

HRSA Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program

**CENTER FOR QUALITY  
IMPROVEMENT & INNOVATION**

# Finding Bright Spots: A Positive Deviance Approach to Improvement



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**Department  
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# Learning Objectives

- You will learn the limiting factors of problem-based approaches to quality improvement
- You will understand the concept of positive deviance and how it can be applied to your HIV program
- You will learn steps to identify practices and behaviors that deviate from the norm in a positive way
- You will learn skills to ‘mine’ for success by applying the concepts of positive deviance and appreciative inquiry

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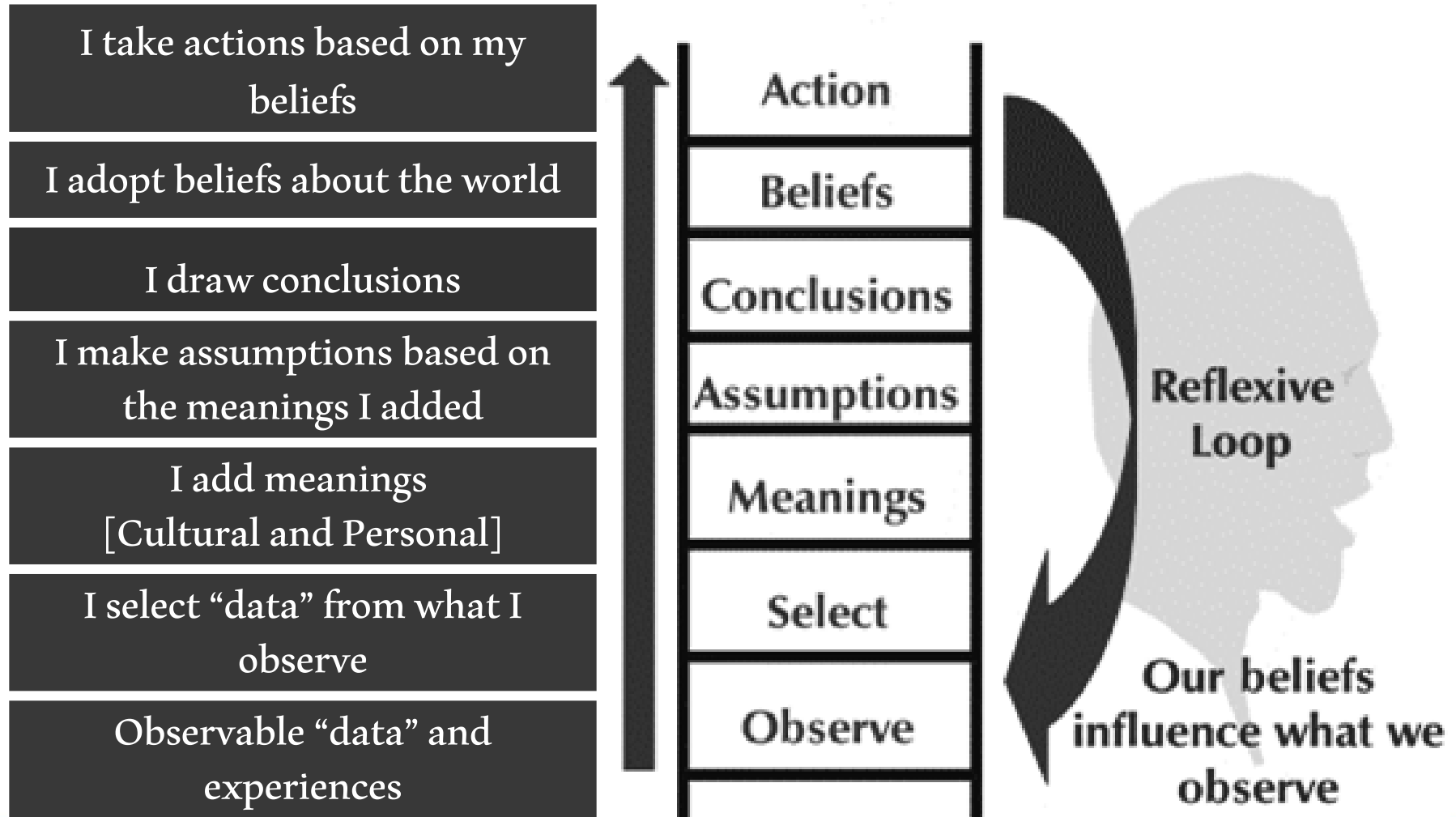
## Known Knowns, Known Unknowns, Unknown, Unknowns

