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**UNDERSTANDING AQUARIUM CULTURE IN THE  
CONTEXT OF STRATEGIC CHANGE**

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**A Research Project  
Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graziadio Business School  
Pepperdine University**

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**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science  
In  
Organization Development**

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**by**

**Katie E. McConnell**

**August 2019**

This research project, completed by

KATIE E. MCCONNELL

under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has  
been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of The Graziadio Business School in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE  
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Date: August 2019

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## **Abstract**

This study examined the relationship between organizational culture and strategic change. Specifically, how leaders can identify a preferred culture to support a new vision and create an action plan for shifting the existing to the preferred culture. Two frameworks were used: The Competing Values Culture Framework and Appreciative Inquiry. The combination of these models can be a helpful tool to create practical knowledge about culture and provide action plans to support the preferred state. Leaders indicated a 52% decrease in hierarchy and a 120% increase in adhocracy culture would effectively support the new vision. These results mapped to literature findings indicating that an innovative, adhocracy culture can boost effectiveness for non-profit organizations and enhance their ability to carry out strategy. Results revealed leaders' preferred culture consisted of equal emphasis on both clan and adhocracy. Leaders indicated collaboration and support associated with clan orientation was a necessary component to facilitate development of an adhocracy culture.

*Keywords:* organizational culture, strategic change, leadership

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iii
List of Tables .....	vi
List of Figures .....	vii
Chapter 1 .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Purpose .....	3
Study Setting .....	4
Organization of the Study .....	5
Chapter 2 .....	6
Literature Review .....	6
What is Culture? .....	6
Competing Values Framework .....	8
Culture and Effectiveness .....	10
Appreciative Inquiry .....	14
Summary .....	19
Chapter 3 .....	21
Methodology .....	21
Research Design .....	21
Sample Size .....	22
Protection of Human Subjects .....	23
Instrumentation .....	24
Competing Values Framework & OCAI .....	24
OCAI, Appreciative Inquiry and the Intervention .....	25
Validation .....	27
Data Collection .....	28
Data Analysis .....	28
Summary .....	29
Chapter 4 .....	30
Results .....	30
Results from OCAI .....	30
Findings from the Appreciative Inquiry Intervention .....	37
Summary .....	43
Chapter 5 .....	44
Discussion .....	44

Key Findings .....	44
Cultural Alignment to the Vision.....	44
Identifying Actions to Initiate the Preferred Culture .....	45
Appreciative Inquiry’s Impact .....	47
Conclusions .....	48
Recommendations .....	49
For the Study Organization .....	49
For OD Practitioners .....	51
Study Limitations .....	53
Suggestions for Future Study.....	54
Summary .....	55
References .....	58
Appendix A .....	61
Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) .....	61
Appendix B .....	64
OCAI Large Group Discussion Questions.....	65
Appendix C .....	66
Appreciative Interview Protocol .....	67

## List of Tables

Table 1: Data Collection Timeline.....	22
Table 2: Appreciative Inquiry Intervention Sample.....	23
Table 3: Results from OCAI Administration.....	31
Table 4: Top Themes Identified from Appreciative Interviews.....	38
Table 5: Organizational Design Elements Identified to Support a Culture Shift.....	40
Table 6: Leadership Actions Identified to Initiate the Preferred Cultural Shift.....	42

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Results of Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument .....	32
Figure 2: Example of Organizational Design Visuals.....	39



## Chapter 1: Introduction

In a 1998 report designed to train officers for the twenty-first century, the United States War College presaged a world that is “volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous” — VUCA, for short. VUCA describes perfectly what is happening in the global business world today (George, 2017). The macro environments in which we conduct business are in constant flux; technology disruptors, cyber terrorism, global economies, and climate change are all indicators of a rapidly changing world in which organizations must exist. Innovation in organizations is pervasive because of the degree and rapidity of change in the external environment. Such rapid and dramatic change implies that no organization can remain the same for long and survive (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Non-profit organizations are not immune to a VUCA world. Today, the operating environments of non-profit organizations are more complex than ever. Reductions in philanthropic donations, cuts in government spending, increased competition, and an expanded need for services have challenged non-profits to search for new ways to respond to changing environmental demands (Young, Salamon, & Grinsfelder, 2012).

As a result, many leaders within organizations attempt to reset strategies in order to adapt to the external factors that inevitably impact their relevance. Leadership goes hand-in-hand with strategy formation, but culture is a more elusive lever because much of it is anchored in unspoken behaviors, mindsets, and social patterns (Groysberg et al., 2018). Cameron and Quinn (2011) explain that without a fundamental change in organizational culture, there is little hope of changing an organization’s strategic direction. The dependence of organizational evolution on culture change is due to the fact

that when the values, orientations, definitions, and goals stay constant – even when procedures and strategies are altered – organizations can return quickly to the status quo.

But culture itself is difficult to define, articulate, measure, and most importantly, change. Unfortunately, people are often unaware of their culture until it is challenged, until they experience a new culture, or until it is made overt and explicit through a framework or model (Schein, 2009). Culture matters because it is a powerful, tacit, and often unconscious set of forces that determine both our individual and collective behavior, ways of perceiving, thought patterns, and values. Organization culture in particular matters because cultural elements determine strategy, goals, and modes of operating (Schein, 2009). Even if leaders recognize the importance of culture, they are unlikely to be aware of the research indicating the significant role culture can play in an organization's success or failure, or they do not have the training or knowledge of what it takes to build successful cultures (Warrick et al., 2017).

As leaders are called upon to navigate their organization's adaptations to an ever-changing volatile environment, scholars argue there must be a clear understanding of an organization's culture in order to respond effectively to these external demands (Jaskyte, 2004). Groysberg et al. (2018) posits that culture may be among the few sources of sustainable competitive advantage left to companies today. Therefore, it is important for leaders to understand the present culture, so the strengths can be reinforced and any weaknesses, inconsistencies and gaps between the desired culture and the present culture can be identified and addressed (Warrick et al., 2017).

## **Purpose**

One such organization that is at the precipice of change is the New England Aquarium, a public aquarium located in Boston, Massachusetts with a 50-year history of educating and inspiring youth and adults alike on ocean issues. However, public perceptions of aquaria have shifted over the last decade due in large part to changing attitudes and a growing intolerance of animals kept in captivity for the purposes of entertainment (Dillenschneider, 2018). As such, many aquariums across the sector are taking a more active role in aligning their work and public platform to educate the public on the conservation of wild populations and ocean health. This external pressure has prompted the New England Aquarium's leadership to rewrite its organizational vision to emphasize its ocean conservation work. This new vision will dictate how the organization works with external stakeholders to transform science into actions that benefit ocean conservation efforts outside the aquarium's walls. This includes infusing conservation messaging across the aquarium's public platforms to motivate the public to act on behalf of the ocean, investing in conservation-based research, and partnering with a variety of stakeholders to solve the biggest threats facing the ocean today (Spruill, 2019).

The prescription of this new vision and subsequent strategic shifts indicate that The New England Aquarium will not only have to change its operations in order to perform against the goals of the strategy, but it is likely that an internal cultural shift will be needed to align with the emphasis on external conservation efforts. This requires that the organization must first understand and appreciate what is positive and distinctive about the culture in its current form in order to build on those assets to realign the culture's focus on supporting conservation work more broadly. In other words, the organization

must consider how its culture may need to evolve in order to respond to the demands of the external world it wishes to collaborate with.

The purpose of this action research study is to assess the relationship between the organization's current and desired culture and explore potential shifts in culture in light of the needs and requirements of a new strategic vision. Two frameworks will be used to guide the interventions for this study: The Competing Values Culture Framework (Cameron & Quinn, 2011) and Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

The research questions are as follows:

1. What is the preferred culture leaders desire in order to align with the organization's new vision?
2. What impact does an Appreciative Inquiry intervention have on leaders' ability to generate the initial steps needed to shift to the preferred culture?

A single case study design was used to explore these research questions and to help the organization understand and build the alignment of their culture to the strategic direction they are headed.

### **Study Setting**

The study organization is a non-profit organization headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts and consists of an aquarium – an iconic cultural destination, a robust conservation research center, and an education department targeting youth of all ages with a variety of programming. The organization employs approximately 300 people, including full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees as well as nearly 100 volunteers and interns.

The organization's mission is to protect the blue planet through public engagement, commitment to marine animal conservation, leadership in education, innovative scientific research, and effective advocacy for vital and vibrant oceans. The organization has been carrying out this work since 1969. Its mission-based activities, including research, conservation, and education efforts have been traditionally (and primarily) supported by government grants, and foundation grants to a lesser extent. (NEAQ, 2019).

### **Organization of the Study**

This paper presents the study in five chapters. This chapter outlined the background and purpose of the study and provided a description of the study setting. Chapter 2 reviews the available literature on organizational culture, particularly with respect to culture change, the use of Competing Values Framework in diagnosing and changing organizational culture and the use of Appreciative Inquiry in organizational change initiatives. It presents the most relevant findings and synthesizes their relationship to this study. Chapter 3 outlines the methods used in the study. Chapter 4 presents the study's findings. It examines the results of the Competing Values Culture Framework's Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) survey and the Appreciative Inquiry intervention. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the study's findings.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this action research study is to assess the relationship between the organization's current and desired culture and explore potential shifts in culture in light of the needs and requirements of a new strategic vision. This chapter reviews the literature on culture and strategy change, culture's relationship with organizational effectiveness, as well as an overview of Appreciative Inquiry as a potential culture change methodology. The main objective of this chapter is to review the concept of culture, its relationship to organizational effectiveness in both for-profit and non-profit contexts, and to explore two intervention methods that may be used to assess it.

### **What is Culture?**

Organizational culture can be difficult to perceive. It can be invisible, hard to measure, and at the same time incredibly powerful in all areas of organizational life (Schein, 2009). Similarly, it is difficult to define. There is no shared or agreed-upon definition; however most researchers can agree that culture is a social construct best described as a shared set of values, beliefs, and assumptions that guide and characterize organizations and their members (Cameron & Quinn, 2004; Denison & Spreitzer, 1991; Schein, 2009; Warrick et al., 2017). According to Schein (2009),

Culture is a pattern of shared tacit assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 27)

In practical terms, organizational culture describes the environment in which people work and the influence it has on how they think, act, and experience work (Warrick et al., 2017).

