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An Appreciative Approach to Managerial Coaching: Words Matter When Increasing Employee Engagement

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Employers set out to create positive cultures where employees can thrive. Despite this effort, engagement surveys find more than 60% of employees are just going through the motions at work. Disengagement affects such key workplace factors as productivity, customer satisfaction, absenteeism, safety, and turnover. What will it take to shift employees from being disengaged to bringing their best self to work? The field of positive psychology may offer promising possibilities. Mounting evidence on the use of appreciative inquiry, strengths-based development, and self-determination theory in the workplace illuminate pathways to initiate and sustain greater well-being and productivity. Managers and others who coach employees are a critical to creating and sustaining this enhanced work environment. This paper examines how the findings of current positive psychology research points to potential ways coaching conversations can foster higher levels of motivation, cultivate a sense that one's work is valued, and strengthen a commitment to goals. This literature review identified a number of evidence-based practices managers may use when coaching to constructively develop individuals in ways that are aligned with personal values and motivation. A discussion of future directions for this work is proposed through a positive psychology coaching intervention aimed at increasing employee engagement.

Keywords

Disciplines

Human Factors Psychology | Industrial and Organizational Psychology | Interpersonal and Small Group Communication | Organization Development

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Advisor: Andrew Soren

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Keywords: appreciative inquiry, coaching, coaching psychology, mattering, organizational psychology, positive interventions, positive psychology, psychological safety, self-determination theory, social norms, strengths, training and development, well-being

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Introduction

Employee disengagement is an undeniable problem. How could it be that, across the globe, so many employees lack a sense of connection and commitment to their job and their organization? Gallup worldwide surveys indicate that approximately 34% of employees rate themselves as "engaged at work" (Harter, 2019). That means that 66% of the workforce is experiencing some level of disengagement. Of the disengaged, 53% are doing the minimum to meet job requirements. The remaining 13% of the unengaged may actively disrupt the work environment with poor work attitudes, spreading unhappiness and alienating co-workers and customers. This surprising data demands that more attention be given to increasing employee engagement.

What might be the benefits of higher employee engagement? Engaged workers bring passion and energy to their job, solve problems, exert extra effort to attain goals, and feel a strong sense of connection to their organization. In organizations where engagement has been surveyed by Gallup, Inc., the business departments that represent the top 25% levels of employee engagement outshined their counterparts in the bottom 25% across almost all essential measures of performance: 21% higher productivity, 20% more sales, 17% higher productivity, and 10% higher ratings in customer satisfaction (Harter, 2019). This top 25% of engaged employees also worked in business units that showed lower turnover, less absenteeism, fewer safety incidents, less shrinkage, fewer incidents, and lower quality defects (Harter, 2019). These critical measures of organizational and employee performance make a powerful case for potential returns on investments in increasing employee engagement (SHRM, 2017).

Managers often are asked to play a central role in increasing engagement at work through employee coaching, support, and managing performance (Beattie et al, 2014). The degree to which line managers effectively fulfill the role of coach varies. For example, while some

enthusiastically engage in coaching conversations, others view it as a burden (Ellinger, Hamlin, & Beattie, 2008). Many managers at all levels of an organization also lack the confidence or competence to effectively conduct the kinds of coaching conversations that encourage learning and enhance the knowledge and skill development of their team members (Ellinger, Hamlin, & Beattie, 2008).

A number of other studies have examined the impact of an organization's own coaches (internal) versus a coach brought in from outside the organization (external). A recent meta-analysis by Jones, Woods, and Guillaume (2016) found that, though learning and performance are positively impacted by external and internal coaching, significantly more positive results were realized through internal coaching. This literature review and intervention will focus on ways to enhance the internal managerial coaching experience.

The most impactful findings from the literature review are that managers who engage in coaching conversations focused on employee strengths, appreciation for efforts and accomplishments, and curious about possibilities for future growth, are more likely to experience greater success in addressing the employee's three fundamental human needs articulated in Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Taking a strengths-based, appreciative approach to managerial coaching may likely to increase an employee's levels of motivation and engagement at work.

Situation Analysis:

Employers around the globe recognize that employee engagement is alarmingly low. Gallup's meta-analysis shows that this problem extends across geographic and professional boundaries, including 230 organizations,49 industries,73 countries, and 1.9 million employees across 82,248 work units (Harter, Schmidt, Agrawal, Plowman, & Blue, 2016). Why is this information so disconcerting for employers? It indicates that not only do some employees feel

disconnected from the purpose and value of their work, but also suggests that some are intentionally disruptive and destructive.

Engagement is viewed on three levels: engaged, not engaged, and actively disengaged (Gallup, 2017). Imagine a piece of trash on the floor. The engaged employee takes the time to pick up the trash. The disengaged employee walks right by it. The actively disengaged employee is the one who threw the trash on the floor in the first place.

The responsibility for coaching has increasingly shifted away from human resources professionals or outside coaches to managerial coaching. Managerial coaching is defined as a facilitative process that enables individuals, groups/teams, and organizations to acquire new skills, higher levels of competence, and improved performance, as well as enhanced personal effectiveness, personal development, or personal growth (Ellinger, & Beattie, 2009). Unlike external coaches, who may only see a snapshot of an employee's performance, managers often see employees in their work role on a daily or weekly basis, enabling them to provide prompt, targeted feedback (Hunt and Weintraub, 2016). McCarthy & Milner (2020) researched managers' views of coaching to find that managers derived positive experiences from coaching others. Their coaching helped achieve organizational goals and intensified the managers' personal satisfaction to see their employees thrive. Managers and employees both reported that managerial coaching facilitated greater readiness for change and increased willingness to take risks and try new, innovative approaches. Managerial coaching emerges not only as an intellectual problem-solving approach, but also as a way to develop transformational, generative growth in both the employee and the manager (McCarthy & Milner, 2020). These findings point to compelling reasons for building managerial coaching skills.

In Hunt and Weintraub's (2016) research, for example, most managers demonstrate a genuine interest in the employee's learning, growth, and ability to adapt effectively to the changing work environment.

Ellinger and Bostram's (1999) research on coaching outlined behaviors typical of managers when they coach. The most effective coaches:

- Establish open communication with employees.

- Keep employees informed of organizational developments.

- Assess and appraise work performance.

- Empower employees to make decisions or take on more responsibility and leadership.

- Provide more challenge for employees to encourage continuous learning.

- Actively practice scenarios to problem solve.

- Delegate increasingly complex and significant tasks to encourage learning and growth.

- Provide and ask for feedback.

These coaching behaviors are needed now more than ever to accelerate employee development (Harter, Schmidt, Agrawal, & Plowman, 2013).

The Need for a Paradigm Shift

For coaching to bring about the most beneficial lift in performance, there may need to be a shift in the typical nature of coaching conversations. The starting point for this shift may be to look where managers are often directing their attention: increasing sales, enhancing service, or improving operational efficiency. These types of metrics lead some managers to focus on

performance deficits, which reflects a negative bias. As Rozin & Royzman (2001) found, people

have a natural predilection toward negativity bias. Humans tend to have an innate predisposition

toward negativity that manifests itself in more attention given to negative events, objects, or

personal traits. This seems to hold true for many managers when they review the work of their

employees. Many managers have tendencies to fixate on what is going wrong or is getting in the

way of improvements or what should be changed in an employee's behaviors. Cooperrider and

Godwin call this the 80/20 trap (2011). As an example, they observe that newspapers usually

devote 80% of their articles to descriptions of violence, crime, corruption, and other tragic

events. This negativity bias has been the subject of psychological research for the past 100 years,

with most research focused on the treatment of disease, pathology, weaknesses, and sickness

(Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This bias is woven into many business practices, such as

needs analysis, determination of root causes, and problem analysis. An entire management

consulting industry is built around these practices, amounting to $300 billion spent per year in

consulting fees to reduce errors, resize companies, and root out problems in operations

(Cooperrider & Godwin, 2011). It's no surprise, then that even for organizations that experience

growth, innovation, and increased success, the managers seem intent on fixing what is wrong by

focusing on performance deficits.

How does the deficit paradigm affect employees? In Cooperrider's and McQuaid's

(2012) view, deficit bias by managers may result in employees feeling undervalued. The deficit

paradigm can creep into the language of the organization, using words and phrases like problem

analysis, low morale surveys, variance analysis, broken, weaknesses, failures, gaps in

performance, low morale, deficiencies in performance or resources, and other negative

frameworks (Fiorentino, 2012).

Cooperrider & McQuaid (2012) identified the following tell-tale signs of a deficit paradigm:

- Managers focus their role and activities around being problem-solvers, taking focus away from creativity, innovation, and strengths-based improvement strategies.

- Managers focused on gaps in employee performance, rather than identifying opportunities for employee development and learning.

- Managers and employees develop negative attitudes toward performance management discussions, due to the negative nature of the conversation brought about by focusing on areas of deficit (Heathfield, 2007).

