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John Thibodeau

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, jthibodeau@wi.rr.com

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APPRECIATIVE ACCREDITATION:
A MIXED METHODS EXPLANATORY STUDY OF
APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY-BASED INSTITUTIONAL
EFFECTIVENESS RESULTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

John Thibodeau

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Under the Supervision of Professor Jody C. Isernhagen

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APPRECIATIVE ACCREDITATION: A MIXED METHODS EXPLANATORY
STUDY OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY-BASED INSTITUTIONAL
EFFECTIVENESS RESULTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

John Thibodeau, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2011

Adviser: Jody C. Isernhagen

This study examined the effects of using Appreciative Inquiry in accreditation and related institutional effectiveness activities within higher education. Using an explanatory participant-selection mixed methods approach, qualitative data from a series of interviews were used to explain the experiences of individuals identified from quantitative survey results. Appreciative Inquiry is a theoretical framework for action research, organizational development, and evaluation that emphasizes the positive aspects of human systems. In recent years, Appreciative Inquiry has been applied specifically to improvement activities associated with regional accreditation, such as the Vital Focus self-assessment that precedes the transition to the Higher Learning Commission's AQIP process. Few studies have attempted to identify common attitudes or themes across multiple institutions using Appreciative inquiry, and no prior studies have addressed the specific impact of Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation activities. In the initial quantitative phase of the study, ANOVA procedures failed to detect a significant difference in perceptions of either institutional or individual change among three levels of participation. Multiple regression analysis indicated that on-going communication and allocation of resources around the inquiry results are two characteristics most strongly correlated with perceptions of positive institutional change. These two characteristics,

along with having a positive topic, continuation of project teams, and training on theory underlying the process, also correlated strongly with perception of positive individual change. The mixed methods results explained these statistical findings in greater breadth and depth by linking them to the results of the qualitative interview phase of the study. Participants described structural and climate changes at their institutions as well as changes in themselves regardless of their level of participation. The stories told by the interview participants reinforced the characteristics of Appreciative Inquiry that correlated with perceptions of change in the statistical analyses and showed the different forms that these characteristics might take at different institutions. Overall, the findings suggest that institutional effectiveness activities based on highly inclusive, open conversations on positive topics, which are supported in all phases by administration, have great potential for changing institutions and individuals in a positive way. Appreciative Inquiry adds value to the accreditation process in higher education institutions.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“What one thing could you do in your upcoming accreditation self-study that would completely transform your institution?” That question was posed by Higher Learning Commission Staff Liaison Dr. Ingrid Walker at a planning workshop in February 2007 for institutions beginning their self-study plans. The question led Gateway Technical College to identify employee engagement as a major self-study goal. The college would come to employ Dr. David Cooperrider’s (1987) model of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to frame its self-evaluation and engage employees in positive Community Conversations around self-study themes. Appreciative Inquiry originated as an action-research methodology in the organizational development field. In Appreciative Inquiry, participants explore stories of their organization at its best moments to identify its life-giving forces, imagine the future that they desire most for their organization, and then make commitments to actions that will create that future. This approach is increasingly popular for evaluation, planning, and change leadership in organizations.

Context of Research Problem

Regional accreditation presents educational institutions with the challenge and opportunity to evaluate themselves against established criteria in order to achieve a third-party certification of their quality. Demands for accountability in this regard from both funding sources and consumers of higher education make accreditation an extremely important activity for higher education institutions. At the same time, “even as institutional effectiveness activities become institutionalized features of the higher education landscape, campus support for them seems to be tenuous and shallow” (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003, p. 34). Particularly among faculty, whose support is essential to the

success of institutional effectiveness activities such as self-study (Nichols, 1995, in Welsh & Metcalf, 2003), acceptance of the importance of accreditation-related institutional effectiveness activities is strongly related to perception of the institution's internal or external motivation, level of involvement or participation, and definition of quality as outcome-based rather than input or process centered (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). These same three factors correlated strongly with administrative support for accreditation-related institutional effectiveness activities as well (Welsh, Petrovsko, & Metcalf, 2003). Appreciative Inquiry provides an internally motivated, highly participative, outcome-focused approach to evaluation and change that fits the needs of accreditation projects.

Appreciative Inquiry originated in the work of Dr. David Cooperrider and Dr. Suresh Srivastva (1987) during an evaluation study of the Cleveland Clinic. Cooperrider and Srivastva argued that the field of action research's "steadfast commitment to a problem solving view of the world acts as a primary constraint on its imagination and contribution to knowledge" (p. 129). Using a socio-rationalist perspective, Appreciative Inquiry views organizations as subject to ongoing reinvention and re-imagination through dialogue and the creation of generative theories that produce new ideas and new actions. The application of Appreciative Inquiry to a variety of organizational problems unfolded over the past twenty years in the work of practitioners such as Dr. Gervase Bushe (1995; 2007; Bushe & Kassam, 2005), James Ludema (2001; Ludema, Whitney, Mohr, & Griffin, 2003), Frank Barrett (1995), and many others. Preskill and Catsambas (2006) firmly established Appreciative Inquiry as a framework for evaluation, which suits the nature of accreditation self-study and related institutional effectiveness efforts. Stetson

(2008) found that “at least three of the six regional accrediting commissions appear to allow, encourage or require Appreciative Inquiry (AI), or processes similar to AI, as part of an institution’s self-study process” (p. 86). Priddy Rozumalski (2002) outlined an appreciative process called Vital Focus as a self-assessment for institutions seeking to enter the Higher Learning Commissions Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP).

The majority of studies on Appreciative Inquiry have been qualitative single-case studies demonstrating the applicability of Appreciative Inquiry as an action research methodology (Ryan, Soven, Smither, Sullivan, & VanBuskirk, 1999; English, Fenwick, & Parsons; 2003; Walker & Carr Stewart, 2004; Yoder, 2005; Calabrese, 2006; Farrell, Wallis, & Evans, 2007), a pedagogical tool (Yballe & O’Connor, 2000; Preziosi & Gooden, 2002), an organizational development process (Miller, Fitzgerald, Preston, & Murrell, 2002; Johnson & Leavitt, 2004; Browne, 2004), a strategic planning model (Randolph, 2006; Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009), or a program evaluation and improvement process (Norum, Wells, Hoadley, & Geary, 2002; McNamee, 2003; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007). With the exception of Bushe and Kassam’s 2005 meta-analysis of 20 case studies, there have been no studies that have sought to identify common attitudes or themes across multiple institutions using Appreciative Inquiry. Bushe and Kassam’s research included only two cases from education, both from the K-12 sector. The particular application of Appreciative Inquiry to regional accreditation has only been addressed in Henry (2005) and Stetson (2008), where it has been listed among many examples of Appreciative Inquiry uses in community colleges. Thus, while there is significant research on the effects of Appreciative Inquiry in other contexts, there have

been no studies of the particular impact Appreciative Inquiry has had on institutions of higher education applying this model to accreditation and related institutional effectiveness activities. This study addressed these gaps in the Appreciative Inquiry literature by surveying multiple higher education institutions using Appreciative Inquiry in this manner. The essential social-constructivist aspect of Appreciative Inquiry required qualitative exploration of individuals' experiences to fully understand the impact of Appreciative Inquiry.

Purpose Statement

This study explored the perceptions of change resulting from Appreciative Inquiry applied to accreditation and related institutional effectiveness activities. An explanatory mixed methods participant-selection design was used, and it involved collecting qualitative interview data to explain the quantitative data in more depth. Participants for the study were employees of two-year and four-year institutions of higher education. Each employee had participated in an appreciative conversation day leading into their institution's accreditation process and served on at least one committee during or as a result of the conversation day. First, in the quantitative phase of the study, survey data collected from Appreciative Inquiry accreditation project participants in higher education institutions were used to explain how participation in Appreciative Inquiry accreditation activities related to perception of change for individuals and institutions. Second, the qualitative phase was conducted to learn how individuals within institutions using Appreciative Inquiry for accreditation described their experience and perceptions of positive changes. In this exploratory follow-up, the results of Appreciative Inquiry were explored with a subset of the survey respondents from phase one. Participants for the

qualitative phase were selected purposefully based on their quantitative survey results. The exploratory follow-up was conducted to provide a deeper explanation of participants' experience and the impacts of Appreciative Inquiry beyond those identified in the survey.

Audience

The results of this research are useful to higher education leaders who desire to build support for accreditation within their institutions and to increase the generative capacity of their accreditation projects. Regional accreditors seeking new models to energize the standard practices of accreditation can also find value in this research. Finally, Appreciative Inquiry practitioners and consultants can find additional insights for their practice.

Research Questions

This study addressed six research questions overall. The first four were addressed in the initial quantitative phase:

- (1) Did participation in Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation activities (independent variable) relate to perceptions of *institutional* change (dependent variable)?
- (2) Did participation in Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation activities (independent variable) relate to perceptions of *individual* change (dependent variable)?
- (3) Were characteristics in the Appreciative Inquiry experience correlated with perceptions of *institutional* change?
- (4) Were characteristics in the Appreciative Inquiry experience correlated with perceptions of *individual* change?

In the qualitative second phase, the fifth research question was addressed with two sub-questions:

- (5) How did participants in Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation or institutional effectiveness activities describe their experience?
 - a. What kind of *institutional* change, if any, did participants perceive as a result of these activities?
 - b. What kind of *individual* change, if any, did participants perceive as a result of these activities?

Bringing these two data sets together, the sixth and final research question was addressed:

- (6) Which participants provided the best insight into the results of the quantitative phase?

Definitions

The following terms related to Appreciative Inquiry and accreditation may be unfamiliar to some readers. Their definitions and relationship to this study are provided.

Action Project. Action projects are a feature of the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) accreditation process. Action projects are structured improvement activities based on the institution's assessment of its strengths and areas for improvement. Following acceptance into AQIP, institutions undertake three or four action projects. As action projects are completed, new ones are introduced so the organization is continuously pursuing three to four planned improvements (Higher Learning Commission, 2007). All of the institutions in this study followed their conversation day with a series of action projects to improve institutional effectiveness.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI). As defined by Watkins and Mohr (2001), "Appreciative Inquiry is a collaborative and highly participative, system-wide approach to seeking, identifying, and enhancing the 'life-giving forces' that are present when a system is performing optimally in human, economic, and organizational terms" (p. 14). Appreciative Inquiry studies organizations at their moments of peak performance through conversation among their members, leading the members to create a vision of the future that motivates positive change. In the context of this study, Appreciative Inquiry is the philosophical framework underlying the Vital Focus process in which all of the subjects were active participants.

AQIP. The acronym AQIP stands for Academic Quality Improvement Program. Developed in 1999 by the Higher Learning Commission, AQIP provides an alternative means of demonstrating compliance with the commission's criteria for accreditation. This model is based on principles of continuous improvement commonly found in initiatives such as Total Quality Management, Six Sigma, and ISO 9000, among others (Higher Learning Commission, 2007). Higher education institutions already accredited by the Higher Learning Commission can apply to move from the traditional accreditation process to the AQIP process by demonstrating their on-going commitment to continuous improvement. All of the institutions involved in this study were transitioning from traditional to AQIP accreditation by undertaking the Appreciative Inquiry-based Vital Focus self-assessment process.

Conversation Day. In the context of this study, "conversation day" refers to a specific planned event at which a large number of college employees participate in structured discussions of institutional strengths and opportunities for short-term and long-

term improvement. A specific framework for a conversation day, called the All-College Conversation, is a feature of the Vital Focus self-assessment process and is based on the principles of Appreciative Inquiry. All of the subjects in this study had participated in a conversation day that was based on the All-College Conversation model, although most varied the structure of their conversation day to fit their local goals and college culture.

Vital Focus. Vital Focus is a self-assessment process developed by the Higher Learning Commission to assist institutions in making the transition to the AQIP accreditation model. All institutions seeking acceptance to AQIP are required to demonstrate their commitment to systems thinking and continuous improvement by undergoing some kind of rigorous self-assessment (Higher Learning Commission, 2007). Vital Focus is one of many possible self-assessments that institutions can choose. In Vital Focus, the Higher Learning Commission conducts an initial employee survey called Constellation, and then the survey results are presented as a basis for discussion in a structured All-College Conversation about the institution's strengths and opportunities for improvement (Priddy Rozumalski, 2002). The Vital Focus assessment typically leads the institution to develop several action projects. All of the institutions in this study had participated in the Vital Focus process.

Limitations

Overlapping processes. The institutions whose employees participated in this study used the Vital Focus self-assessment model as the basis of their conversation days. These conversation days were a first step in each institution's transition from traditional accreditation to the AQIP process. Because the participants experienced Vital Focus, Conversation Day, and the transition to AQIP in close succession or simultaneously, their

perceptions of the conversation day and the other changes that took place may have overlapped in their minds. Appreciative Inquiry underlies the Vital Focus assessment in general and its All-College Conversation step in particular. Participants may not have isolated the appreciative features of their conversation experience from the overall experience of moving to AQIP when responding to the survey.

Survey instrument. Measuring perceptions of individuals using a quantitative instrument requires participants to restrict their responses to a numerical value, such as a Likert scale. In this study, participants were asked to identify the presence or absence of certain characteristics of Appreciative Inquiry with a response of "yes," "no," or "I don't know." The presence of the characteristic in any degree was sufficient for a "yes" response in the methodology of the study, but participants may have perceived varying degrees of these characteristics between the simple "no" and "yes" responses. Similarly, perceptions of change were collected using a 5-point Likert-type scale, so variations on that scale were not available. Limiting the responses on a subjective topic like institutional and individual change to numerical responses may have limited some participants' responses. This was also the justification for adding the second, qualitative phase to explain the quantitative responses in greater depth.

Appreciative Theoretical Lens. In the participant selection methodology for phase two of this study, the researcher chose to interview only individuals who perceived some level of positive institutional or individual change as a result of their Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation activity. This is consistent with the principles of Appreciative Inquiry, which focuses on studying success to discover the positive forces that made success possible. Nevertheless, excluding the individuals who did not perceive

a positive change in their institution or in themselves might be considered a limitation by someone not applying the appreciative theoretical lens.

Delimitations

Within the full range of higher education institutions who have applied Appreciative Inquiry to accreditation and institutional effectiveness processes, several decisions were made to focus this study and limit the scope of the project. First, this study only included institutions that are accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. These institutions are generally located in the Midwestern United States and are all subject to the same set of accreditation criteria. Institutions outside of the HLC may also use Appreciative Inquiry but were not part of this study. Second, all of these institutions had experienced Appreciative Inquiry through the Vital Focus process as they transitioned to the AQIP model. Other possible applications of Appreciative Inquiry to strategic planning, curriculum development, or other institutional processes that may have occurred at these institutions were not examined in this study. Third, participants from these institutions were selected based on their involvement in a college conversation day and service on one or more committees related to that project. Employees of the institutions who did not meet that level of participation were not selected for this study. Delimiting the study in this way ensured that participants shared a comparable experience related to Appreciative Inquiry and accreditation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Accreditation, Evaluation, and Organizational Development

Accreditation has been a feature of higher education in the United States since the late nineteenth century. Emerging from what Hawkins (1992) calls “the Age of Standards,” associations of higher education institutions sought to establish common measures of hours and credits as well as minimum standards of curriculum and practice expected of colleges and universities. While these associations were ostensibly voluntary, their ability to exclude institutions from their list resulted in a coercive climate in which inclusion required conformity (Hawkins, 1992). Regional accreditation began with the North Central Association, which Dodd (2004) characterized as an effort to exert external control of the educational standards. The early focus on standardization and statistical comparison of institutions gave way relatively quickly, as early as 1928 for NCA, to the development of “non-numerical standards designed to meet an institution’s sense of its own mission” (Hawkins, 1992). Nevertheless, accreditation continued to focus on “processes, structures, and resources” (Baker, 2002) through the mid to late 20th century. In doing so, accreditors found another role as providers of quality assurance to students and government funding sources, particularly in the face of proliferating higher education providers. When the federal Higher Education Act tied financial aid eligibility to regional accreditation, any voluntary nature of the relationship all but disappeared.

Today, accreditation continues to be “the most fully developed institutionalization of the idea of accountability in higher education” (van Vught, 1994, in Lubinescu, Ratcliff, & Gaffney, 2001). However, pressure from funding sources and consumers for more accountability have become a regular feature of the higher education world. This

has led to growing criticism of traditional accreditation. Because of its peer-review methodology, it has been called “an episodic exercise in professional back-scratching” (Bogue, 1998) with minimalist standards and secretive processes. Judith Eaton (2001), president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, noted that higher education institutions also have complained about the time and expense of accreditation as a compliance exercise and demanded some value-added component. Declining public confidence in the educational output of universities has reflected badly on accreditation as well, suggesting peer evaluation may not be able to improve results (Baker, 2002). Ewell (2002) suggested that accrediting bodies are perceived as reflecting the values and culture of higher education, reluctant to ask the hard questions needed, and unlikely to heavily sanction their peers. In the face of such criticism, regional accrediting bodies have initiated significant reforms in the past ten years to remain a relevant force in higher education.

At its most basic level, accreditation is an evaluative exercise based on established criteria. In the last ten years, the nature of these criteria has shifted away from external prescriptions toward more generic standards within which institutions can interpret in the context of their unique missions (Eaton, 2001). Institutions conduct a self-assessment based on the accreditor’s guidelines, which is then used by the accreditor to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the institution in terms of the outcomes relevant to its mission. As such, accreditation self-study follows the model of evaluation practice, which distinguished itself from social science research as a field of professional practice in the 1960s and 1970s (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). Evaluation “involves some identification of relevant standards of merit, worth, or value; some investigation of

the performance of evaluands on these standards; and some integration or synthesis of the results to achieve an overall evaluation" (Scriven, 1991, in Preskill & Catsambas, 2006).

Reforms in accreditation not only shifted the focus from processes to outcomes, but added an expectation of continuous improvement. Accreditation expanded beyond documenting "intentions and capacity" to include achievement of outcomes and proof of the "capacity, will, culture, and ability of an institution to improve" (Baker, 2002). Eaton (2001) noted that such reforms were driven by demands from the higher education audience to add value to the process to justify the investment of time and resources. Consequently, accreditation was positioned to offer institutions a set of tools for strategic improvement. "The self-study aids in the improvement of institutions by helping to establish the foundation for planning, the expansion of research and self analysis, a chance to review policies, increasing openness among the different factions of university, and helping staff to develop" (Lubinescu et al., 2001, p. 10). This requires what Ewell (2002) calls "extended, meaningful, broadly participatory examination" or deep engagement of the institution. He is quick to point out that such deep engagement is often pushed out by a focus on compliance and "ritualised [sic] responses" to the improvement processes.

When institutions intentionally position the accreditation process as a tool for improvement, the accreditation self-assessment takes on the character of an organizational development activity, where the focus is on studying in order to improve an organization. Patton (2003) notes that the practices of evaluation and organizational development have evolved together and use many of the same tools. "Evaluation's niche is defined by its emphasis on reality testing, that is, helping users determine the extent to

which what they think and hope is going on is what is actually going on. . . . The processes of evaluation support change in organizations by helping those involved think empirically" (Patton, 2003, p. 87). Organizational development takes the additional step of promoting change and improvement.

Accreditation, evaluation, and organizational development share a common theoretical viewpoint. All three utilize a set of standards, either from an external source or from the institution itself, which provides an empirical sense of what a program or institution should be. When a deficiency is discovered relative to the standards, it becomes the focus for institutional action. Organizational development has traditionally employed a problem-solving model to identify root causes, generate possible solutions, and select solutions to implement. But the absence of problems or deficiencies has not been sufficient to meet the needs of institutions of higher education or their stakeholders. Lubinescu, Ratcliff, and Gaffney (2001) reported that recent initiatives among all six regional accrediting agencies had incorporated the principles of Continuous Quality Improvement to shift accreditation toward a model of organizational learning, not compliance. Some have argued that this shift in philosophy requires a more fundamental paradigm shift:

[Colleges and universities] have evaluated, assessed, and changed themselves using only the mindset, assumptions, tools, and strategies of the Newtonian model and not expanding to include the New Science or Learning Paradigm. As a result, higher education is being improved to sustain its traditions versus being redefined to sustain is transformation more times than not. What is needed, according to many, are whole new ways of evaluating and assessing

higher education's effectiveness in ways that help institutions sustain their own transformations (Priddy Rozumalski, 2002).

Shifting to the New Science or Learning Paradigm would open the door for a framework such as Appreciative Inquiry to influence the accreditation, evaluation, and organizational development fields. Appreciative Inquiry follows a constructivist view of organizational change that departs from the traditional problem-solving approach (see Figure 2.1).

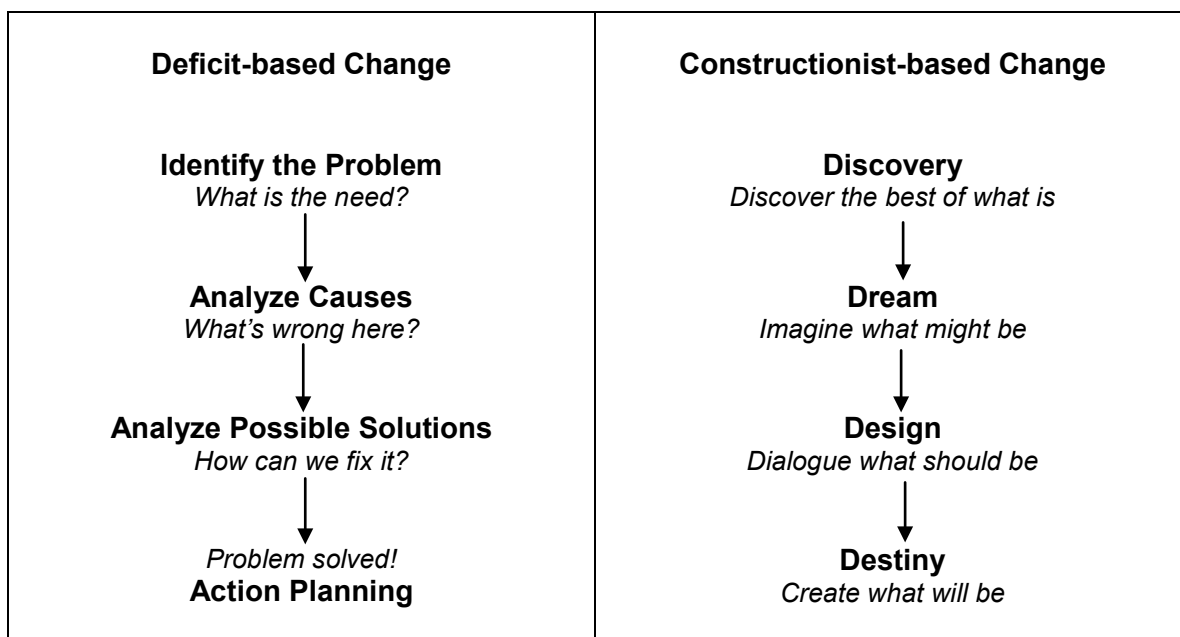


Figure 2.1: Two contrasting models of organizational change (Mohr & Watkins, 2002)

Theoretical Background of Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry emerged from the doctoral work of Dr. David L. Cooperrider at Case Western University. Cooperrider was studying the practice management group at the Cleveland Clinic, a group of professionals trained in medicine, not management, who had invented a particularly successful form of democratic management. The goal of this research was to develop a grounded theory of participatory management. Cooperrider's theoretical framework for the research was social

constructionist, not positivist; he stated, "There is little about collective action or organizational development that is preprogrammed, unilaterally determined, or stimulus bound in any direct physical, economic, material or deep-structured sociological way" (Cooperrider, Barrett, & Srivastva, 1995, p. 157). Simply put, organizations are products of the human interactions that occur within them, and as such, are constantly being re-created as conversations continue. In his study at the clinic, Cooperrider proposed "a co-inquiry into the factors and catalytic forces of organizing that served to create, save, and transform the institution in the direction of its highest potential for a participatory system . . . the ideal membership situation" (Cooperrider et al., 1995, p. 176). In this early research, some of the theoretical underpinnings of Appreciative Inquiry were present: selection of an unconditionally positive topic for inquiry ("the ideal membership situation") and belief that grounded theorizing based on examples from discourse has generative potential, that is, the ability to inspire new ideas and new actions; that "positive deviations in the data" or exceptionally positive moments, would heighten generative potential; and that the resulting dialogue would enlighten what had been taken for granted and lead to new possibilities for performance (Cooperrider et al., 1995). Framed in this way, the study did create great appreciation and enthusiasm among the doctors in the practice management group, who became excited participants in these conversations about peak moments of membership, and the resulting process took on a life of its own after the study was complete. In contrast to what Cooperrider and his colleagues saw as the negative pre-occupation with problem-solving in action research, Cooperrider concluded from the Cleveland Clinic experience:

Appreciative ways of knowing are constructively powerful, we have argued, precisely because organizations are, to a large extent, affirmative projections. They are guided in their actions by anticipatory forestructures of knowledge which like a movie projector on a screen, projects a horizon of confident construction which energizes, intensifies, coordinates, and provokes action in the present. (p. 189)

In addition to the social constructivist framework, Cooperrider's Appreciative Inquiry approach drew upon scientific research into the power of positive images to change behavior, in particular studies of the placebo effect and the Pygmalion effect (Watkins & Mohr, 2001).

Cooperrider's experience at the Cleveland Clinic led him to propose Appreciative Inquiry as an alternate methodology for action research within organizations. He found fault with the problem-solving focus of action research as "a crude empiricism imprisoned in a deficiency mode of thought" (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) that concerned itself only with restoring the status quo to organizations rather than generating theories that could, in turn, generate new ideas and actions. Cooperrider proposed that theories should not be judged in terms of their predictive capacity to foresee past events repeated, but in terms of their generative capacity to "foster dialogue about that which is take for granted and their capacity for generating fresh alternatives for social action" (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Problem-solving, he further argued, implies that there is an empirical reality of "what should be" that needs to be restored through intervention by an outside force; indeed, if the essence of organizational development is problem-solving, then organizations themselves are reduced to problems. In contrast, Cooperrider

proposes Appreciative Inquiry as a force for social innovation, with four basic principles: (1) appreciation of whatever is working in an organization (and the accompanying premise that something works in every organization), (2) theory that leads to application and action, (3) creation of provocative images of “what might be” to generate realistic developmental opportunities for the organization, and (4) collaboration between researcher and subject necessitated by the inseparability of the inquiry process and its content (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

Throughout the 1990s, Appreciative Inquiry evolved as both an action research methodology and an organizational development tool. Repudiating the problem solving methodologies common in organizational development, practitioners of Appreciative Inquiry applied what Cooperrider called the “heliotropic principle” that organizations grow toward images that are life-giving and affirmative (Bushe, 1995), like plants toward light. Bushe defined an Appreciative Inquiry intervention as discovering the best of what is, understanding what creates the best of what is, and amplifying the people and processes who best exemplify the best of what is. A central strategy built on the social constructivist basis of Appreciative Inquiry is dialogue in the form of appreciative interviews that generate rich narratives of peak performance. From these stories, “we are not trying to extract themes from the data or categorize responses and add them up. We are trying to generate new theory that will have high face value to members of the organization” (Bushe, 1995). Another organizational development practitioner, Frank Barrett proposed that Appreciative Inquiry was the most appropriate model for developing “learning organizations.” Echoing the four principles in Cooperrider’s original work, Barrett maintained that high performing organizations (1) celebrate

achievements and direct attention to strengths, (2) create a vision that pushes members to think beyond traditional boundaries, (3) provide feedback that allows members to see actual progress due to their actions, and (4) foster dialogue outside traditional boundaries of hierarchy and function (Barrett, 1995).

