

Abstract

This research arises from the researcher's aspiration to become a strength-based OD professional and from a personal interest in Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a tool for organizational change. In addition it was also the ambition of enabling the focal organization (CS)—a small private IT solutions provider—to become an Appreciative Learning Organization (ALO)—an organization that practices appreciative, innovative and holistic learning. An Appreciative Learning Organization emphasizes learning from its strengths, successes and potential. The primary objective of the research was to develop an Appreciative Learning Organization through an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Organizational Development Intervention (ODI). The intervention focused on developing the participants' competencies in Appreciative Inquiry and demonstrating the linkage between Appreciative Inquiry competencies and two organizational learning practices; 1) supportive learning environments and 2) concrete learning processes and practices. The research was conducted to determine whether this approach could be used to transform the focal organization into an Appreciative Learning Organization.

Action research was used as the core research methodology with a nonrandomized control group and pretest-posttest techniques, performed from January 2013 to July 2013. It utilized a mixed approach—quantitative and qualitative—and employed data triangulation and methodological triangulation for data collection in order to achieve an in-depth inquiry and more valid evaluation and measurements. There were twenty-five participants in the intervention group and twenty-nine in the control group. The ODI process was designed based on Lewin's Planned Change Model—unfreezing, change and refreezing—integrated with five major activities for managing change. In the change stage, three action research cycles were performed in order to develop the Appreciative Inquiry competencies in the participants. Each cycle was designed based on Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and lasted about one month.

The research findings reveal that Appreciative Inquiry as an Organizational Development Intervention (ODI) is an effective approach for developing an Appreciative Learning Organization. The participants showed progressive development in their Appreciative Inquiry competencies, which played a significant role in enhancing the two key practices of a learning organization in the participants—supportive learning environments and concrete learning processes and practices. It is evident that increases in the Appreciative Inquiry competencies and the two key practices of a learning organization prompted the focal organization to start its transformation into an Appreciative Learning Organization. Four crucial elements of the success of this intervention are 1) well-thought-

out design of the Organizational Development intervention; 2) opportunities for participants to learn through experiential learning; 3) reinforcement of behaviors practiced, supported and coached by the researcher; 4) understand the personal traits and thinking preferences.

In order to sustain an Appreciative Learning Organization, it takes time and continuous development. Close support and cooperation with the top management will be necessary in order to totally integrate Appreciative Inquiry practices into the focal organization. Recommendations for further Organization Development intervention for the focal organization to transform itself into a long-lasting Appreciative Learning Organization (ALO) and future studies of this approach by other researchers are also presented.

