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Quality Assurance, Meet Quality Appreciation: Using Appreciative Inquiry to Define Faculty Quality Standards

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Abstract

Objectives: This study outlines the journey of an online university to evaluate faculty performance standards, key performance indicators, and systems for quality assurance using an appreciative inquiry summit model. The study reveals the power of *quality appreciation* as an approach that elicits a shared vision for quality definitions and standards and serves as a historical marker in the higher education shift from data-driven faculty performance approaches to strengths-based, inclusive methods.

Method: The retrospective business case outlines one university's 2018 Appreciative Inquiry Summit, 5D (define, discover, dream, design, destiny/deliver) approach, resulting deliverables, lessons learned, and conclusions.

Results: The summit and subsequent quality appreciation processes laid a foundation for inclusive leadership and inclusive teaching and learning. Quality appreciation was observed to be a third component to quality enhancement that had heretofore included quality control and quality assurance mechanisms. Quality appreciation, based on appreciative inquiry (AI) approaches, is a method for uncovering the positive core of an organization that results in ideal quality standards, definitions, and desires for ongoing quality creation.

Conclusions: This case provides a view of one university's building upon data-driven methods for faculty performance evaluation. The use of appreciative inquiry to advance a quality appreciation agenda and human-centered approaches served as a stepping-stone toward a vision for inclusive, strengths-based quality enhancement.

Implication for Theory and/or Practice: Quality control mechanisms and systems for quality assurance are supported by quality appreciation. In this case, faculty quality appreciation is the integration of AI practices with ongoing evaluation and identification of faculty and classroom quality standards. Quality Appreciation leads to strengthened definitions of quality that are values-driven and founded in the heart and soul of the university's teaching and learning.

Keywords: *faculty performance, appreciative inquiry (AI), appreciative inquiry summit (AIS), faculty quality standards, positive leadership, higher education, distance education, quality assurance*

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Introduction

Quality in higher education is a touted characteristic with varied meanings and measures. Competition for rankings and students has spurred institutions to undertake defining and determining quality, particularly in the realm of teaching and learning (Nasim et al., 2020). Even with regulations established by the United States Department of Education and well-established institutional and programmatic accrediting bodies, quality standards and quality assurance measures in higher education are complex and ever-changing (Tokel & Ozkan, 2017; U. S. Department of Education, 2018) and left to each organization to manage (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2003). In a single university setting, differences in practices, processes, requirements, leadership, and philosophies across programs, schools, or colleges pose a challenge to standardizing systems and expectations for teaching quality or performance.

This manuscript details one organization's journey and process to evaluate and further hone its faculty quality management systems and standards. What makes this case unique is the use of appreciative inquiry (AI), often cited as an approach for change (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010), used herein as an approach for enhancing quality and quality management. It is a retrospective business case offered as an example of one large online university's use of AI to evaluate and improve faculty performance and quality standards.

The purpose of the study was twofold. The initial aim was to review and evaluate current instructional standards, data indicators, and systems along with processes relating to faculty performance, accountability, and faculty development. A team was established to recommend measurable long-term goals for teaching and learning related to the standards, indicators, and processes and identify and communicate implications of the recommendations to the overall university learning model and faculty models. Institutions of higher education have, for decades, been accountable for collecting and internally disseminating data relating to faculty performance as a mechanism for quality management (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2003). Classroom observations, student surveys, and/or quantitative data that can be derived from learning management systems or other tracking systems are included in "an iterative data-driven analysis and evaluation process used to improve faculty activity and engagement in the classroom" (Scalese & Ford, 2012, p. 2). Supervisors and academic leaders access the data for decision-making purposes, quality control and assurance, and to prepare for faculty performance evaluations.

