



Appreciative Inquiry Core Competencies

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The Center for Appreciative Inquiry (CAI) has identified a set of competencies to empower individuals in enhancing their understanding, skills, and application of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). These competencies delineate both the technical skills and behavioral expectations vital for success in the field and serve as benchmarks utilized by CAI during program reviews within its certification process.

Drawing upon the 5-D model of Appreciative Inquiry, the Appreciative Inquiry Core Competencies consist of 14 foundational competencies categorized into five segments: Define, Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny. These segments are intentionally non-hierarchical, with each competency deemed equally essential for proficient performance in the realm of appreciative inquiry.

DEFINE

Defining Ourselves as Change Agents and Its Impact on Our Work

1. Identify Personal and Professional Roles
2. Build Your Appreciative Brand
3. Develop an Environment of Trust and Safety with Clients
4. Craft and Appreciative Working Agreement

DISCOVER

Identify Clients' Focus of Inquiry and Life-Giving Forces through the Power of Inquiry

5. Engage in Active Listening
6. Ask Generative Questions

DREAM

Create an Intervention to Assist Clients in Achieving their Ideal Future

7. Tailor Projects to Clients' Needs
8. Establish Support Structures
9. Invite Dialogue
10. Cultivate Curiosity to Explore Possibilities

DESIGN

Develop Actionable Items to Serve as Roadmap for Change

11. Create Actionable Items
12. Accountability and Measurement

DESTINY

Encourage Clients to Live and Work with Positive Intention

13. Nurturing Success
14. Living Appreciatively

DEFINE

DEFINING OURSELVES AS CHANGE AGENTS AND ITS IMPACT ON OUR WORK

In the Define segment of the AI Core Competencies, we embark on a journey of self-discovery and professional identity, recognizing the pivotal role personal values and authenticity play in our practice of Appreciative Inquiry. Explore the competencies below to cultivate a strong foundation and deepen your understanding of your role as a change agent:

1. IDENTIFY PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL ROLES

Personal values serve as our guiding compass, shaping our perceptions, decisions, and interactions in both life and work. Delve into the exploration of your values, understanding the lenses through which you view the world, and embracing your authentic self. Utilize emotional intelligence to navigate challenges and foster meaningful connections with others.

- a. **Identify, Understand, and Appreciate Your Values:** Explore both implicit and explicit personal and professional values that guide your actions and decisions.
- b. **Understand Your Worldview:** Reflect on the various lenses through which you perceive the world, including race, ethnicity, culture, beliefs, prejudices, and assumptions.
- c. **Embrace Authenticity:** Appreciate and operate from your authentic self, aligning your actions with your true values and beliefs.
- d. **Utilize Emotional Intelligence:** Apply emotional intelligence to navigate interpersonal dynamics effectively and foster positive relationships in both personal and professional contexts.
 - i. **Self-Awareness:** Recognize and identify your own emotions and their impact on both clients and your work.
 - ii. **Social Awareness:** Read emotional currents, cultural nuances, and power dynamics within groups, understanding their influence on clients and your work.
 - iii. **Self-Management:** Maintain resilience and positivity, serving as a source of balance and support for others, especially during challenging times.
 - iv. **Relationship Management:** Foster healthy and beneficial relationships with clients through intentional communication and collaboration.
 - v. **Empathy:** Cultivate empathy to understand and resonate with others' feelings, perspectives, and concerns, fostering deeper connections and rapport.

2. BUILD YOUR APPRECIATIVE BRAND

Enhancing our understanding and appreciation of what makes each of us unique enables AI Professionals to deliver services and offerings that deeply resonate with their clients. Embrace the principles of Appreciative Inquiry and embody behaviors that empower both yourself and others within organizational systems.

