Appreciative Inquiry: From Problems to Possibilities

Michelle Bradley

Manager for Engagement, Consulting, and Training

Midwest Collaborative for Library Services (MCLS)

Pair Up: One partner will interview the other for 3 minutes and then switch roles for another 5 minutes

- Tell me about the best times that you have had with your organization. Looking at your entire experience, recall a time when you felt most alive, most involved, or most excited about your involvement What made it an exciting experience? Who was involved? Describe the event in detail.

- If you had three wishes for your organization, what would they be?

What is Appreciative Inquiry (AI)?

- Appreciative Inquiry is the study and exploration of what gives life to human systems when they function at their best.
- A positive approach to personal change and organization change that is based on the assumption that questions and dialogues about strengths, successes, values, hopes, and dreams are themselves transformational.
- It's collaborative and highly participative.
- It's a journey—from the best of the past through a co-construction of the best and brightest future of that system.

(From *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry* by Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom)

Two Approaches to Initiating/Managing Change

Problem Solving Approach	Asks: What are the problems here?	Focuses on: Problems, deficiencies, what's wrong, what's broken, what isn't working. Seeks "fixes" to problems.
"Appreciative" Approach	Asks: What works well here? What is this organization like when it is at its best?"	Focuses on: Peak experiences, best practices, life giving/life enriching forces.

Origins and Study of Appreciative Inquiry

- David Cooperrider--Cleveland Clinic Project 1980's

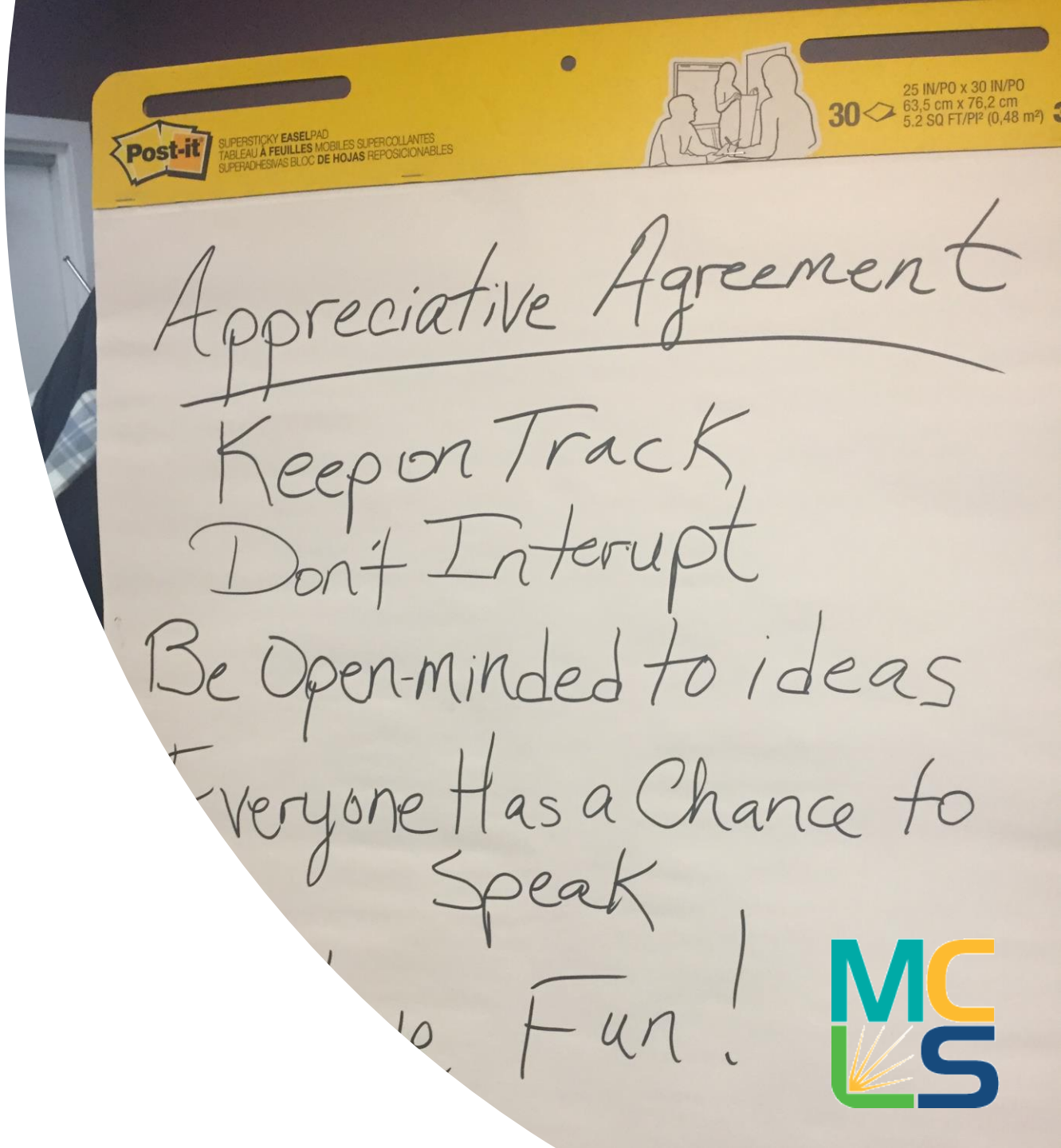
  "What's wrong with the human side of the organization?"

