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AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY APPROACH TO CURRICULUM CHANGE

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INTRODUCTION

Change in higher education is generally undertaken at times of pressure on efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness and transformation of systems and practices. Pressures for change come from the macro- (international and national pressures), meso- (institutional) and micro- (academic departments, communities of practice and individuals) environment within which we operate. Change is a constant and unavoidable feature of personal, professional and organisational life in the education sector. Living with change and managing change has become an essential skill for higher education teachers in South Africa.

The transition from an apartheid state to a post-apartheid society created conditions for fundamental changes at all levels of education in South Africa. This change of government that accompanied the shift to a democratic state also triggered widespread change in higher education in South Africa. The challenge after 1994 has been to redress past inequalities and to transform the higher education system to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities (RSA DoE 1997:7), providing an opportunity for universities to enhance their purposes. Most change in higher education arises from systemic and organisational sources in which there are multiple and contested policy initiatives (Pennington 2003:4). This is a familiar scenario in higher education institutions in South Africa if we take, among others, the implementation of outcomes-based education, the restructuring of post-school sector and the implementation of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) into account.

Pennington (2003:4) warns that “the volume, scale and complexity of contemporary change create a sense of almost continuous ‘white water’ at all levels within higher education institutions”. Change of this scale and complexity cannot be absorbed organically, it requires “a sophisticated blend of management, collegiality and simple hard work over a prolonged period of time” (Robertson, Robins & Cox 2009:32). It is

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useful to think of higher education institutions as large, complex social systems which continually change, adapt and invent in unpredictable ways through the everyday conversations and interactions of people (Jackson 2004:1). Apart from the fact that it requires skilful management and a coordinated effort of people working together to bring about educational change, it also requires staff engagement in a generative, collaborative and creative process of envisioning the future. Arguing that educational systems are in essence about human beings and human experiences and that they exist as a result of real people coming together to learn and grow through individual and collective experiences and effort, it is clear how important it is to focus our attention on the quality of what we do, how we do it and why we do it, as measures of success.

Based on a curriculum review and design action research project at a post-merger university of technology (UoT) in South Africa, this chapter attempts to show how resistance to change can be overcome to unleash a culture of creative and constructive engagement that encourages the development of collaborative learning communities in the institution. The chapter also reports on work in progress where a strengths-based generative approach such as Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is being used to engage higher education teachers in curriculum review and design.

Firstly, the context of change related to higher education is briefly outlined. Secondly, the key aspects, principles and processes of AI are described using the 4-D cycle of AI. Thirdly, the chapter reports on how AI has been used to move away from the deficit-based paradigm of a 'what's wrong and how do we fix it' framework into a strengths-based, generative and co-constructing paradigm for reviewing and designing curricula. Examples from literature on the use of AI to bring about educational change in general, but change in curriculum design in particular, are also provided. Finally, the chapter briefly reports on work in progress at this post-merger UoT in South Africa using a strengths-based approach to empower and engage higher education teachers in curriculum review and design.

THE CONTEXT OF CHANGE

World-wide, the higher education sector and its institutions are operating in an unpredictable, changing environment. Barnett (2000:257) argues that in a complex world higher education institutions are required to handle within the frameworks available to the institution facts, data, evidence, tasks and arguments, while by contrast in a supercomplex world these frameworks "by which we orient ourselves to the world are themselves contested". Fullan and Scott (2009) argue that it is important to understand the context of change that relates to how universities keep in step with a rapidly changing environment, but more importantly, how universities as knowledge organisations evolve and adapt to external and internal pressures. Pennington (2003:6) explains that organisational contexts can vary in a number of significant ways and can involve growth and expansion (more of the same, scaled up and spread wider), diversification (all or some of the existing activities with additional elements), contraction

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(a reduction in both the scale and character of the current agenda), discontinuity (phasing out of some or all of the existing activities) and innovation (doing something completely new to complement or replace existing activities). The current change climate in higher education often requires higher education institutions to undertake a number of these processes simultaneously. There are many ways of thinking about change: for some situations rational, linear ways of thinking about change and how it is accomplished might be appropriate, but for more complex change projects in higher education more flexible ways of thinking are probably more useful (Jackson 2004:2).

Since 1994, the South African higher education sector has been required to comply with new forms of governance, admit vastly different student bodies, tailor curricula and qualifications to a National Qualifications Framework and achieve transformation objectives of government such as access and equity, while also experimenting with different modes of delivery. In addition, South African higher education institutions are required to demonstrate higher levels of accountability in terms of strategic planning, link funding to output, contemplate quality assurance and monitor targets of student and staff profiles. Three pillars emerged from the higher education policies devised by the post-1994 South African government: increased participation resulting in greater diversification of student bodies, greater responsiveness to the needs of industry and society as a result of globalisation, and increased co-operation and partnerships, both nationally and internationally. These aspects are exerting a significant influence on higher education curricula nationally (Breier 2001).

Barnett and Coate (2005:71) argue that curriculum change is dynamic and fluid and that “any curriculum will be developed within its particular milieu, or the social, cultural and physical environment in which it is located”. Barnett (2000:256) poses the following important questions to be considered in relation to the impact of change on curricula: To what extent are higher education institutions (HEIs) responding to change? What are the sources of change to which disciplines respond? What kind of analytical framework (or frameworks) is going to be helpful in understanding curricula and curriculum change?

