

TRANSFORMING PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL THROUGH APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Robert H. Buckham

School of Global Commerce and Management | Whitworth University
rbuckman@whitworth.edu

Abstract

As an essential organizational process, performance appraisal effectiveness remains an unrealized hope. The research question addressed here is can Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000) alter an organization's performance appraisal narrative? This qualitative field study offers an innovative enhancement to Murphy and Cleveland's (1995) performance appraisal communication model by incorporating Appreciative Inquiry as a meta-narrative transformative intervention. Results showed that organization members interpret individual performance appraisal experiences in light of the organization's overall performance meta-narrative. Further, employee interpretations can be positively influenced when they are encouraged to adopt an affirming and hopeful lens that honors performance appraisal's cultural inheritance. The outcomes are attributed to a few organization members dreaming of the process at its best based on previous positive experiences and then expressing their vision in wider and wider circles of sharing. Although based on a small, convenience sample, this intervention also indicated Appreciative Inquiry may offer unique and helpful advantages in performance appraisal research.

Keywords: Performance appraisal, appreciative inquiry, human resources management.

Resumen

Como un proceso organizativo esencial, la efectividad de la evaluación del desempeño sigue siendo esperanza no realizada. La pregunta de investigación que se aborda aquí es ¿puede la Indagación Apreciativa (Cooperrider y Whitney, 2000) alterar la descripción de la evaluación de desempeño de una organización? Este estudio de

campo cualitativo ofrece una mejora innovadora del modelo de comunicación de evaluación de desempeño de Murphy y Cleveland (1995) al incorporar la Indagación Apreciativa como una intervención transformativa meta-narrativa. Los resultados mostraron que los miembros de la organización interpretan las experiencias de evaluación de desempeño individual a la luz de la meta-narrativa de desempeño general de la organización. Además, las interpretaciones de los empleados pueden ser influenciadas positivamente cuando se las alienta a adoptar una lente afirmativa y esperanzadora que honre la herencia cultural de la evaluación de desempeño. Los resultados se atribuyen a unos pocos miembros de la organización que sueñan con el proceso en su mejor momento basándose en experiencias positivas anteriores y luego expresan su visión en círculos más amplios de intercambio. Aunque este estudio se basó en una pequeña muestra por conveniencia, esta intervención también indicó que la Investigación apreciativa puede ofrecer ventajas únicas y útiles en la investigación de evaluación de desempeño.

Palabras claves: Evaluación del desempeño, investigación apreciativa, gestión de recursos humanos.

1. Introduction

Scholars and practitioners frequently lament performance appraisal process weaknesses and deficiencies. Almost forty years ago, Olsen and Bennett (1975) concluded that performance appraisal had not met expectations because performance measurement incorrectly assumes scientific accuracy is possible. Twenty years later, Murphy and Cleveland (1995) reported performance appraisal remained highly unpopular human resource management subsystem too often postulated as a measurement problem. Measurement problems presume a predetermined world (Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers, 1996) remedied by isolating inconvenient variables, attuning to accurate measurements or finding an optimal assessment instrument. More recently, Bernardin, Hagan, Kane, and Villanova (1998) observed, “The appraisal of performance appraisal is not good” (p. 3). Bowman (1999, p. 571) wrote, “The perennial, melancholy search for the best technique, nonetheless, relentlessly (sometimes shamelessly) continues”. As an important organizational process, performance appraisal effectiveness remains an unrealized hope.

As noted by Arvey and Murphy (1998) and Fletcher (2001), there is a significant gap between scholarly performance appraisal research and actual practice. In line with Thomas and Bretz’s (1994) observations, Arvey and Murphy and then Fletcher recommended more cooperative academic and practitioner research projects. Another still unresolved issue is highlighted in Bretz, Milkovich and Read’s (1992) observation that process complexity and fragmented research conclusions necessitate a more holistic perspective balancing performance appraisal process content with contextual

influences.

Performance appraisal is frequently perceived as a process wherein manager and employee dialogue about quantified performance goals and outcomes. Olsen and Bennett (1976) proposed performance appraisal is a social process requiring effective communications practices. Other scholars echoed performance appraisal's communicative nature (Ilgen, Fisher and Taylor, 1979; Murphy and Cleveland, 1995; and Wanguri, 1995). In Murphy and Cleveland's (1995) communicative model, formal and informal messages about how information captured in the performance appraisal process will be used. These organizational narratives are interpreted by supervisors and employees and help them make sense of performance appraisal purpose. Unfortunately, the communicative aspects often lead to higher dissatisfaction because, as noted by Murphy and Cleveland, performance appraisal messages are often mixed and "...do little to reinforce the impression that the organization knows what it is doing" (p. 337). All too often the interpretation postures performance appraisal as a report card.

