FACTORS OF SUCCESS OR FAILURE IN THE PRACTICE OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY: AN APPLICATION OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY IN THE HEALTHCARE HR SETTING

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The concept of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has only been increasing in practice and application since it was first introduced by David Cooperrider in 1986. The idea of using positively framed questions to uncover and leverage an organization's strengths was a drastic change from the more historical methods of problem solving and has since been proven effective through a large variety of different industries. This method can increase employee morale, and assist in building trust across teams and throughout all levels of organizations. While the method can be wildly successful and create long term, positive and transformational change, there is not an abundance of literature detailing situations where Appreciative Inquiry has failed to create change, and the factors that may have contributed to the less-than successful outcome.

This paper will first review literature on the subject of Appreciative Inquiry and summarize some of the tools and factors that can lend towards a successful application. Conversely, it will also analyze the literature to determine the factors that may hinder the success of AI and identify some practices to avoid. It will then use this literature to review a case study of AI application in the Human Resources department of a healthcare system in the Suburbs of Chicago, Illinois where the activities attempted failed to provide transformational or lasting change. The goal of the AI application was to build trust where it historically had been lacking, create a sense of "oneness" on a team that had recently been consolidated from three teams to one, and to kick off a shift in the culture towards a more positive, strength focused mindset.

The discussion will point out key learnings from the research leading to implications for practice. Finally, thoughts on future research are presented based on findings in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

In today's society, change is the only constant. The increasing use of technology in business allows us to be more connected than ever. Yet it's possible that the increasing use of technology through software applications hinders some of the social skills that are important in organizations in general, and even more so when that organization is undertaking a change initiative (Pasmore, 2015; Weisbord, 2012; Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990). There are countless approaches to problem solving and change management, and yet few seem to have a strong focus on the "people" element or they have a tendency to treat adaptive challenges with technical solutions (Bushe & Nagaishi, 2018). At some point, there arose a need for a method or a mindset that better addressed how individuals and teams effected (positively or negatively) the success of operations within organizations. What strengths do individuals bring to the table, and how can those strengths be leveraged to generate ideas, create efficiencies, and ultimately run a more effective and successful business? This set of questions and many more which aim to define what "gives life" to an organization are the ground work for David Cooperrider's theory Appreciative Inquiry (AI).

Cooperrider recognized that focusing on the problems an organization is currently encountering creates a negative mindset, and can make it difficult for the team involved to generate ideas for transformative and lasting change. Meetings that frame organizational challenges as mountains to be scaled often leave team members feeling intimidated, hopeless, and defeated. Instead organizations needed a new method to solve their problems, and to approach change in a way that would be transformative and lasting. Conversely, the field of positive organizational scholarship (POS) has been shown to help create positive expectations about an organization, which energizes and directs behavior towards making those beliefs happen (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

AI is an action research model, rooted in the action-science of Kurt Lewin, that helps organize and change social systems (Bushe, 1995, 2005; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) describe AI in the following way:

> Appreciative Inquiry is about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives "life" to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential.

AI is frequently presented as a 4-D Cycle of Discovering, Dreaming, Designing and Destiny. It is performed through an inquiry process enabling discovery and

capture of information as it exists at that point in time. AI enables flexible exploration of the organization in a way that more appropriate in dynamic environments. Because of this, it also allows adaptability in the intervention to achieve the most desired vision within the current frame of context. AI holds promise in helping to guide organizations towards realizing the values that lead to superior performance with self-sustaining momentum (Bushe, 1995).

A very different approach to Organization Development from AI is the Socio Economic Approach to Management (SEAM) (Boje & Rosile, 2003; Sorenson, Yaeger, Savall, Zardet, Bonnet, & Peron, 2010). In a contrast to AI methods of the search for the positive, SEAM is focused on problem identification and problem solving within organizations. It is also a long process of at least 3-5 years; AI Summits or interventions, as will be presented in this paper, can happen in a day. SEAM is a process of interviews, observation, and data review assessing strategy and financial issues tackling both the micro and macro levels of the organization. It is heavily focused on data collection and analysis carried out by SEAM PhDs trained specifically in the foundational elements of the method. They are considered intervener-researchers gathering data from the results of interventions to further research and knowledge leading towards future interventions.

