



# The University of Bradford Institutional Repository

<http://bradscholars.brad.ac.uk>

This work is made available online in accordance with publisher policies. Please refer to the repository record for this item and our Policy Document available from the repository home page for further information.

To see the final version of this work please visit the publisher's website. Access to the published online version may require a subscription.

**Citation:** Lavis VJ, Elliott C and Cowburn M (2017) Exploring the response to diversity and equality in English prisons. In: Brooks J and King N (Eds.) Applied Qualitative Research in Psychology. London: Palgrave.

**Copyright statement:** © 2017 Palgrave Macmillan. Full-text reproduced with permission from Palgrave Macmillan. This extract is taken from the author's original manuscript and has not been edited. The definitive, published, version of record is available here:

<https://he.palgrave.com/page/detail/applied-qualitative-research-in-psychology-joanna-brooks/?sf1=barcode&st1=9781137359155>.

## **Appreciative Inquiry for Research**

**Exploring the response to diversity and equality in English prisons: an appreciative inquiry.**

## INTRODUCTION: APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY METHODS

Qualitative researchers, perhaps most notably those working within a participatory action framework, have long argued that research should actively engage and involve members of the communities about whom knowledge is to be generated or whose lives it will impact (Lewin, 1951; 1952; Whyte 1991; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2007). Such calls have prompted a significant shift towards the development of methodologies that seek to generate knowledge ‘with’ communities (Fine et al, 2004; Israel, et al 1998) rather than research ‘for’ or ‘on’ communities. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) typifies such inclusive, collaborative approaches to the generation of knowledge whilst simultaneously being focussed explicitly towards facilitating enhancement; whether this is personal, collective or organisational. This quality makes the approach ideal for use in any research site characterised by an existing collective or organisational framework ; public sector (e.g. NHS, Prison Service, Education, Local Councils), private sector (e.g. telecommunications, petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals) and third sector (e.g. religious organisations and charities). We discuss in this chapter an example which illustrates how we have adapted appreciative inquiry methods to facilitate our research in prisons. Before considering our case study in detail we illustrate some of the foundations and principles which underlie AI.

### Doing Appreciative Inquiry

AI is best represented as a ‘family’ of techniques and processes which share the same positively framed values-based principles. Its uniqueness lies in its departure from traditional problem based approaches to research and development by acknowledging the importance of positivity through identifying an organisations’ *‘energy for change’* (Elliott, 1999:2). This inclination toward the positive is often referred to as the ‘heliotropic principle’; this principle suggests that just as plants in the natural world orient towards the sun which sustains and nurtures their growth, so people also incline towards that which energises and sustains them. AI aims to co-facilitate the generation of this energy by identifying an organisation’s self-reflective peak performances or historical ‘best’; in short its strengths and then imagining and designing how this best could become more frequent and prevalent (Elliott, 1992, 43).

Originating as a methodology to aid organisations to change, develop or enhance their effectiveness (Cooperider and Srivastva, 1987; Cooperider and Whitney, 1999) AI has since been applied to a number of other challenging problem areas including; transforming healthcare settings (Carter, 2007), conflict resolution (Larson and Tian, 2005), sustainable development (Elliott, 1999) and researching equality and diversity and the quality of prison life (Cowburn and Lavis, 2013; Liebling Price and Elliott, 1999; Liebling, Elliott and Arnold 2001). In this chapter we draw a distinction between AI as an organisational change process (facilitated by an AI practitioner in conjunction with a workgroup of stakeholders from the organisation) and the utilisation and adaptation of AI methods to generate research knowledge which guides actions that produce real and lasting impact.

AI offers the researcher an organising structure which can be harnessed to formulate the research design. This organising structure is typically focussed on four basic elements; *discovery, dreaming, designing* and *destiny* (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987; Elliott, 1999). However, as we have

already acknowledged, since AI is a family of methods the researcher may need to adapt these phases to suit the nature and purpose of their inquiry or the participant group with which they are working. Thus researchers may encounter the use of slightly different terms to represent these elements amongst exponents of the method. Reed (2007) for example replaces *destiny* with *delivery*, shifting the focus from 'sustainability' to 'planning for action'. Other researchers, for example Stavros and Hinrichs (2009) have adapted AI introducing a fifth 'D' – *defining*, which acts as a precursor to the other elements and focuses on *defining* the target of the inquiry when used in a business context. When AI takes a research rather than organisational change focus (as in our research), this fifth D is commonly already present in the form of the research questions or aims. Hence, the structure we outline here is for conducting AI research based on the 4 D model.

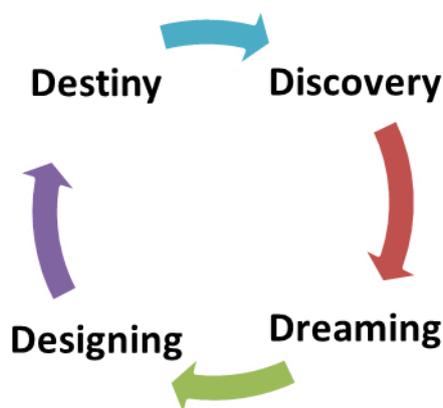


Fig. 1. Appreciative inquiry 4 stage structure.

