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Exploring Positive Organisational Development in an Educational Organisation

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Description

The objective of this paper is to explore different concepts that relate to facilitating and measuring positive organisational development. It examines the positive change approach of appreciative inquiry, in order to explore the impact of appreciative inquiry on enhancing employee self-determination. Self-determination has been found to increase well-being and has been proposed as a framework for researching employee engagement. The proposed studies will examine this framework further, specifically in relation to autonomy support. Coaching is proposed as another important intervention for enhancing self-determination and employee engagement and also as a complementary technique for embedding and enhancing organisational change. The proposed studies to examine these relationships are described below.

Location

iC - SBS Teaching Facility

Exploring positive organisational development in an educational organisation.

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to explore different concepts that relate to facilitating and measuring positive organisational development. It examines the positive change approach of appreciative inquiry, in order to explore the impact of appreciative inquiry on enhancing employee self-determination. Self-determination has been found to increase well-being and has been proposed as a framework for researching employee engagement. The proposed studies will examine this framework further, specifically in relation to autonomy support. Coaching is proposed as another important intervention for enhancing self-determination and employee engagement and also as a complementary technique for embedding and enhancing organisational change. The proposed studies to examine these relationships are described below.

Introduction

This paper introduces to the concepts of self-determination theory, appreciative inquiry, employee engagement and coaching. The study being undertaken will investigate the relationship between these four constructs. examine the impact of a positive organisation development methodology (appreciative inquiry) on employees' perceived autonomy and engagement. This paper proposes that appreciative inquiry (AI) will enhance employees' perceived autonomy support. We also propose that perceived autonomy support will increase employee engagement. The study examines an organisational change initiative within a school that uses an AI approach and individual coaching to implement and embed a positive psychology curriculum across the whole community.

Positive psychology is the scientific study of optimal human functioning, to discover the factors that allow individuals, organisations, communities and societies to thrive and flourish (Keyes & Haidt, 2003; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The concept of positive psychology has moved into several domains, including organisations and education.

While industrial/organisational psychology has a long history of investigating organisational antecedents, individual behaviours and outcomes in the workplace, it is only relatively recently that empirical research has examined the effect and value of applied positive psychology in the workplace (eg Turner, Barling & Zacharatos, 2002; Linley & Page, 2007; Linley, Harrington, & Garcea, 2010). Concepts such as appreciative inquiry and positive organisation development (Cooperrider, 2010), applied positive psychology in organisations (Linley, 2010), and positive organisational scholarship (Cameron et al, 2003), are advancing the notion that human flourishing has a place within, and is of value to, organisations.

Appreciative inquiry

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is an organisational development approach that asks participants to search for the best in people, their organisations, and the world around them (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). AI involves asking strengths-based questions of an organisation's stakeholders that focus on enhancing a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. AI starts from the assumption that people want to contribute and perform at their best and that trust and encouragement work better than suspicion and distrust (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005). AI takes these questions as the starting point for designing and implementing organisational change. In this way, AI is different from traditional strategic planning and development approaches which generally start from the position of deficit and problem solving. Very few studies have been conducted that empirically examine the success factors of AI (Bushe, 2010).

Self-determination theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1987, 1991) proposes two forms of motivation – intrinsic motivation (doing an activity for its own sake) and extrinsic motivation (doing an activity for instrumental reasons) (Meyer & Gagne, 2008). SDT also posits that humans have a basic need for autonomy, competence and connectedness. Environments that provide opportunities for individuals to meet these needs will result in those individuals' flourishing and the fulfilment of these three needs may also interact to variously promote an individual's intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The concept of autonomy support, in particular, has expanded the conceptual framework and understanding of the conditions under which extrinsic and intrinsic motivation may be enhanced (Koestner, Ryan, Bernieri, & Holt, 1984). Further, supporting a person's autonomy has been shown to result in greater acceptance of organisational change (Gagne, et al, 2000).

SDT suggests that contexts that support autonomy foster internalisation of the value of doing a particular task, or adopting a change initiative. AI provides an approach that directly builds autonomy support and intrinsic motivation for adopting a change initiative by surfacing employees' aspirations for the success of the organisation and directly involving them in designing solutions. The use of an AI methodology should therefore result in higher perceived autonomy support in individuals.

Employee engagement

Employee engagement is a relatively new construct that at first appears to be similar to concepts such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and job involvement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Furthermore, there remains uncertainty around the conceptualisation of employee engagement and whether it is a trait, state or behaviour (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Page & Vella-Broderick, 2009). Meyer and Gagne (2008) propose self-determination theory as a possible unifying theory to guide research and practice around the concept of employee engagement. The current study will examine the construct of employee engagement and its relationship to SDT and AI.

Coaching

Coaching resonates with the above assumptions and also assumes that people are competent and able to formulate their own solutions to the issues facing them. The formal inclusion of coaching would be a powerful adjunct to the AI process in a number of ways: coaching interviewers in basic skill acquisition of the AI methodology; coaching participants in adopting a strengths-based approach; coaching leaders of the planned intervention in maintaining focus and momentum on the change initiatives.

