Creating a Strength-Based Appreciative Learning Organization

Lothar Liehmann
Craigwood Youth Services
I am always learning and working at the margin of my ignorance.

Harvey Golub, Chair of Campbell Soup
Former CEO of American Express

Leaders are more powerful role models when they learn than when they teach.

Rosabeth Moss Kantor
Whatever you can do or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius and magic in it.

Goethe
Primary Contributors of Present Direction

- Trends Analysis
- Analysis of Internal Functioning
- Strength-Based Appreciative Learning Organization
- "Now, Discover Your Strengths"
- Therapeutic & Management Literature
Trends – Major Areas

Demographics

Shifting Human Relations

Community Spending Priorities

Decrease in Trust & Respect for Authority

Increasing Sense of Entitlement

Increasing Importance of Technology
At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?

Gallup – 198,000 employees; 7939 business units; 36 companies

When employees answered “strongly agree” to this question, they were:

- 50% more likely to work in business units with lower employee turnover,
- 38% more likely to work in more productive units
- 44% more likely to work in units with higher customer satisfaction scores
Therapeutic Literature

- Gap between talk & walk – delivering strength-based therapies in deficit based cultures
- Solution Focused Therapy
- Counselling Psychology

Management Literature

- Positive Organizational Scholarship; Growth & Fixed Mindsets; Neuroscience; Appreciative Inquiry
Analysis of Internal Functioning

- Deficit-based organization with limited focus on competencies
- Various activities related to knowledge
- Stressed workforce
- Measurement serves no developmental function & is not part of organizational psyche
- Lack of synergy; sub-optimal utilization of organizational resources
- Limited buy-in to need for personal & organizational change & growth
What is a strength-based appreciative learning organization?

- An entity that systematically leverages individual & organizational strengths in the pursuit of sustainable high performance.
- Reflected in outcomes & continuous improvement
- Affirmative, nurturing, & sustaining of life both within & with stakeholders
- Promotes a vision of the workplace that is ‘fueled’ by generative conversation, evolving vision, emergent, more democratic structures, & cultures rich in meaning & relationship

Al Practitioner, Nov.2008
Organization Design Questions

- How does one design an organization that provides a model of stability for our clients while at the same time positioning itself for the future and being responsive to the changing needs of the present? What parts of the structure & processes need to reflect stability while the remainder is designed for change?
- How do we perform well in the present while positioning ourselves for the future?
- How do you affect a major transformation when people are overworked & there are inadequate resources to deal with existing pressures?
- How can you create an organization that employs the strengths of every person as efficiently as possible?
The BIG Question

How does one deliver strength-based treatment plans in a deficit-based organization?
What is a Deficit-Based Culture?
What are the central features of an organization if its practices are focused on strengths, learning, and appreciative inquiry?
The complacent company is a dead company. Success today requires the agility and drive to constantly rethink, reinvigorate, react, and reinvent.

Bill Gates

In times of rapid change, the learners will inherit the future.

Eric Hoffer
The Ordeal of Change
Appreciative Inquiry (See)

Mental Maps
Peter Gould and Rodney White

Appreciative Inquiry (Do)

CRAIGWOOD YOUTH SERVICES

Appreciative (Be)

Strengthen

Learning

A Strength-based Appreciative Learning Organization
Appreciative Inquiry – What is it?

**Appreciate** – 1. Valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes & potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems. 2. To increase in value
Synonyms: value, prize, esteem, honour

**Inquire** - 1. The act of exploration & discovery.
   2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials & possibilities
Synonyms: discover, search, systematically explore & study

AI: A Positive Revolution
David L. Cooperrider & Diana Whitney
The continuous creation and sharing of meaning is the most crucial ingredient in an organization’s capacity to function in a rapidly changing environment.

The Appreciative Organization
Harlene Anderson & al.
Most organizations are built on two flawed assumptions about people:

1. Each person can learn to be competent in almost anything.
2. Each person’s greatest room for growth is in his or her areas of greatest weakness.

Buckingham & Gallup found:

1. Each person’s talents are enduring & unique.
2. Each person’s greatest room for growth is in the areas of his or her greatest strength.
What is a Strength?

Consistent high performance in a particular activity

- Consistency/predictability
- You must derive some intrinsic satisfaction from the activity

The ability is a strength only if you can fathom yourself doing it repeatedly, happily, and successfully.

Leading change is about aligning people’s strengths so that their weaknesses become irrelevant.

Peter Drucker
Casting a critical eye on our weaknesses and working hard to manage them, while sometimes necessary, will only help us prevent failure. It will not help us reach excellence.

Marcus Buckingham

[Criticism has] the power to do good when there is something that must be destroyed, dissolved, or reduced, but [it is] capable only of harm when there is something to be built.

Carl Jung
Learning Organizations

...where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.

Peter Senge, The Fifth Discipline
What Kind of Learning Do We Want to Pursue?

Triple – loop feedback

Double – loop feedback

Single – loop feedback

Attention/Intention/Vision

Strategy/Structure/Goals

Behaviour/Operations

Outcomes in External World

Bill Torbert – Action Inquiry; 2004
Action research may be defined as an emergent inquiry process in which applied behavioural science knowledge is integrated with existing organizational knowledge and applied to solve real organizational problems. It is simultaneously concerned with bringing about change in organizations, in developing self-help competencies in organizational members and adding to scientific knowledge. Finally, it is an evolving process that is undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and co-inquiry.

Shani & Pasmore, 1985: 439
Phases

- Planning
- Orientation
- Training & Development
- Mgmt Retreats
- Beginning Experimentation – Beginning Success
- Further development: HR & Idsh (included team leaders)
- Program Days
- Mgmt Review
Particular Challenges

- Compliance directives
- Cost of engagement
- Best Practices & learning environments
- Follower to leader shift
- Seeing our theory in use vs espoused theory
- Existing focus on the urgent (daily practice) with no time for need to develop
What’s Next?

Performance Amplification
- Tracking & fanning
- Importance of measurement: BSC

Broader Engagement
- All employees & board

Model Development
- Trustworthiness & the deficit culture
Trustworthiness & The Deficit Culture

Primary issues for us today
- Outcomes
- Compliance

Trustworthiness: competence & character

Outcomes $\Leftrightarrow$ Competence
Compliance $\Leftrightarrow$ Character, Competence
Levels of Principle-Centred Leadership with Key Principles

Stephen Covey
Principle-Centred Leadership (modified)
Desired Transformation Outcomes

- Culture change that brings life
- Optimization of human resources
  - Shared leadership
- Employee internalization of continuous growth
- Reimaging internally & externally to one of provider of solutions
- Leadership talent for future
- Performance oriented culture
- Generation of new knowledge & practices
- IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH