

APPRECIATIVE FEEDBACK¹

Appreciative feedback is one aspect of an organizational planning model developed by David Cooperrider and his associates at Case Western Reserve University.

Traditional approaches to feedback focus on defining the problem behavior, setting behavioral change targets, and developing strategies for change. Subsequently, people spend most of their time focusing on what is not working well; feedback thus tends to be about peoples' failings. Most of us realize that if you constantly criticize children they will develop an inferiority complex. We don't stop to think that the same is true for adults.

Addressing problems, setting targets, and working to accomplish them creates a culture of problem-centered improvement. The only time people search for improvements is when a problem is defined. This makes it difficult to develop a climate supporting continuous improvement.

Systematic Appreciative Feedback focuses on envisioning people at their very best. First, a mutual agreement is developed describing (1) what the behavior will look like when the individual is performing at his or her best, and (2) what support others can give to reinforce the new behavior. This agreement is not a conversation about "shoulds" and "oughts." Rather, it is intended to encourage and support any actions in achieving the desired change.

Subsequent *feedback is based on what is going well.* Those supporting the change look for instances of people behaving in ways that move them in the desired direction. It is important to notice *any* movement toward the goal instead of waiting for big, significant improvements. Paying attention to what is going well gets people *out of the box of only noticing problems*; it also actually increases the number of positive examples that you notice.

Appreciative feedback is truly empowering—it calls out the best in people.

¹Drawn from articles by Gervase Bushe and Tom Pitman: "*Appreciative Process: A Method for Transformational Change*," and "*Organizational Visioning: Capturing the Heart and Soul Through Systematic Appreciative Feedback*."