When executed well, AI can have a profound and lasting impact on organizations. This paper will review an AI application method called the AI Summit, and discuss the factors that contribute to the success of AI application in general. Conversely, a reflection of some factors that could potentially hinder the success of an AI application will be presented. Lastly, a case study will be offered, followed by a discussion of key learnings from the research, implications for practice, and thoughts on future research. Please note that in order to gain permission to discuss these applications and results, the authors were required to mask identifiable information regarding this organization.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY IN PRACTICE

AI SUMMIT

The AI Summit is a large group intervention that is unique in that it consists of a fully affirmative process (Whitney & Cooperrider, 1998). In a 1998 article in *Employment Relations Today*, Cooperrider and Whitney present the AI Summit Method, detailing the structure that one of these workshops can and should take on. Before any AI Summit can begin, a topic must be agreed upon that is broad enough in nature to avoid stifling creativity, and yet specific enough to keep the group on task. The attendees at an AI summit should ideally be diverse in nature, ranging from different teams within the organization and expanding where appropriate to include even external parties like partners, vendors, or customers. The event, sometimes taking place over days, is then split into four main phases: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Delivery.

As described by the authors, "The focus of the [Discovery] day is on the discovery of many facets of the organization's positive change core." It includes activities like clearly identifying the focus of the summit, conducting appreciative interviews, discussing peak experiences and identifying best practices from the past and the present that may be helpful in creating a sustainable future. (Whitney & Cooperrider, 1998, p.19). The aptly titled "Dream" phase focuses on defining what potential the organization has at its finger tips to have a positive impact on the world. Groups discuss the dreams that were shared during earlier interviews and start to provide more specific and tangible examples. Group presentations create enthusiasm and further commitment to the exercise, as some Summits include dramatic enactments of "realized" dreams to the larger group of participants. During the third phase, Design, "Participants focus on crafting an organization in which the positive change core is boldly alive in all of the strategies, processes, systems, decisions, and collaborations of the organization," (Whitney & Cooperrider, 1998, p. 20). This could be interpreted as an exercise in hierarchy design, process design, etc., driven creatively by the vision established during the dream phase of the AI Summit. The final phase of the exercise is titled Delivery. The intention of the delivery day is not to deliver a final and unchanging solution to the organization's problems, but instead an "invitation to action" to carry out the ideas presented throughout the first three phases, and to reawaken the organization. Teams will speak on potential actions that can be taken, and participants will self-select to act as agents of actions they support. Task groups should be formed and the group is sent forth to bring these concepts back to their everyday work. The AI Summit ultimately becomes the initiation for the organization into a never-ending cycle of discovering, dreaming, designing and delivering, with a positive mindset and a slew of positive inquiry initiatives to follow. The AI Summit can, in some cases, be the first step to creating a more agile and dynamic organization with an increased capacity to successfully take on change.

FACTORS OF SUCCESSFUL AI APPLICATION

There are studies upon studies that detail successful applications of AI, so in theory it should not be difficult at all to determine the factors that contribute to success. This section will outline just a few of these factors, noting that this is by no means an exhaustive list. The first factor that is absolutely required in order to execute a successful AI summit or other AI initiative is a clearly defined purpose statement for the activity. Cooperrider and Whitney further dictate, "Human systems- communities and organizations- move in the direction of what they study. During an AI summit the task focus serves to organize inquiry and discussions and, hence, to establish direction for the organization's transformation," (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1998, p. 21). Without this purpose statement, the ideas presented throughout all four stages of the process can be random enough that no difference is made at all. However, with a clear statement, participants are provided with a direction to focus their thoughts. The strengths identified become more targeted and as a result, participants come away with a clear picture of how

these strengths can be leveraged through the delivery stage to create a more positive and impactful future for the organization.

