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Symphony D. Oxendine

University of North Carolina-Wilmington, oxendines@uncw.edu

Kerry K. Robinson

University of North Carolina-Wilmington

Michele A. Parker

University of North Carolina-Wilmington

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Transforming departmental culture: Empowering a department through appreciative inquiry

Symphony D. Oxendine, Kerry K. Robinson, and
Michele A. Parker

Abstract

This article outlines an appreciative inquiry (AI) into a departmental professional development process and describes the resulting implementation of an appreciative peer evaluation meeting as one part of the new professional development process. Using AI, a departmental faculty development committee sought to re-envision the professional development process. Also, the authors discuss how using AI can result in positive impacts for culture change and how the model for peer evaluation can promote both individual and collective development of faculty.

Keywords: faculty development, appreciative inquiry, professional development

Faculty development has been a part of higher education in some form since the early 1800s (Lewis, 1996). Though early opportunities for professional development focused specifically on faculty research

expertise, the scholarship on faculty development as a professional field and practice in the last 50 years has evolved to include more holistic approaches than just a focus on research or teaching (Gillespie & Robertson, 2010). Faculty development is defined broadly as “activities that focus on enhancing the professional success of faculty members as teachers, scholars, professionals, and individuals” (Tennill & Cohen, 2013, p. 146). The literature on faculty development is robust with successful strategies for guiding faculty in development throughout their academic career. There are programs and initiatives designed to help faculty address challenges, whether they are early career (e.g., Milo, & Schuldiner, 2009; Willingham-McLain et al., 2019), mid-career (Baker & Manning, 2021), or experienced faculty (Huston & Weaver, 2008). Though faculty development is often implemented as an individual endeavor (Nelson & Cates, 2017), the faculty development process can provide a collaborative opportunity that simultaneously develops individual faculty members and enhances the strengths of the collective faculty as a whole.

This article describes an appreciative inquiry (AI) into one department’s professional development process and the implementation of one aspect of the transformed process, the peer evaluation meeting. AI is a strengths-based approach to facilitating change within organizations and human systems, “based on the belief that human systems are made and imagined by those who live and work within them” (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. xi). AI focuses on altering action positively toward a collective vision or purpose (Bushe, 2007), which inspires faculty to leverage their strengths. The authors, who are members of the departmental faculty development committee, used AI to re-envision our professional development process to align with guidelines for evaluation (e.g., reappointment, tenure, and promotion [RTP], annual review), cultivate a departmental culture of a learning community, provide a comprehensive support system for faculty at all levels, and support the achievement of individual and collective (e.g., department, college, institution) standards and goals.

Context

The University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) is a public, 4-year institution located on the southeast coast of North Carolina with an undergraduate student population of 14,650 and a graduate student population of 3,265. UNCW is dedicated to learning through the integration of teaching and mentoring with research and service. UNCW was reclassified in 2018 as a Doctoral University: Higher Research Activity (R2) by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. Several factors led to this reclassification including expenditures for research and development over \$5 million as well as awarding over 20 research/scholarship doctoral degrees (UNCW Doctoral Transition Task Force, 2020b). During the 2017–2018 academic year, the Department of Educational Leadership in the Watson College of Education (WCE), which houses the Doctor of Education (EdD) in Educational Leadership, graduated 19 of those doctoral students. The Department of Educational Leadership (EDL) consists of 21 members across five graduate programs and an undergraduate minor. It is also the only department in the university with an EdD program. The focus of the department is developing a learning community that improves leadership in education at all levels.

Within the EDL department, the Faculty Development Committee (FDC) is a multidisciplinary group of scholars who meet regularly to advance professional development. The committee also reviews the procedures, policies, and implementation of the professional development process and makes recommendations for strengthening faculty development. The professional development process is a required component of WCE's "commitment to assurance of program quality, academic rigor, and growth and development of personnel" (WCE, 2019, p. III-9). Each department in the WCE implements the professional development process for its faculty members.

