

Appreciative Inquiry Practicum

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AIFT Dates: June 7th – 10th, 2022.
Virtual Attendance.

AI Trainers

1. Joan McArthur-Blair
2. Jeanie Cockell PhD

Brief Description of Group

I worked closely with the Academic Programs-Senior Leadership Council (APO-SLC) for the Academic Programs Division of Rowan-Cabarrus Community College. This group works closely serving the community with:

- 1 Cabinet Level Vice President of Academic Programs
- 2 Associate Vice Presidents
 - a. Academic Support (Library, Distance Education, Tutoring, and Professional Development)
 - b. Academic Programs (Curriculum & Compliance, Schedule and Facilities, Dual Enrollment, Early Colleges, Career & Technical Education, Perkins, and the College's Quality Enhancement Plan.
- 1 Dean of Public Services
- 1 Dean of technical Programs and Engineering Technologies
- 1 Dean of Arts & Sciences (including transfer)
- 1 Dean of Health & Education Technologies
- 1 Executive Administrative Assistant for the team.

8 in the group total.

Part 1 Narrative Summary

The Academic Programs Office Senior Leadership Council (APO-SLC) had their first team building retreat since March of 2020. This new team was in the process of being formed since November of 2021. An unexpected passing, left people-power depleted to the extent of a need for the College to hire two new deans, and two divisions within academic programs reorganized. This whirlwind of change, loss, and restructure left the morale low amongst the group of 8.

I was asked to conduct a 1-hour workshop on Visioning and Leadership by my supervisor. Having attended the AIFT in June, I felt it would be an impactful time to focus on the positive framing of the bodies of work conducted by this group. Two of the deans were less than 6 months into their new roles, but were previously program chairs within their respective service areas for the College. I had rapport with them as I trained them, and was the interim dean while the searches were underway for the College. Being newer to their roles, there was a chance to discuss how impactful this team truly was and could be!

Understanding the dynamic, and that the APO-SLC recently had issues with moral, many coming back full time from COVID-19, and the demands of the Fall 2022 class campaign on the horizon, the retreat message and content requested by the Vice President of Academic Programs resonated. Using the Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR Analysis) and the Reframe models created a culture of amazing long-term collaboration.

Once the SOAR Analysis was completed, an area of opportunity had risen that was immediately used as the subject matter for the Reframe Model. The energy in the room changed, the ideas started to flow, and the team started to bond. These two activity models changed the team dynamics for communication and productivity. So much so, three of the group members asked for collaborative sessions with me on how to best conduct the SOAR Analysis and Reframe Models with their Program Chairs!

Part II Practicum Report

Understanding the dynamic, and that the APO-SLC recently had issues with moral, many coming back full time from COVID-19, and the demands of the Fall 2022 class campaign on the horizon, the retreat message and content requested by the Vice President of Academic Programs was the following outreach planning email:

“Hi Angelo,

Would you provide a session on leadership? I’m envisioning 50 minutes, with 5 to 10 minutes or so for questions. We should make arrangements for everyone to get a copy of your book – how can I purchase?”

*The book mentioned within the communications, is titled:

Lessons in Leadership, Volume 1.

I went on a personal journey of observing, perfecting, and then documenting best practices in leadership development, individual professional growth, social dynamics at work, and organizational change management. I compiled these experiences into a Leadership Workbook. My direct supervisor wished to support me and get the content to the APO-SLC.

In response, I sent options to my direct supervisor:

“Circling around so I can prep a little. What were you wishing / wanting specific?

Options / Thoughts?

A lesson from the book?

Something new I have been working on or plan to post within the rest of the year?

A topic you would prefer covered?

Appreciative Inquiry exercise? (I have 2 that would be perfect!

a. S.O.A.R (which is Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results)

and

b. Positive Reframing (Creating a positive frame on areas of opportunity)

Excited to be doing this session! Let me know your thoughts.”

