An Appreciative Inquiry into an Urban Drug Court: Cultural Transformation

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The purpose of this study was to use an appreciative inquiry (AI) theoretical research perspective and change methodology to transform the working relationships and cultural expectations of members through the discovery of their positive core leading to an optimistic and confidence-based future for an urban drug court. This study describes how participants through their participation in the first two stages of an AI 4-D cycle (Discovery and Dream) transformed their working relationships and organizational culture. Participants included an urban drug court magistrate, manager, and purposively selected staff [15 participants]. The urban drug court is designed as a last chance opportunity for substance abusers. As a result of participation in the appreciative inquiry process, participants (a) discovered a resiliency and willingness to overcome challenges, (b) reaffirmed a sense of purpose in their work and (c), discovered a positive core of successful experience. Our study demonstrates the creative possibilities when applying AI to groups mired in deficit thinking. In doing so, we advanced the research in AI, positive organizational psychology, and learned optimism. Keywords: Appreciative Inquiry, Cultural Transformation, Urban Drug Court, AI 4-D Cycle

Public organizations are influenced by forces beyond their control such as the economy, bureaucratic rules and regulations, as well as policy and legislative making bodies (Boyne & Walker, 2005). These forces, overtime, create an organizational culture that teaches members how to relate to each other, to their work, and to stakeholders. As Simon (1991) states, "What an individual learns in an organization is very much dependent on what is already known to (or believed by) other members of the organization and what kinds of information are present in the organizational environment" (p. 125).

Members of organizations tend to respond to known and unknown forces and the stimuli present within them in similar ways (Weick, 1991). The members develop routines that they assimilate into the organizational culture. Members vested in the organizational culture teach these routines to new members operating on the premise that this is how the organization works (Feldman, 2001). Unless members recognize the forces and stimuli and how they typically respond, they continue to respond in familiar ways; any learning reinforces existing patterns of behavior limiting new learning.

Symptoms deterring organizational learning are fragmentation, competition, and over reaction (Palmiero, 2011). In a sense, the culture of the organization with these symptoms is termed by some researchers as dysfunctional. They view the dysfunctional organization as maintaining a stifling bureaucracy, operating with a silo mentality, holding a fixed worldview, and enforcing conformity (Argyris, 2003; Hunter, 1999; Miller, 2011; Schein, 1994). Public organizations, especially those within large bureaucracies, commonly experience many of these symptoms as part of their common practices.

Our study describes the effects of using an appreciative inquiry (AI) theoretical research perspective and change methodology to address the needs of a public organization described by the organization's manager as a dysfunctional organization (Calabrese, Sheppard, Hummel, Laramore, & Nance, 2006; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987b; Cooperrider,
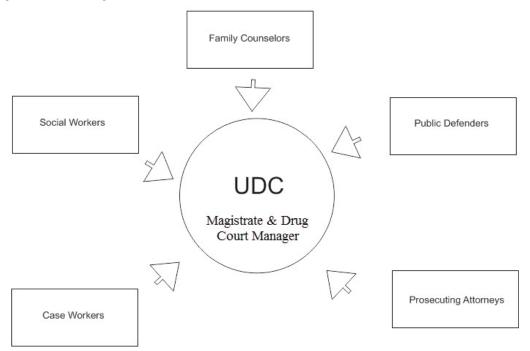
Whitney, & Stavros, 2003; Truschel, 2007). The implications for using AI with public organizations struggling with low expectations and an even lower set of member expectations for success may be important for many public organizations such as public schools, social service agencies, and other government sponsored organizational entities in an era of dwindling resources. We report the effects of using the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle (Havens, Wood, & Leeman, 2006; Mohr & Ludema, 2003) to transform the working relationships and cultural expectations of members through the discovery of their positive core leading to an optimistic and confidence-based future for this organization.