The FDC consists of three individuals with different backgrounds and experiences (e.g., educational, disciplinary, practitioner) who sought to improve professional development in the department for

new and existing faculty. One person was a tenured faculty member with a decade at the university. One faculty member was a tenure-track faculty member coming from another university, and this was the first tenure-track position for another member. We were all drawn to the university because of the high-quality student-centered teaching approach and the perceived culture of support.

As our institution has embraced the new Carnegie status there is uncertainty surrounding issues such as the influence on overall institutional identity and culture, changing expectations of faculty roles and responsibilities, the impact on the promotion and tenure policies, and identifying what resources are needed for successfully moving forward and sustaining the R2 status. Several needs have already been identified that particularly impact our own department faculty regarding maintaining the student-centered teaching focus, increasing support for graduate student scholarship, and concerns about continuing and increasing doctoral education without adequate support (UNCW Doctoral Transition Task Force, 2020a). In addition to the changes surrounding the new classification, within the EDL department, numerous leadership transitions as a result of department chair turnover created inconsistencies in department operations, inconsistent application of policies and procedures, apprehension about departmental decision-making, and shifting team dynamics.

Integrating Appreciative Inquiry Into the Professional Development Process

I (Symphony Oxendine) joined the FDC during the spring of my first year at UNCW. We discussed being intentional about realigning the professional development process to facilitate faculty success. We wanted to create opportunities to share collegial guidance (Miller et al., 2019) and build relationships within the department. The emphasis on community building (e.g., Hara, 2000; Morgan, 2014; Sawarkar et al., 2019; Trower, 2010; Willingham-McLain et al., 2019) could be woven together with

clear requirements for evaluation of tenure and promotion, especially sought by pre-tenure faculty (Trower & Gallagher, 2010).

In February of 2018, I (Symphony) participated in an Appreciative Inquiry Facilitator Training (AIFT). As a former student affairs practitioner and then a faculty member, I have incorporated AI as an instructional strategy and tool to provide students with methods for facilitating AI as a change process in their work as practitioners for 7 years before attending the AIFT. I sought to become certified as an AI facilitator to learn new skills for facilitating whole-systems change within higher education institutions. After the AIFT, I asked FDC members about using an appreciative inquiry approach to guide our efforts to realign the professional development in the department. We agreed that using an appreciative inquiry approach corresponded with our department's values.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is defined as "the study and exploration of what gives life to human systems, at their best" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. xii) by focusing on the positive core (Cooperrider et al., 2008) and is a generative, strengths-based approach to change. AI is a paradigm, methodology, and process. Reframing is an essential component of AI as it shifts from a deficit, or problem-based, focus to inquiring and describing the positive core. Cooperrider et al. (2008) explain that an organization's positive core includes strengths, values, assets, capacities, wisdom, potential, and achievements that represent the best of an organization and contribute to its success. The generative impact of AI occurs by using the positive nature to envision new possibilities and compel action. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) described AI as "the cooperative, co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organization, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives life to an organization when it is most effective and most capable" (p. 8).

The principles that form the foundation of AI are constructionist, simultaneity, poetic, anticipatory, and positive (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney & Cooperrider, 2011). Since AI's introduction, other principles have evolved, including awareness, narrative, wholeness, enactment, and free choice (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2020). The principles are interrelated and produce generativity that is also an "action. It's not just about generating new ideas of working, but it's also a 'doing' of collective future forming through generative connections" (Grieten et al., 2018, p. 106). AI is not only about positivity but is about appreciating and generating new ideas, ways of thinking, and inquiring into change. AI "creates a language and climate of interaction that embraces differences, accepts polarities, and helps create new cultures where diverse values are heard and honored" (Srivastva et al., 1999, p. 9).

