

Using Appreciative Inquiry for Strategic Planning In a Professional Nursing Organization

Jane Flanagan, PhD, ANP-BC
Assistant Professor of Nursing, Boston College
Connell School of Nursing

Marlaine Smith, RN, PhD, AHN-BC, FAAN
Associate Dean for Academic Programs, Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing
Florida Atlantic University

Arlene T. Farren, RN, PhD, AOCN, CTN-A
Assistant Professor, College of Staten Island
City University of New York

Pamela Reis, PhD (c), CNM
Clinical Assistant Professor of Nursing, Midwifery Education Program
East Carolina University

Barbara Wright, RN, PhD, FAAN
Health Policy Consultant

Background

Strategic planning is essential for any organization. During this process the organization charts its course for the future by setting strategic goals and developing an action plan to meet these goals. Organizations should adopt processes for strategic planning that reflect their values and worldview. The Society of Rogerian Scholars is founded on postulates and principles underpinning a unitary paradigm; therefore, the strategic planning process for this organization should reflect a unitary perspective.

In March of 2009, several members of the Board of Directors of the Society of Rogerian Scholars (SRS) discussed the need to develop a strategic plan for the organization. To begin the process, volunteers from the Board formed a Strategic Planning Committee (SPC). The first meeting was in April 2009, and all subsequent meetings were held via telephone conference calls. Table 1 lists the members of the SPC.

Table 1: *Persons assigned for the SPC to contact*

Strategic Planning Committee Member	People invited to participate in the Discovery Phase
M. Smith (Chair)	R. Cowling M. Bramlett M. Newman
Arlene Farren	E. Barrett V. Malinski J. Phillips M. Madrid
Jane Flanagan	R. Parse F. Reeder D. Jones M. Smith P. W. Fry
Pamela Reis	J. Fawcett S. Gueldner M. Alligood H. Butcher
Barbara Wright	S. Hardin

The SPC decided to use appreciative inquiry (AI) to guide the SRS strategic planning process because the tenets underpinning it were consistent with the unitary worldview. The quote below was excerpted from the website *Appreciative Inquiry Commons*. It is a direct quote from Cooperrider and Whitney, the founder of AI and a leading disciple (2005).

Appreciative Inquiry is about the coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives “life” to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. It centrally involves the mobilization of inquiry through the crafting of the “unconditional positive question”... In AI the arduous task of intervention gives way to the speed of imagination and innovation; instead of negation, criticism, and spiraling diagnosis, there is discovery, dream, and design. AI seeks, fundamentally, to build a constructive union between a whole people and the massive entirety of what people talk about as past and present capacities: achievements, assets, unexplored potentials, innovations, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, benchmarks, high point moments, lived values, traditions, strategic competencies, stories, expressions of wisdom, insights into the deeper

corporate spirit or soul-- and visions of valued and possible futures. Taking all of these together as a gestalt, AI deliberately, in everything it does, seeks to work from accounts of this “positive change core”—and it assumes that every living system has many untapped and rich and inspiring accounts of the positive. Link the energy of this core directly to any change agenda and changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized.

(Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005

<http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/intro/whatisai.cfm>)

Based on this overview, Cooperrider and Whitney’s (2005) Four Dimension (4-D) Model of **discover, dream, design, destiny** was used to guide the process. The Committee commenced with the Discover Phase by seeking the perspectives from members of the organization. The questions listed in Box 1 were formulated to reflect the tenets of AI.

Box 1: Questions Asked During Interview – Dream Phase

1. Describe or tell me a story about when the SRS is at its best.
2. What made the SRS that way for you personally?
3. Describe the strengths of the SRS.
4. What are your hopes for the future?
5. Can you think of others we should talk with about this process?
6. Is there anything else you wish to share about the relative present of the SRS?

Prior to proceeding, the strategic planning proposal was presented to the SRS Board of Directors for approval, which was obtained on June 7, 2009. This paper, along with the 2009 SRS conference presentation by Smith (2009), summarizes for SRS members the AI model, the SPC process using AI, findings, and thoughts regarding next steps.