Bringing about change in a higher education institution is difficult, since higher education institutions are resistant to change, and as a general rule academics tend to resist changes that are perceived to threaten their core values and practice (Fullan & Scott 2009:25; Robertson *et al* 2009:33). Where substantive change initiatives are undertaken, it is most likely that they will generate high levels of disturbance, resulting in explicit forms of personal resistance and a state of denial among academic staff (Botha 2001; Jansen 2003). In discussions with higher education colleagues, it has become evident that some are resisting the uncertainty of significant changes such as the re-curriculation of virtually all of the existing qualifications offered by universities of technology in South Africa to meet the requirements stipulated in the HEQF (RSA DoE 2007). A number of these staff members display a range of behaviours such as despondency, disbelief, frustration, uncertainty, confusion, passiveness and even

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anger at the educational system in South Africa. White (1996, cited in Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros 2008:xxi) indicates that “if you combine a negative culture with all the challenges we face today, it could be easy to convince ourselves that we have too many problems to overcome – to slip into a paralyzing sense of hopelessness”.

Although Carl (1995) contends that teachers should be active participants in the process of curriculum design, given the current circumstances academic staff members at UoTs are reluctant to engage in Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) re-curriculation. Addressing this challenge would require overcoming the resistance to change as a result of the recent restructuring of the higher education sector, exploring the nature of the proposed change, turning feelings of uncertainty into opportunities and envisioning a future filled with new possibilities through the re-development of curricula that are responsive to the needs of stakeholders and society in general. It calls for an approach to curriculum change that would encourage high levels of participation and co-operation in the institution; acknowledge the socio-cultural context of the situation; accelerate the pace of the change process; and acknowledge the complexity of the situation by synthesising multiple change initiatives effectively within the institution. At the same time this approach would acknowledge the human dimensions of academic life and be rooted in the life-giving forces of the institution. In the next section, appreciative inquiry is suggested as a strengths-based generative and powerful approach to positive change, but first the notion of higher education institutions as complex adaptive systems is discussed.

COMPLEXITY THEORY AND COMPLEX ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS

Complexity refers to conditions in the universe that are too complex, diverse and integrated to understand in simple mechanistic ways. Complexity theorists suggest alternative ways of looking at the world, moving beyond simple cause-and-effect models, linear predictability and a reductionist approach to understanding phenomena by replacing them with non-linear and holistic approaches in which dynamic interactions between multiple variables are prevalent. Complexity theory embraces change, uncertainty and unpredictability. It relates to the notion of universities as complex adaptive systems, described by Stacey (2003:237) as consisting of “a large number of agents, each of which behaves according to some set of rules. These rules require the agents to adjust their behaviours to that of other agents. In other words, agents interact with, and adapt to, each other”. Complex adaptive systems consist of a collection of interacting elements that function as a whole, stressing the importance of interpretive perspectives that are transphenomenal, transdisciplinary and transdiscursive (Davis & Sumara 2008; Mason 2008; also see Costandius earlier in this volume).

Complexity theory suggests a movement towards bottom-up development and change, local and institutional decision making and a re-assertion of student-centred learning supported by the process rather than the content of learning. Complexity-based curricula would be “dynamic, emergent, rich, relational, autocatalytic, self-organised,

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open and existentially realized by the participants, connected and recursive" (Morrison 2008:25). Teachers would act as facilitators, co-learners and co-constructors of meaning, enabling students to connect new knowledge to existing knowledge, while students have to exercise autonomy, responsibility, ownership, self-direction and reflection. Morrison (2008:26) describes learning as "a joint voyage of exploration" that is dynamic, active, experiential and participatory in nature. Appreciative Inquiry is rooted in complexity theory and social constructionism.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AS A CHANGE AGENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM DESIGN

Appreciative Inquiry is a mode of action research (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987), an exploratory process for positive change that identifies the best of what is happening in the present moment to pursue what is possible in the future. The term *appreciative inquiry* was first coined by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva (1987). These authors argue that conventional action research has largely failed as an instrument for advancing social knowledge of consequence and has not, therefore, achieved its potential as a vehicle for human development and social-organisational transformation. Appreciative Inquiry scholars argue that deficit discourses and traditional problem-solving approaches typical of action research exaggerate weaknesses in a system – an approach that may become a degenerative spiral.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is both a change management process and an "appreciative mind-set", as defined by Bushe (2007:32), which holds the potential for inspired and positive change and involves a collaborative search for those strengths and life-giving forces which are found in individuals, groups, organisations and/or institutions. AI is a challenge to conventional methods of providing leadership and managing change in an organisation or institution. Different from conventional change processes that are mostly problem-centric, AI is possibility-oriented and life-centric (Cooperrider *et al* 2008:3). It is a relational process of inquiry, grounded in affirmation, appreciation and value enhancement. As a result, people become engaged, thus creating more energy and sustainable momentum, a renewed sense of purpose and the development of shared understandings.

Although AI has been described in a myriad of ways, Cooperrider *et al* (2008:3) offer a practice-oriented definition:

Appreciative Inquiry is the co-operative co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves the discovery of what gives "life" to a living system when it is most effective, alive, and constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential.

AI is based on the simple assumption that every organisation or institution has a "positive core", 'something that works well' as defined by Cooperrider *et al* (2008:34).

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The positive core relates to those strengths, opportunities, achievements and awards, financial and technical assets, distinctive competencies, embedded knowledge structures, insights, leadership and management capabilities, values, visions of possible futures and unexplored potential influences that would direct the change agenda and magnify the positive core or life-giving forces of the institution. The following four propositions underlie the practice of AI, according to Cooperrider *et al* (2008:4):

1. Inquiry into 'the art of the possible' in organisational life should begin with appreciation.
2. Inquiry into what is possible should yield information that is applicable.
3. Inquiry into what is possible should be provocative.
4. Inquiry into the human potential or organisational life should be collaborative.