The basic model for utilizing AI in practice is a 4-D cycle including *Discover*, *Dream*, *Design*, and *Deliver/Destiny* (Cooperrider et al., 2008). The 4-D cycle is one of many ways to implement an AI process. However, all AI frameworks are collaborative, engaging, and emergent. Emergent design is a minimally structured framework to follow the group's energy and adapt as the inquiry process unfolds (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012). The first phase in the 4-D cycle is to *Discover* using interviews, storytelling, or sharing into "the best of what is." Discovery intentionally inquires into the positive core by focusing on exceptional experiences to uncover the assets and strengths that made that experience exceptional. In the next phase, building upon the themes that emerged in the Discover step, stakeholders *Dream* about future possibilities. As stakeholders are "envisioning what might be" (Cooperrider et al., 2008), they create images of the future grounded in past strengths and assets. The *Design* phase is when stakeholders "identify what should be the ideal" future by co-constructing provocative propositions or possibility statements for the ideal future. These possibility statements drive stakeholders to create strategies or action plans for achieving their desired future.

The final phase of the 4-D cycle is *Deliver/Destiny*, when the action plans are implemented and change is sustained. This phase is ongoing and “is a time of continuous learning, adjustment, and improvisation . . . because of the shared positive image of the future, everyone is invited to align his or her interactions” to collectively contribute to the fulfillment of the shared future (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 47). “The generativity of Destiny can also be enhanced by iteratively using AI—making the lessons and outcomes of one AI the focus of inquiry for the next AI” (Bushe, 2007, p. 7). As the stakeholders celebrate the successes and learn from the process, the iterative nature of the 4-D cycle eventually goes back full circle to the Discover phase.

Though AI originated in 1987 by Cooperrider and Srivastva as an action research method within organizational development, it has evolved and been applied in many other contexts. Within higher education, AI has been used in areas such as pedagogy (Bush & Korrapati, 2004; Calabrese, 2006; Neville, 2008), research methods (e.g., Giles & Alderson, 2008; Giles & Kung, 2010; Lewis & Emil, 2010), leadership development (Hart et al., 2008), appreciative education (Bloom et al., 2013), appreciative advising and coaching (Bloom et al., 2008; Helens-Hart, 2018), curriculum development (Bester, 2011; Chacko, 2009), strategic planning (He & Oxendine, 2019; Priest et al., 2013), experiential learning (Priest et al., 2013), course evaluations (Kung et al., 2013), academic program development (Priest et al., 2013), graduate student professional development (Falk et al., 2020), and diversity and inclusion programming (Alston-Mills, 2011).

Embedding Appreciative Inquiry and the 4-D Model Into Our Process

Recognizing the powerful framework that AI provides, our goal was to revise the professional development process using the 4-D model. The next section of this article describes the overall AI into the

broader professional development process and the transformation of one component of the more extensive process, the peer evaluation meeting.

Discover

The process of using an AI approach starts with agreeing on an affirmative topic. For this inquiry, the positive topic was aligning our professional development process. The committee then practiced the first step of AI, Discover, into past exceptional professional development practices by sharing our experiences with one another. We also reviewed what our colleagues' needs were via surveys and departmental meeting notes regarding professional development. This anonymous survey was distributed a year before our committee was formed and did not utilize an appreciative inquiry approach, yet our colleagues shared experiences that were meaningful and generative. "A focus on the positive is useful for appreciative inquiry but it's not the purpose. The purpose is to generate a new and better future" (Bushe, 2007, pp. 3–4). The following examples from the survey results allowed us to ascertain what was missing and what the future might look like:

- Tenure-track group meetings tend to heighten my anxiety and give me indigestion. The sessions are well intended, but the lack of clear RTP guidelines, until recently, meant guidance was based on anecdotes and shifting expectations. As the reappointment and tenure document we submit has changed, the lack of clarity only adds stress.
- Some faculty members are being supported more than others, and this inequitable support has been recognized college-wide.
- Tenure-track faculty meetings with tenured faculty meetings would be helpful if the faculty member could be present. If we shared the information and removed the formality.

- I have only attended one tenure-track group meeting, so I cannot answer if they are helpful. I don't find the tenured faculty feedback incredibly helpful. I would still advocate for opportunities to talk with them directly to understand one's research focus and connection across teaching, research, and service.