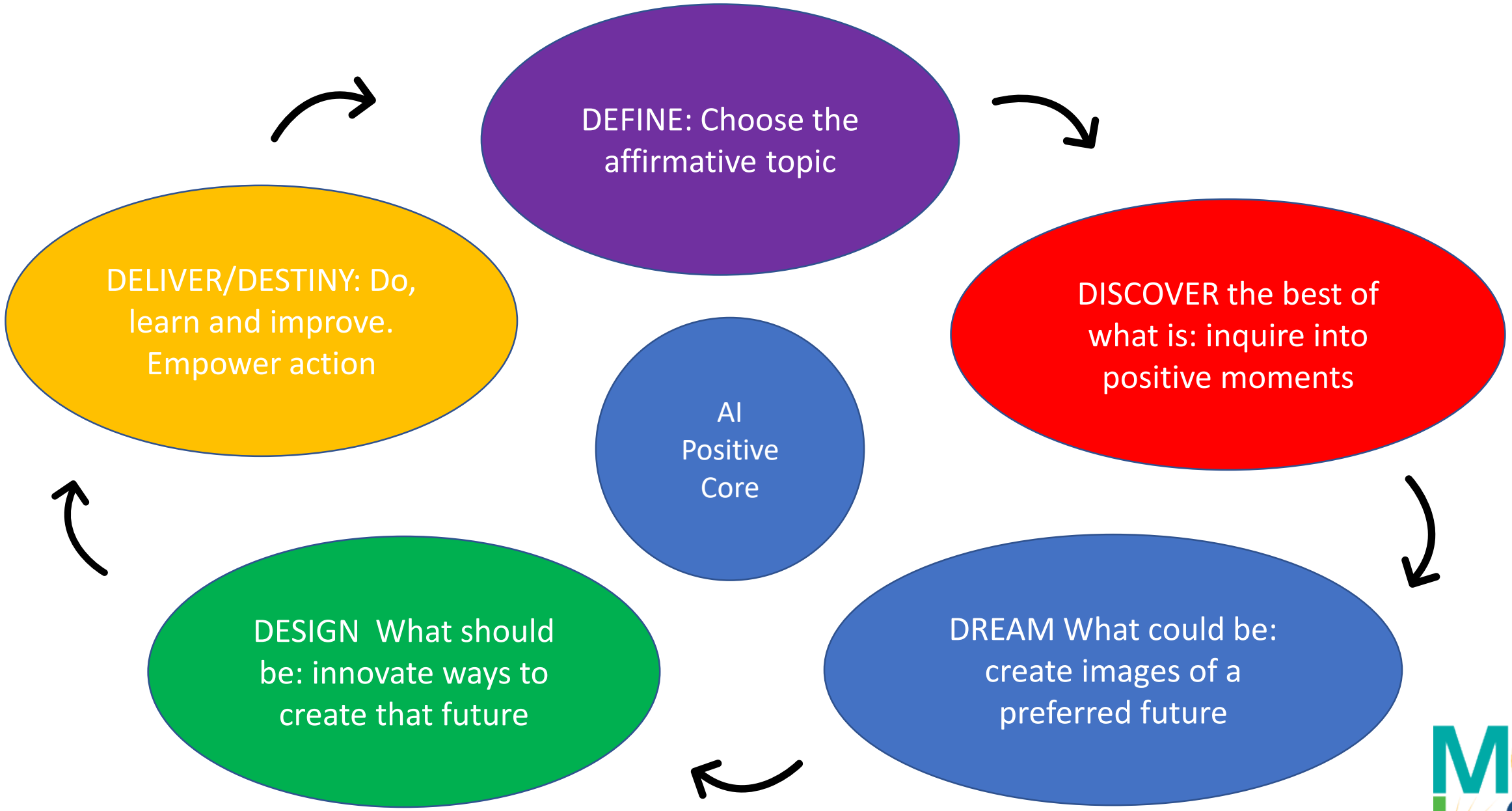
- Ph.D. dissertation in 1984
- AI is evidence based. It is supported by research from the fields of: positive image/positive action, positive psychology, and neuroscience.
- More than 100 scholarly articles, chapters and books.
- At least 3 universities formally teach it.
- Leading universities reference it.