- When managers look for deficits, there is a self-fulfilling prophecy effect because managers look for and expect to find weaknesses and gaps in the performance of their employees. As a result of this lower expectation of work results, employees often end up fulfilling those expectations (Fiorentino, 2012).

How does the deficit paradigm affect employees? When a manager is asking about what is going wrong versus highlighting what is going right, employees may feel their strengths are not understood or appreciated. By contrast, when a manager notices the positive aspects of performance and recognizes the specific strengths being used, it increases an employee's confidence, enhances teamwork, helps assimilate the employee into the organization role, and reduces stress. The quality of an employee's relationship with their direct manager has a significant impact on the employee's level of engagement (Beattie et al., 2014). Positive psychology may be the field that can best accelerate this paradigm shift from the negative to the positive by equipping managers with the tools need to focus on strengths and what's working versus deficits and what's *not* working.

Positive Psychology: What It Is and Why It Matters

Positive psychology is the scientific study of the life experiences that create an increased state of well-being or flourishing (Seligman, 2011). In 1998, Martin Seligman, during his tenure as president of the American Psychological Association (APA), initiated a transformational change in the field of psychology. He declared that psychologists needed to shift their focus from just studying suffering of individuals to looking more closely at what makes life worth living and helps individuals flourish (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Prior to that time, a vast majority of clinical psychology research was focused on pathology, the treatment of disorders, or the study of debilitating conditions of life, like anxiety, depression, suicide, mental illness, and misery (Gable & Haidt, 2005).

Positive psychology is aimed at understanding the complete human condition, including human strengths and frailties. Gable and Haidt (2005) defined positive psychology as the study of what makes life worth living, including the study of the conditions or processes that enable flourishing, or optimal functioning, of individuals, groups, and institutions. They used the metaphor that traditional psychology focuses on bringing someone from a minus eight to closer to zero on the pain scale; positive psychology is concerned with bringing people from zero to positive eight.

Positive psychology can be summarized in these ways:

- **Positive psychology focuses on the study of when people are at their best**. It looks at a person's strengths and how to use the strengths to encourage flourishing individually and collectively (Niemiec, 2017; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

- **Positive psychology includes the study of resources and strategies to deal with the positive and negative experiences of life.** It focuses on building resources that increase well-being, like optimism and resilience, which may act as important tools

to deal with the negative emotions, setbacks, challenges of life, and problems

encountered, specifically researched in the workplace by Youssef & Luthans (2007).

Having higher levels of optimism and an optimistic explanatory style—one that

assumes that situations will work out for the best in the end—have proven to result

in health benefits and psychological well-being (Peterson & Steen, 2002). Optimists

tend to explain positive events in terms of internal factors and stable causes. For

example, "I did well on the exam because I studied hard." This is opposed to a

pessimistic explanatory style of negative events being attributed to internal,

permanent, and pervasive factors. For example, "I never do well on exams because I

can't remember the information."

- **Positive psychology uses empirical investigations into the science of happiness**.
  Evidence from rigorous scientific practices in research has identified which
  processes and practices may bring about increases in well-being (Biswas-Diener,
  2010).

- **Positive psychology interventions promote higher levels of well-being.**
  The field of positive psychology has contributed many positive activities, known as
  positive interventions, that help raise levels of happiness by increasing positive
  feelings, positive actions, or positive thoughts (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).

Positive Psychology Interventions

How does one achieve the positive psychology goal of promoting human flourishing and

elevating a sense of well-being? Many positive psychology practitioners have focused on

developing positive psychology interventions to elevate positive emotions, create opportunities

for greater engagement, build stronger relationships, foster gratitude, cultivate hope, create an

appreciation of greater meaning and purpose in life, and direct efforts toward positive

achievement (Seligman, 2011). Positive interventions invite the potential for increasing abiding

happiness and well-being (Lyubomirsky, 2008). To increase the effectiveness of positive

interventions, Lyubomirsky (2008) provides a "person-activity fit" diagnostic. This assessment

tool considers the elements of an intervention that:

- Provide the flexibility needed to adapt to specific individual needs and desired

  outcomes

- Narrow and select interventions that best meet a person-activity fit

- Identifies activities that minimize hedonic adaptation, or the abatement of boosts

  in happiness with time (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).

Hedonic adaptation, also known as the hedonic treadmill, is the adaptation of one's level

of happiness back to a relatively stable setpoint, even in the face of major positive or negative

events in one's life (Schwartz, 2015). Effective positive interventions that consider the person-

activity fit to achieve greater well-being have the potential to be sustained for longer periods of

time (Bao & Lyubomirsky, 2014; Schueller, 2014).

Advances in positive psychology over the past twenty years may be credited to the

extensive rigorous scientific study in the field. One of the most pivotal theories of well-being is

Seligman's theory of PERMA (2011), which uses a framework of five core elements to enhance

well-being: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. These

five elements all contribute to well-being individually, are pursued for their own sake, and can be

defined and measured independently. Each element has been extensively researched by some of

the most renowned positive psychology researchers. See table below.

The PERMA framework provides opportunity for positive interventions to be directed to

one or more of the five elements of the framework to increase flourishing. Individuals may

pursue these elements to experience a more fulfilling, meaningful life with higher levels of

happiness.

The table that follows contains a brief description of each element and identifies some of

the leading researchers who have contributed scientific evidence of effects on well-being.

PERMA Element	Description
Positive Emotions	Positive emotions serve to open our minds, broaden our awareness, expand our perspectives, and build and develop resources like knowledge, skills, abilities, and relationships. According to the Broaden and Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2013b), positive emotions such as joy, awe, contentment, and love broaden one's awareness and thought-action repertoire, allowing more thoughts and actions to choose from when considering possibilities. This broadened awareness leads to building psychological, intellectual, physical, and social resources which enable one to be more resilient in the face of challenge.
Engagement	Engagement means being completely involved in an experience to the point that it completely absorbs attention (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; 2020). One devotes complete attention to the task at hand and enters a state of flow, where all awareness is directed to the task at hand. Time flies by as immersion in the task seems to be the only sensation. This provides calm, focus, interest, meaning, and challenge.
Relationships	Relationships are the social connections that become the fabric of our lives (Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008). These connections with others promote the love, interdependency, emotional support, and physical interactions that help us in good and challenging times (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006).
Meaning	Meaning is our drive toward fulfilling our perceived purpose on Earth. Meaning explores how we serve ourselves and others through our words and actions at home and at work (Steger, 2017; Steger & Dik, 2010).
Accomplishment	Accomplishing goals and pursuing our ambitions to experience satisfaction and a sense of pride (Locke & Latham, 2002). Gratitude and an optimistic explanatory style may help us persevere toward our goals and become more resilient in challenging times (Peterson & Steen, 2002).

Intersection of Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology

Positive psychology and coaching psychology are naturally complementary fields that offer insights into practices in the areas of goal striving (Green & Spence, 2014), prevention techniques for mental health, enhancing performance, reduction of work-related stress, enhanced well-being and resilience, and fatigue (Grant, 2017; Green, Oades, & Grant, 2006; Palmer & Gyllensten, 2008). Coaching psychology has been defined as the systematic application of behavioral science, within the context of coaching, to enhance life experiences, work performance, and the well-being of organizations, groups, and individuals (Grant, 2007). Integrating cognitive behavioral and solutions-focused coaching approaches with evidence-based interventions from positive psychology may be effective for personal development and goal attainment (Green & Palmer, 2018). Exploring how to increase coaching skills with positive psychology might be done with a series of positive psychology interventions (PPIs). Together, the latest advances in both fields may assist managers by offering ways to use evidence-based coaching to enhance engagement and well-being at work.

Literature Review

Highly relevant positive psychology research for enhancing managerial coaching includes character strengths, appreciative inquiry, self-determination theory, psychological safety, and social norms. While this research provides insights for managers to more effectively coach employees in the workplace, it also has obvious application for external executive coaches or qualified professionals who work with individuals—typically executives or high-potential employees--to help clarify goals, achieve development objectives, gain self-awareness, unlock potential, or be a sounding board for strategies and ideas.

Character Strengths

Character strengths are positive individual traits that are personally fulfilling, valued across cultures and throughout centuries of religious thought, associated with positive outcomes for others and oneself, reflective of one's personal identity, and contribute to the collective good without diminishing another character strength. (Niemiec, 2017). Peterson and Seligman (2004) introduced the Values in Action (VIA) classification of 24 strengths that describe one's character when at optimal human functioning. These character strengths can be ranked for each person based on the centrality of the strength to the individual. It is important to note that the VIA character strength classifications are descriptive, rather than prescriptive (Niemiec, 2017).

Signature strengths are character strengths that have been identified as the most positive aspects of a person's personality that impact how the person thinks, feels, and behaves. Signature strengths, typically the five top-ranked strengths in an individual's strengths profile, are elements of one's character that hold great potential for increased engagement (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). Signature strengths have three key features:

- Essential. The strengths feel essential to who a person is.

- Effortless. Using the strength feels effortless and natural.

- Energizing. Using the strengths is uplifting and a natural source of energy.