People are often unaware of their culture. Organizational culture was often ignored by managers and scholars as it encompassed the taken-for-granted values, underlying assumptions, collective memories, and definitions present in an organization. It conveyed a sense of identity to employees, provided unwritten and often unspoken guidelines for how to get along, and helped stabilize the social system that people experience (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). However, culture can be found in both visible and invisible manifestations within an organization. Schein (2009) states that culture exists at three levels within the organization ranging from the very visible to the very invisible. The highly visible artifacts include items such as dress code, office layout, office design, and presence of technology. Artifacts can also include leadership style, nature of the work environment, how people are treated, and how decisions are made (Schein 2009; Warrick et al., 2016). The less visible and invisible espoused values and underlying assumptions include deep beliefs, values, and consciously held convictions that influence the behavior of group members. These accumulated learnings and shared beliefs – the ways of thinking, feeling, and perceiving the world - is precisely the reason that culture is so stable and difficult to change. However, as companies age, elements of the corporate culture or the misalignment of subcultures can become serious survival problems for the organization especially if external circumstances have changed (Schein, 2009). Thus, it is important to understand and measure organizational culture as a key element of organizational life and performance.

## **Competing Values Framework**

Having an understanding of the practical aspects of organizational culture can help non-profit managers identify the role that present culture plays in their organization's ability to respond to external demands and environmental change (Langer & Leroux, 2017). There are many ways to develop an understanding of the present culture – simply observing and experiencing the culture can provide insights. Another option can be to use standardized culture frameworks. One popular framework that has been widely used by practitioners and scholars is Cameron and Quinn's (2011) Competing Values Culture Framework (CVCF). This framework serves as a way to diagnose and initiate change in the culture that organizations develop as they progress through their lifecycles and cope with the pressures from the external environment. This model has been used in a variety of contexts including for-profit, government entities, and non-profit organizations. The two main underlying assumptions of the CVCF are (a) all organizations can be characterized by common cultural traits and (b) that these traits direct basic assumptions about organizational elements such as decision-making, compliance mechanisms, leadership, motivation and effectiveness (Dennison & Spreitzer, 1991; Langer & Leroux, 2017).

Cameron and Quinn (2011) define four cultural archetypes – adhocracy, clan, market and hierarchy – using two dimensions: flexibility and discretion vs. stability and control on one axis and external focus vs. internal focus and integration on the other (Naranjo-Valencia e. al., 2015). The flexibility and discretion dimension values freedom and autonomy in how members of the organization carry out the work, while stability and control demands consistency and predictability. The external dimension puts value and



emphasis on perceiving and responding to factors outside the organization while internal focus values integration of activities occurring within the organization (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). It is through these ‘competing values’ where the cultural archetypes of adhocracy, clan, market, and hierarchy are derived. The model connects the strategic, political, interpersonal, and institutional aspects of organizational life by organizing the different patterns of shared values, assumptions, and interpretations that define an organization’s culture (Denison & Spreitzer, 1991).

The hierarchy culture is characterized as a formalized and a structured place to work, favoring clear lines of decision-making, authority, standardized rules, procedures & control, and accountability mechanisms. Its key values are efficiency and close adherence to norms, rules and regulations with an alignment of internal organization and stability. Hierarchy culture focuses more on internal issues than external issues and places greater premium on control over flexibility and discretion.

The market culture equally values stability and control; however it emphasizes productivity, performance, results, and profits. It is externally-oriented and values competitiveness with a strong emphasis on winning customers and market share.

The clan culture is internally-oriented and emphasizes flexibility, belonging, and trust among its members. It is highly concerned with empowering employees, teamwork, and collaboration. The clan’s goal is to manage the environment through teamwork, participation, and consensus.

The adhocracy model emphasizes external issues and values flexibility and discretion rather than stability and control. It is characterized by a dynamic, entrepreneurial, and creative workplace. It is externally-oriented towards expansion,

transformation, growth, and resource acquisition (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Denison & Spreitzer, 1991; Duke & Edet, 2012; Naranjo-Velencia et al., 2015).

The primary value of the CVCF is that it sets the table for a conversation about culture in the specific context of the organization it measures. By providing common language and a model to work within, organizations can initiate conversations about culture and how to change it. Scholars have also used the framework's four cultures to describe organizational effectiveness and ability to carry out espoused strategies (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Denison & Spreitzer, 1991). Having discussed the construct of organizational culture and CVCF to understand different types of cultures present in organizations, the relationship between culture and an organization's effectiveness in implementing strategy will be explored.

### **Culture and Effectiveness**

A large body of theoretical arguments support the idea that organizational culture is related to an organization's effectiveness and ability to carry out its strategy (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Denison & Mishra, 1999; Ogbonna & Harris, 2000; Zheng et al., 2010). Ogbonna and Harris (2000) state that "the effectiveness of an organization is dependent on the conscious alignment of employee values with the espoused values of company strategy" (p. 770). Oparanma (2010) suggested that organizational culture stimulates or engenders many other behaviors and activities that bring about corporate success. Other scholars posit that more than any other factor, culture defines the character of an entity and it influences managerial decision-making, strategy choices, and the pursuit of market opportunities in a way that marks one organization from another (Duke & Edet, 2012). Denison and Mishra (1995) concluded that specific culture traits may be useful

predictors of performance and effectiveness. Ogbonna and Harris (2000) also concluded that despite scholarly questions related to the culture-performance link, there is sufficient evidence for the hypothesized relationship between organizational culture and organizational effectiveness.

A review of the literature has uncovered several examples of scholars studying the link between culture and an organization's ability to effectively carry out its strategy in for-profit contexts – which most often is linked toward financial performance in their respective markets. The CVCF dimensions have given scholars a way to explore how the various attributes of the four culture dimensions are related to organizational effectiveness and which types of culture dimensions may be more suited towards the achievement of an organization's goals and objectives. For example, Ogbonna and Harris (2000) used CVCF to gather deeper insights into the relationship between culture and for-profit strategies (i.e., financial performance). Their cross-sectional survey of 1000 small to medium-sized UK firms determined that those with an internally oriented culture underperformed as compared to those with an external culture. Results from their study also showed that hierarchical and clan cultures were not directly related to performance. In fact, they found negative links between hierarchical culture and performance which they suggested that “bureaucratization reduces short term profitability, impedes long-term growth and may even affect the survival of the organization” (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000, p. 782).

These results also maintained consistency with a wide range of studies that suggest externally oriented organizational cultures may be positively linked with effectiveness. For example, Denison (1990) also proposed that culture will remain linked

to superior performance only if the culture is able to adapt to changes in environmental (external) conditions. Naranjo-Valencia et al. (2015) in their cross-sector study of over 1600 Spanish companies matched companies OCAI scores to Likert measurements of employee perception of performance and found evidence to support that the adhocracy culture is the culture most linked with the highest positive effect on performance and that the effect of the hierarchy culture is negative. Similarly, Dennison and Mishra (1995) also found that cultures with traits including flexibility, openness, and responsiveness to external conditions were strong predictors of growth. Therefore, an organizational culture that is characterized with adaptability to its external environment has the potential to positively affect performance outcomes (Yasil & Kaya, 2013).

Despite the links between culture and effectiveness in for-profit organizations, there are minimal studies exploring the link specifically in a non-profit context (Jaskyte, 2004; Langer & Leroux, 2017). Effectiveness and performance in the non-profit context are slightly different than for-profit. Non-profit management theory suggests that the primary interest of a non-profit is not simply for the delivery of services or to make profit, but to achieve some other ultimate objective or mission (Anheier, 2005). The ability to effectively achieve this objective is predicated upon the organization's ability to acquire outside financial resources, believers, and members who will further the objectives of the organization (Langer & Leroux, 2017). Furthermore, multiple changes to the operating environments of non-profits mean that they must be willing and able to adapt and develop innovative capacities in order to survive (Jaskyte, 2004; Langer & Leroux, 2017). As a result, executives are beginning to see that perhaps their most

important task is to create cultures in which members can explore, extend capabilities, and experiment in the margins in an effort to foster innovation (Barrett, 1995).

Similar to for-profit organizations, dynamic and innovative cultures that help to build an organization's adaptive capacity have also been linked to the long-term survival of non-profit organizations, because they help them to meet environmental demands (Kanter & Summers, 1987). Jaskyte (2004) and Langer and Leroux (2017) also found that innovation is necessary and therefore an adhocracy culture most accurately reflects the needs of many non-profit organizations. This coincides with Ogbonna and Harris' (2000) finding that innovative cultures had a direct effect on performance in for-profit organizations. Ogbonna and Harris (2000) concluded that these externally-oriented cultures are in line with the assumption that organizational culture must be adaptable to external environment for a sustained competitive advantage. Jaskyte (2004) also concludes that non-profit organizations that develop a culture of innovation (as often found in the adhocracy quadrant of the CVCF) will be more responsive to changes in their external environment and thus will become more effective. Research conducted by Langer and Leroux (2017) concluded that executive directors of non-profit organizations perceive there to be a positive and significant link between adhocracy or developmental organizational culture and organizational effectiveness. Thus, competitive and innovative cultures which are sensitive to external conditions may have a stronger, more positive impact on organizational performance which also has been evidenced to hold true in a non-profit setting.

After discussing the relationship between culture and an organization's ability to effectively carry out its strategy, it is important to consider how a culture change

initiative may be designed within an organization to uncover aspects of the current culture and identify which aspects to build upon and change. Appreciative Inquiry as a culture change methodology may be a useful intervention in this context.