Our research focused on an urban drug court (UDC) described by the new drug court's manager as having a high-stress environment with a negative and pessimistic culture. She desired to change the culture to one that was positive where members were confident of future success. Consequently, a partnership between the university and UDC was formed. Our goal was to use an AI process to facilitate a change in UDC's prevailing culture.

The UDC is the drug court for a major United States urban population. The UDC is an amalgamation of representatives from multiple groups who seek to collaborate in helping repeat drug offenders function as responsible members of society. They educate and facilitate services that provide assistance, counseling, and incentives to reduce and/or eliminate substance abuse.

The UDC staff members answer to multiple supervisors. They report to the UDC magistrate drug court manager and simultaneously report to the supervisor of the cooperating agency (See Figure 1). Several roles exist under the UDC's umbrella: court magistrate, drug court manager, prosecuting attorneys, public defender attorneys, social workers, caseworkers, and family counselors.

Figure 1. UDC Organizational Structure

The UDC is considered by the county court system as the *last chance* judicial option for substance abusers. It operates, as do most drug courts, by focusing on several parallel, yet divergent tracks. UDC offers substance abusers counseling and support in highly structured settings. Conversely, it openly threatens substance abusers with the "death penalty" (language

of the drug court's staff). The "death penalty" removes children from the home and the substance abuser loses custody of the children. The severity of the penalties associated with last chance efforts exacerbates the tension between the UDC staff and the client, contributing to the high-stress environment.

Prior to beginning our study, three preliminary meetings with UDC's manager were held to discuss a potential partnership. The university/UDC partnership included two broad objectives: (a) to transform UDC staff's cultural through the discovery of the UDC's positive core and (b) to provide a deeper sense for an optimistic and confidence-based future for the UDC. These objectives aligned with UDC's primary purpose: decrease the effect of drugs/alcohol abuse on criminal activity in their service area and reunify children with their parents in a safe, sober, and stable environment.

The Physical Environment of the UDC

The UDC's location presented complex issues. The UDC is located in the juvenile court next to the juvenile detention facilities. We traveled to the UDC to conduct our AI work. We parked in a highly secure parking facility next to the juvenile detention center and across the street from adult criminal court.

We walked from the parking facility to the court area. The court area was equipped with an advanced electronic scanning system. We placed our computer cases, coats, and other materials on the security table; they were searched and sent through electronic scanning devices. We were also subjected to an individual body scans. The research assistant was examined closer because his belt buckle registered on the individual body scanner. After the scanning process was complete, we proceeded to juvenile court.

The UDC is located on the first floor of the juvenile court facility within view of the security station. As we entered UDC, our view was directed toward a raised platform for an additional security guard. Above the platform and hanging on the wall was a half-gallon container of Purell hand sanitizer. The courtroom was dark. Adding to the darkness was the institutional green, worn, dirty carpet.

The furnishings in UDC included a bench for the magistrate, a witness box, tables for the prosecuting and defense attorneys, and approximately 30 movable chairs. The courtroom looked out to a side street and other government buildings surrounding the juvenile court building. In this bleak setting the UDC staff— court magistrate, court manager, prosecuting attorneys, public defender attorneys, social workers, case workers, and family counselors came together to provide a last hope for substance abusers, protection for the children of substance abusers, and a space for collaborative efforts to evaluate and determine best practices.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a social constructionist epistemology. Social constructionism as an epistemology serves as a foundation for AI. As social constructionists, we operated on the premise that human beings construct reality through interactions with each other as they make sense of the context where they live and work (Crotty, 2003). Social constructionism is an empowering epistemology since it embraces self-determinism in a collective and collaborative environment (Gergen, 1985; Whitney, 1998). AI's application of guided, semi-structured conversations, through established protocols provides a context where participants eagerly participate in the construction of new realities (Rickets & Willis, 2004).