Wheatley (2005) opined, "Nothing changes until we interpret things differently" (p. 104). Advancing performance appraisal scholarship and practice may require novel perspectives stimulated by narrative transforming interventions. Building off the communications theme (Murphy and Cleveland, 1975; Olsen and Bennett, 1975) this paper proposes that transforming an organization's performance information capturing orientation to a positive and inspiring performance dialogue can lay the foundation for increased organizational effectiveness. How to do so? As an organization effectiveness intervention, Appreciative Inquiry (A.I.) emphasizes attuning to what works in organizational systems, holistic sense making, tolerance for multiple interpretations and encouragement of participant involvement. Rather than describing what is, A.I. encourages researchers to recognize what organizational systems may become from the perspective of human possibility (Srivastva, Fry, and Cooperrider, 1999). This paper addresses the question, can Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000) alter an organization's performance appraisal narrative?

The next section offers an abbreviated performance appraisal and A.I. literature review. These theoretical streams support the notion that A.I. offers an unconventional approach to advancing the performance appraisal narrative from deficit to a more hopeful and health-enhancing orientation. Next the intervention methodology is outlined. In the data analysis section, research participant stories and interview narratives are summarized. Important themes are highlighted to demonstrate how participants exposed an underlying assumption about performance appraisals that was incongruent with the organization culture and their own personal values and how their narratives turned to an alternative concept underscoring performance appraisal's generative potential as a future-focused development conversation for their organization. Finally, the connection between these results and previous studies

is highlighted along with suggestions for additional investigations.

2. Literature Review

A. Performance Appraisal

The performance appraisal scholarly and practitioner literature is expansive in scope. Helpful reviews are covered in Bretz, Milkovich, and Read (1992), Fletcher (2001), Murphy and Cleveland (1995), and Wanguri (1995). Performance appraisal has been described as a dyadic interaction directed at developing and communicating performance criteria and assessments (Myers, Johnston, and Pearce, 1991). In its simplest form, a supervisor communicates judgments about an employee's performance relative to some standard or expectation. The discussion might also cover future goals and personal development plans. Performance appraisals are also used to capture organizationally useful information. Common information applications include supporting staffing decisions (Thomas and Bretz, 1994), justifying salary increase and promotion decisions (Longenecker, 1997) and employee counseling and development (Cederblom, 1982). Wiese and Buckley (1998) reported performance appraisals are used worldwide in many different types of organizations.

Regardless of emphasis, performance appraisal reportedly can lead to numerous problems. For example, Lawler, Mohrman, and Resnick (1984) claimed performance appraisal can be perceived as a process for supervisors to force their or the organization's will on an employee. As another example, Beer (1981) suggested supervisor's judgmental orientation can generate an adversarial employee relationship. Murphy and Cleveland (1995) postulated some employees may not accept performance appraisal's judgmental component as a legitimate managerial function. Another potential problem can occur when, as a cultural artifact, performance appraisal signals management's conviction that employees need to be directed and controlled like school age children (Coens and Jenkins, 2000). A common theme in these examples is the communicative context surrounding performance appraisal, more fully developed in the social-psychological model outlined in Murphy and Cleveland (1995).

B. Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is a mode of action-research (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 2000) employed to study and change organizations by exploring on-going dialogues within human systems functioning at their best (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003). It is a participatory intervention focused on critical organization issues (Dunlap, 2008). A.I. avoids defaulting to problem solving's deficit language (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000) and is more focused on inquiry than solution advocacy. A.I. involves a search for untapped positive experiences and examples assumed to exist within every living system (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000). Topic choice is fateful because organizations aspire to the questions that get asked and studied (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

In other words, rather than beginning with what is wrong, A.I. begins by asking what is working well. Whitney and Schau (1998) stated that a major A.I. assumption is that “as an organization’s dominant stories change and evolve, so does the organization” (p. 12). They further suggested that A.I. practitioners see performance appraisal as a worthy topic when framed within a positive language research paradigm.

