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## Abstract

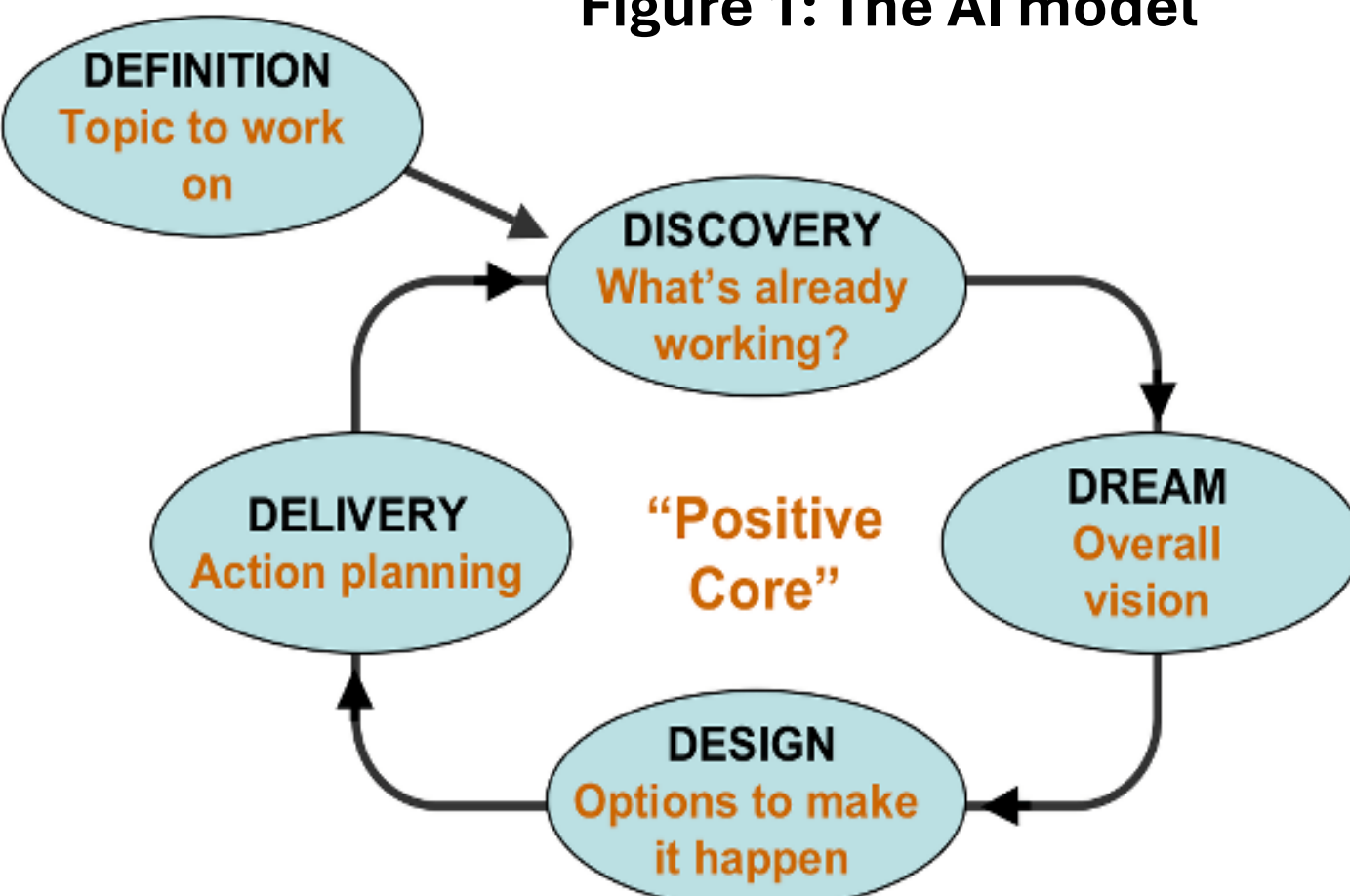
This poster outlines the usefulness of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) in a study that explored staff's wellbeing in a UK NHS maternity unit. Here we share the research process and outputs to help others decide if AI will fit their research aims.

