

Seeking What Gives Us Life

What are our strengths? What delights us?

Practicum Submitted By: Audrey Seymour

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Appreciative Inquiry Practicum Client Project

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1. Contact Info

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2. AIFT Training – Reno Nevada, August 16-19, 2011

3. Organization/group/community – Speaking Circles International, Certified Facilitator community – otherwise known as SCI

- a. Due to the geographically diverse nature of this group, and the limit to how much people can comfortably spend time on the phone, I have divided up the process into a series of summits covering the Discovery (post interviews), Dream and Design phases of the process. The intention is to gather inspiration and momentum as we move from summit to summit.
- b. Since this is a membership organization rather than a corporation, the time commitment up front was more of an issue folks expressed hesitation about when it was an unknown to them. People were more comfortable committing on a summit-by-summit basis rather than signing up for the whole series.

4. Names and/or category of stakeholders included in Core Group, the cross-section of people helping identify the topic and modify the Interview Guide

- a. Building the team – I sent out an invitation to all Facilitators, and the team was formed out of those who responded. We originally had one other Facilitator from the US who had been on the Advisory Team I earlier formed, but she had to leave both teams due to other work commitments. I was very happy with the regional cross-section as well as the expertise-level cross-section that was gathered on the core team.
- b. This team served as the champions, and in particular John Dawson was the champion for the Europe Speaking Circle community, which is a tightly knit sub-community. Doreen and I were the champions in the U.S.
- c. Core team meetings, see details below
- d. Core team members:
 - i. Doreen Hamilton, Training Director, USA
 - ii. Audrey Seymour, former Vice President and AI consultant, USA
 - iii. John Dawson, Trainer, UK
 - iv. Sally Forman, recent Facilitator, New Zealand

5. Positive topic that Core Group identified for inquiry? What method used to identify the topic?

- a. To uncover the life-giving forces of the people and the Speaking Circles International (SCI) organization itself. What we are seeking is what gives us life – what are our strengths, what delights us. As we gather these stories – we will uncover positive possibilities for our future.
- b. We identified the topic through discussion.
- c. There was an issue that made this process perfect – facilitator license renewals were down, and several expressed frustration at the hierarchical nature of the organization and licensing process.

6. Attach/include the modified interview guide (see below)

7. What method of interviews used (e.g. face-to-face paired interviews, etc.)

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- a. We used paired interviews. Since the facilitator community is international, there is a mixture of phone, video Skype, and face-to-face interviews.
8. **Attach/include list of Life-Giving Forces** (what they most wanted to create more of) that were identified in the shared stories. (*see below*)
9. **Attach/include the Top Wishes** they expressed in the Discovery Summit: (*see below*)
10. **Process Note concerning the summits:**
 - a. Due to the globally distributed nature of this membership organization, I ended up creating summits that combined asynchronous online participation plus live teleconferences.
 - b. In the summits we made heavy use of “Speaking Circle” turns, imbued in the culture of this community, giving everyone equally timed turns to speak while in Relational Presence about what moved them, inspired them, both in what they saw/read/heard from others as well as their own direct experience of whatever our topic was. Therefore my session materials would not be directly translatable for general use.
 - c. The dreams and wishes from the Discover Summit, plus background information about AI, and desired outcomes for the entire project as well as the next summits, were captured and kept on a shared online workspace (titanpad.com).
 - d. In preparation for the Dream/Design Summit, the full membership was invited to listen to the audio file of the Discover Summit and read all the themes and wishes we had gathered online. Then in specially prepared sections of the shared online workspace, they were instructed and invited to start writing provocative possibility statements based on the themes/wishes, plus possible proposed projects that would further the vision statements.
 - e. Then during the live teleconference portion of the Dream/Design Summit, participants were invited to either bring a new provocative vision in the moment or comment on one they read that impacted them. The new vision statements were collected by an appointed scribe on the workspace.
 - f. During a break I grouped the visions into categories.
 - g. After the break the group had an opportunity to place 3 asterisks on any of the categories that moved them the most. Then I reordered the categories on the workspace putting the top-vote-getters on top. This felt like a good place to stop and bring the Dream work we had done back to the larger community for comment and feedback.
 - h. Then to start the Design work, participants took turns sharing either a project they were excited about designing, or one they read on the workspace and wanted to participate in.
 - i. Before closing turns, we ended by placing asterisks on those projects we felt would further the top vote-getting visions.
 - j. In the Dream phase, we gathered more input to narrow down the vision statements, but it was clear that global recognition was the top category.
 - k. In the Design phase, we gathered volunteers for the various proposed projects and will see which ones will be sustainable.
11. **Attach/include the Provocative Proposition(s)** they created from the Life-Giving Forces and wishes. (*See below.*)
12. **Attach/include the Strategic Intentions** the group or organization developed to realize the Provocative Propositions they created. (*See below.*)

