

Appreciating Transitional Retirement

ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

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"I know you have plans, but reality is more exciting."

Machon (2010)

This pocket guide invites you to consider what it takes to have a more affirmative, positive and appreciative attitude towards transitioning into retirement. Important as it is to at least attempt to be more energised at the prospect of retirement, we acknowledge that we all have down days; days that are full of challenges where we feel low and negative - important elements of being human.

As a way to stimulate a more affirmative and positive approach, appreciative inquiry (AI) is advocated on the basis that it contrasts with some other approaches which focus on problems rather than successes. It is suggested that a more problem-focused approach may encourage us at times to dwell on negativity. AI has proven effective as an approach as it builds on positive experience, the envisioning of ideals, the articulation of plans, and a realistic intention to carry these out (Kelm 2005)

Cooperider and Whitney (2005) stated that four propositions underlie its practice:

- Inquiry should begin with appreciation
- Inquiry into what is possible should yield information that can be used, applied, and validated in action
- Knowledge that appreciates 'what is' becomes proactive and can stir organisation members to action
- Inquiry into human potential should be collaborative, assuming an immutable relationship between the process of inquiry and its content.

In essence, AI is a form of study that selectively seeks to locate, highlight, and illuminate what are referred to as the 'life giving' forces of one's existence, its positive core.

As a method, the approach can empower and inspire participation in the ownership and development of our retirement

A can do' attitude

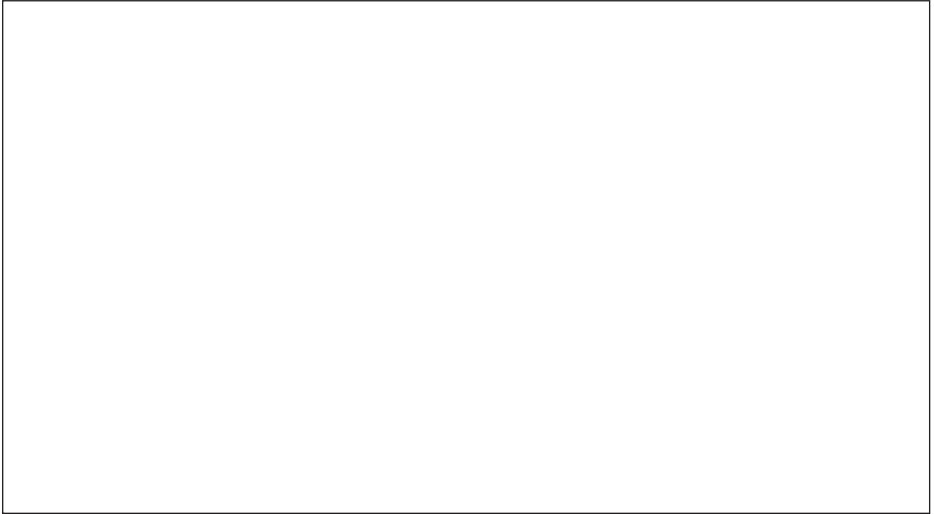


AI is seen as an effective approach because it stimulates inquiry, discussion of ideals, forward thinking and planning. Occupational therapists are professionals who advocate this and promote a 'what can do' as opposed to a 'cannot do' approach to life. With this in mind, there is growing interest in positive psychology which advocates a belief in focussing on people's strengths as a major differentiator for organisations, practice, learning as well as planning for the future. Machon (2010) saw positive psychology as a discipline which centres on the study of positive emotion, positive character traits, and positive institutions thus adding a similar thread to one's understanding.

Pause point

In your own social circles, do you think that there is more positive enthusiasm about retirement? If so, how does it manifest itself?

How do you deal with a media which all too often stress a rather negative bias towards one's attention on the growing crisis with dementia care, loneliness and the negative economic burden of individuals taking early retirement?



Using appreciative inquiry with ourselves and others

If we can achieve a more affirmative and appreciative approach to our own retirement, could we as occupational therapists maximise on our skills and experience to facilitate or coach others in this transition? If you were to desire a sort of supportive coaching role with other retirees be they friends or ex colleagues etc, you could work through this unconditional positive question allowing them to focus on the most life-giving, life-sustaining aspects of retirement.



