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From the Editors

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Positive Organization Practice: Generative Techniques in OD

In placing emphasis on positive organization practice, I am suggesting positive approaches to organizational studies and practices that go beyond traditional problem solving. And I acknowledge that this emphasis on positivity is not new to the field of OD. It also doesn't imply that traditional organizational studies or practices are focused on essentially negative states or phenomena. However, a hunger for positive approaches to doing OD is evidenced by the broad interest in appreciative inquiry and its generative qualities that suggest other approaches to organizational change beyond action research and other traditional practices.

I argue here, along with those at the University of Michigan, Case Western Reserve, and Fielding Graduate University that a positive perspective toward organizational studies offers an umbrella under which various theories about organizational phenomena can be subsumed. In addition, editors Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn, in their seminal book *Positive Organizational Scholarship* (2003), have written that a dearth of research exists in organizational studies about the effects of the positive and the good in organizational behavior, and they have put out a call to the profession to rigorously examine the phenomena that lead to extraordinary positive outcomes. In a review of Cameron, et al., in a recent issue of *Seasonings*, I pointed out that the editors overlooked a number of change practices that have a positive core by reporting only those studies and applications that reflect a strong tradition of empirical research. I suggested that an innovative and evocative social and behavioral science, seen from a positivistic practice perspective, could also include approaches that are not only based on empirical studies, but that also emerge from and are validated by actual practice. Such practices should also have the capacity to generate new theory and spawn innovative approaches to change.

The emphasis of this volume of the *OD Practitioner* on "Positive Organization Practice" may also seem somewhat redundant to some, since the field of OD is based on a foundation of values and assumptions about people and organizations that generally have a positive spin to them and were formulated early in the development of the field. According to French and Bell (1999), the historical values of OD tend to be humanistic, optimistic, and democratic. It is this set of values that

distinguishes OD from other approaches to managing change in organizations. In the articles that follow, the reader will find new, innovative, and generative approaches to positive OD practice.

The introductory article by **Bonnie Richley** and **Tony Lingham** provides a convincing rationale for mixing positive OD and conventional practices into a cyclical and integrative change process they call ICP. Their model is clarified by a case study involving 25 international representatives in a strategic planning initiative that combined positive OD practices such as high-point story telling (AI) with conventional change processes that included various inventories and coaching practices. They conclude their experience with ICP by offering four cautionary insights to those wanting to replicate ICP, or to modify and experiment with variations of positive OD practices.

Kathleen Long introduces a fascinating analysis of the pathogenic dance choreographed by OD practitioners who encounter "wicked" or pathogenic systems, attempt to gain positive leverage for change over the client, and end up increasing the severity and scope of the client's problems in a "morbid pas de trois." She suggests that positive OD practice, when used in a total systems context, may assist in dissolving, versus solving, problems encountered in pathogenic systems.

Thom Allena examines the principles and applications of restorative practices used to deal with misconduct and policy violations within the context of organizational settings. He suggests that rather than punishing employees, restorative practice procedures can lead to forgiveness and a sense of shared responsibility. The fundamental principle is simple: employees are more cooperative and productive when management does things with them rather than to them or for them. A case study of restorative practices in action at UCLA is a dramatic example of the effectiveness of the restorative process at work. Interesting contrasts and comparisons with Appreciative Inquiry methodology are also offered by the author.

Kathy Domenici and **Stephen Littlejohn** mix appreciative inquiry and asset-based development practices to illustrate the value of shifting from a problem-oriented approach to strategic planning to an affirmative planning orientation. They introduce seven stages of planning, from imagining an accomplishment to coalescing a plan, and they detail their experience over a four year period with 32 Tribal Colleges and Universities. Their conclusion: appreciative planning builds on assets and existing resources, avoids unrealistic linear models of systems action, and promotes action planning by engaging key stakeholders in constructive collaboration. The two articles in the next section present cases where social constructionist theory is applied to improve communications and leadership.