Appreciative Inquiry for Strategic Planning: The Model

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) for strategic planning is not the same as the Rogerian methodology used by Cowling (2004) for unitary pattern appreciation. First developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987), AI for strategic planning is based on the fundamental idea that organizations should be fluid and inclusive. Through the AI process, organizations will be open to and will shift toward the ideas raised. While this period of shifting can be unsettling, it is part of a process that is to be embraced. AI for strategic planning should be provocative, applicable, collaborative, and comprehensive with attentiveness to all members’ input. There are five guiding principles of AI that influenced the strategic planning process for the SRS and they are:

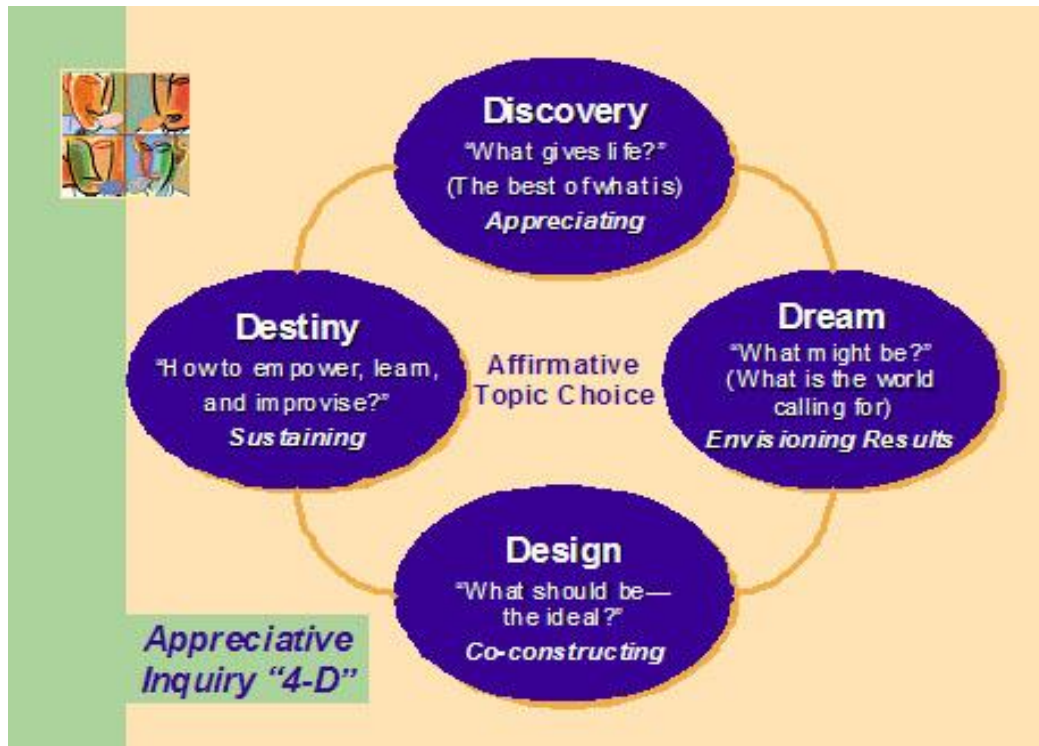
1. **Constructionist** - Suggests that SRS members are co-creating the future of the organization together.
2. **Positive** – Appreciative inquiry provides a language that allows members to express the best experiences they have had as members of the SRS.
3. **Simultaneity** – Promotes the idea that change is not linear; inquiry and change happen together.
4. **Poetic** – The SRS today is representative of many stories over time that have potential to shape the current thought and actions,
5. **Anticipatory** – As an organization the SRS can create images of the past as well as the future that will transform current thoughts and actions (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987 http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/introduction_to_ai.htm.)

Adapted from Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) in Seel's *Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry*(http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/introduction_to_ai.htm), a 4-D model outlines the phases of AI. They are **discovery, dream, design, and destiny**. The 4-D model of Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) was represented by Seel (2008) in a diagram located at http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/introduction_to_ai.htm, and in Figure 1. The AI process is a dynamic and reciprocal and moves freely back and forth between the past, the present, and the desired future. Each phase informs the next and the process is ongoing. The **discovery** phase is focused on appreciating the best of what was and what is within an organization. Discovery is followed by the **dream** phase, which focuses on envisioning the possibilities of what might be. The **design** phase involves members of the group in co-constructing the ideal of what should be. Lastly, the process of **destiny describes** a path that empowers the group to sustain their ideas over time.