Dream

After the Discover phase, the committee identified themes critical to the potential future for transformative professional development experiences. These were the aspirational statements created for the preferred future of our department:

- create and nurture relationships across the department, the college, and the institution;
- personalize the professional development process and assist faculty members in their professional growth and development activities through a structure that builds trust in one another and the process;
- engage with one another's research and teaching; and
- create a more collegial learning community both outside of and as a part of the evaluation process.

Using the themes that came from the Discover phase and acknowledging the newly created aspirational statements, I (Symphony) drafted two provocative propositions. A provocative proposition is "like a vision statement. It provokes action" (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012, p. 28). The provocative propositions are written in the present tense, expressing our hope for what the experience would be in the professional development process within the department. The first concerns our culture: "The Educational Leadership Department aligns our professional development process with the tenure and promotion process by celebrating our collective successes

and encouraging collaboration.” The second proposition is explicitly about the professional development process: “The department is a collegial and appreciative learning community of diverse and dynamic educators and scholars committed to improving leadership at all levels of education by fostering individual and collective growth and innovation.”

Design

We created the provocative propositions to envision a more significant departmental culture shift. After discussing the many opportunities for implementing the change process, we decided to focus on the peer evaluation meeting for reviewing tenure-track faculty progress toward RTP as a critical place to begin this work. Though the idea behind a RTP review is to highlight the tenure-track faculty member’s contributions at designated intervals, tenure-track faculty often felt unsure, uncomfortable, anxious, and confused about the process. We envisioned the new approach to the peer evaluation meeting as a way “to engage in a learning and valuing process” (Grieten et al., 2018, p. 106) as a learning community. By utilizing a framework focused on strengths while incorporating an actual means of collaboration within the department, we reframed the peer evaluation meeting to actualize our departmental values “by celebrating our collective successes and encouraging collaboration.”

Process

The peer evaluation process’s original structure followed a familiar, traditional model similar to mid-term review that “is used as a formative yet informal evaluation to ensure all faculty are on track to earn tenure” (Bowers & Ryan, 2013, p. 96). Previous iterations had tenure-track faculty prepare and submit a report of their teaching, research,

and service to the department's tenured faculty. The tenured faculty would then meet to review and discuss all tenure-track faculty reports together. The faculty discussed the tenure-track faculty members' progress toward reappointment, tenure, and promotion based on the university RTP criteria. Following the meeting, the department chair compiled notes and scheduled an appointment with each tenure-track faculty to provide feedback from the tenured faculty. The department chair shared copies of the written statement of major points with all tenured faculty and each tenure-track faculty. This process situated all feedback as a one-way exchange with the tenure-track faculty member receiving a meeting with the department chair and written feedback.

We deconstructed the peer evaluation process and reconstructed it by reframing how faculty conducted the peer evaluation process to contribute to our department's ideal future. The newly created peer evaluation process and accompanying *Appreciative Peer Evaluation Meeting Guide (APEMG)* were designed to utilize an appreciative inquiry group interview. The tenured faculty and the tenure-track faculty member being evaluated were all together during the meeting. The peer evaluation meeting became a critical part of the professional development process of faculty within the Department of Educational Leadership to ensure progress toward RTP and provide ongoing development for faculty.

Appreciative Peer Evaluation Meeting Guide

The APEMG was framed in a general AI approach to positive questions using the 4 Ds and an appreciative performance communications process (Shelton et al., n.d.). Using the AI model in performance appraisal has demonstrated that "performance can be dramatically improved by encouraging people to discuss, learn from, and build on what's working, rather than trying to fix what's not" (Hearn, 2015, para. 3). The questions guiding the meeting are designed to encourage reflection of past successes, inquire into an individual's strengths, and identify

opportunities for each department's faculty to further one another's professional development. As part of professional development, this new process engaged the faculty in providing feedforward (Kluger & Nir, 2010) focused on positive and transformative goal setting for individual and collective development while also identifying possibilities for collaboration and engaged the tenure-track faculty member in a self-evaluation.

