Chapter 35
Health and Wellbeing as Appreciative Inquiry in a Private University in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

Appreciative inquiry (AI) has been used to promote positive change in different areas of organizational life. It is based on the 4D cycle which includes four distinct stages: discover, dream, design, and destiny. Organizational wellbeing is both a strategy and a responsibility, especially in recent times, when the line between work and life seems to be blurring, and there has been an increased concern about the role that work plays in the health and wellbeing of employees. AI is substantially different from other institutional analysis methodologies because it is not focused on solving problems, but on the positive aspects of organizational life and culture. This chapter presents the case of a private university in Puebla, Mexico, which has been promoting holistic programs to improve employees' wellbeing and happiness, reducing stress and other potential health problems through appreciative inquiry on what members dream, long for, and aspire in terms of better overall health. It is a descriptive study that presents a specific case.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional approach to organizational development programs has focused on creating remedies to a variety of problems in an attempt to generate positive change (Cumming & Worle, 2015). By contrast, Appreciative Inquiry is an organizational change method (Cooperrider, & Avital, 2004) that focuses on the positive aspects of an organization rather than on its problems, identifying and valuing what is good, and investigating about it (Reed 2006; Cooperrider & Srivasta, 2017). Appreciative Inquiries are conducted through the analysis of four phases known as the 4 Ds: Discover. Dream, Design, and, Destiny (Cram, 2010).

Organizations are currently facing complex and ever-changing environments (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 2017) in which uncertainty, job insecurity and instability prevail. Globalization, competitiveness, continuous technological advances, increased automatization, and digitalization have led to increased demands resulting in overwhelmed employees living in increasingly stressful settings (Kleber & van Der Velden, 2009). Rewards and development programs have been modified to promote employee happiness and wellbeing (Grant, Christianson & Price, 2007), thus improving all aspects of their lives.

More than ever organizations are becoming centers of vital connections. While life-giving health programs were originally designed to reduce insurance costs (Lockwood, 2003), they have become an important element in business missions and visions to improve employee productivity (Kirsten, 2010) and retention (Sears, Shi, Coberley & Pope, 2013). Healthy organizations develop good practices (Corbett, 2004), and a culture and climate that can promote employee health and safety through actions directed to the individual, the group, the organization, and inter-organizational processes (Di Fabio, 2017), resulting in a positive revolution on organizational development and change management (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001).

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) has suggested that among the risks of mental health, the following can be positioned in the lead: Inadequate security and health promotion policies, inefficient management and communication practices, lack of decision-making authority, lack of control over their working area, low level of employee support, rigid working hours, and lack of clarity about areas and organizational goals. It is precisely in this context that healthy organizations have emerged (Di Fabio, 2017).

Wellbeing programs that focus on strengthening practices have resulted positive in maintaining a healthy environment (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018). The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO, 2017) has explained that Mexico designed a strategy to promote healthy work settings that are free of violence, that address psychosocial factors, and that promote emotional well-being to generate healthy work habits, and that the strategy is being promoted through active social dialogue, consensus mechanisms, and research and training.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that when experimenting stress continuously, people become less creative and less productive; bad decision are made, and engagement with the organization is eventually lost (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). When this happens, businesses risk their competitiveness (Peterson & Wilson, 2002).

A Higher Education Institution (HEI) was selected for the analysis, since there are very few studies that have been performed in the area of education (Van Straaten, du Plessis & van Tonder, 2016), particularly in relation to the wellbeing of employees (faculty and administrative); and, with no studies of the kind found in Mexico, an interesting area of research has been identified.

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