Benefits of AI

Appreciative Inquiry unleashes power by:

- Building relationships
- Creating opportunities for people to be heard
- Generating opportunities for people to dream
- Allowing people to choose how they will contribute
- Giving people the support to act
- Encouraging and enabling people to be positive and affirmative

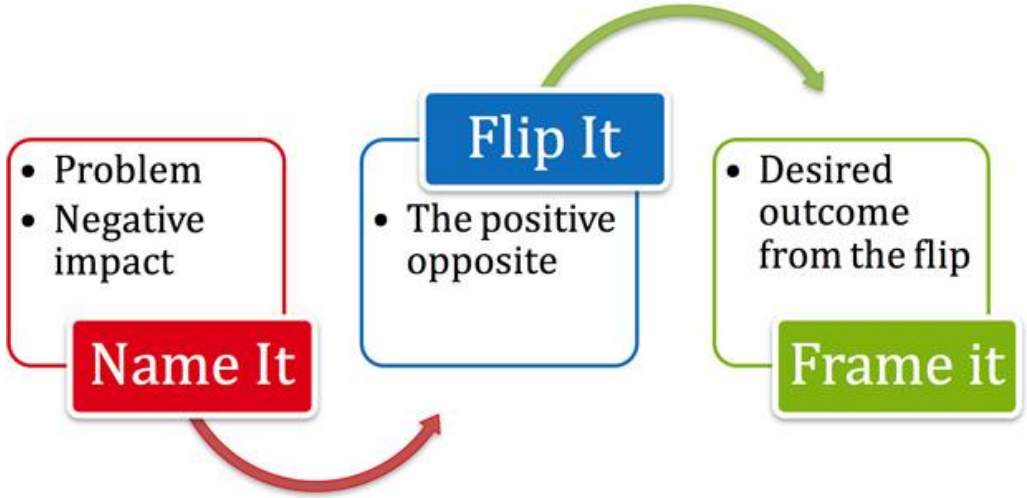



DEFINE: Choose the affirmative topic
DISCOVER the best of what is: inquire into positive moments
DREAM What could be: create images of a preferred future
DESIGN What should be: innovate ways to create that future
DELIVER/DESTINY: Do, learn and improve. Empower action
AI Positive Core

Define: Choose the positive as the focus of the inquiry

Good affirmative topics are:

- Positive: They are stated in the affirmative
- Desirable: The organization wants to grow, develop, and enhance them.
- They stimulate learning: The organization is genuinely curious about them and wants to become more knowledgeable and proficient in them.
- They stimulate conversations about desired futures. They take the organization where it wants to go.