The second purpose of the present study was to engage a methodology that could further support a positive leadership culture (Cameron, 2008) and wellbeing (Stocker et al., 2014). This case study involves a public benefit organization with a long-standing mission centered in social change that, for 50 years, has embraced change and emphasized innovation that serves students, employers, and communities; fosters the

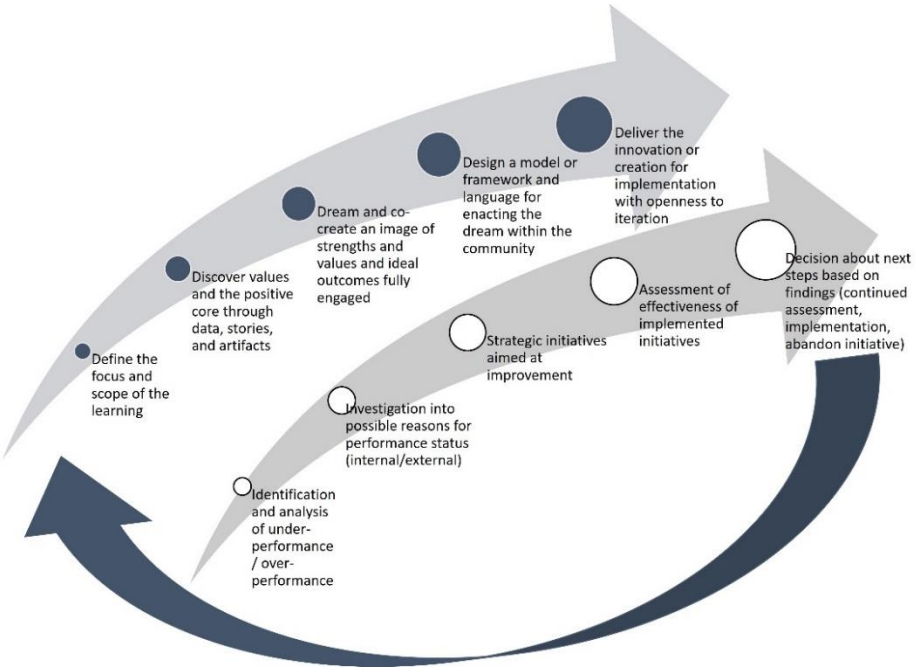
development of positive leadership behaviors; and equips persons at all levels of the organization with the psychological capital and mindset (Dahlvig, 2018) to sustain positive change. As a result, change-making and innovation are incorporated throughout many aspects of daily work, from operations to processes and systems. Social change is embodied in the attitudes and work ethic of many of the university's dedicated leaders, faculty, and staff.

However, when these two goals were presented, it became apparent that it was time to examine the evaluation systems, processes, and support for faculty development, key performance metrics, and existing quality assurance systems. What does the faculty performance data indicate? Are the data aligned to performance standards and measuring what they are intended to measure? Are the data being collected being used? What does quality look like and how is it defined? Where does quality exist within individual faculty performance? To respond to the two charges presented, it was clear that examining these areas through a new lens would be beneficial.

This case is grounded in an organization accustomed to bringing stakeholders together for continuous improvement endeavors, and a summit model builds on this tradition. Further, performance data showed many faculty, staff, and students were doing great work in and outside the classroom. The approach for this case needed to be intentional in the way it honored and built upon existing strengths and ideas. An Appreciative Inquiry Summit (AIS) was used as the method to build on existing strengths and uphold a culture rooted in social change, branching into positive leadership (Cameron, 2008). Use of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) allowed for the exploration of dialogic assessment of quality in teaching and learning during that time (Powley et al., 2004). The process was grounded in the key AI Principles, encouraging asset-focused, inclusive co-construction of an ideal result.

An internal team led the evaluation of current practices, standards, indicators, metrics, and systems relating to faculty performance from a strengths perspective. The university already had a solid track record of engaging cross-departmental teams, identifying outliers or gaps, developing and implementing initiatives, and testing and acting upon the outcomes (see the First-year Student Progress (FYSP) methodology, adapted from Jobe et al., 2016). As seen in Figure 1, the AI model aligns with and builds on the university's 2016 work with a model aimed at solving problems by leveraging strategies that lead to "over-performance" and addressing issues of "under-performance" (p. 14). The application of AI extended this emphasis on over-performance, prioritizing a focus on assets (rather than a primary focus on deficits) for a deeper understanding of core values and strengths.