Appreciative inquiry is a form of action research and is commonly used by AI researchers as both a theoretical research perspective and change methodology. At its core, AI

is a reaction to action research's dominant problem-based focus. It balances the dominant problem-based focus associated with prevailing action research by facilitating the cooperative and collaborative discovery of an organization's positive core (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Once discovered, the positive core serves to generate an imagined and compelling future vision, and implementation of this vision in the present moment (Whitney & Schau, 1998; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

Inherent in an AI framework is the assumption that the direction of inquiry is determined by the first question and that change begins the moment the first question is asked. Consequently, the initial questions guiding an AI study take on primary importance (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2003). The first and subsequent questions are unconditionally positive. Unconditional positive questions lead to conversations that discover the organization's positive core and generate a vision of what is possible (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987a). Moreover, AI eliminates the need for zero-sum thinking and focusing on fixes; replacing it with identification of the Gestalt of individual and collective strengths, commonly referred to as the positive core, and their application to creating a narrative of success. The discovery of a positive core creates a success narrative. A success narrative is central to AI since participants share their highpoint stories to express their ideas, passions, and identify strengths (Cobb, 2010).

Appreciative inquiry protocols are effective and compelling when people share their highpoint experiences. Sharing leads to the discovery of the organization's positive core (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The organization's positive core embraces all that gives life to the organization in those moments when it is functioning at its best. It includes individual and collective strengths, symbols, artifacts, practices, and events that contributed to success.

Appreciative inquiry focuses on the positive core of an organization and its members following a long theoretical and research tradition related to optimism, positive psychology, and humanistic psychology. In doing so, AI increases organizational potential generating a collective recognition of strengths and an inherent capacity to succeed. The discovery of what already exists creates the collective opportunity for new conversations leading creative ways to advance the organization (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987a).

Appreciative inquiry has been applied as a theoretical research perspective and change methodology in public and private settings. Its initial applications are used in the private sector as a change and visioning process with cooperate giants GTE, British Airways, McDonalds, Wendy's, and Roadway Express. AI's application has grown since its genesis and applied to whole-group settings.

The Imagine Chicago AI project, for example, illustrates how neighborhoods might become more vibrant (Browne, 2004). The U.S. Navy, BBC, World Vision, and Nepal applied the AI methodology to foster large-scale collaborative action (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). AI is also growing as a research theoretical research perspective as well as a change methodology in public agencies in educational settings and drug courts (Calabrese et al., 2008; Dematteo & Reeves, 2010; Farrell, 2006; Keedy, 2009). Moreover, AI has been applied in contexts with maximum security prisoners and Chicago gangs (Carraway, 2112; Keedy, 2009) and with female drug recidivists in a drug court setting (Dejoy, 2011).

The principal investigator's AI experience includes its application as a theoretical research perspective as well as a methodology. AI was applied (a) in the context of yearlong studies with small and large public school organizations, (b) research focused on doctoral education, and (c) a cross-cultural study of school administrative practices. The principal investigator's previous work provided the confidence that AI could assist in the transformation of a dysfunctional work environment and contribute to the creation of a healthy, self-sustaining and evolving positive organizational culture at UDC.

Our choice of an AI theoretical research perspective and AI research methods in this study was the result of the principal investigator's successful work in organizational contexts where the culture exhibited symptoms similar to the UDC. The first author of this study maintains a consistent research line using AI for a decade. The research requires extensive fieldwork primarily in educational and community settings. The first author involves doctoral students in AI fieldwork, including the second author in this study. A growing number of the first author's doctoral students have successfully defended AI-driven dissertations. The first author also created a graduate Appreciative Inquiry course and has taught it for the past four years. This experience provided us with the insights we need to apply AI to this context. Our experience, building on the work of others in AI, led us to a assume that UDC participants shared a real, yet unacknowledged history of successful work practices with substance abusers (clients) and when collaborating with each other (Bushe & Coetzer, 1995; Calabrese et al., 2008; Havens et al., 2006).
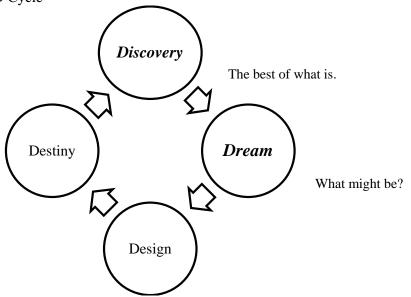
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved study was to use an AI theoretical research perspective and change methodology to transform the working relationships and cultural expectations of members through the discovery of their positive core leading to an optimistic and confidence-based future for the UDC.