Source: Conversations Worth Having by Jackie Stavros and Cheri Torres

Discover: Inquire into the stories of life-giving forces

- This is generally done using one-on-one interviews.
- People share stories of exceptional accomplishments, discuss the core life-giving factors of their organizations, and deliberate upon the aspects of their organization's history that they most value and want to bring to the future

Crafting AI Questions

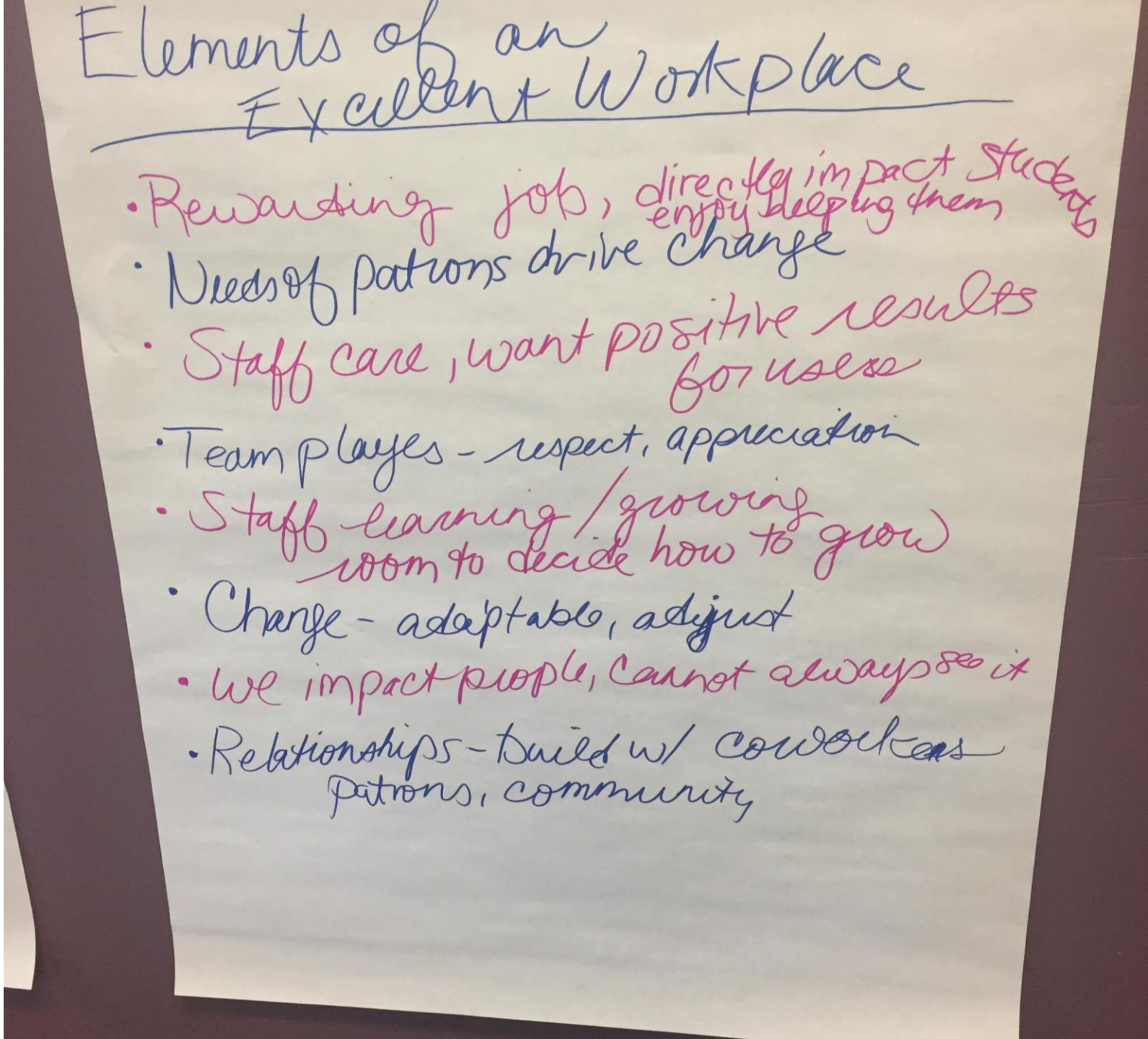
Crafting positive, generative questions is at the heart of Appreciative Inquiry.

Questions should elicit evidence that the best possible outcome that you identified in your topic choice already exists somewhere in the organization.

What might you ask to evoke stories/examples of your topic or outcome at its best?