Figure 1. *AI and FYSP Models*



Note: Adapted from AI 5Ds*,* "Inquiring into appreciative inquiry: A conversation with David Cooperrider and Ronald Fry," by S. Grieten, F. Lambrechts, R. Bouwen, R. J. Huybrechts, R. Fry, & D. L. Cooperrider, 2018, *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *27*(1), 101–114. https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492616688087 and *FYSP*, "The first year: A cultural shift towards improving student progress," by R. L. Jobe, M. Spencer, J. P. Hinkle, & J. A. Kaplan, 2016, *Higher Learning Research Communications,* 6(1), 10–20. https://doi.org/10.18870/hlrc.v6i1.305

Literature Review

The review of literature explores research focused on identifying and measuring quality in teaching and learning in higher education. It also includes a look at the use of AI, especially in academic settings. Additionally, the literature review provides a brief look at positive leadership, especially in higher education and online learning environments.

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Quality of higher education is a complex and potentially controversial topic with government regulations, accrediting bodies, and institutions sometimes aligned, sometimes at odds, and continually redefining quality (Taylor, 2017). At the university level, quality measures may include learning outcomes (Evans et al, 2018), faculty behaviors and teaching techniques (Martin et al., 2019), course, curricular, and program innovations (Lynch & Gaston, 2020; Sparks & Chang, 2021), graduation rates, or employability (Ewell, 2017). Methods for measure and quality assurance in colleges and universities include use of Baldrige principles (Jimerson & Reames, 2015), Six Sigma values (Holmes et al., 2015), agile processes, and total quality management models in higher education (Aziz et al., 2021; Terziovski et al., 2000).

Cockell and MacArthur Blair (2012) offered the AI (4D) and SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results) models for organizational planning because of their rootedness in stories and the positive core of individuals and the organization. Additionally, AI makes it possible to include large numbers of individuals at all levels of an organization in strategic planning and quality management, which is a deficiency of some

quality management models (Aziz et al., 2021). Sparks and Chang (2021) echoed the need for holistic, whole organization approaches to quality, understanding that success lay with whole systems.

Appreciative Inquiry

Originating in organizational development, AI is an approach to promote and enable continuous improvement and organizational growth and positive change. It is known for its value of generative (Stratton-Berkessel, 2010) and dialogic (Dole et al., 2017) processes. With roots and alignment to positive psychology (Cooperrider et al., 2018), AI celebrates what is best in people and systems and then, with a diverse group of stakeholders, uses positive questioning, brainstorming, and imagining for transformation, innovation, and enhancement of wellbeing. AI typically uses a 4-D (discover, dream, design, destiny) approach (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2011) or a 5-D (define, discover, dream, design, destiny/deliver) approach.

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is a tool for transformation (Johnson & Leavitt, 2001) founded in a desire to leverage curiosity and social innovation (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) for the best imagined results. Bushe (2011) contended Cooperrider's initial model for AI was his effort to build on the generative nature of grounded theory methods, and Arora (2021) relayed that Cooperrider's AI was a model for action research. At its essence, AI provides a framework for improvement or growth through co-creation of new ideas for an ideal state founded upon existing strengths and assets (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2011). It is important to note that critique of AI is typically centered around its "vocabularies of hope" and potential to overlook problems (Grant & Humphries, 2006, p. 413).

The five underlying principles for AI were presented in the original writing of Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987), and AI practitioners and researchers have since contributed to additional principles as AI has been applied across many contexts. Key to AI approaches are the original five principles (constructionist; simultaneity; poetic; anticipatory; and positive; Kelm, 2015). The descriptions of these five principles are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Principles of Appreciative Inquiry*

AI Principle	Description
Constructionist Principle *Words Create Worlds*	Emphasizes creation of knowledge, ideas, and understanding through communication among people. Inherent in this principle is the need to include the most diverse group of stakeholders possible (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2011; Gergen & Gergen, 2004). Best AI results rely on a representative group that includes customer to chief with titles checked at the door.
Principle of Simultaneity *The Very First Question Marks the Beginning of Change*	Calls for carefully crafted questions that set the tone for change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2011; Stratton-Berkessel, 2010). The questions themselves have power to shift attention and thinking.
Poetic Principle *What We Focus on Grows*	Reminds us that the topics for investigation are up to us, and the way they are framed and what is emphasized will impact our result (Stratton-Berkessel, 2010).
Anticipatory Principle *Image Inspires Action*	Calls for a process that enables a powerful vision for the future, expressed in stories or images that impact how we move forward toward that future (Stavros & Torres, 2021).
Positive Principle *Positive Affect Leads to Positive Action*	Taps into and builds from the positive core of what exists to grow what is good (Fredrickson, 2001). Additionally, people involved in the processes and systems that emphasize strengths and assets are well-nourished and energized to perform at the highest levels (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