Methods

This AI qualitative case study took place in UDC, a highly restrictive and secure setting. We facilitated participants through an abbreviated application of the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle—Discovery and Dream. The AI 4-D Cycle is commonly comprised of four separate stages: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. The AI 4-D Cycle

We facilitated three AI sessions: (a) an introduction to the AI process; (b) the first stage of the AI 4-D Cycle, Discovery; and (c) the second stage of the AI 4-D Cycle, Dream

Destiny (See Figure 2). AI methods included paired semi-structured interviews, whole group discussions (a type of focus group), and participant-generated documents.

The purpose of Session One was to disclose the overview of the study, seek informed consent according to the IRB guidelines and provide information to participants that the study, including all methods and protocols were IRB approved. at a research university, and to set a schedule for two future sessions. Throughout this study, we used a set of commonly available AI protocols modifying the language to address the specific organizational context.

The purpose of Session Two was to facilitate the Discovery Stage, the first stage of the AI 4-D Cycle. We guided participants through AI activities to recognize successful past practices, identify personal and group strengths, and identify foundational values. The data generated by participants would be used in the Dream Stage to generate a compelling vision for an optimistic and confidence-based future (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2000). Throughout the three sessions, we maintained a deep and rich set of field notes that later served as an important data source.

Data Sources

Participants were full-time staff members of UDC. The UDC manager purposively-selected 15 participants from a pool of 70 staff members at UDC. The purposively selected participants were invited to Session One where we explained the study and the extent of their involvement in the study. The purposively-selected participants were given an opportunity to ask questions about their involvement and the AI process. The 15 UDC participants agreed to participate in the study. The 15 participants included the magistrate associated with UDC, UDC manager, prosecutors, public defenders, prosecutors, and caseworkers.

Data were collected using paired semi-structured interviews, a facilitative process where participants gathered in paired groups to interview each other. After the interviews, participants reconvened as a whole group to share their paired semi-structured interview narratives. We used AI protocols for all activities throughout the Discovery and Dream stages of the 4-D Cycle.

We acted as participant/observers to guide participants in discovering the breadth, depth, and richness of their highpoint stories. We re-framed statements and questions to appreciative and affirming language during all AI activities. We member checked throughout all sessions of the study. We also sought to ensure the consistency of protocol applications. We took extensive field notes that included participants' direct quotations, rich descriptions, and observed behavior throughout all AI activities during Discovery and Dream Stages of AI 4-D Cycle.

In addition, data were collected from numerous participant-generated documents developed throughout the Discovery and Dream Stages. These data were in the form of newsprint documents and digital photos.

Data Analysis

For data analysis purposes, we used data we collected from the first two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle: Discovery and Dream. The quality of our data was determined by ensuring its creditability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Merriam, 2002). We member checked frequently during all phases of the study. Each time the participants convened as a whole group we confirmed the data we recorded on newsprint as to themes, agreements, and understandings reached by the participants. We also submitted a summary of findings to participants for review. We triangulated data by collecting it from multiple sources: field notes, participant generated documents, and digitally captured data. Data were analyzed using

two software programs: Atlas.ti and Tropes. Atlas.ti is a qualitative analysis software that facilitates open and axial coding (Calabrese, Hummel, & San Martin, 2007; Kerlin, 2002). Moreover, it serves as a quotation retrieval process based on codes, memos, and other forms of organization. Tropes is a qualitative analysis software using highly complex algorithms for semantic classification, key word extraction, and identification of linguistic meaning within the text. We also used open and axial coding procedures to identify broad themes. These themes were aggregated to generate our findings. Moreover, the aggregated themes and findings served as the basis for recommendations.