Discover: Part 2 Share the Stories and Identify Life-Giving Forces

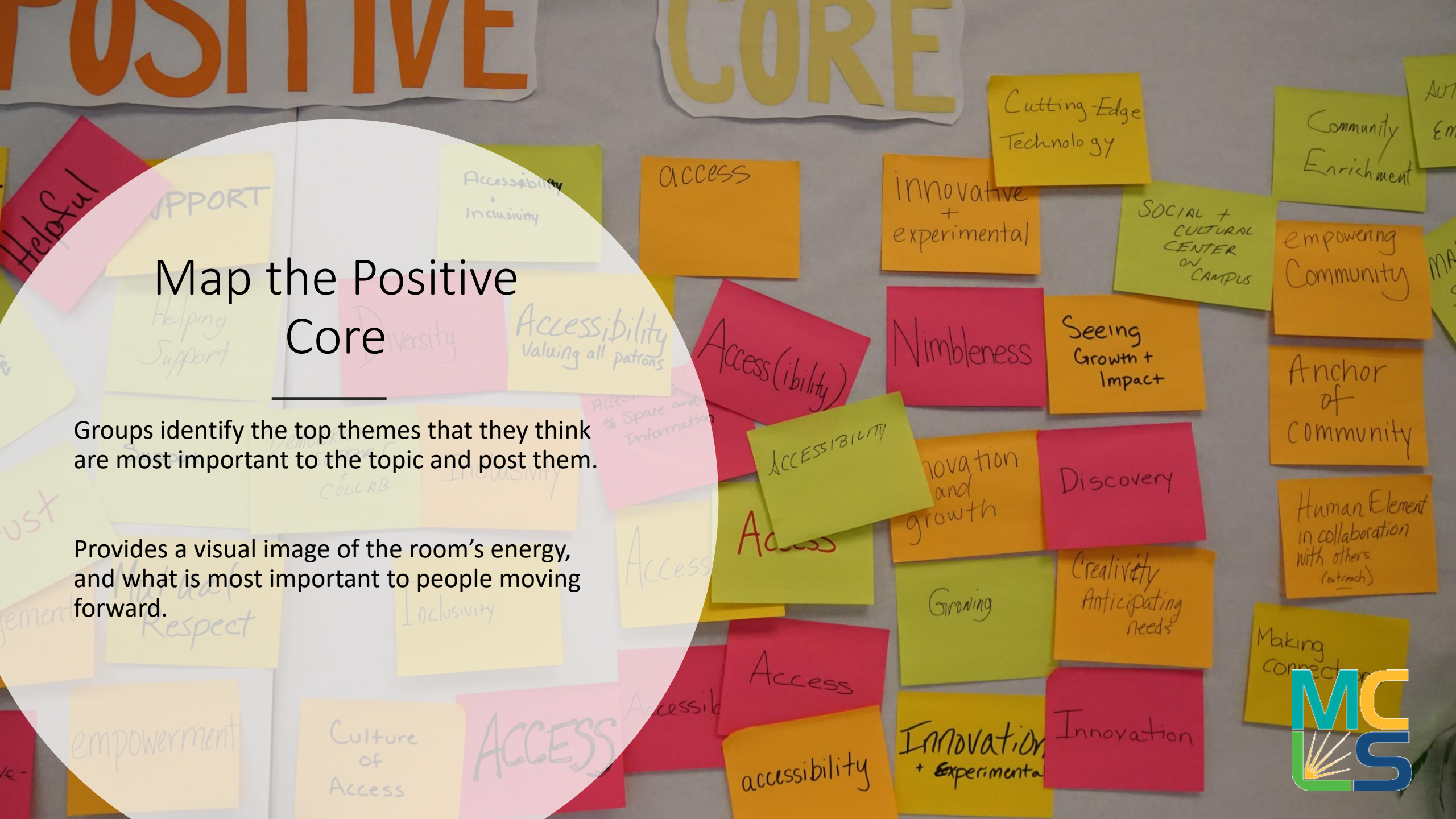
Small groups share the highlights of their partners stories and the groups sift and look for themes and key concepts that arise.



Map the Positive Core

Groups identify the top themes that they think are most important to the topic and post them.

Provides a visual image of the room's energy, and what is most important to people moving forward.