- *Discovery* is the start of the inquiry. Here the goal of the researcher is to identify 'best' experiences and 'peak' performance within the organisation rather than commencing with a problem to be solved. Understanding the underlying elements or conditions which enable or promote peak performance allows them to be replicated or applied to new or developmental areas of the organisation. It is important to be clear that although this element aims at identifying best experience, it also inevitably gathers important information about experiences that are not 'best' or inhibit peak performance.
- *Dreaming* moves the inquiry on and also changes the focus. In this phase research participants are invited to imagine how the subject under inquiry (in the case of the worked example in this chapter, the response to diversity in prisons) might be improved. *Dreaming* enables participants to link their 'best' experience to how things may be further enhanced thereby highlighting elements and issues which are important and energising to them personally.
- *Designing* aims to move from the abstraction of the dream to a more concrete reality. Research participants are actively engaged in identifying practices, relationships, resources and processes which might be necessary to support the ideas outlined in *dreaming* and articulated as 'best' in *discovery*.

- *Destiny* is the final phase of AI and concentrates on what is needed to maintain and sustain the changes that have been dreamed about and designed. This phase is an important factor in maximising the potential of the process to have enduring future impact.

These four elements form the underlying the organising framework on which the researcher can build their data collection and analysis strategies. We outline the process by which this can be achieved below:

1. First, the researcher considers who the stakeholders relevant to the research are. This stage is significant to the ultimate success of the research and its capacity to be impactful. Representatives of all stakeholders relevant to the research topic should be included as participants in the research design. In our case study we review later, stakeholders included prisoners (the 'service user'), prison staff (prison officers, non-operational and partnership agency staff), prison managers (including initial level and more senior managers) and the Governing Governor (the person ultimately in charge of the prison).
2. The researcher then convenes a steering group which draws together representatives from each of these stakeholder groups. The steering group has several important functions;
  - it is a resource to the researcher generating a network of collaborative partners who can facilitate access to different areas of the organisation and to information
  - the group helps to equalised power relations between stakeholders and promotes transparency of the research aims, process and findings to all the stakeholder groups
  - it provides a mechanism through which the researcher comes to understand and take account of those things known to insiders that the researcher, as an outsider, cannot know
  - over time steering group members become advocates for the research and it is often within this group that the 'energy' for change begins to emerge first (Cowburn and Lavis, 2013) . In some research studies it is necessary to have more than one such group – as we will illustrate later in our case study example.
3. The researcher next considers what methods of data collection are most appropriate to the research aims and the organisation in which the research takes place. This consideration may be theoretically or pragmatically driven. Traditionally, the AI approach is mobilised around one to one interviews, small workshops or focus groups. However, a number of variants have emerged condensing the process into one or two day events or 'summits', often involving large numbers of people (see for example Ludmena et al 2003). AI also lends itself to the use of multiple methods of data collection enabling the researcher to draw upon a range of existing techniques or develop new activities and tasks relevant to the participant group or organisation. The use of multiple methods with multiple stakeholders has the advantage of enhancing confidence in the robustness, comprehensiveness and quality of the research offering the potential to triangulate method and or source (Patton, 1999; Mays and Pope, 2000). In our worked example we illustrate the use of multiple methods of data collection in

the form of appreciative ethnography, interviews, survey and focus groups and the development of two specific tasks.

4. Once the researcher has identified relevant methods of data collection they can attend to the development of the protocols they will use to generate data with the participants. The protocol should be oriented by the goals or aims of the research and is constituted by a number of generative appreciatively framed questions. It is important when using AI to draw the distinction between a 'protocol' and the more familiar 'schedule' that is commonly developed to guide interviews or focus groups. A schedule implies a framework of questions to be asked within a more or less structured process (see for example King and Horrocks, 2010). In contrast, a protocol consists of a series of appreciatively framed generative questions which are designed to elicit a storied or narrativised account. The creation of the questions is therefore a key component of a successful AI.