AI is a powerful approach to positive change that builds on the positive core of an organisation or institution, allowing for engagement in both transactional (action planning) and/or transformational change (values-vision-mission identification and alignment). AI helps people create visions for a system based on people's personal experiences, expertise, knowledge and skills. It uses the best things about the system from the past and present that they have experienced and allows them to carry these strengths forward into the future. In 2002, Tom Gonzales, President of Front Range Community College in Colorado, USA said: "What's remarkable about AI, is its focus on what has worked successfully in the past and how it applies to the future. Academic institutions are about tradition. What better legacy for faculty and administrators than to share with a new generation an energetic new vision based on what has been successful?" (Stetson 2002:2).

Bushe (2007:30) states that one of the central sources that influenced the creation of AI was Gergen's generative theory. Gergen (1978:1346) argued that the most important thing social science can do is to give us new ways to think about social structures and institutions that lead to new options for action. An appreciative mindset increases generativity, influencing people's ability to create change. Watkins and Mohr (2001:30) declare that individuals or organisations grow in the direction of what they repeatedly ask questions about and focus their attention on. AI works because it acknowledges humans as social beings who create their identities and knowledge in relation to one another, hence creating knowledge-rich, strengths-based, adaptable learning organisations (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom 2003:19).

This philosophy is an underlying principle of the re-curriculation and development process, allowing staff, students and stakeholders to inquire into the best of the past, while creating a new vision or focus for the future using the 4-D cycle of Appreciative Inquiry as depicted in Figure 20.1 and the application of AI in curriculum design presented in Table 20.1.

CHAPTER 20 • AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY APPROACH TO CURRICULUM CHANGE**THE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY PROCESS**

The five underlying principles of AI (social constructionist, simultaneity, anticipatory, poetic and positive) come to life through the design of the basic AI process, which is typically presented as a cycle of four phases known as the 4-D cycle (illustrated in Figure 20.1). The five core principles of AI are the essential beliefs and views that contribute to the 'blueprint' of Appreciative Inquiry (Watkins & Mohr 2001; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom 2003). They are briefly discussed below.

The constructionist principle

Social constructionism is a fundamental underpinning of AI. It suggests that we have considerable influence over the nature of the realities that we perceive and that to an extent we actually create our realities through language and shared symbolic and mental processes. Human knowledge and institutional destiny are intricately interwoven. Cooperrider *et al* (2008:8) argue that to be effective change agents it is important to understand and analyse the institutional processes and practices as living, human constructions. Fanghanel and Trowler (2008:307) support this view by arguing for the acknowledgement of the socio-cultural context in teaching and learning in higher education as well as for a deeper understanding of the complexity of change by paying attention to "structures and communities within them, and with regard to how individuals behave within those – their ability to respond". Fullan and Scott (2009:76) emphasise that all staff have a role to play in supporting change initiatives in higher education institutions and that change-capable universities operate in a responsive, collaborative, team-based and focused manner. Curriculum change will come about as a result of a highly interactive process that brings people from all levels of the institution together to learn from one another and with one another, building relationships and expanding collective wisdom.

The principle of simultaneity

This principle recognises that inquiry is intervention and that the seeds of change are implicit in the questions we ask. The questions asked set the stage for what is to be discovered and the information gathered become the stories from which the future is conceived, discussed and constructed. Questions have the provocative potential to give form to identities, relationships and patterns of living. They are intrinsically related to reflection and action.

The anticipatory principle

Collective imagination and discourse about the future are collective resources for generating change and improvement. Cooperrider *et al* (2008:9) state "human systems are forever projecting ahead of themselves a horizon of expectation that brings the future powerfully in the present as a mobilizing agent". Success or failure hinges, in part, on the images institutions hold of the future. Motivating images of the future can mobilise powerful, positive and collective action within a higher education institution.

PART THREE • METHODS FOR INTERROGATING, REVISIONING AND IMPLEMENTING CURRICULUM CHANGE**The poetic principle**

This principle is based on the valuing of sharing of information as a way of gathering information about the organisation or institution that includes not only facts, but also the feelings and emotions that people (academic staff and students) experience. Recognising that these stories (like poetry) can be told about any aspect of organisational and/or personal life and performance and that these are open to meaning making, institutional life can be expressed as a narrative, co-authored by its various stakeholders. The practice of AI starts with the selection of an affirmative topic. Based on the notion that human systems such as higher education institutions move in the direction of what they study, the affirmative topic is selected strategically to move the institution in the direction of its highest ideals and values of its stakeholders. The affirmative topic selected for an Appreciative Inquiry process is the main focus of the change process.

The positive principle

At the heart of the Appreciative Inquiry practice is the quest to discover what gives life to an organisation when it is at its best. Building and sustaining momentum for change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding. Bushe (2010) argues that simply focusing on the positive aspects, without a focus on the generative nature of these aspects, will not result in successful change. It is therefore important to strengthen the generative aspects by engaging academic staff members, students, alumni and other stakeholders actively in the review and development of higher education curricula.