Findings

According to Sandelowski (1998), qualitative researchers choose a central point to tell the story they present in their findings. The story we chose to present illustrates the central point of growth and change that occurred incrementally through the discovery, dream stages.

Our data analysis produced three findings:

1. Participants displayed a resiliency and willingness to overcome challenges.

2. Participants reaffirmed a sense of purpose in their work.

3. Participants discovered a positive core of successful experience.

In the following section, the discussion of the findings is embedded in the story of the participants' engagement in two stages of the AI 4-D Cycle—Discovery and Dream. We use pseudonyms for participants throughout the findings to ensure their confidentiality: Brenda-prosecutor, Meagan-prosecutor, Mike-case worker, Sally-case worker, Cheryl-drug court manager, Amber-case worker, Kim-case worker, Sandy-case worker, Dawn-case worker, Danielle-case worker, Laura-case worker, Joel-public defender, and Sarah-magistrate.

The UDC Story

We began our research by asking participants to describe their greatest work challenge(s) at UDC to give full voice to the deeply felt issues they experience. Since the AI process is inherently positive, we summarized the challenges into a single statement and member checked with participants. We then reframed the summarized challenge into an *affirmative topic* to increase the participants' anticipation of what is possible. An affirmative topic is positive, desirable, promotes learning and requires collaboration. It focuses on what is important for creating a flourishing organization through the generative conversations it stimulates among members (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

Michael, Garry, and Kirsch (2012) report, "Expectancies do not merely shape or influence our responses: When we expect a particular outcome, we automatically set in motion a chain of cognitions and behaviors to procure that outcome" (p. 151). Reframing the challenges into an affirmative topic addresses the essential AI question of "what do we want more of?" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Participants identified challenge after challenge. Frequently, participants nodded in agreement with other participants that they shared a similar challenge. Brenda summed up the attitude of the participants when she said, "I've lived life, nothing shocks me."

We listed the challenges on newsprint and placed them on the wall. The long list of challenges was grouped into three primary areas of challenge—each challenge was stated in deficit language:

1. Lack of sufficient resources.

2. Lack of client success and commitment.

3. Lack of communication.

As they identified their three challenges, the challenges were contextualized in their descriptions of their work. They viewed their work as a "dead end" position where they were stuck; yet, they were trying to make the best of a difficult situation until something better came their way. Participants stated their job lost its meaning; they felt powerless to change the conditions of their work.

The challenge: Lack of sufficient resources.

Participants viewed the lack of resources as lack of administrative support and low funding for the UDC.

The lack of administrative support stemmed from participants' perception that administrators, who were not associated with the direct mission of the UDC, did not understand UDC's mission. Moreover, the administrators were more likely to place UDC at the far end of the receiving line when resources were allocated to public agencies. Meagan said, "Our office [county agency] doesn't place a huge amount of support for this office [UDC]. I think if we had more support from our office then we could make more time." The lack of administrative support was echoed by Mike He said, "We're overloaded. If we had more funding, we would have more resources. With more resources, we could do more." The participants believed that without sufficient resources they were powerless to provide sustainable services to clients.

The challenge: Lack of client success and commitment.

The participants felt their demanding work in the UDC did not produce positive results. Although they believed they were internally driven by a desire to help their clients succeed, they believed the client's lack of success was the client's fault for "not following through." This caused deeper frustration.

Sally said, "You can't do it for them; it's hard to watch that [the whole scenario play out]." Sally's comment typified participants' frustration and powerlessness. They attributed blame for the lack of positive results to clients' resistance to become substance free.

Cheryl put emphasis on participants' lack of success by addressing the client's lack of commitment, "How can they put drugs before their kids? I'm trying to wrap my head around why someone would make those choices." Amber agreed with Cheryl: "Clients are resistant to being involved in drug court." Kim nodded and said, "It's hard to get clients to comply; they don't understand or want to listen to why they have to comply with drug court requirements."