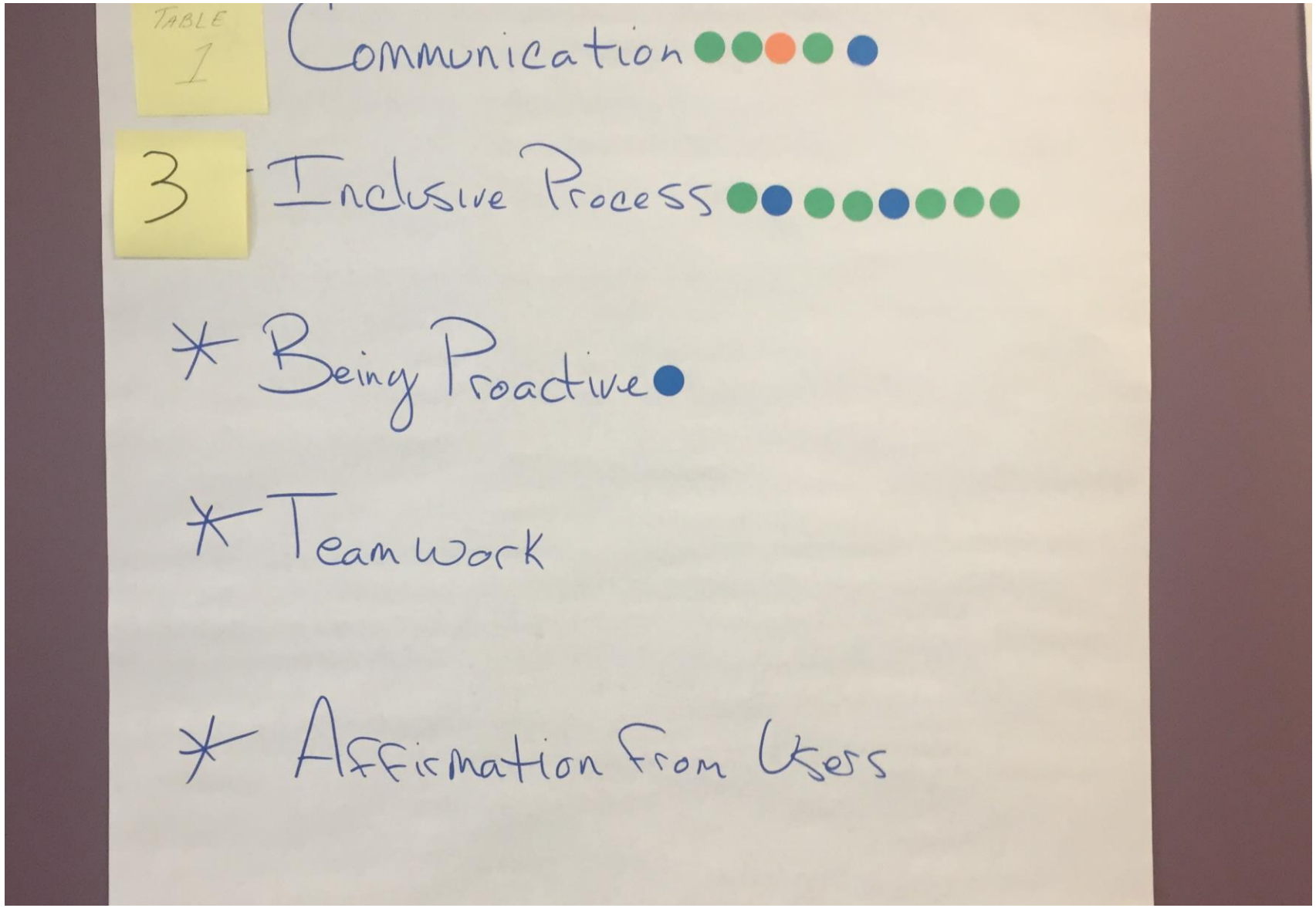