### **Appreciative Inquiry**

According to Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987),

Appreciative Inquiry is a transformational change approach designed to be an alternative to traditional problem-solving interventions. It represents a data-based theory-building methodology for evolving and putting into practice the collective will of a group or organization...Appreciative inquiry opens the status quo to possible transformations in collective action. It appreciates the best of "what is" to ignite intuition of the possible. (p. 165)

The basis of Appreciative Inquiry studies what gives life to human systems when they function at their best. This approach to organization change is based on the assumption that positive questions and dialogue about strengths, successes, values, hopes and dreams are themselves transformational (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). As a practice, the tenants of Appreciative Inquiry suggest that, by focusing on an image of organizational health and wholeness, the organization's energy moves to make that image a reality (Watkins, et. al., 2011). This is in contrast to traditional problem-solving approaches, which according to Appreciative Inquiry proponents, simply creates more images of deficit and potentially overwhelms the system with images of what is wrong. "All too often, the process of assessing deficits includes a search for who is to blame. This leads to people being resistant to the change effort" (Watkins et. al., 2011, p. 16). A deficit focus also has been found to have long-term implications for managers, who often learn to think of themselves as problem solvers, basing their self-worth on problems found and solutions proposed. As a result, they fail to develop a way of talking about the strengths of a system (Barrett, 1995). Alternatively, Appreciative Inquiry is focused on unleashing

through inquiry the positive, life-giving forces that already exist within an organization. It is grounded in the principle that organizations change in the directions of what they study. Therefore, an appreciative, or positive, process produces a “powerful and catalytic” effect that unleashes information and commitment that together create the energy for positive change (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). This highly-participatory model focuses on what the organization is doing right. It helps members understand their organization when it is working at its best and builds off those capabilities to achieve even better results. (Watkins, et. al., 2011).

One of the primary principles upon which Appreciative Inquiry rests is the constructionist principle. This principle is based on social constructionism theory which suggests that what we believe to be real in the world is created through our social discourse, through the conversations we have with each other that lead to agreement about how we will see the world, how we will behave and what we will accept as reality (Watkins, et. al., 2011). It is this theoretical foundation that underscores the belief that bringing all the stakeholders of an organization together is essential to constructive organizational change (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Similarly, scholars have understood organizational culture as following the same theoretical foundation – that it is socially co-constructed and held together by beliefs and behaviors of a group. Harkening back to Edgar Schein’s (1999) definition of culture as “a pattern of basic assumptions that the group has invented, discovered or developed in learning to cope with its problems,” both culture and Appreciative Inquiry rest on similar grounding that understanding and agreements that are created together between individuals become the realities that the group accepts to be true. Therefore, Appreciative Inquiry may be particularly successful

in culture change efforts because Appreciative Inquiry theory, as defined by social constructionism and positive psychology, contends that change by whatever means is first and foremost a social phenomenon, considering what we say together creates what we do together (Baker, et. al., 2008). For example, Baker, et. al. (2008) noted in their study which focused on facilitating culture change in the UK NHS health system, that AI interactions allowed for observation of remarkable insights into positive aspects of organizational culture in response to change. Baker and colleagues (2008) note:

The AI sessions provided an avenue to strengthen links across disciplines and between working groups. Forging better relationships among team members is the basis of “growing” changes in organizational culture organically. AI offers change management professionals a tool by which to gain a clearer insight into the belief root causes of behavior and provides an impetus to build on participants’ candid and enthusiastic engagement (p. 285).

The steps and formula of an Appreciative Inquiry change effort allows for the conscious co-construction of the future by acknowledging the past. As Watkins, et. al. (2011) note, “this kind of data collection stimulates participants’ excitement and delight as they share their values, experiences and history with the organization and their wishes for the future.” The very nature of Appreciative Inquiry surfaces many of the tacit assumptions and unspoken ways of working that are found in organizations – the very things that comprise culture. As Rockey and Webb (2005) state, “Organizational habits, systems and structures are open to interpretation and change. Through inquiry and dialogue, organizations build understanding which leads to different behaviors and actions, which creates new realities.” Therefore, Appreciative Inquiry surfaces these organizational behaviors and offers an opportunity to understand and change them.

It is no wonder that the interest and application of Appreciative Inquiry has grown exponentially since its inception thirty years ago. There are hundreds of examples and



case studies of how Appreciative Inquiry has been used in a variety of organizations on a variety of change topics. Scholarly articles and text books are often replete with rich descriptions and examples of how Appreciative Inquiry has benefited an organization, such as those found in Watkins, et. al. (2011). However, after a review of the research, there is a wide range of interpretation of the intervention's efficacy and long-term change sustainability. In fact, Grant and Humphries (2006) highlight the apparent lack of evaluation despite increased applications and scholarship, noting that "appreciative inquiry remains an action research process with little self-reflection or critique" (p. 402). Some case study outcomes are quite limited, focusing merely on what was achieved in the confines of an Appreciative Inquiry summit itself. For example, a study by Johnson and Leavitt (2001) defined success by tabulating the number of provocative propositions generated and positive reactions and quotes from attendees. The case study includes some language in the analysis section regarding the importance of action plans to be developed but no subsequent mention of the efficacy or sustainability of said action plans.

Alternatively, other case studies point to direct performance benefits that have resulted in tangible benefits to the organization following an intervention. One such example is included in Whitney & Trosten-Bloom's (2010) text in which a case study outlining Roadway Express' Appreciative Inquiry summits which resulted in a 53% reduction in airbag costs, saving the organization \$60,000 in the first 5 months after implementation.

Another analysis from Rockey and Webb (2005) studied the effectiveness of an Appreciative Inquiry summit at Evergreen Cove, a holistic learning center. One year after the AI process, researchers noted that the organization increased its donor base by 50% which was a main objective of the process.

A meta-case analysis conducted by Bushe and Kassam (2005) examined 20 case studies of Appreciative Inquiry in an effort to measure how many Appreciative Inquiry interventions actually resulted in the long-term transformational outcomes that theorists claim makes this style of change management unique. In their study, only 7 out of 20 (35%) of the case studies achieved true transformational change, as described by “changes in the identity of a system and qualitative changes in the state of being of that system” (Bushe & Kassam, 2005, p. 162). Despite this finding, almost all 20 of the published cases were considered and reported by its authors to be a successful example of change.

The authors also found that not all Appreciative Inquiry interventions are created equal – there are inherent variabilities in process and outcomes. For example, of the 7 case studies that achieved transformational change, there was relative consistency in their outcomes. All studies reporting transformational outcomes showed that new knowledge had been created, a generative metaphor emerged to guide the change process, and the change was grounded in organizational reality. Bushe and Kassam (2005) were also able to pin point two processes unique to Appreciative Inquiry that, when present in the intervention, seemed to produce transformative results. The first is its focus on changing how people create new knowledge and ideas and, second, its encouragement of allowing participants to self-organize and improvise change based on the new ideas they generated. They purport that any intervention that did not include these tenants tended to have results indicative of more traditional change methodologies.

Despite the inconsistencies in process and measurement of long-term efficacy, Appreciative Inquiry’s positive, generative change approach is an exciting and unique

alternative to change efforts. All of the literature examined spoke to the positive, high-energy catalysis Appreciative Inquiry unleashes in an organization. Either on its own, or combined with more traditional change approaches, the positive focus of the Appreciative Inquiry process creates a sense of new possibility within organizations. Participants inquire into each other's most positive experiences, locate themes that appear, share their hopes and dreams for the future and then work together to create the common vision that will bring these hopes and dreams to life (Watkins, et. al., 2011). As a result, the usual resistance to change is lessened. The focus on strengths engages the curiosity and enthusiasm of employees and avoids the frequently defensive responses provoked when people feel criticized or threatened in their manner of working (Faure, 2006). Faure's research also posits that focusing on past successes instead of failures allows for employees to feel proud and confident. Instead of being asked to step into the unknown, employees start from something positive that they know well (2006). These emotions can transform organizations because they broaden people's habitual modes of thinking, making them more flexible, empathetic, and creative and enhancing their social connections and making for a better organizational climate (Fredrickson, 2003). Researchers have seen that people find it easier to let go of what must be left behind and take forward the best of the past. "Resistance toward said change is greatly reduced as members of a system embrace a shared image of the desired future and begin moving in that direction," (Rockey & Webb, 2005, p. 18).

### **Summary**

The current literature supports the notion that leaders need to be aware of the culture that exists within their organizations if they want to effectively carry out their

strategies. In fact, alignment of culture towards strategic needs is a central role of senior executives (Ogbonna and Harris, 2000). Cultures are like precious and prized treasures when they are strong, healthy, and driving the right behaviors. They are among the greatest assets an organization can have. However, they are vulnerable assets that can be damaged or lost if leaders are not aware of their value and are not keeping watch over possible culture-changing practices, attitudes, threats, or events (Warrick, 2017). The literature reviewed offered many studies of culture effectively aligning with strategy in the for-profit sector to drive financial performance. (Ogbonna and Harris, 2000, Naranjo-Valencia, et. al., 2015, Dennison, 1990, Dennison & Mishra, 1995, Yasil & Kaya, 2013). The literature supports a greater need for understanding of how culture aligns with strategy in the non-profit sector. Additionally, it suggests that the Competing Values Framework and Appreciative Inquiry would be appropriate methodologies to explore this space. This study adds to the body of knowledge that non-profits interested in aligning their culture with existing or new strategies would benefit from further research into appropriate tools and methodologies for identifying and aligning organizational culture to strategy.

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

The purpose of this action research study was to assess the relationship between the organization's current and desired culture; and explore potential shifts in culture in light of the needs and requirements of a new strategic vision. Two frameworks were used to guide the interventions for this study: The Competing Values Framework and Appreciative Inquiry. The research questions were as follows:

1. What is the preferred culture leaders desire in order to align with the organization's new vision?
2. What impact does an Appreciative Inquiry intervention have on leaders' ability to generate the initial steps needed to shift to the preferred culture?

This chapter describes the research design, sample, protection of human subjects, instrumentation, validity, and data collection and analysis.

#### **Research Design**

The research design for this study was a mixed-methods action research study. Data was collected at two different times: (1) individuals completed a survey as prescribed by the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) as part of the Competing Values Framework, (2) an intervention was held to review the anonymous, aggregated results of the OCAI current and desired states and to embark on an Appreciative Inquiry process as it relates to the new vision. The Appreciative Inquiry portion of the intervention focused on how staff envision shifting their existing culture to match the preferred culture as indicated in the OCAI results. The purpose of this portion of the research design was to attempt to surface staff-generated action items that would

actualize the preferred culture shift needed to support the organization's new strategic vision.