- Appreciatively framed questions can be characterized as prompting participants to retrieve memories of their historical best experiences. They aim to uncover both facts and emotions associated with this peak performance enabling understanding of what happened and how this was experienced by the person. The appreciative question should also excite the participant, generating interest and enthusiasm for the future and its possibilities.
- Enabling these appreciative questions to be generative means moving away from some of the more conventional, often directive starting points for question development. By that we mean avoiding questions which begin with 'what, how, when etc'. The generative question aims to prompt the participant to provide a story about their experience that is told in their own words and in their own way. In this sense the approach to question development is similar to that adopted in narrative inquiry (see for example Wengraph, 2001; King and Horrocks 2010)
- These appreciative generative questions are organized to correspond to the 4D elements for example;

*Discovery: 'Tell me about a point in time when the way in which this prison's procedures for dealing with reports of unfair treatment arising from [ethnicity, sexuality, age, disability] have been at their best? What do you recall as being special about that time?*

*Dreaming: 'If you had one wish for the ways in which the prison tries to ensure fairness and equal treatment for all prisoners, what would that be?*

*Designing: 'Let's talk in a little more detail about how you think the prison could go about making it possible to achieve the suggestions you have made?*

*Destiny: 'Tell me a story about a member of staff, who was regularly able to show respect to ALL prisoners. This could be a real member of staff in any prison, or it*

*could be your 'ideal' member of staff. What do you think helps the member of staff to keep being respectful?'*

5. Once the protocol is designed the researcher then employs their appreciative questions within the framework of methods they have designed for their study. For example, appreciative questions may be informally asked of participants during an observational or ethnographic<sup>1</sup> phase of research and recorded using field notes. Equally they may also be employed within the more traditional one to one interview setting or within small focus group where they can be audio recorded.

The vital component in this stage of the AI is the researchers' role in the delivery of the questions. AI is achieved through appreciative conversations rather than structured interviewing. Such conversations place the participant at the heart of the inquiry and should communicate that they are being taken seriously.

- Appreciative conversations are best thought of as a co-constructed and relational activity where the process of eliciting the story is as important as the data the story reveals. The role of the researcher is to open up a physical and interpersonal space within which the conversation can take place. Such activity is challenging and the researcher will need to be as fully present as possible. By this we mean engaging in active listening, characterised by genuine curiosity and the desire to learn something previously unknown. Becoming an effective exponent of the appreciative conversation requires energy and commitment by the researcher to hone their skills. For this reason we would recommend that those new to using the approach restrict methods of data collection to one to one modes rather than small group or focus group data collection which require an experienced facilitator.
- Remaining appreciative is perhaps the most challenging aspect of data collection. The researcher is likely to encounter some participants who are so embedded or well-practiced in a critical or problem solving world view that they find it difficult to attend to the positive. In such cases the researcher should attempt to 're-frame' the conversation toward an appreciative slant. Re-framing does not ignore negative or problem focussed responses as these are an important and valuable part of the lived experience of the participant. Elliott and Lavis (in production) argue that negative answers often reflect deeply held values that the participant is experiencing as being denied in the story they are telling. Re-framing aims to honour the negativity they experience whilst simultaneously seeking to unearth the denied value which is a route to the positive and to improving and enhancing performance. The example of the process, below, is taken from an interview with a prisoner.

#### Appreciative Question

---

<sup>1</sup> The study of a group or culture through close observation, discussion and interpretation of their daily lives, relationships & interactions.

Interviewer: *"Think back to the induction process you participated in when you first came into prison – what do you most appreciate about that process?"*

Participant: *'Nothing! - It's rubbish. I was made to feel like an idiot - ignored, patronised, mocked....."*

Re-frame of the negative answer

Interviewer: *"So, its important to you to feel valued, accepted and included...?"*

Participant: *"Yes, I suppose it is".*

Interviewer: *"Can you think of an occasion or place where you did feel accepted and included"?*

Participant: *"Yes, when I went to the workshops. The instructors couldn't have been more welcoming....it made all the difference....."*

6. The researcher may also choose to supplement appreciative conversations with other additional tasks which can elaborate any of the 4D phases. These may focus on activities that participants are required to carry out as part of their role in the organisation; thereby illuminating 'best' or 'peak' performance within a task or activity for example. Alternatively, they may use more established data collection tools; such as the PICTOR method referred to earlier in this book or the use of photographs, drawings or visual stimuli which generate discussion about either past peak performance or future orientated ideas. An example of two such tasks is reviewed in our later case study.
7. Analysis of the AI data will depend upon the specific aims and theoretical position taken by the researcher. For example, the data could be explored using one of the methods of narrative analysis (McAdams, 1993; Reissman, 2005) or Foucauldian Discursive Analysis (Willig, 2008) if this were the underlying theoretical position. However, we have found that Thematic Analysis, such as that outlined by Braun and Clarke, 2006, offers a very effective means of establishing patterns of commonality and difference within the data. In studies where additional tasks are developed to complement or enhance the appreciative conversations other additional forms of analysis may be required or possible. The researcher should also consider whether analysis is to be a singular or a group activity (Reed, 2007 provides a useful description of this issue).

Whilst Appreciative Inquiry methods can be used with any organisation, we have found they are an especially effective method when researching with organisations, situations or participant groups, where attending to the positive is something that is unfamiliar, counter intuitive or inherently difficult to achieve. Our case study example, below, illustrates this core strength.