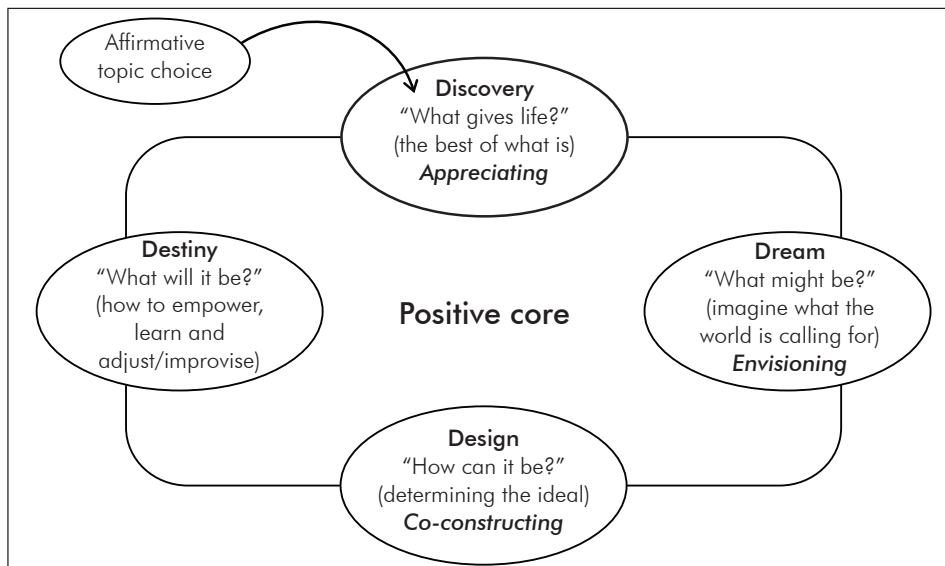


FIGURE 20.1 Appreciative Inquiry 4-D cycle (Source: Cooperrider et al 2008:34)

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With reference to Figure 20.1, the “positive core” is defined by Cooperider *et al* (2008:437) as that which makes up the best of an organisation or institution and its people. Since AI is a dynamic and iterative process of positive change in an organisation or institution, it is addressed through the 4-D cycle of discovery, dream, design and destiny. The positive core or life-giving forces of the institution is interwoven into the phases of the 4-D cycle. AI is more than just defining questions, conducting interviews and gathering data. It is a process of engagement whereby all relevant and interested people in an institution will participate in positive change.

Since the focus for change in an organisation or institution is defined by the affirmative topic of the AI process, the affirmative topic selected for this study is based on the strengths currently existing in the higher education institution under investigation to embrace the challenges presented by a curriculum review and development process brought about by the implementation of qualifications aligned to the Higher Education Qualifications Framework in South Africa.

Discovery phase

In the discovery phase, a whole-system or institutional-wide inquiry into the positive core is undertaken. The positive core focuses on those elements that give meaning and life to the institution. The institution embarks on a process of discovery to value the best of the ‘best of what is’ available in the institution. This phase typically begins with appreciative interviews asking questions that are designed to elicit, validate and revitalise the positive aspects associated with the strengths of the academic department, current curricula and existing partnerships. The discovery phase is typically conducted using focus group discussions or one-on-one interviews with academic staff. This essentially builds a live, collective database of institutional excellences that includes metaphors, imagery and affects in addition to concrete examples such a curriculum data.

Dream phase

The ‘best of what is’ or positive core of the institution is amplified throughout the dream phase, creating a results-oriented vision in relation to the strengths of the institution. Working together in department and/or faculty groups, academic staff members are encouraged to focus on the life-giving forces that contribute to the success of the current curricula, while also envisioning the HEQF aligned curricula of the future. The dream phase often involves large groups of people working together to share key success factors of the current situation and to develop ideas of what the future can be.

Design phase

The positive core of the institution is further woven into the institutional social architecture through the design phase, creating “provocative propositions” (*ibid* 162) by asking key questions about the ‘ideal’ situation. During the design phase academic staff identifies key facets of institutional systems and structures that will be needed to support the realisation of their collectively generated new or revised curricula.

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Provocative propositions form the basis for developing vision-guided action plans for implementation in the next phase. These provocative propositions bridge the 'best of what gives life' to the institution as identified in the discovery phase, with 'what might be' as envisioned in the dream phase, with 'how' to bring the required change about in the design phase.

Destiny phase

Finally, the affirmative capability of the institution as a whole is strengthened by devising implementation strategies to make the intended curricula a reality. The destiny phase also requires an institution to identify, communicate and celebrate positive changes, innovations and results of the AI process. It is a time for people to reflect on what has changed and to recognise the efforts of those who have participated in the change process.

Table 20.1 outlines how the 4-D cycle of AI (Cooperrider *et al* 2008:34) has been aligned to different stages of a curriculum design process and proposes questions to be considered at each stage of the process.

TABLE 20.1 Aligning Appreciative Inquiry to the curriculum design process

Appreciative Inquiry		Curriculum design	
Define	Define the 'topic for inquiry' – frame the question and the inquiry protocol and the participation strategy.	In this case, the focus is on developing responsive, engaged and transformative HEQF aligned curricula in a post-merger higher education institution in South Africa.	
Discover	Discover the positive core or the 'best of what is' of the institution – its opportunities, core values, assets and competencies, ideas and aspirations for innovation, hopes and best practices	In discovering the best of what is, it is important to create opportunities for academic staff in departments to uncover their strengths, those life-giving forces that can be used to build on in the future. Academic departments conduct self-audits to determine the strengths and effectiveness of current practices. A strength-opportunity-aspirations-results (SOAR) strategic analysis is used to explore the positive core of the current system (see Table 20.2). In the discovery phase of the 4-D cycle of AI engagement with various stakeholders such as current students, recent graduates, employers, industry experts and current staff using suitable and appropriate survey instruments to gather data is important. Appropriate questions to consider during this phase are: ▪ What are we currently doing that works well? ▪ How successful are our current curricula in meeting the needs of our stakeholders? ▪ What are the key epistemological, practical and ontological elements of our current curricula? ▪ How can these be enhanced in future? What do our students learn? ▪ How do our students learn? Are our current programmes viable and sustainable and how can these be improved?	