The challenge: Lack of communication.

The lack of communication among participants was evident at multiple levels. Many participants never formally meet with each other. The apparent primary cause for lack of communication appeared to have systemic roots. UDC, for example, serves as a form of clearinghouse that brings multiple public agencies together to work with clients—not with each other. UDC then refers clients to other agencies to provide additional counseling and therapeutic services.

The UDC manage facilitates the clearinghouse nature of the program and requests staff from the appropriate agencies to participate in meetings with the client to determine a plan of action. Sandy said [referring to a prosecutor], "We've never met." In addition, Dawn said, "I don't get enough information about the client from the court. I need more than 10 weeks to be successful."

Lack of (a) sufficient resources, (b) lack of success and commitment, and (c) lack of communication contributed to participants' burnout. The participants associated their frustrations of not being able to help clients become substance free with their feelings about their work. Participants stated they saw the same clients repeatedly and seldom witnessed success. They felt clients, in general, didn't care about their children and at the same time became more dependent on their substance abuse.

In many of these cases, participants felt their only choice was to recommend the client's children be removed from the client's custody. Danielle said, "How frustrating it is when I see my clients' potential and want to see them succeed—and they don't." Laura echoed this sense of frustration, "You can't do it for them, and it's hard to watch what really happens."

The Change—The Discovery Stage

We understood the participants' depth of despair fueled by frustration with the UDC bureaucracy, its physical environment, and clients. This added to their sense of powerlessness to be change agents. We knew from our previous AI work, their images of despair could be replaced by images of empowerment, success, and the promise of success. We reframed their challenges into positive statements "You want the UDC to increase the success rate, gain greater support from external agencies, and attract more resources for your mission?" Each member nodded. Reframing challenges into an affirmative topic is the starting place for the Discovery Stage.

We moved from their challenges to the AI Discovery Stage—we asked positive questions to assist participants in discovering their strengths and the strengths of the UDC. With the affirmative topic as a guide, we began by asking participants to recall a single event at UDC where it all came together, where they were successful, where they felt empowered, most fulfilled, and most excited about working at UDC. We knew if they could discover one incident of past success, it would lead to other discoveries. We also knew that sharing their highpoint experience stories in a public forum would move the conversation from deficit to strengths, from powerlessness to powerfulness.

There were ample participant stories of highpoint experiences. Once they began the discovery process, they easily identified highpoint experience stories. Sarah, the magistrate, said, "We had a mother who was in tears and so thankful. A new client who witnessed this scene and heard the mother's comments as hope-filled said, 'I want to be in your [the mother's] shoes someday. I felt affirmed." Sarah's comments encouraged others to share their highpoint experiences.

Joel said, "A client came up to me and thanked me for working on his behalf. This happened right on the street. He said he felt like a positive member of society, and he was." Danielle said, "My biggest aha moment was when a client had a breakthrough, and finally got it." Similarly, Kim said, "When that light bulb goes off for my client and she finally gets it, she understands I know she has a chance to be successful."

Kim's statement was typical of the other participants. In each case, the highpoint experience was other-centered. We witnessed a gradual recognition on the part of the participants as they began to see their work as more than a job; it was a calling. Danielle said, "A client gave me a hug, and told me that she's really glad I'm in her life. It put things into perspective that my job is a calling."

We observed participants' non-verbal communication and language began to change. Smiles replaced the serious looks. Participants leaned toward each other as they spoke using affirmative language; when they listened, a complimentary interaction of non-verbal behavior shaping verbal communication and verbal communication shaping non-verbal behavior.

As participants focused on their past highpoint experiences, they also started to validate each other's experiences. At this point in the AI process, their perceptions of work and their work environment changed. They no longer focused on problems or attributed blame to external forces or people. They were beginning to realize they were successful; and, they began to understand that they could build on previous highpoint experiences to create an empowered future.