Appreciative Inquiry and the Strategic Planning Process

Using the Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) model, the SPC began with the discovery phase. The committee sought to learn about the organization as viewed by a sample of founders and long-term members, including past presidents and former Board members. Each member of the SPC was assigned to interview several founders/members during this phase. Table 1 outlines the SPC members and the founders/members who were contacted. Interviews were either conducted either by telephone or email. With the latter, each respondent was asked to answer a series of questions listed in Box 1, which were provided via email. If the interviews were conducted by telephone, the same questions were posed and the interviews were either tape-recorded or the interviewer took extensive notes. The SPC agreed to conduct interviews over the summer/fall 2009. The SPC met by telephone conference call in the fall of 2009 to identify common ideas that emerged across all interviews.

Figure 1: Seel's (2008) Representation of the 4-D Model



Reprinted with permission from Richard Seel.

At the 2009 SRS Conference, SRS President Marlaine Smith presented the emerging themes and ideas from the interviews. Following this communication with a large portion of the members, the second phase of AI (the dream phase) began. Small workgroups of those in attendance were formed, and in these breakout sessions participants were asked to share with one another what they envisioned for the future of the SRS. Specific questions are detailed in Box 2. The ideas that emerged from the small groups were then shared with all participants in a work session at the end of the conference.

Based on the information unfolding within the discovery and dream phases, the SPC met in November 2009 to discuss what had been learned, share new information, and identify goals for the design phase. Five broad and interrelated goals were identified. Each SPC member assumed responsibility for one goal and developed a plan to meet it.

Box 2 Group Exercise – Questions for the Discovery Phase

1. What was not reflected in the themes that matter to you?
2. Core Value: If you have to boil it down to one thing, what is the core factor that gives vitality to the SRS?
3. Imagine a future for the SRS in the year 2015

Results

Discover Phase

A synopsis of the responses from the interviews was clustered under the categories of: SRS at its Best; SRS Strengths and Hopes and Dreams.

SRS at its best.

Overwhelmingly participants described SRS at its best during its early and formative years in New York City. More than one participant described being involved in early SRS conferences as “being invited to a good party.” Individually and collectively, the participants indicated that much of the enthusiasm for these conferences was centered on the powerful influence, presence, and values of Martha Rogers. Several respondents commented that that nursing theory itself was new and exciting, and that Rogers engendered excitement about unitary thinking by fostering openness and the enthusiastic exchange of ideas. The membership was large (around 125 members) and early meetings were described as well attended, vibrant, and inclusive, so much so that the members of the SRS formed regional, national, and international groups, as well as smaller and more intimate gatherings at places such as Martha Rogers’ cottage at Pigeon Forge, Tennessee overlooking a mountain stream.

When asked to describe what contributed to the SRS being its best, members stated that the organization moved the science onward. They described that the collegiality of the membership and the ability to share ideas with like-minded people made this possible. Openness, sharing, and intimacy were the words that captured the feeling of those interviewed. Participants discussed that the SRS was inclusive of thought from music, art, science fiction, and cosmology as well as nursing. All ideas were explored and discussed. Members acknowledged that creative artists played an important role in creating the exciting tone of the early conferences. Essentially, no ideas were ever considered to be foolish or inappropriate – rather, all ideas were evolving.

Participants described the need to be creative and to move the science forward. Many of the participants expressed concern about the vibrancy of the organization and felt it is important for membership to be expanded. In addition, members felt a genuine commitment to continue Rogers’ legacy by sharing ideas with each other and with others outside the nursing discipline.

The strengths of the SRS.

The strengths of the SRS as expressed by the membership were numerous, most revolving around the memberships’ commitment to the science of unitary beings. Some noted that this is evident in the longevity of members, a strong and involved Board, and members’ commitment to the SRS. It was recognized that even though it is a relatively small group, each member works hard to maintain the mission, vision, and values of the organization. One member said: “You do not belong to the SRS to get recognition by others outside our group, so it speaks volumes that people who have been and are members of the SRS do so because of a real commitment to the science.” Some recognized

that while the SRS was a small and committed group, the challenges of the current size of the membership could be a limiting factor. Others described a lack of dogma, the creative thinkers, and the willingness of leaders to “go out on a limb” as important strengths of the SRS. Other strengths of the organization mentioned included the annual and affordable conference, the website, listserv, and the *Visions* journal.

Hopes and dreams.