- a. **Act in Alignment with Appreciative Inquiry Values:** Embrace and embody the values and beliefs inherent in Appreciative Inquiry theory and practice, aligning your actions with its principles.
- b. **Embrace the Principles of Appreciative Inquiry:** Integrate the core principles of Appreciative Inquiry into both your personal and professional life, fostering a culture of positivity and growth.
- c. **Embody Change Agent Behavior:** Demonstrate behaviors that empower individuals within organizations to become effective change agents in their own right, fostering a culture of empowerment and self-efficacy.
- d. **Promote the Wholeness Principle:** Educate and empower clients to understand how their individual actions contribute to the greater whole of the organization, promoting a sense of interconnectedness and shared purpose.
- e. **Examine and Challenge Assumptions:** Engage in critical reflection to identify and challenge assumptions underlying your work, fostering continuous learning and growth.
- f. **Nurture Client-Led Solutions:** Facilitate the Appreciative Inquiry process in a way that minimizes your own presence as a consultant, empowering clients to take ownership of their journey and outcomes.

3. DEVELOP AN ENVIRONMENT OF TRUST AND SAFETY WITH CLIENT

Every interaction with a client is an opportunity to cultivate trust, foster an environment of openness, transparency, and collaboration. AI Professionals seize each opportunity to strengthen relationships, convey values effectively, and advocate for the essential elements of successful change initiatives.

- a. **Communicate Values and Assurances:** Effectively convey personal and professional values to clients, demonstrating confidence and assurance in interactions to foster mutual trust, understanding, and credibility.
- b. **Facilitate Open Dialogue:** Encourage clients to communicate concerns and fears without judgment, fostering open and transparent communication channels.
- c. **Foster Psychological Safety:** Establish trusting relationships, encourage open communication, validate client perspectives, cultivate a non-judgmental environment, and emphasize confidentiality.
- d. **Share Knowledge and Insights:** Freely share relevant knowledge and expertise with clients, empowering them with valuable insights and information.
- e. **Promote Transparency:** Foster an environment of openness and transparency, ensuring all stakeholders are informed and involved in the process.
- f. **Identify Key Success Factors and Overcome Barriers:** Determine essential elements for success, advocate for addressing potential barriers, and facilitate growth and development for all parties.
- g. **Provide Timely and Effectively Responses:** Address client inquiries and concerns promptly and effectively, demonstrating commitment to their needs and priorities.

4. CRAFT AN APPRECIATIVE WORKING AGREEMENT

Crafting an Appreciative Working Agreement acknowledges the inherent uniqueness of every individual and organization. It serves as a pivotal tool for AI professionals and clients to align their goals, values, and expectations, fostering a collaborative environment rooted in mutual understanding and shared vision.

- a. **Introduce Concepts and Tailor Change Interventions:** Invite understanding and generate excitement by introducing Appreciative Inquiry concepts and propose customized interventions that precisely meet client needs and aspirations.
- b. **Define Clear Objectives and Establish Achievable Deliverables:** Collaboratively outline clear project objectives and content while ensuring tangible, realistic deliverables within the agreed time frame.
- c. **Present Detailed Timelines and Points of Contact:** Transparently outline project milestones and tasks while designating a key contact person for streamlined communication and coordination.
- d. **Clarify Roles, Expectations, and Communication Channels:** Define roles, responsibilities, and expectations for all parties involved, and establish effective communication channels that suit stakeholders' preferences.
- e. **Ensure Language Relevancy and Financial Clarity:** Use industry-relevant terminology and language to enhance understanding while specifying project costs and payment procedures to prevent misunderstandings.
- f. **Encourage Open Feedback and Feedforward:** Foster an environment of open dialogue to incorporate diverse perspectives and ensure agreement consensus before project commencement.

DISCOVERY

IDENTIFY CLIENT'S FOCUS AND LIFE-GIVING FORCES THROUGH THE POWER OF INQUIRY

In the Discover segment of the AI Core Competencies, we embark on a journey of exploration and inquiry, delving into the art of active listening and the skill of asking generative questions. By honing these competencies, AI Professionals can uncover deeper insights, foster meaningful connections, and inspire transformative change. Explore the competencies below to elevate your ability to engage with clients and uncover their untapped potential:

5. ENGAGE IN ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening is a cornerstone of effective communication, allowing AI Professionals to fully understand the ‘complete message’ conveyed by clients. Through active listening, practitioners demonstrate empathy, maintain neutrality, and provide a supportive space for clients to share their thoughts and feelings.

