it differently!': using appreciative inquiry to promote innovative ideas for better health care work environments. | The most critical elements for the implementation of innovative ideas was that one person or a group of individuals <b>took leadership with a member from the management team showing direct support during the implementation process.</b>   |
| Richer, M., Ritchie, J., & Marichionni, C. (2009). 'If we can't do more, let's do it differently!': using appreciative inquiry to promote innovative ideas for better health care work environments. | The management team, however, did not respond to the health care teams expectation to support the implementation of most ideas.   |
| Richer, M., Ritchie, J., & Marichionni, C. (2009). 'If we can't do more, let's do it differently!': using appreciative inquiry to promote innovative ideas for better health care work environments. | both teams adopted ideas related to <b>interdisciplinary networks and collaboration.</b>  |
| Richer, M., Ritchie, J., & Marichionni, C. (2009). 'If we can't do more, let's do it differently!': using appreciative inquiry to promote innovative ideas for better health care work environments. | The fact that, in both cases, <b>innovative ideas got developed</b> and refined through the unique contribution of individuals from <b>diverse backgrounds</b> is an important point to consider.   |
| Richer, M., Ritchie, J., & Marichionni, C. (2009). 'If we can't do more, let's do it differently!': using appreciative inquiry to promote innovative ideas for better health care work environments. | The different phases of AI permitted this exchange and transformation of knowledge into innovative ideas, supporting the premises of the theoretical framework.   |
| Saenghiran, N. (2013). Towards Enhancing Happiness At Work: A Case Study.  | The workshops could enhance the job itself in terms of freedom for employees' to <b>choose their own method of working</b> , the amount of <b>responsibility, the opportunity to use the abilities</b> , and <b>the variety of tasks assigned.</b>  |
| Saenghiran, N. (2013). Towards Enhancing Happiness At Work: A Case Study.  | The intervention feedback also showed that 90% of the workshop participants stated that they were more <b>optimistic</b> and tended to think and <b>look at things around them more positively.</b>   |
| Saenghiran, N. (2013). Towards Enhancing Happiness At Work: A Case Study.  | The workshops <b>could enhance the level of employee relations satisfaction namely "Industrial relations"</b> between management and workers in the office and organization, the chance of promotion, the way of management of the workplace, and the attention paid to the suggestions from staff. |
| Saenghiran, N. (2013). Towards Enhancing Happiness At Work: A Case Study.  | The workshops helped the participants <b>become more optimistic.</b> To <b>increase happiness at work,</b>  |

### **Axial coding**

After the examination and coding at the primary level, there were many properties that existed in need of further analysis and as such, I moved on to the secondary level of coding. At this level, I utilized the *axial coding* method. Merriam describes this method as the grouping or combining of open codes into categories and classifying into broader schemes (Merriam, 2009). In order to complete the axial coding, I went through the process of “strategically reassembl[ing]” the data using both emerging and established factors of engagement by examining and re-examining the data several times (Saldana, 2013 p. 159). Utilizing the same spreadsheet used in the open coding phase helped to identify related phrases and excerpts by properties then and compare them to the established factors related to employee engagement. Each cell coded in the primary level was labeled in a column to the right to be identified and labeled as *energy*, *job involvement*, *efficacy*, or into another category that emerged. Emerging categories included, *workload*, *stress*, *communication and diversity*. Some of the data presented properties directly related to the engagement factors as well as those from the emerging themes or factors. For example, some terms and phrases included the words “efficacy”, “energy”, “involvement”, “communication”, etc. (Berrisferd, 2005; Conkright, 2011; Doggett & Lewis, 2015; Peelle, 2006). However, there were also properties present in the data that were not directly related to the categories. For example, words like “ownership”, “responsibility”, “accountability” and phrases like “agency and control” appeared in the excerpts and were classified under *job involvement*. Also upon further examination, it was determined that there was some overlap in the categorical properties, for example, the words “accountability” can be related to *job involvement* but can also be related to *efficacy*; as well as “collaboration” could be used to classify *diversity*, *teamwork* and *communication*. As Bohm states, in these instances “...researchers use their background knowledge about the context of the textual passage being investigated and, in general terms, their knowledge about the area of investigation.” Bohm, 2004, p. 271). When confronted with these issues, in most cases, I was able to classify these properties based on my prior research and knowledge in these areas. This was done for each of the factors as shown in Figure 2. There were some terms however, like those presented in Peelle’s (2006) study on Appreciative Inquiry outcomes in cross-functional teams, where the terms *group potency* and *group identification* were used to describe outcomes of the AI process. Peelle defines *group potency* as “collective efficacy” allowing me to classify under *efficacy*; *group identification* was described as an important factor in *teamwork* and thus classified under the *teamwork* category, also shown in Figure 2.