Williams & Haizlip authored a very enlightening article in 2013 regarding the application of AI in the healthcare specific environment, where time, money, and other resources to dedicate to the cause are often in short supply. The article, presented in *OD Practitioner*, presents ten learnings. However, there were three that seem to apply across all AI application that are worth noting as factors contributing to success utilizing the method in general. Echoing themes presented early on by Cooperrider and Whitney, it is of utmost importance that diversity of thought is considered in the execution of an AI summit. Everyone possible should be involved. Williams & Haizlip assert, "Building relationships across disciplines is essential to improving teamwork at the bedside or in the clinic. Make the process as interdisciplinary as possible and do this from the very start," (2013, p. 24). Again, while their article applies to healthcare and the educational healthcare space, this concept is applicable across most, if not all industries. The authors follow up by acknowledging that not every participant can always make it to every session. As a result, getting everyone involved might take extra effort, including sessions at different times of day, locations, and possible integration sessions where attendees from different sessions can come together and discuss their varying ideas.

Another factor of key importance is building and retaining leadership commitment to the exercise. Leaders serve not only as examples living the concepts of AI in their every way work, but also have key roles in encouraging commitment among employees and removing barriers during implementation in the delivery phase. Part of that leadership commitment also involves making sure that AI practices become embedded in the culture of the organization, which can be achieved through continued follow up after the initial summit kicking off these learnings is over. Holding additional "lunch-and-learn" sessions, periodic planning meetings, and other initiatives serve to demonstrate organizational commitment to the practice of constant change and improvement through AI. "It is incredibly easy for groups to lose momentum or lose their positive focus. We often do follow up education for the groups, to teach them more about appreciative practices to use every day, such as beginning meetings with stories of what's going well, the 'flip', or the art of the positive question," (Williams & Haizlip, 2013, p. 25).

Due to the fact that AI has only been formally written about for 15 years, there is a lack of longitudinal research discussing the long term affects or changes over time. Researchers in AI have advocated for a need to follow up to ensure continuity of results and reinforce the positive learnings (Govender & Edwards, 2009; Peelle, 2006). It is fairly clear that the positive momentum generated through the process creates positive results immediately after the intervention, however studies have found that it faded over time and organizational issues persisted if continual follow up is not present (Aggett, Messent, & Staines, 2013; Miller, Fitzgerald, Murrell, Preston, & Ambekar, 2005).

These are just a few examples of practices that can increase the chances of a successful application of AI. There is a substantial amount of literature analyzing these practices over a large span of industries and work spaces, and yet a shocking amount of literature analyzing the opposite; what are the factors that might prevent an AI application from succeeding?

FACTORS OF FAILURE IN AI APPLICATION

In his presentation of the concept of Dialogic Organization Development (2011), Gervase R. Bushe recognizes that while AI is a widely used and generally revered methodology in organizational change and change management, there is actually a small amount of evidence that actually supports the underlying theories. Specifically, he provides a critique of the AI methodology and points out some of the factor that are missing from the groundwork AI theory that are necessary for successful, transformational, and enduring change management. Bushe is not alone in this opinion. Practitioners over the years have questioned the merit and validity of AI application, dubbing it "too Pollyannaish" in nature, concerned that it disregards or ignores existing problems and fails to address root causes. Additional criticism includes the fact that focus on the positive will invalidate any negative organizational experiences of participants and hinder important conversations from taking place (Fitzgerald, Oliver, & Hoaxey, 2010). However, the intention of AI is not to pretend that problems do not exist, but instead to identify strengths which can be leveraged and increased in practice in order to create a more engaged and ultimately successful organization.

Bushe critiques, through several articles over the years, that a lack of attention to the generative potential of questions used in AI processes and other factors may explain why some interventions succeed and some fail. An earlier article in the Journal of Applied Behavioral Science (2005) provides more support for this position. Bushe and Kassam conducted a study of twenty cases of Appreciative Inquiry application before 2003. They were analyzed and evaluated for transformational change based on seven principles and practices based on theoretical literature on AI, and transformational change was defined as follows:

> A case was coded as transformational when evidence was given of a qualitative shift in the state of being or identity of the system, usually reflected in patterns or organization emerging after the appreciative inquiry that were clearly different from previous patterns. A case was coded as not transformational when the changes described new processes, procedures, resources, plans, or methods that were applied without changing the basic nature of the system. (Bushe & Kassam, p. 170).