- a. **Cultivate Curiosity and Demonstrate Understanding:** Foster genuine curiosity and an open-minded approach to fully comprehend the client’s perspective, aspirations, and conveyed information.
- b. **Uphold Impartiality and Positive Attitude:** Create an atmosphere of trust and acceptance by refraining from judgment.
- c. **Allocate Ample Time:** Allow clients to express themselves freely without interruptions, ensuring they have sufficient time to articulate their thoughts and emotions.
- d. **Recap Key Points:** Ensure alignment and progress within the conversation by periodically summarizing key points discussed.

6. ASK GENERATIVE QUESTIONS

Asking the right questions is a powerful tool for uncovering insights, sparking creativity, and facilitating growth. Generative questions open doors to new ideas, perspectives, and possibilities, empowering clients to envision their ideal futures.

- a. **Introduce New Ideas and Perspectives:** Pose questions that expose clients to innovative concepts, diverse viewpoints, and unfamiliar scenarios.
- b. **Explore Client Background and Context:** Inquire into the client’s background, professional endeavors, cultural context, and related aspects.
- c. **Identify Strengths:** Use questions to uncover and highlight the unique strengths of both individuals and organizations.
- d. **Uncover Energies and Inspirations:** Ask questions aimed at revealing the life-giving forces within individuals and organizations, fostering inspiration and vitality.
- e. **Foster Vision and Motivation:** Empower clients by asking questions that encourage them to envision new possibilities, ignite excitement, and catalyze action.
- f. **Promote Open-Ended Inquiry:** Frame questions in an open-ended manner to stimulate deeper reflection, exploration, and discovery.

DREAM

CREATE AN INTERVENTION TO ASSIST CLIENTS IN ACHIEVING THEIR IDEAL FUTURE

The Dream Segment of the AI Core Competencies is where possibilities are envisioned, potential is unlocked, and pathways to extraordinary futures are mapped out. This segment focuses on harnessing collective imagination and creativity to co-create a compelling vision for the future.

7. TAILOR PROJECTS TO CLIENTS’ NEEDS

In the realm of Appreciative Inquiry, each client’s journey is unique, necessitating tailored approaches that suit their specific needs. AI Professionals must adeptly adjust strategies, resources, and timelines to align with the distinct requirements of each project.

- a. **Choose the Right Engagement Approach:** Select the most suitable form of engagement tailored to the client’s change agenda, timeline, resources, and unique circumstances.
- b. **Refine Interview Techniques:** Select the most suitable form of engagement tailored to the client’s change agenda, timeline, resources, and unique circumstances.
- c. **Gather Client Information:** Seek relevant information about the client to design interventions that precisely meet their needs and aspirations.
- d. **Bridge Diverse Perspectives:** Skillfully navigate and reconcile differing viewpoints from various groups within the organization.
- e. **Navigate Organizational Dynamics:** Skillfully navigate and reconcile differing viewpoints from various groups within the organization.

- f. **Flexibility in Delivery:** Remain adaptable in project activities and delivery methods to embrace the diversity represented within the organization.
- g. **Accommodate Diverse Learning Styles:** Engage participants with varying learning and thinking styles, ensuring inclusivity and effectiveness.

8. ESTABLISH SUPPORT STRUCTURES

In times of change, establishing robust support structures is indispensable for guiding clients through emotional and practical adjustments. These structures nurture the development of behaviors and skills essential for achieving desired outcomes.

- a. **Champion Positive Deviants:** Identify and enlist the support of positive deviants within the group to champion change initiatives effectively.
- b. **Foster Core Team Diversity:** Promote core team creation that embraces the Wholeness Principle by ensuring diverse representation from the team, group, organization, or community.
- c. **Tailor Support and Guidance:** Assist the client in identifying where support is most needed and determining the most effective types of support.
- d. **Develop Communication Strategies:** Collaborate with the client to develop a communication strategy that addresses how the change will be communicated, shared, and managed.