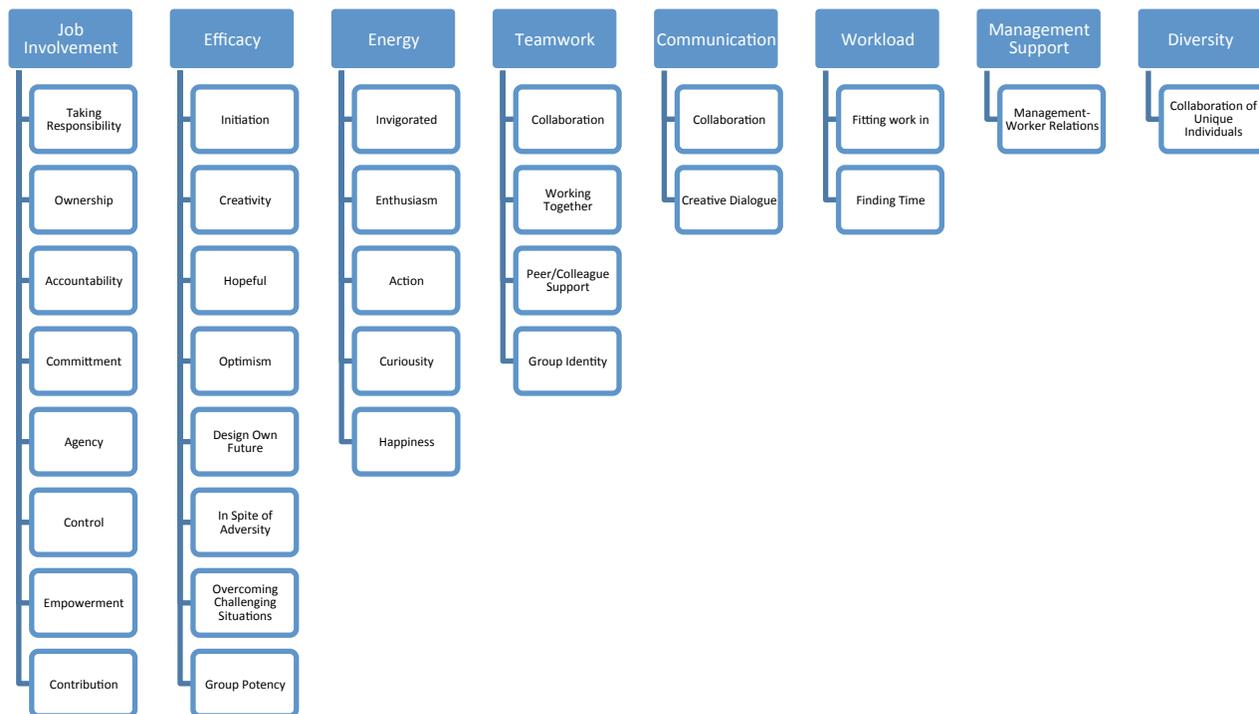


Figure 2. Axial coding properties.

As Figure 2 illustrates, there were many terms and concepts associated with *job involvement* present in the data. The documents and the frequency in which words and concepts included *ownership, empowerment and accountability* occurred suggests that the Appreciative Inquiry experience results in the employee feeling more involved and autonomous over their jobs and more engaged in the success of the organization. *Efficacy* also appeared frequently, with some overlap from job involvement, showing that the belief in the employee’s own abilities increased after the AI experience. There were multiple instances in which outcomes related to a renewed outlook appeared, using terms related to optimism, positivity, and hope. *Energy* occurred with the third highest prevalence, reinforcing the idea that employee’s feel more enthusiastic and are willing to exert more effort into their jobs and the success of the organizations, there were several examples and anecdotes from the data that referenced the employee’s feeling a new sense of invigoration and sense of urgency after their Appreciative Inquiry experience.