Appreciative Inquiry has some weaknesses as an intervention. Golembiewski (1999) claimed much is unknown about A.I.’s features and consequences because most of the work to date relies on anecdotal information. He also advised aversion to negative stories may result in over optimism. Bushe (2000) warned that inquiry focusing on appreciation without a firm grounding in theory makes A.I. fashionable rather than a disciplined intervention.

3. Methodology

A. Setting and Participants

The two-month intervention was undertaken at a century old U.S. industrial company employing approximately 800 workers. Participants described the organization culture as family-value oriented, but where hard-work and results are expected. In this organization, information extracted from performance appraisals are primarily used to support salary, promotion and employee development decisions. Salaried employees are appraised annually using ten standard competencies on a one to five scale. Several organization managers noted the performance appraisal process had evolved into a ritualistic ceremony and was not providing meaningful results. They wanted to get new insights that might help improve the program’s overall effectiveness.

Intervention participants included two women and three men, all holding mid-level corporate technical and administrative positions. Participant median age was forty-seven and the median company tenure was twenty-two years. Participants were selected as a convenience sample, but I felt they closely reflected an organization composite. All participants had received performance appraisals within the last three years and three had appraised others. At the time of the field work I held a senior level human resources management position in the organization. Participant names have been changed to retain confidentiality and the organization name is not disclosed.

B. Methodology

Although prescribed for large scale organization change efforts, Appreciative Inquiry may also be effective for stimulating subsystem improvements (Bushe, 1999). The four-step A.I. model outlined by Whitney (1998) facilitated the study. This includes a discovery phase, dream phase, design phase, and delivery phase. While many A.I. interventions follow this model, adaptations are encouraged (Bushe). For example, in this application participant work requirements and travel schedules dictated using

more one-on-one meetings and e-mails instead of group meetings.

During the positive-story eliciting “discovery phase” five audio-taped participant interviews covered: 1) a peak performance appraisal experience and why participants valued the experience; 2) process strengths; 3) organization culture influences; and, 4) participant dreams and hopes for performance appraisal. The interview protocol was designed to generate both cognitive and contextual data. In the creative thinking “dream phase” participants individually reviewed interview transcripts and identified common themes. This phase emphasizes participants’ role as co-researchers and amplifies their narratives over researcher voice. During the future focusing “design phase” provocative statements were developed to reflect participant aspirations for the organization’s performance appraisal process at its best (Bushe, 1999). This phase promotes participant engagement in data interpretation and theory proposing. Finally in the “delivery phase” participants shared the provocative statements with other organization members and reported back results. This phase promotes turning dreams into action plans by involving other organization members in an expanding affirmative narrative.

4. Data Analysis

A. Discovery Phase

In this section participant experiential stories and related comments are presented. Participants were asked to reflect on a previous performance appraisal conversation with their supervisor that represents a positive and re-affirming experience. Participants were encouraged to offer an unstructured but complete rendition of what they remembered. Other questions encouraged amplification of some point or elicited more accurate interpretation of their meanings. These narratives then became a data set for individual analysis. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggested that narratives provide insight into how people experience the world. Rather than repeat the extended stories, the next few paragraphs reflect themes pervasive in participant responses.

a. BEING APPRECIATED THEME.

One persistent theme in participant stories was a feeling of being appreciated and valued. Bart described a motivating performance appraisal discussion that addressed personal growth and goal setting. Matt recalled being pleased that his supervisor appreciated his contributions. Susan remembered that her supervisor valued her work ethic, cooperation and flexibility. Dan indicated that his hard work was acknowledged “which meant something to me”. Nina’s account focused on feelings of worth. She remarked,

“I thought my supervisor felt my job responsibilities were worthwhile and that my contribution to the company meant something and that I was a valued employee. And so because of that, it gave me an incentive to continue to try and do my best because I

was doing a good job and I just felt like a very worthwhile employee”.

Probing questions focused on why these particular experiences were meaningful to participants. Matt appreciated the “one on one opportunity that we often don’t take on a regular basis to talk about goals and personal satisfaction” so that “none of us are kept in the dark about how others are feeling”. He also values the occasion “to validate my position with my boss or with my employee” and ensure “that we’re doing what each of us thinks is appropriate”. Dan talked about being made to feel like a contributor because, “It was like I wasn’t just doing a job for the company. I was doing a job for the unit and I was doing a job for my boss.” Bart liked the “opportunity to revisit objectives not met, not as a failure but from what can be learned”. Nina too appreciated having her contributions recognized and remarked, “I think that job recognition is the most important thing to me”. The initial stories and subsequent discussions about the meanings inherent in them indicated that validating perceived self-worth is very important to the participants.