In the end from a planning perspective, the decision was for me to:

“Please conduct maybe a lesson from the book, possibly both appreciative activities?”

Having been impacted greatly by Appreciative Inquiry in the AIFT sessions I attended in June 2022, I wanted to work on the art of positive affirmations, team building, and give the other seven members of the APO-SLC content that they could use as tools with their teams.

What I was not ready for, was how low the moral was in the team. How tiered everyone was, how they wanted to truly not be at the retreat. My session on visioning and leadership was after lunch. I started with some conceptual framework pieces on MY WHY. What was SO important with my leadership consulting work within Next-Step Leadership. Which consists of two books with a variety of lessons and personal perspectives on leadership. Readers are able to conduct self-reflection exercises known as “Next-Steps” at the end of each lesson. I used this as an ice breaker, describing a few lessons from Lessons in Leadership, Volume 1 that would be used within their management approaches for their different divisions.

From there, I explained the theoretical framework of Appreciative inquiry from the AIFT I attended. As a resource on theory I gave them a print out from my AIFT.

Specifically: (*Excerpt from Chapter 2 -- The Tenets of Appreciative Inquiry*)

The whole chapter was handed to the APO-SLC. We spent time conducting an overview of the process within “Affirmative Topic Choice” looks like, and then discussed the 5-D Model of AI. We discussed this framework of approach, the processes of AI, and how SOAR Analysis and Reframe are also methods of this practice.

I then asked the group to:

1. Take out one blank sheet of paper.
2. Look up at me.
3. Listen to each question I asked, and then write down the FIRST thing that popped into their heads. I gave them 15-20 seconds to write. Once they were all looking up at me, I would go to the next question.

I asked one of the SOAR Analysis related questions from each quadrant.

Strengths: What are we really doing well?

Opportunities: How are we the best partner with others?

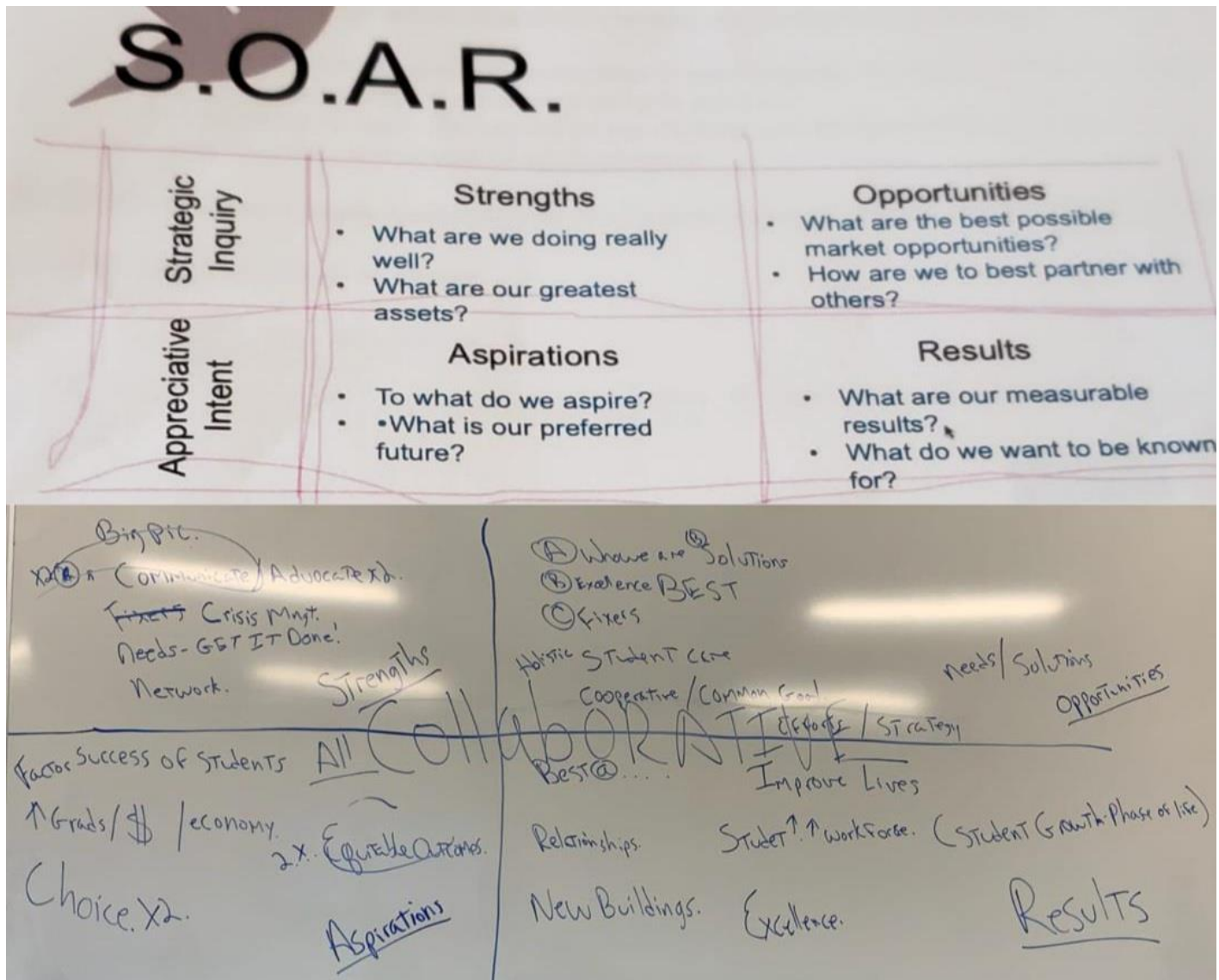
Aspirations: What is our preferred future?