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Appreciative Inquiry	Curriculum design
Dream Fully envision the impact or results of taking the positive core of the institution and expanding it, building upon it	In this phase of the AI approach to higher education curriculum review and design; it is important for academic departments to envision the future, to use available opportunities and new developments in their fields of study to provide strategic direction to their aspirations. Departments should draft a vision and mission statement and compile a strategic plan with clear and achievable objectives. It is also important to develop an action plan and responsibility chart analysis (e.g. RAEW: Responsibility, Authority, Expertise and Work allocation) to guide the process. This kind of activity provides a simple but effective way of improving teamwork, decision making and communication in academic departments – key elements of any change process. Appropriate questions to consider during this phase are: ▪ What is our vision for the future? ▪ Does the vision of the department align to the institution's vision, mission and strategic plan? ▪ What are the strategic objectives of the department? ▪ What are the new developments in our field(s) of study? ▪ What are the new opportunities available to us? ▪ How can the competitive edge of the academic department be enhanced? ▪ How can we improve the viability and sustainability of programmes? How should our curricula change and why?
Design Create vibrant, actionable descriptions of the high leverage items in the institution's social architecture – changes which when implemented will catapult the institution into the future described by the dream and changes which when implemented will serve to sustain the momentum of positive transformation	This phase of the AI process requires academic staff to engage with curriculum theory and to apply principles associated with the design of responsive, aligned and transformative curricula. It is also important to consider teaching, learning and assessment strategies and methods based on sound educational principles of constructive alignment as defined by Biggs (2002). Academic staff should work jointly in teams to explore appropriate forms of knowledge in career-oriented curricula, write intended learning outcomes using learning taxonomies that would encourage the development of high order thinking skills, appropriate practical skills and values and attitudes that would be transformative in nature. Curriculum maps, programme and subject guides are also developed. The creation of suitable learning spaces, the establishment of facilities and the acquisition of technology and equipment to support delivery of new and/or revised programmes should also be carefully considered during this phase. Appropriate questions to consider during this phase are: ▪ How do we align the new HEQF-aligned curricula to the vision, mission and strategic plan of the institution? ▪ How do we develop curricula that are responsive to the needs of our stakeholders? ▪ What are the key aspects of higher education context and curriculum theory to consider? ▪ How do we empower staff to teach the new curricula? How do we align systems and structures to support the new curricula? ▪ What facilities, equipment and technology are required to support delivery?

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Appreciative Inquiry	Curriculum design
Destiny Invite inspired action rather than imposed action plans and ongoing inquiry into the positive as an implementation strategy.	In this phase of the AI approach to higher education curriculum design, academic departments are finalising implementation strategies to phase in new HEQF-aligned qualifications and to phase out old curricula. Appropriate questions to consider during this phase are: ▪ How can we sustain the new developments? ▪ Do we have sufficient capacity to support the new curricula? ▪ How do we know that we have been successful in designing curricula that are responsive to the needs of stakeholders, transformative in nature and aligned in terms of intended learning outcomes, assessment criteria, tasks and teaching-learning activities? ▪ What instruments do we use to measure the effectiveness of the new curricula?

EXAMPLES OF USING APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY TO ENHANCE CURRICULUM CHANGE

There are many examples available in AI literature of how AI has been used in educational projects: Stetson (2002) reports on projects in the USA and Canada; Coghlan, Preskill and Tzavaras (2003) report on a study done at Hills and Dales Child Development Centre; Rogers and Fraser (2003) report on the use of AI for evaluation; Davis (2005) outlines the use of AI at Baker College; Giles and Alderson (2008) report on the use of AI to create transformative learning experiences for students in a family literacy project and Bushe (2010) reports on various educational projects for the British Columbia Ministry of Education. A number of studies have been done on the use of AI to enhance curriculum design processes, for example the enhancement of an informal curriculum of the School of Medicine at Indiana University (Cottingham, Suchman, Litzelman, Frankel, Mossbarger, Williamson, Baldwin & Inui 2008:715-722). McNamee (2003) describes the use of AI in an academic department of a private high school to assess the department's curriculum and to develop collaborative working relations.

This chapter briefly outlines the use of AI in "a conflicted educational context" as described by McNamee (2003:25-29), since her account closely resembles the current situation at the post-merger higher education institution in South Africa. McNamee (2003:25) explains that the generative nature of AI allowed her to invite the academic staff into a conversation about their academic programmes and to explore the strengths of the existing programmes. McNamee (2003:28) reports that by allowing colleagues to develop more collaborative, respectful working relations while conducting a curriculum review through sharing stories of their own love and excitement about teaching, they were initiated into a different and transformative conversation. During the discovery phase, academic staff members described their strengths, values and talents among themselves and these were captured on paper. Using the output of the discovery phase, academic staff members were asked to call out the features that would help them to create an 'ideal curriculum'. The structure of the 'ideal curriculum' focused on teaching, learning and assessment strategies as well as on curriculum

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alignment. Recurrent themes emerged from the discussion on the 'ideal curriculum', informing the design phase of the AI approach. In this phase, academic staff members used the themes that emerged from their collaborative discussions to develop the new curriculum and to devise action plans for implementation. In the final phase of the AI process, academic staff members engaged in a conversation about how to implement the new curriculum. McNamee (2003:37) reports that often what have appeared to be immutable problems (such as the lack of trust and respect in this particular case study) were viewed within "a context of possibility rather than failure". AI allowed this group of academics to create a safe and creative space to explore their strengths and to envision the future curriculum.