While this definition does not specifically detail how to determine whether an AI application was a success as opposed to a failure, it does provide a means for defining whether the change created is transformational in nature and overall, the purpose of an AI initiative should be to create transformative change that becomes a normal and every day part of an organization's innerworkings.

Aside from this measure of change though, how else can practitioners define failure when it comes to AI Application? Before the Summit even commenced, was the subject matter clearly identified? Was it broad enough to encourage innovation and creative thinking, or was it stifling? Was it specific enough to keep participants on track and focused? From there, the "Four D" phased structure of AI intervention is a theoretical foundation, so it is safe to say that each phase must be included in the implementation process. Also widely discussed by many AI theorists and practitioners is the importance of buy in and commitment from the participants in the exercise. The entire purpose of the story telling through peak experience interviews is to gain investment from individuals at every level and every department of the organization, resulting in broad diversity of thought and better awareness of organizational strengths. After the self-formed teams set forth to further discuss and execute new ideas, is there firm commitment from those involved, or are employees simply volunteering for the face value? This success of the exercise can be compromised especially quickly when lack of leadership support leads to limited meeting time, or limited (or lack) of resources to assign to the cause. There are many factors that might take away from the success of an AI application. These, along with factors of success will be detailed and analyzed in the following case study.

CASE STUDY

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Human Resources (HR) department for the hospital system was previously split into what was essentially five teams: Benefits, Compensation, HRIS/HR Records & Compliance (HRIS for short), Recruiting, and Employee Relations. The focus of this case study is on the Benefits, Compensation, and HRIS teams as they navigated a transition in leadership. Benefits at one time had a Director fully dedicated to the work of that team, however when this director retired, the decision was made to absorb Benefits under the Director responsible for Compensation and HRIS. The Benefits team had a history of distrust within the group, as well as with management and the former director. The result was unfortunately a culture of finger pointing and blame assignment that was not present on the HRIS or Compensation teams. The goal of the attempted AI application was creating "oneness" within the new consolidated team as well as to improve communication, increase trust, and begin the shift to a more positively focused framework. The AI Summit was facilitated by a member of the benefits team, who had knowledge and practice of AI through graduate coursework, in partnership with the Vice President of Talent Management & Executive Development. The idea of using AI to make changes within the department was presented to The AVP of Compensation, Benefits and HRIS by the same team member. Her business case requested that the session be conducted over one longer session, or two shorter (two to three hour) sessions. However, due to time constraints, the leadership team insisted the initiative be broken up into three distinctive meetings, as to not interrupt the daily operations of the team.

SESSION 1

The first meeting was to focus on team building; stressing the importance of open communication and providing an introduction into the theory behind AI. The session was included as part of a monthly team meeting including the Benefits, Compensation, and HRIS teams. Without explanation, the group was asked to volunteer to take place in an activity. The activity was collected from *Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 19* (1992). The first six volunteers formed team one, and the second six formed team two. The remaining three employees would serve as observers, with the ability to walk back and forth between rooms where the teams were working. They were tasked with taking notes on how the simulation played out as well as the differences between two teams. The teams were then guided to separate rooms, and instructions were presented to each. The objective for both teams was the same: Build an "eco-friendly and affordable" house from playing cards. Face cards and staples held different "price and quality" value compared to regular cards and tape; teams were instructed to keep this in mind when designing their homes.

The major difference in the exercise came from the communication standards that each team was asked to use. Each member of team one was presented with a hierarchical role in the exercise, which detailed not only the instructions regarding materials, but also some restrictions on who they were allowed to converse with during the exercise. For example, the builder could speak only with the architect, and not with the CEO who was the brain power behind the design. The CEO could speak to the Vice Presidents of Marketing and Finance, but none of them could speak directly with the person who would be physically assembling the house. Quite differently, team two was presented with six copies of the same role: Team Member. Their team communication was unlimited. There were no restrictions on who could take part in the idea generation, design, or building of the house.