Positive Leadership

Leadership development that is strengths-based and focused on human flourishing (Seligman, 2011) takes many forms in the literature. Blanch et al. (2016) see positive leadership most closely aligned with authentic (Hannah et al., 2011) and transformational (Rehman & Waheed, 2012) styles. Authentic, transformational, and positive approaches all involve relationships and connection for the development of future leaders (Caldwell et al., 2012) and empowerment for effective team performance through organizational change (Ishikawa, 2012).

Cameron (2008) emphasized that cultural climate can foster positive affect, build relationships, communication, meaningful work, and implementation of evidence-based strategies to shift cultures and people toward "extraordinary performance" (p. 97). Ryff (1989) provided a foundation for positive leadership grounded in self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships, purpose in life, and personal growth. Leaders who utilize positive psychology and wellbeing theory create interrelationships between managing the business and serving people (Morgan, 2017). Finally, with a call to higher education to serve the "common good" (Dahlvig, 2018, p. 97), it is imperative that leaders and future leaders nourish wellbeing, emphasize strengths and human potential, and understand "what gives life to human systems when they function at their best" (Ludema et al., 2003, p. 9).

Business Case

The plan in this case was designed and implemented to accomplish the goals of the university's call to action and to build on the already existing data-driven quality initiative program introduced at the university in 2010 (Scalese & Ford, 2012). To address the call for review and recommendations for faculty quality indicators and standards as well as the need to support an organizational emphasis on positive leadership, researchers at this university launched a cross-functional organizational Appreciative Inquiry Summit (AIS). The Ludema et al. (2003) guide for leading large group change informed the planning of the AIS. It is of note that the team was not expressly asked to solve a problem and it had not been determined that the standards were wrong or insufficient in any way. This was an opportunity to apply principles of AI for a positive, stakeholder-embracing journey focused on faculty stories of success and strength in teaching and learning as the basis for key performance metrics and faculty standards.

It is an expectation in many institutions of higher education that leaders, faculty, staff, and students have a voice and seat at the table for endeavors that will directly impact them (Bowers et al., 2017). Though an AI approach had not been used for organization-wide change at the university at the center of this case, it seemed to be an appropriate and powerful way to address the objectives. Additionally, it could ensure varying perspectives were captured and incorporated into a larger vision for process and performance evaluation. A successful rollout of any new approach would require the sponsorship of trusted long-time leaders and faculty. The plan for an AIS was approved by executive leaders and their trust for the process secured. In a complex organization with strong leaders and programmatic practices in place across colleges, achieving consensus and consistency in expectations for faculty performance seemed an impossibility. Trusting the AI process to let the answers or results emerge through co-creation and guided inquiry provided an effective way to start.

Appreciative Inquiry Summit

The three-day AIS focused on faculty key performance metrics and faculty quality standards. As with previously used approaches (Jobe et al., 2016), this AI initiative benefited from strong support from leadership at the top of the organization. The provost sent information about the initiative and a request for nominations to join the summit team. Final decisions were made by the researchers and provost to ensure participants represented different faculty and staff roles, lengths of service, programs or schools, and

departments across the organization. The original assembled team of 20 individuals included full-time and part-time faculty, academic leaders, and various staff members from across the organization. Students were represented by staff and faculty who were also enrolled as students.

Faculty Quality Appreciation

The theme for the summit was Faculty Quality Appreciation. The summit team had the shared call-to-action and understood that the focus of the work was on improving faculty performance and refining faculty quality standards. In addition to the focus on faculty quality, the summit team was learning and using the AI approach and 5-D model (see Figure 2), thus the nod to "appreciation" in the theme. Finally, the theme was borne out of a desire to advance quality control and quality assurance practices and theory in faculty performance management. Use of AI as a lens for identifying and building upon quality offered potential for positive outcomes and would garner support and buy-in at all levels.