THE USE OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AT A POST-MERGER UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Finally, this chapter reports on the use of AI at a post-merger UoT in South Africa in an attempt to deal with the defensive behaviour of academic staff and their resistance to change and to engage them actively in curriculum reform and development.

At the beginning of the academic year, the Appreciative Inquiry approach was carefully outlined to a group of senior academic staff members, who would form an institutional forum to drive the AI process and act as change agents in their respective academic departments and faculties to bring about the required curriculum change. The curriculum review and design process was closely aligned to the different phases of AI as outlined in Table 20.1 above. An affirmative topic was formulated, namely developing HEQF-aligned, responsive, engaged and transformative curricula. The institutional forum grappled with the following questions that relate to the key drivers of the AI process: What is the most appropriate form of engagement, given our change agenda, our departmental culture, time frames and available resources? How will we overcome resistance to change in academic departments? What is our change agenda? What is our inquiry strategy?

KEY DRIVERS OF THE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY PROCESS

Form of engagement

Each academic department has appointed a senior academic staff member to represent the department at an institutional forum where these staff members are empowered to act as change agents in their respective departments and faculties. This institutional forum meets once a month, while the change agents meet more regularly in their faculties and academic departments to engage actively with their colleagues. These change agents adopted a strengths-based approach in terms of their engagement with academic staff.

PART THREE • METHODS FOR INTERROGATING, REVISIONING AND IMPLEMENTING CURRICULUM CHANGE**The role of change agents**

Building a critical mass to support change is vital and it is therefore worth investing time in analysing the levels and strengths of commitment of academic staff in academic departments who would be involved in the change process. Change agents are most effective when engaging others in the change process and will typically find themselves working with three kinds of groupings as defined by Pennington (2003:9), namely:

1. rational adopters, those individuals who respond to new ideas by analysis, discussion and evaluation;
2. pragmatic sceptics, those individuals who remain unconvinced that what is being proposed will be better than that which presently exists. They often have to be convinced by presenting proof of benefits, through seeing successful practice in other similar contexts, and
3. resisters/defenders, those individuals who are unconvinced about the merits of change. They will often work actively to prevent the changes being adopted and embedded.

The most important role of change agents using AI is to ask unconditionally positive questions to guide the change process while creating increased opportunities for participation and involvement of stakeholders. Change agents are required to reconcile competing views whilst progressively building up a momentum of support for change. Effective change agents are sensitive to the informal processes of leadership, vision building and developing groups to create and sustain meaningful interventions in their existing (and frequently unexamined) practices.

Inquiry strategy and technique

A curriculum review and design strategy with reporting lines, clear and achievable objectives and timelines is developed to guide the process. When reviewing existing curricula departments focus on the following key aspects: quality of existing programmes, strategic relevance of current and future programmes, and viability and sustainability of current and proposed new programmes. The curriculum design strategy is underpinned by curriculum theory and curriculum design principles outlined in an institutional policy on curriculum design. It is also important to use a SMART approach – specific, measurable, achievable with realistic targets within a reasonable timeframe to drive the process.

A SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results) analysis based on the model of Stavros, Cooperrider & Kelley (2005:405) is used in the discovery phase of the 4-D cycle to allow academic staff members to:

- become active participants in the curriculum design process;
- build on their current strengths, in other words the positive core of the academic department and its programmes;

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- discover new opportunities for growth, e.g. partnerships with other higher education institutions;
- visualise goals and strategic alternatives, e.g. the development of research focus areas;
- identify enabling objectives, e.g. collaborative curriculum design teams in departments;
- design teaching, learning and assessment strategies to enhance good teaching and improve student learning, and
- implement a strategic plan for the academic department that is dynamic, continuous and a living document.

The SOAR analysis is different from a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) where half of the time the thinking is positive and the other half of the time the thinking is negative. The SOAR analysis allows participants to co-create their desired future throughout the process by inquiry, imagination, innovation and inspiration. It is a strategic inquiry into the heart of the academic department, yet with an appreciative intent. Table 20.2 outlines some questions to consider when conducting a SOAR analysis in an academic department. The responses obtained during such a focus group session at a UoT in South Africa are also included in this table.

PART THREE • METHODS FOR INTERROGATING, REVISIONING AND IMPLEMENTING CURRICULUM CHANGE**TABLE 20.2** SOAR analysis compiled by an academic department

	Strength	Opportunities
Strategic inquiry	What are the strengths/qualities in terms of curriculum review and development available to you as a department? ▪ Keen interest in teaching, learning and assessment matters in higher education ▪ Good subject-specific knowledge and skills ▪ Good organisational skills ▪ Teaching expertise ▪ Some staff members' ability to motivate others ▪ The ability to see the bigger picture ▪ Good leadership skills in department ▪ Excellent links with industry relevant to academic programmes ▪ Hard-working staff members ▪ Established research focus areas ▪ Dedicated staff who care about their students ▪ Good infrastructure with equipment and technology to support the academic programmes	What are the best possible opportunities available to you as a faculty to review current curricula and to design HEQF-aligned curricula? ▪ Facilitating change among staff – less resistance and more eager to know and be part of the process ▪ HEQF re-curriculation that could act as catalyst to improve teaching and learning ▪ Allowing one to reflect on one's own teaching and learning practices ▪ Creating staff development opportunities ▪ Establishing interdisciplinary co-operation ▪ Liaising closely with industry and professional bodies to develop curricula responsive to the needs of industry ▪ Opportunities for networking/crossing boundaries ▪ Creating opportunity to see the weaknesses within the programmes ▪ Acknowledging the HEQF as an opportunity for change/to rethink what the new curriculum should consist of to meet needs of stakeholders ▪ Identifying opportunities to see the gaps in the market to offer accredited programmes that align with the objectives and outcomes of professional bodies ▪ Engaging in research or having the opportunity to attend conferences/publish article ▪ Drawing on the collective strengths and support of the change agents