## OUR CASE EXAMPLE

### Introduction to the study

The case we illustrate here posed significant challenges to research study. The objective was to design and test a research methodology which could explore how prisons in England and Wales respond to issues of equality and diversity<sup>2</sup> in their prisoner population. The research design needed to generate knowledge about the experience and effectiveness of this response across multiple stakeholders, including prisoners, prison staff and prison managers/governors. A further requirement was that the knowledge generated should illuminate the effectiveness of current policy, procedure and practice and illustrate how these elements could be improved, hence contributing to further development of prisons' response to diversity nationally and internationally. These objectives are being met through a series of ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) funded research projects. The first, conducted in 2009-2010, was a small scale project to design and pilot a research methodology focussing on one wing of one prison. The second, a large-scale, three year, research project (2013-2016) is currently underway to apply the methodology in three very different prisons, each accommodating diverse prisoner populations within a range of security classifications and offence and sentence types.

### Why was Appreciative Inquiry the appropriate method to use?

In seeking to design a research methodology which could achieve the desired aims and outcomes we were acutely aware that we needed to respond firstly to the requirements posed by the research environment itself. Prisons are by their very nature challenging environments. Researchers have characterised them as difficult (Bosworth, 2001), ethically complex (Dalen and Jones, 2010), emotionally turbulent and draining (Leibling, 1999), hampered by sexism (Gender and Players, 1985; Cowburn, 2007) and perhaps unsurprisingly bound up with issues of power (Giddens, 1982; Bosworth, 1999; 2005; Crewe 2007). Perhaps most challenging is their overriding remit to security and the requirement to control and constrain their population (Bosworth, 1999). Indeed, this requirement to attend to and reduce risks posed by their custodial populations and to anticipate and proactively neutralise problems generates attentiveness in prison staff, managers and prisoners to the negative. We were conscious that adopting a problem focused methodology held the potential to further highlight what is missing or denied within prison life and to create in both prisoners and prison staff unrealistic expectations about what was possible and sustainable in terms of delivering peak performance. Secondly, we had to consider that, in contrast to other research populations, one of the primary stakeholders in the research process – prisoners from diverse minorities - were already disenfranchised and not voluntarily participating in the organisation being studied. Together these issues generated a considerable challenge to the research design.

---

<sup>2</sup> The requirement to attend to equality and diversity is laid down in the Equalities Act 2010. The response to equalities in prisons is devised nationally and laid out within the Equalities Framework published in 2011 by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). However, within this broad framework each individual prison is required to develop their own local policies and procedures to promote equality and reduce discrimination in relation to race, faith, gender, sexuality, age and ability/disability, pregnancy and maternity.

However, AI is imbued with characteristics and principles which hold the potential to redress some of the challenges posed by the prison and its population. It is egalitarian, in an environment where the perspective and worldview of the powerful shape prison life; valuing the stories and experiences of all stakeholders equally. It is empowering in an institution where power incrementally decreases hierarchically from the Ministry of Justice through the Governing Governor and staff to prisoners; enabling all stakeholders to directly contribute to the creation of their own future within the system in which they live or work. AI is inclusive in an environment which is necessarily exclusionary, at the very least in terms of excluding its population from wider society; incorporating the widest possible range of stakeholders. It is also grounded, basing plans for the future in the real and achievable experiences of the past thus minimising the potential for unrealistic or unachievable goal setting (Rose, 2003). These characteristics arise from AI's social constructionist epistemological position where language is not theorised as a passive tool, employed to convey inner 'truths' or 'thoughts' about a common external reality. Rather, it is a dynamic process through which the world and our understandings of it are mutually constructed and reconstructed (Gergen, 1999). Commensurate with this worldview AI is underpinned by a critical realist ontological position. Within this paradigm there is no singular confirmable view of reality; although we may share the same environmental contexts and practices, our reality and the meanings we ascribe to it are understood, negotiated, agreed and affirmed through everyday interpersonal communication and relationship. It was the potentiality afforded by these characteristics, philosophical underpinnings and value bases that made AI such a powerful methodological choice for the current research.

## APPLYING APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY METHODS

The following section illustrates how we applied appreciative inquiry methods in the research we have described above. We consider the methods of data collection employed, particularly the two supplementary tasks and the survey element we have designed to complement the data from our appreciative conversations. We describe how we are analysing this data and how we are drawing on the data in our analysis. This section concludes with a reflection on our use of the method and what we are learning about the application of AI methods through the present research.

### Data collection with Appreciative Inquiry

The four elements of AI; *discovery, dreaming, designing and destiny*, informed four stages of data collection with a range of stakeholders, including prisoners, prison staff and prison managers. The same four phases will be carried out in each of the three prison sites, although our discussion here focuses on only one prison.

#### 1. An appreciative ethnography phase

This phase maps the relationship between the official documentation (policies and procedures) which guides the response to diverse minority groups and its relationship with the formal and informal learning economy of staff knowledge and practice. The research team, working in rotating dyadic pairs, spent 37 consecutive days in the prison from morning unlock to evening lock

up. During this time they observed prison life, talked to prisoners and prison staff and where possible participated in activities aimed at equality and diversity, such as religious services, forums and meetings.

