



John Hayes, Author and Emeritus Professor at Leeds University

Hello I'm John Hayes, I'm Professor of Management at Leeds University Business School in the UK. I work with Aarhus Business School and have been doing so for several years now and this morning what I'm going to talk to you about is appreciative inquiry. It's a rather different approach to looking at organisations and trying to change what's happening in organisations. Instead of trying to focus attention on what's wrong and then trying to fix it, this approach looks at what's right and then tries to accentuate it, so it's accentuating the positive rather than eliminating the negative.

The world out there is a social construction, we view the world in different ways, think of the Middle East crisis for example. People in Israel or Palestine or elsewhere, they have clear views about what's going on, but they have different views. Similarly in our organisations different people have different views about what's happening in those organisations. So we have different constructions of reality and these constructions of reality are open to change and appreciative inquiry is actually trying to change the way we view the world. So instead of viewing the world from a deficiency perspective and focusing on what's wrong, we try and view the world more positively and we try and identify opportunities that can be embraced.

Just as plants grow towards the light, so organisations grow and develop towards whatever it is which is the life-giving force of the organisation. So rather than focus on problems, we focus on opportunities, we focus on what's going well and what appreciative inquiry involves, it involves discovering the best of what is and then going one step further and trying to understand why is the best the best? You know, what are the circumstances that are creating these conditions? And then exploring possibilities for amplifying the best. So we try and work out what it is that's working and then we say what would the organisation be like in this exceptional set of circumstances? If we could actually make that the norm and not the exception and that's the way that we intervene.

If in your organisation you are trying to understand why it is that you've got high labour turnover and people are leaving, rather than seeing it as a problem and focus on why people leave through exit interviews or however else you might investigate that, switch attention to why it is that some people are staying? What is it about their experience at work that turns them on, that creates and develops their commitment to the organisation and then can we amplify that, can we spread that across the organisation?

When we look at problems, people get defensive, "It's not my fault, it's their fault." People are reluctant to share information, people find it difficult to learn in those circumstances. Alternatively when we focus attention on what's working well, people get excited. They are prepared to talk about that, they get engaged, this enthusiasm, this excitement, it spreads to others and we can get a lot of energy behind trying to produce changing organisations. Give it a try sometime.