*“There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don’t know we don’t know. And it is the latter category that tend to be the difficult ones”*

– former U.S. defense secretary

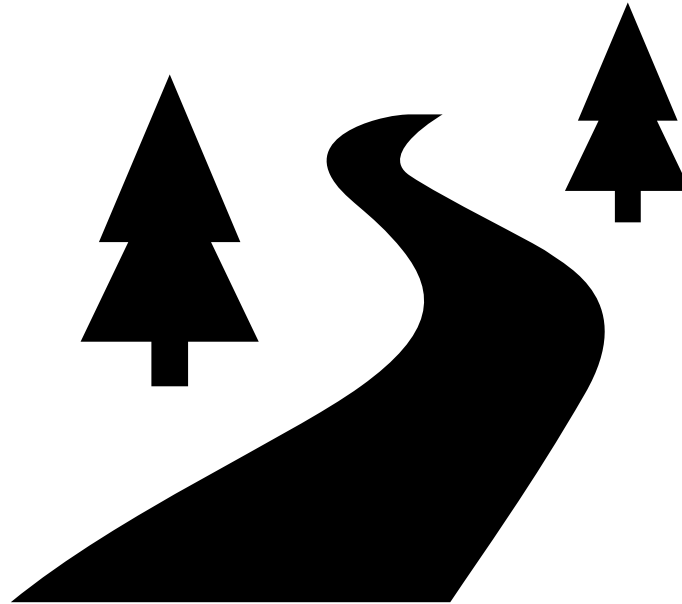


# Mental Model – Ladder of Inference



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Quality improvement requires unending curiosity



