

## Delivering the Impossible Regularly

**A workshop event for leaders in the public sector 23-25 June 2010 Lincoln.**

Co-facilitated by Lesley Moore and Anne Radford

*"There is nothing so noble as public service"* Barak Obama

### Where it started

As we all push hard to win the race around the wheel of target driven public service delivery; the time to think, reflect, focus our attention on the things that matter most and achieve our highest potentials on behalf of others, can be in danger of escaping us all.



In this workshop, we used the appreciative inquiry process to deepen our understanding of our best strengths, competencies and capacities, as leaders of change and innovation. In this way, participants discovered new thinking about organisational change, gained new tools for enabling it to happen, and took away new ways of looking at and influencing their own and their organisation's futures.

*"AI is a way of thinking, being, doing with culture change at its heart"* Anne Radford

We set out some of the differences in what it means to take the Appreciative Inquiry Approach rather than a more traditional one. For example:

Levels	Appreciative Inquiry Approach	Traditional approaches
Individual level	Discovering the best of the past	Analyzing problems
Consultant/change agent	Helping others to think and build capacity	Expert knowledge
Organisational	Living system open to interpretation	Objective decisions handed down for others to carry out
Relational	Socially constructing through dialogue	Persuasion & positional power

In the months and weeks leading up to the workshop participants were invited to begin thinking about the following questions:

*Take a moment to think about the most recent time you delivered the impossible, what turned the impossible into something possible?*

*As you think back over these times when you have been delivering the impossible, what are you telling yourself about yourself? Where are you giving yourself credit or being a little bit (or a lot!) proud of what you have been able to do?*

*There are some times when you have been willing to recognise that you are delivering the impossible.*

*Over these few weeks, you have thought about those times and what you have achieved. If you were to allow yourself to have even more of those times, what would you be imagining? for example, what might be added or reduced in your work, what would be the greatest impact that could come from more of those times?*

### **When people arrived these were some of the things they wished for**

- *To see resources in people so that they can transform their lives*
- *Chance to reflect on the work I do, learning how others are using strength based approaches*
- *Want to work with AI especially in making communities better places. More of the 'how to' questioning skills*
- *Recapture my enthusiasm re: bringing people together in these times to achieve more*
- *Look at ways to improve facilitation in workshops*
- *Want to feel that AI is more robust and how it can be mainstream*
- *Learn about AI to help us with the challenges we have – staff & people we serve*
- *An appreciative approach – know what I would do in the 1<sup>st</sup> 10 mins*



## And these are the questions we used to begin our inquiry



*Some organisations are at their best when leadership is shared among people at all levels of the organisation; and when leadership challenges people to go beyond what they believe is possible. 'Irresistible leadership' engages peoples' hearts, minds and hands in the service of the organisation's vision and core values. It creates a compelling call – a situation that invites people to join in, commit to and give their best. 'Irresistible' leadership grows out of relationships that are connected, trusting and challenging; supportive and provocative; visionary and practical.*

1. *Tell me about a time when you were inspired by irresistible leadership to deliver the impossible, time after time.*
  - *What was the situation?*
  - *What made it irresistible?*
  - *Who was involved?*
  - *What did each person do to contribute to the strength of the situation?*
  - *What did you learn from this situation about irresistible leadership?*
2. *Tell me a story of when you were the source of irresistible leadership, inspired and/or inspiring others to deliver the impossible regularly.*
  - *What created the sense of irresistible leadership?*
  - *How did you feel at this time?*
  - *How did others respond?*
  - *What do you most value about this kind of influence and leadership?*
3. *Margaret Wheatley describes leaders as 'anyone who steps forward to help'. What do you value most about what you bring to your colleagues/organisation/clients/networks? How are you best leading and influencing right now and how might you do more of this in the future?*
4. *If you had three wishes for the way you influence and lead the people with whom you work what would they be?*

## Together we discovered some important stuff:-

- ✓ Leadership can come from anywhere
- ✓ Inspiration from peers can be the best support
- ✓ Change is a 2 way process
- ✓ Ask -> Tell stories -> And be willing to listen

Creating Trust is about:

- Faith – collective & self
- Authenticity
- Connectivity ) Shared energy
- Passion )
- Emotion
- Being able to go with the flow



Modeling own personal behaviour -> so the process feels right -> resonating with our values -> releasing positive energy in people.

## And on enhancing our thinking through imagination & dreaming we reflected on:



- Working to our highest intent
- Initiating conversations that matter
- Being an imp – going at things obliquely
- Connecting to our core purpose
- Daring to dream
- The need for courage and consideration

## And as our reflections deepened we noted that:

- ◆ Slowing down can be hard depending on how fast you are going. Get in the DECELERATION LANE
- ◆ Asking questions can be more productive than knowing [some] answers
- ◆ Conversation creates learning and democracy
- ◆ 'Be' in the moment
- ◆ The joy and productivity of IMAGINATION
- ◆ Enjoy the Journey
- ◆ Trust yourself & your intuition
- ◆ Effectiveness is about being: Aware, enthusiastic, motivational
- ◆ Slow down/ be still to connect to the 'core' before acting
- ◆ NOTICING THE SPACE IN-BETWEEN
- ◆ The value of creative reflection

"Orbital Mechanics: On the theme of slowing down to actually get there faster and better. I've come across this a couple of times.

Docking two spacecraft orbiting the earth – slowing down to catch up  
When you are trying to have a rendezvous between two spacecraft the rules are not the same as with two aircraft. With aircraft the plane behind accelerates to catch up – obviously. Then as it gets close it has to slow down to match the front planes speed.

In a spacecraft this won't work. Adding thrust to a spacecraft puts it into a higher orbit. Higher orbits are slower because their circumference, the distance an object must travel to arrive back at the same place is greater and gravity weaker – so this will slow you down. Contra instinctively you have to apply thrust away from the direction of the target. You have to slow down to drop into a lower faster orbit. You then come back up at the right moment when you've caught up. And that is rocket science." Michael Collins - Carrying the Fire / Andrew Smith - Moondust

### **And participants told us that among their most valuable takeaways were:**

- ✚ *Learning to think again!*
- ✚ *The gradual osmosis of ideas*
- ✚ *Long term sustainability of inquiries – building capacity early where-ever the energy & influence lies*
- ✚ *Seeing things in a new light & ideas about incorporating AI into my work*
- ✚ *Sharing ideas, challenges, inspiration, opportunities*
- ✚ *Using AI in staff appraisals & to generate change in communities*
- ✚ *Positive energy for future vision, designing projects and headlines involving the correct people*
- ✚ *Everything – I am inspired to learn, discover, experience, practice more!*



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*Don't ask what the world needs. Rather ask what makes you come alive: then go and do it! Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.* Howard Thurman Whitman

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Lesley Moore July 2010