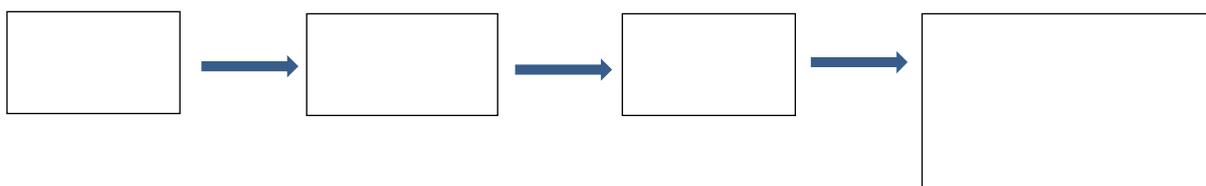
In tandem with the field of positive psychology, the practice and research around coaching has experienced massive growth over the last ten years. Coaching psychology has been described as the ideal vehicle for applied positive psychology (Grant & Spence, 2010). However, to date little attention has been paid to understanding how positive psychology constructs may be operationalised within a coaching relationship. As an exception, Spence and Oades (2011) proposed that self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) offers a useful theoretical framework to understand the impact of coaching both as a practice (in coaching conversations) and as a process (over time).

Proposed study

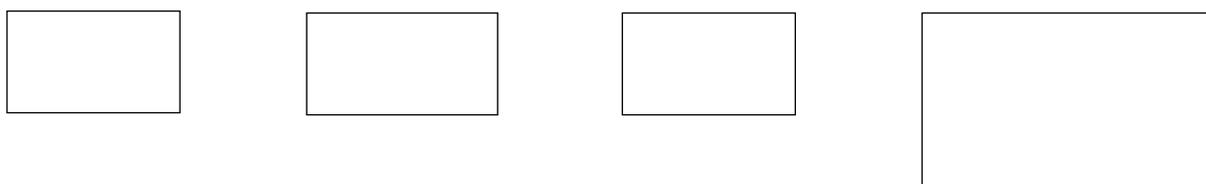
These studies occur in a large private school in NSW. Using an appreciative inquiry methodology (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) to identify themes and engage stakeholders, the school is implementing a positive psychology framework across its community. Various positive psychology interventions are being implemented with pre- and post- measures being collected over three years.

Study 1 examines the relationship between employee's perceived autonomy, employee engagement, well-being, and performance. We hypothesise that perceived autonomy will be positively correlated with all three employee outcome measures. Study 2 investigates the impact of employee's perceived autonomy, employee engagement, employee well-being, and student performance. We hypothesise that perceived autonomy will be positively correlated with employee engagement, employee well-being and student performance. Study 3 will investigate the impact of interventions on employee perceived autonomy, employee engagement, employee well-being, and both employee and student performance. Study 4 will qualitatively analyse the impact of appreciative inquiry and evidence-based coaching as positive organisation development interventions.

Study 1:

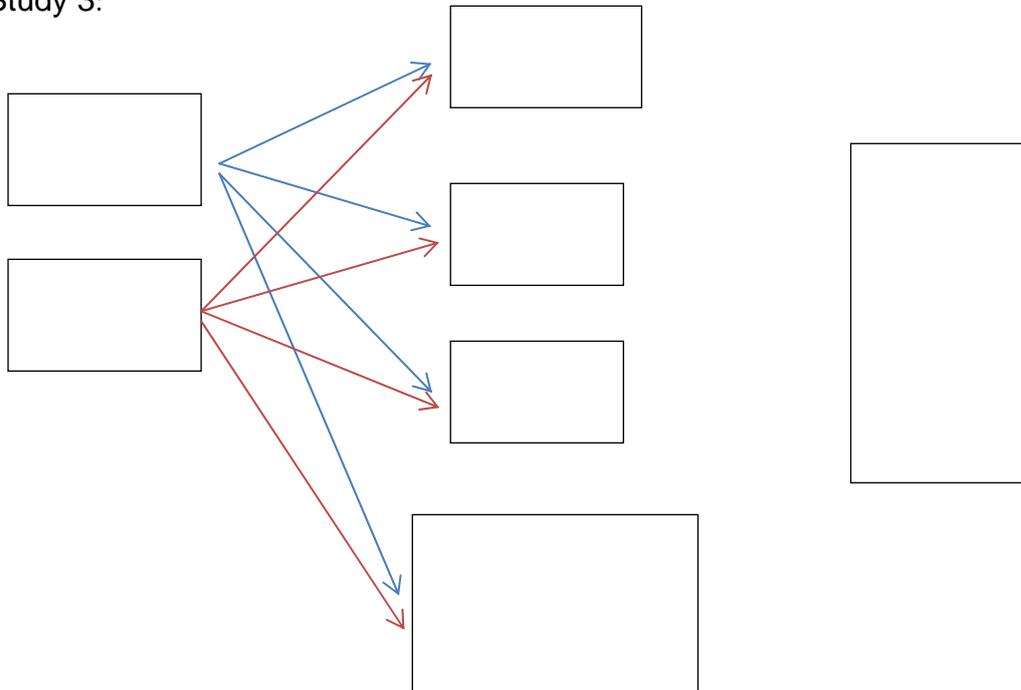


Study 2:





Study 3:



Conclusion

Embedding organisational changes and identifying the mechanisms for increasing employee engagement and performance are critical issues for organisations, warranting further research. This study will investigate the efficacy of appreciative inquiry and coaching in embedding organisational change and ensuring employee engagement. Finally, this study will provide confirmation of self-determination theory as a unifying model for individual motivation and engagement.

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