## 2. Appreciatively framed prisoner interviews

Three members of the research team carried one to one, private interviews with 42 prisoners' representative of those who directly experience the prisons' response to diversity because of their faith, ethnicity, disability, age, sexuality, transgender or foreign national status. The interviews were split into two stages and employed appreciatively framed questions similar to those presented earlier in this paper. The first interview involved appreciative conversations focused on *discovery* of the best experiences of the prisons response to diversity and *dreaming* about how this best could become more frequent and prevalent. To stimulate appreciative conversation the second interview involved the completion of two tasks. These tasks were designed especially for the research to explore how the ideas identified in the *discovery* and *dreaming* phases could be made achievable and sustainable.

- Effectiveness of Existing Equalities Practice Task

A card was generated to represent each formal practice the prison had instituted to respond to the needs of prisoners who fell within the remit of equality and diversity. In order to discover more about prisoners experience of these current practices interviewees were asked to place each card on a grid (see figure 2) to show a) whether they were aware of the practice and b) to show how effective they though the practice was or could be.

**Task 1: which equalities practices are effective?**

	Practice heard of	Practice not heard of
Ability to practice religion/belief	Very effective	
Cultural catering	Effective	
Library	Neither	
Language line	Not effective	
Lifts & Ramps	Very ineffective	
Ok club		
COMP 1		
		Disability Aids
		A forum for my PC
		Prisoner Reps for my PC
		PIDS workers
		Learning mentors
		DIRF
		Emotional support from chaplaincy

Fig. 2 Effectiveness Task.

- Prioritisation of Dreams Task

The second task invited participants to re-visit the dreams they had generated in their own initial interview and the dreams of other prisoners on their residential wing. The purpose of the task was to understand a) how important the dreams were to prisoners from diverse minority groups as a whole and in their relevant diversity sub groups e.g. people of faith and b) how real and achievable the dreams were. Numbered cards were generated for each

statement and the participants placed each card on a matrix (see figure 3) discussing with the interviewer their views. As each card was placed the interviewer could then invite the participant to express how the idea could be designed into actuality and express whether they saw this as something real and achievable now or something that the prison could work towards as part of a future strategy. The task also facilitated appreciative conversation about how the idea could be sustained in the future thereby enabling appreciative conversation about *destiny*.

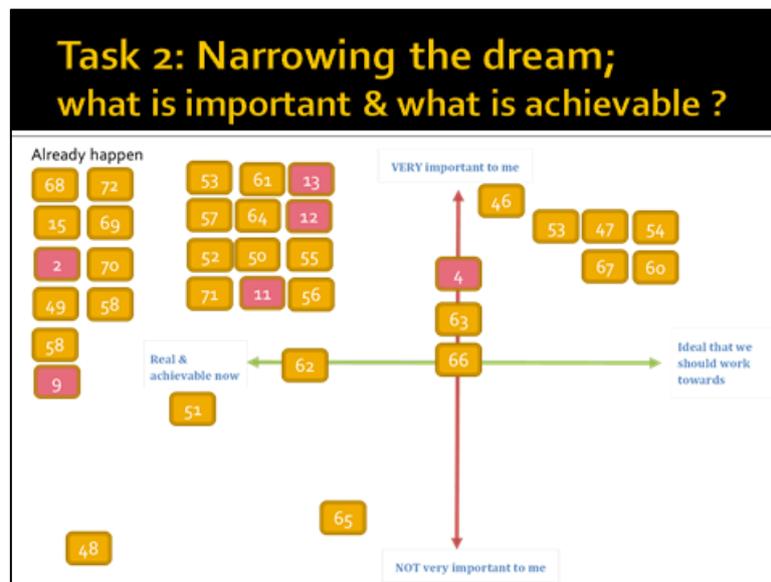


Fig. 3 Prioritisation Task

### 3. Survey to all prisoners

The survey stage of the research enables the views and experiences of the wider prisoner population about the response to diversity and equality to be captured. Consistent with the AI approach, the survey was structured to include four main sections; *discovery*, *dreaming*, *designing* and *destiny*. Each section contained a series of statement items which participants rated indicating their level of their agreement. Each statement was ideographically derived, elicited from the analysis of the one to one AI interviews (Pope and Mays, 2006; Wellings, Field and Johnson, 1994).