People who use their strengths regularly are more likely to experience:

- Less stress and higher levels of positivity. Some character strengths like kindness, perspective, social intelligence, and self-regulation may create a buffer against effects of stress (Park & Peterson, 2009).

- Increased well-being, with higher levels of vitality, sound mental health, and less depression (Mitchell, Stanimirovic, Klein, & Vella-Brodrick, 2009).

- Healthier behaviors and increased energy, leading more active lives, pursuing pleasurable activities, and demonstrating healthier eating habits (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004)

- Greater life satisfaction, which becomes even more elevated when employing strengths-based interventions targeted at strengths of curiosity, gratitude, hope, humor, and zest, which correlate highly with life satisfaction (Proyer, Ruch, & Buschor, 2013)

- More confidence in both their knowledge and use of strengths associated with self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-acceptance (Govindji & Linley, 2007)

- More creative and proactive behaviors at work through feelings of concentration, vitality, authenticity, ability to adapt, and increased attention to detail (Harzer & Ruch, 2014)

- Deeper meaning in their work. Through the use of four or more of their top-ranked, or signature, character strengths at work, individuals are more likely to experience job satisfaction, meaning in their work, engagement, and pleasure (Peterson, Stephens, Park, Lee, & Seligman, 2010).

- Heightened engagement in their work. By using their strengths each day, employees are up to six times more engaged in what they are doing (Clifton & Harter, 2003; Crabb, 2011). Using strengths is a key ingredient in making work meaningful, enjoyable, and engaging (Bretherton & Niemiec, 2018).

Managers enable higher potential performance of employees when they create opportunities for team members to become aware of—and intentionally use—their strengths at

work. Managers can coach for optimal level of use of strengths, being mindful and observant of overuse or underuse. Strengths used at an optimal level offer a pathway toward more effective ways to problem-solve while enhancing individual well-being and life satisfaction (Freidlin, Littman-Ovadia, & Niemiec, 2017). Managers can work with team members to balance character strength usage through tempering or towing effects (Niemiec, 2019). Tempering involves use of a character strength to regulate overuse of another; for example, using self-regulation to temper zest. Towing involves use of a strength to boost underuse of another, as when using creativity to boost gratitude.

Shifting to a strengths-based focus leverages people's inherent drive toward positive change (Ngomane, 2011). According to Tombaugh (2005), managers who take a strengths-based approach to their work tend to create environments that inspire, energize, and promote learning while developing their employee's openness to growth and positive change. Tombaugh's research found that when managers choose to intentionally shift from a negative focus to what is working well, they are more likely to capitalize on opportunities to encourage their employees to use their strengths at work. Tombaugh also noted that in a strengths-focused organization, it may be more common to hear the language of positive change, including words like inspiring, thriving, innovating, exploring possibilities, engaging, capitalizing on opportunities, thriving, and optimism. Many found that managers who create positive change are focused on ways to develop their employees versus spending all their time managing performance (Luthans, Youssef, Sweetman, & Harms, 2012).

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative inquiry is an organizational development model, pioneered by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987), that focuses on leveraging an organization's core strengths to bring about

change, rather than minimizing its weaknesses or challenges that need to be overcome.

Appreciative inquiry looks at the positive present and future, appreciating what is the best in

people. This tends to energize employees. By contrast, traditional organization change

approaches of problem diagnosis tend to drain the energy for desired change (Gordon, 2008).

Looking at each of the two words, appreciative inquiry, provides insight into its intent.

Cooperrider and Srivastva used these words to describe a shift in an organizational change

paradigm from intervention to inquiry, and from analyzing problems to appreciating strengths

(Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

Appreciate, v. 1. Valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around

us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that

give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems. 2. To increase in value – for example, the

economy has appreciated in value. Synonyms: value, prize, esteem, and honor.

Inquire, v., 1. The act of exploration and discovery. 2. To ask questions; to be open to

seeing new potentials and possibilities. Synonyms: discover, search, systematically explore, and

study (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p.7).

Appreciative Inquiry views change though a positive lens of collaboration. Positivity is

more than an end state of an organization; it is the catalyzing force that brings about change.

When employees are invited to imagine and design ways for their organizations to achieve

affirmative goals, overall performance increases (Cooperrider, 2012). Appreciative inquiry

adopts the view that people serve as a life-giving source with potential to contribute strengths

and assets to create positive change. These positive strengths, or core assets, may be leveraged to

create desired future states (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000). Discovering what is best in an

organization or an individual can be transformative, moving change towards promising and

inspiring future states for individuals and organizations (Krattenmaker, 2001; Sisodia, Wolfe, & Sheth, 2003; 2007).

Peter Drucker, one of the most renowned management thought leaders in the past 50 years, shared his ideas on the importance of an appreciative eye for great leadership. Late in Drucker's career, David Cooperrider interviewed him and asked, "What is leadership all about?" Drucker responded without hesitation: *"The task of leadership is ageless in its essence…. the task of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths in ways that make a system's weaknesses irrelevant."* (Cooperrider, 2012).

Drucker's view may be applied to employee development. Cooperrider's (1990) work with appreciative inquiry found that organizations and individuals grow in the direction of where they focus their attention and the type of questions they ask. Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) challenged a prevailing mindset that organizations needed to be "fixed" or there were problems to be solved. They shifted from a deficit bias to one of appreciation. They viewed organizations as living systems that functioned based on human relatedness, a network of people who possessed infinite strengths, unlimited imagination, and boundless potential (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

When organizations take time to analyze their strengths, resources, and successes, there is less emphasis on problem solving and more focus on opportunities to be pursued. Core strengths, when used collectively, bring energy to the task of organizational change. Cooperrider and Srivastva shifted the question from what's wrong with an organization to a systematic discovery of what gives it life; namely, maximizing human potential to empower people to be more capable in an economic, ecological, and human way (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2011). How can an organization become most generative and alive with ideas, innovation, and energy? Research

suggests that this strengths-based, appreciative philosophy can be woven into management

practices that bring out the best in the individual and organization.

To survive, organizations must continually change. Studies show that change is often

brought about by the process of studying the desired object of change. Studying human

systems—observing, asking questions—causes them to change. Inquiry and change happen

simultaneously (Stavros, Godwin, & Cooperrider, 2015). In this same way, positive questions

create positive change. It has also been shown that asking questions that are negative in nature,

as we often see in low morale surveys, can have a negative impact. A low morale survey may

actually bring about lower morale by drawing attention to the very topic of low morale.

(Cooperrider & Godwin, 2011).

As with a low morale survey, in toxic workplaces, the process of studying corrosive

connections of mistrust and negativity unintentionally ended up spreading toxicity (Dutton,

2003; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Studies in work incivility (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000)

documented how corrosive connections at work caused long-lasting damage. A front-line

workers survey found that more than half of the 327 workers who completed the survey

indicated some level of mistreatment at work during the past three years. Another study of 600

nurses surveyed found that within the previous five days of the survey, one-third of them had

been verbally abused by coworkers, managers, and others in the work environment. Frost (2007)

studied how toxic, low-quality relationships lead to feelings of depletion and degradation. In one

case, a sales executive arrived at his new job, and with a curt greeting, his assigned mentor

skipped any office tour and walked the executive right to his new workspace. Walking away, the

mentor was overheard saying to colleagues, "There's the new guy. Someone else try him out and

let me know if he's any good." The new sales executive felt like a piece of furniture. Deflated by

the experience and lacking any sense of connection to his colleagues, he shortly afterward left the organization. Positive cultures and positive change matter.

The strengths-based, appreciative philosophy is supported by five principles of Appreciative Inquiry):

- **Constructionist Principle**: Our words create our reality. We tend to exist in a world that our questions create. What we ask determines what we focus on, investigate, and discover. It influences our ability to be creative, use imagination, plan work, and envision the future reality.

- **Simultaneity Principle**: The moment we ask a question, change begins to happen. The process of asking questions influences the direction of the change.

- **Poetic Principle:** We choose what we focus on in any given situation. How can we look for what is working, what is best, and what is possible?

- **Anticipatory Principle**: We look and listen for what we expect to see and hear. How can we stay open and expect the best from others? How can we engage our imagination about our future and the positive possibilities of what it might become?

- **Positive Principle**: Positive images inspire positive action. The more positive and hopeful the image of the future, the more positive the present-day action will be (Cooperrider, Barrett, & Srivastva, 1995).

Appreciative inquiry encourages us to start with a positive framework for all inquiry that follows. The most widely used model, developed by members of the Global Excellence in Management (GEM) Initiative, uses a 4-D cycle of Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny to identify core positive strengths related to an affirmative topic, or the focus of a positive change intervention (Mann, 1997). The 4-D Cycle, depicted in Diagram 1, identifies and appreciates what is best, imagines and envisions the future, articulates the strategic focus of what might be,

and plans for what can and will be done to achieve the positive image of the future (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The 4-D Cycle may be used to involve employees in a narrative-based process of positive change. The flexibility of the model allows for rapid, informal conversations with colleagues, clients, or employees. It can also be used more formally in an organization-wide process that invites stakeholders from within and outside of an organization to mobilize and create a new course for the future.

