# On the back of the napkin: How community colleges will continue to create innovation

An application for Certified Appreciative Inquiry Facilitator status
By Matthew J. Basham, Ph.D.
Matthew.Basham@wku.edu
Western Kentucky University

1.  Brief description of the organization, group, or community you worked with.

    The Community College Futures Assembly has served as a "Think-Tank" and showcase of best practices for senior administrators in community colleges since 1996. My role is to more fully provide structure to the research component of the conference.

2.  List the names and/or category of stakeholders you included in the Core Group, the cross-section of people that helped you identify the topic and modify the Interview Guide.

    A cross-section of the assembly attended the focus groups. More than two-thirds of attendees were senior administrators, presidents, affiliate board CEO's, and board members. The remaining attendees were doctoral students at the University of Florida LEAD cohort (who also were junior administrators in community college administration.

3.  What was the positive topic that the Core Group identified for inquiry? What method did you use to help them identify the topic?

    In the past we had asked the participants to deduce the critical issues facing community colleges. This year, with the Appreciative Inquiry Training, instead we chose a more positive spin on asking this research question. Several research questions were incorporated into the research design and this document will focus upon the primary question regarding the critical issues. For the actual questions we created an amalgamation using Nystrom (author of "On the Back of the Napkin), Shapiro (The Comeback: How Innovation will Restore the America Dream—the keynote speaker), and Torres (author of the AI protocol: Discovering the strengths of our community and our leaders.) The complete package (approved by the Western Kentucky University Institutional Review Board is attached). In brief, we used a modified 4-cycle appreciative inquiry design and used a chess game as an ice-breaker to make the participants relaxed and to set the stage for the research. Then, in part, we asked them in three different ways: small changes, bold changes, and top trends and developments for creating innovation in community college administration. These were the questions for the focus of this portion of the research. Later, at the congregated assembly we gave 100 of 140 individuals the ability to select from the top 6-7 brainstormed items what they felt was the top issue. Those results are contained in the power point attached.

4.  Attach or include the modified Interview Guide they used, i.e., the Generic Interview Guide slightly modified for the positive topic of the inquiry.

    It is attached.

5.  What method of interviews did people use to inquire into exceptionally positive moments, face to face paired interviews, or some other way?

    For this study we used three groups of 12-15 individuals in a focus group setting. Then voting by the assembly took place a couple of days later. A secondary research outcome used individual interviews.

6.  Attach or include a list of the Life-Giving Forces (what they MOST wanted to create MORE of) that the group identified in the stories they shared.

    Results from the focus groups are attached.

7.  Attach or include the Provocative Proposition(s) the group or organization created from the LGFs.

    Results from the focus groups are attached.

8.  Attach or include the organization, group or community's Strategic Intentions and the individual Commitments, Offers, and Requests that were created to realize the Provocative Proposition(s).

    The strategic intentions includes publication in a number of community college-related journals on the entire data set (Community College Journal of Research and Practice), on the workforce development data set (Catalyst), on the planning, governance, and finance data set (Dispatch), and on the instructional programming and services data set (Community College Journal). Results will also be shared with the State Board Directors (Community College Chancellors and State Directors), the American Association of Community Colleges affiliate boards (AACC), the Association of Community College Trustees and other boards.

    We did conduct a modified design "on the fly." We asked the participants to place a "parting shot" on one of the easel pads on the way out to describe "I will be most proud of (my) community college/administration when _____." We only had 7 of 45 complete this (bright sunny day in Orlando…can you blame them?).  On the day of the assembly voting we asked the same question and why they chose a career in community college administration. That data is contained in an Excel spreadsheet. There is a great amount of information there too. Some of the participants followed the voting, but some went way off topic (since they were not in the focus group)…thus, I feel we have found another technique to enhance the research framework.

    My take from the conference data: I feel community college administrators are suffering from an identity crisis, in many ways like a pubescent teenager…on one hand, there is data to suggest growing up into full-grown colleges expecting faculty to perform research and bring in grant monies (the first time we ever had all three groups say funding is a critical issue) while, on the other hand, there is data to suggest community colleges need to pull back and go back to the way it was…to stay true to the mission and purpose of community colleges. This interesting dichotomy is going to be explored a bit more in depth in the questionnaire as well. This data also seems to supersede the critical issues discussion, adding more depth to the discussion.