Results? What do we want to be known for?

I then asked each individual to tell me their answer one by one for their responses per question.

From there, as a collective group, we deciphered the responses, noted the similarities of thought, and had an open conversation.

In a nutshell, I was able to illustrate that ALL of this group had many similar answers to their supervisor, and for the supervisor, I asked them to look at this SOAR activity as a personal report card of the message they are sending AND how the College is viewed by his leadership team. The diagram is below:



Wholeheartedly “COLLABORATION” was listed amongst all as an greed similarity.

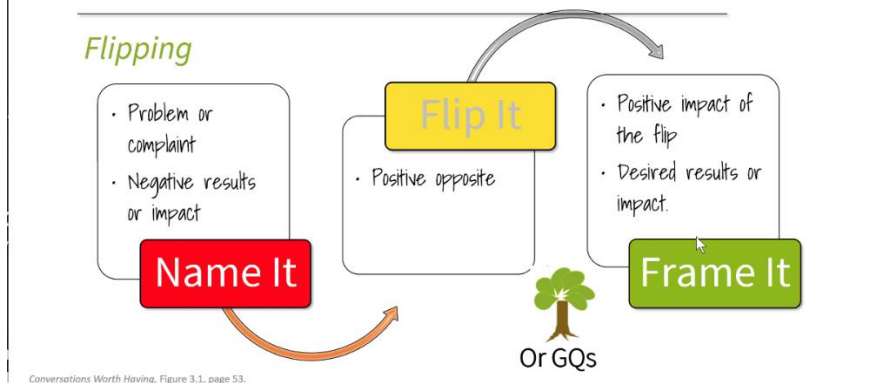
● Note of interest as we moved to the Reframe Activity.

One of the group members, who has the lowest moral, in jest stated “New Buildings” noted in the Results quadrant. They felt it would be seen as snide, BUT they followed the directions. It WAS the FIRST thing that popped into their minds. Though they meant it to be condescending.

From this moment, I stated to the group:

“Okay, perfect! This is an area we all potentially see as a problem or complaint. Let’s flip it. Let’s reframe it!”