b. CONVERSATION FOCUS THEME

Appreciative Inquiry encourages a focus on system strengths rather than deficits. Participants had little difficulty identifying strengths in the appraisal process. Dan insisted “it’s a good time for communications” so “the person feels he matters regardless of what the appraisal is”. Nina indicated it’s a good time to “discuss the employee’s role, progress and what is expected of him or her”. Bart liked the opportunity to discuss succession and personal growth and development. Susan also enjoyed the opportunity to discuss goals. Matt admitted the discussion can be valuable for both the employee and supervisor because “it gives both an opportunity to understand the other’s interests and concerns”. These responses indicate creating time and a format for interpersonal communications is one of the process’s inherent strengths.

c. VALUE CONGRUENCE THEME

Another strength theme in participant stories pointed to the organization’s family-values culture. Participants seemed to have the impression that the organization’s family culture, and the fact that “everyone knows each other so well”, encourages honesty in performance discussions and “makes the process more believable”. Susan referred to the “open honest culture”, where “people treat people decently”, and where “people are valued; they are part of a family”. Nina indicated “the company has always looked out for its employees”. Dan talked about how this family-value influence leads to a more personal relationship and trust and honesty. He stated that because of these influences performance appraisal “becomes something meaningful”. In addition, most of the participants indicated they believed organization members find some value in the process and have come to expect them. Dan summarized this idea by saying,

Yet we owe people them and in a sense we owe each other them...Our people want them...It’s important because it has to do with wellbeing, however you perceive

your worth...and to be able to judge your work...people would like to feel good about themselves, improve themselves...performance appraisal is a way to do it.

B. Dream Phase

Themes from the discovery phase were shared with participants in several conversations and became the basis to encourage dreaming about what performance appraisal at its best could be like for this organization. Although participants prefer a well-defined and consistent performance appraisal process, their dream is for more communication and relationship building. Nina wants to ensure that “everyone has the same guidelines in the beginning”. Matt would like it to be a less formal, but a more frequent cooperative experience because yearly reviews cannot “compensate for the changes that we have seen over the course of a year”. Dan wants to incorporate more of the organization’s family-value culture so people “look forward to the appraisal” and “actually enjoy the appraisal” as a “productive experience”. Bart claimed it should be more team oriented and focus on goal setting and “there should not be a point grading system, no report card”. Like Matt, Susan had a forward looking concept but provided a more specific dream the other participants found very intriguing. She described it as, “it’s a performance management concept where it’s a communication tool to promote department and corporate goals, to coach and assist employees to perform at their highest level so that every employee knows of their contribution to the company”. Participant dreams for performance appraisal were then used in the design phase.

C. Design Phase

Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) recommended developing and sharing provocative statements designed to kindle broad-based creative thinking. Provocative statements are a fresh and transforming narrative offered to other organization members. After reflecting on data generated in the discovery and dream phases, three provocative statements were drafted to echo participant themes. Participants were asked to comment or expand upon the statements. One participant suggested adding a fourth statement and the others concurred. The four provocative statements, aligned with an old assumption are shown below.

- Old assumption 1: We operate under the assumption that the primary focus of performance appraisal must be on “appraisal”, “evaluation”, “judgment” and/ or rating/scoring”.
- New belief 1: We believe performance appraisal places too much emphasis on appraisal and judgment and that what we really want is to encourage frequent, open, honest and nurturing two-way performance conversations.

- Old assumption 2: We operate under the assumption that the supervisor should use performance appraisal as a way to correct problems.
- New belief 2: We believe that performance conversations are an opportunity to provide timely, accurate, specific, and helpful feedback that leads to learning and improvement, coordination, confirmation, appreciation and praise, and a meaningful recognition of our contributions and value as individuals and members of the team.
- Old assumption 3: We operate under the assumption that performance appraisal captures the true essence and reality of performance and that this information can be used for salary, promotion and other administrative decisions.
- New belief 3: We believe a one-page form cannot capture the complexity and complete context of our jobs because they change so often and that performance conversation should be an ongoing and frequent dialogue separate and distinct from administrative decision-making.
- Old assumption 4: We operate under the assumption that performance appraisal is the responsibility of and should be initiated by the supervisor.
- New belief 4: We believe performance conversations are the joint responsibility of supervisors and employees and can be initiated by either.

