

World Vision International Gets Input From 22,000 Employees in 100 Countries Via "Appreciative Inquiry" Methodology

By Sarah Loehndorf

WHEN WORLD VISION NEEDED to set its long-term goals, it turned to its employees for insight—more than 22,000 employees located in more than 100 countries serving 100 million people. Since conventional systems for gathering input could not accommodate this many people nor the distance between them, World Vision turned to an emerging organization development practice called Appreciative Inquiry. Atul Tandon and Lars Gustavsson from World Vision International recently spoke at CMA Long Beach 2005 about how their organization used this tool to harness their goals in a year-long venture that began in 2003.

What is "Appreciative Inquiry?"

Appreciative Inquiry is a new practice used by many organizations, including the U.S. Navy. It involves asking positive questions about the past to generate positive images for the future. Rather than asking employees what they dislike about the organization, it seeks to discover what has worked in the past and how it can be implemented again in the future.

With this tool, World Vision conducted a series of online feedback reports gathered from across the world. Employees voted on what they felt were the most worthwhile goals to focus on in the future.

How did World Vision communicate with such a large, diverse and geographically dispersed organization?

Since World Vision is such a large organization, it decided to use video conferencing and Internet technology to incorporate the appreciative inquiry process. As each participant logged in to provide input, he or she was greeted in one of three languages by President Dean Hirsch of World Vision International. Employees and children served by the organization provided ideas, opinions, stories and pictures, and voted on their goal preferences for the 55-year-old organization.

Some children from the sponsorship programs provided pictures of what they thought the world should be like, moving many employees to tears and reminding them why

they were in this ministry.

Each day responses were uploaded onto the Internet and presented to those participating in the annual Bangkok summit. The responses from 30 countries provided insight into the diverse needs of children's rights, empowerment, basic healthcare and educational issues.

Why is "Appreciative Inquiry" important?

Appreciative Inquiry builds upon the positive aspects of an organization, focusing on its strengths and what works well, the talents and dreams of the people working within the organization, and the possibilities of what the future might bring.

This format lets people dream, but also allows them to be more open to God's plans for them and their ministry. It keeps the organization from dwelling on what's wrong and looking for problems to fix.

The positive focus and vision that's generated comes from all levels of the organization, unleashing the full potential of its people and allowing for full buy-in from the beginning.

Can it be helpful to smaller organizations?

While World Vision used this on a large scale, it also uses it in smaller applications, such as poor commu-

nities and villages all across the world. For example, in many village communities where food is scarce and water is in high demand, rather than dwell on the negative, which is often overwhelming, farmers are encouraged to voice what is working for them, such as cooperatives within the village and new development methods for harvesting crops.

What were the results?

Three aspirational goals were created for World Vision: 1) to honor God; 2) to ignite a world-wide movement; and 3) to enable transformation. World Vision also identified areas of strategic focus, including Christian commitments, policy influence, child well-being, economic development, HIV/AIDs scale-up, donor engagement, ministry quality and organizational effectiveness.

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"Appreciative Inquiry" is a new practice used by many organizations which asks positive questions about the past to generate positive images for the future.

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