Ludema (2001) identified Appreciative Inquiry as a source of “textured vocabularies of hope that serve as catalysts for positive social and organizational transformations." Hope within organizations is a result of building cooperative relationships, creating a sense of optimism that members of the organization can shape and influence their future, inquiring together into the members’ deepest values and highest aspirations, and generating positive actions (Ludema, 2001). Appreciative Inquiry gives the organization the words with which to develop hope, and based on the constructivist power of dialogue, to reshape their organizations. This expands the dialogue and the language of hope and therefore the organizational change exponentially. Ludema (2001) finds that eight basic principles of Appreciative Inquiry align with the four main qualities of hope. First, hope derives from relationships. Appreciative Inquiry is based on the constructivist principle that organizational reality comes from social dialogue and on the collaborative principle or wholeness principle that requires involvement of as many members of the organization as possible. Second, hope creates optimistic images of the future. Appreciative Inquiry’s anticipatory principle suggests that our image of the future guides our current behavior. The provocative principle of Appreciative Inquiry values images that challenge or stretch the status quo and suggest radical possibilities. Third, hope is sustained by inquiry into values and dreams. From its social constructivist roots, Appreciative Inquiry suggests that any aspect of the

organization can be chosen for inquiry, called the poetic principle, and that the organization will grow toward positive images, called the positive principle. Fourth, hope generates action. In Appreciative Inquiry, the principle of simultaneity states that change begins from the first moment of inquiry, that the organization is different as soon as the first question is asked. The pragmatic principle requires that inquiry generate knowledge that can be used and validated in action.

As Appreciative Inquiry has grown and been applied to a variety of organizational and social practices, recent authors have sought to clarify the boundaries of the model. In proposing a means to evaluate Appreciative Inquiry, van der Haar and Hosking (2004) noted that each Appreciative Inquiry intervention is itself a social construction and is therefore always a reflection of local vocabulary and values. Using the term "relational constructivism," the authors argued that what could be constructed through Appreciative Inquiry was limited by local relationships. They also suggested that emphasis on the positive was subject to a local definition of what positive meant and might impose something artificial on the organization. They also questioned whether the provocative principle applied to all organizations as the best path to change. Grant and Humphries (2006) argued for the application of critical theory to evaluate Appreciative Inquiry. In doing so, they suggested that creating images of the organization as it "should be" might oppress some conflicting views in the organization, and they were concerned that the focus on positivity might suppress members' need to express a negative perspective. From a practical standpoint, Bushe (2007) also proposed that positivity might be less important to successful Appreciative Inquiry than generativity, that is, "the capacity to challenge guiding assumptions of the culture." Bushe contended that focusing on the

positive without also focusing on the generative might not produce change, or it might produce only incremental changes in positive aspects of the status quo without revealing the potential for transformational change and greater improvement. Bushe further refined his approach to Appreciative Inquiry by noting that when working with groups that have strong established relationships, generative questions need to focus on the efficacy of group action and include outside perspectives rather than focusing on values and dreams that build group identity.

The basic theoretical foundation of Appreciative Inquiry remains intact after nearly twenty-five years of practice and has been refined by practitioners, theorists, and critics.

Appreciative Inquiry in Practice

The practice of Appreciative Inquiry among organizational development professionals grew rapidly following Cooperrider's (1987) initial work. Watkins and Mohr (2001) outlined the major developments in the growth of Appreciative Inquiry:

1987 – The Roundtable Project, led by John Carter, was the first large-scale change effort to use Appreciative Inquiry as its overall framework. The inquiry at a Canadian accounting firm involved some 400 partners.

1988 – In Joseph Thackeray's Appreciative Inquiry-based data gathering process with the U.S. branch of the Institute for Cultural Affairs, the clients took unexpected ownership of the data analysis process and spontaneously launched planning initiatives. This represented a shift in Appreciative Inquiry's focus from action research to change initiative and reinforced the essential collaborative relationship between researchers and subjects.

1990 – The Organizational Excellence Program, a pilot project of the US Agency for International Development, developed Appreciative Inquiry projects to grow leadership for international development organizations. The Four-D cycle of Appreciative Inquiry was first elaborated in this project.

1994 – The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee conducted a three-year global learning process using Appreciative Inquiry and for the first time involved the entire organization, not just leadership, in the inquiry process. (Ludema et al., 2003)

1996 – The United Religions Initiative was the first global application of Appreciative Inquiry for all aspects of planning and implementing the creation of an organization to support peace. The term “Appreciative Inquiry Summit” was first used to describe the process of involving the whole organization in growth and change.

The practice of Appreciative Inquiry was based on five generic processes which created the “Appreciative Inquiry cycle”: (1) Choose the positive as the focus of inquiry, (2) Inquire into exceptionally positive moments, (3) Share the stories and identify life-giving forces, (4) Create shared images of a preferred future, and (5) Innovate and improvise ways to create that future (Mohr & Watkins, 2002). From these five processes, several models of practice evolved. Cooperrider and Srivastva’s (1987) original model emphasized four dimension of Appreciative Inquiry as research:

1. The scientific-theoretical – seeking socio-rational knowledge of what is through grounded observation, also called “appreciating.”

2. The metaphysical – seeking appreciative knowledge of what might be, also called “envisioning.”
3. The practical – seeking consensus of what should be through collaboration, also called “dialoguing.”
4. The pragmatic – seeking knowledgeable action through collective experimentation into what can be, also called “innovating.”

As the emphasis shifted from research to organizational development, the Four-D model emerged, encompassing the same core processes: Discover what is best in the organization, Dream of the ideal future of the organization, Design the social architecture necessary to move toward that future, and Deliver the change through action, adjustment, and improvisation (Mann, 1997). Because the deliver phase is on-going and changes the nature of the organization, “destiny” often replaces “deliver” as the fourth D. In another variation, a fifth D precedes discover: Define, which refers to the selection of a positive topic for inquiry. Bernard Mohr and Mette Jacobsgaard, cited in Watkins and Mohr (2001), proposed a slightly different model, the Four-I model, to emphasize the groundwork necessary for success: Initiate, which includes introduction of the theory, creation of project leadership structures, topic selection, and planning for the intervention; Inquire, which corresponds to discover in the Four-D model; Imagine, which combines the dream and design phases; and Innovate, in which commitments are made to take action and support change efforts by as many members of the organization as possible. The Four-D model appears most often in case literature and appears to be the most commonly used framework for Appreciative Inquiry practice to date.

Multiple forms of engagement have been imagined to deliver Appreciative Inquiry. The most common is the Appreciative Inquiry Summit. The summit is a “method for accelerating change by involving a broad range of internal and external stakeholders in the change process (Ludema et al., 2003). As a large group process, the summit emphasizes the principle of wholeness by involving as close to every member of the organization as possible in a single event or series of events. Ludema et al. described the premise of the summit this way:

Organizations change fastest and best when their members are excited about where they are going, have a clear plan for moving forward, and feel confident about their ability to reach their destination. In other words, quick and effective organization change is a product of having the ‘whole system’ aligned around its strengths and around ideas that generate energy for action. (p. 13)

Summits may take one to four days, and series of connected summits can become an on-going organizational development practice. Another way to engage in Appreciative Inquiry without bringing the entire organization together in the same space is to engage a group of participants in collecting data through appreciative interviews. Browne (2004) used this structure in the landmark “Imagine Chicago” project, in which fifty young people interviewed approximately 250 Chicago leaders from all sectors of the community. After this dispersed completion of the discovery stage, the interviewers, and as many interviewees as could attend, came together to distill the data and move through the dream and design phases to develop community projects.

The practical value of using the summit model is demonstrated in Powley, Fry, Barrett, and Bright’s 2004 case study of the U.S. Navy’s application of Appreciative

Inquiry, which “push[ed] the boundaries of traditional strategic participation toward deliberative and dialogic democratic practices” (p. 67). The Navy’s newly organized Information Professional (IP) Community participated in a series of Appreciative Inquiry summits to build its identity and overcome status issues relative to the regular naval units who spent time at sea. From the initial summit, IP officers bonded and self-organized around projects to advance the mission of their community, leaving with a new sense of excitement. Powley et al. (2004) suggested three developments from this and other summits that add value:

- Participants develop normative consciousness. They identify themselves as part of a community where colleagues all contribute value to the process. In the naval summits, no uniforms or symbols of rank were worn and participants from all levels mixed and shared ideas openly. Unlike pairings for interviews opened new insights.
- Participants develop holistic collegiality. Individuals come to see their interests and the interests of the organization as intertwined, and they sense the total system is greater than the sum of its individual members. The discovery of positive stories of organizational success builds confidence as well as camaraderie.
- Participants develop communal conviction. The summit activities build commitment to the organization as individuals take ownership of the future direction that they helped to create. Powley et al. emphasize that participation by the whole organization extends beyond data gathering into the decision-

making process regarding implementation of ideas, resulting in greater ownership by all participants.

Ludema et al. (2003) identified six factors that make the summit model successful: acceleration of change, building organizational confidence, immediate and broad access to information, promotion of a “total organization mindset,” inspired action, and sustained positive change.

Appreciative Inquiry as Evaluation

Appreciative Inquiry’s applicability to the task of evaluation is especially relevant when considering its connection to the educational process of accreditation.

Accreditation is an inherently evaluative activity, which ideally creates momentum for change and continuous improvement. One of the earliest cases of Appreciative Inquiry as evaluation involved pharmaceutical manufacturer SmithKline Beecham, which sought to evaluate a simulation-based training program developed for its research and development division. Based on Jane Watkins’ work on an Appreciative Inquiry-based process called “embedded evaluation,” the Synapse Group proposed and was engaged to conduct a “valuation” process with SmithKline Beecham. Initially, the company was concerned that “looking for what is exceptional in something and seeking to do more of that rather than looking for what is wrong and fixing it ran completely counter to our classic views of evaluation” (Mohr, Smith, & Watkins, 2000, p. 43). This reflects a common misapprehension about Appreciative Inquiry: that problems will be ignored in favor of celebrating what works. In the standard Appreciative Inquiry interview format, questions are asked about participants’ wishes for the organization in order to elicit ideas for the Dream phase, which will serve as a counterpoint to the current state of the organization.

Interviewees' wishes frequently reveal current areas of frustration, ineffectiveness, or criticism, but expressing them in the positive creates an immediate recommendation for improvement. The scientists at SmithKline Beecham were accustomed to following a problem-solving model with three elements: (1) describe current state, (2) identify future desired targets, and (3) propose solutions. The Synapse group and the leaders of SmithKline Beecham were able to see connections between the three major elements of their problem-solving model and Appreciative Inquiry: Current situation aligned with the Discovery phase, future desired targets with the Dream phase, and proposals with the Design and Destiny phases. The evaluators worked through the Appreciative Inquiry process collaboratively with the scientists involved in the simulation program and noted four significant outcomes:

1. Assessing and demonstrating the impact of the simulation program on the people involved.
2. Reinforcing and building on the learning from the simulation among participants in the valuation process, by surfacing and retelling stories of success.
3. Identifying the strengths of the simulation process rather than focusing on weaknesses.
4. Building enthusiastic support for continuing the simulation process and for modifying it based on the insights of participants. (Mohr et al., 2000)

Coghlan, Preskill, and Catsambas (2003) reflected that introducing Appreciative Inquiry into the repertoire of evaluation practices supported the recommendation of scholars that "evaluation be more democratic, pluralistic, deliberative, empowering, and enlightening" (p. 15). Participatory evaluation approaches were found to increase data

validity as well as institutional learning. Coghlan et al. noted four similarities between Appreciative Inquiry and collaborative models of evaluation: emphasis on social constructivism; viewing inquiry as ongoing, iterative, and integral to organizational activities; systems orientation; and commitment to putting results into action. Other evaluation scholars have been more cautious in approaching Appreciative Inquiry, expressing concern that "Appreciative Inquiry may encourage unrealistic and dysfunctional perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. It risks encouraging unjustified and intemperate optimism" (Rogers & Fraser, 2003, p. 77). For this reason, Rogers and Fraser suggested that Appreciative Inquiry be used not to surface unknown problems, but to "identify strengths and build courage to attend to known problems" (p. 77). The authors emphasized the importance of adhering to the entire model and using trained, experienced facilitation to avoid "vacuous, self-congratulatory findings (by avoiding hard issues and uncomplimentary data)." Patton (2003) was similarly cautious toward Appreciative Inquiry, noting it "appears to challenge, even undermine, such traditional criteria for assessing evaluations as balance, independence, neutrality, and minimal bias" (p. 89). Patton, Rogers and Fraser, and Coghlan et al. agreed that Appreciative Inquiry evaluation is not suited to every situation and works best in cases where:

- Previous evaluation efforts have failed
- There is fear or skepticism surrounding evaluation
- Varied groups of stakeholders have limited knowledge of one another or the program being evaluated
- The environment is hostile or volatile
- Change needs to be accelerated

- Dialogue is a critical outcome
- Relationships among individuals or groups have deteriorated or groups feel a sense of hopelessness
- There is a desire to help others learn through evaluation
- There is a desire to build a community of practice
- Building support for evaluation and for the program being evaluated is a desired outcome (Coghlan et al., 2003, p. 19)

Appreciative Inquiry in Accreditation

Building on Appreciative Inquiry's action-research foundations, Priddy Rozumalski's doctoral work in 2002 developed and piloted an Appreciative Inquiry-based self-assessment called Vital Focus. This tool was to be used by institutions seeking to enter the Higher Learning Commission's Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP). AQIP is an alternative accreditation model for continuous review and improvement, departing from the traditional periodic peer review model. Priddy Rozumalski argued that Appreciative Inquiry was compatible with AQIP because of the project's focus on challenging and reinventing institutional systems rather than making minor adjustments to existing processes. AQIP has an underlying appreciative structure in that it identifies an institutions best efforts at improvement (Discover phase), looks for opportunities to reimagine the institution (Dream phase), and identifies action projects that will have the greatest potential to improve the institution (Design phase). As a continuous model, the energy for change is sustained by on-going improvement activity and collaboration with the Higher Learning Commission (Destiny phase). Priddy

Rozumalski believed “Appreciative Inquiry ripples through the emotional underlining of AQIP” (p. 70).

In the Vital Focus assessment, Priddy Rozumalski created a model based on the principles of Appreciative Inquiry with the unique addition of survey data infused in the conversations. Institutions conducting Vital Focus assessments begin with a preparation stage in which teams are identified, leaders are trained, and materials are prepared. This mirrors the “Initiate” stage of the Mohr/Jacobsgaard 5-I model of Appreciative Inquiry (Watkins & Mohr, 2001), or the “Define” phase of the 5-D approach (Mann, 1997) discussed in this paper under *Appreciative Inquiry in Practice*. The second stage of Vital Focus is assessment, in which the institution’s employees take an online survey. The survey provides data on the common priorities, perceptions of institutional strengths, areas in which to focus improvement, and places to begin change work. In the third phase—engagement—institutions hold an “all college conversation,” which closely resembles the Appreciative Inquiry Summit event. The results of the online survey are used as “a springboard for dialogue” and are not meant to be analyzed as a typical assessment report might be. This reflects the influence of social constructivism in that meaning is to be created from conversations about the results; meaning is not to be found within the results themselves as might be expected in a post-positivist paradigm. The all-college conversations focus on generating stories of peak experiences (Discover) and top priorities (Dream), discovering process and cultural strengths, and identifying five to ten areas for action that could make the greatest difference in the institution (Design). In the final phase of Vital Focus—discern—more conversations are used to connect the results generated to existing processes and operations, to narrow the project list to three or four

action projects, and to make commitments to action. This is the spirit of the Destiny phase of Appreciative Inquiry, in which the energy of the summit is sustained through commitments to action.

AQIP and Vital Focus represent a bridge between old and new accreditation models, and between the problem-solving paradigm of action research and the appreciative paradigm associated with learning organizations and new science. AQIP's director, Stephen Spangehl (2001, personal communication cited in Priddy Rozumalski, 2002), expressed reservations to Priddy Rozumalski about Appreciative Inquiry's application to AQIP because AQIP grew out of the traditional quality improvement/problem-solving paradigm; because AQIP emphasized having processes to manage and control change, not to unleash spontaneous change; and because of the possibility of Appreciative Inquiry generating "happy talk," not improvement. Nevertheless, Vital Focus's emphasis on appreciative conversation proved successful. The unique step of introducing the Constellation survey data into the conversations is another way that Vital Focus bridges the old and new models of accreditation. The data was at first distracting for some participants who expected the survey to contain the answers needed for improvement (old model). Priddy Rozumalski noted this feedback and concluded the data "add a level of detail and complexity that clashes with the broad scope of the initial appreciative inquiries." She theorized that the data might better be used in the discern conversations later in the process.

Vital Focus represents one structured approach that explicitly brings Appreciative Inquiry into the accreditation process.

Case Research on Appreciative Inquiry

Case studies have illuminated the positive outcomes of Appreciative Inquiry as well as critical insights into its application.

McNamee (2003) utilized an Appreciative Inquiry model to evaluate an academic department in a public high school, a department which was experiencing a high level of interpersonal conflict. She hypothesized that this approach might rebuild some relationships in the department, and that “programs evaluated within an appreciative frame might ultimately become more humane and, by association, more socially useful” (p. 24). McNamee conducted appreciative interviews with each department member and developed themes before working with them in a two-day retreat setting. The evaluation resulted in several faculty-designed projects to improve curriculum and communication. More significantly, perhaps, was the emotional change that McNamee observed. Participants recognized their mutual passion for teaching and “they now have a more inspired assessment of who they are as a group and how they work together. In effect, they report respecting disagreements on issues and becoming more curious than judgmental about them” (p. 37). This reinforces Coghlan et al.’s (2003) recommendation of the appropriateness of Appreciative Inquiry evaluation with hostile or negative groups.

Willoughby and Tosey (2007) evaluated a school-improvement process based on Appreciative Inquiry in an English secondary school. Among their findings were that Appreciative Inquiry resulted in enthusiastic responses to positive questions, insights into organizational culture and learning environment, and collaborative strategies for change. The authors also noted that in a school environment, involving students and teachers in a “level playing field” created some discomfort among teachers who perceived a threat to

their authority and power to make decisions. Raising students' expectations about their ideas being heard and implemented was also seen as a potential source of resentment if follow-through did not occur. They also found Appreciative Inquiry to be "necessarily political, and that apparently benign, rational intentions to encourage participation and to distribute leadership could function to repress or discount diversity and dissent" (p. 516). Willoughby and Tosey concluded that the culture must be willing to support collaboration through the entire decision process.

Norum, Wells, Hoadley, and Geary (2002) used Appreciative Inquiry as a program evaluation model for the Technology for Education and Training graduate program at the University of South Dakota. This involved students and graduates of the program in administering online questionnaires and conducting follow-up appreciative interviews. In this case, the results were combined using qualitative data analysis strategies rather than the more generative open discussion strategies in a typical Appreciative Inquiry process. Recommendations for action were reported to the department faculty, who took ownership of subsequent change processes. Despite the differences in this Appreciative Inquiry application, the researchers noted, "The student interviewers themselves were changed in carrying out the interviews as they gained new knowledge of the [sic] how the respondents felt about the TTD Program, and in turn examined how they themselves felt about it" (p. 7). They concluded, "The difference in using the Appreciative Inquiry approach is that instead of dwelling on the 'problem,' the conversation focuses on suggestions for what could be done about it. A generative energy is created as possibilities unfold" (p. 10).

In a fourth example of Appreciative Inquiry applied to evaluation in education, Calabrese (2006) reported that a co-constructed Appreciative Inquiry evaluation of a school-university partnership “eliminated the stimulation of defensive routines that commonly occur when action researchers intervene in an organization” (p. 170). The researchers also observed as they reported their results, “it was as if the administrators and teachers already knew the findings and were already in the process of formulating a design that would begin building a healthy inner-city high school” (p. 180). This reflects the Appreciative Inquiry principle of simultaneity, wherein the initiation of the inquiry begins to change the system even before results occur.

Other long-term positive results of Appreciative Inquiry have been documented in case research. Powley et al.’s (2004) case study of the U.S. Navy found that even after participants returned to the command and control hierarchy of military operations, “[they] resume their positions with deepened respect for the resilience that organizational structure can offer. The summit reconnects people with each other, and it provides organization members with a stronger sense of purpose” (p. 79). Similarly, researchers found in a case study of a transcultural strategic business alliance that using Appreciative Inquiry to build collaboration between divisions resulted in improved collaboration, stronger interpersonal relationships, and greater understanding of the purposes of the alliance (Miller et al., 2002). Randolph (2006) observed from her study of Appreciative Inquiry strategic planning in a volunteer organization that the process increased the energy of participants to envision their future and enhanced “confidence, continuous feedback, commitment, and leadership” (p. 1086).

In a study of the impact of Appreciative Inquiry experiences compared with theories of transformational learning, Wood (2007) found that individual participants in Appreciative Inquiry events underwent significant personal transformations. Following participation in Appreciative Inquiry activities, individuals demonstrated more open-mindedness and deeper understanding of their roles and responsibilities in their professional and personal lives. They recognized an alignment of their personal values with the Appreciative Inquiry process. Their emotional states shifted during the event from negative to positive, and positive emotions were sustained after participating. They reported improved relationships at work and at home. Some characterized Appreciative Inquiry as a turning point in their lives.

In the major study to date of multiple Appreciative Inquiry interventions, Bushe and Kassam (2005) performed a meta-analysis of twenty published case studies to discern the presence or absence of transformational change. Unlike other organizational development interventions, Appreciative Inquiry emphasizes the creation of new knowledge within the organization and of a “generative metaphor that compels new action” (p. 3), so the researchers sought to test whether these outcomes were present. Based on their review of Appreciative Inquiry literature, the researchers selected eight variables to look for in the case literature:

1. Transformational change, that is, qualitative shift in the identity of the organization (dependent variable)
2. New knowledge created versus new processes based on old knowledge
3. Generative metaphor created
4. Adherence to Appreciative Inquiry principles

5. Following 4-D cycle
6. Beginning with positive stories
7. Focus on figure (existing organizational element) or ground (deep organizational assumptions)
8. Implementation (formal action plan) or improvisation (support for spontaneous, grass-roots change)

All of the twenty case studies were reported as organizational successes, but the researchers found that only seven described a transformational change such as would be expected from the premises of Appreciative Inquiry. Bushe and Kassam (2005) concluded that the most significant factors for creating transformational change were the creation of new knowledge, use of a generative metaphor, penetrating to the deep assumptions of the organization (ground), and using an improvisational approach to implementation. Relative to improvisational change, they reported,

If we can create a collective sense of what needs to be achieved, create new models or theories of how to achieve that aligned with the inherent motivation people have in relation to their organizational life, then a great deal of change leading to increased organizational performance can occur if people are allowed and encouraged to take initiative and make it happen (p. 14).

Bushe and Kassam (2005) also noted that not all organizations were seeking a fundamental transformation and that using Appreciative Inquiry within conventional structures generally yielded conventional results. This is similar to Bushe's (2007) emphasis on valuing generativity over positivity in order to break out of the status quo. Bushe and Kassam stated that other organizational development approaches used to

enhance conventional systems might be as effective as Appreciative Inquiry used in this manner.

Summary of Literature Review

The practice of accreditation in higher education has developed along a similar path with the professional practices of program evaluation and organizational development. All three have emphasized empirical standards of quality. All three have engaged in data gathering to determine the presence of minimum levels of quality. All three have tended to engage in a problem-solving approach to deficiencies, but all three have also shifted in recent years to a more learning-focused model for improvement. This shift has opened the door for Appreciative Inquiry as an approach to all three practices.

Appreciative Inquiry is

[a] collaborative and highly participative, system-wide approach to seeking, identifying, and enhancing the 'life-giving forces' that are present when a system is performing optimally in human, economic, and organizational terms. It is a journey during which profound knowledge of a human system at its moments of wonder is uncovered and used to co-construct the best and highest future of that system. (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 14)

Rooted in social constructivism, Appreciative Inquiry breaks with traditional organizational development methodologies by viewing organizations as miracles of human interaction rather than problems to be solved. Systems thinking and theories of positive image, such as the placebo effect and the Pygmalion effect, are also foundational to the approach, as are hope theory and critical evaluation.

Practitioners have developed models for the application of Appreciative Inquiry, the most common of which is the 4-D model: Discover the positive core (what is), Dream of the ideal future (what might be), Design the organizational architecture (what should be), and empower the organization to creatively implement change at all levels on an on-going basis, that is, the Destiny phase (what will be). These phases might be accomplished by small groups within an organization, through a series of separate interviews and group activities, or most commonly, at a large group event called an Appreciative Inquiry Summit. The summit model has distinctive advantages in terms of speed, relationship building, and culture change.

Among its organizational development applications, Appreciative Inquiry has been used successfully as an evaluation model, despite some lingering concerns from evaluation scholars. It may best be used to focus on strengths and address known problems, to introduce new methodology where previous evaluations have failed, to improve relationships, and to build on-going capacity for continuous learning and evaluation. Appreciative evaluations have demonstrated positive results in case studies from education, government, and business sectors. In the most comprehensive study to date, Appreciative Inquiry was found to make fundamental transformations to organizations when the intervention generated new knowledge, created a generative metaphor to inspire action, penetrated the basic assumptions of the organization that may have been taken for granted, and allowed spontaneous, improvisational change within the framework of the desired future.

Pertinent to this study, the literature supports using an Appreciative Inquiry approach to the process of regional accreditation self-study, which is focused on

documenting strengths and showing institutional commitment to addressing known problems. Accreditors' focus on continuous improvement fits well with Appreciative Inquiry's focus on transformational change. Alternative accreditation models such as the Higher Learning Commission's AQIP, and its Vital Focus self-assessment, are highly dependent on Appreciative Inquiry principles. Several studies suggest conditions or factors that one should expect to be present if a transformational change resulted or was likely to result from an Appreciative Inquiry approach to accreditation.

Chapter Three: Methods

Purpose Statement

This study explored the perceptions of change resulting from Appreciative Inquiry applied to accreditation and related institutional effectiveness activities. An explanatory mixed methods participant-selection design was used, and it involved collecting qualitative interview data to explain the quantitative data in more depth. Participants for the study were employees of two-year and four-year institutions of higher education. Each employee had participated in an appreciative conversation day leading into their institution's accreditation process and served on at least one committee during or as a result of the conversation day. First, in the quantitative phase of the study, survey data collected from Appreciative Inquiry accreditation project participants in higher education institutions were used to explain how participation in Appreciative Inquiry accreditation activities related to perception of change for individuals and institutions. Second, the qualitative phase was conducted to learn how individuals within institutions using Appreciative Inquiry for accreditation described their experience and perceptions of positive changes. In this exploratory follow-up, the results of Appreciative Inquiry were explored with a subset of the survey respondents from phase one. Participants for the qualitative phase were selected purposefully based on their quantitative survey results. The exploratory follow-up was conducted to provide a deeper explanation of participants' experience and the impacts of Appreciative Inquiry beyond those identified in the survey.