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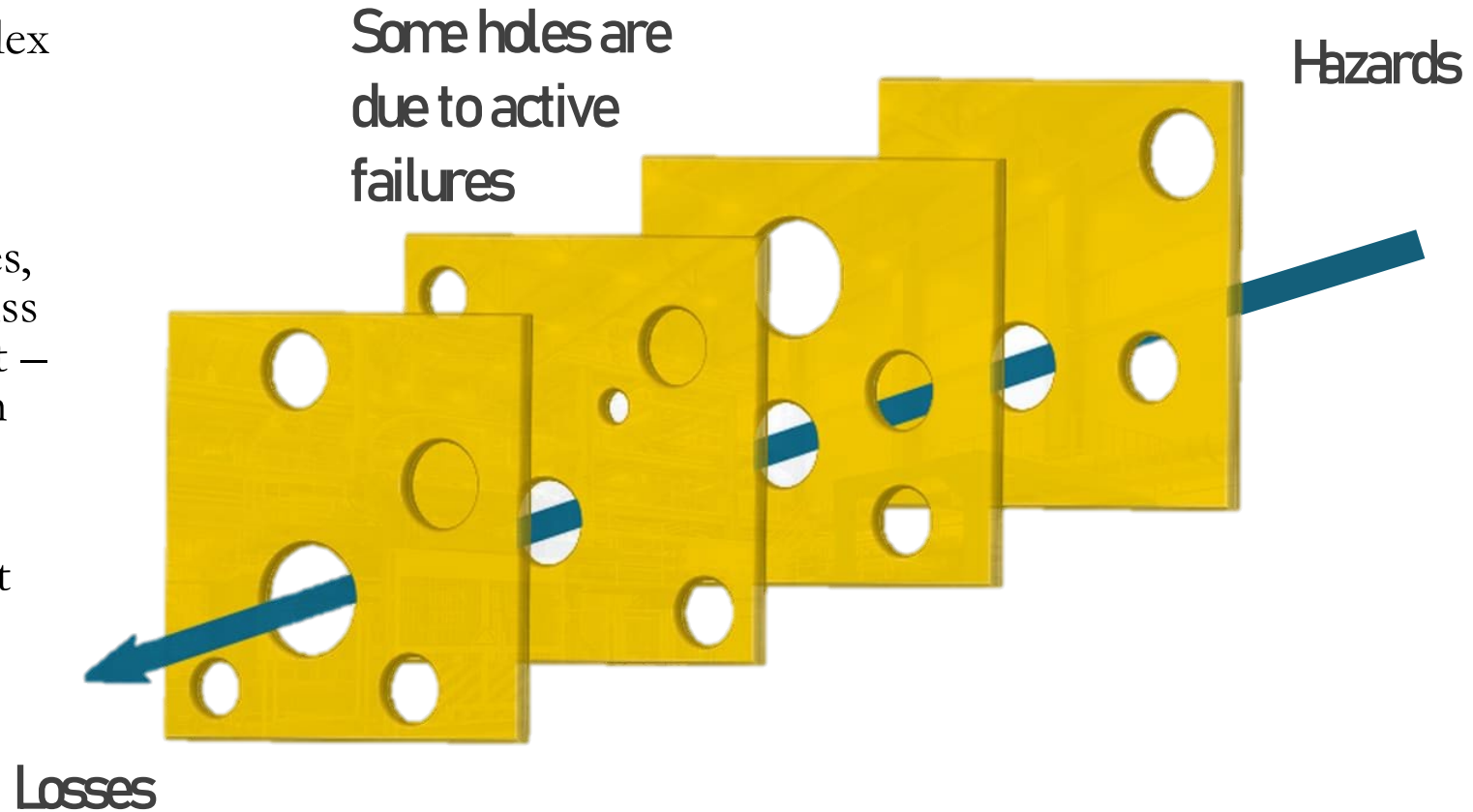
# Do You Suffer from Barrier Fatigue?

Example: Collaborative Listing of Barriers to Mental Health Care

- Long waiting list
- Language barriers
- Psychiatrist (professional availability)
- Mental health modalities offered
- Uninsured
- Inconsistent due to other priorities
- Transportation (clients have no money for MetroCard)
- Shelter clients are concerned with housing and unable to focus on treatment
- Lack of communication despite having consent on file
- Clients unable to sit for long periods of time for sessions
- Lack of medication adherence
- Medication access
- Missed PCP and medical appointments
- Diversion of medication to fuel substance use habits
- Increased hospitalization
- Decreased quality of life outcomes and health diagnoses
- Lack of emotional support, marked episodes of isolation
- Increased stigma about HIV diagnosis
- Lack of connection to community and others
- Unable to build rapport with staff

# Looking at Barriers is Important

- Swiss cheese model by James Reason published in 2000
- According to this metaphor, in a complex system, hazards are prevented from causing human losses by a series of barriers
- Each barrier has unintended weaknesses, or holes – hence the similarity with Swiss cheese; these weaknesses are inconstant – i.e., the holes open and close at random
- When understood, the Swiss Cheese Model has proven to be an effective foundation for building robust methods to identify and analyze active and latent failures





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# Blind Spots

If we're only looking at the problem one way, we've got a blind spot. And blind spots can harm you.





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## Traditional Problem-Solving Approach

1. What's wrong here? (Deficit Approach)
2. Begin with the underlying causes of the problem
3. Develop solution



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# Deficit Approach

- Obsessed with the barriers
- Magnify the problem
- Creativity killer

*They see the holes, not the net*



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## Positive Deviance

The Positive Deviance approach is an asset-based, problem-solving, and community-driven approach. It enables a community to discover successful behaviors and strategies and develop a plan of action to promote their adoption by all concerned.



Source: Positive Deviance Initiative

# Sternin's Problem



Source: Positive Deviance Collaborative

## *The Impossible Task*

In 1990, Jerry Sternin was sent by Save the Children to fight severe malnutrition in rural communities of Vietnam. The Vietnamese foreign minister, having seen many such “do-gooder” missions in the past, gave him just six months (and little money) to make a difference

## *The Issues – True But Useless*

Complex systemic causes of malnutrition – poor sanitation, poverty, lack of education, etc. He considered such information “T.B.U.” – “True But Useless”

## Local Assets

- Mothers of the healthiest children did things differently
- The different ways of feeding was stigmatized as “low class”
- Local practices were effective, realistic and sustainable
- Sternin identified these families as “bright-spots”





## Local Messengers



- Helped mothers in other villages to study their local bright spots and replicate their behavior
- “Bright spot” mothers in numerous villages train others in the most effective practices for their communities
- At the end of six months, 65% of the children in the villages where Sternin worked were better nourished

## Bright Spots



Source: Positive Deviance Collaborative

*Bright Spots* or *Positive Deviance* is an understanding that in every community there are certain individuals or groups whose uncommon behaviors and strategies enable them to find better solutions to problems than their peers, while having access to the same resources and facing similar or worse challenges.

Jerry Sternin's team reduced malnutrition among 2.2 million Vietnamese children by finding *bright* spots in villages challenged with poverty, sanitation and water supply and developing an asset-based, community-driven, sustainable plan of action to promote their adoption.



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## Am I a Bright Spot?

- Brightness is a practice, not a destination
- Brightness is a spectrum
- The number of potentially bright organizations is unlimited
- Brightness is uneven within an organization
- The specifics of bright behavior have local variations

Bright Spots Leadership in the Pacific Northwest. Paul G. Allen Family Foundation and Helicon Collaborative. February 2012

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## Traditional Problem-Solving Approach

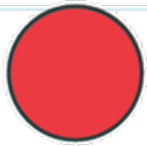
1. What's wrong here? (Deficit Approach)
2. Begin with the underlying causes of the problem
3. Develop solution

## Positive Deviance Approach

1. What's right here? (Asset-based)
2. Begin with analysis of demonstrably successful solutions (Bright Spots)
3. Solutions found internally (by people "like us" from the same culture and similar resource)

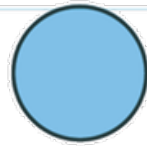
# Positive Deviance Approach Steps

## PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION



Identify an **intractable problem**

## DATA ANALYSIS



Determine the presence of positive **outliers**

## BRIGHT SPOT SEEKING



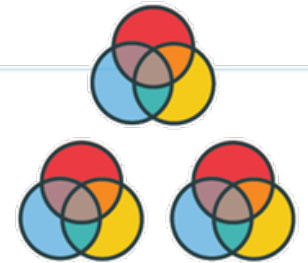
Discover **uncommon but successful behaviors and strategies**

