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Appreciative Inquiry to Enhance Well-being within Organizations



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Abstract

Stress has been rising over the past five years in the workplace (Scandura, 2018) and is estimated to cost organizations close to \$300 billion a year (Smith, 2012). Given the global impact and rising cost of organizational stress, it may be wise for businesses to implement preventative stress management and wellness programs that promote positive thinking and work-related attitudes. Inspired by positive psychology, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a framework that focuses on positives and strengths rather than problems (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). This working concept demonstrates the leadership and change strategies to improve well-being within organizations.

Background

- The World Health Organization calls stress the “health epidemic of the 21st century” (Smith, 2012, para. 1).
- Stress impacts organizational performance in a multitude of ways.
- Organizational stress harms employees’ health and well-being.
- Organizational stress reduces productivity, increases potential accidents, and leads to job burnout and withdrawal (Scandura, 2018).
- When employees feel job burnout, they have negative work attitudes, low job satisfaction, low organizational commitment, and high frustration (Scandura, 2018).

Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

- AI is an innovative organizational development and learning model that taps into the potential and brings out the best in both people and businesses (Rockey & Webb, 2005).
- When one starts with what is working well mindset, one adopts an optimistic outlook that things can get better (Goldberg, 2001).
- When one focuses on positive elements and experiences, employees are more engaged and inspired (Rockey & Webb, 2005).

4-D Model

Discover

Focuses on reflecting and appreciating peak experiences from the past

- Leaders ask employees what has worked in the past in terms of enhancing their positive affect and well-being

Dream

Focuses on the future and imagining ‘what might be’

- Leaders ask employees to use the positive memories to help them visualize the potential.

Design

Consists of leaders synthesizing employees’ thoughts and feedback

- Leaders discuss what they learned and what can be changed.

Destiny

Encourages leaders to deliver and commit to actions

- Leaders develop a plan and share commitment to employees.

Statistics

The “Stress in America” survey evaluated 1,950 adults’ levels of stress and found:

- **42%** of adults’ report that their stress level has increased over the past five years,
 - and **36%** say their stress level has stayed the same.
- **61%** of adults say that managing stress is very important,
 - but only **35%** report they are doing a very good job at this.
- **44%** of adults say they are not doing enough (or are not sure how) to manage their stress,
 - but **19%** say they never engage in stress management activities.
- Money (**71%**), work (**69%**), and the economy (**59%**) continue to be the most commonly reported sources of stress (APA, 2014, p. 31).

Key Terms

- **Stress** – the discrepancy between the demands placed on an individual and his/her ability to manage those demands and reach his/her goals (Quick, Quick, Nelson, & Hurrell, 1997).
- **Organizational stress** – when greater psychological job demands are combined with lower job control (Karasek, 1979).
- **Job burnout** – “a prolonged response to chronic stressors on the job” (Maslach, 1998, p. 68).
- **Preventative stress management** – a set of methods that promote health at the workplace and avoid distress (Scandura, 2018).
- **Employee well-being** – the lack of “emotional exhaustion, psychosomatic health complaints, and physical health symptoms” (Scandura, 2018, p.14).

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