The question about the hopes and dreams of members seemed to generate the most creative responses, and also captured the sense of urgency to continue, grow, and spark the legacy of Rogers. Most expressed a need to advance nursing science, theories, and knowledge. Many thought it was important to pursue joint ventures with organizations that share similar ideas on the discipline of nursing, such as the American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA), International Association of Human Caring (IAHC), and the Parse and Newman Scholar groups. Relevant ideas included welcoming and incorporating new scholars into the current membership, fireside chats with Rogers’ niece (Dr. Katherine Lundy), inviting stories that capture the historical perspective, increasing Wiki participation, and expanding the international presence of the SRS. Ways proposed to increase involvement with rising scholars include post-doctoral fellowships, developing and offering Rogerian Science courses, and increasing the visibility of the conference through technology. Another participant offered that the SRS consider the strategy of developing a speakers’ bureau either through the SRS or Sigma Theta Tau so that schools or hospitals could request Rogerian speakers. Lastly, in keeping with valuing the history of the SRS, it was widely recognized that there is a need for a permanent home for the SRS archives.

Dream Phase

The dream phase co-created by all members present at the Plenary Session of the 2009 conference resulted in a number of viable ideas. The evolving topics/dreams included:

1. Increasing membership
2. Impacting health policy consistent with unitary values
3. Reaching out beyond nursing to other disciplines to stimulate interest in Rogerian thinking
4. Ways to teach a new generation of nurses about Rogerian Science – i.e. books, Wiki, web page
5. Reaching out to other nursing organizations both through meetings and publications
6. Continuing the annual conference, but also considering other ways to remain connected throughout the year

Design Phase

Prior to a November 2009 meeting of the SPC, members of the committee received the notes from the Plenary Session so that the notes could be examined

for common suggestions. From these data, the SPC members identified five goals that were thought to reflect major areas that emerged from the discovery and dream phases. Each SPC member was asked to develop ideas and strategies to meet each of these goals and to then share these ideas at the SPC meeting held in June 2010. The goals and SPC member who developed ideas on how to meet the goal are as follows:

1. Increase membership (Arlene Farren)
2. Advance the Science of Human Unitary Beings (SUHB) (Marlaine Smith)
3. Enhance the visibility of and knowledge about the SRS (Jane Flanagan)
4. Expand the impact of the SRS for human betterment (Pamela Reis)
5. Enhance the historical stewardship of the SRS (Barbara Wright)

In June 2010, the SPC members presented their ideas about the proposed plans to each other. The draft was then shared with the SRS Board for their consideration. The thoughts generated by the SPC were numerous and this next section provides only a brief summary of some of their ideas. These goals and ideas will be discussed in further detail at the 2010 conference.

Goal 1: Increase membership.

Multiple ideas about ways the SRS could increase membership were identified. These included improving the use of technology to update and access the SRS membership, re-examining the potential of the list serve, creating email lists for communication purposes, and providing an on-line payment options for renewal. Encouraging new memberships through linkages with other organizations such as AHNA and IAHC was suggested. Outreach could also be achieved by advertising information about the SRS in other nursing journals such as *Nursing Science Quarterly* and *the Journal of Holistic Nursing*. Other strategies, such as maintaining the low cost of the annual conference and creating regional groups were suggested. In addition, suggestions were made to better support leadership succession, by encouraging involvement and enhancing the members' awareness of the organization and fostering affiliation through mentorship. This includes providing new members with information about the organization and encouraging their involvement through mentorship. Recognition of members who serve and transition meetings was also discussed as a way to strengthen and smooth the process of organizational succession.

Goal 2: Advance the SUHB.

Suggestions for advancing the science of SUHB included republishing Rogers (1970) book as it is now out of print, making it difficult for new and emerging scholars to read Rogers' original work. This republished book would provide Rogers' updates to SUHB that were subsequently published in various formats, but not in one book. It was also acknowledged that it would be valuable to have more discussion groups at the annual conference – either as part of a special pre-conference session or during the conference. The creation of a digital video recording of the master class given annually at the SRS conference was also recognized as an important way to disseminate knowledge about and advance the SUHB. Other ideas centered on technology and included

developing content on the web that it includes up-to-date resources from Rogerian Scholars and the formation of research interest groups. In addition, it was recognized that members would benefit greatly from learning how to participate in the Wiki site to generate on-line dialogue among SRS members.

Goal 3: Enhance the visibility of and knowledge about the SRS.

