APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AS AN IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITY FOR LINK GERENCIAL CONSULTORES

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Abstract

This article presents research on IPLACEX's Teacher Support Program (hereinafter PAD), which focuses on improving the distance learning experience from the perspective of professional teacher development. The objective is to evaluate teachers' perceptions of the PAD and its impact on skills development. A qualitative approach was used, including semi-structured interviews and content analysis. The results indicate that the PAD is effective in providing constructive feedback and practical tools, highlighting the importance of communication and interpersonal relationships. However, areas for improvement were identified, such as the need for more continuous support and more effective teaching strategies.

Keywords: Teacher support—teacher perceptions—skills—teaching preparation—communication—feedback.

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ARTICLE

This research began in 2017 as a thesis project for a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from the Metropolitan University. Its purpose was to implement an organizational intervention based on the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) methodology at Link Gerencial Consultores. To this end, the 5D Model proposed by David Cooperrider was used, based on five phases: Define, Discover, Dream, Design, and Destination (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005).

THE COMPANY LINK GERENCIAL CONSULTORES

Link Gerencial Consultores is a Venezuelan consulting and training company founded in 1998, with international experience, and headquartered in Caracas. It is made up of a team of multidisciplinary professionals who are constantly searching for innovative and tailor-made solutions to meet the needs and expectations of their clients, while enhancing their competitiveness (Link Gerencial, 2018).

> In order to become a consulting and training company recognized in Latin America for its innovative management solutions tailored to its users, Link is guided primarily by the following values: Flexibility, Innovation, Quality, Respect for Talent, and Service (Link Gerencial, 2018, p. 3).

For the company's General Management, the growth and training of its employees is essential so that they can offer a better service and ensure that the projects they provide to their clients are up-to-date, optimal, and enable them to face the conditions of the environment in a favorable way; That is why its managers decided to promote the development and improve the performance of its employees using Appreciative Inquiry as a tool that provides elements to meet the needs outlined above.

OBJECTIVES THAT GUIDED THE RESEARCH

General Objective:

> To implement the Appreciative Inquiry model among the employees of Link Gerencial Consultores (Venezuela headquarters) as a strategy for building a vision of the company's future based on their personal and group strengths (Alfonzo and Atencio, 2018; p. 10).

Specific Objectives:

1. To identify the successful narratives of Link Gerencial employees through appreciative dialogues.

2. Appreciate the individual and group strengths and positive aspects that make up the Positive Core of the company.

3. Compare participants' aspirations and desires regarding the future of the company.

4. Work with participants to develop a detailed action plan to achieve the company's desired future.

5. Detect, together with the participants, the progress made in accordance with the action plan (Alfonzo and Atencio, 2018; p. 10).

THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE INTERVENTION

On the one hand, the fundamentals of Positive Psychology were taken. This is a branch of psychology that seeks to understand, through scientific research, the processes underlying the positive qualities and emotions of human beings, which for a long time were ignored by general psychology (Vera, 2006).

Additionally, Seligman (2011) reinforced the innovative nature of Positive Psychology (PP) with strategies that allow for the development of positive emotions, strengths, and virtues in human beings; the promotion of interpersonal bonds; and the enhancement of commitment, purpose, and achievements of both individuals and the groups and systems with which they are connected. These elements make it possible, among other things, to strengthen institutions such as the family, the community, the school, and organizations.

Despite being a recent development, PP has had a major impact in the workplace, giving rise to **Positive Organizational Psychology** (Salanova, 2008), which has demonstrated that it is by focusing on positive elements (rather than those that cause problems) that greater influence can be achieved in line with the achievement of objectives.

Starting the intervention by empowering participants from the outset, valuing what each one has to contribute to the optimal functioning of the system in which they find themselves (rather than starting from what is lacking or what does not work), increases their capacity and motivation to improve situations that propel them towards the path of healthy organizations (Seligman, 2011; Vera, 2006, and Seligman, 1996).

On the other hand, the research focused on Appreciative Inquiry, which is a methodology based on a collaborative process that "seeks to connect people and organizations with their competencies, skills, talents, and their best achievements and practices" (Subirana and Cooperrider, 2013; p. 27).

In the 1980s, its creator, David Cooperrider (Subirana and Cooperrider, 2013), together with other researchers , dedicated themselves to implementing the AI model in the United States and Canada in order to evaluate its functioning and applicability in the organizational area. and it was not until around 2005 that it became more widespread in European countries, along with Latin American nations such as Uruguay, Costa Rica, Argentina, and Chile, among others, diversifying into areas such as personal, social, health, education, culture, government, etc.