**Table 1**

***Data Collection Timeline***

Data Collection Method	Duration	Timeline
OCAI survey distributed to senior leaders in the organization	10-15 minutes to complete survey	3 weeks prior to group intervention date
Group intervention inclusive of OCAI discussion and Appreciative Inquiry process	3 hours	3 weeks post survey distribution

**Sample Size**

The focus of this study was aimed at senior managers within the study organization who have had insight or have made direct contributions to the development of the leader-initiated change in the organization's vision. The senior management sample size was 31 employees ranging between the ages of 30-65 and included 20 Directors, three Associate Vice-Presidents, six Vice Presidents, one Executive Vice President and the Chief Executive Officer. These senior leaders represented a cross-section of the organization with representation from each of the major functional areas including administration, education, aquarium operations and conservation research. All senior managers are located in one location split between three buildings and operating environments, including an administrative center, a public aquarium and a conservation research laboratory.

All 31 senior leaders employed by the study organization were invited to participate in the OCAI culture survey and attend the 3-hour focus group. Of these, 21 completed the OCAI culture survey and anonymously submitted their results for a 68%

survey response rate. Of the 31 senior leaders, 10 attended the focus group for the purpose of reviewing survey results and participating in the Appreciative Inquiry process which represents 32% of the survey sample. Two senior management roles were represented in the focus group meeting: Vice President (30%) and Director (70%) with representation from all four functional areas of the study organization.

**Table 2**

*Appreciative Inquiry Intervention Sample*

Position	N (%)	Functional Area
Vice President	3 (30%)	Administration (2), Research (1)
Director	7 (70%)	Administration (2), Education (1), Aquarium Operations (2), Conservation Research (2)

N = 10

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Permission to conduct this study was obtained through the Vice President of Human Resources on January 4, 2019 and Pepperdine University's Internal Review Board on February 5, 2019. Additionally, the researcher completed the Human Subjects Training web-based course as provided by Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program) on September 24, 2017.

The Competing Values Framework survey instrument distributed to participants explained the research study and voluntary nature of participation. Participants were not required to identify themselves in the completion of the survey and all data was aggregated to create the organization's existing and preferred culture profiles. Participants were offered an anonymized summary report of the results upon completion of the survey process and at the beginning of the Appreciative Inquiry intervention.

Participants who agreed to engage in the OCAI debrief and Appreciative Inquiry interventions also provided consent prior to the start of the process and qualitative data in the form of notes transcribed by the researcher during and after the intervention was de-identified and aggregated for the purposes of this study. All intervention data, and survey results were stored securely in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home.

### **Instrumentation**

**Competing Values Framework & OCAI.** The Competing Values Framework provided descriptions of four culture types along two separate axes measuring the continuums between flexibility and stability and external versus internal orientation. The combination of culture descriptors and a visual representation of the existing versus preferred state allowed leaders to understand where they are and where they need to go. The Competing Values Framework was chosen as the measurement tool for this study for several reasons. First, it is a validated instrument for assessing organizational culture and management competency. A review of scholarly publications in the ten years prior to Cameron & Quinn's writing, reveals that more than sixty doctoral dissertations had investigated the relationship between organizational culture and a variety of outcomes using the OCAI. (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 27). Second, it is not biased in the sense that any one cultural archetype is preferred over another in terms of what will be most effective for the organization. The instrument has been used in a variety of industry sectors including for-profit, health care institutions, education, religious organizations, non-profit organizations, government entities and many others (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Therefore, the instrument appears appropriate and is likely to be effective within the context of a non-profit aquarium. Third, it's administration is itself an intervention



allowing for discussion and action planning by the group. Because it allows for joint diagnosis and action planning, it can create the basis of shared understanding and buy-in for change among the group.

Volunteer members of the senior management team were given the standard OCAI set of statements (see Appendix A) to fill out individually three weeks prior to the intervention session. Anonymous results were compiled by the researcher, and an average composite view was created for the purposes of this research and to inform the subsequent Appreciative Inquiry intervention.

**OCAI, Appreciative Inquiry and the Intervention.** Appreciative Inquiry was chosen as a follow-up intervention to the OCAI administration as a means to build on the organization's strengths rather than focusing on the organization's problems or deficits. This process was designed to engage organization members in a conversation that built upon actual instances where the organization was already performing in a positive way. In this instance, it was used as a means to understand and create the pathway for a shift towards the senior leaders' preferred culture and to identify the specific, necessary action steps needed to bring about the culture change. By focusing on strengths and positive outcomes, the process of Appreciative Inquiry is believed to reduce anxiety, fear, and stress that are commonly associated with organizational change (Srithika & Bhattacharyya, 2009).

All senior leaders were invited to voluntarily attend the intervention designed to create greater understanding and potential consensus around the composite existing and preferred culture plots for the organization. The group reviewed the composite OCAI plots showing the existing and preferred cultures and was asked a series of questions

aimed at articulating what the preferred change in culture will mean for the organization (See Appendix B). After the full implications of the composite OCAI were reviewed and discussed as a whole group, the leaders participated in an Appreciative Inquiry intervention focused on creating the preferred culture as the topic of inquiry. Specifically, the inquiry focused on the area of largest discrepancy between the current and preferred culture. The group was divided into small table groups assigned by the researcher to achieve a mix of tenure, technical expertise and organizational rank. The intervention was modeled after the five generic processes of Appreciative Inquiry (Watkins, et. al., 2011):

1. Focus on the positive as a core value;
2. Inquire into stories of life-giving forces;
3. Locate themes in the stories and select topics from the themes for further inquiry;
4. Create shared images for a preferred future;
5. Innovate ways to create that preferred future.

In pairs, staff interviewed each other by inquiring about positive stories that have occurred in their lives and in the organization (See Appendix C) and derived common themes from the different stories. Then the pairs returned to original table groups to share stories and continued to identify themes which was combined and reported out to the larger group to capture the themes that most resemble the organization working at its best. Individually, leaders reviewed the themes presented by each of the groups and voted by placing a check mark next to the top three themes they believed are most needed to actualize the preferred culture. The themes with the most support from leadership were identified as the central themes that informed the design and action planning for creating the preferred culture.

Once the central themes were identified and agreed upon, the leadership group remained in their groups and began to action plan and design which elements of organizational architecture would be most effective in actualizing the preferred culture. Using a portion of the ABC Inquiry Model (Watkins, et. al., 2011), leaders then identified specific people-related and systems-related organizational elements that need to change or be developed to support the desired culture shift. Table groups reported out their organization design elements to the rest of the group and individuals again voted for the organizational elements they felt would best support the preferred culture. These selected elements were used as a means to narrow the focus for the purpose of leaders then choosing specific actions to be undertaken to initiate and push forward the shift in culture.

After leaders reviewed and agreed upon the structural elements, individuals were then asked to reflect on the organizational items they identified, the possible future state they created during the Appreciative Inquiry process, and then committed to specific actions they could personally make in the 30 days following the intervention to begin actualizing the process of moving the culture to the preferred state. Leaders recorded their commitments to action on two index cards. One was given to the researcher; one was kept by the leader for placement on their desks. Each leader also reported out to the group their commitments to action.

### **Validation**

The instrument used in this research, the OCAI, is widely considered to be both valid and reliable (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Several studies have been conducted using the OCAI to verify that it studies what it purports to study: four types of organizational

culture as defined by the Competing Values Framework. The instrument has been used by numerous researchers in studies of many different types of organizations (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, Tseng, 2010, Yassil & Kaya, 2013, Ogbonna & Harris, 2000). These studies have all tested the reliability and validity of the instrument in the course of their analysis.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected twice during the course of the research to assess the participants' perception of the organization's culture. In the first phase, participants completed a quantitative survey (OCAI) to determine existing and preferred culture profiles. In the second phase, an intervention was administered to discuss the outcomes of the OCAI survey and continued with an Appreciative Inquiry exercise designed to elicit participants' reactions to the survey and subsequent necessary actions. This phase was qualitative in nature and consisted of the researcher taking notes during and after the intervention as well as analyzing themed, aggregated outputs provided by participants.

### **Data Analysis**

The OCAI survey is quantitative in nature and was calculated individually by the subjects and anonymously aggregated by the researcher. OCAI scores were averaged together by the researcher to create a composite score for the organization. The qualitative data from the intervention was examined and coded by the research subjects as part of the Appreciative Inquiry intervention for the purpose of identifying key common themes. The researcher also recorded the specific organizational systems identified by leaders that are needed to support the preferred culture and the subsequent

action items leaders committed to take to advance the preferred culture needed to support the organization's new vision.

### **Summary**

This chapter described the methods used to identify leaders' preferred culture in light of a new strategic vision and to surface action items to begin the process of shifting towards that preferred culture. This study used a mixed-method design and gathered data in two phases using a survey and a focus group intervention. Of the 31 senior leaders employed by the study organization, 21 completed the OCAI culture survey, and 10 attended the focus group. The next chapter reports the study findings.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this action research study was to explore an organization's preferred culture in the context of strategic change with the following research questions:

1. What is the preferred culture leaders desire in order to align with the organization's new vision?
2. What impact does an Appreciative Inquiry intervention have on leaders' ability to generate the initial steps needed to shift to the preferred culture?

This chapter presents the survey results of 21 senior leaders who completed the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) and the Appreciative Inquiry discussion findings from 10 senior leaders who participated in the focus group intervention.

### Results from OCAI

Following the administration of the OCAI, scores were calculated to determine the organization's existing and preferred culture. Results show a consensus view of the organization's existing culture as being predominantly internally focused, with a bias towards hierarchy and clan quadrants. Survey scores show the preferred culture should instead be weighted more towards the adhocracy and clan quadrants which emphasize a flexible culture with a relatively balanced internal and external orientation. Table 3 reflects the data resulting from the leadership group's aggregated OCAI scores. The highest mean score for existing culture was hierarchy ( $M = 34.33$ ,  $SD = 20.72$ ). The lowest mean score for existing culture was adhocracy ( $M = 13.83$ ,  $SD = 9.33$ ). The highest mean score for the preferred culture was clan ( $M = 35.00$ ,  $SD = 12.52$ ). The lowest mean score for the preferred culture was hierarchy ( $M = 16.44$ ,  $SD = 7.76$ ).