## Background

AI was first developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva<sup>1</sup> and sits within action research approaches that aims to create practical and collaborative change. It has a distinctive and deliberate strengths-based approach to achieve emancipatory learning and change, rooted in the experiences of stakeholders. AI has a strong theoretical base drawing on social constructionism, neuroscience, and positive psychology. Its assumptions include that:

1. every society, organisation or group/team have strengths or things that work well and can be elaborated and expanded;
2. our realities can be co-created through the quality of language, relationships, interactions and actions with one another.

Figure 1: The AI model



The original model uses a four step or '4-D process' (Fig. 1) to take participants through an in-depth exploration of their organisation, team or individual roles. Starting with discovering and appreciating best experiences (discovery), imagining the ideal - how it would be if those valued experiences happened most of the time (dream), defining the dream more clearly and discussing steps towards realising it (design), to wide ranging actions, improvisation, learning, adjustments (destiny). Deciding what to study, or the 'affirmative topic', is important because 'human systems move in the direction of what they study'. Hence, some have added an extra step, 'definition' (see Figure 1).

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Methodology paper European Journal of Midwifery

### Why use Appreciative Inquiry? Lessons learned during COVID-19 in a UK maternity service

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**ABSTRACT**  
Choosing the 'right' research method is always an important decision. It affects the type of study questions that can be answered. In addition, the research method will have an impact on the participants – how much of their time it takes, whether the questions seem important to them and whether there is any benefit in taking part. This is especially important when conducting research with staff in health services. This article is a reflection on the process of using Appreciative Inquiry (AI) in a study that explored staff wellbeing in a UK maternity unit. We share our key learnings to help others decide if AI will fit their research aims, as well as highlight issues in its design and conduct. We discuss our experience of using AI, the strengths and limitations of this approach, and conclude with points to consider if you are thinking about using AI. Although a study team was actively involved in decisions, this paper is largely based on reflections by the first author, the researcher conducting the field work in the maternity services.

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## The NHS maternity services case study

Appreciative Inquiry was undertaken in an NHS maternity unit in England. This AI approach aimed to provide a space for participants to reflect on meaning in their work. It has the potential to generate novel insights, encapsulate creativity, and co-create change. AI was particularly appropriate during the COVID-19 pandemic as taking part could offer a therapeutic effect.

Thirty-nine individual interviews were conducted with a broad range of clinical staff including midwives of all grades, an obstetrician, trainee doctors, student midwives, and maternity support workers. Four group discussions were also held with mixed professional groups. Staff were asked to reflect on what made a good day and what made a difference to their wellbeing. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, initially analysed thematically by the research team but then analysed further by the maternity team. Feedback was provided to management and staff through clinical governance meetings, social media, newsletters, and informal conversations. Various changes were initiated by staff and supported by management.

Ethical approval: NHS Health Research Authority.

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METHODOLOGY PAPER

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## References:

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3. Arnold R, Way S, Mahato P, van Teijlingen, E. (2023) "I might have cried in the changing room, but I still went to work". Maternity staff managing roles, responsibilities, and emotions of work and home during COVID-19: an Appreciative Inquiry, *Women & Birth* (online first) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1871519223002299>
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5. Hodgkiss, D., Quinney, S., Slack, T., Barnett, K., Howells, B. (2024b) *Appreciating Health and Care: AI in practice*, Forres: Appreciating People.