Old assumption 1 represents a deficit narrative. It encourages interpreting performance appraisal as a report card giving experience. New belief 1 represents a development oriented narrative based on mutually beneficial interpersonal communications. Old assumption 2 represents a deficit narrative painting the employee as an instrument that when broken can be fixed, and if not broken can be fine-tuned. New belief 2 encourages interpreting performance appraisal experiences as mutual growth and development and commitment building. Old assumption 3 envisions performance appraisal as sub-part to a larger administrative process that provides information that may be used against an employee. New belief 3 envisions performance appraisal not as ceremony, but as recurring event where employee voice carries equal weight with supervisors. Old assumption 4 perceives performance appraisal as a top-down process initiated by and for organization managers. New belief 4 encourages interpreting performance appraisal discussions as dialogue where employee and supervisor are equal partners, which either authorized to initiate.

Participant responses to the provocative statements were supportive. Nina saw them as “more positive and forward looking”. Susan viewed them as proactive because “mentoring is better than evaluating”. Dan said, “Performance appraisal without the report card can bring out communications”. Matt summarized by saying it is ludicrous to expect a good conversation about goals and improvement in a one-hour conversation. Bart said, “I liked Participant 4’s concept of performance management where it’s proactive instead of reactive. A year after the fact is too late”. He also

believes open, two-way communication is a must.

D. Delivery Phase

Participants then shared the four provocative statements with other organization members and report back comments. Each participant contacted a minimum of five other employees, and the maximum additional contact was nine. All employees contacted by participants agreed with the new provocative statements. Nina indicated many felt “the old assumption statements fell far short of what they were designed to accomplish”. Susan reported that most liked the idea of “improving and encouraging regular communication” and “sharing the responsibility of the performance conversation”. Matt said contacts felt “people would be excited about a nurturing 2-way conversation”. Interestingly, study participants reported how much they enjoyed sharing the provocative statements with others. Carrying a positive message rather than just soliciting more complaints made these conversations with others easier to conduct. Susan liked interviewing others as “a facilitator rather than as a problem solver” and stated, “This is just an incredible communication tool and I think they felt good that I was talking to them about this, they felt empowered”. Matt found that, “It is fun being supportive”.

5. Study Finding

The previous section attempts to faithfully and fairly highlight critical elements in participant stories and interview narratives. However, Riessman (1993) counseled, “All forms of representation of experience are limited portraits” (p. 15). She further pointed out, “Although the goal may be to tell the whole truth, our narratives about others’ narratives are our worldly creations” (p. 15). In other words, what follows is the author’s interpretation of how participants interpret their performance appraisal experiences and how their perspective changed during the intervention.

A. Understanding the Old and New Narratives

Appreciative inquiry interventions are an opportunity to engage participants in identifying and challenging habitual assumptions and to work toward possible fresh meaning making perspectives. Participant stories and interview narratives accentuated two competing theories of performance appraisal’s place in this organization. The old assumptions promote a measurement and judgment narrative. These assumptions are also reflected in the widely recognized uses for information captured in performance appraisal documentation. However, participants perceived this assumption as incongruent with the organization’s family values oriented culture and their own personal values. Participants further perceived the old assumptions as straining the supervisor-employee relationship. Even positive comments about performance infer

the supervisor has made some judgment about the relative merits of results and/or behaviors. Bart exclaimed, "There should be no report card". In reflecting on his performance appraisal story, Matt remembered being "relieved to discover there was absolutely nothing I could do differently".

The new assumptions promote an appreciative and affirming narrative about personal development and a mutually hoped for future unencumbered with judgment and measurement language. Recognition and affirmation accrue from a positive dialogue about how the employee can affect organization success going forward. Participants acknowledged Susan's dream of performance management as a possible new paradigm. In their vernacular, performance management is more about future-focused performance planning with a hope and opportunity filled lens rather than being a past-focused and judgment-based measurement lens. It's important to recognize that Susan's notion of performance appraisal as performance management stimulated a fundamental transformation in participant thinking and moved participants closer to this organization's authentic positive core. In turn, other organization members appreciated the study participant's new lexicon around performance conversations.