Research Questions

This study addressed six research questions overall. The first four were addressed in the initial quantitative phase:

- (1) Did participation in Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation activities (independent variable) relate to perceptions of *institutional* change (dependent variable)?
- (2) Did participation in Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation activities (independent variable) relate to perceptions of *individual* change (dependent variable)?
- (3) Were characteristics in the Appreciative Inquiry experience correlated with perceptions of *institutional* change?
- (4) Were characteristics in the Appreciative Inquiry experience correlated with perceptions of *individual* change?

In the qualitative second phase, the fifth research question was addressed with two sub-questions:

- (5) How did participants in Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation or institutional effectiveness activities describe their experience?
 - a. What kind of *institutional* change, if any, did participants perceive as a result of these activities?
 - b. What kind of *individual* change, if any, did participants perceive as a result of these activities?

Bringing these two data sets together, the sixth and final research question was addressed:

- (6) Which participants provided the best insight into the results of the quantitative phase?

Appreciative Theoretical Lens

Not all Appreciative Inquiry activities achieve the outcomes to which they aspire. Among those that do succeed, the scope and character of the resultant changes may vary considerably. In this study, positive change and transformational change were two possible outcomes of Appreciative Inquiry. In their meta-analysis of Appreciative Inquiry case studies, Bushe and Kassam (2005) defined positive change in terms of process improvements or other planned enhancements that kept the basic nature of the institution intact. In contrast, transformational change “refer[s] to changes in the identity of a system and qualitative changes in the state of being of that system” (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). Kezar and Eckel (2002) described transformational change in greater detail, noting that “it alters the culture of the institution by changing select underlying assumptions and institutional behaviors, processes and products; is deep and pervasive, affecting the whole institution; is intentional; and occurs over time” (p. 296).

Appreciative Inquiry is based on the premise that appreciating what works in an organization is the basis for innovation and improvement. Studying the positive core of success enables the organization to create further successes. A common analogy among Appreciative Inquiry practitioners envisions a medical researcher entering a village where childhood disease is rampant. Instead of examining the sick children, she locates the healthiest child and studies that child’s family history, physical surroundings, diet, and so forth. Learning what makes one child healthy becomes the key to helping all the children by applying the positive lessons from the healthy child to change the circumstances of the

unhealthy children. Similarly, in this study, the researcher proposed to explore the experiences of subjects who perceived positive or transformational changes in their institutions and in themselves in phase two. Studying the greatest successes of Appreciative Inquiry in institutional effectiveness provided insights to assist all institutions in effectively employing Appreciative Inquiry for institutional improvement. Each institution could apply elements of the positive core of these successful inquiries to its own improvement processes.

Mixed Methods Rationale

The use of mixed methods to study the application of Appreciative Inquiry to accreditation and related institutional effectiveness activities capitalized on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research methods and compensated for the situational weaknesses each presents. In the first phase, quantitative techniques were superior to qualitative approaches in their ability to generalize across a population of institutions using Appreciative Inquiry and generate comparable data. However, the numbers alone did not capture the experience of using Appreciative Inquiry. Following the participant selection, the second phase employed qualitative methods. This produced superior richness and depth of understanding of the individual experiences of Appreciative Inquiry participants. Because every Appreciative Inquiry is a unique social construction of the people involved, these qualitative data were needed to build on the quantitative results from phase one. This was consistent with the rationale for an explanatory mixed methods study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 96). Neither method alone could do as much as the two together.

Methodology Definition and World View

Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) provided a comprehensive definition of mixed methods:

Mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone. (p. 5)

The application of mixed methods to this research problem derived from a world view of pragmatism, which allowed the post-positivist premise that institutions using Appreciative Inquiry had an objective reality that could be measured in a survey as well as the social constructivist belief that each organization was a product of the social interactions of its members and each Appreciative Inquiry experience was therefore unique and special. The pragmatic world view opened the possibility of bringing mixed methods to bear as appropriate to this research problem. In other words, "pragmatists consider the research question to be more important than either the method they use or the worldview that is supposed to underlie the method" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 21).

Mixed Methods Design

This research followed an explanatory participant-selection design. This design falls within the developmental purpose for mixed methods in which “one method is implemented first, and the results are used to help select the sample, develop the instrument, or inform the analysis for the other method” (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 2008, p. 138). The explanatory design normally gives greater emphasis to the quantitative data (QUAN→qual); however, in the participant selection variant, the quantitative data serves mainly to guide purposeful selection of participants for the more important qualitative phase (quan→QUAL). The integration of the methods comes in the participant selection phase, between the quantitative and qualitative phases. The clear sequence of stages makes this design appealing to researchers, particularly because the two phases can be presented in distinct sections using their own appropriate terminology and analytical processes. (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Greene et al., 2008). For further illustration of the method, an excellent example of explanatory mixed methods design in the field of educational leadership is Ivankova and Stick’s 2007 study of persistence in a distributed doctoral education program. See Appendix A for a visual diagram.

The explanatory participant selection design presented several challenges for the researcher: time required, sample selection, criteria for selection, and initial approval (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Because this design is sequential, not concurrent, the time required for completion of the research was doubled; the quantitative phase had to be completed before beginning the qualitative phase. Therefore, this researcher allocated additional time to complete both phases of the research. Second, the explanatory design

requires researchers to decide whether to use subjects from the same sample in each phase or to take a new sample from the population for the second phase. Fortunately, this is not true in participant selection design, which by its very nature selects members of the sample from the quantitative phase to participate in the qualitative phase. Nevertheless, the researcher was challenged to determine the criteria from the quantitative research that would determine the selection of the qualitative participants. This was not possible until the quantitative results were analyzed and trends or groups of responses appear. This can add to the difficulty of obtaining initial approval from an Internal Review Board (IRB) for this type of study. In this case, this researcher described the kinds of variables that would be used to select participants for the second phase and designed an informed consent letter that left open the possibility of an interview following up on the initial survey. A second submission to the IRB once the qualitative phase participants were selected was not deemed necessary.

Population and Sampling

For this survey phase, a list of 29 colleges that had participated in an Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation process since 2004; the employees of these institutions represented the total population. This list was compiled through collaboration with Dr. Lynn Priddy at the Higher Learning Commission in Chicago, IL. Dr. Priddy is the developer of Vital Focus, an Appreciative Inquiry-based conversation process facilitated by the Higher Learning Commission and used by many higher education institutions involved with their Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). The population was limited to employees involved during the last five years to increase the likelihood that participants would remember clearly the details of their institutions' processes.

Going back five years also increased the possibility that institutional change, which is slower than individual change, might have occurred since the event.

The researcher made contact with the leader of the most recent Appreciative Inquiry activity at each college and requested the names of all individuals who participated in the Appreciative Inquiry conversation activity and served on at least one committee or team during or as a result of the conversation activity. Using committee or team participation to narrow the population increased the likelihood that the participants would have sufficient knowledge of the college's appreciative process and its results. At the same time, this group would include more than just the advocates who organized or led the process, so there would be less possibility of a sampling error that skewed toward positive opinions of Appreciative Inquiry. The list of employee participants from the colleges that agreed to participate constituted the sampling frame for this study. Coverage error could have occurred at this stage of the process if the institutional contact was unable or unwilling to provide the requested list of conversation-activity participants. Clear communication about the purpose of the study and the kinds of individuals who were needed helped build the necessary trust to gain access to a good list.

After obtaining IRB approval, this researcher invited those conversation participants to participate. Because the primary purpose of this survey was to identify interesting participants with diverse experiences of institutional and individual change for the second qualitative phase of the study, the entire sampling frame received the survey. If the main purpose had been to generalize about the experience of the entire population, a random sample of appropriate size would have been sufficient. Having a sample this large reduced the sampling error; however, this could also have resulted in a large group

of non-respondents. Working through a trusted institutional contact and appealing to the participant's desire to serve as an expert on his or her institution's process increased the participants' trust and commitment to complete the survey. All participants were asked to indicate if they were willing to be interviewed for the second, qualitative phase of the study.

Variables and Measures

For this survey, the independent variable was participation in the Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation activities. While all of the respondents participated in some way, participation levels varied. Therefore, the first survey item described three levels of participation: participating in some activities (low), participating in all activities (medium), and promoting, organizing, or leading activities (high). The first research question focused on the relationship of the participation variable to the respondent's perception of institutional change resulting from the Appreciative Inquiry-based process, which was the first dependent variable. The survey measured the participants' perception of the level of institutional change based on Bushe and Kassam's research (2005). A scale made up of ten items (numbers 5-14) asked participants to rate how well or poorly a statement about positive institutional change described their college using a five-point response scale. These statements were about the creation of new knowledge, changes to basic assumptions about the college's identity, changes to the internal dialogue or commonly told stories at the institution, and level of on-going implementation of change strategies.

The second research question shifted from institutional change to individual change, another dependent variable that might be related to participation. The survey

measured the participants' perceived level of individual change as a result of the Appreciative Inquiry process, again based on concepts from current literature. The ten items in this scale (numbers 15-24) asked participants to rate how well or poorly a statement about positive individual change described them, using the same five-point response scale. These statements described increased positive energy, appreciation of one's contribution, connections of individual to group interests, greater ownership of college direction (Powley, Fry, Barrett, & Bright, 2004), improved understanding of colleagues' feelings (Norum et al., 2002), greater motivation to collaborate with peers (Willoughby & Tosey, 2007), and overall sense of optimism (Ludema, 2001).

The final research questions for the survey phase asked what characteristics in the Appreciative Inquiry-based process correlated most highly with perceptions of institutional and individual change. Characteristics of Appreciative Inquiry activities that are prevalent in the literature were the characteristics for this question. These are summarized in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Common Elements of Appreciative Inquiry

Pre-Inquiry	Inquiry	Post-Inquiry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive support • Leadership team • Outside facilitation • Appreciative Inquiry training • Invitation from President 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole group event, summit, or conversation day(s) • Collection of positive stories • Peer interviewing • Positive topic statement • Structured model (e.g., 4-D, 4-I, or Vital Focus) • Motivating vision of future • Action-oriented projects • Positive metaphor, slogan or theme created 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-going project teams • On-going communication of results • Allocation of resources to support projects • Improvisation and adaptation encouraged • Structured follow-up events
Adapted from Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Ludema et al., 2003; Bushe & Kassam, 2005		

Three survey items (numbers 2-4) asked respondents to indicate whether or not each of eighteen characteristics was present before, during, and after their institution's process. These characteristics included the level of executive support, whether an outside facilitator was used, whether training was provided, whether a summit was held, whether a model of Appreciative Inquiry (4-D, 5-D, 4-I, Vital Focus or another variation) was used, whether appreciative interviews were used, how results were communicated, and how results have been sustained. (See Appendix F for survey instrument.)

Validity and Reliability

Drawing the questions for the survey directly from the existing literature on the results of Appreciative Inquiry instilled confidence that the survey was a valid measurement. Nevertheless, two testing procedures improved the assurance of validity. To determine content validity, the survey was shared with several experienced Appreciative Inquiry practitioners to review and comment on the appropriateness of the terminology and the selection of questions related to the topic of the research. Appreciative Inquiry author and consultant Gina Hinrichs stated that the questions were clear and specific, noting that Appreciative Inquiry is a "fairly ambiguous process." Dr. Jackie Stavros, another Appreciative Inquiry author and consultant, confirmed that the survey appropriately captured the concepts of Appreciative Inquiry and the outcomes reflected "the strengths, opportunities, aspirations (wishes) and results one hopes to achieve." Appreciative Inquiry consultant Peter Kozik also confirmed that the survey captured the essential outcomes of Appreciative Inquiry.

The survey was also pilot tested with seven individuals who participated in Gateway Technical College's Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation activities to

determine if the questions and instructions were clear and appropriate, which reinforced the face validity of the instrument. Five of the seven completed the entire survey. Four months later, the same five individuals were asked to retake the survey to measure its test-retest reliability. The correlation between the results of the first and second administration was statistically significant, $r = +.89$, $n=5$, $p < .05$, two tails. The coefficient of determination, $r^2 = .79$, also indicated a strong relationship between the two result sets.

Pilot Study Results

Respondents to the pilot test had mixed reactions to the informed consent section of the original cover letter. One found it reassuring, while another felt the paragraph dissuaded recipients from doing the survey by giving so many warnings. However, the sentences that this person recommended deleting were part of the standard informed consent language. A tester also questioned the confidential aspect, asking if "anonymous" would be more accurate. Another respondent felt the opening of the letter was not warm enough to draw readers into the task. One pilot tester was unable to follow the link from the third party website tinyurl.com, which was used to make the survey link more attractive and clear. As a result, the researcher added a warmer opening to the letter in the form of a question, "As someone who recently joined in a conversation activity about the positive aspects of your college, are you willing to share your experiences to help other colleges?" The informed consent paragraph was simplified while retaining the required elements so readers were not intimidated by these requirements. Finally, the link from tiny.url was replaced with the actual link from the survey software.

Within the survey, testers commented on the instructions, expressing some confusion about the distinction between the overall accreditation process and the conversation event that was based on Appreciative Inquiry. The use of “your process” in the section on institutional change confused one tester, since “your” implies the individual has a process. One tester noted that if an institution had not finished its accreditation project, the questions would be difficult to answer with confidence. As a result, the phrase “rather special,” which one tester considered biased toward positive responses was removed. The researcher made all the references to the process involved in the study consistent and eliminated “your” wherever it appeared.

Regarding the questions in the survey, one tester questioned the original five levels of participation in question one, noting that differentiating between attending events and fully participating suggested those who merely attended were grudging participants. While this did reflect the researcher’s initial thought process, the distinction seemed unnecessary and might have biased respondents’ attitudes toward the rest of the survey. The distinction between “slightly” and “somewhat” was also questioned. As a result, question one indicated only three levels of participation, describing low, medium, and high participation levels. This also simplified data analysis.

Survey Procedures

To begin contact with the 230 individuals in the sample, the researcher asked the institutional contact person who supplied the participant names if he or she would send a brief e-mail to the participants introducing the researcher and encouraging participation in this survey (See appendix B). This occurred one day before the actual survey was sent. A template was provided for this pre-notice, and the institutional contact was encouraged

to personalize the message. The cover letter was a personalized e-mail using the name of the institutional contact and the dates of the Appreciative Inquiry-based activity (See appendix C). The researcher used a word processing program to generate the customized e-mail cover letters. Some e-mail filters might have blocked a large number of e-mails with the same subject line arriving simultaneously as spam, which occurred during the pilot test. Fortunately, this did not occur with any of the institutions involved. The cover letter contained all the necessary elements of informed consent and contained a link to an online survey hosted by Survey Monkey, a commercial survey tool. Participants were told that by clicking the link in the e-mail which took them to the survey, they were consenting to the terms of the research agreement in the cover letter. Survey Monkey can also manage e-mail contacts with survey respondents, making it possible to send subsequent e-mails only to non-respondents. However, this method does not collect IP addresses, which were used to match responses in the two sections of the survey, so the feature was not used. Consequently, reminders were sent to the entire sampling frame with this statement at the end of the introductory paragraph: If you have already answered that survey, thank you, and you needn't read further.

One week after the initial e-mail, a follow-up e-mail was sent (See appendix D). A second reminder was sent two weeks after the cover letter (See appendix E). Because of the ability to view results immediately from Survey Monkey, the researcher was able to share how many people had already answered the survey and encourage non-respondents to join that group.

Survey responses were stored on Survey Monkey's secure server and downloaded for analysis in SPSS. Because the survey results were used for participant selection for

the second phase of the survey, it was necessary to collect directory information from the individual respondents who were willing to be interviewed if their responses fit the selection criteria. At the point where respondents were asked to participate in the second phase (Question 26), they left the original survey and moved to a second, separate survey that collected directory information. This created two completely separate data sets that were downloaded from Survey Monkey. In order to mask the identity of individual responses, the IP address of the respondent's computer, which could be recorded by Survey Monkey, was used as a unique code number for each respondent in both data sets. The directory information in the second survey was not matched with the individual survey responses from the first survey.

Participant Selection Method

Based on the results of phase one, respondents were classified into four groups based on their level of perceived institutional change and individual change:

		Institutional Change Scale	
		Low ←	→ High
Individual Change Scale	High ↑	High individual change Low/no institutional change	High individual change High institutional change
	Low ↓	Low/no individual change Low/no institutional change	Low/no individual change High institutional change

Figure 3.1: Groups Expected From Survey Results

A purposeful sample was selected using Appreciative Inquiry's positive focus.

Individuals were chosen for phase two from each of the three quadrants reporting a high level of individual change, institutional change, or both. No individuals were selected

from the group that perceived low or no change to themselves or their institution. This was consistent with the Appreciative Inquiry approach of studying positive outcomes in order to identify the core of those experiences and build upon that positive core. Any areas of frustration, ineffectiveness, or criticism that hampered more positive results were evident from the wishes participants included in their survey responses (Question 25). Participants from each of these groups were selected for interviews. In an effort to study an interesting range of participants, those selected for phase two came from different colleges and from different levels of participation in their projects.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

In order to contact subjects for the second, qualitative phase, the code numbers associated with the selected cases were used to retrieve directory information, if provided, from the separate computer-generated data set from section two. The researcher did not know which of the individuals who volunteered for interviews gave which responses on the survey. Subjects were contacted by e-mail, with a follow-up telephone call, to arrange an interview. Face-to-face or telephone interviews were conducted for participants who self-identified in the second section of the survey. A second consent document, explaining the nature of the interviews and the use of the interview data, was signed prior to participation in phase two of the study. Participants' permission was requested before audio-recording occurred. Interviews were recorded with the subject's permission, and detailed notes were taken as well. Interviews were transcribed. Data were stored electronically as audio recordings and word processing files. Each subject was asked to review the interview transcript for accuracy. This

strategy, called member-checking, is an effective way to ensure the validity or credibility of qualitative data (McMillan, 2008).

The qualitative data were analyzed using the constant comparison technique to identify common codes and themes among the interview transcripts. As each additional interview was completed, comparison to the previous data reinforced codes and themes and identified new divergent codes and themes. Sub-themes were identified as well within categories.

Mixed Methods Analysis Procedures

Following the qualitative phase, the quantitative and qualitative results for each of the three groups were brought together to explain in greater depth the types of individual and institutional change experiences that occurred as a result of Appreciative Inquiry being applied to the accreditation and related improvement activities.

Researcher's Resources and Skills

The researcher completed all required research methods courses prior to undertaking this project: Introductory and Advanced Statistics, Survey Methods, Qualitative Research Methods, and Mixed Methods Research. Components of this proposal were developed throughout those courses. The statistical analysis methodology was reviewed by the staff of the Nebraska Evaluation and Research (NEAR) Center at the University of Nebraska. Access to Survey Monkey online survey software and SPSS was provided by the researcher's employer.

Potential Ethical Issues

Gaining access to subjects for this study involved working through the leadership at colleges and universities. This might have been perceived as a required activity if

promoted by the college leadership, so every attempt was made to ensure participants were volunteers. Subjects' participation was completely voluntary, and identities of participants were kept confidential throughout the study. Participants read a statement of informed consent at the beginning of the online survey and were required to click a link indicating their agreement to the terms of the consent as they moved into the survey. At any point, subjects could skip questions or leave the survey without completing it. Selected participants read and signed a second informed consent document before being interviewed for phase two, and they were allowed to decline answering particular interview questions or to withdraw from the study if they chose.

Timeline for Study

- November 2009 – Proposal accepted by doctoral committee.
- December 2009 - IRB approval obtained.
- January – February 2010 - Built sampling frame from institutional contacts
- February – May 2010 – Surveys completed
- May 2010 – Analyzed quantitative results and selected participants for quantitative phase.
- June – August 2010 – Conducted interviews and analyzed data
- September 2010 – Combined quantitative and qualitative results.

Summary of Methodology

In order to answer the research questions in this study, the researcher developed and conducted a valid, reliable quantitative survey assessing the participants' participation level, the characteristics of their Appreciative Inquiry-based process, their perceptions of institutional and individual change, and their wishes for improvements to their process.

Using an appreciative lens on participant selection methodology, selected respondents participated in individual qualitative interviews to explore the experience of their institution's appreciative process. These two data sets were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively and then using a mixed methods approach to arrive at the study's results.

Chapter 4: Results

This study explored the perceptions of change resulting from Appreciative Inquiry applied to accreditation and related institutional effectiveness activities. First, in the quantitative phase of the study, survey data collected from Appreciative Inquiry accreditation project participants in higher education institutions were used to explain how participation in Appreciative Inquiry accreditation activities related to perception of change for individuals and institutions. Second, the qualitative phase was conducted to learn how individuals within institutions using Appreciative Inquiry for accreditation described perceptions of positive changes.

Phase One: Quantitative Results

Survey Population and Response Rate

The survey results from phase one of the study were finalized in May 2010. Of the 29 colleges identified for the study, 13 agreed to participate and supplied 230 e-mail addresses for potential employee participants. The entire sampling frame of 230 received the survey. Survey responses were received from 172 individuals. Six respondents abandoned the survey after the first question, so these surveys were discarded. This left 166 complete surveys for a response rate of 72 percent.

Survey Instrument

Respondents completed a 27-question online survey. The first question asked respondents about their level of participation in their college's accreditation project. Questions two through four asked about the presence or absence of common characteristics of Appreciative Inquiry (See Table 3.1, page 49). Questions five through fourteen related to respondents' perceptions of institutional change. Questions 15 through

24 related to respondents' perceptions of individual change in themselves. Question 25 was a narrative question regarding respondents' wishes for improving the appreciative accreditation process at their institution. Finally, questions 26 and 27 invited participation in the second, qualitative phase of the study and collected contact information from willing participants. Table 4.1 summarizes the relationship of the survey items to the research questions for phase one of this study. The entire survey appears in Appendix F.

Table 4.1: Survey Items by Quantitative Research Question

Quantitative Research Question	Survey items
(1) Did participation in Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation activities (independent variable) relate to perceptions of <i>institutional</i> change (dependent variable)?	1, 5-14
(2) Did participation in Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation activities (independent variable) relate to perceptions of <i>individual</i> change (dependent variable)?	1, 15-24
(3) Were characteristics in the Appreciative Inquiry experience correlated with perceptions of <i>institutional</i> change?	2-4, 5-14
(4) Were characteristics in the Appreciative Inquiry experience correlated with perceptions of <i>individual</i> change?	2-4, 15-24

Quantitative Survey Results

All respondents were participants in a college-wide conversation event and worked on a related committee during or after that conversation. In response to question one regarding their participation, 79 individuals (48%) said they participated in "some events" related to their appreciative process; this was referred to as low participation. Another 33 (20%) reported participating in "all events" or medium participation. The remaining 54 respondents (32%) organized or led the events in their appreciative process, representing a high level of participation. These groupings were used in analyzing the

level of perceived change and also in the participant selection process for phase two of the study.

Appreciative Inquiry events have a number of common characteristics reported in the literature (See Table 3.1, page 49). On questions two through four, respondents were asked to identify whether any of these characteristics occurred in their college's process.

Table 4.2 summarizes the participants' awareness of these characteristics.

Table 4.2: Participant Awareness of Appreciative Inquiry Characteristics

<u>Pre-Inquiry (Question 2)</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>IDK</u>	<u>Yes%</u>	<u>No%</u>	<u>IDK%</u>
A leadership team from across the college planned the process.	158	5	3	95%	3%	2%
The President visibly supported the process.	149	9	8	90%	5%	5%
The President invited employees to participate.	141	5	18	86%	3%	11%
Training was provided on the theory behind the process.	124	24	16	76%	15%	10%
A facilitator from outside our college was used.	94	46	25	57%	28%	15%
<u>Inquiry (Question 3)</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>IDK</u>	<u>Yes%</u>	<u>No%</u>	<u>IDK%</u>
One or more large group conversation events were held.	160	5	1	96%	3%	1%
Participants described what is best about our college.	148	7	9	90%	4%	5%
Participants designed action-oriented projects to complete.	147	7	9	90%	4%	6%
Participants stated a positive vision for our future.	143	5	16	87%	3%	10%
The process was focused on a positive topic about our college.	134	14	17	81%	8%	10%
Participants told positive stories about the topic.	128	11	24	79%	7%	15%
A structured model was referenced (such as 4-D, 4-I, or Vital Focus)	90	18	55	55%	11%	34%
Participants interviewed each other about stories, values and wishes.	89	34	40	55%	21%	25%
<u>Post-Inquiry (Question 4)</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>IDK</u>	<u>Yes%</u>	<u>No%</u>	<u>IDK%</u>
Communication continued after the process was over.	143	10	12	87%	6%	7%
Project teams continued working after the process was over.	142	8	16	86%	5%	10%
The college is spending money on the projects we started.	121	12	31	74%	7%	19%
Follow-up conversation events were held or are planned.	122	21	23	73%	13%	14%
People are making changes that were not part of the process.	92	13	60	56%	8%	36%

Respondents answered "yes" more than 70% of the time to all but four of these common characteristics, indicating that these appreciative events were conducted similarly following common patterns of practice. The elements that had more varying responses (use of outside facilitation, naming of the model, paired interviews, and spontaneous change) are common but not essential to the Appreciative Inquiry process.

Perceptions of change at the institutional level were reported next in questions five through fourteen. Respondents indicated how much or how little each of ten statements about institutional change described their college or university following their conversation event on a five-point Likert-type scale where 1 denoted "not at all like our college" and 5 denoted "exactly like our college." Results are listed in Table 4.3 from highest to lowest mean response to the survey items.

Table 4.3: Institutional Change Responses

	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mode</u>
5. Because of this process, people are talking about new ideas that we didn't consider before.	3.25	0.84	4
6. People are demonstrating new priorities because of this process.	3.16	0.87	3
12. The college has a well-ordered action plan for implementing the results of this process.	3.05	1.00	3
10. The college now approaches its old problems with new processes or plans because of this process.	3.01	1.04	3
11. People have different assumptions about how things should happen because of this process.	2.92	0.90	3
14. People are talking about greater possibilities for the future than before because of this process.	2.84	1.06	3
13. People are talking to each other who never would have talked before this process.	2.79	1.02	3
9. People have been encouraged to make spontaneous improvements because of this process.	2.71	1.11	4
8. People tell each other different stories about the college because of this process.	2.43	0.99	2
7. This college has changed its identity because of this process; it is a different place.	2.40	1.01	2

The four items with the highest mean scores are consistent with the application of Appreciative Inquiry in the Vital Focus model, particularly the development of an action plan to address existing challenges in the institution (Priddy Rozumalski, 2002). The item with the largest variation, "People have been encouraged to make spontaneous improvements because of this process," had a mode response of 4 - "Very much like our college." Bushe and Kassam (2005) identified the presence of this factor as an indicator that the Appreciative Inquiry had gone beyond positive change to the level of transformational change.

