Organizational Consultation: An Appreciative Approach
VI. Selecting Among Consultation Models

William Bergquist and Agnes Mura

In providing services to a diverse set of institutions, with unique needs and environments, a human or organization development practitioner must make some difficult decisions concerning the appropriate use of these change and consultation strategies. In collaboration with the client, a practitioner must determine the capacity and willingness of the client system to make full and effective use of a specific model. To the extent that a practitioner has the know-how to employ more than one approach, he or she probably will be of greater service to any one client, as well as to a variety of clients. We have identified and briefly described four different models of consultation in previous essays in this series.

Client Maturation and Consulting Models

Within certain contexts, each of the different approaches will flourish. In general, the more "mature" a client system, the more likely are Model Three and Model Four to be successful. The maturation of a client system can be determined by an assessment of:

(1) the amount of time the client system already has spent in identifying and addressing the convening problem (whether successfully or unsuccessfully),

(2) the amount of relevant knowledge and skills available to members of the client system,

(3) the number of previous interactions between the client and practitioner (or other practitioners), and

(4) the capacity and willingness of the client system to set high but realistic goals for the work to be done.

When an organization is newly acquainting itself with a particular problem or program, Model Two seems to be most appropriate. Model Two consultations are often less time consuming and expensive than are the other approaches. They also tend to be less controversial and are more acceptable to an

inexperienced client than are the third or fourth model. One can expect attitude change from Model Two. Conversely, a change in process can be expected from Model Three. Structural change or stabilization will result from successful use of Model Four. Model One and Model Two seem to be most appropriate and usually most comfortable for the inexperienced practitioner or occasional consultant. These approaches often result in immediate and tangible success. One also does not have to struggle against the dominant expectation in most client systems that Model One or Model Two will be provided. Ironically, the other models probably are used most effectively by practitioners who also feel comfortable using Model One or Model Two. The practitioner who is limited to Model Three or Four, because he or she cannot make a speech or write an articulate report, may discover a mismatch with a client who wants something different from a consultation than the practitioner can offer.

Each of the four models of consultation that have been described in previous essays has its place in meeting the diverse and challenging needs of contemporary organizations and their human resource development programs. A practitioner or client for that matter would be well-advised to remain open minded about each of these approaches, and to make profitable use of each one when the goals of a program or context of a problem call for it.

Model IV Revised: The Appreciative Perspective

Over the past decade something of a revolution has occurred in the field of organizational coaching and consulting. This revolution primarily concerned a reframing of Model Four. It is no longer just a matter of gathering valid and useful information that a client can use to make decisions regarding future directions. It is no longer a matter of being a somewhat indifferent lighthouse beaming out information about the waters in which a sea captain and crew are navigating. It is now a matter of helping the client to gather and interpret information that specifically references the strengths, hopes and capacities of the organization. It is a matter of identifying what is going well in the organization and which stories being told in the organization are compelling and energizing. The lighthouse offers a beam of light that reveals the safe channels and that highlights and spotlights the wonder of not only the sea, but also the ship, crew and captain. This revolution is often labeled appreciative inquiry—or more broadly the appreciative perspective.

Appreciative inquiry has truly arrived. This term and the underlying concepts and attitudes associated with this term are flourishing in the fields of organizational development and organizational consultation. The term appreciative inquiry has even been abbreviated. Organizational consultants who are in the know now simply call it *AI*. This seems to be a sign that this organizational change strategy is now fully admitted to the club.

There is an important difference, however, between AI and many of the other concepts of leadership and management that have passed like a forgettable breeze across the organizational landscape. AI has real substance. It offers great promise as a vehicle for shifting attitudes and as a way of informing and transforming organizational processes. There is much to appreciate in the progress made to date in the field of appreciative inquiry. Yet, more must be done if the full potential of AI is to be realized. This book is intended as one effort to expand the range of and deepen our understanding about the processes of appreciative inquiry.

Specifically, the second set of essays in this series concerns those organizational structures that hold the potential of supporting the attitudes and processes of appreciative inquiry. This is the next step in AI. We must identify the structural strategies of AI that will enhance powerful processes such as the four "D's (discovery, dream, design and destiny) and the formulation of provocative propositions. These structural strategies also help to actualize the potential found in such AI attitudes as the valuing of alternative perspectives, acknowledging contributions and recognizing the value of cooperation.