B. Narrative Transformation

Why did this sense making transformation take place, first with participants then with other organization members? Perhaps the positive-conversation based Appreciative Inquiry methodology created a protected space where previously unstated individual hopes and dreams could be publicly verbalized and become "our picture" of a desirable future. Gergen, Gergen, and Barrett (2004) claimed change happens through inquiry based dialogue and the generative potential of differences. Susan initiated a different lexicon that other participants, and later many organization members, came to adopt. The new lexicon generated a refreshing perception about performance conversations in this organization. Social constructionists believe choice of language is important. In this organization, changing "performance appraisal" to "performance management" brought about new sense making which then had a transformative and emancipating impact on the organization's performance narrative. It was not a rebellion. Nor was there an innovative process change brought about by tinkering with performance appraisal variables or redesigning appraisal forms. Rather, the transformation surfaced when the language changed. Instead of a habitual, deficit-based measurement narrative, organization members found they had a shared dream for a hope-based personal development narrative. And because there was emotional buy-in, participants became champions rather than instigators. By identifying what is being done right rather than discarding what there should be less of (Norum, Wells, Hoadley, Geary, and Thompson, 2004), participants strengthened performance appraisal for this organization.

Performance appraisal at its essence is sharing perceptions. However, under a

measurement or evaluative archetype an employee may not honor the supervisor's judgment or perception, and vice versa. Advocacy reduces truth finding and centers on whose perception prevails. A performance management focused narrative can substitute "my perception about you" with "our dreams about the future as we see it". The performance conversation becomes a relationship building experience where perceptions are verified or realigned in a joint discovery process. Contribution affirmation and individual value become reflected in effective dialogue about what can be done to help the organization in the future. The new performance narrative appears to faithfully represent the constructive and affirming core of this organization's desired human interrelationships.

C. Connection with Other Literature

Mount (1984) suggested that enhancing satisfaction with the performance appraisal process requires the unique perspectives of both managers and employees. In this study, a small employee cohort, and later a much larger number of employees and managers shared their unique experiences and notions about what performance conversations could and should be. Boswell and Boudreau (2000) found employees preferred development focused appraisals, a theme evident in participant dreams for the future. Anderson et al. (2001) encouraged substituting "valuation" for "evaluation" to support better communications, engaged participation, increased trust and more risk taking. Study participants transformed performance measurement conversations to health and vitality promoting conversations engaging both employees and managers. Halachmi (1993) suggested past focused performance appraisal is like driving a car while looking in the rear view mirror. He recommended performance targeting to encourage supervisor-employee relationship building. Susan's provocative performance planning statement focused the organization's attention on relationship building in place of appraising performance already historical. Wiese and Buckley (1998) wrote, "Effective managers recognize performance appraisal systems as a tool for managing, rather than a tool for measuring, subordinates" (p. 244). Dan commented during his interview, "I look at it for myself and also from the whole organization point that this should be an extension of day-to-day relationship building".

This intervention showed that organization members interpret individual performance appraisal experiences in light of the organization's overall performance meta-narrative. Further, employee interpretations can be positively influenced when they are encouraged to adopt an affirming and hopeful lens. As stewards of the performance appraisal process, human resource managers must attune to and facilitate these preferred interpretations. They should recognize that individual appraisal interactions are only a part of a constellation of interactions that generate

a common, organization-wide narrative. Emphasizing performance conversations as an opportunity for communication facilitation can influence organization member interpretations toward a positive theme. As noted by Longenecker and Goff (1992), effective performance appraisal systems require managers and employees have "...a shared perception of the purposes and functions of the process and a shared belief that it is useful to them on an individual basis" (p. 17).

This intervention also indicated Appreciative Inquiry may offer unique and helpful advantages in performance appraisal research. Cooperrider and Whitney (2000) claimed A.I.'s organization change advantages are based on five key principles. Results of this intervention support these principles. First, the constructionist principle assumes knowing occurs in relationship. In this intervention, A.I. helped participants come to know performance appraisal as a relationship nurturing conversation. Second, the principle of simultaneity suggests change begins with the initial inquiry and what is discovered is shaped by the questions asked. In this intervention, beginning with positive experiences helped stimulate positive inquiry rather than problem fixing. A.I.'s positive language may open new lines of performance appraisal research. Third, the poetic principle argues an organization's story is not fixed but is constantly being co-authored and is subject to continuous reinterpretation. Participants learned that they had the power to reinterpret their experiences consistently with the organization culture and their personal values. A.I. may encourage performance appraisal researchers to look for alternative interpretations rather than focus on a single event. Fourth, current behavior is shaped by anticipations about the future. In this intervention participants found they could reshape the future by publicly articulating their hopes and dreams and involving others in an evolving shared dream. A.I. supports an action-research orientation. Fifth, the positive principle encourages bringing affirmative language to the change agenda. This intervention was not simply about bringing an appreciative perception. Rather, it was about using an appreciative approach to inquiry (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