However, this presented a challenge as the interview data was so detailed and rich that the number of potential items which could be included in the survey was vast; with some 274 potential items identified across the four AI elements. A conventional approach to addressing these issues would have been to establish the validity of the potential items through a statistical reduction of items; including only those which factored onto one another in statistically meaningful ways (Pett, Lackey and Sullivan, 2003). However, when discussing item validation with our steering group and with prisoner advisors to the project they expressed concern that a statistical reduction might remove items which had distinct meaning for prisoners belonging to particular minority diversity groups. Ultimately, the validation of items was established by a group of prisoner advisors representing diversity sub groups completing a version of the survey

which included all the potential items. Content validity was established drawing on the principles outlined by Campanili, Martin and Rothgeb (1991). Each member was asked to rank the individual items and provide qualitative feedback on the ranking. This process enabled us to engage in a structured discussion about the representativeness of the items to the diverse minority groupings whom the prisoners represented and supported. It also established the face validity of the measure in terms of ease of use, readability and clarity (Fowler, 1995)

#### **4. Staff focus groups**

Three members of the research team carried out five appreciatively framed focus groups with small stratified samples of prison staff; officer staff, healthcare staff, staff working for partnership agencies within the prison, such as probation and restorative justice, middle managers, and senior managers. This data was supplemented by a series of informal appreciative conversations with staff as the research team observed them carrying out their daily duties. The focus groups and appreciative conversations were structured to correspond to the 4D process and included questions such as *'Take a few minutes to reflect on your career as a whole (and that might include your experiences working at other prisons). Can someone tell us about where or when they think the response to issues of diversity have worked best? and the follow on question 'What was it that made them so effective there/at that point in time?'*

Together these four stages of data collection provided insight into the response to diversity and equality in the prison as it happened, through our direct observation and as it was experienced by prisoners, staff and managers and relayed to us through appreciative conversations in the form of interviews or focus groups. This data was refined and further interrogated through the two appreciative tasks and the prisoner survey. The data revealed insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the response itself and how the response was experienced by staff and prisoners, revealing what they were proud of or experienced positively, what more was needed to enable diverse minorities to feel as respected and as well treated as others and what energised both staff and prisoners in terms of achieving this desirable future. This data was then brought together through the analysis process we outline below.

### **Analysis of data produced through Appreciative Inquiry**

In this section we provide an overview of how each type of data was recorded and analysed. Our aim is to provide context for the reader which allows them to make sense of how the data was treated prior to its intellectual interrogation which we review in the next section.

The data produced by the process discussed above took several forms.

1. The appreciative ethnography produced field notes detailing appreciative conversations and activities observed. Field notes were recorded on the day of observation and typed up as soon as possible.
2. The prisoners interviews and staff focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim

3. The survey produced quantitative ratings reflecting participants' views about statements relating to the 4Ds and open ended qualitative comments. A data set was created using SPSS data for the ratings and the qualitative comments were typed up verbatim.
4. The two appreciative tasks (the effectiveness and the prioritisation tasks) undertaken by prisoners during their second interview produced grids or matrices (see fig. 1 and 2) which can be both quantitatively and qualitatively analysed.

We brought the field notes, appreciative conversational data from the interviews and focus groups and the qualitative comments together using N-Vivo<sup>3</sup> as an organising tool.

As we noted earlier in the chapter many methods of qualitative analysis would lend themselves to the analysis of AI data. In the present study we used Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to generate codes and then themes in N-Vivo. We do not describe this method or make detailed reference to the structure, organisation or analytic methods employed with N-Vivo here as there are sources which focus on this aspect of analysis (See Braun and Clarke, 2006 and Bazley, 2009; Bazley and Jackson, 2013).

We used SPSS as a means of producing descriptive data on how survey respondents rated the statements that had been generated from the qualitative prisoner interviews. We produced descriptive statistics for the prisoner population as a whole and explored how diversity subgroups rated statements about actual practices or ideas for the future that related specifically to them.

## Illustrative findings

Since the focus of this chapter is on the application of Appreciative Inquiry techniques to develop a research methodology, we do not provide a comprehensive discussion of the findings of the equalities and diversity research we have used as our case study. Rather we focus here on the process of interrogating data arising from the AI approach, the kinds of findings it is able to produce and their utility to an organisation in terms of guiding actions that produce real and lasting impact. We also consider how the appreciative task data can be analysed to generate 'foundations for action'; by this we mean providing information in a form that enables the organisation to prioritise actions, both strategic and tactical.

### Intellectually interrogating the coded data and descriptive statistics

As with other qualitative approaches analysis of the data does not end with the coding or breaking down of the raw data into useful units of meaning. A powerful analysis must also involve interpretative activity; the drawing together and synthesis of meaning. This is especially true of AI with its epistemological roots in social constructionism where sense making is a social, dialogical and interpersonal activity (Gergen, 1999). However, this can be daunting when faced with large amounts of data from diverse sources produced by multiple methods.

---

<sup>3</sup> N-Vivo is one of several brands of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software packages (CAQDAS). This software facilitates the organisation of qualitative data sets and is particularly useful where data sets are large, produced across multiple research sites or contain multiple participant types. The package does not analyse the data for the researcher, it merely acts as an organising system for holding and enabling retrieval of the data.