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	Aspirations	Results
Appreciative intent	What would you like to achieve in future as a department in terms of curriculum design? What significant changes and improvements in teaching and learning would you like to bring about in your department? ▪ Conduct a thorough situational analysis with enhanced collaboration from various stakeholders ▪ Evaluate current curricula to determine effectiveness by using suitable instruments to obtain feedback from stakeholders ▪ Establish new partnerships to support programmes ▪ Seek new opportunities to expose students to the world of work ▪ Develop curricula that are responsive to the needs of stakeholders and society in general ▪ Benchmark qualifications nationally and internationally ▪ Revive the lunch time discussions on teaching and learning /creating opportunities for healthy debate and discussion ▪ Enhance a student-centred approach to teaching ▪ Implement effective interventions for “at risk” students ▪ Align programmes with requirements of professional bodies to enhance competitive edge ▪ Enhance quality of student learning, teaching and assessment practices	What would the measurable results be of your achievements/aspirations as a department? What are the measures of recognition or rewards that should be used to motivate you to achieve these results? ▪ Meeting regularly to monitor progress ▪ Hosting staff development workshops and training programmes ▪ Developing strategic plan and objectives with measurable targets and clear timelines ▪ Improving quality of teaching and student learning ▪ Establishing research niche areas with improved research output ▪ Enhancing interdisciplinarity of curricula ▪ Achieving better co-operation between academic departments and faculties

REFLECTIONS ON THE USE OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Based on their own experience of using AI in large organisations across the world, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) provide a number of reasons why they believe AI works so well. They argue that it generates opportunities for people to share their strengths, stories and aspirations, allowing them to build relationships and granting everyone an opportunity to be heard, which prompts people to relate to the socially crafted nature of their organisational realities. Using AI to bring about large-scale change in a higher education institution is a long-term project and the use of AI is approached not as invention or event, but as a continual, systemic, self-reinforcing

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journey of discovery and learning for all involved in the process (Fitzgerald, Murrell & Newman 2002). One measure of success for an AI initiative is to determine to what extent an organisation has enhanced its capacity for positive change by asking questions such as: Has the inner dialogue of the organisation transformed from problem-oriented, deficit discourse to strengths-oriented, affirmative discourse? Have the patterns of conversation, interaction and relationships become more life-centric?

Appreciative Inquiry interviews conducted by the author elicited the following responses about the strengths of change agents in academic departments at the UoT under investigation:

... willingness to learn from others and using the knowledge to reach a goal ...

I think recognising my personal strengths helped me in getting buy-in from the department on curriculum issues.

... able to embrace and welcome change ...

... ability to see the bigger picture ...

I am able to act as a conduit across all these levels [department, faculty, institution] to help further the process of HEQF re-curriculation.

... openness to hear view of others ...

Although it is too early to determine the overall success of the AI approach, early signs indicate that academic staff members at the UoT under investigation are more positively inclined towards HEQF re-curriculation in general and that the discovery of current and past strengths in collaboration with stakeholders has proven to be a fruitful learning experience for all. Change agents currently working in academic departments to bring about curriculum change have also indicated that their interactions with colleagues have inspired them in the following ways:

... to re-examine subject content and teaching and learning approaches in the department ...

... to broaden my own knowledge of curriculum design, implementation and evaluation ...

... to be part of a community of practice regarding curriculum development ...

... to change mindsets ...

I think there is a wonderful opportunity to work across departments.

... to develop responsive curricula by engaging the advisory board and alumni ...

... to have a task team dealing with curriculum issues with a clear assignment of duties, roles and a structured plan with deadlines to achieve milestones ...

Majority of staff have a keen interest in academic development, so there is fertile ground for curriculum work.

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Bringing curriculum development and teaching and learning down to the individual lecturer's level to engage with curriculum and teaching and learning scholarship as part of their jobs ...

The feedback from the UoT change agents clearly indicates that the use of AI brings out the best in people, which in turn generates unprecedented co-operation across different levels of the organisation. It shifts the focus of the curriculum inquiry to those realities that are sources of positive energy promoting a generative, collaborative and creative process of envisioning the future.

CRITIQUE OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

It is, however, important to acknowledge that Appreciative Inquiry remains a mode of action research with little self-reflection or critique to evaluate the process as an action research method. Grant and Humphries (2006) question the overwhelming positive orientation of the AI process and propose that critical theory provides a useful contribution to the evaluation process of Appreciative Inquiry. They suggest that the focus on what is 'good' be extended by considering another dimension of appreciation. Appreciation in their opinion may also mean to know, to be conscious of and to take full or sufficient account of, thus encouraging a much deeper understanding of organisational dynamics.