9. INVITE DIALOGUE

Dialogue is at the heart of AI, fostering a culture of creativity, conflict resolution, shared meaning, and new opportunities. AI Professionals cultivate a culture of dialogue that encourages creativity and fosters the creation of shared meaning.

- a. **Encourage and Incorporate Feedback and Feedforward:** Foster a culture of continuous feedback and adapt approaches based on insights received.
- b. **Seek Inclusive Input:** Actively solicit input from all stakeholders, including those who may be less vocal, to ensure diverse viewpoints are considered and valued.
- c. **Facilitate Guided Conversations:** Guide discussions to maintain focus on key objectives and foster constructive dialogue, ensuring clarity and understanding through effective communication.
- d. **Create Safe and Inclusive Environments:** Cultivate physical and virtual spaces conducive to open dialogue, where individuals feel safe to express emotions, concerns, and differing viewpoints.
- e. **Deepen Understanding Through Inquiry:** Pose thoughtful questions and follow-ups to uncover underlying issues, assumptions, and opportunities.
- f. **Resolve Conflict Constructively:** Address conflicts respectfully, acknowledging diverse perspectives and guiding discussions towards shared goals and resolutions, creating a pathway for positive outcomes.

10. CULTIVATE CURIOSITY TO EXPLORE POSSIBILITIES

Innovation often begins with curiosity—a willingness to explore uncharted territories and envision new possibilities. By cultivating curiosity, AI Professionals empower clients to navigate challenges with creativity and openness, fostering trust and collaboration among stakeholders. This competency encourages a mindset of exploration, inspiring clients to approach complex issues with fresh perspectives and discover innovative solutions.

- a. **Promote Inquiry Skills:** Encourage clients to transition from providing answers to asking insightful questions, fostering a mindset of inquiry. Prompt clients with thought-provoking inquiries to delve deeper into their perspectives and possibilities.
- b. **Facilitate Curiosity:** Provide clients with the time, space, and resources necessary to explore their interests, ideas, and unconventional solutions. Foster exploration by supporting clients in expressing curiosity authentically and comfortably.

- c. **Reframe to Abundance:** Assist clients in reframing situations and conversations from a mindset of scarcity to one of abundance. Encourage clients to shift their focus from what they don't want to what they aspire to achieve, guiding them towards positive outcomes.
- d. **Empower Creative Thinking:** Enable clients to develop the skills and mindset to adapt creatively and effectively in dynamic work environments. Foster independent creativity by empowering clients to operate innovatively outside of your assistance.
- e. **Capture and Enhance Ideas:** Ensure that all ideas generated during discussions are captured and considered, valuing each contribution. Lead client brainstorming sessions to identify energizing themes, threads, and impactful insights. Aid clients in crafting vivid metaphors and visualizations of their positive topics, enhancing understanding and engagement.

DESIGN

DEVELOP ACTIONABLE ITEMS TO SERVE AS ROADMAP FOR CHANGE

The Design Segment of the AI Core Competencies bridges the gap between envisioning a preferred future and taking concrete steps to make that vision a reality. This segment is where dreams are translated into actionable plans, and where strategies for achieving desired outcomes are crafted. The core competencies within this segment are essential for guiding clients through the process of creating, implementing, and sustaining transformative change.

11. CREATE ACTIONABLE ITEMS

AI Professionals play a pivotal role in guiding clients to unleash their imagination, generative intelligence, and capacity for innovation. Through collaborative efforts, they empower clients to design actionable items that pave the way toward realizing their envisioned future.