Define

The AIS began with a provost welcome and review of the call-to-action. The facilitator discussed the AI approach and tenets for engagement. The summit team was told this would be a summit powered by positive leadership and positive education. The summit team would be considering the whole system of whole individuals. Team members would self-manage, share stories, encourage the ideas of others, listen, and engage in mutual inquiry. Team members would honor diversity, embrace various forms of expression or creativity, and embrace the unknown. They would find common ground and opportunities where their strengths and imaginations come together.

Discover

A guidebook for summit team members was modeled after the World Positive Education Accelerator AIS (Cooperrider et al., 2018), with a coordinating slide deck that included the agenda as well as guiding questions and prompts for the 3-day, 5-D process. The activity of Day 1 included robust one-to-one AI interviews with table sharing and large group report-outs. Additionally, the agenda included mini presentations that broke up the storytelling and sharing. Mini presentations were led by staff and included a focus on existing faculty quality standards, performance data, and the classroom observation process.

Dream

In the afternoon of the first summit day, the team used small group discussions, large group brainstorming activities, and small group creative presentations in the dream phase of the work. The team was asked to look ten years into the future and imagine what is possible in a faculty quality appreciation model. What might be in place to support the best in online teaching standards, systems for accountability, and support? Team members were asked to consider the classroom experience, design of program support and college support, and the look and feel of a positive institution and flourishing workplace that serves to model and enrich social change and quality experiences for students, faculty, and staff. The team was asked to be bold. This was their opportunity to think beyond any potential barriers that existed in the moment and embrace the very real proposition that the team had an opportunity to envision and create the best online university the world has ever seen. Further, the team was given four specific domains to shape their dreams: faculty performance for online learning, faculty as agents for academic excellence and social change, systems or structures for quality assurance, and faculty quality appreciation and innovation. The summit team discussed the domains and elected to combine the first two, seeing both as part of the faculty role. They agreed each round table would focus on one of the (now three) domains. From there, some team members rearranged themselves in the room to sit with individuals who seemed to be focusing on their area of interest, and the team identified a need for a mixture in roles and areas of expertise at each round table.

Design

The design stage began on the morning of day two. The group debriefed from day one, shared overnight reflections or morning "shower revelations," and set off to review the creative work that was done at the table. The summit team discussed brainstorming rules in more depth to prepare for a morning where every wild idea would be written on a sticky note. They spent time brainstorming the list of actions and ideas that could be a part of the design to bring their dream to life. The design work eventually resulted in taking the most promising ideas from brainstorming and model creation of the dream stage into a prototype, logic model, or provocative propositions or affirmative statements. Throughout the design process, teams presented to the group for feedback and discussion and had the opportunity to consider and integrate input from the larger group.

Deliver

Finally, the provocative propositions, prototypes, models, and designs were summarized and presented to the large group through an action plan. Summit teams named their initiative(s); developed or restated an aspirational/provocative statement; listed key objectives; identified university resources, partners, or expertise they might need; and identified potential challenges or dependencies. Each team also began to map out early, intermediate, and long-term steps and tasks. These action plans were put together by the summit facilitator and each team reported out to the larger working team, the executive sponsor group, and university governance bodies.

Figure 2. *5Ds of AI Applied to Quality*

Note: Adapted from *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change*, by D. D. Whitney, & A. Trosten-Bloom, 2010, Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Results

From the very start of the AIS, questions, and discussions about what quality looks like and how to define it were too important to dismiss. The stories and discussions that were brought forward in discovery made clear that the goals expressed in the call to action could not be achieved without some preliminary steps to address a need for clarity, accessibility, and transparency around faculty quality indicators, performance metrics, and

systems for quality assurance. In other words, the dreaming and design stages could not be about identifying key performance indicators or redefining teaching quality until all the people in the room understood, had access to, and provided input regarding the information they needed to regulate and manage their own behaviors and performance (and that of their teams). Resolving the need for clarity, access, and transparency of quality standards and faculty performance data became the focus of the dream, design, and delivery phases for the team.

This proved to be a case that disputes concerns that AI ignores the deficits in the interest of discovering the best of an organization to deliver the ideal (Grieten et al., 2018). In this case, the AIS was designed, in part, to evaluate and update quality metrics, standards, and processes; it resulted in an unearthing of gaps and inconsistencies prohibiting faculty ownership of quality. Those gaps had to be honestly acknowledged to work our way back to the positive core and to a new definition of our work together in the summit and beyond. That honest acknowledgment contributed to the "life-giving" results generated by the summit team (Grant & Humphries, 2006, p. 407).