In summary, the resulting narrative transformation in this organization can be attributed to Appreciative Inquiry's action orientation and simultaneous use of appreciation or positive topic choice and inquiry (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003). The initial positive stories created an emotionally constructive space for developing new insights. Ludema (2000) referred to "textured vocabularies of hope" (p. 266) that catalyze positive organizational transformation. Participant's publicly espoused dreams led to conversations replete with hope for the future, while honoring performance appraisal's cultural inheritance. After reading an initial report at the intervention's completion and with tears in her eyes Nina stated, "I didn't realize I had so much power. These are my words. My words are getting people to think differently".

6. *Issues for further Exploration*

Appreciative Inquiry interventions may enlarge the scholarly performance appraisal conversation and provide new insights. As a research tool it is data rich and potentially generative. Although the initial interview population was small, the number of organization members touched by the study was multiplied when participants shared the provocative statements. Expanding this study to a larger population within the organization and duplicating it in other organizations should provide more insight into this kind of A.I. application. Second, A.I. opened the door to a deeper understanding of performance appraisal as a lived experience. However, the surface has barely been scratched.

References

- ANDERSON, H., K.J. GERGEN, S. MCNAMEE, D. COOPERRIDE, M. GERGEN and D. WHITNEY (2001), "The appreciative organization", Taos, New Mexico: *Taos Institute Publications*.
- ARVEY, R.D. and K.R. MURPHY (1998), "Performance evaluations in work settings", *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 49, pp. 141-68.
- BEER, M. (1981), "Performance appraisal: Dilemmas and possibilities", *Organizational Dynamics*, (Winter), pp. 24-37.
- BERNARDIN, H.J., C.M. HAGAN, J.S. KANE and P. VILLANOVA (1998), "Effective performance management: A focus on precision, customers, and situational constraints", In J. W. Smither (Ed.), *Performance appraisal: State of the art in practice* (pp. 3-48), San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- BOSWELL, W.R. and J.W. BOUDREAU (2000), "Employee satisfaction with performance appraisals and appraisers: The role of perceived appraisal use", *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol. 11(3), pp. 283-299.
- BOWMAN, J.S. (1999), "Performance appraisal: Verisimilitude trumps veracity", *Public Personnel Management*, Vol. 28(4), pp. 557-572.
- BRETZ, R.D., G.T. MILKOVICH and W. READ (1992), "The current state of performance appraisal research and practice: Concerns, directions and implications", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 18(2), pp. 321-352.
- BUSHE, G.R. (1999), "Advances in appreciative inquiry as an organization development intervention", *Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 17(2), pp. 61-67.
- BUSHE, G.R. (2000), "Five theories of change embedded in appreciative inquiry", in D.L. Cooperrider, P.F. Sorensen, D. Whitney and T. Yaeger (Eds.), *Appreciative inquiry: Rethinking human organization toward a positive theory of change* (pp. 99-

- 109), Champaign, Illinois: Stipes.
- CEDERBLOM, D. (1982), "The performance appraisal interview: A review, implications, and suggestions", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 7(2), pp. 219-227.
- COENS, T. and M. JENKINS (2000), "Abolishing performance appraisals", San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- CONNELLY, F.M. and D.J. CLANDININ (1990), "Stories of experience and narrative inquiry", *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 19(5), pp. 2-14.
- COOPERRIDER, D.L. and S. SRIVASTVA, (2000), "Appreciative inquiry in organizational life", in D.L. Cooperrider, P.F. Sorensen, D. Whitney and T. Yaeger (Eds.), *Appreciative inquiry: Rethinking human organization toward a positive theory of change*, (pp. 55-97), Champaign, Illinois: Stipes.
- COOPERRIDER, D.L. and D. WHITNEY (2000), "A positive revolution in change: Appreciative inquiry", in D.L. Cooperrider, P.F. Sorensen, D. Whitney and T. Yaeger (Eds.), *Appreciative inquiry: Rethinking human organization toward a positive theory of change*, (pp. 3-27), Champaign, Illinois: Stipes.
- DUNLAP, C.A. (2008), "Effective evaluation through appreciative inquiry", *Performance Improvement*, Vol. 47(2), pp. 23-29.
- FLETCHER, C. (2001), "Performance appraisal and management: The developing research agenda", *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 74, pp. 473-487.
- GERGEN, M.M., K.J. GERGEN and F. BARRETT (2004), "Appreciative inquiry as dialogue: Generative and transformative", in D.L. Cooperrider and M. Avital (Eds.), *Constructive discourse and human organization*, (pp. 3-27). Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- GOLEMBIEWSKI, R.T. (1999), "Fine-tuning appreciative inquiry: Two ways of circumscribing the concept's value-added", *Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 17(3), pp. 21-27.
- HALACHMI, A. (1993); "From performance appraisal to performance targeting", *Public Personnel Management*, Vol. 22(2), pp 323-344.
- ILGEN, D.R., C.D. FISHER and M.S. TAYLOR (1979), "Consequences of individual feedback on behavior in organizations", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 4, pp. 349-371.
- LAWLER, E.E., A.M. MOHRMAN and S.M. RESNICK (1984), "Performance appraisal revisited", *Organizational Dynamics*, Vol. 13, pp. 20-35.
- LONGENECKER, C.O. (1997), "Why managerial performance appraisals are ineffective: Causes and lessons", *Career Development International*, Vol. 2(5), pp. 212-218.