The largest difference calculated between the existing and preferred culture is represented by a 52% decrease in hierarchy mean scores and a 120% increase in adhocracy mean scores. Scores also show the leaders' apparent acceptance and confirmation that the existing clan orientation should not only be maintained, it should be slightly increased in the desired culture by 15%. The data also indicated a slight decrease (16%) in market orientation for the preferred culture as well.

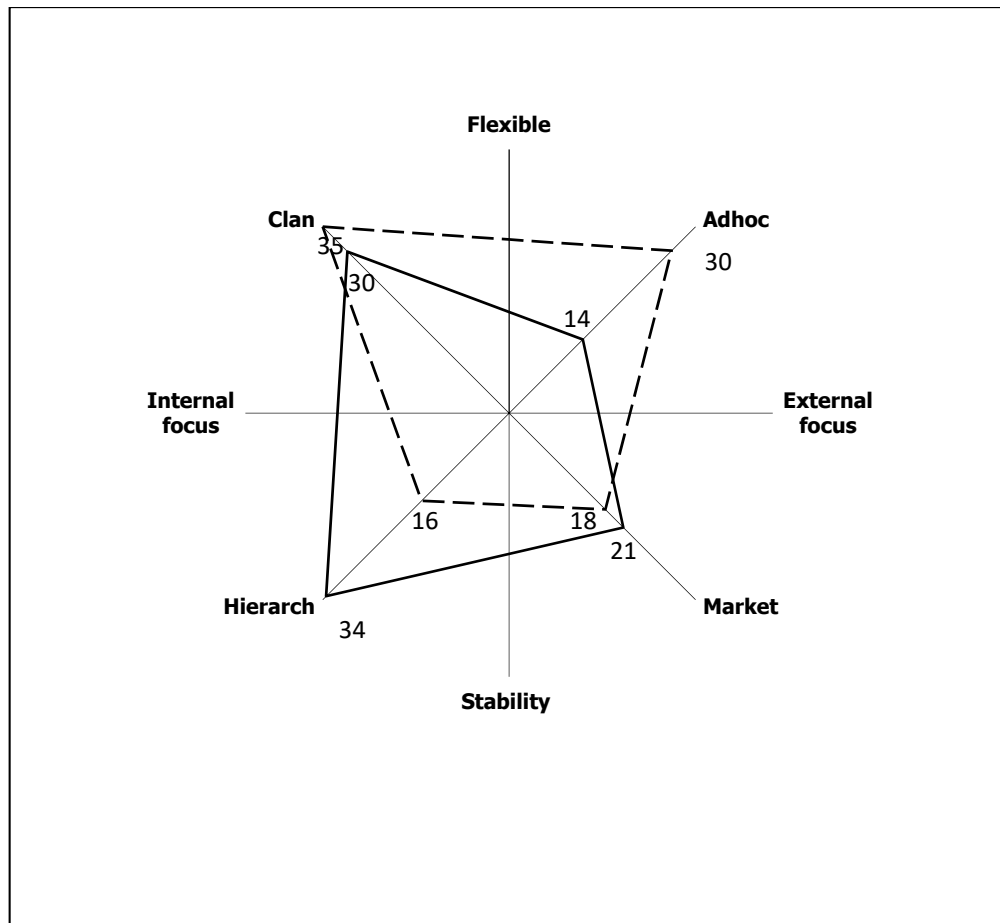
**Table 3**

*Results from OCAI Administration*

<b>Lettered Category</b>	<b>Quadrant Name</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>%Δ in mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
A Existing	Clan	21	0-80	30.33		20.47
B Existing	Adhocracy	21	0-40	13.83		9.33
C Existing	Market	21	0-85	21.44		19.05
D Existing	Hierarchy	21	0-100	34.33		20.72
A Preferred	Clan	21	10-75	35.00	+15%	12.52
B Preferred	Adhocracy	21	5-50	30.50	+120%	8.65
C Preferred	Market	21	0-30	21.44	-16%	9.84
D Preferred	Hierarchy	21	0-35	16.44	-52%	7.76

Figure 1 graphically illustrates Aquarium leadership's existing and preferred cultures, particularly evident is their desire to decrease their hierarchy orientation in favor of increasing an adhocracy orientation in the future.

Figure 1

*Results of Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument*

*Note:* The results of the OCAI administration show Aquarium leadership described the existing culture (solid line) as being substantially weighted toward an internal orientation (hierarchy and clan cultures). The leaders' preferred culture (dotted line) indicates a substantial weighting towards the adhocracy and clan quadrants, which provided a more balanced internal and external orientation.



At the beginning of the focus group intervention, Aquarium leaders reviewed their aggregated OCAI scores and the resulting culture plot. The group discussed the scores for both existing and preferred cultures. For the existing culture, all 10 participants agreed that the OCAI results provided an accurate representation of how they experience their current culture. For example, a vice president remarked, “This feels accurate to me. I experience us as consistently internally focused in most of our thinking and decision-making.” In discussing the existing culture in the context of the recent strategic shifts in the organization’s future vision, Aquarium leaders unanimously agreed that their existing culture’s bias toward hierarchy would hinder their abilities to organize, innovate, and build strategies to support the new vision. A participant remarked, “Hierarchy is focused on maintaining a set operating environment – the vision will require us to change a lot of how we operate, we’ll need a different orientation to support that work.” This also mirrored the existing culture’s low emphasis on the adhocracy quadrant. However, there was also acknowledgement that some pockets of the organization would need to keep elements of the hierarchy quadrant: “Focus on quality and stability is important for those of us who work in animal care and water quality,” one director commented, “lives depend on us following a strict protocol and chain of command.” All 10 participants agreed that attributes associated with hierarchy would be needed in areas where high degrees of accuracy are required, but on the whole, the organization would have to loosen its hierarchy orientation to support a shifting operating environment.

The researcher noticed there were minimal comments on the market quadrant, only that some leaders were surprised the current culture did not skew more in that direction and wondered why. One participant remarked, “Other than one survey a year,

we don't gain a lot of external data that would allow us to be truly market focused, although as a public-serving organization you'd think we would put more emphasis here.”

In shifting to discussing the preferred organizational culture, particularly in the context of the current strategic planning activities and the organization's new vision, the majority of leaders focused immediately on the strong weighting of the adhocracy quadrant for the preferred culture and the distinct departure from the hierarchy quadrant. The desired shift to an adhocracy culture represented the largest shift between existing and preferred culture scores. Leaders unanimously marveled at the resounding re-confirmation of their existing clan culture and, to their collective surprise, a desire to increase it even more in the preferred future culture. One participant commented, “Look at how high we already score in clan, and yet even with the new vision on the horizon, we still want more of it.” Clan's focus on ‘organization as family’ (Cameron & Quinn, 2011) continued to resonate with leaders and was not seen as conflicting with the organization's strategic shift. As the whole group debriefed the OCAI results and made sense around what the results would mean for a preferred culture, increasing the adhocracy quadrant was seen as the most important focus for the new culture. Three distinct themes emerged as norms, practices, and behaviors that should dominate a preferred organizational culture that would be needed to support the new vision: 1) innovation, 2) risk-taking, and 3) trust.

### **Innovation**

Eight of 10 aquarium leaders present in the focus group expressed a strong need to grow innovation throughout the organization in order to make progress on the vision of becoming a global conservation organization. Innovation would have to become a core

value of the aquarium's culture and many expressed frustrations that the current culture, with its strong emphasis in the hierarchy quadrant, was insufficiently supportive of innovation. When discussing the role of hierarchy as a possible inhibitor to innovation, one leader declared, "We need our daily work to be driven by people and possibility, and not about policy and protocol." Leaders exhibited a desire to move away from hierarchy's emphasis on protocol and that increasing collaboration as a means to innovate would have to be emphasized in the preferred culture. "Delivering on this mission and vision is not only going to impact what we do outside the building but also how we work together across the institution," one director said, "In order to innovate, we're going to have to cross [divisional] lines in ways we're not currently set up or used to doing."

### **Risk-Taking**

All leaders also discussed that supporting the new vision would inherently mean taking risks and trying new things. Specifically, in regard to the tension between hierarchy and adhocracy quadrants, leaders wanted less policy and adherence to the status quo and more freedom to experiment and try new things, new ways of working and organizing, as well as new streams of work. One participant commented, "We stay pretty focused on what's happening in our departments and communication seems to be very hierarchical. We miss out on other ideas that would help us think of new ways of working. We need to start engaging people beyond our departments." Leaders unanimously agreed that increasing collaboration as a new way of organizing was their way of beginning to reduce hierarchy – a step that seemed to be a prerequisite for identifying and taking new risks.

To support an increase in experimentation, leaders discussed ways to build and incentivize responsible risk-taking which included talking openly with staff about taking risks and celebrating them regardless of the outcome. For example, a functional director commented, “We need to incentivize and recognize risk-taking at all levels of the organization, and people with positional authority need to communicate their support for it.” It was further emphasized that leaders should grant permission to staff to take risks and not penalizing failure but instead frame it as learning. A vice president remarked, “Google celebrates failures and even gives employees awards for the biggest fail; it means they value the act of trying new things even if the outcome isn’t a big win. We could use a bit of that here.”

### **Trust**

The theme of trust came up specifically as being a mediator for innovation and risk-taking. Leaders commented that the strong, nearly equal balance of internal clan and external adhocracy in the preferred culture would reinforce one another. “I’m not surprised we prefer to remain strong in the clan quadrant,” one vice president remarked, “If we are going to be changing the way we work, taking risks, and trying new things, we’re going to have to trust each other and build the necessary relationships to endure the inevitable failures along the way.” In other words, a clan culture with high trust was needed to take risks and innovate in a positive manner. In fact, the preferred culture shows a 15% increase in the already strong clan quadrant. Trust was linked to the clan culture and leaders appreciated the high bias towards this quadrant and felt that an increase in trust and ‘family-like’ feel throughout the organization was a positive and distinctive trait of the Aquarium and that staff should build on that clan orientation to

create the trust needed to take risks and try new things which would be required in a culture of innovation. The group continued on a discussion on the importance of psychological safety and felt like clan's emphasis on people support and a culture of caring for one another facilitated the growth in the preferred adhocracy quadrant.