Goal 3 centers on the exchange of Rogerian ideas with those in and outside the discipline of nursing. Within the SRS it was agreed that dissemination about the SPC would be important, and this paper is an outcome of that goal. Another idea was to send out press releases to news organizations so that the conference would be “covered” and knowledge about the SRS would reach a broader audience. Other ideas included networking or holding joint conferences with disciplines that share similar ideas, or with whom there could be the potential for mutual expanded thinking. This initiative would include collaboration with organizations in fields such as cosmology, noetics, art, music, and philosophy. In addition to considering joint conferences, it was also recognized that publishing Rogerian based publications outside nursing would increase the visibility of and knowledge related to the SRS. Ideas around presenting SUHB research and conceptualizations to community groups such as local parishes, senior centers, and hospitals were also discussed. Another idea was to include more presentations at the SRS conferences that demonstrate the creative and imaginative use of Rogerian science, such as Cowling’s unitary aesthetics presentation at the 2009 SRS conference, and working with local artists to do a performance series as a way of informing a broader audience about nursing that is informed by Rogers.

Goal 4: Expand the impact of the SRS for human betterment.

As a first step in reaching this goal, it was recognized that it is important for the organization to identify the mission of the SRS in improving healthcare and social policy, and this could be best achieved through the creation of a policy interest group. Reaching out to those within the SRS who are working with ethnically and culturally diverse populations and setting aside time at the annual conference for people with this shared interest to connect was identified as being an important way to meet this goal. Through the formation of a group interested in policy, a white paper could be developed outlining the role of the SRS in relation to human betterment. Another suggestion was to consider publishing a review of the literature on SUHB work to date that is focused on culturally and ethnically diverse individuals.

Goal 5: Enhance the historical stewardship of the SRS.

The primary goal identified in association with this goal was to better organize and preserve the SRS archives of the work and teachings of Rogers. This goal was recognized as both essential and urgent, so that future scholars will be able to access these materials. Achievement of this goal involves reviewing Rogerian materials that are presently located at the Foundation of New York State Nurses in upstate New York, and the Mugar Library at Boston University.

NEXT STEPS

An important next step is seeking feedback from SRS members. Feedback opportunities may include placing a draft of the strategic plan on the website for review and comment by members and communication/dialogue at the 2010 Conference and General Assembly. The draft of the designed plan is a work in progress and can be updated and revised based on dialogue. Suggestions and ideas from the discovery and dream phases have been essential to the formulation of the still evolving design, but some of the ideas generated are already being implemented. For example, there will be no cost increase to the 2010 Conference fee, working sessions will be included in the conference program, and in keeping with fostering Rogers' legacy, her niece Dr. Katherine Lundy, will be presenting at the 2010 conference. With ongoing involvement of the membership and affirmation of the strategic plan, more in-depth action can be realized. Ongoing appreciation of how the plan is unfolding can be detailed at Board meetings, with a report to the membership at the annual business meetings (General Assembly) and through online venues.

CONCLUSIONS

The AI approach has been a useful way for the SRS to develop a strategic plan. This summary of the discovering, dream, and design phases provides the SRS membership with the ideas and goals to date. The process of AI is fluid, so it is acknowledged that these first three steps are not complete, rather they are open to comment and suggestion as the destiny phase evolves. Likewise, the dialogue will continue in many formats, including sessions at the 2010 SRS conference. Finally, the SPC believes that feedback from the membership is essential to the success of this effort.

REFERENCES

- Cooperrider, D. L., & Srivasva, S. (1987). Appreciative inquiry in organizational life. In W Pasmore & R Woodman (Eds.), *Research in Organizational Change and Development*, Volume.1, (pp. 129-169). Greenwich, CT. Jai Press.
- Cooperrider, D. & Whitney, D. (2005). Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change. Retrieved from <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/intro/whatisai.cfm>
- Cowling, W. R. (2004). Pattern, Participation!! Praxis!! and Power in Unitary Appreciative Inquiry. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 27(3), p 202-214.
- Cowling, W.R. (2009). Providing spaces in the relative present for healing: Stories, music, and images Presented at Society of Rogerian Scholars on October 25, 2009 at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida.
- Seel, R. (2008). An introduction to appreciative inquiry. Retrieved from <http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/articles.htm>
- Smith, M. (2009). Appreciative inquiry for strategic planning: Discovery and dreaming. Presented at Society of Rogerian Scholars: Plenary Session on October 24, 2009 at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida.

Copyright of Visions: The Journal of Rogerian Nursing Science is the property of Society of Rogerian Scholars and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.