## COMMUNITY



Community members **practice the behaviors**

## SPREADING AND SCALING



**Monitor + evaluate** the impact



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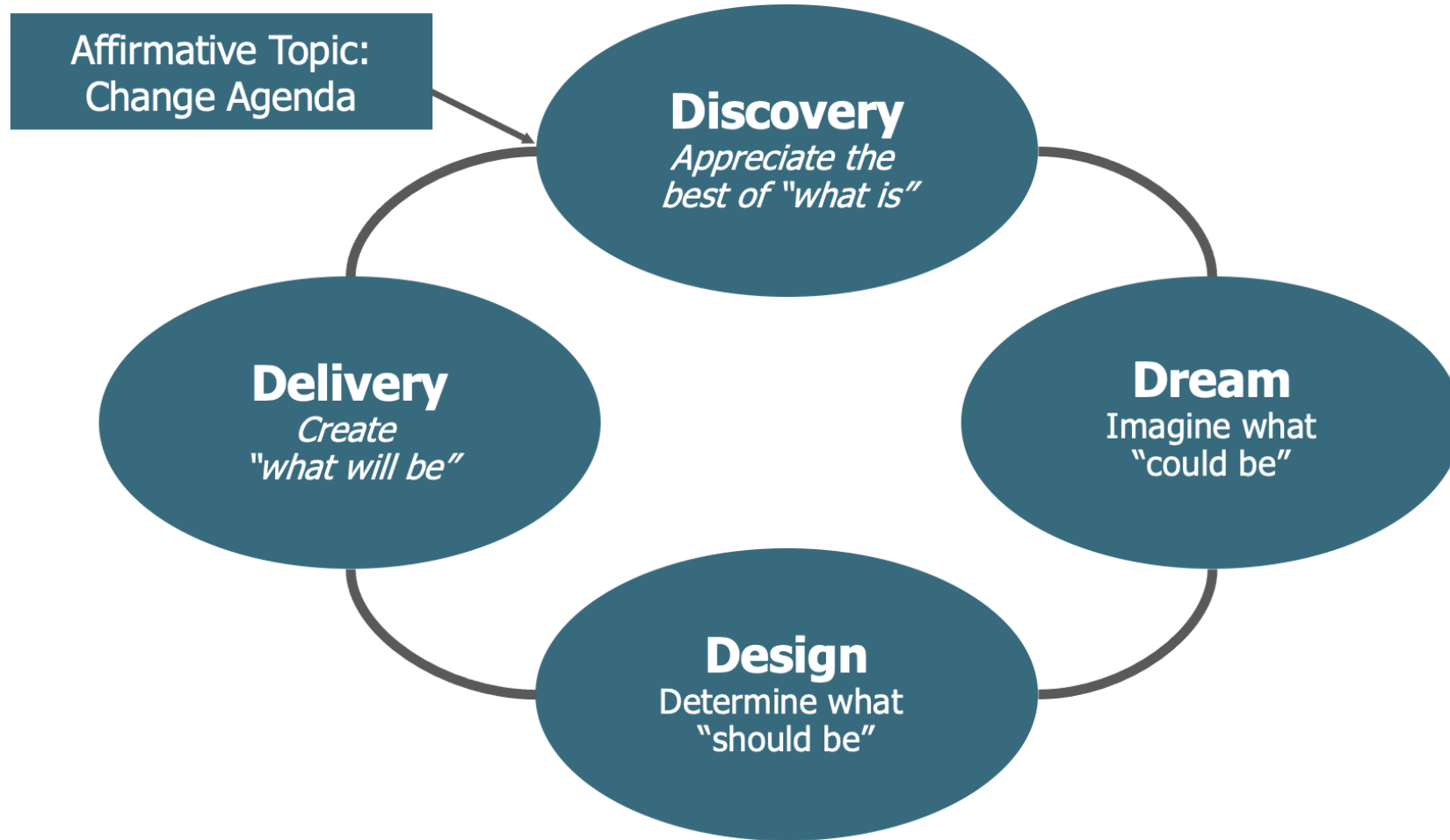
# Where are You Seeing Uncommon Results?

Ask how does the Bright Spots provide the

- right care
- right time
- right place

Be open, listen

# Changing the Conversations - Appreciative Inquiry



## ORIGINAL

Words create worlds and shape our perception, knowledge, & understanding of the world around us.