- LONGENECKER, C.O. and S.J. GOFF (1992), "Performance appraisal effectiveness: A matter of perspective", *SAM Advanced Management Journal* (Spring), pp. 17-23.
- LUDEMA, J.D. (2000), "From deficit discourse to vocabularies of hope: The power of appreciation", in D. L. Cooperrider, P.F. Sorensen, D. Whitney and T. Yaeger (Eds.), *Appreciative inquiry: Rethinking human organization toward a positive theory of change* (pp. 265-287), Champaign, Illinois: Stipes.
- MOUNT, K.M. (1984), "Satisfaction with a performance appraisal system and appraisal discussion", *Journal of Occupational Behavior*, Vol. 5, pp. 271-279
- MURPHY, K.R. and J.N. CLEVELAND (1995), "Understanding performance appraisal: Social, organizational, and goal-based perspectives", *Thousand Oaks, California: Sage*.
- Myers, D.W., W.R. JOHNSTON and C.G. Pearce (1991), "The role of human interaction theory in developing models of performance appraisal feedback", *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, pp. 28-33.
- NORUM, K.E., M. WELLS, M.R. HOADLEY, C.A GEARY and R. THOMPSON (2004), "Appraisal: An appreciative approach to program evaluation", *Constructive discourse in human organizations*, pp. 193-214, Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- OLSEN, L.O. and A.D. BENNETT (1975, December), "Performance appraisal: Management technique or social process?" (Part 1), *Management Review*, pp. 18-23.
- OLSEN, L.O. and A.D. BENNETT (1976, January), "Performance appraisal: Management technique or social process?" (Part 2), *Management Review*, pp. 22-28.
- RIESSMAN, C.K. (1993), "Narrative analysis", Newbury Park, California: Sage.
- SRIVASTVA, S., R.E. FRY and D.L. COOPERRIDER (1999), "Introduction: The call for executive appreciation", in S. Srivastva and D.L. Cooperrider (Eds.), *Appreciative Management and Leadership*. Euclid, OH: Williams Custom Publishing
- THOMAS, S.L. and R.D. BRETZ (1994), "Research and practice in performance appraisal: Evaluating employee performance in America's largest companies", *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, Vol. 4, pp. 28-34.
- WANGURI, D.M. (1995), "A review, an integration and a critique of cross-disciplinary research on performance appraisals, evaluations and feedback: 1980-1990", *The Journal of Business Communication*, Vol. 32(3), pp. 267-293.
- WHEATLEY, M. J. (2005). "Finding our way", San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- WHEATLEY, M.J. and M. Kellner-Rogers (1996), "A simpler way", San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- WHITNEY, D. (1998), "Let's change the subject and change our organization: An appreciative inquiry approach to organization change", *Career Development*

International, Vol. 3(7), pp. 314-319.

WHITNEY, D. and A. TROSTEN-BLOOM (2003), "*The power of appreciative inquiry: A practical guide to positive change*", San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

WHITNEY, D., and C, SCHAU (1998), "Appreciative inquiry: An innovative process for organization change", *Employment Relations Today*, (Spring), pp. 11-21.

WIESE, D. and M.R. BUCKLEY (1998), "The evolution of the performance appraisal process", *Journal of Management History*, Vol. 4(3), pp. 233-249.