### **Findings from the Appreciative Inquiry Intervention**

A similar set of central themes emerged during the Appreciative Inquiry intervention that took place immediately following the discussion of the Aquarium's OCAI results. As each of the tables reported out the results of their appreciative interviews and subsequent table discussions, certain concepts and ideas were regularly repeated as central to increasing a culture of innovation at the Aquarium. Small table groups reported out themes from their table discussions and all leaders reviewed through a gallery walk, with each leader voting for their top three most important themes. Table 4 shows the top five central themes that emerged as most preferred.

**Table 4***Top Themes Identified from Appreciative Interviews*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>Description</b>
Collaboration	11 (34%)	The ability for staff from diverse corners of the organization to work together to innovate in ways that incorporated multiple points of view.
Positivity	9 (27%)	An emphasis on promoting and celebrating acts of innovation even in the face of failure.
Openness to new experiences / change / risk	4 (13%)	Enthusiasm for trying new things and/or increased tolerance for risk.
Support networks	4 (13%)	People to turn to when change or risk becomes uncomfortable. Encouragement for pushing beyond what is known.
Fostering an internal motivation for taking risks and changing	4 (13%)	Encouraging and incentivizing people's internal drive to improve ways of working at the Aquarium.

N = 32

All five of the central themes identified by leaders during the Appreciative Inquiry intervention cannot be solely ascribed as key tenants of the desired increase in the adhocracy culture. In fact, two of the common themes (Openness to new experiences/change/risk and fostering an internal motivation for taking risks and changing) are related to the adhocracy quadrant while three of the themes (Collaboration, Positivity, and Support Networks) are related to the clan quadrant.

Next, leaders worked through the design portion of the Appreciative Inquiry process and identified people and process aspects of organizational architecture that

would be needed to support these themes and ultimately the preferred culture. Table groups discussed specific elements of organizational design and each crafted a visual (Figure 2) that indicated which design elements would be required to shift. Each group reported out their results and the group discussed the implications. Table 5 outlines the results of the report outs on people and process changes that would need to be made to support future state.

**Figure 2**

*Example of Organizational Design Visuals*

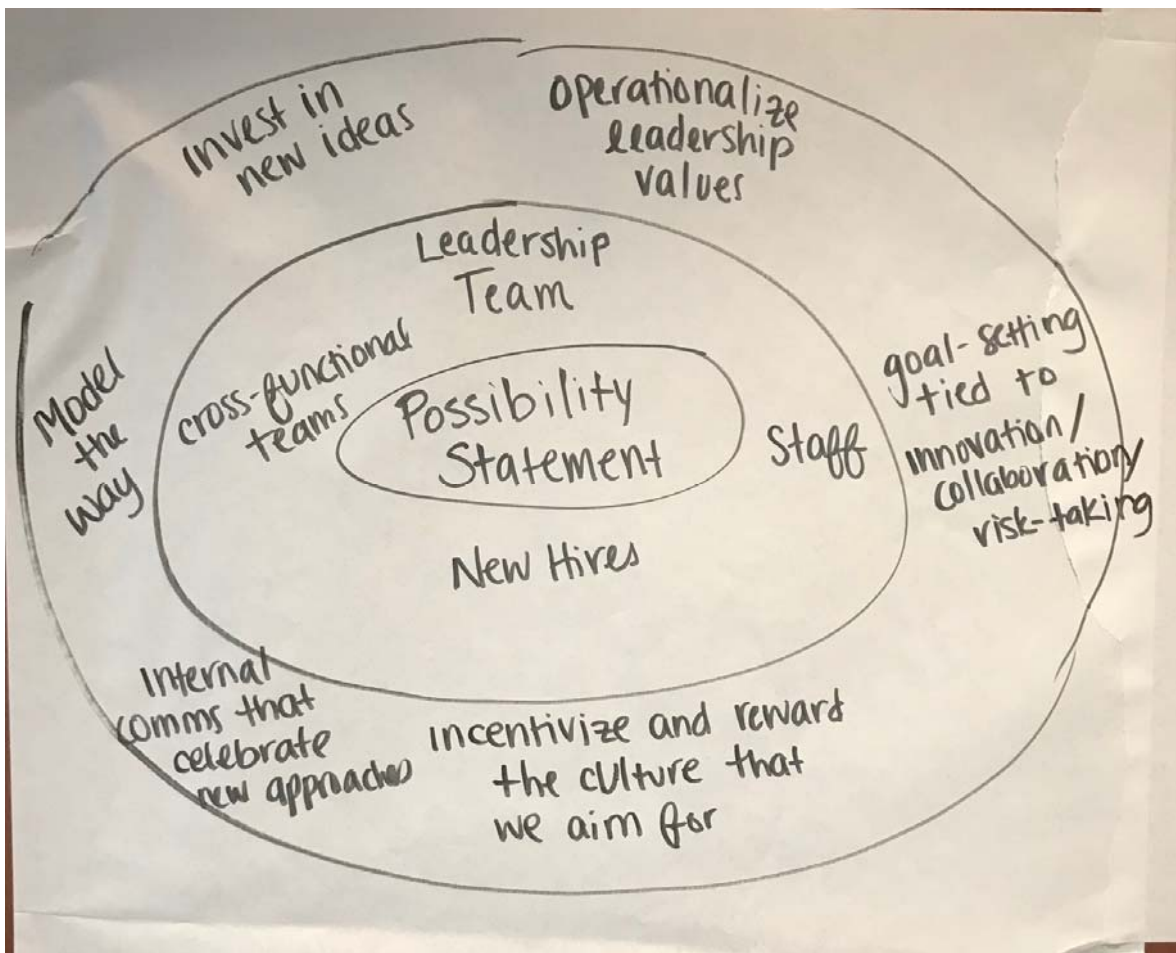


Table 5

*Organizational Design Elements Identified to Support a Culture Shift*

Central Themes	People	Processes
Collaboration	Cross-functional teams work across the institution to bring new ideas to light keeping an eye towards diversity and inclusion	Opportunities to engage with staff in other departments (informal forums, shared space, meetings, brown bag learning sessions)  Embracing technology to internally integrate business systems
Positivity	Leadership Team celebrates risks	Internal communications systems that celebrate new approaches
Open to new experiences / change / risk	Leadership Team is open to trying new things and encourages and supports their staff to do the same	System for input/idea generation and follow-up from leadership
Support Network	Functional teams support individuals to try new things	Mentoring program to support early leaders and grow risk-taking and innovation in key talent
Internal Motivation for Change	New hires embody an internal motivation for risk and innovation	HR-led pathways for advancement and talent management  New ideas are given resource investment by the organization Recognize and reward behaviors that reinforce the culture leaders aim to create.

Organizational design elements centered broadly around access to people across the institution and incentivizing, supporting, and celebrating risk-taking and innovation in a variety of modalities.



After identifying and designing elements of the organization's architecture that could be changed or enhanced to support a culture of innovation, the Appreciative Inquiry intervention concluded with the deliver phase. At this time, individual leaders offered specific actions that they would undertake to help the Aquarium shift its culture to increase innovation and build trust. Examples of specific ideas included shifts in hiring practices, incentivizing and motivating teams, discussing and celebrating risk-taking as a positive trait, process innovations, and several others. Table 6 outlines the specific actions that leaders committed to advance the culture shift within 30 days of the intervention date.

Table 6

*Leadership Actions Identified to Initiate the Preferred Cultural Shift*

<b>Central Theme</b>	<b>Leadership Commitments to Action</b>	<b>Related Design Element</b>
Collaboration	I will find at least 2 opportunities for members of my team to engage in cross-functional meetings or experiences and recognize them for their contribution.	Cross-functional teams work across the institution to bring new ideas to light keeping an eye towards diversity and inclusion
	I will think of and try to model at least two different approaches to leadership that foster equity and inclusivity to generate a diversity of perspectives.	Cross-functional teams work across the institution to bring new ideas to light keeping an eye towards diversity and inclusion
	I will seek out other members of other departments and include them on new initiative project teams so we can think of new and fresh ideas.	Opportunities to engage with staff in other departments (informal forums, shared space, meetings, brown bag learning sessions)
Positivity	I will recognize and reward staff for the process of change not just the end result.	Recognize and reward behaviors that reinforce the culture leaders aim to create.
	I will empower, reward and celebrate the innovative wins (no matter how small) from the Marketing and Communications team.	Internal communications systems that celebrate new approaches
Open to new experiences / change / risk	I will exercise the importance of being open to “possibility” in job interviews when hiring for new staff.	New hires embody an internal motivation for risk and innovation
	I will challenge our existing department policies and practices and will not be afraid to “flip things on their heads” to gain a different perspective.	Leadership Team is open to trying new things and encourages and supports their staff to do the same
Support Network	I will lift up my new staff person and give her the freedom to identify and create new corporate materials and presentations.	Mentoring program to support early leaders and grow risk-taking and innovation in key talent

Internal Motivation	I will discuss risk-taking and encourage innovation & change of process at next staff meeting.	Leadership Team is open to trying new things and encourages and supports their staff to do the same
	I will prioritize the projects within my functional team that are aimed at getting new ideas off the ground.	Functional teams support individuals to try new things

Of the 13 organizational elements that were identified as necessary components of shifting to an adhocracy culture, seven actions (54%) were mapped to descriptions of a clan culture while the remaining six (46%) mapped to descriptions of an adhocracy culture. Furthermore, of the action items identified by the 10 leaders, six (60%) mapped to the clan orientation while the remaining four (40%) mapped to the adhocracy orientation.

### **Summary**

This chapter reported the findings that emerged from the study. Using a mixed-method approach of quantitative survey data analysis and qualitative analysis of focus group discussion during an appreciative inquiry process, senior leaders determined that a shift away from an existing hierarchy culture to a preferred adhocracy culture would be needed to support the organization's new vision. With a particular emphasis on increasing responsible risk-taking and collaboration for the purposes of innovation, leaders identified specific actions to take that would grant greater access to diverse thinking across the organization and support and incentives that would drive collective innovation behaviors. These findings proposed an understanding of the organization's existing and preferred culture from a leadership perspective and an organizational and individual action plan for leaders to begin actualizing the desired future culture.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this action research study is to assess the relationship between the organization's current and desired culture and explore potential shifts in culture in light of the needs and requirements of a new strategic vision. The following research questions were explored:

1. What is the preferred culture leaders desire in order to align with the organization's new vision?
2. What impact does an Appreciative Inquiry intervention have on leaders' ability to generate the initial steps needed to shift to the preferred culture?