Barnett Pearce and **Hilda Carpenter** offer the theory of the coordinated management of meaning (CMM) and recommend that consultants and their clients view themselves as co-participants in the process of making the world in which they operate. When clients focus on their communication patterns and practices, they become stewards of their own communications, and the consultant shifts from observer to active participant in the process of achieving this new focus.

Also building on a social constructionist platform, **Kevin Barge** describes a "systemic

movement to leadership" which develops leaders' abilities to understand and make sense of the connections between people, language, meaning, actions taken, and context. He presents some of the practices that the London-based Kensington Consultation Centre Foundation has developed to train leaders in how to work with language and meaning to mobilize and unleash human potential in organizations. His descriptions of conversational practices such as affirmative noticing, story telling, and circular questioning is reminiscent of appreciative inquiry methodologies with the shared goal of building positive working relationships.

Expanding this conversation to include the goal of trust building, **Dennis and Michelle Reina** suggest that more productive and rewarding work environments will emerge if relationships are founded on trust. By taking actions that build sustainable trust, leaders develop an understanding of the complex dynamics involved. They propose that even when trust is broken, a sense of betrayal can be resolved, and the Reinas outline seven steps for healing to achieve such resolution. Trust, they conclude, is the critical ingredient required both for successful relationships and organizations.

Carl Oliver outlines an approach to building a corporate culture that honors personal accountability and ethical behavior. He draws upon a three stage theory of "ethics dynamics" that corporations need to pay attention to if they want their employees to work ethically. The most challenging stage, beyond compliance and establishing a culture of corporate ethical values, is an embedded sense of trust. OD practitioners can help to instill these values by training corporate leadership, by sponsoring discussion groups, on-line and off, by focusing on ethics scenarios, and by establishing ethics contact channels or communication channels, labeled as helplines or openlines, that provide a source of employee input for building and strengthening the corporate culture.

In the concluding article, **Donald Klein** challenges us to experience a personal transformation in our way of thinking by shifting from a Psychology of Projection to a Psychology of Appreciation. He argues that appreciation is an internal state of being that exists within all of us, and that every human being is born with the ability to access the feelings associated with appreciation: wonderment, awe, fascination, excitement, and delight. He suggests that for too long we OD practitioners have functioned within a mind state that the author refers to as a "Psychology of Projection," where the contents of our mind ". . . are confused with the facts of the external world." These projective assumptions are taken as correct reflections of reality, and they lead to a clash in projections when communicating with other individual and collective identities. Such misunderstandings can lead to prejudices, recriminations, and violence. Klein offers a way out by suggesting two basic steps for creating a fundamental "change of mind" in how we think and cope with the world and with one another, and he uses a personal case study to illustrate this proposed change of mind. He cites the upsurge of excitement in OD about appreciative thought as a harbinger for a movement towards positivity among OD practitioners.

The organizing principle behind this volume has been to introduce a sampling of OD practices that generate positive organization values and that draw upon theoretical perspectives that go beyond Appreciative Inquiry or, in several instances of the case studies cited above, mix AI with other approaches to OD. Our reach in this volume is

purposefully broad. Even so, we haven't been able to include those practices and traditions oriented to social justice, inclusion and diversity, socially responsible businesses, sustainable management, organizational wellness, and other contributions that focus on creating the best of the human condition in working environments and communities. Hopefully, this work will find its way into another issue of the OD Practitioner.

The articles selected offer an intriguing number of different perspectives and approaches to practicing OD—all in the tradition of our humanistic, optimistic, and democratic values. And it's only a sample. The field is evolving, and as practitioners rally to the banner, I expect the scope and breadth of this new/old lens through which to observe our profession will continue to expand.

~ ***Don Bushnell***

References Cameron, K.S., Dutton, J.E., and Quinn, R.E., (2003) Positive organizational scholarship: foundations of a new discipline. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

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