AFFIRMATIVE
TOPIC

DISCOVERY
"What gives life?"
The best of what is
Appreciating

DREAM
"What might be?"
*Envisioning Results/
Impact*

DESTINY
"How to empower,
learn and improvise?"
Sustaining

POSITIVE
CORE

DESIGN
"What should be –
the idea?"
Co-constructing

4-D CYCLE OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Diagram 1: 4-D Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry. Retrieved information from David Cooperrider's website:
https://www.davidcooperrider.com/ai-process/
Graphic by Impact Performance Group®-Lydia Hardy

Through the appreciative inquiry process, managers can:

- Elevate individual strengths.

- Broaden and build individual resources.

- Envision future possibilities that encompass the use of the strengths to achieve new goals and create new realities.

Broadening and elevating positive emotions builds resources that help people persevere during challenging times. This phenomenon, known as The Broaden and Build Theory by Fredrickson and Losada (2005), shows how positive emotions broaden awareness and build up positive resources into a positive upward spiral. To increase resilience during change, it is beneficial to intentionally increase the kinds of experiences that lead to positive emotions. When individuals and organizations experience positive-to-negative emotions in a ratio of 2.9 to 1, they are considered to be flourishing. The nature of appreciative inquiry focuses on positivity, which fuels positive emotions and positivity resonance, defined as the positive emotion between two or more people of a deeply shared connection related to flourishing mental health and well-being (Fredrickson, 2013c).

Using a strengths-based paradigm does not mean that an organization or its individuals will ignore the existence of challenges, obstacles, weaknesses, or deficits. On the contrary, appreciative inquiry involves the process of recognizing and acknowledging all of these types of challenges and uses the process of reframing to view them as opportunities for enhancements, growth, or potential areas for innovation (Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, & Rader, 2010). Appreciative inquiry provided a set of principles and a process for helping employees understand when they are at their best at work—and how to leverage those core strengths, values, knowledge, and experience to create goals—and pathways to attaining them.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory is a motivation theory of personality, social processes, and development that looks closely at how individual differences and social contexts affect two different types of motivation: autonomous motivation and controlled motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2015). Autonomous motivation propels someone to engage in certain behaviors at work because these behaviors are consistent with the person's intrinsic goals. Controlled motivation relates to doing something because of a reward one will receive or a punishment they wish to avoid.

Self-determination theory is based on these key findings:

- People are driven to grow and gain mastery over challenges. They pursue new experiences to develop a cohesive sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

- Self-determination theory focuses on the intrinsic motivation to act in ways that gain knowledge or independence. Though external rewards (extrinsic motivation) can encourage action, a more sustainable and long-lasting motives for action come from intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

- People have three universal psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

  o Autonomy is the need for agency over one's choices in life. People need to feel they have control over their own goals and behaviors, and sense of ownership and control over their day-to-day activities and long-term career path.

  o Competence is the need to grow, learn, and master new skills so that people feel they have the skills needed for success and, as a result, will more likely use those skills to achieve their goals. Competence allows us

to use our skills to contribute in ways that feel meaningful and valued by

others. People want to feel that they are effective in their jobs.

- o Relatedness is the desire for a sense of belonging, attachment, and

    relationships with others around them (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Self-determination theory looks at the process of internalizing competence, autonomy,

and relatedness as an active, natural process that involves individuals transforming their goals

and performance expectations into personally endorsed values and self-regulations (Deci &

Ryan, 2000). Goal-directed activities can vary in the degree to which they are self-determined or

more autonomous. Intrinsic motivation and well-internalized extrinsic motivation are the basis

for self-determined or autonomous behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The self-determination continuum, illustrated in the figure below, depicts the degree to

which behaviors are self-determined. Diagram 2.

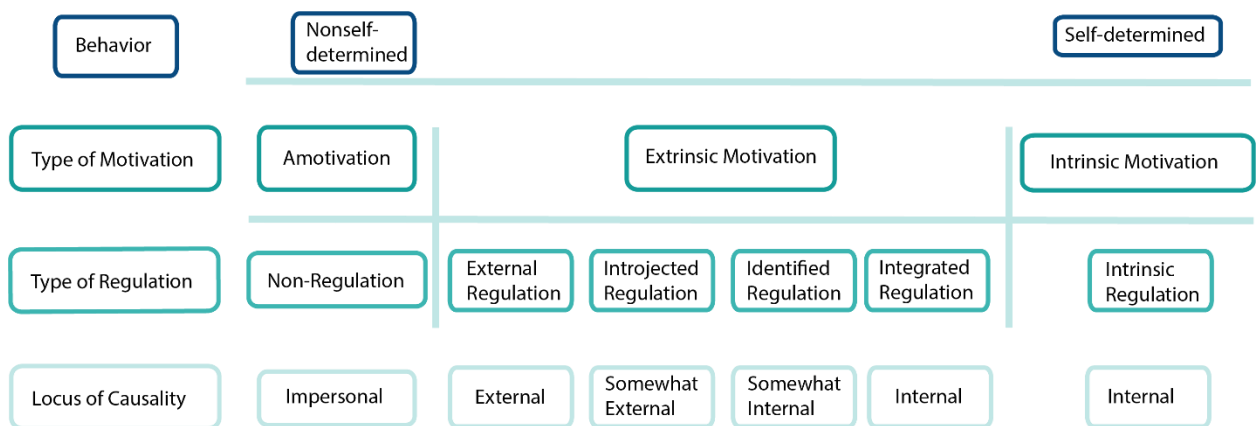Figure 1. The self-determination continuum, showing the motivational, self-regulatory, and perceived locus of causality bases of behaviors that vary in the degree to which they are self-determined.

Diagram 2: Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological inquiry*, *11*(4), 227-268.
Graphic by Impact Performance Group®-Caitlin Corcoran.

According to Deci and Ryan (2015), levels of motivation predict things like performance, psychological health, openness to learning, and overall experiences. Self-determination theory proposes that satisfying the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness promotes psychological health and effective engagement at work.

Four decades of research on self-determination theory show that people adapt and increase well-being when they are supported by the right environmental conditions (Lee & Reeve, 2020). Self-determination plays a key role in psychological well-being because people feel they have control over the choices in their life (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

A 40-year meta-analysis of the influence of external incentives versus intrinsic motivation on performance confirmed three key findings regarding on-the-job performance (Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Ford, 2014). First, poor performance is rare among individuals who gain enjoyment and personal satisfaction from their tasks at work. This is true for those employed in businesses, schools, health care professions, and other lines of work. Moreover, individuals who enjoy their job overall, not just certain tasks or aspects of the job, tended to outperform their counterparts who did not (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001). The second finding is that there is a variance in the role of extrinsic incentives on performance. When extrinsic incentives are indirectly related to the work or based on the performance being measured, then intrinsic motivation is a better predictor of performance. Third, when the meta-analysis looked at which mattered more, intrinsic motivation or extrinsic incentives, intrinsic motivation mattered more for the quality of work. Extrinsic incentives tended to be better predictors of the quantity, rather than the quality, of performance (Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Ford, 2014). Managers may consider these findings useful when they analyze the type and quality of tasks to be completed and when determining what extrinsic incentives to offer.

Social support is also essential for fostering employee growth in the three universal psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) that, when satisfied, increase intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). A manager can influence their employee's motivation to action when they enable the employee to feel that what the employee does will affect the outcome (Deci & Ryan, 2004).

Goal identification is another method that managers can use to increase an employee's sense of self-determination. During coaching conversations, employees who are encouraged to freely choose and develop their goals will likely experience an enhanced sense of autonomy and competence, resulting in performance goals and desired outcomes aligned with the employee's values and sense of self. This approach helps creates workplace conditions where an employee is intrinsically motivated, rather than motivated by such external motivators as work pressure, rewards, punitive consequences, or negative emotions like envy (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Here are some considerations for managers looking to apply self-determination theory:

- Listen to employees to understand their perspectives.

- Trust that the employees will do a great job when given the right conditions to do so (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

- Capitalize on coaching conversations to communicate common organizational goals and tie the employee's work to something meaningful so the employee can understand why what they are doing matters (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

- Focus on establishing shared goals to create a strong sense of relatedness and belonging. When each employee understands their role in helping to achieve a shared goal, there is a greater sense of commitment.

- Create open dialogue so their team members can ask questions, raise concerns, and offer alternative ways to achieve the goals (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

These coaching behaviors support higher levels of employee performance by increasing the degree to which an employee becomes involved in and contributes ideas for goal attainment. Employees develop a clearer picture of how their work fits into broader organizational goals and, as a result, feel a greater sense of meaning from their work.

Additional Positive Psychology Research

There are two additional areas of Positive Psychology worthy of special attention, given how they may positively or negatively influence the likelihood of success of a coaching intervention: Psychological Safety and Social Norms. Each topic is briefly discussed here provide information to consider when designing managerial coaching interventions.