This chapter presents a discussion of the study results, including key findings, conclusions, recommendations, study limitations, and suggestions for future study.

### Key Findings

Conclusions were drawn for each research question based on the study data.

These conclusions are discussed in the sections below.

**Cultural alignment to the vision.** In this study, aquarium leaders gained a greater understanding about their organizational culture and demonstrated an espoused desire to adopt an innovation orientation associated with the adhocracy quadrant of the Competing Values Framework while also maintaining and growing the organization's strong clan orientation as an effective way to align with the organization's new vision. Study findings indicated the identified preferred culture that would help the organization support the new strategic vision is one that exemplifies high levels of trust, responsible risk-taking, and innovation. OCAI results from survey participants indicated that a marked shift away from an existing hierarchy culture and towards an adhocracy culture

was needed to effectively carry out the new strategic vision. During the focus group intervention, there was espoused consensus around the idea that an aquarium culture that increased the qualities of the adhocracy quadrant would bolster innovation and that this externally-focused orientation would be required to effectively deliver on the organization's strategic direction. This outcome suggests alignment and continued support for the research conducted by Langer and Laroux (2017) and Jaskyte (2004) which suggests positive correlation between the innovation found in the adhocracy culture and organizational effectiveness in the non-profit context.

**Identifying actions to initiate the preferred culture.** Study findings indicated that Appreciative Inquiry's 5D cycle positively impacted focus group participants' ability to rapidly discover and build on cultural values needed to undergird the shift towards the espoused preferred adhocracy culture. These values included collaboration, positivity, risk-taking, support networks, and openness to change. The values generated from the Appreciative Inquiry intervention collectively, and rather accurately, aligned with the two strongest orientations of the preferred culture as identified through the OCAI implementation, adhocracy and clan. While leaders espoused desire to shift to an increased adhocracy culture garnered the most attention during the focus group discussions, only two of the identified values mapped to qualities described by the innovative adhocracy culture while the remaining three mapped to qualities described by the clan culture. Values including openness to new experiences, changes and risk-taking, and internal motivation for change do seem to align to the adhocracy culture's emphasis on "entrepreneurship, experimentation, innovation and a commitment to cutting-edge approaches" (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 75). However, collaboration, positivity, and

support networks are not traditionally themes that fall within the adhocracy quadrant, which is most often described as a culture where “individual initiative is encouraged, and people stick their necks out” (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 75). Instead, these themes much more readily align to the leaders’ equal favor of the clan culture’s emphasis on “being a friendly place to work with a concern for people and an emphasis on teamwork.” (Cameron & Quinn, 2001, p. 48). This relates both to the OCAI data which shows an increase in clan orientation and an increase in adhocracy orientation for the preferred culture, and also to the subsequent focus group discussions in which leaders discussed that the clan orientation would be the vehicle by which the significant increase in adhocracy would be achieved. One table group’s possibility statement best exudes how this facilitation would work:

We are universally positive with our colleagues and our ideas. Always striving together to use new experiences in taking risks to reach greater heights. We reward collaboration and innovation regardless of outcomes. We value contributions from each of our employees and encourage individuals and teams to explore innovative work.

The organizational elements and action item data also mapped more towards the clan culture, despite the OCAI data and discussions centered on increasing innovation associated with the adhocracy quadrant. This may be explained by the relationship between psychological safety and innovation where psychological safety has been named as a prerequisite for greater innovation and growth (Edmondson, 2018). As Edmondson (2018) purports,

Achieving high performance requires having the confidence to take risks, especially in a knowledge-intensive world. When an organization minimizes the fear people feel on the job, performance — at both the organizational and the team level — is maximized. (p. 173)

It is possible that Aquarium leaders were identifying the prerequisites for innovation by highlighting elements of the clan culture that would provide fertile ground for developing psychological safety, which is present when colleagues trust and respect each other and feel able to be candid (Edmondson, 2018). Increasing collaboration across the institution and developing relationships that span functional areas are activities that seem clan-like; however, according to the research, these elements must first be present before more practical areas of increasing innovation, like taking risks and initiating change, can happen.

Additionally, to create the psychological safety needed for innovation, how leaders present the role of failure is essential.

Astro Teller at X Development, Alphabet's advanced research subsidiary (formerly Google X), observed that "the only way to get people to work on big, risky things...is if you make that the path of least resistance for them [and] make it safe to fail." In other words, unless a leader expressly and actively makes it psychologically safe to fail, people will automatically seek to avoid failure. (Edmondson, 2018)

This research also supports the themes and design elements leaders identified that are aimed at leadership actions including leadership team actively supporting risk-taking along with the mentoring program to model the way for employees to take risks and try new things.

### **Appreciative Inquiry's Impact**

Appreciative Inquiry's design and deliver phases provided an effective framework where participants identified key changes in organizational design that would be needed to support the new culture and also allowed participants to identify personal, individual actions they could take to initiate the process while continued system-wide action planning is underway.

The implication of these findings is that the combination of the Competing Values Framework and Appreciative Inquiry appears to provide an effective way to identify the organization's desired culture and subsequently build consensus and action plans needed to initiate a shift towards the preferred culture. This intervention design allowed senior leaders to perceive their existing culture, validate a preferred future culture, and create actionable steps needed to shift the organization's culture to support the change in strategic vision in an inclusive way. As a result, leaders in the study organization have practical data should they wish to begin initiating change efforts aimed at shifting the culture.

Grounded in Bushe and Kassam's (2005) findings that the two necessary processes that seemed to produce transformative results included changing how people create new ideas and allowing participants to self-organize and improvise change based on these new ideas, there is reason to believe this intervention method may prove to be effective in initiating transformational change within the organization. Through the use of OCAI as a means to discuss culture in a practical way, paired with an emphasis on the positive aspects of the organization, participants created new knowledge about the culture in a way that was different than their regular sensemaking processes. Additionally, the design phase of the Appreciative Inquiry intervention provided a means for leaders to improvise changes needed in the organization to initiate the shift to the preferred culture.

## **Conclusions**

First, through the use of the Competing Values Framework, senior Aquarium leaders identified that a maintenance of an existing clan culture combined with a shift away from an existing hierarchy culture towards a preferred adhocracy culture would be needed to



support the organization's new vision. Second, an Appreciative Inquiry intervention was effective at guiding leaders to developing key actions needed to initiate the shift towards the preferred culture including identification of core values of the preferred culture, action plans for changing elements of organizational design to support the preferred culture and individual commitments needed to initiate the culture change.

### **Recommendations**

**For the study organization.** The primary recommendation stemming from this research is for the study organization to consider continuing and broadening the application of this combined method across the enterprise in an effort to engage and generate staff input from all levels and functional areas. Increased engagement beyond the senior leadership level will surface data from the full breadth of the organization which can provide richer data from a variety of perspectives and stay in line with the inclusive nature of the Appreciative Inquiry process.

Additional recommendations from this study include the consideration of implementing the organizational systems changes identified during the Appreciative Inquiry intervention as potential key underpinnings for the actualization of the preferred culture. The following recommendations are synthesized from participant-identified actions:

First, focus on HR systems that align individual personal motivations with innovation. Study data suggested that there are no formal mechanisms for encouraging risk-taking or innovation among employees. A first step of changing the performance management system to include goals and competencies that incentivize innovation and risk-taking would be key for shifting behaviors. Creating specialized bonus structures for

teams that innovate successfully should be implemented. Additionally, ensuring HR seeks out candidates for employment that have a history of working and thriving in innovative workplaces would be a hiring strategy which would work in tandem with the culture shift. It was also suggested that the organization deploy an internal mentoring program for high-potential employees to be mentored by leaders who have been successful in leading innovative programs and initiatives, and to model responsible risk-taking.

Second, identify key leadership behaviors and actions that support the preferred culture's values of trust, risk-taking, and innovation. Study data also surfaced a desire for clear, explicit leadership behaviors to be identified and lived out by senior leadership. If experimentation and risk-taking are paramount to achieving the preferred culture, leaders need to practice this in earnest by accepting a willingness to challenge the organization's existing policies and practices and be willing to hear differing perspectives. Participants indicated that leaders should accept responsibility and model the way for experimentation, giving staff the opportunity to try new things and to celebrate the act of doing something new. These leadership behaviors should be directly tied to compensation and performance evaluation. Additionally, data showed that an acceptance and prioritization of thinking time by leaders was needed for staff to be able to plan for shifts and changes instead of staying predominantly focused on current operational matters. Executive team meeting structure should shift to include innovation discussions and prioritizations.

Finally, align team structure and information systems to support the generation of new ideas. Study findings also suggested that building ad-hoc cross-functional teams aimed at carrying out goals tied to the new strategic plan would create ways for staff across the organization to communicate and generate new ideas and projects would be valuable. The organization may also benefit from encouraging inclusivity and diversity in these conversations to ensure that different perspectives are heard.

**For OD practitioners.** The combined interventions documented in this study may be recommended to organization development (OD) practitioners seeking to help their clients better understand the distinct nature of their culture and to identify and design a preferred culture that will best support changes in large-scale organizational strategy. The data from this research suggested that the linked implementation of the OCAI and utilization of the Competing Values Framework coupled with an Appreciative Inquiry intervention provided an effective methodology for understanding organizational culture and designing how it may need to shift to support a strategic change.

Practitioners can use the Competing Values Framework and the OCAI to help their clients better understand not only their existing culture but also the preferred culture in a manner that aggregates quantitative data from all levels of the organization. The emerging data provides a visual map and a concrete framework to set the stage for a discussion on how culture impacts the organization in a non-threatening way.

Employing Appreciative Inquiry immediately following the implementation of the OCAI provides a way for clients to make sense of their existing and preferred cultures and identify particular values upon which to build the preferred culture. The Appreciative Inquiry process also allows clients to engage in action planning ranging from changes in

organizational architecture to the specific individual steps needed to ensure cultural alignment to a strategic organizational change. Additionally, since this study was conducted at a non-profit organization, it appears that this combined intervention would be useful in any context involving mission-driven organizations that are seeking to address culture in times of strategic change.