After the time for the exercise expired, the entire group came together to see each house and act as potential buyers. The teams presented their work, which differed greatly and then there was a vote to determine who would buy the house built by team one versus team two. The varying communication structure made an obvious and visible difference on the quality of each structure. Team one's house appeared to be collapsing between the first and second floors, and seemed messier in appearance. On the other hand, team two's house appeared very stable and could even be lifted off of the table without impact. It has a full roof, balcony and even some chairs made from extra material and a make-shift playing card fire pit. (See pictures, Appendix A).

During the debrief, both teams and the observers discussed how the communication styles and restrictions either helped or hindered their progress during the exercise. As a group, the entire department came to an agreement that the application of this exercise to problem solving in their work was quite clear. Open communication in all directions of the hierarchy is of utmost importance.

This open communication allowed them to develop ideas that contributed to a strong foundation, and a structure that would not simply blow over, and they agreed this was a principle that needed to be applied in their day to day. After the debrief, a short presentation was given with an introduction to Appreciative Inquiry. The group discussed the importance of a positive mindset and a curious mind. The presentation ended with a plan for the next two sessions. A survey was to be conducted prior to the next session, and so session two would include the review of that survey as well as appreciative interviews. Session three would get into the "design and delivery" phases of the AI process. Until then, each member of the team was encouraged to start practicing appreciation by considering three positive things that happened at the end of each day. The feedback that followed over the next few days via office conversation and email was overwhelmingly positive.

SESSION 2

Session 2 was planned for the following month's meeting. However, the team was preparing for the self-labeled "busy season" and the session was pushed back another month. In between sessions, communication was lacking. There were no follow up emails or reminders to keep working on the "three positive things" exercise each day. As a result, some of the momentum around the initiative seemed to be lost in the two-month span between sessions. Also, during that time, some internal and external partners to the team were surveyed to determine what strengths survey participants saw on the team and to provide examples of positive interactions. The intention of the survey was to aid in the definition of a focus for the following session, so that the idea could be used as a focus in the Four D stage of AI application. Survey results can be found in Appendices B and C.

One week in advance, the group was sent a set of Appreciative Interview Questions (Appendix D) and asked to review and begin thinking of their own positive experiences. This second session would again be included as a small part of an existing team meeting, so time was limited. The day of the second session, the group was paired into groups of two and given 15 minutes each to walk through the questions. After the interviews were over, volunteers were asked to discuss their peak experience, and the group attempted to draw themes. During this session, there was a noted reluctance to participate in the debrief. The enthusiasm and excitement for the concepts created during the first session appeared to have disappeared, and while some important themes emerged, the seeming lack of trust still seemed to be an overwhelming barrier to successful application. Amy Edmonson's (1999) idea of "psychological safety" seemed to be missing, as though employees felt this more personalized exercise was somehow less safe than the house of cards activity from Session 1.

At the end of the appreciative interview debrief, some reminder slides on AI were presented, and a discussion of what to expect from the next session took place. Since the survey results from internal and external partners were inconsistent and somewhat contradictory, we would select a different focus and

theme for session 3 so that the group could begin putting AI into practice through the use of Discovery, Dream, Design and Delivery. However, at this point the "busy season" of year end planning, annual open enrollment for benefits, and merit planning for compensation had started and at the point this case study was written, the third session had been postponed indefinitely.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

For purposes of this analysis and discussion, the authors would consider this case study to be an unsuccessful application of AI for several reasons. In short, the processes outlined by Cooperrider and Whitney were not fully followed. The intervention did not start with a clear purpose or focus and as a result, both the survey and appreciative interview lacked focus. This lack of focus created a situation in which the team wasn't sure what information would have value or impact, and the results were so scattered that it was difficult to draw useable themes. While some major strengths were identified, namely a great attention to subject matter expertise, the identification of a clear problem to apply those strengths to was lacking.