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is defined as one's perception of their willingness and comfort with taking interpersonal risks in the workplace (Edmondson, 1999). An employee's feelings of high psychological safety play a key role in their willingness to speak up at work and may influence the quality and productivity of coaching conversations. Psychological safety affects an employee's willingness to contribute ideas and take action in a collaborative work setting (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Employees are often asked to work collaboratively with cross-functional teams in team meetings and team communications. The willingness to voice one's opinions, share ideas, and offer suggestions for improvements or changes to the status quo by looking at situations with a new perspective has a significant effect on the amount of learning and innovation that occurs within organizations (Edmondson & Lei, 2014.) This is also true of

one-on-one conversations with managers who want to encourage brainstorming in development conversations. The higher the level of psychological safety, the more an employee is motivated to share their opinions, ideas, experience, and knowledge (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

Psychological safety research has examined behaviors such as speaking up, which is defined as upward-directed, promotive verbal communication (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Research has shown that individuals often do not feel safe speaking up in their work environment (Detert & Edmondson, 2011). Speaking up often involves being able to offer ideas to improve processes, which can be a critical aspect of creating a learning organization (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). When managers demonstrate a high level of receptivity to creative ideas, employees are more likely to engage in speaking up.

A climate of psychological safety may be essential for increasing individual learning and innovation. People are more likely to offer ideas, take risks, be willing to experiment, make mistakes, admit to mistakes, ask for assistance from others, and provide honest feedback if they feel it is safe to do so (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Coaching conversations will be more fruitful when psychological safety enables a collaborative discussion about what is working and how the employee's strengths might be leveraged to achieve current and future performance goals. This open exchange encourages the sharing of ideas and co-creation of effective development activities. Psychological safety will be a key mediator in that process (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

Psychological safety is also key to creating more open exchanges before and after coaching conversations. Managers will benefit from being more intentional and attentive to the factors that enable the level of psychological safety needed to create more open environments for dialogue, sharing of knowledge, feedback, learning for individuals, and learning for organizations (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

Social Norms

Social norms define the expectations of appropriate behavior in a group. To create

positive change and embrace a strengths-based coaching approach, managers in organizations

often model the behaviors that become norms within an organization. Norm perception is a

dynamic process, so there are many ways norms can be developed. Positive interventions can

change managers' behaviors in the workplace, equip them with new knowledge, skills, and

behaviors relevant to their roles, and provide clear messages from organizational leadership that

certain behaviors are important and desired within the management ranks (Tankard & Paluck,

2016). Gaining full adoption and consistent execution of these desired skills can shape and shift

managers' behaviors through structured learning and development programs supported by clear

expectations and rewarded by performance systems (Johnson, Corcoran, Yerace, Satterfield, &

Chan, 2020).

Social norms may become part of the foundation of group interaction (McDonald &

Crandall, 2015). Social codes, which often make up the means for adhering to social norms, tell

people how they are supposed to think, dress, act, comport themselves, and interact with each

other. Social norms define standards of behavior, often detailing appropriate behavior that

defines what the group does and who they are (Sherif & Sherif, 1953). Akerlof and Kranton's

research (2011) on social norms indicates that how people feel and think about themselves has a

significant influence on decisions they make. When in a group, individuals learn about the norms

over time, continually adapting to expected group behavior by updating their impressions of the

group or through other sources that provide more information about the group's norms (Miller &

Prentice, 2012; Paluck & Shepherd, 2012).

There are individuals within groups who seem to set social norms. Known as social

referents, they have a highly visible presence within a group. Often, members of the group want

to emulate them, so these social referents play a critical role in shaping and shifting norms (Paluck & Shepherd, 2012). In contrast to social referents, some members are "engaged followers," taking cues from managers and social referents to solidify their own social identification (Reicher, Haslam, & Smith, 2012).

Norms become an important consideration when developing coaching interventions because research in this field indicates that individuals care about the norms of the groups, known as reference groups, to which they belong. People form their identity, in part, when they conform to group norms. Individuals risk exclusion or a loss of social status if they stray from reference group norms (McDonald & Crandall, 2015).

Tankard and Paluck (2016) have found that subjective perception of a norm is important, given that these perceptions influence the individual's behaviors and opinions. These perceptions need to be considered when attempting to shift norms of behavior. The reference group's perceived values and activities tend to be demonstrated and continually updated by general knowledge and information about the groups' opinions and behaviors, how each individual within the group behaves, and by the group's institutional systems, policies, and practices (Tankard & Paluck, 2016). Desired norms may be built into potential coaching training to develop specific coaching skills and behaviors. The speed of adoption of these new norms may be affected by the adoption rate of the reference group, advancing or hindering the rate of change of managers' coaching behaviors.

Applications Plan

Using a strengths-based, appreciative inquiry framework for employee development that fosters greater autonomous motivation will be the focus on my application plan. The goal is to design and develop a skills-based training program for workplace managers that teaches an appreciative approach to managerial coaching, As identified in McCarthy and Milner's (2020)

research on managerial coaching, managers are motivated to coach employees when they see that

coaching can be transformational, generating growth in employees and within themselves. Given

the current low levels of employee engagement, there seems to be significant opportunity for

training that supports stronger internal relationships, builds competence in manager and

employee skills, and increases motivation at work. As mentioned earlier, this training solution

may also be relevant for external executive coaches working with executives or high-potential

employees to achieve greater engagement and motivation at work.

Proposed Working Title: Words Matter: Appreciative Coaching

Words Matter: Appreciative Coaching Workshop will teach managers the skills and

concepts to engender a more appreciative, strengths-based conversation that considers specific

ways to address the employee's universal needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

Please reference Diagram 3. Two key concepts discussed during this training will be the

Appreciative-Mindset™ and the CAR-COACH™ Process. These may be used in conversations

with employees, peers, and superiors.

The course objectives include strengthening a coach's ability to effectively conduct

coaching and professional development conversations to:

- Use conversational techniques to recognize strengths, discuss ideas for bringing one's

    best self to work, support growth, identify opportunities for mastery, build connections,

    and co-create developmental action plans to set and meet performance goals.

- Support the employee's ability to meet or exceed performance goals.

- Increase the employee's level of engagement at work.

- Deepen the employee's sense of meaning and mattering.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY
- Simultaneity
- Poetic
- Positive
- Constructionist
- Anticipatory

STRENGTHS
- 6 Virtues
- 24 Character Strengths
- Universally Applicable
- Signature Strengths
  - Essential
  - Effortless
  - Energizing

SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY
Theory of human personality and motivation, including intrinsic and extrinsic factors.
- Importance of addressing universal human needs of:
  - Competence
  - Autonomy
  - Relatedness

ELEMENTS OF APPRECIATIVE COACHING

Diagram 3: Elements of Appreciative Inquiry.
Graphics by Impact Performance Group®-Lydia Hardy

The workshop will articulate ways to apply research from character strengths, appreciative inquiry, self-determination theory, psychological safety, and social norms to an overall coaching process and coaching conversation. All activities will be designed to support knowledge acquisition, encourage the practice and consistent use of positive psychology principles, and apply the strategies and skills to personal and professional scenarios.

Workshop Concepts

The workshop teaches the concepts of the Appreciative-Mindset™ and the CAR-COACH™ Skills.

Demonstrating the Appreciative-Mindset™ throughout any coaching conversation offers ways to build higher quality relationships, increase trust with an employee, and generate more creativity when establishing goals or building action plans for development and learning. The Appreciative-Mindset™, when adopted by a manager, shifts coaching conversations from directive to more supportive, positive, energizing, and empowering to the employee.

CAR-COACH™ Skills support the flow of the coaching conversation, from setting the stage for a positive, open exchange to an exploration of needs to identifying such developmental ideas as goal setting and forward-thinking action planning.

These concepts encourage managers to focus on leveraging employee's strengths to accomplish tasks and amplify what's working to achieve even greater success. For example, an employee's strength may be curiosity. Here's how a coach might light leverage a strengths-based approach:

1. **Encourage Use of Strengths**. How can the team member use the strength of curiosity to discover new ways to achieve their current project deliverables?

2. **Amplify What's Working** (skills, processes, knowledge, willingness). What is the team member doing that is working well to move the project forward, increase energy, and encourage collaboration? How can we do more of it? What are the possibilities of amplifying those processes?

3. **Increase Engagement.** How will an employee's use of strengths and process that are working well impact their feeling of engagement (defined as discretionary performance, intent to stay, and loyalty to organization)?

4. **Increase Flow Experiences.** What are the ways managers help employees experience

more flow (completely involved in an activity for its own sake, where time flies, there

is complete concentration, and one's skills are being used to the utmost

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). (Refer to Diagram 4.)

