

**DOING DATA ANALYSIS: AN EXAMPLE FORMAT FOR
AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY REPORT**

FAIRMOUNT NORTH AMERICA

**OUR FUTURE BEGINS WITH
OUR STRENGTHS**

***Committee members include:**

**Paula Smith
Sharon Stone
George Vender
Ed Wild**

OVERVIEW

On behalf of all the people at Fairmount North America, the Committee on Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is pleased to present its first report -- **“Vision 2000: It begins with our Strengths.”**

Our hope is that this report serves both as a catalyst and as an invitation. The invitation: To participate in an organization-wide process where everybody at each location has the opportunity to think strategically and imaginatively about “our common vision for the organization of the future.” As a catalyst: the report provides inspiring snapshots of many of the strengths of the organization “when it is working at its very best.” There is, it must be acknowledged, an undeniable positive quality about this report. Some of it stems from the nature of the questions that were asked of you in the interviews. But equally important, much of it comes from the real sense of optimism people feel about the company and its prospects for the future. We too, as a committee, found ourselves really energized and excited about the organization’s future when we began letting our imaginations go --

What will Fairmount North America look like in the 2000? What will it look like if all of its best qualities are magnified, extended, or multiplied, let’s say, by a factor of ten? Are we really ready, as many have said in interviews and private conversations, to jump to a whole new level as an organization? What is our dream? What do we really want this organization to be in the future?

How This Document Was Put Together

We constructed this analysis from interviews with 329 of you, comprising all locations and all levels of personnel. The questions used in the interviews (which lasted from 1-2 hours each) were generated in several 3-day workshops on “Appreciative Inquiry” held in August-September.* During those workshops several topics were identified -- **care and respect for people, teamwork, leadership, empowerment, common goals and direction, commitment, and recognition.** The interviews were designed to explore these topics in several ways. When, for example, have people felt really empowered in this organization? What supports or strengthens empowerment? What are the organization’s “best practices” when it comes to good people management, or empowerment? What would we like to do more of to build a more empowered organization?

On the basis of the interviews, the data was then put together first by location and then as a whole corporation. This particular report is a summary overview for the whole of Fairmount. It draws on information from each site report, attempting to discover those ideals that are common throughout the company.

* Appreciative Inquiry is an approach to organization development now being used in many companies. It is a positive approach that strengthens TQM and other continuous improvement methods. For more information see Cooperrider, D. and Srivastva, S., “Appreciative Inquiry In Organizational Life.” In Pasmore & Woodman (eds.) Research In Organizational Change and Development, JAI Press. Reports were prepared by The Innovative Group; D. Cooperrider & R. Williams. For more information about this process call (216) 791-1110.

In terms of analysis, we first typed up all the interview responses and grouped them together by question. The next step was to code each comment to discover, for example: What are the most important factors that create, maintain, or strengthen **empowerment**? We then grouped examples (and quotes) of empowerment together and attempted to put words to the **topic-ideals**. What do people really mean when speaking about empowerment? What are people really saying is **ideal**? We figure that if we did our homework well the topic-ideals, as written, will resonate strongly with what people **want** the organization to be. Two things are important to keep in mind when reading through the report. First, these topic-ideals are fashioned from peoples' actual experiences. There are examples, many examples, of each of the ideals (see actual quotes). Thus, the topic-deals express the corporate culture of Fairmount as we understand it from appreciation of our proven strengths. But the statements go a step further. They also, hopefully, represent a bold extension of those strengths -- focused vision to which people are saying they aspire as an organization. The topic-ideals are stated, therefore, in the present tense, not because they have totally been attained, but because people are saying this is their present "ideal" based on experiences when they/we have been at our best. We invite you to think of this document as a resource, as a catalyst, to help you think seriously about what you want this organization to be like in the future.