As addressed in the article by Williams and Haizlip (2013), another necessary component that was missing from this process was follow up. There were opportunities for follow up and reinforcement of the concepts between sessions one and two, and even since then. However, it appears none of those opportunities were taken, and as a result, overall momentum for the intervention and shift in cultural attitudes were lost. The time span between sessions could be symptomatic not only of an overwhelming work load combined with lack of resources, but also a potential lack of leadership commitment. While it is increasingly difficult to find time, space, and frankly, funding, for these types of initiatives, it is important for management to recognize the impact that these types of OD interventions can have on the bottom line. With a concept like AI, sometimes it is difficult to grasp the bottom-line impact, and as a result management buy-in and commitment can be at times difficult, if near impossible to gather. It is also very possible that the timing of this intervention was poor. The busy season defined by this team spans all of the way from September through February. It is possible that the results may have been different if the AI intervention was started in March as opposed to August, when workload is accelerating instead of slowing down.

Some scholars and practitioners of AI consider it a "new lens" for viewing the same or old problems (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). With change being such a constant across all industries including healthcare, and the speed of that change continuing to accelerate, the deficit-based problem-solving methodology may not be the best approach anymore. In order to be successful in any industry workers must be more agile and adaptable than ever, and AI provides an increased capacity to handle change by choosing to focus on strength instead of weakness. However, in order to successfully harness the power of AI methodology, one must first understand what policies, practices and even language may contribute to or

hinder a successful application. If and when the sessions in the above case study are continued, it will be of utmost importance for the facilitators to have this new understanding and be able to apply the learnings to the initiative.

Application of Savall & Zardet's Qualimetrics Approach (2011) might be another lens though which this organization should be analyzed in preparation for future attempts. While there are economic factors to be analyzed in consolidating the teams and their budgets, equally important are the social structures and behaviors. Savall and Zardet point out that these social stressors, such as lack of trust demonstrated in the case study, can translate to lower performance and increased cost, or the "hidden cost" of organizational life. For example, how much time does lack of trust cost the department? Staff may be spending unnecessary time documenting interactions as a way to protect themselves from future finger pointing. Raising this point to the leadership team, and addressing the potential economic cost of social issues, may be a way to increase buy in and commitment from an executive level and may be a key factor in pushing the initiative along.

It is for these reasons that there is a need within the field of OD to increase the amount of research on AI implementations that are less than successful. It may seem contradictory to the very positive core of AI theory, however this understanding of what hinders the success of AI summits and other methodologies will allow future practitioners to learn from the mistakes of others, and increase the number of successful implementations that result in transformational change. Our current is in a constant battle for competitive advantage, and application of AI theories may just be what provides that advantage.
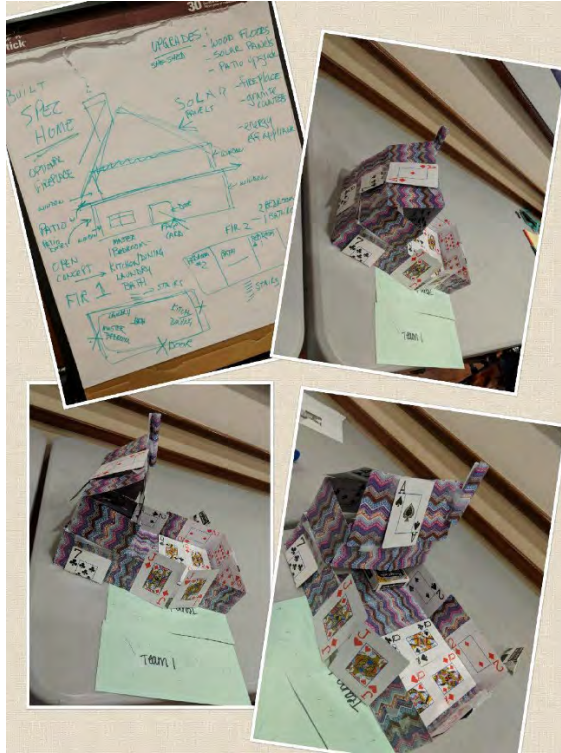
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APPENDIX A

House of Cards Exercise:

TEAM 1

TEAM 2

APPENDIX B

Survey questions & answers for Internal HR Partners (Manager of recruiting, HR Business Partners and HR Generalists: Areas that this team supports.