The desired outcomes for Appreciative Coaching include employees' personal

development, which may lead to more opportunities for them to flourish at work, increase work

engagement, and have more experiences of flow. See Diagram 4.
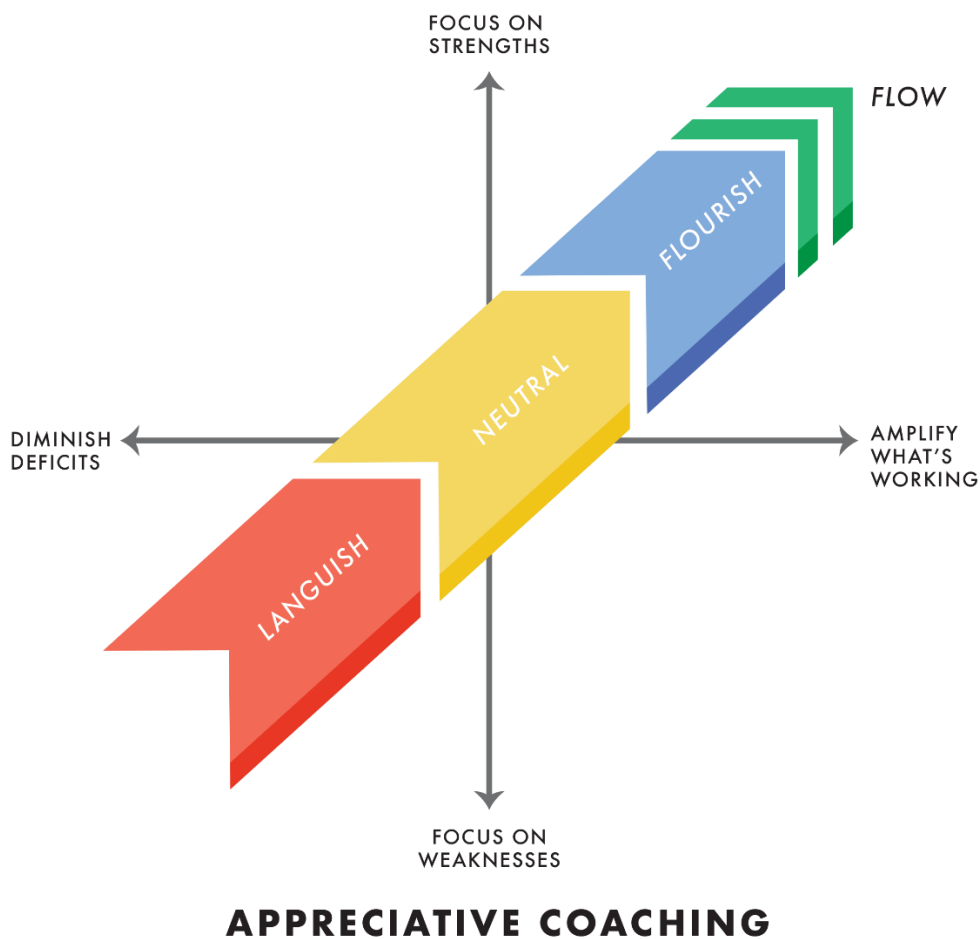
Diagram 4: Appreciative Coaching
Graphics by Impact Performance Group®-Lydia Hardy

Appreciative-Mindset™

The Appreciative-Mindset™ is based on key learnings from the positive psychology literature discussed in this paper. The mindset guides the type of words a manager chooses during the coaching conversation (positive, affirming), the nature of the questions asked (appreciative), and the commitment to active employee input and idea-sharing throughout the dialogue. Words and tone matter for creating the optimal environment for productive, generative conversations. The Appreciative-Mindset™ allow the coaching process to be more empowering, positive, collaborative, and forward-thinking. The mindset is used throughout the coaching process to ensure that discussions are strengths-based, appreciative, and foster self-determination. It is essential to assume an Appreciative-Mindset™, depicted in Diagram 5, during each step of the coaching process, including:

- Reviewing any background notes and prior discussions and preparing for a conversation.

- Conducting conversations that explore performance areas and identify opportunities to bring more innovative and strengths-based approaches to the work

- Following up with positive communications and reflections of what went well and what might be done differently moving forward.

APPRECIATIVE-MINDSET™

Diagram 5: Appreciative-Mindset™
Graphics by Impact Performance Group®-Caitlin Corcoran.

The Appreciative-Mindset™ encourage managers to:

- **Spot strengths**. Effective coaching conversations acknowledge and encourage active use of an employee's signature strengths (top three to seven strengths in the VIA Assessments identified by completing a VIA Inventory of Strengths Survey at www.viacharacter.org).

- **Use an appreciative eye**. Coaching conversations are conducted in an appreciative manner by:
  - Using an appreciative eye to identify what is positive about a given situation and spot what is working and what is going well.
  - Committing to co-creating positive change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

- **Create psychological safety**. Coaching conversations happen in a manner that creates more psychological safety, allowing coachees to take more interpersonal risks

(Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Coaches set the stage by conveying positive intent of the conversation, demonstrating respect, valuing input, establishing norms for collaboration, encouraging an open exchange of ideas, actively listening, perspective-taking, and offering non-judgmental comments.

- **Tap into motivation**. Coaches create an environment in which conversations and coaching processes attend to three basic human needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness, as articulated in Self-determination theory to increase intrinsic motivation or well-internalized extrinsic motivation (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008).

The Appreciative-Mindset™ will be adopted throughout an organization as it becomes part of the organization's social norms. Key leaders in an organization may become champions and models of this mindset to positively influence the actions of other managers. Energy and enthusiasm build as more managers lead and coach with this mindset.

CAR-COACH™ Skills

CAR-COACH™ Skills provide a framework for the key elements of a productive, enriching coaching conversation. The skills also provide guidance on the types of words that encourage more openness and collaboration rather than words that tend to shut down a conversation or cause an employee to become defensive or withdrawn. The skills form a model that guides a coaching discussion from its opening remarks to its conclusion. CAR-COACH™ Skills will be part of the *Words Matter: Appreciative Coaching* Workshop. A brief outline of the course is in here. A more detailed outline of content and activities is offered in Appendix B.

Program Content	Unit Outcome
Overview Program Objectives	Participant Buy-in to the Value of the Learning Experience. Personal Goal Setting for the Learning.
Appreciative-Mindset™ AI and Strengths Research in Coaching Discussions.	Understanding of the research and theories supporting the mindset. Deepen comprehension of when, how, and why to Apply Appreciative-Mindset™ to Coaching Conversation.
CAR-COACH™ Skills	Understand structure of the CAR-COACH™ skills in a coaching framework and conversation. Discuss relationship between principles and skills. Understand how to use principles during stages of the conversation.
CAR: **C**ompetence **A**utonomy **R**elatedness	Ways to frame conversations to increase self-determination, intrinsic or well-internalized extrinsic motivation. When to build CAR in conversations and coaching process.
Convey positive intent	Creates more psychological safety and sets stage for open dialogue.
Optimize Strengths	Strength spot and identify additional ways strengths can be used in current role and responsibilities. Learn AEA: Aware, Explore, Apply, and SEA: Spot, Explain, Appreciate strengths models for bring more strengths use at work.
Amplify Appreciative Discovery	Use principles of Appreciative Inquiry to explore what is working and how to amplify positive progress toward goals. Ensure goals and work are aligned with personal values and shared organizational goals.
Crystalize action plans	Co-create an action plan that leverages signature strengths, integrates ideas uncovered in appreciative discovery to enable growth and new learning opportunities.
Harness power of positive	Recognize achievements and acknowledge contributions to build sense of adding value and being valued (mattering).
Program Summary. Post Workshop Assignment, and Personal Action Plan	Review of Appreciative-Mindset™ and CAR-COACH™ concepts taught in workshop. Action planning to apply concepts to coaching conversations in the workplace.

Adopting an Appreciative-Mindset™ and using the CAR-COACH™ Skills encourage elevation of appreciative inquiry and use of strengths within individuals. As employees use more strengths at work, combined with appreciative inquiry into possible ways to grow, they may experience more positive emotions at work. These positive work experiences may increase shared positive emotions with others to create positive resonance (Fredrickson, 2013b). The broadening of awareness and a building of resources creates an upward spiral of positivity,