*Teamwork, Communication, Workload, Management Support and Diversity* appeared with seemingly descending prevalence at the secondary coding level. The terms like *collaboration, working together* co-worker/colleague support appeared throughout the data and classified under teamwork.

*Diversity* appeared with the least prevalence but was included as a factor because the spirit and concept of diversity, although not explicitly mentioned in the other sources, the spirit of this concept seen throughout the other categories. The concept of *workload* also appeared, somewhat as an outlier due the fact that the other factors were associated with positive AI results. However, workload was viewed as a potential negative effect on employees due the highly involved nature of Appreciative Inquiry interventions. The choice to code these emerging factors and categorize them came from both their presence in the data as well as their presence in research related to engagement and work culture. It was important to this study to acknowledge emerging factors to enhance the integrity and value of the research and findings.

Table 2. *Axial coding.*

| Author  | Primary Level: Open Coding   | Secondary Level: Axial Coding                |
|---|--|--|
| Berrisford, S. (2005). Using appreciative inquiry to drive change at the BBC.   | It set up a <b>willingness to be involved</b> which still permeates our workplace.   | Job Involvement                              |
| Berrisford, S. (2005). Using appreciative inquiry to drive change at the BBC.   | Our people <b>generated powerful creative ideas</b> about our corporate values and how we could improve the BBC and make it a better place to work   | Efficacy;                                    |
| Berrisford, S. (2005). Using appreciative inquiry to drive change at the BBC.   | AI also provided, and continues to provide, a platform for <b>creative dialogue</b> .  | Communication                                |
| Berrisford, S. (2005). Using appreciative inquiry to drive change at the BBC.   | most importantly, it ensured <b>ownership</b> and <b>"buy in"</b> to our corporate values.   | Job Involvement                              |
| Berrisford, S. (2005). Using appreciative inquiry to drive change at the BBC.   | At team level it <b>helped build communication</b> within and between teams and <b>through the line</b>  | Communication ; Teamwork; Management Support |
| Conkright, T. A. (2011). Improving performance and organization value through a virtual appreciative inquiry summit.  | The <b>creativity, ownership, and accountability</b> that the AI Virtual Summit spurred have resulted in many positive outcomes  | Job Involvement; Energy; Efficacy            |
| Conkright, T. A. (2011). Improving performance and organization value through a virtual appreciative inquiry summit.  | <b>Instead of waiting for leadership</b> to provide direction and solutions, the 12 individuals identified what they could do to support organizational objectives and <b>designed their own future</b> within the context of the larger organization. | Job Involvement; Efficacy                    |
| Conkright, T. A. (2011). Improving performance and organization value through a virtual appreciative inquiry summit.  | The pre-summit survey, peer-to-peer interviews, summit sessions, and innovation team collaboration <b>invigorated and empowered</b> the team.  | Energy; Efficacy; Teamwork                   |
| Conkright, T. A. (2011). Improving performance and organization value through a virtual appreciative inquiry summit.  | the team came away <b>energized</b> and <b>hopeful</b>   | Energy; Efficacy                             |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | take <b>ownership</b> of change in their practice;   | Job Involvement                              |