Our approach to the interpretive level of analysis was to devise a process where our sense making related closely to addressing the issues the research was aiming to explore. We began by mapping our coded data sources (field notes, focus groups, interview transcripts, the effectiveness and the prioritisation task data etc) onto the research aims to see the 'layers' of data which related to a) the aims and b) the 4D structure which we used as a route to identify data which related to the present (*discovery*) and the future (*dreaming, designing and destiny*).

We then explored this data collaboratively to generate 'propositions'. Working initially individually we identified key points in the data and began to construct challenging statements or propositions which might assist us to interrogate the data further. The aim of these propositions was to move us beyond a simplistic interpretation of the data and allow us to attend to the dynamics of particular participant groups whilst not being constrained into necessarily seeing those groups as different. In this way we could attend to the specificity of data relating for example, to only disabled prisoners whilst at the same time not missing the way in which the needs of disabled prisoners mirrored those of prisoners of faith. Equally, we explored data which specifically indicated the views of different types of prison staff whilst also attending to how this mirrored or diverged from the views of prisoners. Thus our analysis became a process of generating 'propositions', exploring these within the data, critically reflecting upon what was emerging and using this to challenge our interpretations and propose alternatives. Vital to this process was the generation of research memos through which we recorded our analytic journey, noting our discussions and the decision arising from them.

### **Generating foundations for action**

A common difficulty experienced by researchers is to translate their analytic and theoretical findings into a format that has utility for the organisations they are working with and for. Too often research is conducted only for the report to 'sit on the shelf' because it is not clear to those working within the organisation how to take action which might address the knowledge that has been generated. Our application of AI principles and techniques helped us to address this difficulty and generate what we refer to as 'foundations for action'. Foundations for action aim to a) highlight for the organisation what is already working effectively and what has been experienced as effective in the past, b) indicate what improvements could form the basis of an initial short term response and which could be part of a longer term improvement based on the views of the stakeholders who participated in the research c) enable the organisation to appreciate what the likely impact of making those improvements is for the various stakeholders and d) identify where the energy to support change has been most strongly expressed and by which stakeholders.

### **Helping the organisation understand what is already working effectively.**

The generation of descriptive statistics from the effectiveness task grid (figure 2) and the survey enables the prison to see clearly how effective its current practices are being. When synthesised with the qualitative analysis of the appreciative conversation between the interviewer and prisoner when completing the task the prison can appreciate how these practices are actually experienced and in what ways they might be improved.

### **Establishing the foundations for future action**

Similarly, the prioritisation task matrix (fig. 3) can be analysed descriptively in SPSS to contextualise the ideas dreamed of by prisoners from diverse minority groups. Plotting the placement of each statement in a quadrant of the matrix reveals prisoners views about the relative importance of the ideas dreamed of. It also establishes their views about whether the ideas are achievable in the short term or more likely to be achieved as part of a longer term strategy. Grids can be plotted to analyse and compare the priorities of diversity sub groups or by residential location or functional area (for example education or chaplaincy). Synthesising these grids with the qualitative analysis of the appreciative conversations between the interviewer and the prisoner when completing the task provides weight and depth about why these issues are important to prisoners & what impact they will have on improving respect & feeling fairly treated. It also reveals prisoners views about how these ideas could be put into action (*designing*) and sustained (*destiny*).

Cross referencing this composite data with the analysis arising from the appreciative conversations with staff in the focus groups adds further depth to the emerging picture, allowing consideration of where staff and prisoner views converge and diverge.

### **Identifying the energy for change**

Together this layering of the data from each of the participant sources and each phase of the research enables the researcher to offer an interpretation of where the 'energy for change' is strongest. The selection of ideas that are considered most important and easily achievable where staff and prisoner views converge allows the improvement process to begin with consensus. This is not to suggest that those ideas which are less easily achieved or where views diverge can be ignored, but rather that beginning with consensus on issues that are viewed by all stakeholders to offer improvement enables .....

### **Generating a plan for future action**

When synthesised, the analysis arising from the AI process provides the foundations for an action plan which can address the issues under investigation (see fig. 4) in the present case - the response to Equality and Diversity.

## Reflections on using Appreciative Inquiry Methods

The AI methodology presented in this chapter is an emergent and developing approach. As we indicated at the outset of the chapter it is currently being applied in a three year project which spans three different types of prison and prisoner populations. A key aspect of this project is to explore how the methodology can be adapted for use in different research sites and contexts. For example, where a prisoner population is relatively static a research team could deliver all the stage 1 interviews, elicit discovery and dreaming statements for the effectiveness and prioritisation tasks and then return to complete the stage 2 interviews at a later date. However, in prisons whose population is typified by remand or short sentences the stage 1 and stage 2 interviews must occur within a few days of one another to avoid participant attrition. The adaptations to process required by this and other emergent issues during the project will further refine and develop the application of AI in this context.