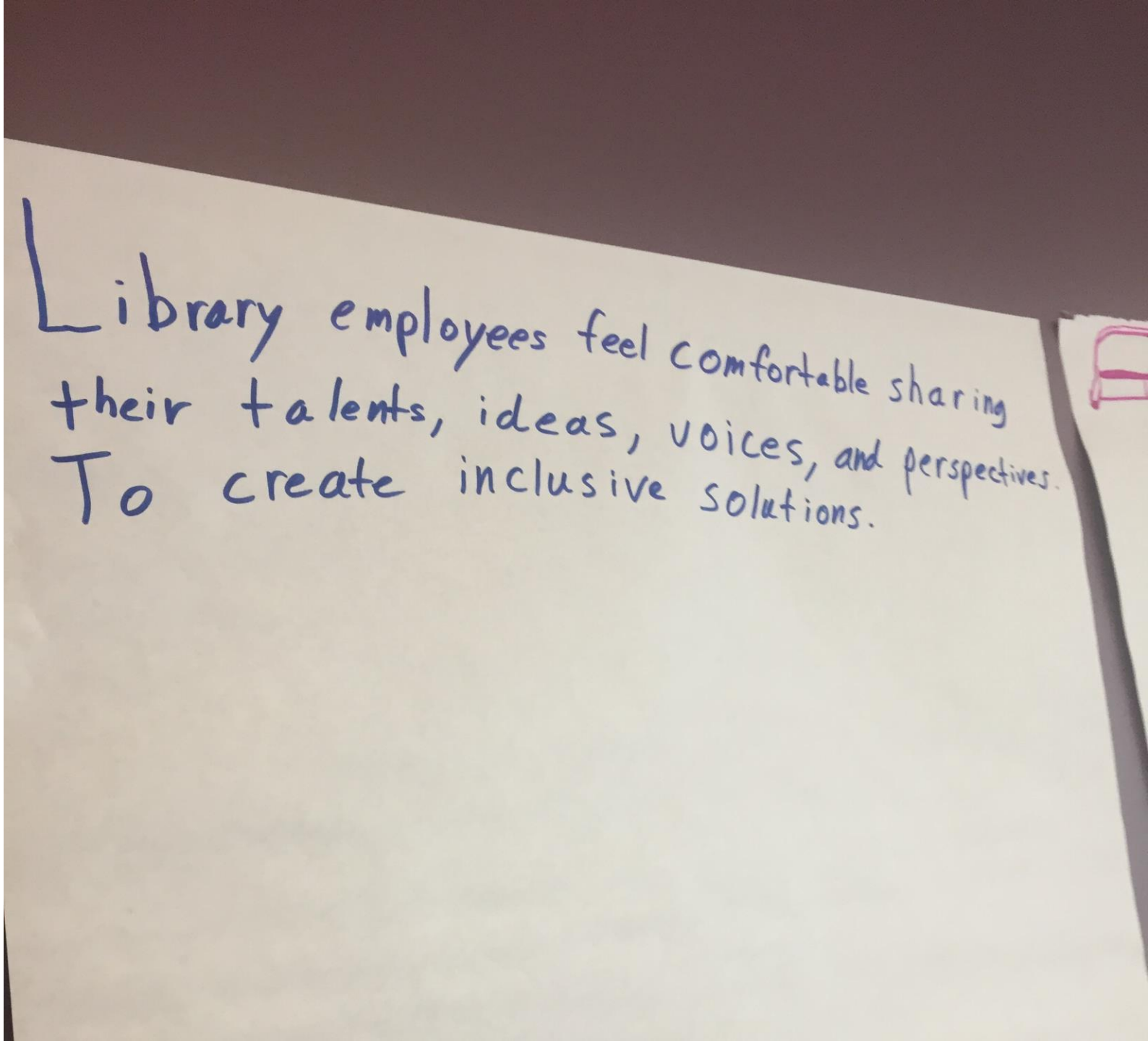