I Create a Positive Frame



As a group, we then conducted the reframe process on the thoughts of “New Buildings”. What happened was an entire light bulb moment. The positive opposites, filled the conversation. The desired results of what could be due to ALL of these new spaces for the APO-SLC division were brought into the world.

The problem or complaint was: “New Buildings”

*As a larger community college, now having MORE space and buildings.

Positive Opposites and reframes that filled the conversation:

- More space for community engagement.
- More opportunities to host events and new program initiatives.
- Another physical space and resource for students in need of tutoring or studying.
- Growth in employer – student interactions.
- Increased visibility in the community college’s service area.
- Opportunity for APO-SLC to maximize the development and usage of the new building.

I watched the energy, vibe, communication, and dialogue change as the group had an epiphany rock thrown at our heads.

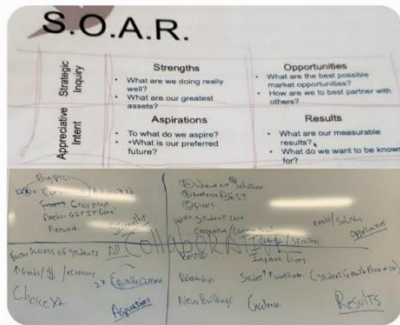
Everyone realized, we missed collaborating, we missed putting our collective thoughts and talents to use together. Even my direct supervisor started to speak freely and add thoughts. I could see the beginning of moral mending within this time.

Wait! There's MORE . . .

One of the Deans approached me after they reflected over the weekend. They wanted to try the SOAR and Reframe Activities for their welcome back meeting with their program chairs!

Here is the text-versation the dean and I had to initiate the use of the S.O.A.R activity in their next program chair meeting before the start of the Fall 2022 Semester.

W What were the 4 questions you asked us at the retreat? 9:58 AM



10:03 AM

They are on the top of the sheet

10:04 AM 1 from each category

Strengths- what are you doing really well.
Opportunity- How are we the best partner
Aspirations- future
Results - known for?

Vreat the diagram. Start with strengths. And move along

10:05 AM

10:06 AM Humbled and flattered that you are thinking of it today.



Meeting with Dean

Our Discussion consisted of the build for the meeting.

The Agenda

Friday Virtual Zoom

Dean and Program Chairs (7)

Opening Icebreaker

Introductions

Celebrations (Been a while since the team met – Last Fall)

Pictures are being sent, PowerPoint ahead of time.

Collaborative Exercise. How to Collaborate with others and others across the College.

Expectations for the Year.

Appreciative Inquiry Discussion for her to utilize in the meeting:

Asking: If you were to come in and say “This was the best year I ever had!” What made it so?

Visioning

Take ALL OF IT and BUILD ON IT with SOAR Technique

ALSO

Show Reframe Technique

Use Chat Function per Question.

The goal for the dean was to build a true success measures conversation. The use of SOAR and Reframing would add to the collaborative approach.

In our conversation, it was important for me to stress the AIFT practices of intentionally shaping the focus of the conversation on a desirable outcome. The NEED to work toward energizing the discussion in a way that moves to positive, inspirational mindsets.

I explained the need for Generative Questions. The need to create a space for a variety of perspectives. The need to try and glean unseen information. Making these pieces visible, can impact a desired direction.

Relative to the SOAR Analysis, I stressed the need to stay open to opportunities as they come to the session. Explaining that this was a great time to allow for the program chairs to imagine, them as the dean to innovate and collectively work with administration to implement possible results.

Personal Reflection on my Own Learning

The process of reframing and the %-D Model of Appreciative Inquiry have been very impactful for me personally. I have always been a seeker the silver lining in situations, however I NOW have tools that can reinforce, and rebuild the perspective of others around me.

Using the SOAR Analysis and having the EUREKA moments was empowering. I seek to learn more from attending the Appreciative Inquiry Practitioners Community meetings. I also feel networking, viewing, and constant collaboration will assist me in becoming a better advocate for AI.