In the initial phase, we only utilized the process for tenure-track faculty members. The *APEMG* consists of five parts. The tenured faculty ask the tenure-track faculty questions in Part I: Discover (e.g., "Think about where you were at the beginning of the year and where you are today. How have you changed? Give yourself credit for little improvements in your professional competencies or personal effectiveness.") and Part II: Dream (e.g., "As colleagues and a department, what is the most important thing for us to do to support you in achieving these goals?"). The tenure-track faculty member being evaluated then asks the tenured faculty questions in Part III: Discover (e.g., "What positive difference does my work [teaching, research, service] make for [a] You as faculty, [b] The department, and [c] The field and community contributions?") and Part IV: Dream (e.g., "To help me be more successful, what do you suggest I continue to do, do more of, do better, or do differently in my [a] Teaching, [b] Research, [c] and Service?"). At the end of the meeting, Part V: Design is an opportunity for everyone to design an improved future by revising, reframing, or adding professional development goals based on the conversation.

While the idea behind these two-way conversations is to ensure that the tenure-track faculty member has a voice in the process, the process is development. In some instances, there may be identified areas of growth that are critically important to address for the tenure-track faculty member to achieve upcoming milestones. Though information is presented during the appreciative interview, there is also an opportunity for a follow-up post-interview with the participant's mentor.

Deliver

We presented the peer evaluation meeting process and *APEMG* for faculty members to comprehend and get buy-in. The entire process was described and discussed. For instance, we re-envision mentoring and annual evaluation meetings being used along with the guide. In the first piloting of the guide, all tenured faculty received a copy of the guide. Two tenure-track faculty members were preparing their tenure dossiers for fall submission. This pilot would allow them to engage in the appreciative peer evaluation process before finalizing their materials. A pre-meeting by the tenured faculty was held first to discuss the personal materials and decide who would ask specific questions (as long as we had sufficient time). We allotted 1 hour per meeting and went through the questions in sequential order. The individuals meeting had an opportunity to ask questions on the guide and probe the feedforward they received. A tenured faculty member projected the materials assembled for the session (e.g., CV or draft RTP application) for everyone to see simultaneously in the room. One person managed this visual and scrolled through the material as needed.

The process was well received by the tenured faculty members as well as both tenure-track faculty participants. One tenure-track faculty member shared feelings after completing the pilot.

As long as I've been here, we've never had any formal or informal process in our department that honors individual strengths and accomplishments and needs for support in such a thoughtful, supportive, and affirming way. It also appropriately acknowledges the need for connectedness and synergy across an individual's work. We need more thinking and activities that build this kind of departmental culture.

The new evaluation meeting process was equally affirming for other tenure-track faculty members who engaged in the pilot. The first

shared his positive experience with the new strategy faculty and a stronger connection with tenured colleagues after the experience:

As part of the meeting, we were encouraged to share our perceived appreciative inquiry strengths as educators, administrators, and researchers. We were also allowed to explain aspects of our materials that might not be evident in the application form. The committee highlighted the strengths of our materials and provided feedback to improve the submission. Although we had received feedback in the past, the feedback came through the department chair in a letter. It felt impersonal and was easy to misinterpret information. By contrast, the face-to-face meeting was helpful and affirming. I walked away with a stronger sense of my colleagues' appreciation of my work and a better understanding of what I needed to change. The entire experience was more positive and more effective.

At first jaded about the new format, a second tenure-track faculty member initially "felt an unusually high level of frustration and resentment." He continued, "After my hostility subsided, I cautiously accepted the intent of the tenure-track review meeting." His change in belief was evident as he stated he was:

feeling good about my application and how colleagues regarded my work. It was a powerful feeling that my department, not only individual colleagues, appreciated my contributions to teaching, scholarship, and service both at that moment and cumulatively since I arrived. The powerful experience lasted longer than the meeting and immediately afterward but still lingered months later. I can easily recall the powerful emotions I felt after the meeting, including joy and a sense of pride in the feedback I received.

