

# 8 Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge

## Learning objectives

- Define Appreciative Inquiry and discuss how the Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge approach is different to problem-solving approaches to knowledge management.
- Understand the importance of stories and positive language in Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge.
- Apply the four steps of Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge to event examples.

## Introduction

The previous chapters in this book have so far mainly focused on problem-solving approaches to knowledge management within event organisations. It has been argued that there are a lot of knowledge management challenges in event organisations, which need to be overcome in order for the organisation to be successful in the long run. This chapter presents an entirely different approach to knowledge management: it introduces Appreciative Inquiry as an approach to management based on an organisation's strengths with regards to knowledge management, such as, for example, knowledge creation and knowledge sharing practices that are already working well. Applying the principles of Appreciative Inquiry and Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge, as defined by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987), Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) and Thatchenkery and Chowdhry (2007), the aim is to utilise

the strengths within the organisation, and learn from and further build on these strengths, in order to enhance the organisation's knowledge management practices and ultimately its success overall.

The first two sections of this chapter introduce Appreciative Inquiry and Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge as alternative approaches to knowledge management. They highlight key principles of these and provide examples as to how they can be applied to event organisations. The final section of the chapter more specifically discusses (positive) stories and storytelling within the Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge approach and focuses on how stories of success, achievement, and positive memories can be a useful tool within event organisations to create a shared understanding and knowledge of what the event is about, what it aims to achieve, and how to work together effectively and efficiently. It will be reemphasised that these tacit knowledge practices are invaluable within any organisation, and can provide a competitive advantage in the long term.

## **Appreciative Inquiry – making visible what works well in an organisation**

Most of the management, knowledge management, as well as event management literature to date has emphasised problem-solving approaches. For example, previous chapters in this book have highlighted challenges and issues like knowledge hoarding, lack of trust between staff members, the inexperience of volunteers, or the misuse of power. An Appreciative Inquiry approach turns all of this upside down and identifies an organisation's strengths; it highlights everything that already works well within the organisation, in order to build on these strengths over time. This includes individual employees' strengths, as well as strengths developed at a group or team level and within the organisation as a whole. This is not easy to do, however, as Thatchenkery and Chowdhry (2007: 33) argued, "Being appreciative is harder than finding problems. To be appreciative, we must experience a situation, accept the situation, make sense of the situation (pros/cons), and do a bit of mental gymnastics to understand the situation with an appreciative lens. Not only that, the appreciative lens that we put on the situation impacts our next experience as well."

Appreciative Inquiry was first developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva and further developed by some of their colleagues (see for example, Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider et al., 1995; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003; Van Tiem & Rosenzweig, 2006). Their research mainly looked at organisational behaviour and initially explored both the strengths and weaknesses of a case study organisation. It was, however, particularly the strengths that they were fascinated by, as well as the many positive stories shared within the organisation, and they decided to develop these ideas further. The work is based on social constructionist underpinnings and developed these key principles of Appreciative Inquiry (summarised from Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999):

- ◆ *The constructionist principle*: The organisation needs to be understood as a living, human construction where relationships are the locus of knowledge, and the world is made sense of through the power of language;
- ◆ *The simultaneity principle*: Inquiry and change occur at the same time;
- ◆ *The poetic principle*: The organisation's story is co-authored by all its members; stories are sources for learning and interpretation;
- ◆ *The anticipatory principle*: By creating positive images of the future, current behaviours and actions are positive too; and
- ◆ *The positive principle*: Positive questions and stories provide momentum for change.

Based on these core principles, Appreciative Inquiry within the wider management literature, is defined as a step-by-step process to identify 'what is', 'what might be', 'what could be' and finally 'what will be' (Thatchenkery & Chowdhry, 2007), as can be seen Figure 8.1. However, the process does not always evolve sequentially across these different stages and not necessarily one at a time; it can be quite improvisational. Appreciative Inquiry will be different for every organisation, for every team, or community; and it continuously changes based on what is important to members of the organisation (Finegold et al., 2002; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). The approach has been widely applied across different organisational settings as well as in tourism and hospitality research (Maier, 2008; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Koster & Lemelin, 2009), but research in event management using Appreciative Inquiry is scarce.