13. **Impact or Results:** what group attitude process or structure changes have people made as a move toward realizing the provocative propositions? What progress have committed toward their strategic intentions or initiatives or pilot projects? What stories of success can you share?
- a. Members reported that the community is absolutely stronger than before the appreciative inquiry process. Facilitators got to reconnect with others they had not spoken to since their training days. There is a growing perspective shift in the facilitator community that appreciative inquiry helps them walk their talk and their value of positive appreciation as a way of life. There had been a number of frustrated facilitators and annual renewals were decreasing every year. It's been turned around, facilitators are reporting and acting more empowered, starting collaborative projects, and even previously retired facilitators are returning to the community because so many exciting things are happening.
 - b. I hear people talking about continuing to develop and grow an AI mindset in the organization. As John Dawson said, not all of the ideas we gathered will be picked up, but the approach itself has definitely been picked up.
 - c. We heard that they learned what kind of questions to ask and have a desire to keep asking them. For example, the European facilitator community has taken on the inquiry of "How can we be better facilitators?" which actually arose out of a problematic incident. It was a very different approach than creating an ethics committee that would review the situation and set new policy. Instead we have a whole community discussion about how to create more of what they want in the behavior and skill level of facilitators!
 - d. The appreciative inquiry prospective was a perfect fit to the culture of Speaking Circles, where the audience comments on the essential qualities of the person up front rather than any critiques about what could be improved in their speaking skills. One of the main points of the Speaking Circles approach to public speaking is to evoke the best in each person's natural radiant presence, and trust that as people are more comfortable sharing their passion and being their authentic selves in front of a room, their speaking presence will continue to get more compelling. Artificial techniques concerning gestures and voice variation become unnecessary when people are fully alive while speaking. One of the most fun comments that came out of the first summit was "Oh I get it, appreciative inquiry is just giving the organization a Speaking Circle turn!" They really got it and took to it wonderfully.
 - e. (See below for notes on our projects and initiatives)
14. **What will you do to ensure that people continued to move toward realizing the provocative propositions?** How you help them gather stories of success? How will you help them celebrate? How will you as facilitator support their ongoing success?
- a. I have an ongoing consulting contract with SCI for facilitator programs, which I've been doing for several years, originally as Vice President of SCI.
 - b. The core team has become the new Advisory Team for SCI, so we have committed to meeting throughout the year and keeping this process alive, doing it even better next year.
 - c. At the Discovery Summit the group has had as a top vote-getter in the "top wishes" category that there be more regular meetings and opportunities to collaborate. This was reinforced at the Dream/Design Summit with a proposal that was tied for the most votes: "Monthly global (or regional) teleconference with revolving hosts where the host

keynotes with a 5-10 minute share on topic/theme of choice and then facilitates sharing turns and discussion.”

- d. Between that and my passion for holding people accountable to their aspirations, I will be continuing to steer the facilitator community through emails and phone conferences. Previously I set up a monthly call for facilitators with founder Lee Glickstein, and attendance had been dropping off. After my first orientation call about the AI project, his attendance doubled. So I imagine continuing to bring the topics that have arisen to the monthly calls, and depending on the results of the summit series, we may have new structures as well to support the success of both the organization and its members.
15. **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?
- a. What I initially wished for myself was to gain enough confidence in this work to market myself as a consultant doing organizational change work with methods including AI. For the organization, my wish was to engage the SCI Facilitator community to step up to shared ownership, and to inspire the founder to loosen the hierarchical control he had over the growth and direction of the organization. I wanted to heal the split that was starting to grow from frustrated facilitators who wanted more collaborative contribution to the evolution of the work.
 - b. I was able to reinforce how much I love this work, how naturally AI comes to me. I was always good as a software development team leader at bringing out the best of my team, and with this training I get to build on that strength and fine tune what I do as a consultant. I received lots of spontaneous positive feedback and appreciation for what I brought and did, and how I did it. For example, after one summit meeting a core team member wrote: “Audrey, your strength in guiding us yesterday was wonderful. I felt you on purpose as well as being light hearted so that we could enjoy creating together.” And after a community email announcing the next summit meeting another core team member wrote: “Love it Audrey. And what comes across so powerfully is the momentum of your leadership in this process, I feel the movement in what you have written, which is very exciting. You are dynamic, and your commitment to bring the rich gifts of this project is abundant.” I came away confident that I am good at this and can really serve people, really have a significant impact on the evolution of an organization. It’s very exciting!
 - c. My personal best experience I think was the breakthrough I experienced when leading the Discover Summit. I felt powerful, strong, present, confident, in the flow, and it hit me solidly in my bones that I am good at this. It just felt so natural, I felt in love with the whole process. It no longer felt like an abstract idea but a living breathing thing I loved to do, to be in there in the moment optimizing the human system and bringing out each person’s personal best at the same time. 2nd place best experience was during the Dream/Deliver Summit when I changed the process midstream. The first sharing turn in the Dream process led to such great possibility statements that I dropped the 2nd go-round and just opened up the floor for any additional thoughts. Then I added a shorter sharing turn to express how they were feeling about all the visions we had written, how they were impacted. I love the confidence to adapt to what the group needs rather than sticking with an initial agenda.
16. Have you received **permission from the client organization** to tell us their story? Does Company of Experts have permission to share the story with others?