Seeing the science and research that has been conducted in regard to AI has also been beneficial. I discuss the content related to positive image and positive action often. I try to shed light on how we build our relationships with people, the words we use, and the way we present information to others.

Many individuals I speak with about AI become more interested and eager to discuss once they are aware there is scientific content related to the practice. I always use the examples from the AI Facilitator Training on Days 3 & 4 relative to Placebo Effect, Pygmalion Effect, and positive affirmation versus deficit-based conversations.

What is Next for Me, and Appreciative Inquiry?

I truly enjoy change, and change management. I plan on adding the SOAR Analysis to my professional toolbox fully. In future books, such as Lessons in Leadership, Volume 3, I may add a full lesson on positive reframing.

In regard to my professional role as an Associate Vice-President of Academic Programs, I plan on using SOAR to review how my new Academic Programs Office team is functioning. I will

use the SOAR analysis as a temp check report card for the new group. I will be hosting a APO Team Retreat at the end of October 2022. The group consists of:

A new (2 Months) Executive Administrative Assistant.

A new (4 months) Curriculum & Compliance Coordinator

A new (3 weeks) Scheduling & Facilities Coordinator

A Director of Career and College Promise Programs (5 Years)

And three Career and College Promise Early College Liaisons (4,3, and 1 year respectively)

For a total of 7 people.

The Agenda will include team building exercises, and a semi-diluted version of the Appreciative Interview learned Day 1 in the AIFT, and the SOAR activity.

Handouts from the initial Appreciative Inquiry Content Delivery

APO-SLC Team Retreat
8-5-2022

Visioning and Leadership

Question – Theme: What do we need to know to make information informed decisions?

And **WHY? – Purpose?**

What brought Angelo to the point of writing Lessons in Leadership, Volume 1?

<https://linktr.ee/nextstepleadership>

Next-Step Leadership's true question defined:

- How can you elevate leadership within a person so that they are able to bring it out into the world, into their jobs, classrooms, whatever it is they are passionate about doing?
- I have always been passionate about leadership. It applies to my day to day today, and career because I was put in a variety of roles very early in my life.
(It was very humbling to learn the impact of my choices and decisions for an academic institution as well as the livelihood of an employee)

Team: *HOW do you apply leadership to your day to day and career? HOW do you elevate?*

JOURNEY of “Getting to Paper. . .”

NEXT STEP Leadership
February 9, 2011 · 🌐

A new networking and relationship building platform for leaders! To blog about their experiences and create personal bios for informational interests.

7 People reached 0 Engagements – Distribution score **Boost a post**

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

GOAL:

Simplify day to day leading and amplify using the structure of Next-Step Leadership.

Lessons of Thought for OUR Team Retreat:

8 – Goal Setting

20 – Change

40 – Interrupt Someone’s Life

44 – Do Your Job – The Rest is Details

(Ask yourself the Next-Steps for each lesson)

Appreciative Inquiry Assumption:

“Every human system has something that works right—things that give it life when it is vital, effective, and successful. AI begins by identifying this positive core and connecting to it in ways that heighten energy, sharpen vision, and inspire action for change.”

<https://www.centerforappreciativeinquiry.net/more-on-ai/what-is-appreciative-inquiry-ai/>

Takeaway Tools from Today



1. S.O.A.R. Analysis and 2. Positive Reframing / Flipit



S.O.A.R.

Strategic Inquiry	Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are we doing really well?• What are our greatest assets?	Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the best possible market opportunities?• How are we to best partner with others?
	Appreciative Intent	Aspirations <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To what do we aspire?• What is our preferred future?

WHY / Purpose:

So many people tell us what we are NOT doing well. Can we reframe our conversations to illustrate what excites us day to day? THIS is our personal challenge. . .

Create a Positive Frame

Flipping