creating an elevation and extension of positivity and positive change. Change becomes possible, even to the extent of the Elevate-and-Extend Theory of Positive Change proposed by Cooperrider and Godwin that is illustrated in Diagram 6 (2011).
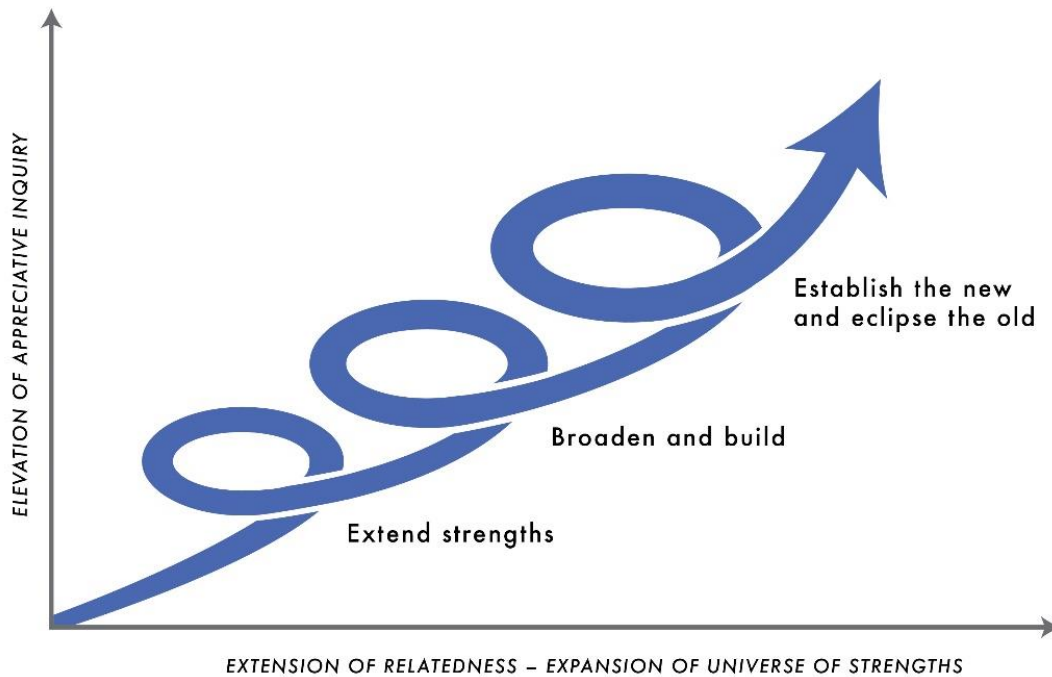
Diagram 6: Elevate and Extend Theory of Positive Change. Cooperrider, D. L., & Godwin, L. (2011). Positive organization development: Innovation-inspired change in an economy and ecology of strengths. *Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship*, 737-50.
Graphic by Impact Performance Group®-Lydia Hardy.

Potential Challenges with Implementing *Words Matter: Appreciative Coaching*

The proposed one-day coaching workshop for managers has several challenges that deserve consideration. For implementation to succeed, there are several important aspects that, if left unaddressed, present significant challenges to success. These considerations include:

- The involvement and support of managers at various levels of the organization.

- Buy-in from sponsors and stakeholders in the concepts and desired outcomes.

- Ongoing implementation and reinforcement.

- Metrics and benchmarks for gauging progress and effectiveness.

- Ways to leverage feedback to provide continuous enhancements to the overall workshop design to achieve desired behavioral and learning outcomes.

- Celebrating successes.

As with any important change initiative, thoughtful planning will increase the likelihood of success. Three top factors of any change initiative have been identified as culture and values, business processes, and people and engagement (Kash, Spaulding, Johnson, & Gamm, 2014). For organizations that will implement *Words Matter: Appreciative Coaching*, there are important culture and values, business process, and people and engagement questions to consider for design, planning, and implementation of a training initiative. (See Appendix for C for the list of questions.) Meetings with senior management, human resources, and learning professionals to address these questions will facilitate robust discussions on ways to co-create the learning experience for organizations.

Another potential challenge of the workshop may be the degree to which managers are aware of their cognitive biases. Cognitive bias occurs when individuals collect incomplete data, use mental shortcuts to assess what is happening, and weigh evidence more heavily that supports their beliefs (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Individuals also often have inaccurate perceptions of themselves. Managers may enter coaching conversations with an implicit bias, based on limited availability of information, limited observed behaviors, and potential comparisons to others subjectively viewed as favorable in the organizations, that act an anchor for rating performance relative to others in the organization. Extensive research on implicit bias by Gilovich, Griffin, and Kahneman (2002) shows that people may not always use a rational process for judging a

situation or making decisions. In the *Words Matter: Appreciative Coaching* workshop, managers will be given reference material on implicit bias to create greater awareness of this phenomenon.

Another design challenge will be to incorporate skills that enable managers to minimize an employee's defensive response by creating higher psychological safety, demonstrating emotional intelligence, and fostering positive emotions.

When people feel threatened, they may tend to respond with a fight or flight instinct. Google's Project Aristotle, a 2012 extensive study of norms that create the most productive teams, showed that the number-one norm is psychological safety (Duhigg, 2016). Employees may be working individually and as part of a team, where psychological safety is an important part of the work climate. This Google research confirms Amy Edmondson's work on the need for psychological safety in the workplace.

Managers' ability to focus on strengths and appreciate positive behaviors is designed to elicit more positive emotions in the relationship. Increased positive emotions have a broaden-and-build effect that broadens one's awareness and builds psychological, social, and physical resources for enhanced ability to solve complex problems and foster cooperative relationships (Fredrickson, 2013b). Barbara Fredrickson, at the University of North Carolina, has found that positive emotions increase trust, curiosity, confidence, and inspiration. Higher levels of trust may enhance the quality of coaching conversations.

The proposed positive psychology intervention of this appreciative coaching workshop will benefit from continued attention to these challenges and a commitment to new developments that would enhance the design and learning outcomes. This will be reflected through ongoing research.

Measurement

The *Words Matter: Appreciative Coaching* Workshop is designed to enhance the employee's experience during coaching conversations, increase engagement, and create positive change. Ongoing measurement of the training and skill reinforcement is recommended to assess the impact on the quality of coaching conversations, level of employee engagement, and key performance indicators that would be impacted through positive change. Measurement is also an effective way to identify any modifications needed to program design or implementation to more closely attain desired outcomes.

To measure this intervention, I plan to use the **Kirkpatrick Model** for measuring four levels of impact of this training intervention (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016). This model is particularly effective for measuring the success of training initiatives because of the simplicity of the process, the limited number of variables being measured, and the ease of identifying evaluation criteria (Bates, 2004). When measuring the two higher levels of the impact, clients may determine the degree to which they would like to gather pre- and post-data sources to establish a clear baseline upon which to measure improvements in performance. It is also beneficial to select a control group that may not initially receive the training so the impact of the workshop training may be isolated from other factors that may be impacting performance levels.

Though all models have some deficiencies, this model provides adequate insights into the training impact and assess educational program effectiveness. What follows is a summary of the four levels.

Level One: **Participant Self-Assessments of Training Experience.** Was the learner satisfied with the learning experience, as measured by a self-assessment survey? I would recommend that an easy-to-survey online tool like Survey Monkey or Poll Everywhere be used to gather and accumulate data. For clients who have their own evaluation system, such as

Qualtrics, feedback data will be gathered using those systems. Questions may include the degree

to which someone is glad that they attended, key concepts learned, overall workshop rating

compared to other learning experiences, clarity of content, quality of facilitation, concepts most

likely to apply on the job, and if one would recommend the workshop to others. Evaluations will

be gathered after every class and summarized to find trends, success stories to share, and

opportunities to adjust the training solution for more positive reception and application to the

job.

Level Two: **Learner's increases in knowledge, skills, and willingness to use the**

training content in their work. This level assesses if participants learned the content well

enough to remember it and know when to apply it in specific situations. This is often done

through mastery tests or types of knowledge checks to measure comprehension, retention, and

knowledge of when to apply the concepts learned. This may be assessed in a pre- and post-test or

be limited to testing knowledge only once the learning experience has been completed.

Level Three: **Changes and improvements in behavior.** This level examines whether

the concepts learned in the training experience are transferred into practice in the workplace.

This is often measured through observation and reporting on the completion of tasks. The

observers note the presence or absence of a desired behavior during a specific task being

performed. For example, if learners had completed a unit on how to conduct more effective

meetings through a defined set of behaviors, one could observe the following:

- Did the person open the meeting with a complete agenda that included meeting
  objectives, topics to be covered, and participation guidelines?

- Were the clear explanations of processes for decisions, time frames, and meeting
  roles?

- Did the person summarize the discussion and open items?

- Did the person confirm next action steps and next team meeting dates and times?

Observers would note the meeting behaviors regarding agenda setting and meeting management. This would be the basis for feedback and coaching conversations. The observation data would be the source of measurement.

Key stakeholders may also be interviewed to ask about their observations on the behaviors of the managers and any observed impact of the training on relationships with employees. Employees may also be surveyed to grade the quality of coaching sessions with managers using a coaching behavioral checklist. This feedback may be used for further managerial professional development.

Level Four: Specific business results derived from the learning experience. Prior to training, key performance indicators are identified as the likely and desired business outcomes to be impacted if the training initiative is successful. These metrics may include aspects of employee performance, including attendance, productivity, turnover, human resource complaints, advancement in the organization, engagement levels, and degree of collaboration and innovation. For this measure, it is helpful to get a baseline of current levels of the performance indicators. Once the training initiative has been completed and there has been enough time allowed for learners to assimilate knowledge, apply it to their job, receive coaching and reinforcement to support growth and development, then the performance indicators are measured again. Businesses often measure results at three, six, nine, and twelve-month milestones. This data is frequently used to support the return on investment analysis of a training initiative.

Measurement may be expanded to include employee experience surveys that capture feedback on the quality and frequency of the coaching process with their managers. This information may prove to be very useful when supporting managers in the development of their coaching skills. It may also identify specific situations to address between employees and

managers that may involve human resource issues or other resources to address needs. Employee experience surveys may also identify overall themes regarding strategies for increasing employee engagement through the coaching process.