| Author  | Primary Level: Open Coding   | Secondary Level: Axial Coding               |
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| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | improve and/or 'action' the things they care about;  | Job Involvement; Energy                     |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | AI was valued by EPs for two key reasons: enabling <b>ownership of action</b> ; <b>facilitating communication within the organisation</b> .  | Job Involvement; Communication              |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | 'felt a bind when trying to fit in actions around day to day work'   | Workload                                    |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | 'set aside more meeting time to work on follow-up activities in groups as it was <b>difficult to find time to meet</b>   | Workload                                    |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | 81 per cent 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the related item, AI <b>'Gave me an increased sense of agency and control amidst wider LA restructuring'</b>  | Job Involvement                             |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | enabled to <b>communicate effectively</b> with their <b>service managers</b> ('bottom-up' change process),   | Communication ; Management Support;         |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | <b>energy</b> for change is high after the Design phase,   | Energy                                      |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | Each member of the group <b>took responsibility</b> for an action(s) <b>they felt enthusiastic about</b> .   | Job Involvement; Efficacy; Energy           |
| Doggett, C., & Lewis, A. (2013). Using Appreciative Inquiry to facilitate organisational change and develop professional practice within an Educational Psychology Service. | having frame- works for consultation; <b>being optimistic and solution-focused</b> ; having <b>curiosity and enthusiasm</b> ; <b>taking risks and working in challenging situations (i.e. willingness to feel uncomfortable)</b> ; <b>and the importance of peer/colleague support enabling effective practice</b> . | Energy; Efficacy; Job Involvement; Teamwork |
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| Peelle III, H. E. (2006). Appreciative Inquiry and Creative Problem Solving in Cross-Functional Teams.   | AI exhibited higher levels of group identification (higher than CPS, problem solving)   | Teamwork                                      |
| Peelle III, H. E. (2006). Appreciative Inquiry and Creative Problem Solving in Cross-Functional Teams.   | higher potency from task initiation to task completion  | Efficacy                                      |
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| Peelle III, H. E. (2006). Appreciative Inquiry and Creative Problem Solving in Cross-Functional Teams.   | The findings supported the <b>efficacy</b> of AI.   | Efficacy                                      |
| Richer, M., Ritchie, J., & Marichionni, C. (2009). 'If we can't do more, let's do it differently!': using appreciative inquiry to promote innovative ideas for better health care work environments. | During the design phase, the group took <b>ownership</b> of this idea and <b>decided to propose a vision</b>  | Job Involvement                               |
| Richer, M., Ritchie, J., & Marichionni, C. (2009). 'If we can't do more, let's do it differently!': using appreciative inquiry to promote innovative ideas for better health care work environments. | The most critical elements for the implementation of innovative ideas was that one person or a group of individuals <b>took leadership with a member from the management team showing direct support during the implementation process.</b>         | Job Involvement; Management Support; Teamwork |
| Richer, M., Ritchie, J., & Marichionni, C. (2009). 'If we can't do more, let's do it differently!': using appreciative inquiry to promote innovative ideas for better health care work environments. | The management team, however, did not respond to the health care teams expectation to support the implementation of most ideas.   | Management Support                            |
| Richer, M., Ritchie, J., & Marichionni, C. (2009). 'If we can't do more, let's do it differently!': using appreciative inquiry to promote innovative ideas for better health care work environments. | both teams adopted ideas related to <b>interdisciplinary networks</b> and <b>collaboration</b> .  | Teamwork; Diversity; Communication            |
| Richer, M., Ritchie, J., & Marichionni, C. (2009). 'If we can't do more, let's do it differently!': using appreciative inquiry to promote innovative ideas for better health care work environments. | The fact that, in both cases, <b>innovative ideas got developed</b> and refined through the unique contribution of individuals from <b>diverse backgrounds</b> is an important point to consider.   | Diversity; Teamwork; Energy                   |
| Richer, M., Ritchie, J., & Marichionni, C. (2009). 'If we can't do more, let's do it differently!': using appreciative inquiry to promote innovative ideas for better health care work environments. | The different phases of AI permitted this exchange and transformation of knowledge into innovative ideas, supporting the premises of the theoretical framework.   | Teamwork                                      |
| Saenghiran, N. (2013). Towards Enhancing Happiness At Work: A Case Study.  | The workshops could enhance the job itself in terms of freedom for employees' to <b>choose their own method of working</b> , the amount of <b>responsibility, the opportunity to use the abilities</b> , and <b>the variety of tasks assigned</b> . | Job Involvement; Efficacy                     |

| Author  | Primary Level: Open Coding  | Secondary Level: Axial Coding |
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| Saenghiran, N. (2013). Towards Enhancing Happiness At Work: A Case Study. | The workshops <b>could enhance the level of employee relations satisfaction namely "Industrial relations"</b> between management and workers in the office and organization, the chance of promotion, the way of management of the workplace, and the attention paid to the suggestions from staff. | Management Support            |
| Saenghiran, N. (2013). Towards Enhancing Happiness At Work: A Case Study. | The workshops helped the participants <b>become more optimistic</b> . To <b>increase happiness at work</b> ,  | Efficacy; Energy              |

### Trustworthiness

At the final coding stage, I utilized the *selective coding* method. It is at this stage that my theoretical model developed based on the prevalence of data in those categories. First, I counted the number of instances in which each employee engagement factor was present in the axial coding level, I sorted those instances by greatest to least frequency. This method of coding is particularly important in grounded theory research in order to ensure the transparency and trustworthiness of my findings. Finally, I evaluated the presence of the three factors as seen in Figure 3, along with any other emerging factors to determine if there is relationship between the appreciative inquiry outcomes and factors related to employee engagement. From here I will be able to establish whether appreciate inquiry outcomes in the organizational employment setting result in employee engagement.