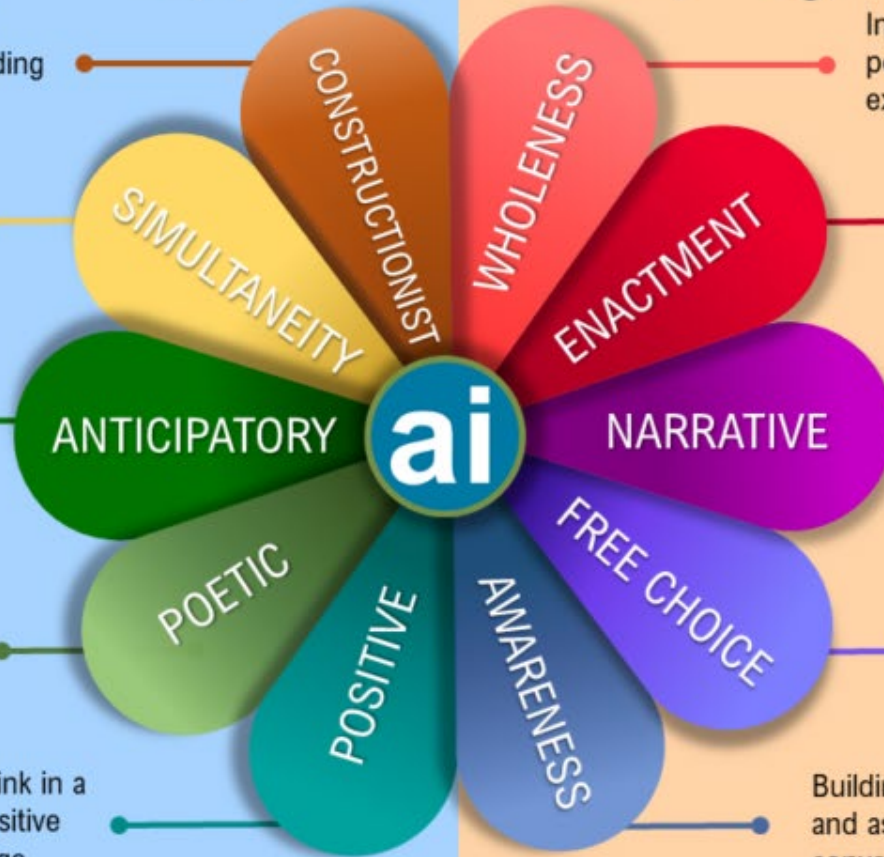
The questions we ask are fateful and ignite change the moment the question is asked.

New and inspiring images of what we want stimulate us to make small changes that align with our preferred future.

All situations have an infinite number of things we can explore and what we choose to focus on makes a difference.

Emotions influence what we do or think in a situation. Positive emotions invite positive questions that result in positive change.

# Principles of Appreciative Inquiry



## EMERGENT

Inclusivity builds collective capacity by pooling our collective knowledge & expertise in generating new opportunities.

Embodying the change we wish to see helps create a living model or prototype of our ideal future.

Stories are transformative; we live into the narratives we construct and tell ourselves.

People are more committed to positive change when they have the freedom to choose how and what they contribute.

Building awareness around underlying biases and assumptions help to cultivate deeper conversations & relationships.

<https://www.centerforappreciativeinquiry.net/more-on-ai/principles-of-appreciative-inquiry/>





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# Tips for Applying Positive Deviance

- Acknowledge the reality of the issues
  - What are some "True But Useless Facts"?
- Identify the change
  - Make it easy to do the work
  - Go beyond documenting (demonstrate, images)
- Identify the messengers
  - Choose the right messengers
    - Opinion leaders
    - Connectors
  - Educate the messengers to deliver the message
  - Include peer-to-peer communication



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## References

- Heath, Chip and Dan. Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard. New York: Broadway Books, 2010.
- Pascale, Richard, Sternin, Jerry, Sternin, Monique. The Power of Positive Deviance: How Unlikely Innovators Solve the World's Toughest Problems. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2010.
- Bright Spots Leadership in the Pacific Northwest. Paul G. Allen Family Foundation and Helicon Collaborative. February 2012  
<http://heliconcollab.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/BrightSpotsLeadership.pdf>

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*Thank you*

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# Contact Information



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