How To Use This Document

The most thorough approach we have in mind would be as follows:

1. Read the **summary** at the beginning of each section to get a feeling for the topic-ideal. Ask yourself: If we could be this way all the time, would I want it?
2. Read each of the **sample quotes** to get an idea of what people actually talked about. Ask yourself: Do these quotes illustrate the topic-ideal? Do you have other examples, from your own experience, that help illustrate the way things could be like in the ideal? What are those illustrations?
3. Read through the **analysis**. Ask yourself: Does the analysis sound plausible? What else would you add to the analysis?
4. Remember: A future does not arrive uninvited. It is built. Organizations begin in the imagination. And when an organization as a whole takes time to give voice to its preferred future it is all that more likely to bring it about. Put simply -- it is easier to do things together when there is common focus.

Next Steps

Over the next several weeks meetings will be held to discuss the report. We hope these meetings will be used for three purposes;

1. As a vehicle for discussing the discoveries -- to confirm, restate, debate, and elaborate.
2. As an opportunity to appreciate the organization for what it is today and to expand our thinking about what it could be in the future.
3. As an invitation for people at each location to become part of a Vision 2000 team.

We believe the appreciative inquiry approach is a powerful way of building common focus. One management thinker, Peter Senge, calls it building “a learning organization”. He writes

*If anything, the need for understanding how organizations learn, and accelerating that learning is greater today than ever before. The old days when a Henry Ford, Alfred Sloan, or Tom Watson **learned for the organization** are gone. In an increasingly dynamic, interdependent, and unpredictable world, it is simply no longer possible for anyone to “figure it all out at the top”. The old model “the top think and the locals act” must now give way to integrated thinking and acting at all levels. While the challenge is great, so is the potential payoff. “The person who figures out how to harness the collective genius of the people in his or her organization” according to former Citibank CEO Walter Wriston, “is going to blow the competition away.”*

It has been an exciting task thus far. We look forward to the feedback sessions.

Ideal-Type Theme # 1: A Team-Based Organization

Fairmount North America has become a multifaceted business where the mindset of teamwork has become a critical success factor in continuous, innovation, and responsiveness to customers (internal and improvement). Said one person: “There are hundreds of examples of positive impact and innovation because of teamwork -- our history keeps teaching us that none of us is so smart as all of us.”

More than a set of empty slogans or words, the call for teamwork has been a call for fundamental change. Fairmount is an organization that has in fact dared to experiment with advanced organizational changes and management approaches. It is an organization that has shown its change efforts even when there are inevitable setbacks and learning pains. The movement to a team-based organization at Fairmount is not cosmetic -- “it is inevitable” said one person.

But it is not just the spirit or mindset of teamwork. When working at its best the organizational structure eliminates unnecessary hierarchy and division, and engages people as partners. At Fairmount, the so-called organizational chart with its hierarchy of reporting relationships and separation of jobs, reflects only one reality. The “other structure”, not generally shown on the chart, is an overlay of person-to-person networks, cross-functional project groups, team, information-seeking meetings, new business planning groups, and the like. While this kind of “ad-hoc teamwork” often seems a bit confusing (from a standard organizational chart perspective) it can be argued that it is precisely this -- the ability to create fast, focused, free-formed, flexible (even fun) teamwork -- that has brought Fairmount so much success in recent years. Through the use of this “parallel” organizational form (i.e., the non-hierarchical team-based organization) Fairmount fosters the cross fertilization of ideas, minimizes the building of empires, harnesses the synergy of group cooperation, and cultivates the pride of being a valued member of “one outstanding corporation”.

Sample Quotes:

1. *Early last year we had a serious situation in California. It was a dangerous situation where the product could jeopardize someone's safety. We never had an experience like that. Never had a recall before. Lives could be at stake. Liability laws in California were strict. It put us in an unbelievable pressure point. Some of our customers were scared for their business. The negative situation grew darker. Our customers became adversarial. But we dug down deep. I remember sitting in the room when we made the decision to respond. People were shouting, arguing, searching for what to do. Gerry stepped forward and made the decision. We acted immediately. Came up with a war plan. Launched a campaign. A team went to Escardo, California hunting down all the big tanks. Bob at our Ontario warehouse was a hero-helping make everything we needed to have happen in California. Millions of dollars were at stake. At home, FRP was heroic. They made 700 replacement tanks in a matter of months. It probably cost us 1/2 million dollars to do what we did. But we were taking the long-term view.*
2. *Teams: This is what the place is really all about. It's about people working with one another. Why have an organization if people don't need other people. We are what we are because of our teamwork, and not just individual parts. It's how the parts fit together. You see, you could try to make a car from all the best parts: engine of a Mercedes, body of a Vette, brakes from a Cadillac, etc. But you know what: the car won't work. It is how the*