Although the process was affirming for these tenure-track faculty members during the pilot as they prepared to submit their materials,

all department members participating in the pilot realized we needed more time for the entire process.

Discussion

In this discussion, we focus on four areas that were most affected by implementing this new practice. First was the embracing of the appreciative inquiry practice. Second, with a unique opportunity to establish connections, relationship building in the department also developed positively. A third development was the opportunity to explore the professional development process and tailor individualized learning to a faculty member's needs. Fourth, there was the transformational and organizational change that occurred within the department.

Embracing the AI Process

As we were developing the guide as a faculty development team, we recognized the importance of having the entire department understand the AI model as the basis of this work. Initially, not all faculty members were familiar with AI and needed to be introduced to the conceptual underpinnings inherent in developing this process. We repeatedly emphasized creating positive change actions as a vital tenet of the AI model (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). While we highlighted the AI model's underpinnings, it was equally important to ensure that department members understood appreciative inquiry. Adopting this model did not mean that our conversations would be only happy and friendly, approaching all situations through rose-colored glasses, because the process still requires accountability. Accountability is a critical factor that cannot be overlooked. Though this new model emphasized support and ongoing development while highlighting strengths, critical feedback is still a component of the model when needed (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Having opportunities

to revisit this model ensures that the collective group is intentional with its use. As we embrace AI, we envision new ways of operating in all aspects of departmental work.

Relationship Building Within the Department

Relationship building is critical to the success of faculty members in achieving upcoming milestones; facilitating academic socialization; and navigating through the department, college, and university processes as a whole (Mullen & Forbes, 2000). While traditional forms of support (e.g., formal mentoring programs, peer review of teaching) between tenured and tenure-track faculty are meant to be an altruistic structure by providing support for the tenure-track faculty member, it also historically adds a power dynamic between the two that may be difficult to negotiate (Hansman, 2002; Mullen & Forbes, 2000). This formal hierarchical structure is evident during milestone events (e.g., reappointment, tenure, and promotion), where information delivery is typically one-directional.

In response to the needs of our departmental faculty, we transformed the peer evaluation meeting from a top-down, one-sided, impersonal evaluation of the tenure-track faculty member's work to a generative process that encouraged a two-way celebration and recognition of individual and collective strengths. Our development of the peer evaluation meeting did not supplant the evaluative processes required by university policy. It simply humanized it. Approaching one another with an appreciative mindset resulted in evolving formal and informal relationships in the department.

We viewed this new method of interaction as a means to incorporate critical questioning and intentionality. By focusing on interactions that are non-prescriptive, goal based, and action oriented (Little & Palmer, 2011), the peer evaluation meeting provided an opportunity to create connections by talking and listening to one another's needs in an environment of trust and care. Although discussed in the context of mentorship, trust is a critical component in support of the

development process (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). The peer evaluation meeting requires vulnerability on everyone's part because well-meaning guidance and support is essential to faculty development. The element of care (Noddings, 2012) is also a two-way process. It allows the tenured faculty to demonstrate care in delivering feedforward. It also requires the tenure-track faculty to acknowledge that care is being offered and is received.

Through this new interaction, a sense of belonging developed by engaging with colleagues authentically (Cranton, 2006), sharing strengths that each person contributes to our community, increasing knowledge of one another's work across programs/disciplines, and encouraging accountability as well as support beyond interactions with a formal mentor or department leadership. The faculty members being reviewed felt valued, appreciated, and affirmed rather than their worth being solely tied to productivity. The tenure-track faculty felt empowered to bring new viewpoints, technologies, ideas, and concepts (Sawarkar et al., 2019) to department work instead of waiting until they achieved tenure. These conversations focusing on powerful questions and deep listening (Little & Palmer, 2011) have carried over from the peer evaluation meeting into our departmental conversations.