The findings of the selective coding as shown in Figure 3, shows the prevalence as estimated at the axial coding level, validated by counting the frequency of their occurrence within the selected data samples. Job involvement appears with the highest prevalence at fifteen times, Efficacy thirteen times and Energy at nine occurrences. These findings were consistent with the initial review and evaluation of the data including the concept of employee engagement.

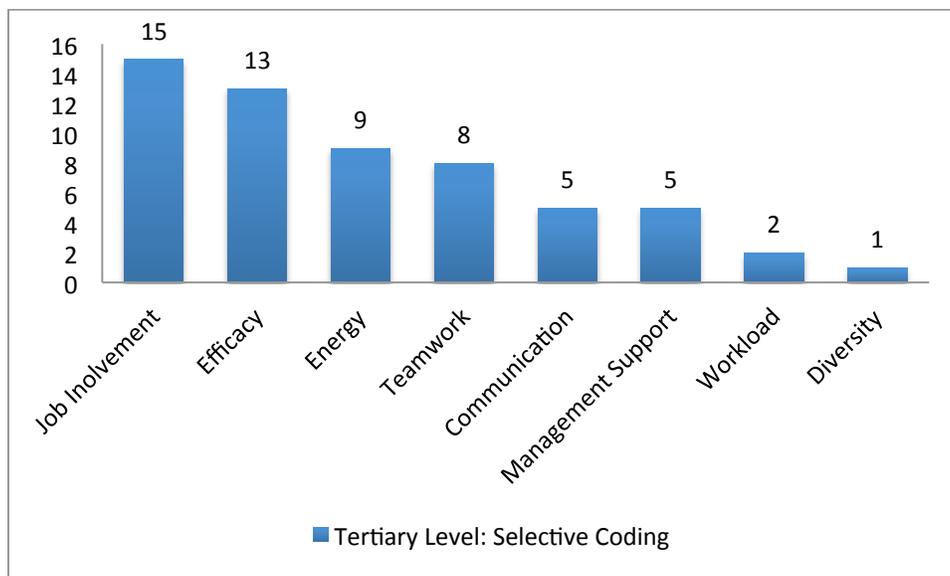


Figure 3, Selective coding results.

Upon analysis of the prevalence and frequency in which the established engagement factors of *energy, job involvement and efficacy* occurred in the sample, as well as the prevalence of emerging factors of shown to be related in some degree to changes in employee behavior, the findings indicate that the appreciative inquiry experience applied as a method of organizational intervention, results in the employee’s increase state of key dimensions related to employee engagement as well as other aspects of the employee work environment experience.

## Discussion

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The findings of the content analysis revealed that Appreciative Inquiry intervention results in many employee related outcomes. The experience of Appreciative Inquiry impacts employee engagement by enhancing an employee's job involvement, efficacy and energy. However, the findings also revealed that AI impacts employee feelings and behavior resulting in teamwork, communication, management support and diversity.

## Research Questions

### **Research question one.**

What factors influence employees to feel engaged?

The review and analysis of the literature showed that there are many different views on what employee engagement means and what influence it. For comprehensibility and the purpose of this study, I used the established engagement dimensions introduced by Maslach (2001), which are energy, job involvement and efficacy. These factors were an evolution of Kahn's first introduction of employee engagement and was one of the first tools used to measure employee engagement through a scale of engagement (the established factors) to job burnout (the antithesis of those factors). The findings of the analysis were consistent in that an employee's *energy, job involvement* and *efficacy* were factors related to employee engagement outcomes.

### **Research question two.**

How does appreciative inquiry influence employee engagement?

The finding of the content analysis suggest that the concept of Appreciate Inquiry applied as a tool for organizational intervention results in the experience of enhanced job involvement, efficacy and energy for employees. It also results in enhanced teamwork, diversity and communication. The findings also showed that management support and workload are factors related employees are noted and should be kept in mind when applying the AI organizational intervention. Specifically, AI could potentially negatively affect employee engagement if implementing workplace changes from the intervention significantly impact or increase the employee's job duties. Management support was found to be a factor that enhanced engagement factors if present in Appreciate Inquiry outcomes. Figure 4 illustrates the theoretical concept that AI outcomes result in factors related to employee engagement factors as well as other employee behaviors.