## Publications

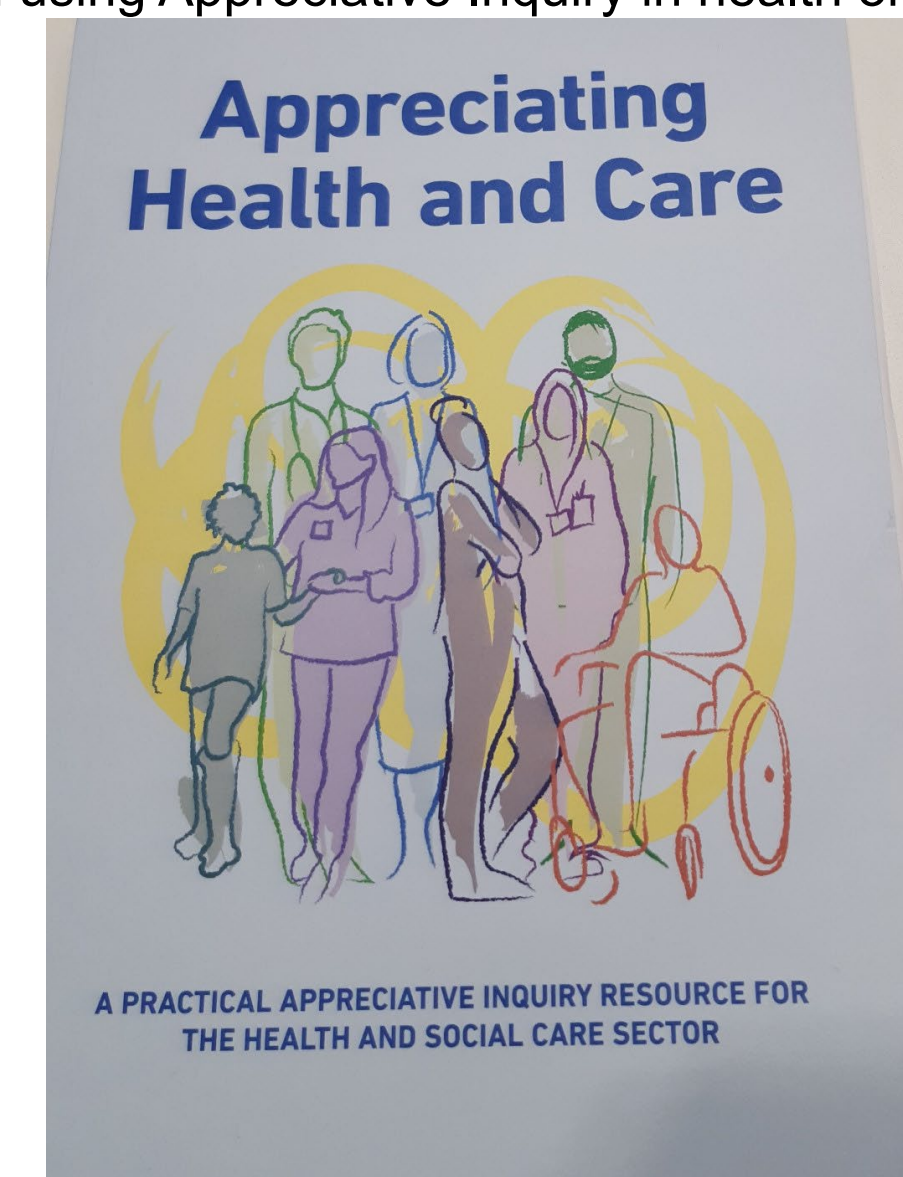
Women and Birth  
Available online 9 August 2023  
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**'I might have cried in the changing room, but I still went to work'. Maternity staff balancing roles, responsibilities, and emotions of work and home during COVID-19: An appreciative inquiry**

Rachel Arnold<sup>a 1</sup>, Edwin van Teijlingen<sup>a 2</sup>, Susan Way<sup>a 3</sup>, Preeti Mahato<sup>b 4</sup>

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We contributed to the book *Appreciating Health and Care: A Practical Appreciative Inquiry Resource for the Health & Social Care Sector*.<sup>4-5</sup> Rachel Arnold is the lead author of our contribution 'Let's get messy! Where to start with using Appreciative Inquiry'. Here we explain how we adapted and overcame some of the challenges, strategies that worked, and practical ideas for anyone interested in using Appreciative Inquiry in health or social care.



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### Learning to use Appreciative Inquiry

January 16, 2024  
By Rachel Arnold

What is Appreciative Inquiry? How does one shift from research that focuses on problems and negative details to the strengths-based approach of Appreciative Inquiry? What are the benefits and requirements of such an approach? And what is it about Appreciative Inquiry that fosters change?

Appreciative Inquiry, developed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva, is a five-step process (originally four steps), as shown in the figure below. The steps are:

1. Definition – deciding what to study is critical in moving humans in a positive direction
2. Discovery – discovering and appreciating best experiences
3. Dream – imagining the ideal – how it would be if those valued experiences happened most of the time