In the area of individual change, respondents used the same Likert-type scale on questions 15-24 to evaluate how much or how little each of ten statements described them individually following their participation in the Appreciative Inquiry event. These results are listed in Table 4.4 from highest to lowest mean response to the survey items.

Table 4.4: Individual Change Responses

	<u>Mean</u>	<u>St Dev</u>	<u>Mode</u>
23. I am more open to new ideas because of this process.	3.29	1.04	4
22. I am more committed to the future of this college because of this process.	3.18	1.11	4
19. I collaborate with others more because of this process.	3.14	1.13	4
24. I understand other people's feelings better because of this process.	3.10	1.04	3
21. I see how my goals and the college's goals are connected because of this process.	3.08	1.09	4
15. I am more hopeful because of this process.	3.07	1.10	3
20. I am more optimistic about the future because of this process.	2.89	1.14	3
16. I feel closer to my fellow employees because of this process.	2.87	1.11	3
17. I am more excited to come to work because of this process.	2.62	1.10	3
18. I feel more joyful because of this process.	2.28	1.13	1

The mean and mode for these responses are slightly higher than the institutional change responses, with the exception of "I feel more joyful because of this process," for which the most common response was "Not at all like me." The item with the highest mean in

this group, "I am more open to new ideas because of this process," is consistent with the highest response from the institutional change items, "Because of this process, people are talking about new ideas that we didn't consider before."

Scores on the ten items on institutional change were added together to create an institutional change scale with a minimum value of 10 and a maximum of 50, as were the ten items on individual change. The institutional change scale had a mean of 28.31 with a standard deviation of 7.69. The mean and standard deviation for the individual change scale were 29.87 and 9.22, respectively. The scale values for the three levels of participation (See Table 4.5) show only slight differences in perception of institutional and individual change among the three groups. The highest mean score for both scales is found among the medium level group, who participated in all events but were not the leaders or organizers.

Table 4.5: Scales by Participation Level

Level of Participation	Institutional Change (Mean/SD)	Individual Change (Mean/SD)
Low ("some events")	27.95/7.86	29.75/9.55
Medium ("all events")	29.91/7.53	29.97/8.75
High ("organized or led")	27.87/7.53	29.93/9.12

Statistical Tests on Quantitative Survey Results

Statistical tests were performed on these data to explore the relationship between the respondents' scores on the institutional and individual change scales and other survey results. The first set of tests considered the participants' level of participation relative to their responses on the two scales. Starting with the institutional change scale, an ANOVA procedure was performed to test the hypothesis that level of participation made a significant difference in the respondents' perception of institutional change. In this case, the analysis of variance did not reveal a significant difference among the three

levels, $F(2,163) = 0.89$, $p = 0.41$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$. A second ANOVA tested the related hypothesis that level of participation made a significant difference in the respondents' perception of individual change. Similar to the first result, the analysis of variance failed to show a significant difference in perceptions of individual change among the levels of involvement, $F(2,163) = 0.35$, $p = 0.71$, $\eta^2 = 0.004$. The very small effect sizes in both tests suggest a negligible difference in perceptions of change among the three groups. Summary tables for these tests (Tables J.1 and J.2) are found in Appendix J.

A second set of tests was performed to examine the characteristics that respondents reported in their Appreciative Inquiry processes and the relationship of those characteristics to perceptions of institutional and individual change. Multiple regression analyses were used to determine which of the characteristics might be significant predictors of perceived changes resulting from participation. Because participants' responses on the characteristics were categorical (yes, no, or I don't know), numerical values of 1, 2, and 3, respectively, were assigned to the responses. (See Table J.3 in Appendix J for means and standard deviations for all characteristics.) The dependent variable in the first multiple regression analysis was perception of institutional change, and the eighteen characteristics (see Table 3.1, page 49) were entered as possible predictor variables. Using the forward selection method, the analysis identified two characteristics as significant predictors of perceived institutional change: "The college is spending money on the projects we started" ($\beta = -0.34$, $p < .001$) and "Communication continued after the process was over" ($\beta = -0.32$, $p < .001$). These two characteristics predicted 26% of the variance in perceived institutional change, $R^2 = 0.26$, $F(2,153) = 27.22$, $p < .001$. The model is summarized in Table J.4 in Appendix J.

In the second multiple regression analysis, the perception of individual change was used as the dependent variable with the same predictor variables, and again the forward selection method was employed. This analysis produced a model in which five characteristics combined to predict 27% of the variance in perceived individual change, $R^2 = 0.27$, $F(5,150) = 10.80$, $p < .001$. The first two predictors were the same as in the previous regression analysis for institutional change. The characteristics in the model are as follows:

"Communication continued after the process was over," $\beta = -0.22$, $p = .006$

"The college is spending money on the projects we started," $\beta = -0.18$, $p = .020$

"The process was focused on a positive topic about our college," $\beta = -0.19$, $p = .007$

"Project teams continued working after the process was over," $\beta = -0.18$, $p = .021$

"Training was provided on the theory behind the process," $\beta = -0.14$, $p = .050$

The model is summarized in Table J.5 in Appendix J.

Narrative Survey Results

Question 25 on the survey in phase one of the study was narrative and asked respondents to express up to three wishes that would make the results of their appreciative process more positive for the college or for themselves personally. The standard interview format for Appreciative Inquiry uses a wish question to refocus unmet needs, dissatisfaction, or frustration in terms of a positive vision (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). The responses to this question revealed what respondents felt was missing or what they wished had been present to a greater extent at their institutions. Over 330 wishes were expressed in this part of the survey. Because of the format of the online

survey, the wish statements were all of similar length and allowed quantitative as well as qualitative analysis (See Table J.6 in Appendix J). Using each wish as a discrete unit for analysis, the data were coded using an open analysis of key words rather than predetermined codes, and aggregated into four thematic areas: Improving the conversation process, improving institutional practices, expanding resources, and improving the institutional climate.

The largest thematic group were wishes to improve the conversation process itself. Although each conversation was a large group event, many respondents wished that participation would have been greater. Various wishes addressed a need for greater participation from all employees; for example, "I wish that more people would actively participate in the ongoing process, rather than the individuals who are always willing to take part." Individuals specifically wished for participation from the student population, the business office ("I wish the business office would have participated to a greater extent rather than moving their office to a table on conversation day."), management, part-time instructors, faculty, senior leadership ("I wish senior leadership beyond a few key people took a more active role."), and the President ("I wish the President would have participated to a greater extent; and not disappear after the rest of us become a captive audience."). In addition to participation, various wishes addressed the need for more understanding of the process; for example, people wished "all employees had a better understanding of the quest for continuous improvement" and "more employees really understood how AQIP works and why it is better for our institution to promote helping students learn." Faculty, administration, and the Board of Trustees were highlighted as groups needing to understand the process. Beyond participation and understanding, some

respondents desired a higher level of engagement, wishing "all employees recognized the importance of contributing their ideas," "more people cared about the process," and "we could get greater buy-in collegewide to improvement processes." Finally, a number of respondents expressed process-focused wishes surrounding the implementation of results: "I wish more staff were willing to take on projects," "I wish that there had been more decisive follow-through on all the work we did," and "I wish the things that were spoken are carried out overall [sic] areas."

The next largest set of wishes surrounded the desire for improved institutional practices that would follow from the content of the conversations and foster continued improvement. Consistent with the statistical survey results, communication was an important element in this category and was the subject of the largest number of wishes in the survey. Respondents wished for "better follow-up communications," "more dissemination of what is happening with the process," and "utilization of an internal marketing campaign to explain the process and its impact." Beyond communication about the conversation process, respondents wished for better communication in general within their institutions; for example, "I wish for more active listening across all components of the university - faculty, staff, and administration - rather than prescribing actions or hanging onto things because of status or 'tradition,'" and

There are many changes going on in the college and they just happen and people don't really know how or why they are happening, it would be nice to have meetings maybe several times a year and let us know what is happening and why and how that it affects the college and our jobs.

Another two topics that appeared frequently under the theme of improved practices were closely related: support from administration and breaking down the hierarchy within the institution. The typical response in this category expressed a desire for "support by administration for the work to be done"; individuals wished "my department chair was more supportive of my innovations, ideas, and achievements," "senior administrators were more flexible about allows [sic] staff to try small changes," and several along the lines of "I wish we had more visible support from the college president." Regarding barriers within the institution, respondents wished "administration was not so top-down in approach" and "the faculty and staff still did not see themselves as two distinct groups." One person stated, "I wish there was a more cooperative work environment between the Administration, Faculty, and Staff. Even after this conversation day there are still divides between these three groups." Collaboration was a common topic as well, expressed for example by "I wish all staff helped each other out wherever and whenever there was need," and "I wish we were able to collaborate across disciplines more frequently as faculty teams to generate more ideas and solutions to problems that directly affect students." The conversation day and subsequent improvement processes drew attention to these practices as areas for improvement, allowing staff to envision what they desire instead of the areas they find frustrating.

A third wish theme, expanded resources, echoed the statistical survey results as well. The importance of spending money on the results of the conversation appeared in many respondents' wishes: "I wish clear funding was tied to each action project," "I wish our budget process was more in alignment with our strategies," "I wish we had more funding so we could act on new ideas," and "I wish we had the financial resources to

carry out the wonderful goals we have articulated at these town hall meetings." Two other resources that respondents envisioned in their wishes were staff ("I wish we had more personnel so we could do more of the things we talked about.") and time ("I wish I could be cloned and I could have more time to sit in these meetings to move the projects forward."). More external support, better facilities, and greater diversity were the subject of other resource-focused wishes to make the improvement process more positive.

The last category of wishes surrounding the conversation process related to improving the institutional climate as a direct or indirect result of the conversations. Openness to change was one of the two most desired aspects of climate; for example, "I wish staff felt empowered to make change," "I wish we were able to inspire coworkers (faculty) who might be resistant to change," and "I wish that the administration would LISTEN [sic] to the bad as well as the good, and that it would promote an openness to change." The other frequent wish was for more positivity surrounding these processes: "I wish that everyone would participate with a positive attitude," and "I wish there would have been more positive attitudes expressed during Conversation Day." One respondent expressed this wish for the institutional climate:

I have a dream, that our University would embrace the many feedback comments during the process regarding integrity, and begin to foster a spirit of community, trust, and professionalism. This is sadly very evident in some departments, but overall we are doing better.

In an Appreciative Inquiry, the responses to the wish question provide insight into participants unmet needs or desire for more of something. In this survey, the wishes can be used to generate a vision for the appreciative process that would generate the most

positive results for institutional and individual change. The ideal process has broad participation, understanding, and engagement from stakeholders, and the institution commits to implementation. Communication and collaboration are fostered with the support of administration and without regard to traditional divisions and hierarchies. Ample resources and an open, positive climate that fosters trust, respect, pride, and safety are also part of that overall vision.

Answering the Quantitative Research Questions

This study addressed six research questions related to the perceptions of change among participants in Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation activities. In Phase One, the initial quantitative phase, four research questions were addressed:

Question One. Did participation in Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation activities (independent variable) relate to perceptions of *institutional* change (dependent variable)?

Based on the results of the quantitative survey, participants were grouped into low, medium, and high participation levels. An ANOVA process using participation level as the independent variable and each respondent's score on the institutional change scale as the dependent variable failed to detect a significant difference among the three levels.

Question 2. Did participation in Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation activities (independent variable) relate to perceptions of *individual* change (dependent variable)?

The answer to the second research question echoes the first. The same ANOVA procedure, this time with the scores on the individual change scale as the dependent

variable, produced a similar result. The scatterplots used in the participant selection process, shown in Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, illustrate these results as well. The distribution of scores above and below the mean for institutional and individual change are noticeably similar at all three levels of participation.

Question 3. Were characteristics in the Appreciative Inquiry experience correlated with perceptions of *institutional* change?

This question was addressed using multiple regression analysis, with each respondent's institutional change score as the dependent variable and their responses on the presence or absence of 18 common characteristics of Appreciative Inquiry processes as the independent variable. Using $p \leq 0.05$ level of significance as the criterion to enter a variable in the resulting model, the researcher found two characteristics did correlate with perceptions of institutional change: "The college is spending money on the projects we started" and "Communication continued after the process was over." These two characteristics only predicted 26% of the variance in perceptions of institutional change, leaving a large amount of variance unexplained by the regression analysis.

Question 4. Were characteristics in the Appreciative Inquiry experience correlated with perceptions of *individual* change?

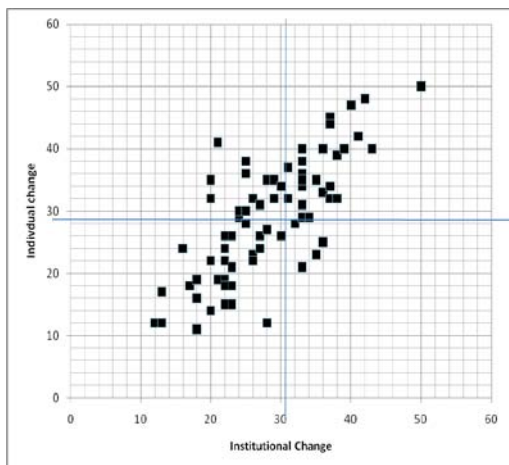
Another multiple regression analysis determined that a combination of five characteristics explained 27% of the variance in respondents' perception of individual change, again using $p \leq 0.05$ as the criterion for inclusion. In addition to the two variables that predicted institutional change, the multiple regression analysis found that "The process was focused on a positive topic about our college," "Project teams

continued working after the process was over," and "Training was provided on the theory behind the process" significantly contributed to perceptions of individual change.

Phase Two: Qualitative Results

Participant Selection

The results of the quantitative survey in phase one were used to identify individuals whose stories would provide a deeper understanding of the appreciative conversation process and its results. The institutional change and individual change scales were used as two axes to plot the individual results for each level of participant, as explained in the methods chapter.



4.1: Low involvement responses

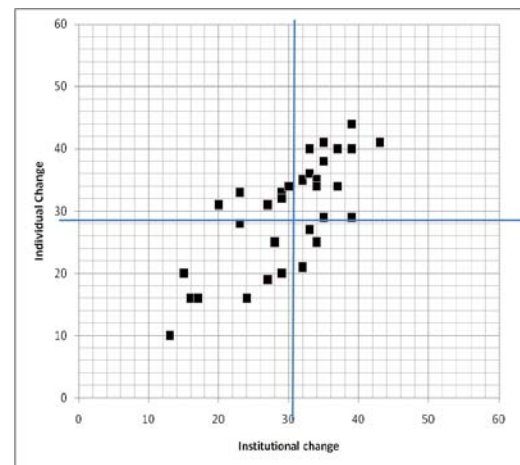


Figure 4.2: Medium involvement responses

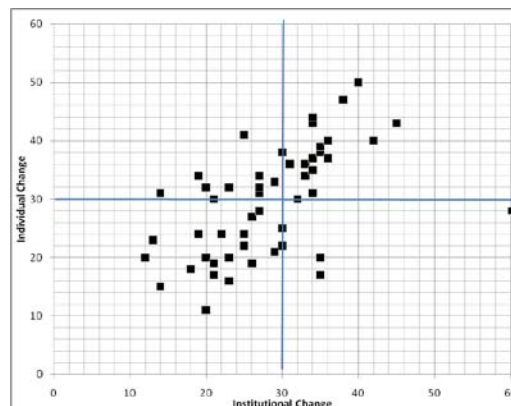


Figure 4.3: High involvement responses

In all three groups, more responses fell in the lower left quadrant (lower than average perception of both institutional and individual change) and the upper right quadrant (higher than average perception of both institutional and individual change) than in the other two quadrants in which one scale response was above the mean and the other was below the mean. As explained in the methods section, individuals were selected for interview in phase two from all but the lower left quadrants of each group in these diagrams. This would have resulted in nine interviews; however, the three respondents in the upper left quadrant (high institutional change and low individual change) for the high involvement group did not consent to be interviewed. Therefore, only eight individual interviews were conducted for phase two. One was a face-to-face interview, and the remaining seven were conducted by telephone.

Qualitative Interview Protocol

Each interview was conducted following a 14-question protocol. The first three questions collected information on the interview subject's position and experience with their institution and with Appreciative Inquiry. Questions four and five provided background on the college's process. In the sixth question, the subject described his or her role leading up to the conversation day. Question seven explored the details of the appreciative conversation event. The immediate follow-up to the event was covered in question eight. Questions 9 and 10 asked about perceptions of institutional change, and questions 11 and 12 asked similarly about individual changes perceived. Question 13 asked subjects to share their wishes for the future. The final question gave the subjects the opportunity to share anything that they felt the researcher missed in the interview. The interview protocol itself appears in Appendix I.

Qualitative Interview Participants

From all the respondents who consented to be interviewed, the following individuals were selected based on their scores on the institutional change and individual change scales to be interviewed for phase two. Because the responses from the two parts of the survey were maintained separately, this researcher did not connect each interview candidate to his or her individual survey responses. Pseudonyms have been used to maintain anonymity of the participants, and institutional locations have been changed:

- Amy is a faculty member in an allied health program at a technical college in Minnesota. She has been employed full-time at her college for seven years and was "fairly new" at the time of the conversation with perhaps two or three years' experience. She'd been an adjunct instructor prior to being hired full-time. Her college had done conversation days before but not with the appreciative focus.
- Barbara is an administrator in charge of coordinating online programming for her community college located in Michigan and was about to be promoted to Dean for Online Learning. She has been employed at her college a total of 15 years, ten of which were in a full-time position. At the time of the conversation day, she was located on a smaller branch campus of the college. This was her first experience with an Appreciative Inquiry event.
- Charles has been with his community college in Kansas for 25 years and is the chief financial officer. He has seen his college through many changes,

but he had not experienced an Appreciative Inquiry conversation prior to this process.

- Don is a senior administrator with Charles at the community college in Kansas and directs continuing education and economic development. He's been at the institution for 30 years. While he's been through many continuous improvement processes with the college's business customers, this was the first appreciatively focused event he'd done.
- Ellen is a technical staff member who spent nine years in the admissions office before becoming a conference center technician at a technical college in northern Minnesota. She'd been at the college seven years before this conversation day and had never experienced an appreciative process.
- Faye's position is the administrator for the non-credit division at a small public university in southern Illinois offering continuing education courses for the community. She has been with the institution 25 years in several positions and was in her current job at the time of the conversation day. It was also her first exposure to Appreciative Inquiry.
- Gina is a college dean at a small university in South Dakota and has worked there for 13 years. She had experienced appreciative planning conversations in other institutions with whom the university partnered.
- Henry is a faculty member and a coordinator at a state college in Colorado. He teaches in arts and humanities. His coordinating role involves working with the school districts in his institution's rural

community. He's been at his college for 20 years in various positions. He had not experienced the conversation process prior this event.

Table 4.6 summarizes the characteristics of the interview participants.

Table 4.6: Summary of Qualitative Interview Participants

Name	Position	Type of Institution	Location	Years at Institution
Amy	Faculty	Technical College	Minnesota	7 years
Barbara	Distance Learning Administrator	Community College	Michigan	15 years
Charles	Chief Financial Officer	Community College	Kansas	25 years
Don	Senior Administrator	Community College	Kansas	30 years
Ellen	Conference Center Technician	Technical College	Minnesota	10 years
Faye	Continuing Education Administrator	University	Illinois	25 years
Gina	Dean	University	South Dakota	13 years
Henry	Faculty	State College	Colorado	20 years

Six of the eight respondents shared a positive experience from their institution's appreciative conversation day and the events that followed. However, the other two respondents shared less successful stories of their appreciative accreditation experience, even though both had a higher than average score on one or both of the change scales. Gina reported a mixed result from her university's project, and Henry reported a more negative picture of what he experienced at his college. In the next section, the six positive cases are reported together, and then the two less positive cases are treated separately.

Successful Stories of Appreciative Accreditation

Each institution's journey toward the appreciate approach began with an administrative decision to shift from the traditional periodic evaluation model of accreditation to the Higher Learning Commission's continuous improvement model called the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). Conducting the Vital Focus self-assessment activity prepares the institution to move into AQIP, and the conversation day is the heart of the Vital Focus model (Priddy Rozumalski 2002). Responding to interview question four, all but one of the respondents' institutions called their events "Conversation Day." At Ellen's college, the full name "AQIP Vital Focus Conversation Day" was used, but no others used the formal name. None but Amy's used the term "Appreciative Inquiry" during their process. Four of the six respondents recalled that a regularly scheduled in-service day was used for the event, but Barbara recalled, "It was not an event that we always have. It was a new and different kind of thing." At Faye's college, the event was planned to coincide with a major concert on the campus, which was incorporated into the theme of the day. From interview question five, respondents indicated that the conversation day events were planned to involve all college employees, reflecting the Appreciative Inquiry principle of wholeness, that is, having everyone who is part of the system participate in its improvement. Nearly all employees at Barbara's, Charles and Don's, Ellen's, and Faye's colleges participated. Amy did not recall any administrators being present at her college's meeting, except for the ones who were leading the process.

Preparation for the conversation day (Interview questions five and six). All of the successful appreciative conversation days were organized by teams of individuals that represented different areas of the college. The director of AQIP at Amy's college and

her team led the conversation event. At Barbara's college, a steering committee that included administrators, faculty, and staff planned the conversation day. The administrative cabinet at Charles's and Don's college initiated the AQIP project and agreed on the structure and the process beforehand. The project itself was led by the Executive Dean of Instruction and Development. Ellen was part of the AQIP Steering Committee that planned her college's conversation day. She volunteered for the group, which was comprised of a mix of office and technical support staff, faculty, and management. Faye was on the committee that organized the logistics of her institution's conversation day; the team went to Chicago prior to the day to learn more about the Vital Focus process. The committee represented a variety of areas from the university, including key individuals from the faculty senate and administration. The provost's office was in charge of the event. An outside facilitator led the conversation day itself at Faye's college, but in the other cases, staff within the college also led the conversation day events.

The respondents also attributed much of the success of their appreciative accreditation processes to the support of administration or other institutional leaders. At Amy's college, their past president made the decision to adopt the AQIP accreditation model and Appreciative Inquiry. The current president continued the effort and "has been all for it." At Barbara's college, a new vice president hired after the conversation day "picked up on a lot of the work that the committees did in these processes and then he made it a priority for the college to follow up on those things. He's been carrying that one-college banner." Don recalled,

We have a college president who is new, although she's been at [the college] for 17 years, but she's new to the job and so she's got a different process that she's going through, but she bought into this because she's been a part of our system for so long, and she knows the weaknesses and she knows the people that she can count on and the ones that she's going to have to follow up on to get results from and, and so that's helped.

Ellen credited the campus administrators and president for reminding staff the conversation days were mandatory: "Our president, he's absolutely 110% behind it, plus he also came from an AQIP model." At Faye's college, staff received invitations from the president and the provost as well as from the leaders of the university faculty, university administrative assembly, and the staff group.

Extensive preparation preceded all of the conversation days. In particular, early and frequent communication was mentioned in several of the successful accounts.

Barbara recalled receiving the conversation day agenda a week or so in advance. Also, a communication survey was done before the conversation day. She believed that more notice would have been an improvement. "I think the first thing we heard was about two weeks before conversation day," she said, "and I think if we would have heard sooner, further out, it would have been more helpful." At Don's college, "There was some marketing, promotional type things for the employees to maybe get them thinking in terms of this might be a little different than what we've normally had. It would have come out through the president's office." He further recalled,

There was a smaller group that did the planning [and] had the various components mapped out for the inquiry event. We had certain staff people who spoke briefly

and focused on some key operational areas of the college in which we want to make improvements sooner, maybe helped to assign some priorities, so, there was a small group that actually did that.

Faye served on her college's planning committee and recalled,

I was aware of the importance of the day and the effort to put importance on the day and to communicate how important it was for everyone. It's surprising how much prior organization is required. It's just important to attend to every single detail and think through things that could go wrong or things that might not go well and work all of that out in advance to make it as positive as possible and as successful as possible.

Ellen was the most heavily involved of the six in her college's planning efforts.

Ellen's college had two all-employee days. At the first day, speakers from another AQIP college and Stephen Spangehl from the Higher Learning Commission laid the groundwork for the process. Ellen remembered,

After going through the groundwork presentation that we had in September, people were a little leery thinking they were going to listen to speakers. So I had to really work hard to get people back on board. We all did, just say, "Ok now, that's done. That's the groundwork. Now, it's you. This is all about you. You are going to be telling us, coming together in your groups, identifying our strengths and our opportunities and look where we could improve or maybe something that hasn't even been addressed before." And I promised them it would not be the same-old same-old what we've been doing year after year.

[Our committee] continually kept all staff informed of what our process and procedure was, and that this conversation day was [necessary] to us being accepted for the AQIP model. So anytime we got together and met and formulated the day for the conversation day, we would let all staff know. We'd bring them up to date. Plus we did have our own website for the staff and a newsletter that they could link on and see updates.

In addition to Ellen's role in planning the details of the day, she also took on a motivating role:

Pumping up the staff, getting them on board, talking about it, sharing my enthusiasm for how important this was to our college and that we were going to have a voice and this wasn't the same-old, same-old that we've been doing for years and years. This was a brand new process, and I felt very strongly about it, and I felt it was a very positive movement in our college. And, so that's what I basically drummed up enthusiasm here on our campus.

Setting for the conversations (Interview question 7b). Four of the respondents' colleges chose to hold their conversation days on their campus. Barbara recalled that "the college closed for the day and everyone went to the main campus, which is about 90 miles away, and that is where we had the conversation day. It was in the gymnasium so that it could accommodate everyone." One drawback of the location, she remembered was, "It was a little hard to hear probably between the groups because we were probably closer than we should have been." Faye's university also held its conversation day in its gymnasium. Classes were rescheduled or cancelled for the day. The room was set up with tables with table cloths and chairs and two head tables. Screens were set up and

messages were projected on them as people entered. She recalled there was food and refreshments and music playing as well. "It was well-organized and somewhat festive," she added. Charles's and Don's event was held in the college gymnasium, which was decorated with balloons to create a festive atmosphere. Charles recalled 20 or 30 tables were set up. The day started with the administrators serving breakfast to the faculty and staff. Amy's college held the conversation day for faculty at an off-site convention facility. The day started with breakfast, and the event lasted just half a day. Ellen's college held its conversation day at an off-campus site in the center of its district so driving distances for everyone were equal. Ellen remarked that this also prevented people from sneaking away to their offices to work.

In all cases, diverse groups were formed to carry out the conversations. At Barbara's college, "we were all assigned to smaller groups that included faculty, staff, and sometimes administrators as well." Don recalled, "people sat at a table not necessarily by job duties or departments. I mean we tried to mix people up a bit which isn't that hard to do." Ellen explained:

One of the things that we had done in part of our planning is identify those groups that we had identified when we brought our group together: office and technical support, custodians, managers, faculty. And what we did is, we planned at every table who would sit where - not by name, just by position. So again, we had that mix of people and that way we didn't have all your office and technical staff sitting together and working together. We encouraged people to work with people they didn't even know.