After gathering this data at all four levels of measurement, organizations can look for any trends in data and qualitative feedback. This information can be used to identify ways to enhance the overall intervention design, scope, timing, duration, or ongoing organizational support.

Conclusion

As leaders, one powerful way to apply positive psychology throughout the coaching process relies on shifting the focus from what is wrong to what is working and what is best in humans. The goal of this literature review and proposed Appreciative Coaching positive psychology intervention is to provide ways people can refocus on human strengths and encourage realistic optimism. This appreciative approach uncovers performance enhancement opportunities and encourages creativity and transformative innovation.

The positive psychology research discussed in this paper presents an opportunity to promote employee engagement through enhanced coaching conversations that encourage employees to bring their best self to work. Coaches accomplish this by encouraging their coaches to leverage their strengths and take an appreciative eye toward professional development opportunities. Coaches foster greater intrinsic motivation by addressing fundamental human needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. When this appreciative approach is used, there may be more opportunities for the manager to:

- Recognize strengths, value work contributions.
- Encourage greater alignment of personal values with organizational values and goals.

- Increase employees' feelings of belonging by acknowledging the value they bring.

Through collaboration with employees in setting goals and identifying ways to leverage strengths to achieve those goals, the coach fosters more meaning, flow, and engagement at work.

When managers in organizations seek to develop the best in individuals and organizations, there is a greater chance for higher levels of achievement, performance, and employee engagement.

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Appendix A: Managerial Coaching Survey Questions used by McCarthy and Milner (2020)

24-Question Survey completed online with free text responses.

Questionnaire sent to mailing list of 9053 general managers and Human Resource managers in Australian organizations. Of 8834 final recipients, 580 completed the survey and provided rich details and examples to questions.

1. How many people are employed by your organization?
2. Broadly speaking, what is the core business of your organization?
3. How would you describe what a manager does when he/she coaches?
4. Do you yourself do any coaching?
5. Whom do you coach?
6. Which of the following do you coach?
7. How often do you coach your employees?
8. What coaching behaviors do you use? Please tick all which apply.
9. For what purposes do you as a manager use coaching? Please tick all which apply.
10. Do you see any differences between a manager coaching and a manager using other leadership styles?
11. As a manager, have you experienced benefits for the people you coach?
12. Have you observed any benefits for the people you coach?
13. Do you think there may be any other benefits from managerial coaching in general?
14. Have you experienced any difficulties coaching as a manager?
15. Have you experienced any of the following difficulties with coaching as a manager?
16. What other difficulties, if any, do you think might arise with managerial coaching in general?
17. Please describe a critical incident (positive or negative) from your own experience as a coaching manager.
18. Have you had training in coaching?
19. What training have you had in coaching?
20. On a scale of 1-10, where a 1 is extremely difficult and 10 is extremely easy, how easy do you find it to use your coaching skills as a manager?
21. Do you get any support from your company regarding coaching as a manager?
22. What further support, if any, from your company would you like to assist you with coaching as a manager?
23. Would you describe your company's culture as a coaching culture?
24. Are there any other comments you would like to make about being a coaching manager?

Appendix B: Words Matter: Appreciative Coaching Workshop Description

Coach Model and Program Content	Unit Outcome	Activities
Overview Program Purpose and Impact	Participant Buy-in to the Value of the Learning Experience Personal Goal Setting for the Learning	Kick-off, workshop objectives, agenda, High Point Interviews, group discussion of Positive Core. Expectations.
Appreciative-Mindset™ AI and Strengths Research in Coaching Discussions	Understanding of the research and theories supporting each of the principles. Deepen comprehension of when, how, and why to Apply Appreciative-Mindset™ to Coaching Conversation	Presentation of Appreciative-Mindset™ research. Group Discussion and examples.
CAR-COACH™ Skills	Understand structure of the CAR-COACH™ skills in a coaching framework and conversation. Discuss relationship between principles and skills. Understand how to use principles during stages of the conversation.	Presentation. Group discussion. Example of CAR-COACH™ skills. Team building activity-value of positive psychology coaching. Key take-aways.
CAR: **C**ompetence **A**utonomy **R**elatedness	Ways to frame conversations to increase self-determination, intrinsic or well-internalized extrinsic motivation. When to build CAR in conversations and coaching process.	Present and discuss self-determination theory in coaching process. Examples. Video vignettes of team members in coaching conversations. Case study.
Convey positive intent	Creates more psychological safety and sets stage for open dialogue	Small group activity: generate words that create safety and convey positive intent of conversation. Apply to own coaching situation. Pair and share.

Coach Model and Program Content	Unit Outcome	Activities
Optimize Strengths	Strength spot and identify additional ways strengths can be used in current role and responsibilities. Learn AEA: Aware, Explore, Apply, and SEA: Spot, Explain, Appreciate strengths models for bring more strengths use at work.	Discussion of Signature Strengths. Partner Practice AEA Model and SEA Model for Strength spotting in self and others. Video vignettes. Practice coaching discussion of strength spotting with own coaching situation and become stronger at spotting strengths.
Amplify Appreciative Discovery	Use principles of Appreciative Inquiry to explore what is working and how to amplify positive progress toward goals. Ensure goals and work are aligned with personal values and shared organizational goals.	Discuss principles of appreciative inquiry. Video story. Case examples. Case study to practice an appreciative eye. Appreciative goal setting to achieve more desired positive behaviors using strengths. Apply to own situation to refine coaching words.
Crystalize action plans	Co-create an action plan that leverages signature strengths, integrates ideas uncovered in appreciative discovery to enable growth and new learning opportunities.	Group discussion for co-creating coaching plans to achieve desired goals. Outline best practices for goal setting and development of action plans. Examples and case study. Pairs practice-Amplifying with appreciative inquiry.
Harness power of positive	Recognize achievements and acknowledge contributions to build sense of adding value and being valued (mattering)	Team building activity on valuing and being valued. Discussion on appreciation, belonging, meaning, and building connection to a larger purpose. Team presentations.
Program Summary. Post Workshop Assignment, and Personal Action Plan	Review of Appreciative-Mindset™ and CAR-COACH™ concepts taught in workshop. Action planning to apply concepts to coaching conversations in the workplace.	Summary of key concepts. Key take-aways activity. Personal Action Plan to apply concepts to upcoming coaching conversation. Overview resource library and post-workshop assignments.

Workshop Description

Workshop length: One day and one-half days or three virtual online modules

Target audience: Any manager responsible for coaching to foster growth, learning, and development of others. Managers would benefit from completion of foundational coaching training that provides a structured approach to coaching conversations prior to attending this advanced workshop.

Delivery method: Self-directed learning (reading, reference materials, knowledge test, and pre-workshop assignment). Cohort learning with peers in a virtual or face-to-face workshop format. Post-work assignment will apply key workshop concepts to an upcoming coaching conversation.

Pre-work: Reading that provides an overview of course objectives and program concepts, complete the VIA Inventory of Strengths Survey (accessed at www.viacharacter.org), a worksheet for an analysis of strengths-use in major work tasks, coaching skills self-assessment, and a goal-setting activity.

Appendix C: Planning and Implementation Questions for Appreciative Coaching Initiative

<u>**Culture and Values**</u>:

1. What are the values of the organization and how well do they align with the principles of an appreciative coaching approach?

2. What support is the organization providing managers to help them coach and develop their team members?

3. What is senior management's view of the positive psychology concepts of strengths, appreciative inquiry, psychological safety, and self-determination theory? How open is senior management to the idea of management and human resources embracing these concepts in employee development to foster engagement and increase levels of employee motivation?

4. How will senior management participate in the training initiative?

<u>**Business Processes**</u>**:**

5. What communication plans will convey the value of the initiative for this coaching training?

6. What systems will be put into place for managing logistics for training registration, enrollment, dissemination of pre-workshop assignments, attendance and completion, post-workshop task completion to create accountability and enable full participation in the learning experience?

7. What ongoing resource library will be available to support managers' continuous growth?

8. What reinforcement and sustainment strategies will be in to place to ensure the concepts are continually applied to employee development conversations?

9. How will the organization identify additional concepts and resources that so the appreciative coaching approach will become part of the fabric of the organization.

People and Engagement:

10. How will managers and employees become involved in co-creating and planning this initiative?

11. Who will be the workshop facilitators? Can facilitators be teamed up with internal champions to support the facilitation and sustainment efforts with the workshop pre- and post-assignments?

12. How can internal champions within the organization provide continual communication and support throughout the initiative to create excitement, convey purpose and value of the initiative, provide mentorship for younger managers attending the training and developing their coaching skill set, collecting and sharing feedback from the managers and employees regarding their experiences before, during, and after the workshop and follow-up activities, and developing effective ways to recognize progress and celebrate successes on an individual, team, and organizational level.

13. How will success stories be shared within and outside of the organization?

14. How will employees who are being coached be asked for input and feedback?

15. How will the initiative be measured for impact on an ongoing basis?