- a. I have permission to tell you about the story for my Certification project. My sense is that we want to track the results over time, perhaps a year, to really be able to tell a good story. It feels like the new way of thinking is just getting launched, and I'd like to be able to tell the story of more tangible results.

Appreciative Inquiry Interview Guide

2/25/12

Purpose of the Community Inquiry: to uncover the life-giving forces of the people and the organization itself. What we are seeking is what gives us life – what are our strengths, what delights us. As we gather these stories – we will uncover positive possibilities for our future.

"Your responses can be anonymous if you wish, but the Appreciative Inquiry core team invites you to share your authentic truth with our community. It will give much better outcome if we can be open with each other."

1. Best transformational or deep learning experience ever: Tell me a story about the best transformational or deep learning experience that changed the way you see the world or who you are as a person. Describe how you saw things before and after the experience. Over what period of time did it happen? How did it happen - what were the conditions that supported the change? What made it an exceptionally positive experience?

2. Best experience with *Speaking Circles*: Tell me a story about the best times that you've had with *Speaking Circles* work. Looking at your entire experience, recall a time you felt most alive, most involved, most excited about your involvement. What made it an exciting experience? Who was involved? Describe the event in detail.

3. Values: Let's talk for a moment about some things you value or appreciate deeply.

- What do you value most about yourself as a person?
- What do you value most about your work with *Speaking Circles*?
- When you are feeling best about work, what about the task itself do you value?
- Thinking wider now - What do you value about our organisation?

4. Core values: What do you experience as the core values of your organisation? Give some examples of how your experience those values.

5. Contribution: What is the single most important thing that your connection with *Speaking Circles* has contributed to your life? To the world?

6. Three wishes: What three wishes would you make to heighten the vitality and the health of this organisation?

(Take notes for the other person and capture highlights of what you heard on the Summary Sheet.)

CORE TEAM MEETINGS:

1. 2/4/12: Initial planning meeting to design process in general and questionnaire specifically, with action item of trying the interview with each other
2. 2/24/12: Reporting on our experience with the interviews, and adapted the questionnaire accordingly. Each of the 4 of us took a group, a subset of the facilitators, to usher through the interviews and answer questions, then receive the results
3. 4/13/12: Progress report on interviews, brainstorming how to improve it for everyone
4. 4/21/12: Progress report on interviews and design of discovery summit
5. 5/3/12: Progress report on interviews and practicing/tweaking discovery summit design
6. 6/14/12: Debrief of our discovery summit on 6/7/12, planning for the dream/design summit
7. 8/23/12: Debrief of our dream/design summit on 7/20/12, and of the process so far
8. 9/13/12: Report from John back from Europe Facilitator Day, their feedback on the AI project, our reflections on what we achieved and what's next. Our own celebration!

EXAMPLE Core Team Meeting Design:

SCI Appreciative Inquiry Project

Enhancing the Facilitator Community

February 4, 2012

12 Noon Pacific Time

Skype call length: 1 1/2 hour

Meeting Intents:

1. To adapt the standard AI questionnaire which will form the basis of our community inquiry, and to choose our methodology of rolling out the inquiry
2. To interpret the results and choose our methodology of sharing the results
3. To decide how to harness the energy and ideas to make use of the results, engaging and enhancing the community

Orientation/Preparation:

1. Intro at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwGNZ63hj5k>
2. Optional second video at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF2RV_C0XuE
3. See document titled ““Appreciative Inquiry SC Eur Fac Day 2011” – *open before we start*
4. Optional document titled “Crafting Appreciative Questions”
5. Log into our online workspace