9.  Impact or Results: What organizational, group or community attitude, process or structure changes have people already made as they move toward realizing the Provocative Proposition(s)? What progress have people made toward their Strategic Intentions or Initiatives or Pilot Projects? What stories of success can you share?

    We received such positive feedback on the research this year as being such a sound plan with such tremendous results. As such, we received personal invitations to replicate the research with a conference of program chairs/deans (Academic Chairs International), community college researchers (Council for the Study of Community Colleges), board members (Association of Community College Trustees). We plan on presenting the top issues and letting the groups select their top issues (as we have in the past). This will provide us with gap-analysis data between groups of community college administrators. We expect to write-up the methodology for submission to the American Educational Research Association journal: Education Researcher later this fall.

10. What will you do to ensure that people continue to move toward realizing the Provocative Proposition(s)? How will you help them gather stories of success? How will you help them celebrate? How will you, as the AI Facilitator, support their ongoing success?

There is another component to the project which is on-going: individual interviews. The doctoral students at the University of Florida have set appointments over the next two months to conduct the individuals from the conference who were presenting on their best practice in community college administration. Early results from a few interviews are more than positive. Such that, a questionnaire is being developed for distribution to senior administrators and faculty of the 300 community colleges in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) district (Texas to Florida up to Kentucky). As editor of the online journal I am afforded direct connection via a listserv to the presidents of these institutions. The goal is to capture the most provocative propositions from these administrators and stories of positivity before they retire. The end use will be in community college leadership programs throughout the country.

11. What did you wish for in the inquiry? What did you learn from the inquiry about yourself and your facilitation? What was your "personal best" experience related to facilitating the Inquiry?

I was personally looking for another way to deduce the critical issues without saying critical issues. I believe the Torres protocol worked very well and I am excited to see the personal interview data returned as well. I am happy to report that I feel it went very well and I hope this project really helps advance the possibilities of research methodologies using appreciative inquiry in community colleges.

12. Have you received permission from the "client" or "clients" to tell us their story? In other words, does Company of Experts.net have permission to share this story with others? If not, who would COE.net need to contact to receive permission?

Yes, the participants have consented to the data and outcomes being presented in any fashion.

# Individual Interview Protocols

Take 20-30 minutes with a conference participant. Feel free to choose a comfortable location.

Since our focus is also upon innovation we will be using the interview protocol a "Culture of Innovation" by Kate Tucker.
http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/practice/toolsQuestionsDetail.cfm?coid=13185
plus a few additions if needed (where noted).

**Introduction to interviewee:**
Everyone's organization culture is unique and special in some way. Every organization has its patterns and stories—the 'way we do things around here"—that seem to stick with the organization forever, through thick and thin.

High performing organizations are different that many because they consistently create cultures, which support people in doing their jobs effectively, innovatively and enjoyably. They consciously develop these cultures in ways that are strategically different or better than their competitors.

When approached with this kind of consciousness, an organization's culture becomes a strategic advantage. It helps attract and retain empowered and skilled employees who contribute to the excellence of their products and services in innovative and different ways. Employees feel empowered to be different, to make mistakes and to take risks with confidence.

1. When you think back to your beginning with [community colleges], what were your most positive and powerful first impressions?
2. What attracted you to [community colleges]?
3. Without being humble, what do you value most about yourself, your work, and the expertise you bring to your clients?  What do you value most about [community colleges] in supporting your success? (from IMC)
4. When you think of organizations that you consider innovative, what is it about what you know about their culture that makes them attractive to you?
5. How can we create more of that quality within our culture?
6. What trends and changes do you see in the world outside of [community colleges] that excite you and give you a sense of confidence in the possibilities for a future culture of innovation, lived by all employees?
7. [if this was 2022] looking back from [2022] describe to me what the history of a culture of innovation in [community colleges] looks like and how has it taken us far beyond the competition, really setting us apart as a true world-leading organization?

Summary Sheet:
Please summarize the key highlights from the interviews here, as follows:
1. Was there a "quotable quote" that came out of your interview? If so, then please write it here.
2. What was the most exciting, positive story that came out of your interview? Please summarize it here.
3. Please write down at least three themes or highlights (no more than three words each) that you have noticed during the interview.