In addition to advancing the AI methodology, our work is also challenging assumptions that the appreciative focus of AI; identifying peak performance as the starting point of any inquiry might prevent discovery of the negative aspects of prison life. Rather our work is illustrating that AI identifies strengths and weaknesses, whilst actively engaging the interest and involvement of prisoners, prison staff and senior prison management (Cowburn and Lavis, 2013). Our more recent work on the present project is indicating that adopting an appreciative starting point alters the dynamics of the way the participants and stakeholders engage with the research process; breaking down taken for granted ways of viewing prison life.

A further benefit of adopting an AI methodology for research is the level of *energy for change* the process generates in comparison with methodologies which take problems as their starting point. Research from the field of positive psychology suggests that being placed in a positive affective state creates an opening of the mind. When a person feels positive about the present or the future they are more open to participation, creating thinking and working collaboratively (Freidrickson, date). Clearly, appreciative inquiry when conducted in its organisational development format where stakeholders are actively participating in the generation and analysis of data holds far greater power to invoke these benefits but nevertheless these positive aspects are features we have noted in participants within our research.

CE and MC - What should they avoid? What critique of our use of the method would you offer?

## References

- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 3, 77-101.
- Carter, C.A., Ruhe, M.C., Weyer, S., Litaker, D., Fry, R.E., and Stange, K.C. (2007) An appreciative inquiry approach to practice improvement and transformative change in health care settings. *Qualitative Mangement of Health Care*, 16 (3), 194-204.

Cooperrider, D. L. and Whitney, D. K. (1999) *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Cooperrider, D.L. and Srivastva, S. (1987) Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life. *Research in Organizational Change and Development*, 1, 129-169.

Cowburn, M. and Lavis, V. (2013)

Elliott, C. (1999) *Locating the Energy for Change: An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry*. Winnipeg, Canada: International Institute for Sustainable Development.

Fine, M. & Torre, M.E. (2006). Intimate Details: Participatory Action Research in Prison. *Action Research*, 4 (3), 253-269.

Fine, M., Torre, M.E., Boudin, K., Bowen, I., Clark, J., Hylton, D., Martinez, M., "Missy," Rivera, M., Roberts, R.A., Smart, P. & Upegui, D. (2003). Participatory action research: Within and beyond bars. In P. Camic, J.E. Rhodes, & L. Yardley (Eds.), *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design* (pp. 173-198). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Israel, B., Schultz, A., Parker, E. and Becker, A. (1998). Review of Community-Based Research: Assessing Partnership Approaches to Improve Public Health. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 19, 173-202.

Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. (2000) "Participatory action research". In N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (Eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.) (pp.567-605). C.A.: Sage.

King, N. and Horrocks, C. (2010) *Interviews in Qualitative research*. London: Sage.

Larson, M. J. and Tian, X. (2005) Strengthening women's contributions to sustainable peace: The benefits of flexibility. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 23 (1), 53-70.

Lewin, K. (1951) *Field theory in social science: Selected theoretical papers*. New York: Harper

Lewin, K. (1952) Group decision and social change. In G. E Swanson, T. M. Newcomb, and E. L. Hartley (Eds.), *Readings in social psychology* (pp. 459–473). New York: Henry Holt.

Lewis, S. (2011) *Positive Psychology at Work: How Positive Leadership and Appreciative Inquiry Create Inspiring Organisations*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Lewis, S., Passmore, J., & Cantore, S. (2008). *Appreciative Inquiry for Change Management: Using AI to facilitate organizational development*. London: Kogan Page

Liebling, A. Elliott, C. and Arnold, H, (2001) Transforming the Prison: Romantic Optimism or Appreciative Realism?. *Criminal Justice*, 1 (2), 161-180.

Liebling, A. (1999) Doing prison research: Breaking the silence. *Theoretical Criminology*, 3 (2), 147-173.

Liebling, A. (2005) *Prisons and their Moral Performance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Liebling, A. Price, D. and Elliott, C. (1999) Appreciative Inquiry and relationships in Prison. *Punishment and Society*, 1 (2), 71-98.

Ludmena, J.D., Whitney, D., Mohr, B. J. and Griffin, T.J. (2003) *The Appreciative Inquiry Summit*. San Fransisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

McAdams, D. (1993) *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*. London: Guildford Press.

Park, P., Brydon-Miller, M. Hall, B. and Jackson, T. (1993) *Voices of Change: Participatory Research in the United States and Canada*. Wesport, Conn: Bergin & Garvey

Reed, J. (2007) *Appreciative Inquiry: Research for Change*. London: Sage.

Riessman, C. (2005) Narrative analysis. In N. Kelly, C. Horrocks, K. Milnes, B. Roberts and D. Robinson (Eds), *Narrative, Memory and Everyday Life*. Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Press.

Wengraph, T. (2001) *Qualitative Research Interviewing: Biographic Narrative and Semi-Structured Method*. London: Sage.

Willig, C. (2008) *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology: Adventures in Theory and Method* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Whyte, W. F. (1991) *Participatory Action Research*. Newbury Park: Sage