At Faye's college, seating was also organized in advance:

I remember being grouped with folks that I really hadn't worked with much prior to that day or since. There was a faculty member that I hadn't interacted with much and there was an administrative person and a program chair, and I believe we moved around to another table for different questions, for different conversations.

The exposure to different points of view was helpful for all the respondents.

Conversation day activities (Interview question 7e). The respondents recalled that the conversation day was structured and moved quickly. None felt their day was too long. Faye recalled specifically the steps in the Vital Focus model being used at her college:

We had conversation one, then two, then we reported out. Then we had conversation three, then we had lunch, then we picked up conversation three again and reported out and we reviewed our next steps and then at the end of the day we did quick fixes and there was a closing. [Conversation] one is, what do we agree matters most? Two is, what do we agree are our strengths? What shines vibrantly? And we were to report out on that. Three was in two parts. Part one was, what holds the greatest opportunity for making a significant difference at [our university]? And then after lunch we picked it up and part two was, what holds the greatest opportunity for making a significant difference at [our university]? We reported out and then we reviewed the next steps, understanding the next steps about AQIP and [the university] and our future. And because the AQIP process does often identify quick fixes or the low-hanging fruit, we had a brief discussion on those quick-fix kinds of things. So that they wouldn't

necessarily need to become a part of the teams that would pick up our big topics later.

The other respondents described similar processes from their conversations. Amy described her initial skepticism:

They had sticky notes for us that we each in a group of maybe eight or ten of us at a table would start talking about things that were good and things that needed to be fixed and just start writing them down on sticky notes, and then we went and put them on big boards to just kind of combine them together. I walked out of there feeling like, I have no idea what's going to happen with this. It just seemed like just kind of craziness.

Amy considered it one of the college's more productive in-service days.

Barbara recalled how her college's conversation process resulted in lists of ideas being developed:

We went through a series of questions and we talked about what we thought could be improved and where there were some problems with communication and where there were some differences between the campuses, and then the information from the session was channeled to the president's council and they made a list based on that of what we could fix quickly, what would be a medium range type opportunity, and then what would have to be long-term opportunities. We just accumulated these big lists within our groups, and then each group shared out its list to the bigger group and they had a projector and they would put in all the ideas for improvement, and then the files were saved and then everybody could add to those ideas and help flesh them out a little bit.

Charles described the process generally at his and Don's college conversation day: We would have some people come up on stage that threw the topics out there for discussion, and I'm sure that there were probably some other table discussions that happened at the same time. Those table topics with people taking notes of comments made with the participants at each table, and the notes I think probably were given to the committee to review.

Don supplied more detail and remembered that the day started off with a skit showing how the college traditionally handled face to face customers. "It was kind of funny, I mean, a little hokey, but yet accurate, I guess, if you want to put it that way because that's how we've been doing things." The college also brought in a motivational speaker on customer service as part of the conversation day program, "and he had them under his spell from the very first time he started talking." Then the group discussed what to retain and what to improve:

What we do or an area of the college in which we work and how we normally do things and how could we do these better? What are we doing now that we wish we didn't have to do? And why can't we just get rid of that?

Ellen detailed how the small groups took on the conversation task with little need for direction or oversight:

The usual leaders took leadership, got into their groups, and then they worked together, and we did give them a broad spectrum of ideas; for instance, communication, safety and security, and curriculum development. We were looking at areas for improvement. And I think at first as part of the planning committee, we facilitated our small groups just to get them going, and then we

stepped back and we were there simply to clarify or answer any questions about what our purpose was. They would decide on topics and come up with ideas; then as an even larger group, we would make larger groups, compare what the two had, look at similarities and so then we would combine them and then the people in their group would vote and we had these round colored little sticky things, and then they would just put them by the order that they wanted them; for instance, blue was the number one priority for them, so they would put that by that and then we would just add up how the voting went, and then we identified their top five. And then it was a paring down process. We'd have discussions, see what bubbles up, and then we'd go through that process of elimination, funnel that back down. When we were reporting out, it was all about them. They were reporting out. For instance, we identified in one area quick fixes or what would take long-term. They really had to use their critical thinking skills to determine what would work short term and did we have the resources - financial, human capital. Did we have it all to work with?

Conversation day atmosphere (Interview questions 7c, 7d, and 7f). All of the respondents also discussed the positive atmosphere at their conversation day events. At the same time, all recalled some level of skepticism from a portion of the participants. Amy shared, "It definitely started with an eye-rolling 'Oh my God, what are we doing? I'm trying to teach my kids,' kind of thing. It's like, 'Can we get back to work please?'" Barbara stated, "There was still some reluctance on the part of some to buy in, some of the jaded attitude where it's not going to change anything anyways so why should I waste my time? There are always those people." Don observed similar behavior:

I always like to kind of watch the room and look at people and judge their reactions. I mean, are they wondering what we're going to do, are they starting to nod off, are they thinking about "How much longer are we going to have to put up with this? When can we leave?" And to be honest, there wasn't much of that.

Ellen illustrated how the positive atmosphere helped deal with negativity by sharing a story:

There was an incident when we were doing our final report-outs of what we identified in our conversation day, which were the top areas that we needed to work in and then we also asked people to volunteer to be on those committees to work towards resolve, and there was one person who started heckling a speaker. And we were a little mortified. We've never had that happen before at any of them, and he actually swore and it was like, "You're one person." The speaker handled it very well and said, "Let's talk after. Obviously you're very upset about 'wasting your day' and let's speak after and we'll take it from there." And he started to go on again, but his peers then said, "You know, later. If you don't like it, leave right now." So I was really proud of my co-workers to take it upon themselves to correct the behavior of an adult man who's a physician. I think that incident actually worked in our committee's favor because here we are being berated verbally in front of all of our colleagues by one person, and it's kind of hard to hide that emotion when you see someone attacking you verbally like that in your work. And I think that garnered more support for us.

Describing the atmosphere of the conversation day, Amy remembered "a lot of energy" at her conversation event:

It was definitely a high energy, there were a lot of ideas flying around and people were starting to really mention their concerns, and the one thing that sticks out is I remember a nursing instructor saying, "I think we should have a take your board member to work day, so that the board people can see what we do," and I just remember that one. It just kind of stuck out in my head, and I thought "Well, that's an idea."

Barbara called her college's conversation day "kind of a celebration"; she continued:

It came with discounts at the book store and t-shirts. We all got t-shirts so that we would all feel like one college at the event. I think some people had some goofy costumes. I think it was a 60s theme, so shirts were tie-dyed for conversation day, and then people wore 60s clothes to go with it. [There was] a mixture of people thinking it was cheesy and [who] really didn't buy into it, and then other people were kind of excited like I was about the opportunity to do some things. I think more people bought into it as the day progressed.

Charles recalled a mixture of feelings and attitudes regarding the conversation day. He felt the overall atmosphere was positive. Don described it as a "relaxed, casual atmosphere," and added "it went fast and it was enjoyable." Ellen described the atmosphere at her event like this:

I must say, once things got rolling, it was phenomenal, and people really enjoyed themselves. We timed every segment that we did, and we had to stop them. It wasn't that they were done ahead of time. The engagement I thought was really incredible. Overall, the outcome was fantastic.

Faye's college did the most to create a positive atmosphere for their day by including entertainment for the participants:

The day itself had some festive moments to it. There was a nickel, there was kind of a little theme, a fun theme about a nickel, like giving a nickel, and someone donated a jar of nickels and people could guess how many were in the jar and there was a drawing about that, and then we have a beautiful relatively new theater here on campus and Nickelback was playing that night. And part of the organization of the whole thing is that it was planned kind of strategically around the same time or something and so several times throughout the day and the weeks leading up to it there were announcements about 'don't forget to go to the concert,' and that was all kind of woven into the day. I believe there were quite a [few] surveys that were sent out prior to the day, and there were some little kudos given to any office who answered the survey first, and everybody in your group has completed a survey, so it was quite a bit of fanfare surrounding the day that made it somewhat festive and not just a lot of work, but somewhat fun.

When the day was complete, Faye recalled a very positive reaction:

It was very positive because we as a university [had] grown from a community college to a university over the years and we had been through several presidents [and] there had been a little bit of turnover at our provost level and our presidential level. We have two unions on campus and there was some general concern going into the day that there might be some negativity or some apathy or lack of support for all gathering in a room and working on what's good about the

university and starting a conversation. And I think we were all very pleasantly surprised in that it went very, very well. I don't recall any major conflict at all.

Follow-up to the conversation day (Interview question eight). Each respondent recalled that there was an immediate follow-up to the successful conversation day events. Amy recalled that the leader and her team

took it and literally wrote everything down, all the ideas, and posted it on our website that we could then look at, and then we had a follow-up with it, and I don't remember specifically what the follow-up was, but it was another day. It might have been just another all faculty day scheduled. I do remember going, "Oh," when it was like, "All right people, this is what you had to say here and here and here, and then on this we had here and here and here."

Barbara recalled that the informal follow-up conversations from her college's event started immediately as the event ended:

On the way home in the [college] vehicles, the conversation continued and it was probably a little bit more open than it was on the main campus where we talked about it. Some of the things people didn't bring up in the meeting were things they were more likely to say in a car with 5 or 6 people.

These informal follow-up discussions did not get connected back to the process. At Barbara's college, open meetings were held a couple months after the conversation day for follow-up. "They also put things on our website about what the quick fixes would be."

Ellen, who was a planning team member at her college, described their follow-up this way:

What we did is we really encouraged them on their flip charts to keep accurate lists and summaries of when people were choosing what they felt was most important for quality improvement, that they kept a nice summary of that. We gathered all of those materials, all of the flip chart pages, all of the notes, our notes that we took while we were observing, and then at the end of the report out, if something bubbled up at the last minute, we could keep track of that as well. It was all compiled and the results were sent out to every staff member, and then they were also posted on the our special AQIP website and people were given a link to that as well. The communication from then on, through the staff, each individual campus has an in-service or an all-staff meeting once a month, and we always bring forward what's going on with that and where all the projects stand. Faye recalled a similar process at her college that relied on capturing all the conversation day content in writing:

Immediately they compiled the outcome information that our people showed up on the screen, and I do remember that because there was some clean-up that our group spent working through the actual [results]; I think there were even some anonymous hand-written notes that were handed in too that were asked for, and so our people in our group cleaned all that up and typed all that in, and that was all somewhat published or reported on to the campus. So there was immediate feedback to the whole campus of some sort. Then, there was a full report given out. It was very long and there was quite a bit of detail, statistics given, what matters most to us, and that was reported back to the campus. There were photos about the day that were sent around the campus. There was a big report done and

then there were some things that people identified as what you called easy fixes or quick fixes, and I do believe those were attended to right away, and it might have had something to do with as simple as repaint the parking lot stripes, that kind of thing, and I think those were attended to right away, and then, of course, your teams were set up, and those teams went into the AQIP process then immediately, and so that was good.

Charles recalled, "The committee would have gathered the comments and notes that were taken and again formulate the AQIP projects." Don elaborated:

There was a summary made of the day that each employee received. I mean, here's what was said. Here's what you said. Here are the things that were said about what we're doing well. Here are the things that were brought up that we aren't doing well in our opinion, and so, what are we going to do with these?

In addition, the administration at Don's college followed up:

We [cabinet members] each have a notebook that shows what we either volunteered to do or what we were assigned to do, and we have two cabinet meetings a month, and at one of those we specifically spend time talking about this process and reporting back on what we've done, what we're in the process of doing differently. Some decisions, of course, require a more formal process. We put everything down on paper and we've got it, and instead of like we've done in years gone by where they bind it and put in on the shelf, we're actually using the documents and holding people accountable in a nice way. Not threatening or anything, but "doggone it you said you were going to do this, now why didn't you

do it? Or when can you do it? Because this is really important. We're counting on you" type thing.

Because the conversation days led into each college's AQIP accreditation action projects, follow-up committees were a part of each respondent's story. At Amy's college, volunteers were solicited for three action project teams at the conversation day. She eagerly joined the team looking at admission requirements for programs. "In our program, we were very interested in what was going on with students being prepared and admitted," she explained, "because we are having trouble with attrition. So it's like, 'all right, let me get my fingers in there. Let me see what's going on.'" Two other committees dealt with internal communications and attrition. Amy stated:

That specific team I was on was wonderful. It's probably the only chance I had other than working my own little bubble. It was a wonderful chance to get to know some of the administration, and to get some of the staff, because there was representation on each committee for that. I know some of these people that I would not have otherwise known.

Barbara joined the Academic Quality Improvement committee after the conversation day:

I think leaders developed out of that day. The people who were the most outspoken in the small groups were nominated to be co-facilitators by the people who participated in those groups. So that's how the AQIP committee was formed partially is by these suggestions of people from that day for who should lead from the groups. So for the first two or three years, our quality improvement efforts were led by the people who were chosen by their peers.

Charles and Don were both appointed to several of the action project committees at this college. Ellen's college formed a number of committees; for example, a standing committee on communication and an ad hoc committee on unifying the five college locations with the feel of a single college. "I know that the committees are active," she said, "and then we always celebrate our achievements by retiring action projects."

Two Less Successful Stories

Two of the interview participants who scored higher than average on one or both of the change scales on the survey described less successful conversation days than the other six. Nevertheless, they were able to see some positive changes follow from their events.

Lack of follow-through. Gina's university launched its appreciative accreditation project under the banner of "Vision 2014," which was led by the vice president of academic affairs, along with the institutional research director and a faculty member. They also had three outside facilitators. She recalled:

Prior to that day we had done a survey. I don't know if Survey Monkey was even around then, but we'd done a survey, and [the Higher Learning Commission staff] was there because they had all the results and they summarized the results of the survey.

All employees were invited to the conversation day, and classes were cancelled for the day. The event was held in the university's gymnasium. As in the other cases, the employees were grouped for maximum diversity:

There were like a chair or a dean was at every table. They had people from staff, maintenance staff, dining staff, some of those folks at every table; you had

secretarial staff or support staff also at the table; and you had several faculty members at the table; and occasionally you had a higher level administrator. So there were about six to eight people with that make-up, and every table had that make-up.

Gina's college followed a process similar to the conversation days of the other interview respondents:

We basically started out with a little continental breakfast, and I think the first thing we did was the review from the Constellation Survey. We then went into what that meant for [our university] and some of the basic statistics of [the university], and then we were asked to write some personal goals. We were asked to write group goals, kind of put them together and then eventually come to a point of how we handled academic things and we kind of put things in categories. We broke for lunch, and then we came back and basically that's when we started more of a whole group action where each table started to report out and eventually came up with the big pieces of paper so that we could put dots on. So the length of the day, we probably started at 8:30 and we were done by 3:30.

Following the group work, Gina recalled, "Out of that somebody, the team, the AQIP team took it. I guess they put it together in some kind of form and out of that grew three action plans."

As with the other cases, the atmosphere at Gina's conversation day started out mixed:

I think for me and most of the other folks, I think we really didn't know what it was going to be all about. I think there was some anxiousness because I think we

knew ahead of time that the Constellation Survey was going to be reviewed and there had been some rumors around campus of things about it. And so I think some people were kind of uneasy about that or anxious that it would personally point out people that weren't doing their jobs. I was hoping it would just give us some structure and I had hoped for the day that we could finally get everybody kind of talking across colleges.

As the day went on, Gina recalled a positive change in climate:

I think there was a high energy. People were talking and socializing. I think that day gave people a lot of positive news about the university. We know we're the lowest paid university in the state, and I think they felt like there might be plans to rectify some things. So I think that people were hopeful. I think people felt like they walked away with a greater understanding of the university as a whole and I think people were tired at the end of the day.

Looking back on the day, Gina reflected:

I thought probably the strongest aspect was the beginning conversations where you really tried to get to know [other people's jobs]. Your perception of someone's job might not really be their job, and so when you ask people to do things, you don't really know all the other 1,200 things that they really do. I think it was the first opportunity to try to understand that when I do something in academics, the registrar's office now has to do these 12 things, not the one thing that I think they have to do, so those kinds of things I think were beneficial.

In terms of follow-up, Gina's university undertook three major projects from their conversation day:

They formed three action plans, and I think they might have done those when they went to Chicago for a meeting. The action plans were student retention, in that they put a student success committee together and we formed a student success center. The one I was on was on instituting our first integrated data system, and that coincided with us receiving a Title III grant, and so I was on the team and still am that integrates and keeps the changes up and going and cleanse data. We worked almost two jobs for three years, and that one actually has been closed as a success because the action plan itself was only for the implementation, not the maintaining period. I think the third one had more to do with enrollment, getting the enrollment up, but I don't know what happened. There was an enrollment committee that was formed, but it disintegrated.

Gina shared wishes she had that would have improved her university's process as well: "Given our physical plant situation at the time, I couldn't have done [it], but today I could have put it in a more intimate environment where it wasn't a gymnasium feel."

Regarding the follow-up to the conversation, she stated:

I wouldn't have waited six months in between. We didn't recap everything until the next year. And I thought that it was out of sight, out of mind. You had different players. I believe you have to recap a lot more often through a lot of things, whether we got e-mails asking us to respond, if the committees were formed sooner. It felt like everybody went back in to just the AQIP committee, and everybody else just went on their merry little way, except that we named it Vision 2014 and put it in the catalog.

Gina did not recall the information from the big sheets of paper at the conversation day being shared in any way with the college as a whole immediately after the event.

Regarding the next conversation day six months later, she explained:

It was kind of a recap of where we were and where we've been. Not much new came out of it. We just redid those big sheets of paper and put new dots on. Basically it felt like we were rehashing some of the same issues on the second day, and we started to deviate from the plan on town hall. We have town hall meetings still, but they don't have anything to do with AQIP. Even when we did do follow-ups, we tended only to involve director-level people. And I think that for the employee who works in dining services or at the secretarial level, they really didn't get the opportunity to continue that growth process and I think that's important.

She summed up her feeling of disconnectedness this way:

You might have specific issues that came to the table and the new committees, but there wasn't a throwback to what it was all about. Never in this process did we take, you know, somebody's proposing a new major. How does that fit in with our Vision 2014? Nobody ever made those checks and balances after the fact except some of us who wanted to, but nobody would listen. You had some of the deans and the faculty that wanted to make those alignments, but upper management wasn't concerned about that at all, and the AQIP committee wasn't concerned about that at all.

A conversation day in the midst of administrative upheaval. Henry's experience with the conversation day at his college and its follow-up was the most

negative of the eight interview subjects. This was largely due to the climate at the college and administrative changes that hampered the process. Henry recalled:

We did have one day where it was just the faculty talking to the president, and I think the decision that came out of that was we were going to do the AQIP, but we needed to have somebody come in and tell us what we were going to do.

This led to planning the conversation day. The overall project was led by a group of administrators from across the college. An outside facilitator was used, and all employees were invited to attend the conversation day. Henry characterized it as "very poorly organized." He explained:

The people who were there were not really prepared for what they needed to do there. The impressions that a lot of people had, versus what was, were different, and then because of the situation that the institution was in and the relationships with administration, some faculty took it as an opportunity to bitch. I think if it would have been from our standpoint organized so people knew what they were supposed to do versus come in, stand up, take the floor and complain. More of "we know there's problems, we know there's things we need to fix. Let's talk about what we're going to fix, how we're going to approach it." I think the lady that facilitated it tried to do that, tried to take things into a positive, "you can make change, you can do these kinds of things." She struggled simply because we weren't prepped enough and organized enough on our end to facilitate what she wanted to really accomplish. She sent us all of the stuff. I mean it wasn't in any way, shape, or form her problem. She had sent everything: the agendas, the outlines, what she wanted, what she needed, how she wanted everything set up.

She had forwarded that in plenty of time for it to be printed so she could facilitate it a particular way, and it just didn't happen.

Henry also described the circumstances that created the tense atmosphere surrounding the event:

The previous president, the president that was here when I got here, was a meticulous stickler, hardcore. The building was immaculate, you did your job or there were consequences for not getting stuff done, meeting deadlines. He was very good and our institution was flying pretty high when he retired. And we brought in a new guy who rode the wave of the success that was going on and didn't really follow through, and so what was happening was, there were things getting assigned, there were responsibilities, duties, and people weren't doing them. People who were getting assigned to them weren't doing them and it was fine. There was a lot of tension between administration and faculty. Our enrollment had decreased by 50 percent. Our budgets were getting cut left and right. There was a lot of negative on campus. A lot of negative going in.

Everybody, everybody knew that things needed to get changed, but there was a lot of finger-pointing going on about who was supposed to change it and who wasn't doing their job and who was doing their job, and so we were not in a good place when we started this.

Despite the negative atmosphere and lack of preparation, Henry recalled that some people did try to get into the spirit of the appreciative conversation:

We don't need to complain, we need to figure out what it is that's wrong and move forward. Some people were there, very much "we need to move, we gotta make

some changes, what changes are we going to make?" Others just wanted to complain about the situation. So I think there were things that administrators needed to hear and there was direction that was set and out of that meeting came, "Ok, here's the categories that we need to work on, put a team together of people who can deal with these particular issues, who's going to be the best people on campus to deal with these particular issues, let's make a team and let's get going on them." I think there was a lot of excitement about the fact that everybody was supposed to be included.

Follow-up to the conversation day was also less than successful for Henry's college. "Not everybody was invited to get involved," he recalled. He continued:

So we kind of had that high ebb. We came back off of the training days in Chicago. We put together teams to work on action projects. Mostly like my team was "Ok, I'll take these guys. These guys are the biggest bitches that we have on campus, and we'll work on a project right away, so they can't say they're not involved, blah-blah-blah. You guys are responsible for this project." So we tried to do that when we came back, to get people involved because it was kind of a lull for a bit after the conversation day, and then we had to get people back into it.

That was the problem with the Chicago thing. School was out, so when we got back the faculty weren't around. What we did on the Chicago thing got communicated. Here's what we're going to be working on this fall. Here's who the teams are. We actually got the teams to meet over the summer and explained to them what we were doing, so I would say there were probably about 20 to 25 people on those teams who were brought right back in the summer to explain, and

then in the fall at the in-service, it was all gone through with everybody on campus. So, what came out of the conversation day got sent out as an e-mail, a minutes kind of thing, notes. Whether everybody read it or not, well, you know how faculty are. "I didn't get that. Yeah, you did. Well, I got it, but I deleted it."

As the accreditation project continued, administrative turnover further eroded the momentum from the conversation day. Henry described the upheaval that followed:

We had a little difficulty with the state. The state came in, our president resigned, and we got a new president. Recommendations were made. There were only two people off of that [AQIP] team that remained at the college. Everybody else was replaced. Then last year or so, they brought in another person. The new president had one of the guys set up where a lady from AQIP came in and talked to the faculty again, and we basically revised the AQIP process and finished what we were doing and started in a little bit different method. We actually had kind of two conversation days. The second lady that came didn't really [do] much, so I don't want to call that a conversation day.

With the new president came a reorganized approach to the AQIP process:

That team was changed so initially we had an AQIP team, and then the new president changed it, so now our AQIP team is different. There's nine people instead of eight, but there's layers in the AQIP so, I don't know if I'm explaining that right, so there's like nine categories, and I'm chair of, I think it's eight, number eight, the external relationship building. I'm the chair of that and then there's chairs of the others. Also [on] the team now, some of them are administrators, some of them are faculty, so it's a totally different team, totally

different set-up than it was initially. The thing is, I don't want to say it was negative. There were two totally different interpretations of how AQIP works. Our first president had one, and our new president has a different one. So it's not really that our first method we were doing was wrong; our first method was different. The new president said it was wrong, but I don't think it was. It was just different. It was a different approach. Different approaches aren't necessarily wrong.

Henry expressed disappointment with set-backs in the work of the original AQIP teams:

The administrative change made a lot of changes just coming in without using any AQIP stuff. Almost like, "yeah, maybe you should have looked at some of the stuff we did because we were working on some of these things"; for example, the hierarchy and job descriptions and things of that nature was one of the projects that we were working on, and the new administrator pretty much disregarded that and created his own, so that team worked really, really hard on that and a lot of it got negated by administrative overrule.

On the other hand, another project on program review was successfully completed and implemented. Henry characterized a third project on developing divisional mission statements as "a waste of time." Ultimately, Henry did sound a hopeful note regarding the inclusiveness of the new president's approach to AQIP:

I think this process because of the way the teams are set up now, you have administrators, faculty, and staff on every committee and so that unity really makes things run smoothly. I think that that might be the biggest thing that comes

out of this is this whole cooperative spirit, what's best for the institution versus what's best for me and my position.

Perceptions of Institutional Change (Interview questions 9 and 10)

In the participant selection model, three of the eight interview participants had a score below the mean on the institutional change scale. Nevertheless, all the interview participants shared some kind of example of positive change that occurred at their institutions following the conversation day and the related accreditation activities. Because of the action-oriented projects that are part of AQIP, many of these changes were related to existing processes and structures at their institutions. Barbara's college conducted a communication audit, made physical improvements to their landscaping and parking, and started a task force on valuing people. Charles's and Don's college changed its student advising process and was successfully reaccredited. Faye felt her college's change from the quarter system to the semester system was a positive change. Gina's college started a student success center and implemented an integrated data system. Henry shared that his college's program review process was successfully changed. Amy cited an improved admission process and the success of their reaccreditation project using AQIP. Amy was the only participant whose college carried the Appreciative Inquiry beyond the conversation day and incorporated it into their professional development workshop program. "I just loved it," she stated enthusiastically, "that whole frame of mind change, 'look at it from a positive attitude' type of thing, I thought was just great. It made for a really great day. And I came back and told my faculty, you gotta do this!"

Barbara shared a particularly successful committee as an example of institutional change at her college:

We have an action project as a result of our improvement efforts for on-line learning, and the on-line learning action project is working towards lining up on-line processes and also getting accreditation for on-line degrees, and I would say that action project has been a place where the campuses have come together because it includes members from both campus locations and it has addressed a lot of those processes. The people who were on the group were well chosen, they're all very collaborative in nature, and they would want to share those processes, but they're also open to the idea that it could change or that it needs to be different. So they're willing to explore different things and they have, and so they've been an incredibly productive group. Not only have they worked on the accreditation issue but they've probably completed a dozen other projects in addition to that. They have impacted the college.

Don also shared that people are taking ownership at his college:

We've gotten most of our employees thinking in terms of self-improvement as a system, as individuals, as work groups, as departments, and there have been numbers of conversations among employees, and I'll give an example in our front business office on one of the campuses. They've actually had some meetings among themselves and their supervisor to discuss what they could change not only in the physical structure of how that's laid out, but who does what, and I think one of the big things that came out of this is that more and more people realize that this is everybody's job, whether it's marketing the college, whether it's customer service, whether it's improving the appearance of the college, even though I'm not one of the maintenance people, it's still part of my job to if I see

something say, how can we fix this? How could we move this or get this out of here and so forth, so we've got more people than ever before thinking in terms of what we can do better, and there's been some significant improvements, I mean small but when you put them all together collectively they've been good.

All of the participants also shared stories of climate changes at their institutions.