Van Haar (2002, cited in Grant & Humphries 2006) argues that AI and its evaluation should not be understood as two separate and independent activities, but that these should be seen as an interwoven and ongoing process. Rogers and Fraser (2003) focus mainly on AI as a means of evaluation, acknowledging that the approach is best suited to long-standing programmes which may require an infusion of positive energy, or when the purpose of the evaluation is not to identify unknown problems but to identify strengths and build courage. In summary, both the literature and the personal experience of the author indicate that Appreciative Inquiry can be a valuable and useful technique when the purpose of the evaluation is not to identify unknown problems, but to identify strengths within an organisation. By addressing problems and weaknesses from an appreciative stance, those participating feel better equipped to address challenges.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the pressures and challenges of educational change in higher education in South Africa have been outlined with specific reference to staff perceptions at a post-merger university of technology in South Africa. Appreciative Inquiry as a strengths-based generative and powerful approach to positive change was outlined in detail. The five-dimensional technique of define, discover, dream, design and destiny was closely aligned to the curriculum review and development process with examples from literature of how AI has been used to enhance curriculum design. McNamee's (2003) account of and the author's personal experience of how AI was used as a change agent

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in a conflicted educational context to engage academic staff members in curriculum design indicate clearly the generative potential and the collaborative nature of AI to bring about positive change.

Finally, the chapter outlined how AI has been used during a re-curriculation process at a post-merger higher education institution in South Africa. Based on the accounts of academic staff members who have acted as change agents in academic departments, it is evident that bringing about institutional change through AI and engaging academic staff actively in curriculum design is a slow, unpredictable and iterative process. AI has generated an impetus towards transforming existing curricula at this institution by creating opportunities for appreciative conversations among colleagues, by generating positive thinking about the future and by envisioning a shared destiny. In the process, higher education teachers are no longer spectators, standing on the periphery of the change process, but are more actively engaged in the process of curriculum review and design, empowered to make a difference.

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● ABBREVIATIONS

AAU	Association for African Universities
ACE	American Council on Education
AD	Academic Development
ADSP	Academic Development Support Programme
AERA	American Educational Research Association
AHEF	African Higher Educational Forum
AI	Appreciative Inquiry
AIR	Association for Institutional Research
ANC	African National Congress
APD	Academic Professional Development
ASHE	Association for the Study of Higher Education
ASP	Academic Support Programme
ASPECT	Academic Support Programme for Engineering in Cape Town
CAT	Computer Analysis Toolkit
CE	Community Engagement
CESM	Classification of Educational Subject Matter
CHAE	Centre for Higher and Adult Education
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CHESD	Centre for Higher Education Studies and Development
CHESP	Community Higher Education Service Partnership
CHET	Centre for Higher Education Transformation
CM	Curriculum Mapping
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPE	Continuing Professional Education
CPL	Continuing Professional Learning
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
CREST	Centre for Research and Science and Technology
CSBL	Community service-based learning
CRC	Curriculum Review Committee
CSC	Centre for Student Counselling
CSD	Centre for Science Development
DELNA	Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
ECSA	Engineering Council of South Africa
EGS	Education Guarantee Scheme
EHE	Encyclopaedia of Higher Education
ELOs	Exit Level Outcomes
ELT	Experiential Learning Theory

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EPU	Education Policy Unit
ESF	European Science Foundation
ESL	English as a Second Language
FET	Further Education and Training
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
GTM	Grounded Theory Methodology
HBI/HDI	Historically Black/Disadvantaged Institutions
HE	Higher Education
HED	Higher Education Development
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HELF	Higher Education Looking Forward
HELTASA	Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee (of the CHE)
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
HERDSA	Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
HET	Higher Education and Training
HICD	Human and Institutional Capacity Development
HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IBSS	International Bibliography of Social Sciences
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IEHE	International Encyclopaedia of Higher Education
IF	Institutional Forum
IKS	Indigenous Knowledge Systems
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISI	International Scientific Information
ITLS	Improving Teaching and Learning for Success
JIPSA	Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition
LHEA	Leaders of Higher Education in Africa
MODE 1	A mode of knowledge that is mostly disciplinary in nature
MODE 2	A mode of knowledge that is mostly trans-disciplinary, trans-institutional and heterogeneous
MS	Microsoft
NASFAS	National Students Financial Aid Scheme
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NMMU	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework

NRF	National Research Foundation
NWG	National Working Group
OBE	Outcomes-based Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development
PBL	Problem-based Learning
PBRF	Performance Based Research Fund
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PGCHE	Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education
PGCHET	Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education and Training
PGDE	Postgraduate Diploma in Education
PGDHET	Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education and Training
PQM	Programme and Qualification Mix
QPU	Quality Promotion Unit
REDIBA	Research Development Initiative for Black Academics
RHEP	Research on Higher Education Programme
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SA	South Africa
SAAAD	Southern African Association for Academic Development
SAADA	South African Academic Development Association
SAAIR	Southern African Association for Institutional Research
SAARDHE	South African Association for Research and Development in Higher Education
SAC	South African College
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SAICA	South African Institute for Chartered Accountants
SAJHE	South African Journal of Higher Education
SANTED	South Africa-Norway Tertiary Education Development
SAQA	South African Qualifications Act
SARUA	Southern African Regional Universities Association
SEDA	Staff and Educational Development Association
SL	Service Learning
SOAR	Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results
SoTL	Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
SRC	Southern Regional Congress
SRHE	Society for Research into Higher Education
SSRC	Social Science Research Council
SU	Stellenbosch University
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
TQM	Total Quality Management
UCT	University of Cape Town
UFS	University of the Free State

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UKZN University of KwaZulu-Natal

UMALUSI The quality assurance body in South Africa for General and Further education

UNESCO United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UP University of Pretoria

UWC University of the Western Cape

VCD Visual Communication Design

WASC Western Association of Schools and Colleges

WiR Women-in-Research

ZPD Zone of Proximal Development

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