Professional Development Process

The implementation of the new peer evaluation meeting was the first step in realigning the professional development process within the department to be a more comprehensive continuous process. For individuals participating in the appreciative process, this was an opportunity to provide a voice to a structure that was previously excluding the faculty member being evaluated. The peer evaluation meeting allowed for the opportunity to share strengths but also to ask for targeted assistance where needed. By incorporating this model into our professional development process, an environment of support and ongoing development emerged for all faculty. These shifts in practice

occurred beyond the individual meeting to practices adopted within the department.

Transformational and Organizational Change

By embracing an appreciative process, we transformed existing practices. Additionally, there has been a shift within the department to utilize a more appreciative approach in other components of our work. Department meetings now incorporate inquiry that is positive and appreciative overall, there is more engagement during department meetings, and meetings are used as an opportunity to connect with one another as a learning community rather than just communicating updates. Language in emails is also changing. One example was the department chair using the title “Appreciative Feedback for Tenure-Track Faculty” when scheduling annual performance evaluation meetings instead of referring to it as an “Annual Review.”

As with any culture shift, implementing AI is not a short-term commitment. While the department focuses on various new initiatives, we continuously revisit the appreciative inquiry framework to ensure implementation fidelity especially as our department continues to grow. The generative impact of the use of AI within the department has spread throughout other areas of the institution. In fact, the College of Education is in the second year of using AI to facilitate its strategic planning process. Other programs and divisions across the institution have facilitated AI summits to implement change, and several administrators have attended AI facilitator training to be able to assist with cross-institutional initiatives.

Implications

Although the process focused on how the peer evaluation meeting and appreciative feedback process will enhance tenure-track faculty development, we should engage all faculty and instructional staff members in our department. This guide provides a method

for reciprocal mentoring (Smith et al., 2016) no matter the point in a person's career. This process allows for expertise not to be bound by rank. Tenure-track faculty can make significant contributions when providing guidance and support to a veteran, tenured peer.

The department has now utilized this process through multiple iterations, refining each cycle (e.g., such as identifying and using questions that elicit the most conversation), and we are currently looking at ways to expand this process. During the piloting of the guide and development meetings, an overview of the peer evaluation process and accompanying *APEMG* was shared with the Dean's Leadership Team by the department chair. The logical next steps are to have the FDC members share the latest results of the process with the Dean's Leadership Team to recommend piloting in other departments. We shared the presentation with the faculty external to our department, offering to present the process at a college-wide faculty meeting or to other departments. Once the process was offered to other departments within the College of Education, the goal was to expand the guide to other colleges on campus and other universities interested in utilizing the peer evaluation meeting guide as appreciative support to their RTP process.

Conclusion

Using appreciative inquiry provided an opportunity for us to shape our departmental and faculty community by examining how we have and continue to construct and enact the shared values and goals of our department. This approach has much potential because it was initiated by the faculty. The empowerment of faculty comes from being participants and beneficiaries in co-constructing change and influencing a positive culture. The process of professional development we describe here contributes to faculty development individually and as a collective while creating a sense of belonging through a culture of support. Finally, we believe that sharing this information can improve

faculty development by encouraging the use of AI at all levels of the institution to improve the academy.

Acknowledgments

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Biographies

Symphony D. Oxendine, Cherokee/Choctaw, is an Associate Professor of Higher Education in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. Symphony was a student affairs practitioner for over 6 years before pursuing her PhD. As an Indigenous quantitative scholar, she focuses her research on areas that help shape the direction and development of higher education by contributing to the understanding and transformation of various institutional, psychosocial, and political processes for positive change.

Kerry K. Robinson is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. She earned a PhD in Educational Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University. Her primary research areas include women in leadership, the superintendency, and well-being of school leaders. While maintaining a focus on research and teaching, Kerry also commits to supporting the development of aspiring and current leaders through her work with mentoring and building support networks.

Michele A. Parker is a Professor of Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. She earned a PhD in Research, Statistics, and Evaluation at the University of Virginia. Her responsibilities include teaching research and evaluation courses for graduate

students. Michele has authored publications on technology use, pedagogy, mentoring, and faculty development in higher education.

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