parts mesh, how the parts act as a team. The same is true here. Teamwork is not an option. It's got to be a way of life.

3. *The most effective team effort was on an integrated product development team. It was about large tanks. We were working out the concept of flanges and various ports. Fifteen people were involved. The group was too large but worked OK. To make these teams really work we need: (1) only 6-8 people, (2) must recognize people's contributions, (3) recognize people in written minutes and (4) need democratic leaders who are dynamic and positive and give people the recognition.*
4. *I felt most involved when we re-did the whole back on the FRP line. We cut the water bath down, re-arranged equipment, figured out how to run it with 6 people instead of sixteen -- and we did it together, it was fantastic. We met once a week. Tim was a great listener. All our ideas were used. There wasn't anybody in the area not involved unless they chose not to be part. This is a model of how we could be all the time. We need more of this.*
5. *Great teamwork happened when the marketing group decided to introduce a new product. We were all kind of intoxicated !! It was a universal tank concept. We had all the pieces and parts. Costed no money. A team took the ideas from concept to production in less than 6 months. We had twelve people from every part of the company. We can draw three lessons (1) the goal was sold to the team -- everyone agreed 100%, (2) everyone wanted to make it a success, (3) we had lots of communication -- lots of meetings. At times, we met once a week for a couple of hours. We also had good leadership.*
6. *I've been here almost 20 years and I'm really clear my high point was the beginning of the teams and team training. But it was also a low for me -- the high point was being in the training session with the managers. Just being in the same room together broke down lots of negative stereotypes we had for each other. I wish this would continue. The company needs it. The low point though was not being accepted by co-workers anymore... lots of people were negative about the team idea saying it wouldn't work. As it turns out, maybe their predictions were right. But we shouldn't let the thing die. Sure there were mistakes and two steps forward and three back for a while. But the team idea is critical for our future. Nobody wants to go back to the authoritarian style where workers are to "leave their brains at the time clock"*

Commentary:

Fairmount North America is an organization that has dared to experiment with advanced organizational changes and management approaches. The most controversial -- and arguably the most productive -- has been the idea of teams. My reading is that the organization has been overly hard on itself as it relates to inevitable "learning pains". The idea of a more group-based, less hierarchical or paternalistic form of management **is** a major change -- and Fairmount is not alone in its love-hate affair with complex transformation like this. In my reading of the sentiment of the organization there is no going back to more authoritarian management relations ("where people check their brains at the time-clock"). The question is not whether or not to have team-based processes but how to persist and work through inevitable learning pains even when there are voices of cynicism. In this case **even** the cynicism should be valued. The cynical voice puts into words the doubts that we all have. We have no doubts only about things we do not care about. That's the point. People care. They see a promise in the team idea that they really want. The idealism in this area is

extremely high at Fairmount. In my more adventurous moments, I find myself wanting to suggest a giant step forward with the team idea, much like the examples given in an important new book Real Time Strategic Change. With re-commitment, the team idea can and will thrive at Fairmount and making it work will be a big key to the company's success in the future.

Teaching note: This Appreciative Inquiry report goes on; it has eight "ideal-type" themes with illustrative quotes and stories. It ends with a compilation of all the visions for the future. This kind of report is usefully used as background material for building provocative propositions. We have also distributed reports like this prior to people coming to a Future Search conference. Before an artist paints a picture he/she assemble their material: red colors, green, blue, yellow, etc. The Appreciative Inquiry report serves exactly the same purpose -- it is the material that will help the collective imagination come alive.

