Appreciative Inquiry in a Nut Shell

A useful AI definition is:
"Appreciative Inquiry is a process for engaging people in building the kinds of Organisations and a world they want to live in. Working from peoples' strengths and positive experiences, AI co-creates a future based on collaboration and open dialogue."

Key assumptions behind AI:
1. In every situation something works… find it and let it flourish.
2. What we focus on becomes our reality… if we focus on possibilities we find possibilities – if we focus on problems we find problems.
3. There are always multiple realities – different ways of seeing.
4. The way we ask questions either creates or denies possibilities. So be mindful how we do this.
5. The language we use creates our reality.
6. When we carry forward to the future some of our old ways - then they should be the very best of our old ways.
7. Value differences – diversity nourishes creativity and resilience – seek it out and welcome it.

There are three tools that support the AI approach and principles:

1. **AI conversations/interviews – developing questions**

AI interviews – sometimes called appreciative conversations – are at the heart of AI. They can be used in many parts of the AI process. Essentially, they are a structured conversation, and normally called protocols – a useful bit of jargon! 'Protocol' is the term AI practitioners use to describe the sequence and focus of questions in an appreciative conversation – they can vary in length from three to six questions.

2. **The 5D cycle - Definition, Discovery, Dream, and Destiny/Delivery**

I. Definition
This phase involves choosing the right area, theme or concern to inquire into matter. They should stretch and challenge the status quo.

II. Discovery
Essentially this phase is based on dialogue and structured conversations. In depth investigation of 'what works' rediscovers and remembers the organisation or community's success, strengths and periods of excellence.

III. Dream
This phase is highly practical because it's grounded in the organisation or community's history (rather than unbounded vision making). It is a description of where the organisation, group, community wishes to be.

IV. Design
In this stage, the stories and the best work from discovery are combined with the imagination and creativity from dream, to create the structures and working arrangements to move things forward.

V. Destiny/Delivery

Builds on the dream and design process to create the future arrangements to maintain momentum and generate actions. Engages personal commitment to ensure 'buy in' across the organisation. It is important to remember that AI is not just the 5D process but is about the principles, generativity, and asking the right questions.

3. **SOAR™ (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results/ Resources)**

SOAR is the Appreciative Inquiry contribution to strategic planning, and a *'generative'* alternative to a SWOT analysis. As an alternative to the dominant threats and weaknesses elements of SWOT, the SOAR approach encourages a more innovative and positive approach to asset-based strategic planning. It generates enthusiasm and creates positive momentum. Focusing on strengths and opportunities for individuals and organisations is much more powerful and effective than dwelling on deficiencies.

Some helpful hints about using AI

➢ It is not just about positive thinking. AI is the first cousin of positive psychology
➢ It's about a way of being and working from the principles
➢ It does not ignore problems but looks at them from a different perspective
➢ At its best it is generative, a game changer and transformational
➢ Ideally before using it, take some AI training to feel comfortable and fluent with the approach. If that is not possible then 'start small' by asking different and appreciative questions
➢ Practice using AI interview questions.
➢ AI will be particularly useful where learning and sharing of best practice is a key objective
➢ Taking time on the Definition stage from the 5D model is useful in defining a topic for the inquiry

What are the essential benefits?

There are a number of well documented benefits of using AI, most notably:
✓ The emphasis on 'building on what works' and on people's strengths.
✓ The assumptions lying behind it, and its generativity
✓ The way it encourages co-creativity and co-design, and is whole system.
✓ Fostering solutions and actions that are "owned".
✓ It encourages people and organisation resilience and well- being.

Founded in 2006, Appreciating People is based in Liverpool, and works regionally, nationally and internationally. The company supports organizations and communities to maximize their assets and strengths and build on "*what works*, supporting Organization Development, resilience, adaptability, innovation and wellbeing across public, private and community sectors. Our AI training resources are sold in 10 countries and some are about to be published in Spanish and Italian.

Clients include British Red Cross, various NHS organisations, Housing organisations, Homeless service providers, providers working with young people. Recipient of Workplace Wellbeing Charter, and of 4 ISO certificates. We have worked with health organisations supporting them to increase their understanding and use of asset based approaches in health; with homeless hostel staff and residents; and with prison health care staff - training them to use AI to support people in Recovery - www.appreciatingpeople.co.uk/portfolio/work-with-recovering-addicts-at-king-georges-hostel-in-westminster/