At the national level, the application of AI as a methodology has had limited scope, or at least there is little documentation on the subject. However, since 2013, the Metropolitan University, led by Professor Carmen Rosa Arzola, has been promoting the implementation of AI as an intervention tool through the application of feasible projects in various institutions: non-governmental organizations and private and public companies.

This intervention approach began as the 4D model, named for its four phases: Discover, Dream, Design, and Destination (Subirana and Cooperrider, 2013). Cooperrider later added a preliminary phase, which would be the first (Define), to turn it into the 5D model (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005).

Below is a brief description of each of the five stages that make up the AI learning cycle:

1. DEFINE phase (called the Preliminary Phase in some research): this is the first step of the intervention, in which the commitment of the main actors, its scope, and the logistics necessary to achieve the objectives of the intervention are determined.

2. DISCOVER phase: allows you to determine and recognize the strengths and tools available to the group. To do this, you investigate the company's best practices, the

positive elements that the team has, and who is most skilled at each of the tasks to be performed. The technique used to discover the best of the organization is the Appreciative Interview. Based on its results, a group content analysis is carried out, which allows us to identify the topic or topics that will be addressed during the intervention. This stage culminates with the construction of the group's Positive Core (PC), around which the rest of the phases of the intervention will revolve.

> The positive core is identified in the Define and Discover phases, mobilizing a dialogue throughout the organizational system. It is expanded throughout the Dreams phase, in which we generate a clear, results-oriented vision in relation to the potential discovered. In the Design and Destiny phases, the future is built based on the strengths of the organization's positive core (Subirana and Cooperrider, 2013; p. 220).

3. DREAM phase: articulates desires, hopes, and aspirations for the future . The objective of this stage is to formulate inspiring propositions that lead participants to remember the best that the organization has to offer and to imagine what it can become in the future. The Dream to be built is shared by all members, based on the review of their NP.

4. DESIGN phase: here, decisions must be made regarding the procedure for achieving the Dream. It is essential to determine the most important elements required to achieve it and how people can ensure they enjoy and learn throughout the experience. At this point, visionary or provocative proposals (which must be innovative and realistic) are generated, allowing for the design of a vision of the organization as an excellent place to work. It is a kind of Action Plan in which participants decide which proposals will be implemented and how; it is characterized by expanding the *status quo,* challenging common beliefs and established routines, and suggesting desired possibilities for the company and its employees.

5. DESTINATION Phase: this involves implementing the actions designed to achieve the Shared Dream. Here, emphasizes the execution of actions and their maintenance through continuous follow-up activities.

Importance of Appreciative Intervention

Currently, AI as an intervention is essential, as various studies have shown that the use of best practices and the promotion of positive attitudes in building healthy organizations is more effective than mere problem solving. The pursuit of quality over negative elements allows for growth and empowers both the members of the organization and its processes and policies,

multiplying improvements and motivating employees to grow alongside the company (Glenn, Saretsky, & Stetson, 2014).

Additionally, AI promotes workplace well-being, which fosters a better work environment where all team members are committed to achieving goals, as they themselves have been part of defining those goals and the entire process involved in achieving them. By actively participating, they have a greater commitment to themselves and to the organization.

Finally, the use of this intervention strategy results in the generation of shared positive visions, fostering a culture of appreciation and constant learning, which in turn contributes favorably to the organizational climate, stimulates creativity and personal commitment among workers, and integrates participants by directing their work toward the organization's mission and vision (Fundación Factor Humá 2011).

METHODOLOGY USED

The research is qualitative in nature and was carried out as a Feasible Project. The latter seeks to respond to proposals made by a group of people, an organization, or social groups , in order to address situations that are part of their priorities (Dubs de Moya, 2002; Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador. 2006).

The 5D model proposed by Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) was applied, which comprises the five phases described above: Define, Discover, Dream, Design, and Destination. The number of participants was 18 company employees who were working in Caracas at the time.

Because the collaboration of each of the members was essential for the proper development of this research, the work sessions were planned and carried out during their working hours, thus facilitating attendance, which in turn enhanced the participation of each member of the organization in the activities.

Techniques for data collection and information analysis

In order to achieve the objectives set and collect the information required to carry out the activities tailored to the client's needs, the following resources and techniques were used:

- Diagnostic interview with the General Manager to determine the client's needs.