- a. **Refine Vision into Clear Goals and Objectives:** Guide the client in refining their vision into clear, focused goals that serve as actionable targets.
- b. **Facilitate Transition to Action:** Guide the client in transitioning from conceptual discussions to tangible actions, ensuring clarity and accountability in the implementation process.
- c. **Design Specific Action Steps:** Collaborate with the client to design specific action steps that enable them to practice, demonstrate, and achieve their desired outcomes effectively, while also defining clear, measurable strategic objectives that align with their overall vision and mission.
- d. **Create Implementation Plans:** Assist the client in developing detailed implementation plans outlining the steps, timelines, responsibilities, and resources required to achieve strategic objectives.
- e. **Explore Supportive Resources:** Assist the client in exploring how new relationships, information, and resources can support the success and sustainability of their goals, fostering a supportive environment for their endeavors.

12. ACCOUNTABILITY AND MEASUREMENT

In the dynamic landscape of change, AI Professionals serve as guides, empowering clients to take ownership of their actions and recognize the profound impact these actions wield on achieving their overarching goals. Through a commitment to accountability and meticulous measurement, clients navigate their journey of transformation with clarity and purpose, ensuring meaningful progress and sustainable outcomes.

- a. **Monitor and Evaluate Progress:** Support the client in establishing mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating progress towards strategic objectives, including key performance indicators and milestones.
- b. **Maintain Focus:** Keep the client engaged and aligned with the established goals and objectives throughout the change initiative.
- c. **Adapt and Modify:** Collaborate with the client to review and adjust action items as necessary, ensuring they remain relevant and conducive to achieving desired outcomes.

DESTINY

ENCOURAGE CLIENTS TO LIVE AND WORK WITH POSITIVE INTENTION

The Destiny Segment of the AI Core Competencies is where the seeds of transformation planted during the previous segments blossom into sustainable growth and continuous improvement. This segment focuses on nurturing success and living appreciatively, ensuring that clients not only achieve their desired outcomes but also maintain and build upon these successes over time. The core competencies within this segment are crucial for guiding clients through the final phase of their journey and setting the stage for ongoing development and flourishing.

13. NURTURING SUCCESS

In the journey towards realizing their aspirations, AI Professionals serve as guides, supporting clients in overcoming obstacles and redirecting their efforts towards the actions crucial for attaining their envisioned outcomes. Through nurturing support and strategic guidance, AI Professionals empower clients to navigate potential roadblocks and stay steadfast on the path to success.

- a. **Focus on Results and Outcomes:** Direct the client's attention towards achieving tangible results and desired outcomes, stimulating ongoing exploration of what energizes human systems at their best.
- b. **Empowerment and Support:** Empower the client to take meaningful action towards their goals through tailored coaching, mentoring, and follow-up support. Celebrate short-term victories and milestones along the journey.
- c. **Capacity Building:** Deliver effective training sessions and provide access to resources that support continued growth and development. Guide the client in implementing an ongoing process of Discovery, Dream, and Design to foster continuous improvement.
- d. **Role Clarification:** Clarify your role, if any, in supporting the client's future endeavors and determine the type of follow-up support that would be most beneficial, including the frequency of contact.

14. LIVING APPRECIATIVELY

AI Professionals embrace a mindset of continuous growth and learning, actively engaging in activities that enrich their understanding and experience. By nurturing their curiosity and expanding their knowledge, they enhance their capacity to support clients in realizing their fullest potential and embracing new opportunities for growth and success.

- a. **Engage in Ongoing Study and Learning:** Encourage continuous growth by actively participating in ongoing study and learning related to the field of Appreciative Inquiry, ensuring a deep understanding and up-to-date knowledge.
- b. **Practice Reflection and Learning:** Foster a culture of reflection and learning by encouraging regular reflection on experiences and insights gained, promoting personal and professional development.
- c. **Build Knowledge and Networks:** Expand personal industry knowledge and networks by actively building connections and relationships within the field, facilitating opportunities for collaboration, learning, and growth.
- d. **Maintain Professional Certification:** Uphold Appreciative Inquiry Certification to demonstrate a commitment to ongoing professional development and adherence to industry standards, ensuring continued excellence in practice.