1. Think of a "peak" positive experience you've had working with the Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance team. What was it? What made the experience great?
   a. "Working with Deb on joint commission surveys was always a pleasure. Prepared and all issues prevented in advance. Working with Karen on multiple projects as an incredible knowledge base. Working with Theresa on a few emergent needs- she was thorough, efficient and a pleasure to work with. Aaron is also always helpful to the entire team. Alyssa provides excellent service and has a great attitude. Sandra is also super smart, organized and a pleasure to work with. So I guess I am saying that there are several players on the team that provide great experience!"
   b. "Working with Compensation through a very challenging restructure. It was a good experience because there was collaborative brainstorming and consideration of many options to try and solve an organizational problem."

     c.   "I needed a few reports from HRIS and the turnaround time was fantastic. Also the same for the records are where I needed information from a file that was not at my location."

     d.   "Our comp team is always a pleasure to work with- they are often asked to help with salary reviews, experience rating and new job codes and they always do so very promptly. What makes it great is their understanding of the urgency of some of these requests and how it impacts other processes, so they are always willing to help. Records also does a great job of notifying the talent acquisition team about rehires (that may not have been reported).

     e.   "Christine has great customer service skills and has always been very responsive to any requests. Even when she gets overwhelmed, she gives a timeline."

2. What do you feel are the most significant strengths of the Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance team?

     a.   "Knowledge, knowledge, knowledge! I am always confident in the answer when I ask Karen or Deb for an insight."

     b.   "Subject matter expertise is the most significant strength."

     c.   "There is a wealth of knowledge, they are willing to always help and get the correct answer or assist."

     d.   "Compensation- nice established guidelines on comp, responsiveness. Benefits- assistance with new employee benefits materials. Nice materials provided to give to potential hires & candidates. HRIS- responsiveness, updates on rehires. Nancy specifically is great at writing processes and mapping out processes, she also helps us troubleshoot often. Records- responsiveness. Deb specifically is a subject matter expert on compliance!"

     e.   "For the most part, this group really cares about delivering the best service/product. They work really hard to keep up with the increasing demands of their jobs."

3. What do you feel are the Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance team's biggest opportunities for improvement?

     a.   "Frustration management. Generally, they seem to feel that the rest of the department is working against them, which I do not think is the case. And project management to try and get things on timetables, and deliverables consistently maintained."

     b.   "At times, I do feel there is an opportunity to understand better what is needed from a business standpoint so the information/analysis is more 'useable' to the business leaders."

     c.   "Benefits could be better at responding in a timely manner, especially when it relates to leaves of absence and employees reaching their unprotected time or 26 weeks of maximum leave."

    d. "Comp- Nothing comes to mind. Benefits- More education to the entire team on benefits. We do get overviews, but not often thorough explanations or talking points of how we might best explain things. At times, it has also felt like they are hesitant to help with certain scenarios (for example, recent hires who may have a specific question). HRIS- It would be great to have dashboards, access to data more quickly. Often there is only one person who can get you the information you may need and you are reliant on that person's schedule/availability. It can take a really long time (weeks to months)."

    e. "The responsiveness of the group varies. There are some that are excellent, some that you have to chase, and some that you never get a response from or try to contact anymore. It would be great to have a service standard, and hold staff accountable."

4. If you could offer advice to the Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance team, what would it be?

    a. "Talk to people in other departments with an open mind, and assume that they want the best for everyone too."

    b. "Take time to understand that we (HR) support the business' goals vs the business needing to adapt to what/how we do things. Also, I'd encourage these areas to also work directly with employees. Everyone in HR should be communicating with employees directly to assist them."

    c. "Keep in mind that sometimes the information being requested is due to needing it for someone else so the timeliness or at least responding saying how long it may take to get what is needed so we know it is acknowledged."

    d. "When you are setting up new processes/procedures, it would be great if you could involve more customers/users, so you could get a better product."

