"MAKE YOUR ORGANIZATION MORE POSITIVE!": THE POWER OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

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This paper aims to describe the methodological aspects, the contents, and the usefulness of the appreciative inquiry (AI) approach, a methodology aimed to generate new knowledge and to produce change, leveraging positivity and generativity. The paper describes the activities of an action research project which used the AI 4D model (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny) in a residential care setting, and proposes a specific kit designed for and used by the researcher-consultant to support the AI process. One hundred nineteen healthcare providers participated in the AI intervention. Data were collected through the Positive Organization Questionnaire (POQ), the "like a garden" metaphor, and the educational intervention. Some categories of objectives emerged from the data analysis: a) feeling better at work; b) improving the management of one's work; c) improving the relationship with others. These themes consolidate what emerged in the phase of imagining a desired future and with the preliminary results of the questionnaire. Theoretical, methodological, and practical implications for positive organizations are discussed.

It is with some emotion that we write during what can be considered the most relevant health emergency of our time. "The COVID-19 pandemic has irrevocably transformed economies all over the globe, infected millions, and has tragically caused large numbers of deaths. Institutional leaders must react to disrupted supply chains, enable remote workforces, break bad news to employees and families, as well as maintain their own hope and energy so they can continue to serve, guide, and move forward without any trusted roadmap" (Cooperrider & Fry, 2020, p. 266). But at the same time it has shown, in a way that Giordano (2020) defines blatant, "the multiplicity of levels that connect us to each other, everywhere, as

well as the complexity of the world we inhabit, of its social and political logics, economic, but also inter-personal and psychic" (p. 3). Albert Camus in his work "The plague" (1947/2004) wrote that "plagues and wars always catch men unprepared" (p. 30), and "what, however, the contemporary world absolutely needs is precisely the ability to think of the future as a good possibility, or as an opportunity for change" (p. 30). Once the illusion that progress occurs automatically, due to destiny or a historical or technological necessi-ty, has been overcome, the task is to imagine structures and social relations that are less unjust, less self-destructive, more livable, though not perfect. The point is trying to trace an anterotopy, that is, the credible image of a future in view of which to act decisively" (Mordacci, 2020, p. X).

Today, people, groups, and organizations are all committed — at different levels — to tackling a challenge that is "titanic," especially for the health sector, under constant pressure unheard of for a long time. Although it may appear difficult, if not downright unlikely, to have a positive attitude in the face of so much suffering, we start from the assumption that this attitude is precisely what we need to make deci-sions that may improve our future. At an organizational level, positive organizations are defined as those working constantly to forge positive thinking and positive actions, in the awareness that the organizational commitment toward people — that is, investment in the development of human resources, in the promotion of organizational well-being and health protection, and in the improvement of job satisfaction and perfor-mance — is the driving force behind innovation and change, as well as the positive nature of relations with public opinion and stakeholders, in terms of full and shared social responsibility.

Among the elements that characterize the positive organization (De Carlo et al., 2016) are:

- the enhancement of the person, differences, freedom, and will;
- sharing objectives, their consistency with working procedures, justice, and organizational equity;
- the promotion of innovation and change;
- the correct management of relations between colleagues, superiors, and workgroups;
- the appropriate circulation of information, empathy, and tolerance.

In positive organizations, work is inspired by the following principles (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014):

- "Craftmanship," which provides the opportunity to be creative and to work with "one's own hands," combining theoretical, applicative, and technical aspects;
- "Pride in the profession," which includes aspects such as solving problems, working by combining head, hands, and heart, the opportunity of using state-of-the-art techniques and materials, but also of doing meaningful, socially-relevant work;
- "Immediate results/Aesthetics," related to more immediate aspects, such as producing an outcome characterized by its own coherence/effectiveness/beauty, performing a high-quality intervention, making an adequate evaluation of a problem, and implementing a suitable and innovative intervention;
- "Long-term results," mainly centered on a long-term benefit, also in terms of personal satisfaction. In other words, the prospect of obtaining, through our work, a result that, over time, has its own — recognized — validity.

According to the self determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000), a work environment that supports the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs (competence, autonomy, and relationship) of the individual's promotes autonomous motivation (e.g., intrinsic), well-being, and job performance. According to Maslow (1970), the SDT incorporates the aesthetic need, present in various people who "get sick from ugliness, and are cured by beautiful surroundings; they crave actively, and their cravings can be satisfied only by beauty" (p. 24). The perception that one's work satisfies these basic psychological needs is consid-ered a personal resource in the well-known job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007,

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2017; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014), because the person feels part of a group and able to perform their job well, by using their skills and planning their work.

Some studies, conducted in very different contexts, have highlighted how people participate in high-level performances because they recognize that such performances have an intrinsic value and appreciate their validity and beauty. Participation in such events can therefore contribute, among other aspects, to satisfying the value and aesthetic need. With particular reference to the issue of organizational well-being, the British HSE system for "good work" — the system at the basis of European and national regulations in the sector — places the correctness and integrity of the organization among the basic factors. On the operational level, good work indicates attention to values and constant commitment to promote and implement them, both individually and collectively.