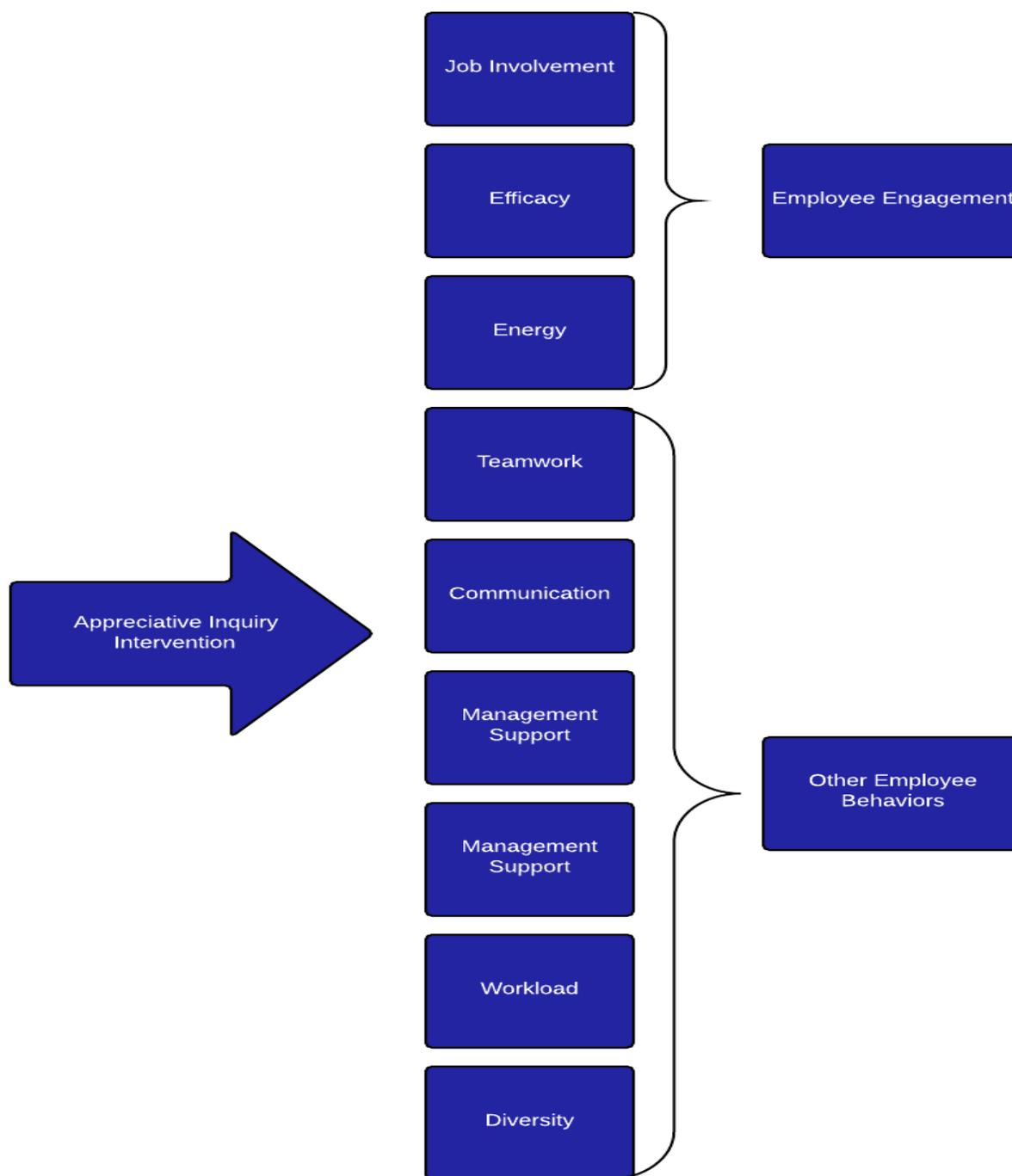


Figure 4. Emergent theoretical model

### Conclusions

The aim of this study was to understand how Appreciative Inquiry outcomes influence employee engagement. To address this question, I first had to understand the concept of employee