A coaching dialogue and subsequent meetings can progress through four distinct stages enabling the process to enhance success, affirm ideals and goals, and forward planning. If you are interested in a framework to help you with this, Ludema et al. (2001 p192) outlined the following four 'D's' - 4 dimensional model of appreciative inquiry:



Discovery - where the focus is on identifying the most positive aspects of experience



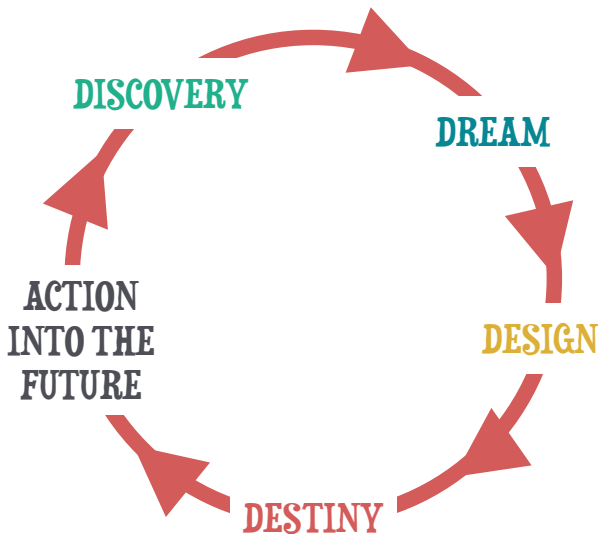
Dream - where ideal future development is envisioned based on this experience



Design - where individuals consolidate plans, and ways in which their ideal can be attained



Destiny - plans are put into practice, and continue outside the discussion



The 4 D approach can motivate and empower retirees to change their perspective, enhance well-being, improve their health, outlook, situation, occupational balance and creativity.

If you were to use AI as an approach to help you with your transition, remember that it highlights a belief in the following.

A belief that:

- In every society, organisation, group, community or individual something works
- What people focus on becomes their reality
- Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities
- The act of asking questions of a group or individual influences the group or individual in some way
- People are more confident and comfortable in their journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known)
- If people carry parts of the past forward, those parts should be what is best about the past
- It is important to value difference
- The language people use creates their reality

Pause point

The following are examples of affirmative questions you may ask yourself or others (adapted from Roberts and Machon 2015)

If you are ready, take notes and ask yourself the following.



Discovery (what is)

- What are the best things that have happened to you in retirement?
- Have you had any pleasant surprises in the way people react to you?
- Describe your three greatest accomplishments to date how can you use what you've learned from these accomplishments to assist you in making future changes?
- What made them stand out for you?
- What are the five most positive things in your life?
- Who are the key supportive people in your life and what do they provide for you?
- List five adjectives that describe you at your best
- What energises you?
- What would you like to contribute to the world?
- What are you most wanting to achieve in the next three years?



Dream (what might be)

Write a list of what your needs are, and what vision do you have in relation to your occupation of choice and retirement? what are your dreams?



Design (what should be)

Having given some thought to potential ways forward, what might be your next specific action steps? Should you wish, create a positive call for action (what support do you require to fulfil your dreams?)



Destiny (what will be)

Once you have identified your dream in life and retirement, what about designing and building that dream and affirm what will be.

Action plan

Based and building on the stages thus far – design an action plan to include the specific occupation based tools to help you fulfil your vision and future needs.

Outcome of the process may include you identifying your :-

- activities of daily living
- recreational needs
- Physical needs
- Psychological needs
- Spiritual needs
- Emotional needs
- Environmental needs
- Personal/sexual life
- Professional needs
- Consider other agencies you may want to involve

Reflect on the 4 D model and offer your own critique by highlighting its potential and also its challenges.

To end, give some thought to the words of Thomas Moore, a prominent psychotherapist.

In Thomas Moore's Soulful Ageing work (2017), he speaks of retirement as ...

"marking the end of a particular form of work, but all along other kinds have also been addressing the longings of the soul. By doing service, volunteering, working at a hobby, gardening, taking care of the house, studying, and even travelling. These may all be forms of work that speak to our deep hopes and wishes. Obviously, they can continue after formal retirement, so that in this simple way we continue to work, and your soul benefits. Some people enjoy retirement, being released from a job that has occupied them for many years. For others, retirement doesn't make any sense. They will continue to do their job as long as they are able. The work we do in retirement could be more important than ever.

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