Further recommendations for OD practitioners seeking to help align culture to support a shifting organizational strategy include:

First, employ change management practices for implementing the action plan. In the design phase of Appreciative Inquiry, staff identified elements of organizational design that would need to shift to support the preferred culture. The study data surfaced changes in processes and people initiatives that would scaffold the actualization of the preferred culture. Therefore, OD practitioners should consider employing change management practices to give extra support to those key initiatives that are related to undergirding the actualization of the preferred culture.

Second, ensure multi-stakeholder engagement. Since culture is considered to be a collection of shared assumptions carried by all members of an organization, it is inherently a pervasive social construct. Therefore, OD practitioners working with clients on culture change initiatives should always strive for wide engagement of multiple stakeholder groups within an organization. This combined intervention allows for whole system engagement and practitioners should make every effort to ensure the entire system is engaged in sensemaking and action planning for culture change.

## **Study Limitations**

A limitation to this study was the relatively small sample size of the research population. The researcher was requested by the study organization to focus only on the senior management level of the business. At the time the research was conducted, only members of this level of the organization were aware of the strategic shift and change in vision. The invitation to complete the OCAI was sent to all senior leaders of the study organization which consisted of 31 individuals. Of the 31 leaders who received the survey, 21 responded for a survey response rate of 68%. While this is a favorable response rate given the population, it is still a small subset of the overall organization. The same 31 senior leaders were invited to participate in the focus group and only 10 attended the 3-hour voluntary intervention designed to confirm the results of the OCAI survey and to embark on an Appreciative Inquiry process. If this study were to be repeated, it would be valuable to extend the sample size to a larger pool of the organization to ensure a diversity of views. This is particularly important in culture change initiatives where all members of the organization experience and uphold the organization's culture.

A second limitation to this study included the absence of demographic data, specifically department/functional area representation, employee tenure, and age when conducting the survey. This demographic data could have provided further analysis on differing perceptions of culture from various functional areas across the organization. Additionally, any material differences in perceptions of culture based on participant's age and organizational tenure may have also generated insights on perceptions of existing and preferred culture based on age and time spent working within the study organization.

A third limitation to this study included limited time and participant availability during the Appreciative Inquiry intervention. Since the intervention was voluntary to participants and occurred during business hours, the researcher restricted the intervention time to a 3-hour block in which to progress through the Appreciative Inquiry cycle. Ideally, more time would be allotted to ensure participants had enough time to dialogue and sense-make on aspects related to understanding their organizational culture. Additionally, a key tenant of Appreciative Inquiry interventions includes ensuring the ‘whole system’ is represented in the room. While there was diversity of experience among the 10 focus group participants, spanning the three major functional areas of the study organization, additional voices and perspectives would have benefitted the overall output of the intervention. Encouraging discussions among employees from different departments and hierarchical levels helps share mental processes and provides them with an overall understanding of the organization rather than a fragmented one (Srithika & Bhattacharyya, 2009).

### **Suggestions for Future Study**

This study did not examine whether the interventions it employed produced a material or sustained change in the Aquarium’s organizational culture nor did it evaluate whether or not the preferred culture that was identified by senior leaders actually supported the organization’s strategic shift over time. The suggestion for future study is to conduct elements of this study again after time has passed. It would be suggested to use the OCAI to assess if any material shift in organizational culture toward the adhocracy quadrant had been made as a result of the completion of action items identified in the Appreciative Inquiry intervention. It would also be important to understand how

the action items were carried forward after the intervention. This would be helpful in determining if the leader-identified actions helped shift the culture in the direction of the innovation-focused adhocracy quadrant.

Additionally, it would be beneficial to allow for extended periods of time for discussion during the Appreciative Inquiry intervention and to include all members of the senior leadership team as well as staff members of various rank from a variety of functional areas to ensure that all organizational perspectives are included in the sense-making of existing and preferred culture along with necessary action planning efforts.

The future study would also gather new data. Participants would be asked to identify some elements of demographic data including number of years in the organization, functional area or department, and position/rank to generate insights about whether perceptions of existing and preferred culture differ in relation to these factors.

On a macro-level, any future study utilizing this combined method of interventions would also allow the option to test the efficacy of Appreciative Inquiry as a culture change methodology over an extended time, which would help fill the evaluative knowledge gap described by Grant and Humphries (2006) regarding the long-term sustainability of outcomes related to Appreciative Inquiry interventions.

## **Summary**

Understanding organizational culture is a key requirement for leaders in all contexts. Culture is exceedingly important to understand in times of strategic change. Leaders must gain an understanding of what their organization's culture is and how it may support or detract from any planned changes in strategy and direction. Too many organizations fail to address culture when conducting strategic planning efforts and

charting a new organizational vision and direction. It is important to not only gain an understand of the existing culture, but to identify and actualize a preferred culture needed to support a new desired direction for the organization.

This study examined how senior leaders might identify a preferred culture in the context of strategic change and subsequently create an action plan for shifting organizational culture to support a new strategic vision. 21 senior leaders were anonymously surveyed to ascertain the organization's existing and preferred culture using the OCAI as part of the Competing Values Framework. A subset of 10 leaders then participated in an Appreciative Inquiry intervention as a means to collectively understand and build the necessary action plans to actualize the preferred culture to support a new strategic vision.

OCAI survey results indicated the preferred culture to be one that predominantly supports an innovation focused adhocracy orientation matched with family-like clan orientation. Focus group participants discussed and confirmed the survey results as a valid representation of the preferred culture needed to effectively carry out the strategic vision; one that exudes high levels of trust, responsible risk-taking, and innovation. Through an Appreciative Inquiry intervention, participants identified the themes of collaboration, positivity, openness to change, supportive networks, and internal motivation as core values needed to build the preferred culture. Essentially, the high emphasis of clan would lay the groundwork to create the psychological safety needed to increase innovation across the enterprise. Participants then targeted elements of organizational design that would need to change to support the preferred culture and made personal change commitments to begin making the shift to the preferred culture.



While action plans have been identified, and some early commitments have been made, more time will be needed to ascertain their efficacy and sustainability. Future examinations of the long-term effect of these combined interventions as a means to identify, actualize, and produce sustainable results in culture change will provide valuable insights regarding the link between organizational culture and strategic change.

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**Appendix A: Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI)**

1. Dominant Characteristics		Now	Preferred
A	The organization is a very personal place. It is like an extended family. People seem to share a lot of themselves.		
B	The organization is a very dynamic entrepreneurial place. People are willing to stick their necks out and take risks.		
C	The organization is very results oriented. A major concern is with getting the job done. People are very competitive and achievement oriented.		
D	The organization is a very controlled and structured place. Formal procedures generally govern what people do.		
	Total		
2. Organizational Leadership		Now	Preferred
A	The leadership in the organization is generally considered to exemplify mentoring, facilitating, or nurturing.		
B	The leadership in the organization is generally considered to exemplify entrepreneurship, innovating, or risk taking.		
C	The leadership in the organization is generally considered to exemplify a no-nonsense, aggressive, results-oriented focus.		
D	The leadership in the organization is generally considered to exemplify coordinating, organizing, or smooth-running efficiency.		
	Total		
3. Management of Employees		Now	Preferred
A	The management style in the organization is characterized by teamwork, consensus, and participation.		
B	The management style in the organization is characterized by individual risk-taking, innovation, freedom, and uniqueness.		
C	The management style in the organization is characterized by hard-driving competitiveness, high demands, and achievement.		
D	The management style in the organization is characterized by security of employment, conformity, predictability, and stability in relationships.		
	Total		

4. Organizational Glue		Now	Preferred
A	The glue that holds the organization together is loyalty and mutual trust. Commitment to this organization runs high.		
B	The glue that holds the organization together is commitment to innovation and development. There is an emphasis on being on the cutting edge.		
C	The glue that holds the organization together is the emphasis on achievement and goal accomplishment. Aggressiveness and winning are common themes.		
D	The glue that holds the organization together is formal rules and policies. Maintaining a smooth-running organization is important.		
	Total		
5. Strategic Emphases		Now	Preferred
A	The organization emphasizes human development. High trust, openness, and participation persist.		
B	The organization emphasizes acquiring new resources and creating new challenges. Trying new things and prospecting for opportunities are valued.		
C	The organization emphasizes competitive actions and achievement. Hitting stretch targets and winning in the marketplace are dominant.		
D	The organization emphasizes permanence and stability. Efficiency, control and smooth operations are important.		
	Total		
6. Criteria of Success		Now	Preferred
A	The organization defines success on the basis of the development of human resources, teamwork, employee commitment, and concern for people.		
B	The organization defines success on the basis of having the most unique or newest products. It is a product leader and innovator.		
C	The organization defines success on the basis of winning in the marketplace and outpacing the competition. Competitive market leadership is key.		
D	The organization defines success on the basis of efficiency. Dependable delivery, smooth scheduling and low-cost production are critical.		
	Total		

**Appendix B: OCAI Large Group Discussion Questions**



1. What are the attributes and activities that we want to emphasize if we are to move toward the adhocracy quadrant?
2. What attributes should we reduce or abandon if we are to move away from the hierarchy quadrant? Which attributes of this quadrant would we keep?
3. Based on the overall preferred culture plot, what practices and behaviors should dominate our new culture?
4. Do you believe the preferred culture will support the vision? If so, how?

**Appendix C: Appreciative Interview Protocol**

A culture of innovation (Adhocracy) is defined by a dynamic, entrepreneurial and creative culture. Focus is on taking risks, experimentation and innovation. The organization encourages individual initiative and freedom.

1. Best experience:

Tell me about a time where you had to create or try something new in your life. AND/OR Think of a time when you took a big risk in your life. Describe that time in detail. What were you doing? Who was involved? What happened? What/who motivated you?

2. Qualities and Skills: We all have different qualities and skills we use to try something new. Let's reflect on those qualities and skills from different levels:

Yourself: Without being humble, what is it that you value most about your ability to try new things.

Your Organization: Share a story from your experience working at NEAq that closely resembles the descriptions of an Adhocracy (innovative) culture. What was happening? Describe the circumstances where attributes of the Adhocracy culture already exist in our organization?

3. Wishes: Imagine all the possibilities for an innovative culture at NEAq; what would an ideal environment look like that motivates you to try something new?