engagement and what factors drove employees to become engaged. After reviewing the research I was able to identify three factors that indicate employee engagement, which were job involvement, energy and efficacy. It was understood that if an employee exhibited or reported those three factors, then that employee would be considered, engaged. The next step in the study was to analyze Appreciative Inquiry intervention outcomes in the workplace to examine if those engagement factors were present. After analyzing the data, it was found that Appreciative Inquiry interventions result in varying degrees of employee related outcomes related to engagement and other behaviors. The majority of the sample presented a higher frequency of occurrence in job involvement suggesting that employees exhibit and report the feeling of having an increased sense of responsibility and ownership in both their job but also in the organization (Berrisford, 2005; Conkright, 2011; Doggett & Lewis, 2015; Peelle, 2006). The analysis also showed substantial occurrence of enhanced or increased efficacy and energy of employees indicating that as a result of the AI experience, employees felt an enhanced sense of ability in their jobs as well as an increased sense of optimism and fervor to accomplish tasks. Also emerging from the analysis were other factors related to employee outcomes such as teamwork, communication, management support and diversity. These factors may not be directly related to engagement but also represent positive results in the work environment of employees.

The results of this study suggest that the use of Appreciative Inquiry as tool for organizational intervention can result in positive outcomes in the work environment. Also the principle of AI which is to focus on and examine what is positive about an organization can lead to transformational change in not only the engagement of it's employees but also in other positive employee behaviors.

### **Recommendations**

This study qualitatively examined the relationship between Appreciative Inquiry and employee engagement through the analysis of reported outcomes. The findings of this research are significant because it can provide clarity and understanding among a vast pool of differing and uncorroborated information. However, the limitations of this study in time and scope provide an opportunity to build upon this research to further more guided discussion. For example, a quantitative study examining a statistical relationship between pre AI employee engagement and post AI employee engagement would be beneficial as well as studies focused on specific industries in the U.S. would provide more targeted information for OD practitioners and would substantiate the findings of this study and related research on Appreciative Inquiry. Also, further examination of the concept of employee engagement would be beneficial in providing even more directed and accurately targeted efforts to increasing engagement in the workplace, there were examples from the findings that alluded to intrinsic (internally motivated) as well as extrinsic (externally motivated) outcomes in engagement.

## Implications

There has a significant deficiency in U.S. employee engagement with little to no sign of improvement (Gallup, 2013). This has a potentially negative impact on the economy as employee engagement has been found to have an impact on organizational performance in many areas including retention, productivity and customer satisfaction, factors that widely known to increase or decrease profitability (Bhuvanaiah, & Raya, 2014; Drew, & Wallis, 2014). So how can this be changed? Organizational leaders and stakeholders alike can benefit from increased engagement but what was found in this study was that the information surrounding these two areas was both limited and disconnected. The findings of this study provide information and implications that can provide clarity on the use of Appreciative Inquiry in the workplace. As the outcomes of the traditional and more widely used problem-solving method of intervention has not remedied the engagement problem in the U.S. this points organizations toward a possible solution that has outcomes not only related to engagement that leads to improved performance but other positive outcomes for the work environment, warranting the need to change the way we implement change within the U.S. work environment.

## Summary

The research questions in this study included 1) what factors influence employee engagement? and, 2) how does Appreciative Inquiry influence employee engagement. Utilizing the review of current literature and grounded theory constant comparative analysis indicated that there are three factors of employee engagement, established by Maslach (2001) and evolved through validation of other research that include job involvement, efficacy and energy. The second research question addressed by the findings, suggest that Appreciative Inquiry, when applied as a tool in organization to bring out about change, results in reported occurrences of the three engagement factors of employee engagement. Job involvement was found to be the most prevalent in reported outcomes indicating that employer's should implement an AI intervention if they seek to increase the autonomy, ownership and responsibility that their employee's feel towards their individual jobs and toward the organization. Also emerging from the analysis were other factors related to exhibited and reported employee behaviors including teamwork, communication, management support and diversity. These added benefits to employer's who look to Appreciative Inquiry as an intervention. Should all organizations abandon problem solving adopt the AI philosophy and practice? As most business experts are aware, there is never a "one-size-fits-all" approach when it comes to a human system. However, while there is still more insight and evidence needed, the information presented in these findings should encourage organizational leaders as well as organizational development scholars and practitioners to consider the AI approach to effect positive change in their culture and work environment.

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