Barbara volunteered:

I think that people are valued more. People understand a little bit more what other people do, and I think over time a respect has developed for how things are done on our campus and how things are done on other campuses. We're mapping more processes. We've come to the realization that we based a lot of our efforts on personal leadership and we need process-based leadership. I think we're coming more together as one college instead of operating in two silos basically.

She summed up the climate change at her college this way:

I think people were just a little bit reluctant that first time to express their ideas, but the more we met after that, and we would meet a couple two or three times during the year for different discussion groups. They were never called conversation day, but we had other opportunities at in services and things to work on projects, and I think that the longer that's gone on, the more likely people have become to speak up, and so the more productive those groups have become. And I think the administration pays close attention to what's being said and does what it can take to implement the ideas from groups. Some things they move forward with and some they don't, and I think more often than not they try to move forward with some type of initiative to address what people are bringing up so

hopefully people will buy into the process and continue to make suggestions and contribute. And I don't think there is that much reluctance to participate now. I still think people kind of don't always make the most honest comments, and they kind of try to be politically correct and if they would be more open, it would be more helpful but we're not to that point yet.

Charles and Don also described changes in the atmosphere of their institution.

Charles shared:

One of the things that the accreditors came back with was that, as far as what they said during their evaluation of their time on campus, more conversation with employees dealt with the family atmosphere at the college. And I think that's been a very positive response. That's what people feel working here.

Don made a similar comment:

A big thing is that I sense among the employees in general, I mean this is true throughout the college, I go out to the cafeteria, the student center at lunch sometimes and sit with a group of maintenance, custodians, whatever we call them, or some of the faculty and I don't fit in with those groups. I don't work in the academic side so I'm not around those people very often, but the atmosphere is very friendly and I see a higher level of communication among employees than we've had in a long time. One big thing is I feel more comfortable talking to people that I don't normally work with at the college about things related to the college that may or may not be part of their job. And when I say more comfortable, it isn't because I was apprehensive about talking to them or hesitated to talk to them, but because we went through this, they have a different

perspective, and so they're more receptive to maybe discussing some things that they wouldn't have before or sharing some things with me that they wouldn't have shared before because well, 'you know he's one of them, he's down at the administration building,' so while it isn't anything to do specifically with just me, as a result of this day, this atmosphere has made things better.

Ellen's perceptions of institutional change were also related to climate and how it has improved at her institution:

I have seen buy-in from the majority of the staff and people more willing to come forward and serve on these committees. People have come to me and said they feel valued, and I think when you have a valued staff, you have a loyal staff, a staff that's working to provide good service to our customers. I don't have that closed-door feeling anymore that administration is in this bubble and they have secrets. I feel everything is transparent.

She felt this started at the conversation day itself:

One of the things that happened during that day is, we always take care of minor business, and our CFO spoke on the financial situation, and people said from the very beginning, when they were doing the quick updates that they appreciated the honesty. They'd never had a CFO come forward before and say, "This is exactly where we're at financially." So, I just feel like the open-door policy of honesty, there's nothing to hide, I think that really struck true with people, and I just I don't hear people bashing our administrative people like they used to in the past. I really believe that there has been a slow morphing of trust in what we've done,

and the people that are what they consider the leaders of our college, and that would be in administration.

Faye's similarly observed that the conversation day marked the beginning of a climate of open communication at her institution:

A big thing that came about in the general conversation was the need for more open communication from across campus, positive communications, because as I had said over the years prior to this there was kind of a climate that maybe wasn't as positive, and I believe since this conversation day, since we took up AQIP, there's been a real effort made for official and positive communications across the campus from the president's office, from the provost's office, and I've noticed an increase in positive communications and feeling more informed.

Henry saw mixed results from his college's disorganized conversation day but perceived some level of success:

The climate change initially was not really happening. I think we were at a tough time with our administration; it's just that [the former president] didn't really give the ownership up of things. The new president came in, and at least he puts forth an image of he's giving it up and letting the faculty and staff have more ownership of the institution. My understanding of the whole AQIP was to provide ownership, commitment from the employees. It was partly theirs and they have something to say about how things function or don't function on campus, so I think there's a lot more involvement in maybe not necessarily making decisions as such but knowing about things and having input into things before the decisions are made. Not on everything, but things that have to do with academics and the

climate of the school. The administrative staff is, still they do whatever they want to do, but academically there seems to be more commitment, more input from the faculty.

Henry placed some hope in the new president for continuing the change:

Our president, his interpretation of how [AQIP] works is that we probably will have a conversation day every fall. That's kind of the impression that I'm getting is that we'll meet as a whole group, every employee will meet and we'll do it.

We'll talk about it and, let's see last fall we had the different groups get together and present what their thoughts were, so yeah, I think it's going to happen every year.

Unlike the others, Gina only recalled positive process changes and did not perceive a positive climate change at her institution:

I think there was a beginning to bring what we called silos together and not act independently, but because of the upper management team at the time, that fell apart totally, and we even had some consultants for our action plan that tried to maintain that view and it didn't work, so people went back to acting in their silos and what's best for them. In some cases it was worse than before. Because [a senior administrator] at the time was doing deals behind tables and in back rooms with certain colleges and not being forthcoming and transparency that we were supposed to be moving towards, it tore the university apart. And so we certainly weren't looking at the vision, so we had major issues there. I think that they're redoing some AQIP stuff now and it's bringing some things back together, but even then the communication over the past year has been—unless you were on a

committee, you were virtually not aware of anything. And only faculty and some staff were put on this time. We didn't have the whole shebang like we did last time.

Perceptions of Individual Change (Interview questions 11 and 12)

Six of the eight interview participants scored above the mean on the individual change scale of the survey. Consistent with that finding, six of the eight were able to share something related to positive individual change. Charles and Henry did not see a change in themselves.

Amy felt that the Appreciate Inquiry approach "was kind of a confirmation of how I felt, like my philosophy in general. It was a real affirmation like 'Yeah, this can be done this way. This is great.'" She described taking a more positive approach to dealing with difficult students. "I make sure the student understands we are on the same page. We have the same goal. We want you to graduate. We both want you to succeed. It's been very, very useful and I definitely get a very positive response from that."

Barbara's involvement in the conversation day and the AQIP committee helped her emerge into a leadership role:

By fall 2006, I would have been on the AQIP committee. So I was already moving into that position where I could help lead other people who are involved in the same and related processes that came out of the conversation day, and then over time, I've been tasked more heavily with things because of the visibility that the committee work afforded me.

Barbara saw a change in her communication style also:

I find that I tend to explain things to more people and to try to bring them on-board and I also try to share the bigger picture of the vision, the perspective that you get from having been on those joint committees with other people so they understand the importance of the committee that they're on, so that they feel comfortable making a statement or helping them figure out how to say what they want to say in a way that's productive, in a way that going to be accepted by people from the other campus or by other members of the committee that they work on. So I guess I find myself mentoring other people and helping them figure out how to be more productive members of the groups they're member of as well.

Barbara gave this example illustrating her individual change:

I led a discussion group at in-service that talked about the basic course shell concept and how it worked, and I found myself in front of a room of either very supportive faculty or very hostile faculty and a few staff spread in. Some faculty absolutely supported it and thought it a great idea, and some were absolutely opposed to it. So I kind of felt like the duck on the wire going back and forth answering questions. But I felt like the answers that I gave really bridged the gap and explained the direction we were taking as a college as a whole and that came from the work on that committee, of course, and then I was representing that committee's work in that session really. I felt very good about the answers that I gave to everybody and I felt like we gave them a lot of really good information.

Don shared that his college's process changed his perception of his role in the college:

I've realized that every day, I need to analyze what I could do better, what I should do differently. I don't necessarily want to call it always reinventing myself, but I always do frequent self-evaluations. As a result of this conversation day, I see myself in a little broader role than just doing what I'm hired to do and maybe helping to facilitate change more than what I've done in the past, so as a result of this conversation day, I've felt better about things, and I think one thing is, I'm not a meeting person. And yet with this conversation day, it did open up some insight into kind of a little different perspective: "All right now this is something that's important to us, so how can we make it enjoyable? How can I make it enjoyable? How can I tolerate this type of thing more?" And it hasn't been that hard. It's been actually easy to be honest. It's helped me more quickly understand some aspects of the college that I never really understood before because I either didn't want to or didn't have to or I couldn't make any in-roads into them and then I didn't try hard enough because what difference does it make anyway.

Ellen's individual change centered on internalizing the idea of continuous improvement:

I try to remind myself every day that we're making continuous improvement. We don't just sit back on our laurels and just wait for every 10 years to roll around; we look around. What could we do? We've formed a committee on our campus just to spruce up the dreary looking places, just to make it inviting so that when you walk in, you don't look around and say, "Well, they could do something with this." Why don't we hang some relevant information on a wall just to have

something there for people to see, and maybe put some greenery in. Or we have old furniture, let's bring it up from the basement and make a nice little sitting area. We call ourselves the Pretty Committee. So, we're thinking constantly [about] how we're perceived by people walking through our doors and that's their first impression, and that matters, and we've got to do something about that.

Ellen also encourages this attitude in others now:

I'm really sensitive to attitudes and opinions about things, and especially if someone comes up with something negative. Instead of just saying, "Oh okay, so that's how you feel," and blow[ing] them off, because who wants to hang around a negative Nancy, I might say, "Well, what do you think we could do to improve that? Would you be willing to take that forward?" Because we do have on our website the opportunity for them to go forward and identify what they see is a problem.

Faye felt a closer connection to her university and its goals from participating in the conversation day:

I consider it, personally, a very positive experience. I do remember that day as being very positive and a day when myself and others around me felt valued by the university and while you always know you're a part of the university, you're doing all you can do for your job, it is very positive to feel valued, and I think that one of the best ways to help that happen is just a personal, public invitation/semi-requirement for folks to come and say how they feel in a focused way and how would they make the university a better place, how would they provide better services to students, and then get a chance to say what role they play in doing all

of that. And I just think it was very positive, and I feel more valued because of it. I would think that maybe one change I might have seen since not necessarily the conversation day itself but in going with the AQIP process, is I do have a clearer idea of [our university's] long-term and short-term goals and that we do have long-term goals and short-term goals and that we do have a strategic plan, and to me that seems a little more transparent or open to the public or available for people to know about than it was before.

Gina shared that the conversation day and its less than successful aftermath did result in an individual change: "One of the things that I've done a whole lot is ask more questions here, probably more than some people care to. I am a big policy person, and that's important to me to follow policy, so I've been lot more vocal about that." She also stated that the individual project committee on which she served had an impact on her individually:

The action team that I was on afterwards was more important. Again, I believe that's because it was continuous and weekly and we understood what we were doing, and I think, I truly believe that if you're going to have a collaborative effort, you have to meet often. That was life-changing. It was an opportunity to really get into the depths and the workings of the university and understand personalities, understand how we have to come together as a unit. That action committee was one of the best things I've ever done professionally.

Wishes for the Future (Interview question 13)

Similar to the final question on the survey, the final question in the eight interviews asked participants to share their wishes for the future of their institution now

that the conversation day and its follow-up activities had occurred. The wish question leads people to focus on an ideal future, often by fulfilling some unmet need from the current state.

All of the participants were able to share a wish for further growth and change at their college or university. Amy hoped for more conversation:

We need more conversation days. I thought it went really well. I thought once we understood what we're doing, I think to do it again would be a good idea.

Keep those communication lines open between administration, faculty, and staff.

I think that would be my biggest wish.

Amy also wished for "the individual [Appreciative Inquiry] workshops, I'd like to see everybody go through that and do that." Faye also hoped the conversation days would continue, "I would like to see us continue, have another conversation day and continue to build on moving forward with new short and long term goals, and as we achieve some of our goals, then move forward onto new ones." Barbara wished that the communication from the project would take hold:

I would like to see people actually talk about the things that are important and to talk to all the stake holders involved and to be more positive. It'd be nice if we could just bring our issues out and openly ask questions and provide answers and then to work toward what's best for the college as a whole, which I think we are starting to do. But people just kind of fall back and start digging their fighting positions when questions come up, and what we really need to do is, as a whole, stop, take a look at it, analyze it, and move forward with the best answer for the college as a whole.

Charles's wish focused more on the analytical process of the conversation day and the desire for more of this kind of thinking:

I hope that we continue to look at the situations that would create an AQIP project for the betterment of the college. I think it's critical to self-analyze at the institution and if you have several individuals who think that there's a need to get something different done, I think that's a wonderful way of accomplishing that. The more you do, the more you tell, the more people understand what we're trying to get accomplished.

Don wished for a continuation of the high level of employee involvement in the improvement process at his college:

I hope that we continue to involve everybody in the process and that we do it in a broader way than what we may have done years ago. We're all on more of an equal basis, we all have our jobs to do, but doggone it, the maintenance person in our building, you're just as important and in some ways more important to the system than what I am. So we're trying to instill that philosophy, and it's been a big change in a short amount of time.

Ellen also wanted to extend the level of involvement and engagement into the future:

I really feel that the staff is going to have more buy-in in what we move forward with because it's their ideas. It comes from them. And they have seen that management is not dictating how to handle their ideas. And looking for solutions for things that could be improved upon. And I think that is so important because we have some staff that have been here 30+ years, and they've seen it all from 'Ok we're going to do this and it's going to be great' and it goes back, and so those

naysayers are really hard to move forward and change is difficult. But if it's their change, then there's buy-in, and I think that is the most important thing. There will always be the leaders who want to get involved and will lead the way, but the staff seeing that it's not the higher management saying "You're going to do this, this, this and this"; it's the local representatives on your campus that are your peers reporting out and saying "This is what we've come up with," or they'll send out a survey and get results and then they send all the survey results and say "Okay, this is what came out of that. This is from you." And I really feel that going forward, people are not going to be afraid to fill out surveys—sometimes people feel they're going to be tracked down on those surveys.

Gina's wish follows from her description of the administration not following through on the conversation process:

My hope is...we have a new VP, so I have a lot of hope there, and he seems to also understand AQIP and standards and everything that goes around that, and my hope is that we can be beyond reproach in our dealings with kids and making sure that we have opportunities to grow, and that we come together in more discourse so that everybody does have an opportunity to voice their opinion. I want people to have a voice, and we have started some new strategic planning where that might happen. I haven't seen the end of that yet. The university's had some financial issues over the last couple years. I think some people feel like things are hidden, and I think that they would entertain a lot of knowing what's happening, how can we change, how can we be part of the change, rather than being hidden, everything hidden.

Likewise, Henry's wish follows directly from the difficulties in his college's process:

I think the institution needs to revert. I don't want to sound like a conservative who talks about the past, but we used to have this whole community idea, this whole notion of working together and it's a community and cooperation and everybody got along really well. Then we went to a faculty versus staff, rifts within the departments, rifts within the staff. I see the beginnings of [collaboration]. I think there's a lot more cooperation going on; there's a lot more conversation going on between the different groups. It's not us versus them anymore; it's not your department, my department. I mean when they get on the AQIP stuff, it's more institution as a whole, so I see it happening already.

Henry ended his interview on a cautiously optimistic note:

As an institution we needed drastically to make changes, and this provides a really nice tool to do that. It's what we needed as an institution and it came about in a very timely period that we need to do this, and I think a lot of people understand that we need to do it, so there really is pretty good commitment, and it's probably because we were not in a good place and we need to get back to a good place.

Answering the Qualitative Research Questions

In the qualitative second phase, the fifth research question was addressed with two sub-questions:

Question 5. How did participants in Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation or institutional effectiveness activities describe their experience?

Six of the eight interview participants had positive experiences to share from their conversation day and subsequent events. Another related a positive conversation day but a disappointing lack of follow-up on the events of the day. The eighth participant shared that poor preparation reduced the effectiveness of the conversation day, and administrative turnover following the day caused the subsequent efforts at institutional improvement to lose momentum. In all eight cases, the participants described processes that flowed from the institution's decision to use the AQIP accreditation model; that were led by administration, often with the assistance of a cross-functional team of college employees; and that were supported by the institution's president and executive leadership. Communication and attention to detail prior to the event were important contributors to the success of the day, and in the case of the unsuccessful conversation day, the lack of preparation was to blame for its failure. All of the conversation days were held in a large gymnasium or conference center that would hold all the institution's employees, or in one case just the entire faculty, and efforts were made to include all employees in the conversation. Working in diverse groups with employees of different functions, participants recalled discussing positive aspects of their institutions that were working as well as areas of their institutions that needed improvement. Most of the conversation days were broad discussions of the whole institution; two had pre-selected themes of communication and customer service rather than casting a wider net. Employees identified "quick fixes" as well as longer term projects, which became the basis for follow-up group projects. All but one of the conversation days had an overall positive atmosphere, despite some initial skepticism; in several cases, the organizing committees used themes, decorations, contests, and entertainment to build a positive

atmosphere. In all but two cases, the organizing committee provided immediate follow-up to the employees who had participated in the conversation. The lack of immediate follow-up in the remaining cases caused the improvement projects to lose momentum and support. All eight interview participants were able to provide positive examples of change from the conversation day and subsequent events.

Question 5a. What kind of *institutional* change, if any, did participants perceive as a result of these activities?

Institutional changes resulting from the conversation day and the committee work that followed fell into two main categories: process change and climate change. Process changes were an expected result because the committees formed from the conversation day took on action projects with change as their objective. These large-scale projects resulted in new systems for student admission, student advising, and student success. Other projects focused on valuing employees and improving communication channels. Infrastructure improvements ranged from small cosmetic improvements to facilities to a large implementation of a new integrated data system. Participants also cited the AQIP accreditation process as an example of institutional change, particularly the successful results of their visits by the Higher Learning Commission.

Climate changes were not a planned result of the conversation day, but they were evident in the participants' experiences as well. The seeds for this change were planted at the conversation days by soliciting and acknowledging the ideas of all staff. As the subsequent events rolled out, the participants described a higher level of idea-sharing, participation, and collaboration among all employees. As people made suggestion and saw results, they felt more connected to their institutions. The participants also

described more open communication between levels of their organizations. In the two less successful cases, one interview participant shared that the climate changes were less noticeable or slower to start, despite the process changes that occurred. In the other case, the climate actually suffered due to the lack of follow-through from the conversation day.

Question 5b. What kind of *individual* change, if any, did participants perceive as a result of these activities?

Six of the eight interview participants were able to articulate an individual change that occurred as a result of their participation in the conversation day and subsequent activities. Several of the participants described feeling a stronger connection to the greater mission, vision, and goals of their institution. Participating in the process helped them to think outside the boundaries of their positions, and as a result, they found themselves asking more questions or explaining the bigger vision to others. They passed this change along also by mentoring others or encouraging others to speak up in positive ways. They also internalized the spirit of continuous improvement and described doing more self-evaluation and self-reflection on how to make daily improvements in their work.

Summary of Results

The responses to the quantitative survey provided broad comparable data from appreciative accreditation and institutional effectiveness efforts at multiple institutions. This enabled the researcher to discover relationships among the data that can be generalized beyond individual case examples of Appreciative Inquiry. The addition of qualitative data from the interview phase provided a deeper, richer picture of an Appreciative Inquiry application, presented in the participants' own voices as much as

possible. This approach conveys the enthusiasm, or in some cases disappointment, that the process can generate. These two data sets are brought together in the next chapter as a means of participant selection and an explanation of the quantitative data following mixed methods design.

Chapter 5: Mixed Methods Results

Mixed Methods Rationale

The use of mixed methods to study the application of Appreciative Inquiry to accreditation and related institutional effectiveness activities capitalized on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research methods and compensated for the situational weaknesses each presents. In the first phase, quantitative techniques were superior to qualitative approaches in their ability to generalize across a population of institutions using Appreciative Inquiry and generate comparable data. However, the numbers alone did not capture the experience of using Appreciative Inquiry. Following the participant selection, the second phase employed qualitative methods. This produced superior richness and depth of understanding of the individual experiences of Appreciative Inquiry participants. Because every Appreciative Inquiry is a unique social construction of the people involved, this qualitative data was needed to build on the quantitative results from phase one. This was consistent with the rationale for an explanatory mixed methods study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 96). Neither method alone could do as much as the two together.

Strengths of the Quantitative Approach

In the first phase of this study, the quantitative data collected from the survey instrument enabled comparison of participation levels, Appreciative Inquiry characteristics, and levels of perceived institutional and individual change across 13 higher learning institutions. Collecting the perceptions of the individual respondents in quantitative form allowed for statistical analysis of the relationship among the variables in the study. Despite the unique experience of each individual, the researcher was able to

generalize the survey results to the population of institutions who used the Appreciative Inquiry-based accreditation model. The findings regarding the relationship of participation level to perceived changes (research questions one and two) and regarding the characteristics of the Appreciative Inquiry event relative to perceived changes (research questions three and four) provide a basis for understanding the impact of the appreciative approach. This phase of the mixed-methods design provided a jumping-off point for the second, in-depth qualitative phase.

Participant Selection Results

The primary way in which the quantitative and qualitative phases come together in this mixed method design is in participant selection. In the participant selection model of explanatory mixed methods design, "a researcher needs quantitative information to identify and purposefully select participants for a follow-up, in-depth, qualitative study" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 74), with greater emphasis placed on the qualitative results. The analysis of the quantitative data sets the stage for selecting the subjects for qualitative phase. One method for performing this analysis is typology development. "In the typology development mixed-method analysis strategy, the analysis of one data type considers the homogeneity within and the heterogeneity between subgroupings of data on some dimension of interest, yielding a set of substantive categories or typology" (Caracelli & Greene, 2008, p. 236). In this study, the first dimension of interest was the level of participation, which yielded three subgroups from which to choose interview participants: low, medium, and high level participants. Within each subgroup, scores above the mean on the institutional and individual change scales were used to further subdivide the possible interview subjects, as shown in Table 5.1. Participants who scored

below the mean on both the institutional and individual change scales were excluded from phase two based on the appreciative approach of focusing on positive outcomes.

Table 5.1 Typology for Participant Selection

Level of Participation	Perception of Institutional Change	Perception of Individual Change
1. Low	High	Low
2. Low	Low	High
3. Low	High	High
4. Medium	High	Low
5. Medium	Low	High
6. Medium	High	High
7. High	High	Low
8. High	Low	High
9. High	High	High

Selecting interview participants in phase two from each of these categories provided a broad range of subjects, all of whom perceived positive change in their appreciative experience.

Because the quantitative data analysis had shown that level of participation had very little effect on the perception of positive institutional or individual change, the researcher did not expect to find sharp contrasts among the perceptions of change of interview participants from different participation levels. Furthermore, in the analysis of the presence or absence of 18 characteristics of Appreciative Inquiry, the correlation models developed suggest that certain characteristics should be present in the stories of successful appreciative approaches to accreditation. These models explained only 26 or 27 percent of the variance in perceptions of change; therefore, differences in the individuals' stories would also be expected.

Strengths of the Qualitative Approach

Appreciative Inquiry is rooted in social construction and driven by the narratives shared by the individuals involved. For this reason, every Appreciative Inquiry is unique, and the impact on every participant will be different. While the quantitative data in phase one provided a basic comparison of these experiences, they could only be fully understood through the words of the participants. This is the strength that the qualitative approach added to this mixed-methods design. The stories told by the eight interview participants expanded and deepened the meaning of the quantitative results.

Connecting the Quantitative and Qualitative Results

Consistent with the quantitative survey results, the eight interview participants were able to share some perceptions of institutional change and individual change regardless of their level of participation (See Table 5.2, page 129). In terms of institutional change, Amy and Gina, who were at different participation levels, focused more on structural or process changes, while the other six saw both structural and climate changes. Two of the medium participation subjects did not perceive a change in themselves; nevertheless, Gina's perceived change in herself was consistent with the changes described by the other subjects. Overall, the qualitative results provide a clearer picture of the kinds of change that the interview participants experienced as a result of participating in the appreciative conversations at their institutions.

A second touch-point between the quantitative and qualitative results reflects the characteristics that were most strongly correlated with perceptions of positive change in the survey. Perceptions of institutional change correlated significantly with

Table 5.2 Perceptions of Change From All Interview Subjects

Subject	Comments on Institutional Change	Comments on Individual Change
	<u>Low Participation (reported on survey question 1)</u>	
Amy	We have changed our entrances for our preparedness for our students, which is very good. I know there's still room for improvement. I would say it really helped us sail through our accreditation well.	It was a confirmation of how I felt, my philosophy in general. And I did notice there were a couple key phrases and things that I found I would be saying to myself.
Don	We've gotten most of our employees thinking in terms of self-improvement as a system.	I see myself in a little broader role than just doing what I'm hired to do and maybe helping to facilitate change more than I've done in the past.
Faye	Since this conversation day, since we took up AQIP, there's been a real effort made for official and positive communications across the campus.	I feel more valued . . . I do have a clearer idea of our long-term goals and that we do have long-term goals and short-term goals and a strategic plan.
	<u>Medium Participation (reported on survey question 1)</u>	
Charles	More conversations with employees dealt with the family atmosphere at the college.	None
Gina	I think the focus on making sure students have kind of a support system has been a positive change for the university.	One of the things I've done a whole lot is ask more questions here. . . I'm a big policy person, so I've been a lot more vocal about that.
Henry	There's a lot more involvement in maybe not necessarily making decisions as such but knowing about things and having input into things before decisions are made.	None
	<u>High Participation (reported on survey question 1)</u>	
Barbara	I think people are valued more. I think we're coming together as one college instead of operating in two silos.	I find I tend to explain things to more people and to try to bring them on board and I also try to share the bigger picture of the vision.
Ellen	People have come to me and said they feel valued, and I think when you have a valued staff, you have a loyal staff, a staff that's willing to provide good customer service to our customers.	I'm really sensitive to attitudes and opinions, especially if someone comes up with something negative. I might say "Well what do you think we could do to improve that?"

communication continuing after the conversation process ended and money being spent on the projects that were started in the conversation process. In the qualitative results, participants described the kinds of communication that occurred. In all six of the successful stories of the appreciative processes, some kind of document summing up the conversation day was shared with stakeholders; this might have been a report, newsletter, or website. Amy and Ellen both recalled hearing or presenting updates on the progress of their projects at faculty-staff in-services or regular department meetings. Barbara's college held open meetings specifically to follow up on the conversation outcomes. Don experienced the on-going communication at every meeting of the president's cabinet. In the two less successful cases, Gina and Henry both specifically mentioned the lack of on-going communication.

The qualitative results also highlighted some of the ways that money was allocated based on the conversation results. Some were small but very noticeable investments, such as the Red Devil pride campaign at Barbara's college. The college established an action project on valuing people, and Red Devil pride gave employees the opportunity to nominate one another for service to their fellow employees or the college. Honorees got fifty dollar gift certificates and public recognition. Two of the interview subjects reported that their colleges undertook small-scale and large-scale facility improvements based on their conversations. At the high end of spending, Gina's college made a major investment of Title III funds in a new data system as one of its action projects. These examples illustrate the kind of communication and resource allocation that were identified in the quantitative analysis.

These two characteristics were also significantly correlated with perceptions of individual change, along with three others: focusing on a positive topic, project teams continuing after the conversation day, and training on the theory behind the process. The qualitative data affords further explanation of these characteristics as well. All of the participants indicated that part of their conversation day was a discussion of what is working at their institution. This is one of the prescribed questions in the Vital Focus model that all of the interview subjects' institutions retained. Don recalled that his college narrowed the topic to "excellent customer service." Barbara's college focused specifically on better communication. Others discussed their strengths more generally.