APPENDIX C

Survey questions & answers for External Partners (Various hospital Presidents, Vice Presidents, etc.)

1. Think of a "peak" (positive) experience you've had working with the Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance team. What was it? What made the experience great?
   a. "There have been many examples of major projects and day-to-day operations that are positive. What makes the experiences great is working as a team. When both departments are functioning and collaborating on the same objective. Working together and trusting each other. 'I've got your back' approach. Employees seldom appreciate the effort that goes into a key venture. Employees are quick to find fault and it is a positive experience when your teammate are working together."
   b. "They are always extremely responsive and helpful."

2. What is the most appealing or rewarding thing about working with this Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance team?
   a. "The most rewarding is building the relationships and knowing who you can trust and count on. The personal touch makes working with the HR Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance team so rewarding."
   b. "Knowledgeable and friendly staff."

3. What do you feel are the Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance team's greatest contributions to your organization?
   a. "Greatest contribution is building relationships and processing reliable records and data."
   b. "Professionalism and dedication."

4. What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing you around Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance? Where do you see opportunity for improvement?
   a. "When employees call our department but really need HR/Benefits. Many times the employee states they started in HR And were directed to call us. The employee runs around from one department to the other only to be sent back to the original department. Before passing the employee to another department, 1. Understand the original question and 2. Stay with the employee until the next department can confirm they can help the employee. Hand off the caller with a soft transfer confirming they are in the correct department. Benefits phone tree is frustrating when we are trying to put an employee in direct contact with an HR Benefit representative."

APPENDIX D:

Peak Experiences Questionnaire: Conducted in pairs of two for 15 minutes per partner

1. Peak Experience: Tell a story about a time when you felt the most alive and engaged, joining with others to accomplish something important that you could not do alone. (Use the questions below to prove more deeply, to help your interviewee expand their story)
    a. What was going on?
    b. Who was involved?
    c. What made that experience a peak experience?
    d. What was your contribution?
    e. What spark attracted you to that group?
    f. How did this group work together to accomplish the task/mission?
    g. How did you feel then?
    h. Looking back at this distance, how does your memory of that experience feel now?
2. Valuing: What do you value most about yourself, your work, and the Compensation, Benefits & HRIS group? (Use the questions below to prove more deeply, to help your interviewee expand their story)
    a. If I were to ask someone who knew you best, what would they say they valued most about who you are?
    b. What do you value most about your work?
    c. What has been the single, most important contribution you feel you've made in your work and how has it changed your life?
    d. What about the Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance group do you most value?
    e. How has the Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance group contributed to your life?
3. Core Life-Giving Factors: For you what is at the core of joining with others in this field? What draws you to join, participate and contribute to this Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance
    a. What are the core factors, energizing roles or behaviors that help bring alive your participating and contribution in a team of colleagues?
    b. What would you say is that the very core of the Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance group? What are the core factors that give life to this organization?
    c. What one strength does the Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance group have that will have the greatest impact on our future success?
    d. What are the unique attributes of this Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance group, without which it would not be the same?

4. Trends: What are the macro trends that you see that are relevant to the Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance group and its goals?
    a. What do you see as the key needs of the organization's operating units, and how do you see the Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance organization helping to meet them?
    b. How does the Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance have to change in order to best meet our internal customers' needs and the trends that face us all?
    c. What gives you the most hope, most opportunity for building a better organization at our company?
5. Wishes for the future: You fall into a deep sleep and wake up in the year 2024. The Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance organization has been transformed in keeping with your deepest wishes…
    a. What's happening that's different?
    b. How do you know?
    c. What happened to allow the Compensation, Benefits, HRIS & HR Records/Compliance organization to achieve these results?
    d. What three wishes/visions do you have that would make that transformation possible?