

Using Appreciative Inquiry in Evaluation of Training Programs: World Bank Institute

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In the fall of 2000, the World Bank Institute (WBI) presented a challenging evaluation task to EnCompass LLC – to develop an evaluation methodology for its two primary training programs. WBI training programs were under increasing pressure to demonstrate results from both the internal evaluation unit and external donors. The desired outcomes of the training programs, however, had not been clearly defined and some of the workshop managers were hesitant to commit to the evaluation process. The evaluation team approached this set of challenges by incorporating Appreciative Inquiry methods throughout the evaluation project. In this way, the evaluators were able to deliver an effective and useful methodology, engage the system in the evaluation process and instill a broad commitment to evaluation and to Appreciative Inquiry.

The World Bank Institute Training Programs

EnCompass was engaged by the WBI to support its evaluation needs for the training programs, *Flagship Health Financing and Sustainability* and *Adapting to Change: Population, Reproductive Health and Health Sector Reform*. The Flagship program offered an annual workshop on how to analyze, design, and implement health reform, and how to create partnerships for organizations engaged in health reform initiatives. The program trained as many as 80 policymakers each year. The participants came from donor agencies such as the World Bank, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), among others.

The annual training offered through the *Adapting to Change* program focused on the techniques for protecting and promoting reproductive health programs by engaging in the design of health reform efforts. This program also sought to create a community of practice among reproductive health professionals who would help each other after the workshop. This workshop was presented to as many as 70 donor representatives and reproductive health professionals whose programs were affected by health reform policies.

Evaluation had become increasingly important for these programs for a number of reasons. Beginning in 2000, the World Bank Institute was placing greater emphasis on evaluation of its training portfolio. The health and reproductive health programs were two important programs for WBI, and their technical managers wanted to get ready for a possible evaluation from WBI's Evaluation Unit. They wanted to make sure that the evaluation methodology captured the broader impact of the two programs as well as participant numbers and training costs.

In addition, both programs had donor agencies to which they reported: CIDA, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and the British Department for International Development (DFID). These donors required detailed reports about the

difference these programs were making. Also, they were hoping to use the evaluation findings to 'sell' the WBI learning programs to World Bank operations' units, so that operations would incorporate the learning programs into their portfolios.

The AI Evaluation Approach

One of the biggest challenges in developing an evaluation methodology for both of these learning programs is that their desired outcomes had been articulated in very broad terms, namely to create a common language about reform, to encourage networking, and ensure a consistency in how health reform was being implemented around the world. The evaluation team determined that the best approach to understanding the needs of the program staff and participants as well as the desired changes in knowledge and behavior would be through dialogue and inquiry. AI was also chosen because of its ability to engage many different stakeholders in a constructive dialogue at the same time thus making the process more efficient.

The evaluators used Appreciative Inquiry throughout the project to:

- Manage several focusing sessions both for developing the evaluation methodology and for creating the evaluation plan
- Develop indicators for measuring impact on behavior change and capacity building for partner institutions for both programs
- Develop the focus group interview guide for collecting evaluation data regarding the curriculum of the *Adapting to Change* workshop
- Facilitate a workshop to enable the implementation of the curriculum feedback recommendations.

Focusing the evaluation

Focusing the evaluation was an involved process. Initially, two appreciative sessions were held for each of the two programs incorporating the Inquire and Imagine phases of Appreciative Inquiry. Participants inquired into best experiences for their learning program, conducted a stakeholder analysis and imagined the desired future. Then, they brainstormed a list of evaluation questions that they needed answered in order to move toward the desired future.

Developing measurable indicators

After the focusing sessions, it was determined that more detailed information was needed to better define the training programs' behavioral and capacity building outcomes. Measurable desired outcomes did not emerge from the focusing meeting. When queried regarding specific desirable changes, program managers and resource persons did not articulate what they expected from participants in terms of behavior change but rather mentioned only broad kinds of change, e.g. using common language and networking.

Thus, the evaluation team was invited to work directly with the participants of both learning programs to explore specific behavior change goals further. In these sessions, the Imagine and Innovate phases of Appreciative Inquiry were used to develop participant visions and provocative propositions for use upon returning to work. Based on the themes

that emerged from these sessions, the evaluators developed measurable indicators related to each theme.

Participants said they found the vision and provocative proposition exercise very useful because it deepened their learning and helped them see the relevance of the training to their work more clearly. They requested and received copies of their notes on the visions and provocative propositions prior to leaving. Here are some examples of the types of specific behaviors that emerged from these AI sessions:

- Hold follow-up training activities including conduct of training of trainers in the home organization, and incorporate reform aspects in the training curricula of the home organization.
- Apply new lessons and tools to policy formulation including the drafting and advocating of a new law supporting reproductive health in the health reform package, and pilot test a new package of reproductive health reform in a middle eastern country.
- Apply new tools in planning including use of the Integrated Service Matrix in the development of a country's five-year plan.