Project teams were also a prescribed feature of the AQIP process that each institution was adopting, so action projects were organized and carried on after the conversation. The correlation of these projects with perceptions of individual change is made clearer by the qualitative data. Amy called the team she was on "wonderful" and added "It was a wonderful chance to get to know some of the administration, so I just really enjoyed that thoroughly." Barbara shared that her action project team stayed together for a year and a half working on different process issues because they were having great success. Gina called her action project to implement a new data system "one of the best things I've ever done professionally." The interactions and accomplishments of these teams contributed to personal changes in these participants.

Finally, training on the theory behind the process correlated with perceptions of individual change. The qualitative data provided only one strong example of this characteristic: at Amy's college, Appreciative Inquiry workshops were held for any staff or faculty who were interested in learning more. Amy endorsed them very

enthusiastically and did cite changes in the way she works with students as a result of learning about Appreciative Inquiry. None of the other interview participants mentioned Appreciative Inquiry training; however, Henry and Ellen participated in training on the theories behind AQIP process in Chicago, which other respondents may have associated with that characteristic on the survey.

Answering the Mixed Methods Research Question

Bringing the quantitative and qualitative data sets together, the sixth and final research question was addressed.

Question 6. Which participants provided the best insight into the results of the quantitative phase?

The eight interview participants selected for phase two of the study represented all three levels of participation from the survey; the similarity of their experiences reinforces the finding from the first two research questions that level of participation did not significantly impact the perceptions of change. The characteristics that were shown statistically to impact the perception of institutional change were present in all the successful case studies. The same is true for four of the five characteristics that were shown to impact individual change; only one of the interview participants describe any training on the theory behind the conversation process. The wishes for the future expressed by the interview participants were consistent with those reported on the survey also. Overall, the interviews provided broader and deeper insights into the conversation days and their follow-up activities and the changes that participants perceived as a result of those events.

Chapter 6: Discussion

The combination of the qualitative and quantitative results of this study using mixed methods leads to conclusions that can have an impact on higher education institutions' use of Appreciative Inquiry in their accreditation and institutional effectiveness processes. In this chapter, the researcher will reflect on those results and discuss several themes that run through the data and their implications for appreciative accreditation processes. This chapter will also identify limitations of this study and suggest future research possibilities in the area of Appreciative Inquiry, accreditation, and institutional effectiveness.

Reflections on the Quantitative Results

At the outset of this project, one of the researcher's assumptions was that leaders of Appreciative Inquiry processes would be more inclined to perceive positive results. For this reason the sampling frame for the survey was structured to include more than just the leadership of these Vital Focus processes. The actual results surprisingly showed no significant difference between the positive perceptions of those who just participated in some of the conversation process and those who were organizers and leaders. One explanation might be that the Appreciative Inquiry process equalizes all participants; everyone experiences all the steps in the process the same way. The leaders' experience of the conversation itself is not that different from anyone else's.

It is also interesting to observe from the scatterplots of the scores on the institutional change and individual change scales (Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, pages 73-73) that the correlation between the two scales appears to be strong. The number of people who experienced positive institutional change but not individual change and vice versa

was small compared to those who experienced both kinds of change or neither kind of change. This was not one of the research questions of this study. In further research, the relationship between positive institutional changes and positive individual changes from Appreciative Inquiry processes could be explored in greater depth.

Two of the characteristics of Appreciative Inquiry events that correlated with perceptions of positive changes were not surprising. Communication after the event and spending money on the results of the conversation correlated most strongly with both kinds of change. Appreciative Inquiry, like other processes used in higher education planning and improvement, is likely to be met with skepticism; it may be seen as the next management fad or another contributor to initiative fatigue. The leaders of an institution show their commitment to the process by keeping it in front of people through communication and by putting money behind it. Without these commitments, people will expect the results to be bound and placed on a shelf somewhere, never to be seen again. The three additional characteristics that correlated with perceptions of individual change were less obvious. The combination of the institutional commitment along with the process's positive focus, working on project teams, and learning about the theories behind the process made a difference to people. According to Appreciative Inquiry theory, people are drawn toward positive images, like plants toward a light source, so the opportunity to discuss and work toward a positive future could very well lead to positive change in these individuals.

Themes from the Study Results

Based on analysis of the codes that emerged from constant comparison of the interview transcripts, three patterns of key words revealed themes that run through the

experiences of the participants in these appreciative accreditation processes. These themes connect with the previous literature on Appreciative Inquiry and provide valuable insights for institutions and individual practitioners of Appreciative Inquiry.

Theme One: Inclusiveness leads to feeling valued, empowerment, and collaboration. Reflecting back on the conversation event, most of the respondents mentioned that the inclusiveness of the process was a positive force. "I got the feeling that my input was very important. I expected to maybe just be listening and off to the side, but I found out that when I threw out an idea, Holy Christmas, if it didn't become a part of the solution," Amy said with a laugh. "So that was pleasant, that was pleasant for me as the faculty." Barbara noted:

I work on an outreach campus, so I think a lot of us were looking forward to the opportunity to share ideas for things that would improve the college. I think everybody was looking forward to talking about what happened from their perspective. We always felt that the 90 miles between our campuses created a bit of a disconnect, and so we were looking forward to being able to share our ideas with the main campus.

For Barbara, "It was a great opportunity to share, and I was looking forward to seeing what would come out of it." The open forum for sharing ideas was the best part of the day for Barbara. Charles recalled the best part of the conversation day as "getting everybody together, getting their attitudes and getting comments." Ellen agreed, citing:

The camaraderie--people coming together and actually getting excited about a purpose and realizing that this is going somewhere. And I really believe that people felt their voice mattered. I honestly feel that people feel valued because no

opinions was turned down. No idea or thought was turned away. They were all included and it was their peers that decided what we were going to tackle, and I think it gave people a sense of empowerment to see on the report-out that something they're concerned about was a high priority.

Faye most valued "the open communication and convening everyone together successfully."

After the event, respondents described people feeling more valued by their institutions and being more willing to share ideas. Don noted the willingness of staff to speak candidly to their supervisors:

Some people haven't been used to just calling their supervisor and saying "you know, I've got a problem, this is just driving me crazy." They felt like maybe they shouldn't, but we tried to break down some of those barriers, so the communications have improved.

Amy linked her college's Appreciative Inquiry follow-up training after the conversation day to greater collaboration in her department:

There's a real feeling of teamwork. We have these calibration meetings. 'What's working? Where are you in your classes? What are you doing in this class? How's this student doing?' That kind of thing. There's definitely, "This is good, this is good, we're going in the right direction."

In Gina's case, the failure to include a large number of employees in the follow-up to the conversation day prompted people to return to working in silos. In their wishes for the future, the interview respondents expressed a desire for continued collaboration and even greater awareness and engagement from employees. Greater involvement and

engagement were also frequent wishes expressed on the survey to improve colleges' conversation processes. Likewise, a higher level of collaboration was a common wish. These wishes describe the preferred future for these colleges' improvement processes.

The individuals in these cases described outcomes similar to those that Powley et al. (2004) from participation in an Appreciative Inquiry summit. Participants identified themselves more strongly with their organizational community (normative consciousness), they saw the tie between their interests and that of their organization (holistic collegiality), and they felt a sense of ownership of their organization's future (communal conviction). Gina, for example, gained a greater appreciation of how her job roles and decisions impacted others at her college, echoing Wood's (2007) conclusion that participation in Appreciative Inquiry deepens individuals' understanding of their roles and responsibilities within their organization. Including many employees in the conversation day and in the subsequent projects strengthened their feelings of ownership and responsibility for their institution's future.

Theme Two: Open sharing of ideas produces stronger institutional communication. "There were a lot of ideas flying around and people were starting to really mention their concerns," Amy commented. The conversation day process encourages participants to share all their ideas in a very open, participatory process. In the preparations for the day, surveys were cited as a way to gather input from all staff members. Once people gathered for the conversation days, free-flowing conversation was essential to success. Don reflected that the organizers at his event had to balance the structure of the day with the spontaneous energy that came from the conversation. He recalled that when people began talking about what was working at the college, "that took

a little more than what I think the committee had planned on, but it was worthwhile because some of the examples given were things that some of us wouldn't even think twice about, but it was important to them." Participants described feeling that their ideas were valued in this process. Several also used the word "openness" to describe the conversation day climate.

After the conversation day event, participants continued their increased level of communication. Barbara noted the continuation of the conversation as she and her co-workers rode back to their branch campus. Don recalled spontaneous conversations about improvement in the lunchroom with custodial staff and faculty. Follow-up conversation days and town hall meetings were cited by several participants as formal events to continue communication. Some of the subsequent action projects also were devoted to improved communication, such as a formal communication audit and the formation of a "valuing people" committee. In the case where momentum was lost after the conversation day, failure to communicate with participants for six months was the culprit. This theme also carried over into the wishes that participants expressed for the future, both on the narrative wish question on the survey and in the individual interviews. Participants expressed hope that more conversation days would be held to keep the lines of communication open. They expressed a desire for a future that included open communication, valuing staff's ideas, and an overall sense of community at their institutions.

These qualitative results are consistent with aspects of the literature on Appreciative Inquiry. Barrett (1995) referred to "dialogue outside the boundaries of hierarchy and function" as a characteristic of high performing organizations that is

fostered by the appreciative conversation process. All of the interviewees described a conversation day at which employees with different functions and levels of authority freely discussed the strengths and opportunities for improvement at their college. This was also consistent with the results of the survey, which showed that communication after the conversation day event was a significant predictor of perceived institutional and individual change. Survey respondents also frequently expressed wishes for more and better communication.

Theme Three: Administrative participation raises trust, openness, and mission commitment. In all of the interview responses, the administration of the college strongly supported the conversation day. With the exception of Amy's case, the administrative staff were present at the conversation day and were mixed in with faculty and staff for the conversation activities. Deliberate efforts were made to break down the institutional hierarchy. Barbara noted that everyone was given the same shirt to wear to the event, regardless of status. Don described the administration serving food, waiting on tables, and clearing dishes at the breakfast at his college's event. In the conversations during the day, administration, faculty, and staff were mixed together at tables at all the events. Ellen specifically noted the level of candor and transparency in the administrators' presentations at their conversation day. She stated, "I just feel like the open-door policy of honest, 'there's nothing to hide,' I think that really struck true with people." She continued, "We see how busy these people are. We see how hard they work. And I think people are understanding that they're working hard for all of us, not just themselves, that it's for all of us, for our entire college."

In Willoughby and Tosey's (2007) case study of Appreciative Inquiry applied to a school setting, the authors cautioned that hierarchical institutions may not be open to this kind of level playing field, in their case, open sharing between faculty and students. The institution's culture must be willing to sustain collaboration between groups with different levels of power. Breaking down the status barriers among administration, faculty, and staff was a frequently expressed wish on the narrative question of the survey. When it occurred in the interview responses, employees responded with greater trust in administration and stronger commitment to their role in the college mission.

Perhaps as significantly, the failure of administration to continue participating and supporting the improvement process led to negative results in the two less successful conversation processes. Gina felt the upper management's lack of concern about aligning future projects to the vision created at the conversation day caused people to lose interest in the process. She also described the lack of upper management support as a reason that communication between departments broke down after the conversation day. At Henry's college, the arrival of a new president who made structural changes that negated the work of an AQIP team disheartened the participants. The prior president's perceived unwillingness to give up ownership of processes also had hampered the improvement team efforts. The appreciative processes can be quickly derailed if the administration does not foster commitment at every step of the way.

Positive Change Versus Transformational Change

In their meta-analysis of twenty case studies, Bushe and Kassam (2005) concluded that using Appreciative Inquiry within conventional structures would yield conventional results, which could be positive but probably not transformational. That is

to say, the fundamental nature of the institution would remain unchanged. In this study, the mean response to the item "This college has changed its identity because of this process; it is a different place" was 2.40 on the 5-point scale, and the most common response was "slightly like my college." Bushe and Kassam also found that when the process focused on existing organizational elements rather than deep assumptions, and when implementation was highly structured rather than improvisational, results were less likely to be transformational. In this study, the conversation days focused on how to improve existing processes, and in the subsequent improvement work, there was limited spontaneous improvement. In question four of the survey, 56 percent of respondents said people were making changes that were not part of the process; 8 percent said this was not happening; and 36 percent were unsure. Item 9 on the survey, "People have been encouraged to make spontaneous improvements because of this process," had a mean response of 2.71 and had the largest variation among institutional change items with a standard deviation of 1.11. The mode response was 4 - "Very much like our college." This suggests that while the largest number of respondents felt they were encouraged to go outside the college's action plan, a substantial number did not sense this permission at all or sensed it only slightly. Overall, the results of this study suggest that applying Appreciative Inquiry within the traditional model of continuous improvement on which AQIP is based may be unlikely to transform organizations, despite the overall positive results that do occur.

Implications for Practice

This study suggests that the use of Appreciative Inquiry in accreditation and institutional effectiveness activities can result in perceptions of positive changes in

institutions and in individuals. In these case studies of institutions implementing the Vital Focus self-assessment and conversation day process as part of their transition to the AQIP accreditation model, participants with varying levels of participation were all able to share positive experiences. Accreditation project leaders and Appreciative Inquiry practitioners can improve the likelihood of positive experiences by incorporating the success factors noted in the quantitative and qualitative data.

At the institutional level, gaining and maintaining the support and participation of administration is fundamental to success. Presidential support for the appreciative approach must be the starting point for a successful project. Part of supporting the process will also be committing the institution's physical, financial, and human resources to the task before and especially after the conversation. As the process unfolds, top administrators must be visible and engaged in all aspects of the process. At the conversation event, administrators should join in the conversations with faculty and staff, making every effort to set aside their status. Sometimes the conversation may be difficult for administration to hear, but this can be valuable feedback for leaders. When the conversation event is over, this study showed that when people see the institution's leaders spending money on the projects that were proposed, they are likely to perceive a positive change in the institution. Failing to support the results of the appreciative conversation is a sure way to destroy the positive momentum from that event. Therefore, the leaders of an appreciative accreditation or improvement project need to be certain that the institution's administration is willing to commit both time and resources to the entire span of the project before the work begins.

The more inclusive the project can be, the more likely it will result in positive change as well. Everyone involved with the systems being discussed should be present to the greatest extent possible: "The closer we get to including every member of the system, the more dramatic and sustainable the impact" (Ludema et al., 2003, p. 12). This makes the conversation day a powerful driver for the project. Scheduled in-service days during which the college or university is normally closed are convenient opportunities to bring all employees together. The inconvenience of closing for a day and planning a large group event should not deter organizations from using the large group conversation process to launch their improvement processes. Participants in this study described positive results when their institutions played up the special nature of the day and added activities to create a festive atmosphere. Survey respondents wished for greater participation as a way to improve their colleges' processes. Allowing all employees to have a continued role in institutional effectiveness activities, whether by serving on a committee or providing on-going input and feedback, sustains the energy for improvement. When only select individuals were tasked to carry on projects and receive information about the process, the excluded employees were less committed to improvement.

Organizers of appreciative accreditation and improvement processes must also maintain a high level of communication throughout all phases of the project. The successful stories included communication about the planning of the conversation day, multiple invitations from key leaders to attend the event, and preparatory information so attendees could be active participants. The Vital Focus model includes a survey prior to the conversation, which serves as a catalyst for discussion. Successful conversation days

were characterized by open brainstorming discussions where all ideas were recorded and valued. Sharing a summary of the information from the conversation with all stakeholders as soon as possible following the event had a positive effect in several of the interview responses, and failing to do so harmed the process. The survey results in this study demonstrated that communication continuing after the conversation day was a significant predictor of perceived positive changes at the institutional and individual level. Developing a communication plan for all phases of the improvement project from the outset will be a key element in a successful implementation.

The practices that contribute to participants' perception that their college or university has changed for the better were also shown to influence feelings of positive change in the individual participants themselves. This study suggests that providing individuals with training on the theory behind the improvement process and having a clear positive topic for the conversation day are additional practices that foster feelings of individual improvement. While this may not be a primary objective of these appreciative processes, individuals who experience a positive individual change are likely to channel that energy into the institution and further improve the overall climate. Engaged and committed employees will promote and sustain the change process.

In summary, the use of an appreciative process for accreditation and institutional effectiveness, if done properly, will unleash a tremendous amount of positive energy from all members of the organization and direct it toward all manner of improvements. Leaders need to be ready to support this outpouring of enthusiasm with the needed resources. They need to nourish the process with communication, feedback, and rewards. Trying to strictly control the output of the conversation or shut people out of the process

can be damaging to the organizational climate. As the saying goes, you cannot put the genie back in the bottle.

Limitations of this Study

This study focused on one application of Appreciative Inquiry to the processes of accreditation and institutional effectiveness, that is, the Higher Learning Commission Vital Focus self-evaluation model. This self-evaluation was a common first step for institutions considering a shift to the AQIP accreditation process. As noted in Chapter Two, while the Vital Focus conversation day design is firmly rooted in Appreciative Inquiry, Priddy and Spangehl differed on whether AQIP was inherently appreciative (Priddy Rozumalski, 2002). Participants may not have separated the appreciative conversation day process from the subsequent structured AQIP activities when answering the survey or interview questions. Therefore, the perceptions of change in the study should not be construed as results of the appreciative conversations alone, but rather as results of the entire AQIP transition.

Two participants responded to the e-mail solicitations regarding the survey with suggestions for ways the survey design might have been stronger. One participant felt that when identifying the characteristics of Appreciative Inquiry that were present at their institution (Questions 2-4), the three options of "yes," "no," and "not sure" were insufficient. He suggested that a fourth option, "somewhat/sometimes," would have improved the data collected. He shared, "I found myself constantly having to decide between a black and white response, neither of which accurately reflected my feelings regarding the question." It was not clear which of the three choices a person with this concern might have selected. Another participant also responded to the survey e-mail

suggesting that each of the twenty questions about institutional change and individual change should have included a place for narrative comments. For example, she did not consider item 9, "People have been encouraged to make spontaneous improvements because of this process," to be a desirable condition. The survey did not specify that the presence or absence of the twenty changes in the survey was positive or negative; nevertheless, a participant who felt the need to qualify his or her answers may not have answered accurately. The added challenge of coding qualitative comments on twenty survey items would have been substantial but might have added some additional insights into participants' perceptions of institutional and individual change.

While the choice to selectively study the responses of individuals who perceived change was deliberate, it could be perceived as a limitation by some readers. The experiences of those who did not perceive either institutional or individual change may have provided additional insights into the limitations of appreciative accreditation processes. The intention of this study was to employ an appreciative lens in designing the methodology in order to identify the positive core from cases in which change was perceived. These positive attributes are most instructive for institutions and practitioners wishing to successfully implement the appreciative model. In addition, the responses to the narrative "wish" question from all survey participants did give a voice to those who wanted more of something that was not present in their process.

Suggestions for Further Research

The Vital Focus self-assessment is only one way that Appreciative Inquiry can be incorporated into an accreditation process. Other institutions may be using Appreciative Inquiry in different ways; for example, this researcher's college used Appreciative Inquiry

as a data-gathering tool without a formal improvement process attached. Future research could focus on a broader population of Appreciative Inquiry users using a similar research methodology as this study. Appreciative Inquiry also has applications in strategic planning and other institutional effectiveness processes outside accreditation, and the same questions regarding the perceived positive effects as were addressed in this study could be applied in those cases as well. There are numerous possibilities for broadening the study of Appreciative Inquiry as it related to institutional effectiveness in higher education.

In addition to broader opportunities for study, opportunities also exist to study this specific population more deeply. One approach to deepen the research on this data set would be to interview individuals who did not perceive institutional or individual change resulting from the appreciative accreditation process. Some modifications to the interview protocol would be necessary since the questions were written assuming the interviewee perceived change. Another alternative approach would be to focus more deeply on the individuals who organized and led the conversation day and subsequent committees. These individuals would have more time and energy invested in the projects, and the effect of that level of commitment on the perceived results might make an interesting follow-up.

A third area for further research into the results of appreciative approaches to accreditation was suggested by Bushe and Kassam's 2005 meta-analysis of case studies, which looked specifically for transformational changes to institutions. Some of the survey questions in this study were suggested by Bushe and Kassam's research, but the intent was not to differentiate between positive change and transformational change in

these results. Using more of the constructs from Bushe and Kassam's analysis to modify the survey and interview design in this study might identify cases where the use of appreciative accreditation approaches went beyond conventional results to the level of institutional transformation.

Conclusion

“What one thing could you do in your upcoming accreditation self-study that would completely transform your institution?” This question led Gateway Technical College to embrace Appreciative Inquiry in its accreditation project. The Gateway Conversation, as the project was named, used the Appreciative Inquiry framework to explore the positive experiences, values, and wishes of community members as they related to the five Higher Learning Commission criteria for accreditation. The results of these conversations provided a rich source of qualitative data for the institutional self-study and built ownership of the accreditation process within the college community. Based on the results of this study, Gateway probably missed out on a great opportunity to transform itself by not using the results of the Gateway Conversation to form improvement teams, allocate resources, and communicate on an on-going basis with its stakeholders. While the limited application of Appreciative Inquiry did not significantly change Gateway, it did plant the seeds for future appreciative approaches to institutional change. Personally, learning more about Appreciative Inquiry through the accreditation project and this doctoral study has dramatically changed my outlook on my institution, my profession, and all my relationships. I hope that this study will contribute in some way to others' journeys toward their desired positive future.

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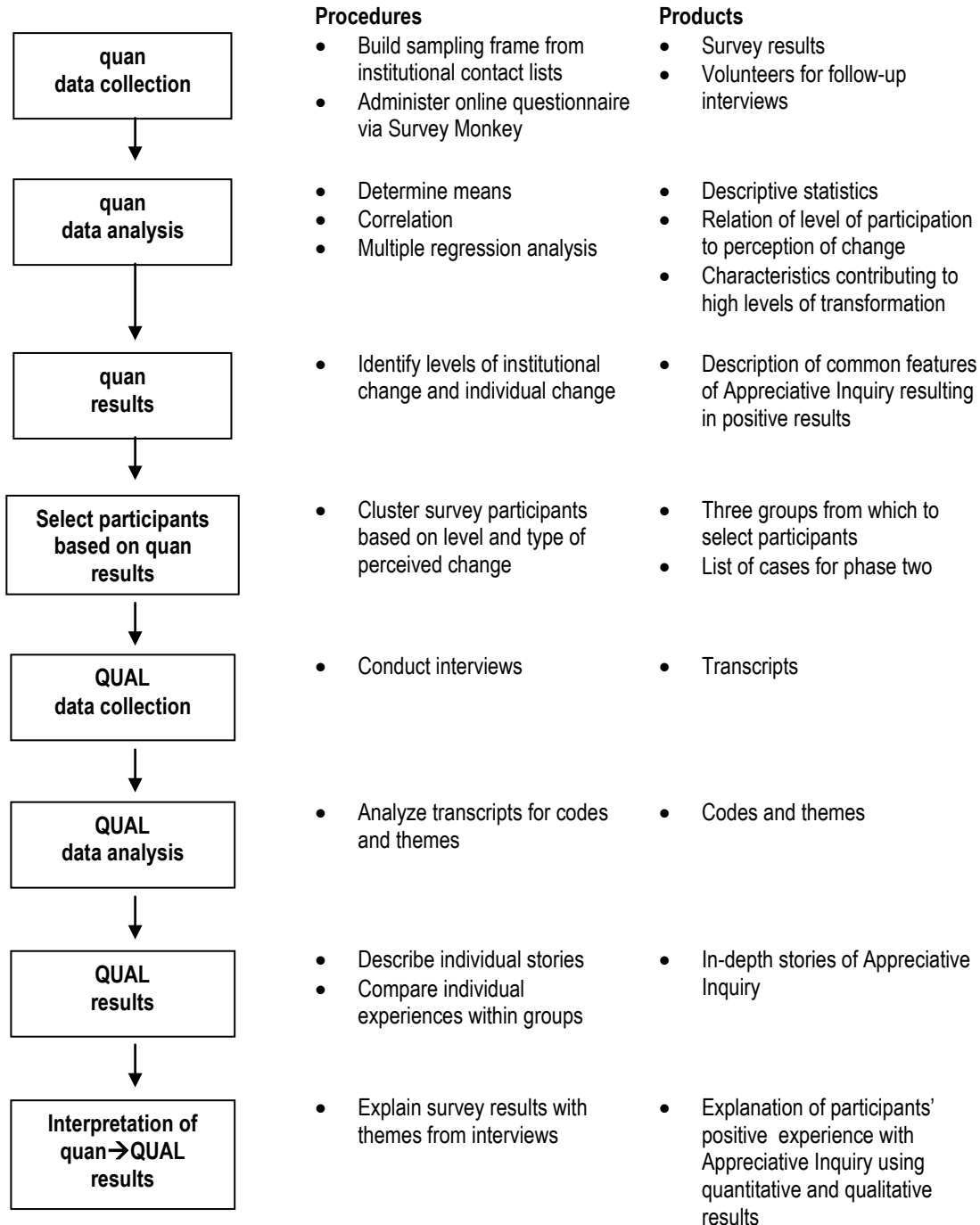
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Appendix A: Visual Diagram of Mixed Methods Approach



Adapted from Thøgersen-Ntoumani, C. & Fox, K.R., 2005, in Plano Clark and Creswell, 2008.

Appendix B: Pre-Notice E-mail

To be sent electronically by the institutional contact person if he or she agrees to do so. May be revised as the contact sees fit from this template.

Subject: Please consider survey request

Dear Colleague [*or name of respondent*]:

In the next day or two, you will receive an e-mail from Mr. John Thibodeau, a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, who is working on his dissertation entitled "Appreciative Accreditation." Because you participated in our recent accreditation project [*contact may provide a better description*], Mr. Thibodeau would like you to respond to a brief online survey about your perceptions of that process.

You are not required to participate in any way. If you do participate, your responses will be kept confidential and used only within Mr. Thibodeau's research project.

To ensure you receive Mr. Thibodeau's e-mail, you may want to add jthibodeau@wi.rr.com to your e-mail contacts and/or the Safe Sender list in the junk mail filter of your e-mail software.

I hope you will consider assisting Mr. Thibodeau with his research, which will further the use of conversation processes like ours in higher education.

[Name of Contact Person]

Appendix C: Cover Letter via E-mail

Subject: Institutional and Individual Change Survey Request

Dear [*Name of Respondent*] or Dear [*Name of College*] Colleague:

As someone who recently joined in a conversation activity about your college, are you willing to share your experiences to help other colleges? Your assistance today will help me understand and share the impact that participating in these projects can have on institutions like yours. My name is John Thibodeau, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, working on an IRB-approved research project for my dissertation entitled "Appreciative Accreditation." Because [*Name of college contact*] identified you as a participant in your college's most recent accreditation or improvement process, your opinions are my most important source of information for this research.