TABLE 1
Communication
3 - Inclusive Process
* Being Proactive
* Teamwork
* Affirmation From Users

Dream: Create shared images of a preferred future

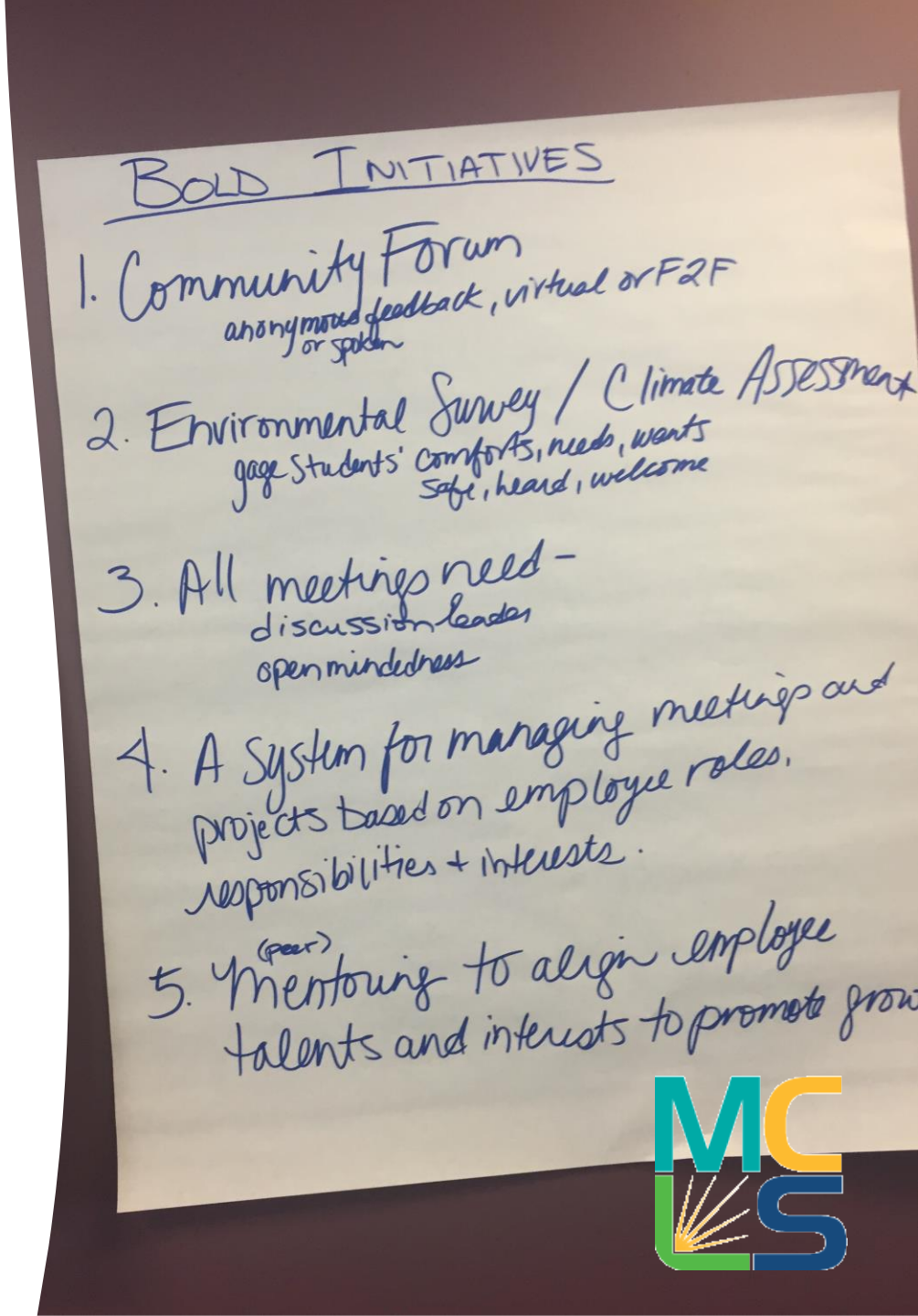
- Visual image: Envisioning the structure when all of the the themes are present fully and at their best
- Word image: The Provocative Proposition or Possibility Statement. The group's vision of the most desired future it created.
- https://youtu.be/sPxwWOzOtF4

Provocative Proposition or Possibility Statement



Design: Innovate and improvise ways to create the future

- Identify strategies/initiatives/practices to achieve the provocative proposition.
- Develop an action plan-steps, resources, assistance needed, timelines
- Individuals develop commitments, offers, requests.
- Focus first on high-impact/low effort initiatives (early wins.)



Destiny: living into our destiny

- Implement action plans
- Celebrate success that moves toward the provocative propositions
- Build an appreciative eye into existing processes and structures
- Build AI into the normal way of doing business.

Resources

- *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry* by Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom
- The *Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry* by Sue Annis Hammond
- *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Light* by Jane Magruder Watkins, Bernard Mohr, and Ralph Kelly
- The Center for Appreciative Inquiry. www.centerforappreciativeinquiry.net