- Appreciative Dialogues. This refers to the narratives developed within the team, which allowed for the systematic evaluation of the positive elements of the members and

the organization, in order to establish a collective reality through the exchange and construction of common meanings (Subirana and Cooperrider, 2013).

- Direct observation, note-taking, photographic and audio recordings, minutes, and field journals facilitated the documentation of important elements that would later form part of the analysis of results.

- Appreciative Interview Script applied through Focus Groups, understanding the latter from an appreciative perspective.

- Instructional Design and Group Dynamics. Work sessions were planned through experiential exercises that encouraged interaction and strengthened the bonds between participants in favor of personal and group growth in the organization (Shaw, 1979).

- *Feedback* instruments. These consisted of a simple written evaluation provided to participants at the end of each phase. These instruments allowed us to gather diverse opinions regarding the activities carried out and to evaluate whether the objectives set were being met in accordance with the plan stipulated at the beginning of the intervention, and/or whether it was necessary to readjust any element of it.

Group content analysis of appreciative interviews

In the Discover phase of the AI, the Positive Core of the organization is constructed, which is based on the information gathered through Appreciative Interviews which, as mentioned above, were conducted using Appreciative Focus Groups; The results were processed using Group Content Analysis of the appreciative interviews (Varona, 2009), which allowed us to examine the data and evaluate each participant's assessments of the intervention. In order to carry out this technique effectively, a series of steps proposed by Federico Varona were followed exhaustively. We suggest that those interested consult the text Varona, F. (2009): Appreciative Intervention: A new, provocative, and effective way to build organizations in the 21st century.

RESULTS THAT CAN BE HIGHLIGHTED FROM THE RESEARCH

Beyond the fulfillment of the objectives that framed this intervention, we highlight the following elements achieved in each stage of the AI:

- ❖ DEFINE phase: The visible commitment on the part of management and workers made it possible for the intervention to be carried out in an organized manner and

within the established time frame. The topics to be addressed, chosen by consensus, were: communication, empathy, and tolerance among members.

❖ **DISCOVER phase:** The statements from the Positive Core (PC) in the Discover phase were grouped as follows:

✓ **Family and Closeness:** We are close and support each other. We feel like a family.

✓ **Commitment and challenge:** Our work always gets done. We take on challenges with commitment.

✓ **Teamwork and support:** All areas depend on each other. We always have excellent people, both personally and professionally.

✓ **Professionalism, talent, growth, research, learning, and training:** We create spaces for mutual learning. In this company, we can grow professionally, achieving new goals and facing challenges with the best tools.

✓ **Tolerance and flexibility:** Management is flexible and tolerant. We are a friendly and outgoing team.

✓ **Human quality, harmony, and achievements:** Link Gerencial Consultores is a company with high expectations for 2018 (Alfonzo and Atencio, 2018; p. 83).

❖ **DREAM phase:** The shared dream was written as follows:

We dream of improving communication so that we are all aligned with the objectives, allowing for good planning and recognizing everyone's successes, in order to position as the number one company in the region (Alfonzo and Atencio, 2018; p. 87).

❖ **DESIGN phase:** Regarding the action plan, participants focused on three fundamental pillars that served as a guide for developing the details of innovative proposals to be implemented in the short, medium, and long term. These pillars were as follows:

1. Improve communication to align objectives, challenges, and goals. If we are all aware of what we want to achieve, nothing is impossible.

2. Work on positioning Link Gerencial as an international benchmark. Grow together and celebrate it.

3. Formalize processes, work with more order and planning (Alfonzo and Atencio, 2018; p. 91).

❖ **DESTINATION phase:** After implementing the actions designed in the Design phase, the researchers made four follow-up visits and were able to evaluate the team's progress with respect to the proposals. According to the workers' reports, some teams had begun their assigned tasks while others were in the preparation phase. They commented that the situation in the country.

CONCLUSIONS

In general terms, the intervention using AI methodology yielded benefits in terms of how people interacted and functioned administratively, which enhanced the well-being of Link Gerencial Consultores on three levels: personally, as a group, and as an organizational system.

As indicated by Varona (2009), they were able to develop Appreciative Intelligence, which allowed them to perceive the positive potential of each individual and recognize their strengths and attributes both personally and as a group, in order to subsequently build together the Posit le Core of the organization , which can serve as a support for facing contingencies in an adaptive manner, with flexibility in the face of change and with collective awareness.

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