Developing a focus group interview guide

During the *Adapting to Change* workshop, the evaluators ran two concurrent focus groups to solicit feedback on the workshop curriculum and to explore ideas for improvement. The evaluators used the Inquire phase of Appreciative Inquiry to explore exceptional experiences related to the workshops. Participants were also asked for wishes to make more of their exceptional experiences possible. After that, participants' views were solicited on various aspects of the curriculum (e.g. views of content balance, mix of small group, plenary and lecture sessions).

Results and recommendations

Based on expert review of the curriculum and the analysis of the focus group data, the evaluators prepared a curriculum evaluation review with recommendations. The storytelling part of the focus groups enabled the evaluators to provide meaningful and exciting quotes from the stories to explain and support their recommendations.

Facilitating the adoption of evaluation recommendations

The *Adapting to Change* workshop managers and resource persons embraced the feedback from the evaluation, and asked the evaluators to facilitate a curriculum review workshop to consider how to incorporate the recommendations. Participants included managers, resource persons, internal WBI evaluators, and outside experts. This review used the Inquire phase of Appreciative Inquiry to develop expectations, articulate the values underlying the learning program and raise wishes for future changes to the curriculum. The group developed themes, and worked on draft provocative propositions and plans for each one. These were then shared and discussed. Based on the consensus developed, actions steps were placed on a timeline. Participants were so energized by the process that implementation of the changes for this training program began immediately. Such actions included significantly shortening the background on the emergence of reproductive health,

the inclusion of a case study/simulation that was more relevant to participants' own country work, and follow-up with participants through email and videoconferencing.

Impact of Using AI in the Evaluation

Using Appreciative Inquiry had several important benefits for this evaluation.

Clarified desired outcomes

The most significant benefit was to clarify desired outcomes efficiently in short sessions with the participants. These sessions also benefited participants by deepening their own thinking and giving them the opportunity to reflect on their own learning. Participants in the *Adapting to Change* program were so enthusiastic that they asked the evaluators to organize a similar session the following year and to train resource persons to run it. The evaluators submitted a completely scripted curriculum for this session.

Encouraged useful feedback

In the focus groups, participants provided constructive feedback on the program.

Increased the use of results

Using Appreciative Inquiry created interest and excitement on the part of the client for the evaluation. The request for evaluating the *Adapting to Change* workshop curriculum came after the focusing session of that group. The request to facilitate incorporation of the curriculum evaluation recommendations was also made after the report was submitted.

Provoked use of key process

After the analysis of the provocative propositions was submitted to each client, learning program managers and resources persons became very excited about the themes reflected in the analysis. They used these reports as part of their annual presentation to their donors in London to demonstrate the types of behavior change that their respective programs promoted. These intermediate reports, submitted as supporting documentation to the proposed indicators, were a turning point for embracing the evaluation process and methodology.

Increased the credibility of the evaluation

Initially, some resource people were skeptical about the use of Appreciative Inquiry. When the link between the evaluation and the success of each program was clear, the client group was able to see how the evaluation questions were aligned with their own information needs and their desired future. This led to increased transparency of the evaluation and buy-in, and forged a partnership between the evaluators, program managers and resource persons.

Created common ground

The two learning programs had historically thought of themselves as different. After the focusing sessions, they were surprised to find that they were more similar than they

expected and that they held shared values. This led to increased collaboration between the two learning programs.

Insights from Using AI in the Evaluation

The most beneficial uses of Appreciative Inquiry were for focusing the evaluation and for developing measurable indicators.

The greatest challenge was adapting Appreciative Inquiry to meet the parameters set forth by this client. For example, the workshop participant groups were large (70 to 80 participants). To meet this challenge, the evaluation team divided them into regional groups and asked three different evaluators to manage each session. Prior to the sessions with participants, the lead evaluator (this author) held short training sessions for the evaluators who led each session with participants.

One of the most difficult and important skills in applying AI is learning how to reframe the study of problems to the study of success, as the study of problems is much more commonly practiced. Designing the AI process well is important so that the evaluator/facilitator can be genuinely interested and excited about inquiring into best experiences, visions, and provocative propositions.

As more evaluators incorporate Appreciative Inquiry into their evaluations, it is useful to think through how they want to apply AI to their evaluation practice in each situation. Furthermore, it is important to fit AI within a credible evaluation methodology that stands up to scrutiny and meets client needs.

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