One of the most significant results of the summit was that faculty quality appreciation emerged from the AIS as a desirable ongoing practice. One summit working team produced a proposal for revision to the governance model to allow for a cross-departmental stakeholder group focused on ongoing quality definition, discovery, dreaming, design, and delivery. Data will not always reveal where quality exists, but the humans involved in learning and teaching will uncover the strengths and assets that continue to evolve. What resulted from the AIS and the ensuing work was an understanding that quality control and quality assurance systems and processes could answer the questions of whether requirements were met and how requirements were met. It was through the AIS focused on quality that stakeholders were able to ask what requirements should be met and what requirements could be imagined serving stakeholders and their learning and teaching most effectively. Quality appreciation emerged as a novel approach to defining and identifying quality.

The AIS resulted in the formation of three formal working groups, each with a slate of deliverables and action plans. In the days that followed, an initial summary of the work was presented to a university governing body. The report included an overview of the AI approach including its positive, strengths-based focus to emphasize and build on core values. The cross-departmental and cross-college stakeholder group allowed the team to ensure outcomes were faculty driven and student centered. The work included establishing communication plans for university-wide updates and transparency at all levels of the organization. Finally, the working team would develop a plan for ongoing evaluation, improvement, and commitment to a quality appreciation process.

The first working group would focus its energies on clearly articulating cross-college faculty standards and competencies, eventually publishing them in the faculty handbook. Further, the group developed a faculty quality goal statement and a framework for key faculty roles that was comprised of quality standards, quality indicators, and evidence of quality performance. The overarching goal was that faculty members use this model as a guide for performance achievement, growth and development, and professional accountability. It was also intended that the model could help faculty develop annual work plans and summarize their performance for performance assessment/review processes.

The second working group was charged with making vital information and performance data available for greater faculty self-service, accountability, and efficacy. This working team partnered with university information technology team members to design components for a faculty portal. This portal would include new information pages that provide insight into the organization and support system around each faculty member. The primary focus was building a faculty-facing dashboard with highlights of key performance indicators of the individual faculty member as well as a dashboard indicating students at risk or in need of outreach.

The third working group embarked on a plan to identify the positive core of the existing faculty observation process and present a more efficient and effective process and role. Their findings affirmed the strengths of

the university's observer role and uncovered effective practices and uses for the position in some settings that could be used in the co-construction of an ideal process and role for other settings. The group presented opportunities for efficiencies and an expansion to the model for observation in the dissertation phase of learning and teaching and in the competency-based learning environment. Additionally, the group updated the observation report and honed the job description for greater clarity and consistency.

What emerged from the AIS in answer to the call to action was not what was anticipated, making the presention of the findings and planning for next steps challenging. In the spirit of engaging stakeholders along the way, the working team gathered and organized a large team of university experts, many of whom were named during the delivery portion of the summit and some of whom were added based on conversations with leadership. The role of the university experts was to attend bimonthly presentations of the working groups to vet the work products in progress, ask questions, contribute ideas, and simply be a part of the work as it was developing. This was a new construct for the university, and attendance was inconsistent. The facilitator also had bimonthly meetings with the full executive team following each university expert meeting. The idea was that the working teams would be able to consider feedback from the university experts before presenting to the executive sponsors and before communicating updates to the wider university community.

The working teams were actively contributing for a period of 12 months following the AIS (one working group remained active for more than 18 months). Team members were added for their expertise and to continue to maintain a cross-departmental/college perspective. Some team members were removed from the working team when they left their roles at the university or took on workloads that prohibited their ongoing involvement. Subgroups were added to the initial three working teams, and over the course of one year the original summit team of 20 grew to over 120 working group, sub-group, and university expert team contributors.