The Future—The Dream Stage

We began the Dream Stage by asking participants to share highpoint experience stories from the Discovery Stage. As a whole group, we reflected on the wall chart [newsprint] listing participants' values and strengths the participants identified in the Discovery Stage. We member checked with participants; they smiled and affirmed the chart with head nods. This preliminary work created a confident mindset among participants to proceed with the Dream Stage.

Participants imagined a future grounded in a positive working relationship within UDC. Laura said, "Together, we'll find ways to do the impossible." Cheryl added, "Clients will say that we gave them a reason to believe in themselves."

Participants were daring to dream that the impossible was possible. In daring to see what could be possible, they recognized the future success of UDC requires extra effort and commitment to sustain and evolve their positive working relationships. They agreed that collaborating and discovering ways to make UDC more effective were important steps. They used the phrase "coming to the table" to represent how they were going to foster positive relationships and advance the mission of UDC.

We asked participants to imagine a successful future vision and to speak about it in the present tense. They collaboratively imagined a compelling future for the UDC projected in 10 years. They described the UDC as receiving the award for *Drug Court of the Decade*. As they imagined the future, we listed the dreams they shared for UDC. Their dreams of the future described success in five broad areas:

1. We overcome financial and bureaucratic obstacles.

2. We are all at the table working together.

3. We form excellent working relationships.

4. We provide exceptional service.

5. We work in an environment where agencies and departments work in each other's

   best interests.

Recommendations

The culture we initially experienced is similar to many education-related organizations that serve a high needs population. We offer recommendations that may be generalizable to

those who lead or manage these organizations. We believe that the dreams identified by the participants for UDC are possible. We also believe that achieving their dreams are within their grasp to implement immediately. To achieve their dreams we offered the following recommendations.

1. We encouraged UDC to set aside time each week during their collective meetings to purposefully share and celebrate small successes. In publically sharing and celebrating small successes, a cultural shift will take place—moving from one of pessimism to one of optimism for what might be accomplished (Calabrese, Goodvin, & Niles, 2005).

2. We encouraged UDC to seek to purposefully partner with complimentary organizations to seek funding for creative ways to address client addiction, professional development, and issues related to work induced stress (Calabrese, 2006).

3. We encouraged UDC to consider involvement in a four-day retreat where participants become fully involved in the entire appreciative inquiry 4-D Cycle—Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny (Reason & Heron, 2004).

Discussion and Conclusion

Our research with UDC allowed us to experience the UDC work environment. Our experience helped us to understand the participants' burnout, frustration, and discouragement. We recognized their fixation to focus on problems associated with their work and their deep sense of powerlessness to do anything about their work conditions. Their problem based focus was juxtaposed to the AI alternative we proposed. It is the juxtaposition of problems and vision of a desired future that offers the genesis of this study's scholarly significance.

Our work with UDC demonstrates the creative possibilities that arise when reframing challenges into an affirmative topic and involving participants in the Dream and Discovery stages to address the affirmative topic. We recognized the changes to the participants' mindset from deficit thinking to hope and optimism. In doing so, we advanced the research in AI, positive organizational psychology, and learned optimism (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005; Quinn, 2005). The change in mindset created by the research university/UDC partnership facilitated the transformation of negative images into images of successes and imagined future success.

Appreciative inquiry facilitates the building of a healthy learning and workspace environment. AI provides a space where participants are encouraged to name their challenges and transform them into a compelling vision. The challenges faced by UDC staff are immense; yet, the AI process ignited a desire among UDC participants to confront these challenges. Their desire was fueled by the re-discovery of complementary strengths.

The strengths of UDC participants have their basis in a collective deep sense of calling to make a difference in the lives of their clients. We witnessed participants desiring to capitalize on their shared sense of calling to act as transformative agents for clients. The potential exists for UDC to advance to become nationally recognized in working with substance abusers so that they function as responsible members of society.

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