Your college brought people together in [*Month and Year*] to share your positive stories, your wishes for the future, and your ideas for reaching that goal. You may recall hearing terms such as Appreciative Inquiry or Vital Focus, or you may have had your own name for the process. By sharing your experiences, you can assist other colleges who are considering taking this same approach to improvement, and you may enjoy recalling aspects of your own college's events.

The link at the bottom of this e-mail will take you to Survey Monkey, a web-based survey tool, where you will spend **less than 15 minutes** answering questions about your college's process and your opinions about the results. There are no wrong answers, and every response is invaluable to my research.

This is a confidential, voluntary survey. Your individual responses will not be identified or shared with anyone at your college. You may skip questions you prefer not to answer, and if you decide not to finish the survey, you can exit and your responses will not be retained as part of the results. At the end of the survey, you will be asked if you are willing to be interviewed about your responses in the second phase of this study, and if so, to give your contact information. Please complete the survey even if you prefer not to be interviewed. There is no known risk or harm in completing this survey.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, [John Thibodeau](mailto:John.Thibodeau@unl.edu), (414) 403-9552, or jthibodeau@wi.rr.com. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln if you have any concerns or questions about your rights or treatment as a participant in this research: University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, (402) 472-6965, or irb@unl.edu.

In order to keep your identity confidential, only the IP address of your computer will be recorded with your survey responses.

Clicking this link indicates you have consented to participate in this survey:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=xn1xw8wAJiHP5K1dzavIGQ_3d_3d

Enjoy completing the questionnaire, and thank you for your generous assistance with this useful research.

John Thibodeau

Appendix D: Reminder E-mail

Subject: A Friendly Reminder: Institutional and Individual Change Survey Request

Dear [*Name of Respondent*] or Dear [*Name of College*] Colleague:

Last week you received a letter from me asking you to take 15 minutes to complete an online survey on your participation in your college's recent accreditation or improvement process.

I hope that [*Name of college contact*] was correct in identifying you as a participant in your college's efforts to bring members of its community together to share your positive stories, your wishes for the future, and your ideas for reaching that goal. This makes you an expert resource for researchers like me who want to learn more about how these activities can make a difference. You can help your college be a role model for other institutions. And you may enjoy reflecting on the very positive discussions you had with your colleagues during that process.

My name is John Thibodeau, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, working on an IRB-approved research project for my dissertation entitled "Appreciative Accreditation."

The link at the bottom of this e-mail will take you to Survey Monkey, a web-based survey tool, where you will spend **only about 15 minutes** answering questions about your college's process and your opinions about the results. There are no wrong answers, and every response is invaluable to my research.

This is a confidential, voluntary survey. Your individual responses will not be identified or shared with anyone at your college. You may skip questions you prefer not to answer, and if you decide not to finish the survey, you can exit and your responses will not be retained as part of the results. At the end of the survey, you will be asked if you are willing to be interviewed about your responses in the second phase of this study, and if so, to give your contact information. Please complete the survey even if you prefer not to be interviewed. There is no known risk or harm in completing this survey.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, [John Thibodeau](mailto:John.Thibodeau@unl.edu), (414) 403-9552, or jthibodeau@wi.rr.com. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln if you have any concerns or questions about your rights or treatment as a participant in this research: University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, (402) 472-6965, or irb@unl.edu.

In order to keep your identity confidential, only the IP address of your computer will be recorded with your survey responses.

Clicking this link indicates you have consented to participate in this survey:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=xn1xw8wAJiHP5K1dzavIGQ_3d_3d

Enjoy completing the questionnaire, and thank you for your generous assistance with this useful research.

John Thibodeau

Appendix E: Second Reminder

Dear [*Name of Respondent*] or Dear [*Name of College*] Colleague:

You still have time to share your valuable experiences as a participant in your college's recent accreditation or improvement process. About two weeks ago, I e-mailed you at the suggestion of [College Contact] and asked you to participate in an IRB-approved research project for my dissertation entitled "Appreciative Accreditation."

Your experiences will help demonstrate the impact that your college's efforts to bring members of its community together to share stories, wishes, and goals can have. You only need about 15 minutes to become part of this project. Already [*Number of responses*] professionals like you have taken the survey, and it's not too late to join them.

Please contact me if you have not read my original e-mail explaining the project at jthibodeau@wi.rr.com so I can send you complete information about the project.

In order to keep your identity confidential, only the IP address of your computer will be recorded with your survey responses.

Clicking this link indicates you have consented to participate in this survey:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=xn1xw8wAJiHP5K1dzavIGQ_3d_3d

Thank you for your assistance.

John Thibodeau

Appendix F: Survey Instrument

Screenshots taken from Survey Monkey

Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)


Institutional and Individual Change Survey for Participants in Appreciative Conversations

You were part of a unique project at your college. You came together over a period of months and shared your successes and your wishes and dreams for the future of your institution. There are many names for what you did, such as Appreciative Inquiry or Vital Focus, but you may have called it something else. You were part of a sharing project that was designed to help your college improve in some way. You might have done this as part of your college's accreditation work.

However you did it, your participation was essential to making it work. The process you used is all about the people in your institution talking to one another. In fact, the process you used is based on the idea that your institution is created by the stories you tell. That is the importance of your contribution.

You can make another important contribution today by answering this short survey about what happened at your college before, during, and after your process. This research will help other institutions who are considering an activity like yours. This is a survey about your perceptions, so there are no wrong answers. You may skip any questions you are not comfortable answering, but please submit this survey regardless of how much you complete.

Thank you for sharing your ideas today.

 4%

[Next](#)

Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)


Your Participation

1. Which of the following best describes your participation in your college's recent accreditation or improvement process?

I participated in some events related to this process.

I participated in all events related to this process.

I promoted, organized or led events for this process.

 8%

[Prev](#) [Next](#)

Institutional and Individual Change Survey
Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.
Your Process

The next three questions will ask you to describe features of your college's recent accreditation or improvement process.

2. Please indicate whether or not each of these statements describes the events that occurred leading up to your college's recent accreditation or improvement process.


	Yes	No	Not Sure
The President invited employees to participate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The President visibly supported the process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A facilitator from outside our college was used.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Training was provided on the theory behind the process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A leadership team from across the college planned the process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>


4. Please indicate whether or not each of these statements describes the events that occurred following your college's recent accreditation or improvement process.

	Yes	No	Not Sure
Follow-up conversation events were held or are planned.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communication continued after the process was over.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The college is spending money on the projects we started.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People are making changes that were not part of the process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Project teams continued working after the process was over.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

██████████ 12%

[Prev](#) [Next](#)

Institutional and Individual Change Survey		Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.
Your Institutional Change		
The next ten questions are about your perceptions of how participating in this process may or may not have changed your college.		
How much or how little does the following statement describe <u>your college</u> ?		
5. Because of this process, people are talking about new ideas that we didn't consider before.		
<input type="radio"/> Not at all like our college		
<input type="radio"/> Slightly like our college		
<input type="radio"/> Somewhat like our college		
<input type="radio"/> Very much like our college		
<input type="radio"/> Exactly like our college		
		16%
<input type="button" value="Prev"/>		<input type="button" value="Next"/>

Institutional and Individual Change Survey		Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.
Your Institutional Change		
How much or how little does the following statement describe <u>your college</u> ?		
6. People are demonstrating new priorities because of this process.		
<input type="radio"/> Not at all like our college		
<input type="radio"/> Slightly like our college		
<input type="radio"/> Somewhat like our college		
<input type="radio"/> Very much like our college		
<input type="radio"/> Exactly like our college		
		20%
<input type="button" value="Prev"/>		<input type="button" value="Next"/>

Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Institutional Change

How much or how little does the following statement describe [your college](#)?

7. This college has changed its identity because of this process; it is a different place.


Not at all like our college

Slightly like our college

Somewhat like our college

Very much like our college

Exactly like our college

 24%

Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Institutional Change

How much or how little does the following statement describe [your college](#)?

8. People tell each other different stories about the college because of this process.


Not at all like our college

Slightly like our college

Somewhat like our college

Very much like our college

Exactly like our college

 28%

Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Institutional Change

How much or how little does the following statement describe [your college](#)?

9. People have been encouraged to make spontaneous improvements because of this process.


Not at all like our college

Slightly like our college

Somewhat like our college

Very much like our college

Exactly like our college

 32%

[Prev](#) [Next](#)

Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Institutional Change

How much or how little does the following statement describe [your college](#)?

10. The college now approaches its old problems with new processes or plans because of this process.


Not at all like our college

Slightly like our college

Somewhat like our college

Very much like our college

Exactly like our college

 36%

[Prev](#) [Next](#)


Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Institutional Change

How much or how little does the following statement describe [your college](#)?

11. People have different assumptions about how things should happen because of this process.

- Not at all like our college
- Slightly like our college
- Somewhat like our college
- Very much like our college
- Exactly like our college

 40%

[Prev](#) [Next](#)


Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Institutional Change

How much or how little does the following statement describe [your college](#)?

12. The college has a well-ordered action plan for implementing the results of this process.

- Not at all like our college
- Slightly like our college
- Somewhat like our college
- Very much like our college
- Exactly like our college

 44%

[Prev](#) [Next](#)

Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Institutional Change

How much or how little does the following statement describe [your college](#)?

13. People are talking to each other who never would have talked before this process.


Not at all like our college

Slightly like our college

Somewhat like our college

Very much like our college

Exactly like our college

 48%

[Prev](#) [Next](#)

Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Institutional Change

How much or how little does the following statement describe [your college](#)?

14. People are talking about greater possibilities for the future than before because of this process.


Not at all like our college

Slightly like our college


Somewhat like our college


Very much like our college

Exactly like our college

 52%

[Prev](#) [Next](#)

Institutional and Individual Change Survey	Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.
Your Individual Change	
The next ten questions are about your perceptions of how participating in this process may or may not have changed you as an individual.	
How much or how little does the following statement describe <u>you</u> ?	
15. I am more hopeful because of this process.	
<input type="radio"/> Not at all like me	
<input type="radio"/> Slightly like me	
<input type="radio"/> Somewhat like me	
<input type="radio"/> Very much like me	
<input type="radio"/> Exactly like me	
	
<input type="button" value="Prev"/> <input type="button" value="Next"/>	

Institutional and Individual Change Survey	Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.
Your Individual Change	
How much or how little does the following statement describe <u>you</u> ?	
16. I feel closer to my fellow employees because of this process.	
<input type="radio"/> Not at all like me	
<input type="radio"/> Slightly like me	
<input type="radio"/> Somewhat like me	
<input type="radio"/> Very much like me	
<input type="radio"/> Exactly like me	
	
<input type="button" value="Prev"/> <input type="button" value="Next"/>	

Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Individual Change

How much or how little does the following statement describe you?

17. I am more excited to come to work because of this process.


Not at all like me

Slightly like me

Somewhat like me

Very much like me

Exactly like me

 64%

[Prev](#) [Next](#)

Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Individual Change

How much or how little does the following statement describe you?

18. I feel more joyful because of this process.


Not at all like me

Slightly like me

Somewhat like me

Very much like me

Exactly like me

 68%

[Prev](#) [Next](#)

Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Individual Change

How much or how little does the following statement describe you?

19. I collaborate with others more because of this process.


Not at all like me

Slightly like me

Somewhat like me

Very much like me

Exactly like me

 72%

Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Individual Change

How much or how little does the following statement describe you?

20. I am more optimistic about the future because of this process.


Not at all like me

Slightly like me

Somewhat like me

Very much like me

Exactly like me

 76%

Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Individual Change

How much or how little does the following statement describe you?

21. I see how my goals and the college's goals are connected because of this process.


Not at all like me

Slightly like me

Somewhat like me

Very much like me

Exactly like me

 80%

[Prev](#) [Next](#)

Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Individual Change

How much or how little does the following statement describe you?

22. I am more committed to the future of this college because of this process.


Not at all like me

Slightly like me

Somewhat like me

Very much like me

Exactly like me

 84%

[Prev](#) [Next](#)

Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Individual Change

How much or how little does the following statement describe you?

23. I am more open to new ideas because of this process.


Not at all like me

Slightly like me

Somewhat like me

Very much like me

Exactly like me

 88%

[Prev](#) [Next](#)

Institutional and Individual Change Survey [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Individual Change

How much or how little does the following statement describe you?

24. I understand other people's feelings better because of this process.


Not at all like me

Slightly like me

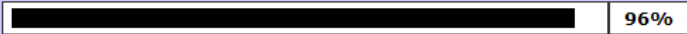
Somewhat like me


Very much like me

Exactly like me

 92%

[Prev](#) [Next](#)

Institutional and Individual Change Survey		Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.
Your Wishes for the Process		
25. If you had <u>three wishes</u> for your college's process that would make the results more positive for the college or more positive for you personally, what would they be?		
I wish	<input type="text"/>	
I wish	<input type="text"/>	
I wish	<input type="text"/>	
		96%
<input type="button" value="Prev"/> <input type="button" value="Next"/>		

Institutional and Individual Change Survey		Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.
Your Further Participation		
<p>This study will have a second phase in which individuals will be interviewed so the researcher can develop a more in-depth understanding of the experience of participating in an improvement process like yours.</p> <p>Please consider whether or not you would be willing to be interviewed in order to answer the final question. You will be taken to a separate survey site so that your name will not be connected to the responses you gave on this survey.</p>		
		100%
<input type="button" value="Prev"/> <input type="button" value="Go to Question 26"/>		

Institutional and Individual Change Survey Part II		Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.
Your Further Participation		
26. Would you be willing to be interviewed about your experiences related to the changes you have seen in your college and in yourself because of your improvement process?		
<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No		
<input type="button" value="Next"/>		

The screen for Question 27 will not appear if the response on Question 26 is “No.”

Institutional and Individual Change Survey Part II [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Your Contact Information

Your contact information will be recorded separately from your responses on the previous survey questions and cannot be used to identify your responses.

27. If you answered yes to question 26, please provide the following information so you can be contacted if selected for a follow-up interview.

Name:

College:

Address:

City/Town:

State:

ZIP/Postal Code:

Email Address:

Phone Number:

Institutional and Individual Change Survey Part II [Quit this survey. Responses will not be saved.](#)

Thank You

This concludes the survey. Thank you once again for your responses. Your contribution will help other institutions following your innovative footsteps.

If you have any questions about this survey or its use in the study, you may contact the principal researcher at the address listed below.

John Thibodeau
jthibodeau@wi.rr.com
2832 55th Avenue, #26
Kenosha, WI 53144
(262) 764-1880

Appendix G: Request for Interview (Phase 2)

Dear [Name of Participant]:

In [month] of this year, you completed a survey for my doctoral research project on "Appreciative Accreditation," and you indicated that you were willing to be interviewed for the second phase of my research. Based on the responses you gave on that survey, you have been selected as an interview candidate.

In this phase, I will be interviewing individuals to explore more deeply their experiences with their college's appreciative conversation activity and related events. Your story will help me create a picture of what these appreciative events are like for participants.

I would like to interview you [in person/by telephone] sometime during the weeks of [list range of dates not exceeding two weeks]. I'd like to choose a time and place that is most convenient and comfortable for you. If you would respond to this e-mail with a list of convenient times and dates, I will work with you to confirm the best opportunity for us to talk.

The interview itself will take approximately one hour of your time. Once we have confirmed the time and place, I will send you a list of my questions as well as a consent letter for you to sign and return to me, just to confirm that you have been informed about all aspects of this phase of my study.

If you have decided since responding to the survey that you prefer not to be interviewed, please let me know so that I can identify another participant for this phase of the study.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, John Thibodeau, (414) 403-9552, or jthibodeau@wi.rr.com. You may also contact Dr. Jody Isernhagen in the Department of Educational Administration, (402) 472-1088 or jci@unlserve.unl.edu, or the Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln if you have any concerns or questions about your rights or treatment as a participant in this research: University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, (402) 472-6965, or irb@unl.edu. Please keep a copy of this e-mail for your records.

I look forward to talking with you about your experiences.

John Thibodeau

Appendix H: Phase 2 Informed Consent

Dear [participant name]:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the second phase of my doctoral research project, *Appreciative Accreditation: A Mixed-Methods Explanatory Study of Appreciative-Inquiry-based Institutional Effectiveness Results in Higher Education*. In this phase of my study, participants who perceived positive change in their institutions and/or in themselves during the survey phase will be asked to share their experiences in greater depth. The purpose of the second phase is to explain the survey responses to create a deeper, richer picture of the experience of participating in an appreciative conversation process. You were selected for phase two because of your positive responses to the survey in phase one.

The interview I have planned will take approximately one hour of your time. We will meet at the time and place we discussed: [insert specific time and location here]. At that time, I will ask you the questions on the attached interview protocol. I may ask additional follow-up questions to help you share your experiences more fully. I will also leave time for you to ask me any questions you may have. The interview will be audiotaped, with your permission, and I will be taking written notes during the interview. I will be transcribing the audiotape as well, and I may ask you to review the transcript for accuracy to be sure I capture your story correctly.

I hope you will enjoy talking about your experiences with your appreciative process. You are welcome to request a copy of my dissertation, which you may find interesting as well. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with participating in this kind of research. Participation in phase two of this study is voluntary. You can change your mind about participating at any point without consequence. If you choose to withdraw from the study, no information you provided in phase one or phase two will be included in the final results. Your identity and the college at which you work will be kept confidential and won't be revealed in the dissertation report. The information you provide will be kept secured in my office. All survey results, audiotapes, and transcripts will be destroyed after the completion of the dissertation, and will be kept no longer than five years.

If you have any questions concerning any part of this research, you may contact me at (414) 403-9552 or jthibodeau@wi.rr.com. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Jody Isernhagen, at the University of Nebraska at (402) 472-1088 or jci@unlserve.unl.edu, or the Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln if you have any concerns or questions about your rights or treatment as a participant in this research: University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, (402) 472-6965, or irb@unl.edu.

Please check the box below if you agree to be audiotaped during our interview. Then, if you consent to the terms I've explained here, please sign this letter and return it to me in the envelope provided. Please keep a copy for your records. I am looking forward to our

interview and learning more about your experience with your college's appreciative conversation process.

I give permission for my interview to be audiotaped.

Appendix I: Interview Protocol

Subject Name: _____ Phone or E-mail _____

Location: _____

Date and Time: _____

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today for this interview. The interview will take no more than an hour. The information you share with me today will be part of my doctoral dissertation study, which has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Nebraska. What you tell me today will only be used for my project. I won't be sharing it with anyone at your college. In my study, I will assign you a pseudonym if I include quotes from your interview. So please feel free to discuss your honest opinions.

I will be taping our interview and making a transcript of what we both say, word for word. I need to do this so I have your words and thoughts instead of just paraphrasing what I remember and possibly misinterpreting you. I'd like to ask you to look at the transcript with some of my notes later to be sure I got everything right. Okay?

This recording will be erased upon verification of transcripts. Detailed transcripts will be destroyed once my dissertation has been accepted by my committee. If you agree to participate, you may withdraw at any time without consequence or explanation. If you choose to withdraw, you will be given the option of having the information you provided to that point in time excluded from the study.

The purpose of my study is to find out what kind of positive changes people perceive after participating in the kind of college-wide conversations of positive experiences your college conducted. We call this approach Appreciative Inquiry. You are our expert since you participated in your college's conversation activity.

Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Questions	Notes
1. What is your current job at this college?	
2. How long have you worked here?	
3. Was this your first experience with an Appreciative Inquiry event?	
4. Was there a name for this project?	
5. Who led this project at your college? How were you invited to get involved?	

Questions	Notes
<i>(Listen for executive involvement, cross functional groups, and outside facilitators)</i>	
6. What kinds of things did you personally do as part of this process?	
7. You mentioned attending [conversation event name]. Can you take a minute to picture that event and remember as much about it as you can? a. How long was the event? b. Where was it held, and what did the room look like when you arrived? c. How did you feel going into the event? d. How did other people act during the event? e. What kinds of activities did you do during that event? f. How did you feel at the end? g. What did you like best about that event?	

Questions	Notes
<p>h. Would you have changed anything about how it went?</p> <p>i. Is there anything else that you remember about that event that you want to share?</p>	
<p>8. What was done with the actual results of the conversations and related activities in which you participated?</p> <p><i>(Listen for on-going teams, communications, change processes, or follow-up events)</i></p>	
<p>9. What kind of changes have you seen in your college since that process was completed?</p> <p>10. Can you think of a particular time and place when you really noticed a difference in the college? Tell me as much about that as you remember.</p>	
<p>11. What kind of changes have you seen in yourself since that process was completed?</p>	

Questions	Notes
<p>12. Can you think of a particular time and place when you really noticed a difference in yourself? Tell me as much about that as you remember.</p>	
<p>13. What do you hope will happen in the future for your college because of the results of your Appreciative Inquiry?</p>	
<p>14. Do you feel anything important was left out of the interview? What topics do you think were missing? What else would you like to tell me to help me understand the changes that happened because of your process?</p>	

That's all I need to ask you today. Have you thought of any other questions for me?

I'll be transcribing our interview and putting my notes together in the next week or so. May I contact you within the next week or so to review my notes to be sure I got everything right?

Again, thank you very much for being part of my research.

Appendix J: Additional Statistical Tables

Table J.1: Institutional Change ANOVA Results

<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Between Groups	105.0935	2	52.54675	0.888073	0.413429	3.051471
Within Groups	9644.617	163	59.16943			
Total	9749.711	165				

Table J.2: Individual Change ANOVA Results

<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Between Groups	59.23326	2	29.61663	0.345375	0.708472	3.051471
Within Groups	13977.61	163	85.75221			
Total	14036.84	165				

Table J.3: Descriptive Statistics for Numerical Values on AI Characteristics

Appreciative Inquiry Characteristics	Mean	SD	N
The President visibly supported the process.	1.13	.436	156
A leadership team from across the college planned the process.	1.07	.324	156
A facilitator from outside our college was used.	1.56	.738	156
Training was provided on the theory behind the process.	1.35	.659	156
The President invited employees to participate.	1.26	.654	156
One or more large group conversation events were held.	1.04	.237	156
Participants told positive stories about the topic.	1.38	.739	156
Participants interviewed each other about stories, values and wishes.	1.68	.835	156
The process was focused on a positive topic about our college.	1.31	.659	156
A structured model was referenced (such as 4-D, 4-I, or Vital Focus)	1.78	.925	156
Participants described what is best about our college.	1.16	.502	156
Participants stated a positive vision for our future.	1.24	.623	156
Participants designed action-oriented projects to complete.	1.16	.502	156
Project teams continued working after the process was over.	1.26	.631	156
Communication continued after the process was over.	1.21	.568	156
The college is spending money on the projects we started.	1.45	.789	156
People are making changes that were not part of the process.	1.79	.944	156
Follow-up conversation events were held or are planned.	1.41	.726	156

Table J.4: Regression Results for Predictors of Perceived Institutional Change
Institutional Change - Multiple Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.409 ^a	.167	.162	7.104	.167	30.943	1	154	.000
2	.512 ^b	.262	.253	6.708	.095	19.730	1	153	.000

Coefficients^c

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1 (Constant)	34.402	1.192		28.868	.000
The college is spending money on the projects we started.	-4.021	.723	-.409	-5.563	.000
2 (Constant)	38.599	1.469		26.271	.000
The college is spending money on the projects we started.	-3.295	.702	-.335	-4.694	.000
Communication continued after the process was over.	-4.332	.975	-.317	-4.442	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), The college is spending money on the projects we started.

b. Predictors: (Constant), The college is spending money on the projects we started., Communication continued after the process was over.

c. Dependent Variable: Institutional Change Scale

Table J.5: Regression Results for Predictors of Perceived Individual Change
Individual Change - Multiple Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.376 ^a	.142	.136	8.639	.142	25.391	1	154	.000
2	.430 ^b	.185	.174	8.445	.043	8.155	1	153	.005
3	.471 ^c	.221	.206	8.281	.036	7.114	1	152	.008
4	.496 ^d	.246	.226	8.179	.024	4.844	1	151	.029
5	.515 ^e	.265	.240	8.101	.019	3.906	1	150	.050

Coefficients^f

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	37.060	1.634		22.686	.000
	Communication continued after the process was over.	-6.155	1.222	-.376	-5.039	.000
2	(Constant)	39.726	1.850		21.476	.000
	Communication continued after the process was over.	-5.338	1.228	-.326	-4.348	.000
	The college is spending money on the projects we started.	-2.523	.884	-.214	-2.856	.005
3	(Constant)	42.912	2.172		19.758	.000
	Communication continued after the process was over.	-4.940	1.213	-.302	-4.072	.000
	The college is spending money on the projects we started.	-2.605	.867	-.221	-3.005	.003
	The process was focused on a positive topic about our college.	-2.715	1.018	-.192	-2.667	.008
4	(Constant)	44.430	2.253		19.720	.000
	Communication continued after the process was over.	-4.037	1.267	-.247	-3.187	.002
	The college is spending money on the projects we started.	-2.152	.881	-.183	-2.443	.016
	The process was focused on a positive topic about our college.	-2.777	1.006	-.197	-2.762	.006
	Project teams continued working after the process was over.	-2.537	1.153	-.172	-2.201	.029
5	(Constant)	46.495	2.464		18.868	.000
	Communication continued after the process was over.	-3.561	1.278	-.218	-2.787	.006
	The college is spending money on the projects we started.	-2.062	.874	-.175	-2.360	.020
	The process was focused on a positive topic about our college.	-2.723	.996	-.193	-2.733	.007
	Project teams continued working after the process was over.	-2.660	1.144	-.181	-2.326	.021
	Training was provided on the theory behind the process.	-1.997	1.010	-.142	-1.976	.050

a. Predictors: (Constant), Communication continued after the process was over.

b. Predictors: (Constant), Communication continued after the process was over., The college is spending money on the projects we started.

c. Predictors: (Constant), Communication continued after the process was over., The college is spending money on the projects we started., The process was focused on a positive topic about our college.

d. Predictors: (Constant), Communication continued after the process was over., The college is spending money on the projects we started., The process was focused on a positive topic about our college., Project teams continued working after the process was over.

e. Predictors: (Constant), Communication continued after the process was over., The college is spending money on the projects we started., The process was focused on a positive topic about our college., Project teams continued working after the process was over., Training was provided on the theory behind the process.

f. Dependent Variable: Individual Change Scale

Table J.6: Wish Question Themes and Codes

Conversation Process	125	Institutional Practices	118
participation	25	communication	36
implementation	17	administrative support	17
engagement	15	break down hierarchy	16
understanding	15	collaboration	14
data/measurement/follow-up	10	mission/big picture	9
faster	7	participation in decisions	8
further conversations	7	customer/student focus	7
unified	5	data-driven decisions	3
clearer	4	recognition	3
meaningful	3	accountability	2
goals	3	maintain character	1
preparation	2	training	1
interactive planning	2	academics	1
simpler	2		
facilitation	2	Climate	40
individualized	1	open to change	11
student input	1	positivity	11
voluntary	1	trust	4
focused	1	leave past behind	3
separate	1	respect	2
decentralized	1	transparency	2
		honest	2
Resources	51	fairness	2
funding	24	pride	1
staff	10	safety	1
time	9	openness	1
external support	5		
facilities	2		
diversity	1		