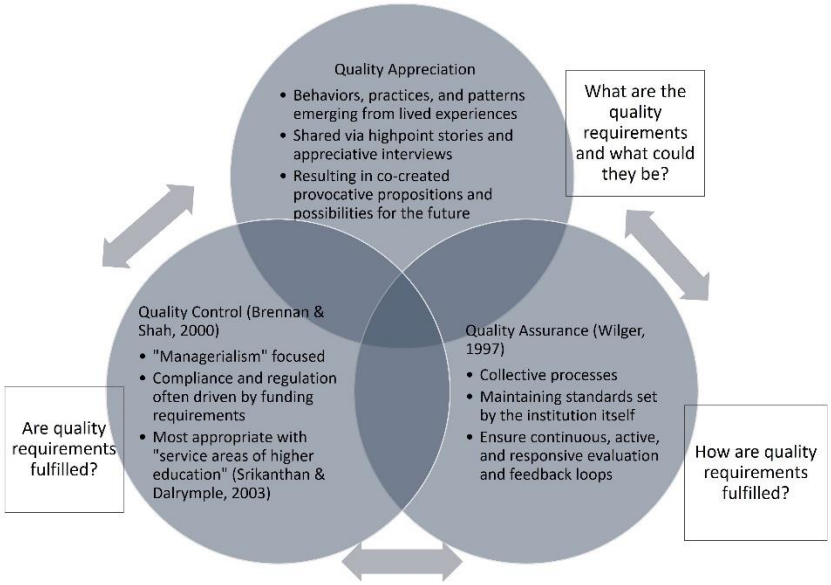
Discussion and Conclusions

At the summit kick-off, during expectation setting and early discussion about defining the work together, questions and conversations made clear that the summit would only be the beginning of the work. It was also clear that the AIS and the focus on quality control, quality assurance, and now quality appreciation would result in outcomes that team members could be proud of and that would serve the university well. The AIS offered the flexibility to uncover gaps and needs even while the team focused on strengths and assets. Additionally, the AIS call to listen deeply to one another prevented problems from being ignored and unresolved. As team members connected with what was most important and what would be most effective in moving forward the provost's call to action, the provocative propositions were identified as steps toward the assignment. The AI process did not allow for glossing over problems or barriers; rather the approach called the team into a 5-D process that would set them on a journey, rooted in strengths and core values, addressing gaps and deficiencies in forward movement toward the ideal state.

What was delivered out of the AIS and the year of working group action that followed bridged a gap and resolved problems to enable steps that would come in the years to follow. After one year of work, the working groups had developed and presented their re-organized and more clearly articulated faculty standards and competencies through governance for publication in the faculty handbook. The data group launched faculty-facing performance data and other information and insights in the faculty portal for all faculty. The working group focused on classroom observation and quality assurance, launched revised observation reports, and clarified role descriptions for the faculty observer.

While the work products were valuable, the significant value and findings came in the way of further development of a quality culture (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008) grounded in a mission of social change and a desire for greater inclusion of all constituents. Quality appreciation, as seen in Figure 3, enhances the quality management model by asking what might be in terms of quality.

Figure 3. *Quality Appreciation for Quality Management*



Note: Quality appreciation presented as a third component in quality management with quality control (Brennan & Shah, 2000) and quality assurance (Wilger, 1997*)*

The university has gone on to use AI approaches in its strategic planning, innovative vision work, and employee performance and self-assessment processes in combination with other methods for continuous improvement, evaluation, and change. The introduction of AI for defining quality standards was a pivotal point for the university. First, it achieved its initial goal for supporting a culture focused on positive leadership and wellbeing of staff, faculty, and students. Second, it built on former data-driven approaches (Jobe et al., 2016; Scalese & Ford, 2012) with human-centered, values-based, co-constructive approaches. Given the importance of the student–faculty relationship in any educational setting, engaging students in these processes is critical. One limitation of this project was the inclusion of only dual-role students (those who were both enrolled as students in the university and held a position as staff or faculty). Future iterations of this model would benefit from involving students who are not also employed by the institution as their experience is different and their perspective valuable.

Quality appreciation or the integration of positive, strengths-based AI approaches for identifying and defining quality standards may offer a model to other institutions for determining what quality looks like. This case offers one university's experience with quality appreciation and the shared vision for quality that resulted. One of the keys is engaging a diverse team of representative stakeholders. Use of AI to define quality calls organizations to include the humans involved in creating and experiencing the quality directly. Appreciative, aspirational dialog uncovers the best in an organization so it can be built upon, and the people involved can more confidently begin to answer the question of what should be required or measured or what should be standard for quality management.

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