Agenda

When	What	How
12 Noon (7 min)	Welcome	Hello and check-in – 1 minute turn each
12:07pm (3 min)	Agenda	Agenda for today: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review why we’re doing this – engaging Facs, Audrey’s certification project, what calls to you about this project?• Review background about Appreciative Inquiry – Audrey and John (perhaps a case story?) (Did everyone look at materials?)• Choose our key topic/intent for inquiry to orient our questionnaire design – what do we want more of?• Choose our methodology (pros and cons) – paired interviews, small groups, survey, etc. Any suggested additions or changes to our agenda today?
12:10pm (10 min)	Why are we doing this?	1-2 minute turns each, starting with Audrey and John (Fac Day and now)
12:20pm (10 min)	AI Background	Audrey and John

12:30pm (25 min)	Our Questionnaire	See titanpad <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we like the inquiry topic/intent used at Europe Facilitator Day 2011, or do we want to adapt it? • This is a standard interview guide, do we want to adapt the wording of the standard 5 questions in any way? • Summary sheets to capture the essence of the interview
12:55pm (25 min)	Inquiry Process	Let's choose how we want to ask these questions of the community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paired interviews – most effective – 30 minutes? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What amount of coverage would we aim for? ○ How shall we recruit participants? ○ Each person who receives an interview then does one? (Then only one hour commitment all around.) • Or, we each lead a small group discussion to capture stories? • John's additions • Other options?
1:20p (5 min)	Logistics Next steps	Questions?
1:25p (5 min)	Closing	Closing turn/reflections: 30 sec to 1 minute each

LIFE-GIVING FORCES: Discovery Summit 6/7/12:

- a. Transformation – including facilitating transformation and personal transformation through facilitating
- b. Authenticity
- c. Love - creating a field of love - we are agents of change who hold a sacred space that facilitates love globally
- d. We, not me (power of collective)
- e. Deeper level of presence
- f. Compassion
- g. Openness

TOP WISHES: Discovery Summit 6/7/12:

- a. more regular calls, meetings, to learn from each other and cocreate
 - i. sharing course structures
 - ii. gatherings/conferences once a year online or in person to share work and cocreate to bring out into community.
 - iii. formats for facilitators to connect globally more regularly and collaboratively
- b. greater financial success for facilitators
 - i. find way to develop SC financially to make living from it
 - ii. business development training to share
 - iii. promotion, expand work through internet, marketing, products, getting word out, how do we make much larger offering
- c. branding, branding, branding of Speaking Circle (we can go into any city in the world and find a Speaking Circle)
 - i. spreading visibility through social networks
- d. clear vision and message for where we are going (AI process is helping)

PROVOCATIVE POSSIBILITY STATEMENTS - PROPOSALS: (*what would be a stretch for us, taking us beyond how we do business now?*)

Provocative possibility statements are written in the present tense AS IF they already were happening (hence the provocative part of the name)

(NOTE: based on the culture of SCI, it was decided to not narrow this down further but keep all the voices in the mix)

GLOBAL RECOGNITION:

- "We are a collaborative organization that is known globally for facilitating authentic presence in front of a group, with facilitators in every country in the world."
- SC is everywhere. People know they can walk into a safe environment of transformation.
- We are globally visible and recognised for being the centre of presence and connection.
- The organisation is known globally for its transformative process.
- Speaking Circles is part of business everywhere.
- We fundamentally change people's lives by allowing them to fully take their place in the world and by doing that we create magical new possibilities in their lives. And we are so good at doing this we are accepting the Nobel peace prize for presence work around the world.
- "Speaking Circles is a global collaborative of visionary and pragmatic facilitators providing transformational practices, including Relational Presence, for individuals seeking greater authenticity, presence, and clarity in their professional and personal lives."
- We were the undiscovered miracle and now we are the discovered miracle.

LEADERSHIP: We are a thriving organisation where everyone feels heard and they can influence, contribute and lead so people are excited about being part of the organisation.

STRATEGIC INTENTIONS:

Community Projects:

- Monthly global (or regional) teleconference with revolving hosts where the host sometimes keynotes with a 5-10 minute share on topic/theme of choice and then facilitates sharing turns and discussion, and alternately the host facilitates an inquiry based on an AI-style question. Doreen Hamilton and I have taken on this project for next year.
- Brainstorming team of individuals collaborating on the PR (public relations) possibilities – 2 volunteers, one from the U.S. and one from Europe, will take this on once the new website is complete (see below)
- In their recent Facilitator Day (now a twice-yearly event), Speaking Circles Europe community has taken on the inquiry “What can we do to become better facilitators?”
- Mentoring program for new facilitators – in the planning stage, will start in Europe as the two volunteers are from there and it fits into the inquiry theme above

SCI Projects:

- Relational Voice training – founder Lee Glickstein to facilitate monthly, codeveloping with Facilitators, for applying Relational Presence in teleconference settings rather than in person – started and ongoing
- New website that has a more globally friendly brand, with individual profiles for all facilitators – Worldwide portal and SC Europe is complete, North America and Asia/Pacific in the planning stage