Therefore, widespread rationality must be fully in force comprising the true, the just, the beautiful, and the good, which can be summarized in the beautiful and the useful. One of the most widespread illusions in the contemporary world is identifying all that is rational with all that is scientific, giving science the primacy, if not the exclusivity, of rationality, to the detriment of the areas of arts, history, philosophy, sentiments, education, values, the taste for beauty and the good, which today are often referred to, in falsely reinforcing terms, as "human sciences." Trying to make the rational coincide with the incontrovertible truth of science, thus tending to relegate to irrelevance all that pertains to rationality in the sphere of values, has led to a sort of basic, multifaceted "sin" that must be fought by extending the dominion of the rational in every way, including the beautiful and the useful, contrasting as much as possible the irrational, that is the false, the unjust, the painful, and the tragic (De Carlo et al., 2016; Ivaldi & Scaratti, 2020). For this purpose, it is good to correctly re-interpret, for example, the dynamics of merit, social recognition, incentives, and career development.

At the basis of positive actions, there is always the direct assumption of responsibility, the search for sharing, the tension toward the common good — as well as to individual and collective values, therefore to beauty and usefulness. It is, therefore, necessary to make constant reference to regulatory hierarchies, which provide the directions toward which to move and the principles capable of regulating actions. We must counteract the elements of the irrational, the specific falsehoods and injustices, the concrete pain, with the commitment to good knowledge, evaluation, and action procedures, which must be shared and not imposed.

There is a need for widespread positive thinking, both in organizations and in individuals. A need to work trying to pursue the beautiful and the useful; to appreciate beauty and goodness in relationships with colleagues, collaborators, and users, relying on their full and convinced participation; to feel constantly satisfied in carrying out one's work; to seek and spread a working climate of friendship, efficiency, and serenity.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Choosing to use the appreciative inquiry (AI) methodology therefore appears to be strategic and consistent with the premises set out above. AI was born in the mid-1980s with the pioneering work, among others, of Fry, Cooperrider, Srivastva, and colleagues at Case Western Reserve and it rapidly developed as a theory and practice of organizational change and development of international nongovernmental organizations, subsequently involving an increasing number of public and private organizations operating in different sectors, and of people, at all levels up to the present day (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Over-

coming the approaches oriented to a deficit-based, problem-centered thinking vision, AI focuses on what works well in organizations and acts by fostering and promoting their positive potential (Woodfield et al., 2017). A model of integration between theory and practice, as well as of great flexibility, it is usually conducted within the framework of the action research methodology (Lewin, 1946), of which it constitutes a sort of "awakening" (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). It emphasizes discourse and narration as processes useful for organizational change (Burke, 2018): central is the dialog focused on the strengths of the working environment, people, and the social context in which they live (Cooperrider, 2012).

It develops from social constructionism and its applications in situations of management and transformation of organizational contexts (Gergen, 1982, 1999). Breaking the barriers between observer and observed, it constitutes a cooperative and co-evolution process (Cooperrider & Avital, 2004), aimed to develop and strengthen what is good and any corrective actions (Cooperrider et al., 2008): it starts from positive relationships and strengths and examines critical issues and plans initiatives and actions to remedy them, while also increasing positivity. It consists of four phases, according to the well-known 4D model, described below (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

1. Discovery – How we are, through the appreciation of the past and the present, identifying positive aspects, resources, critical success experiences, potentialities.

2. Dream – How I would like us to be, through the shared imagination of the possible and desired future and the elaboration of hypotheses on how the present can evolve by expressing the best resources available.

3. Design – How we should be, through the co-design of specific objectives to be achieved, based on a virtuous correspondence between identified resources and emerged desires.

4. Destiny – What makes the desired future achievable, through the identification of specific actions/behaviors to support the future and the mysteries it may hold.

According to Cooperrider (as cited in Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. xi), "appreciative inquiry transforms organizations into places that are free and alive, where people are eager and filled with positive power, and where the creativity of the whole never ceases to amaze, surprise, and innovate." The AI was chosen because, with its characteristics of identification in the process of work improvement — also through the use of metaphors — and with the concreteness and positivity of its four phases, it constitutes a generative methodology allowing participants with the most negative perceptions of the work environment to abandon stereotypes and implicit assumptions, to be surprised by how many resources they possess, to activate and direct their energies toward objectives of improving organizational well-being and job performance.

AI is increasingly present in organizations, for example for the design and implementation of organizational stress management interventions (Ravalier et al., 2019), or for entrepreunership research within the family business context (Woodfield et al., 2017). For an in-depth analysis of the AI methodology in organizational life 30 years after its first elaboration, see the work of Cooperrider (2017). Such empirical evidence demonstrates its power in building and sustaining effective relationships, and in producing new representations of care work, even at a distance (Fry et al., 2020), in healthcare (Coleman & Wiggins, 2017; Curtis et al., 2017; Fiedhouse & Onyett, 2012; Hung et al., 2018; Magnussen et al., 2019; Mirkovic et al., 2018; Scerri et al., 2019; Watkins et al., 2019; Whiting et al., 2020). To examine and critique how the phases of the 4D cycle of AI are implemented in a healthcare context, see the methodological review by Trajkovski et al. (2013). The usefulness of AI, leveraging positivity and generativity, is also evident in its applications with older people (Clarke et al., 2018; Sixsmith et al., 2017), and in a residential care setting (Amador et al., 2014, 2016; Dewar & Kennedy, 2016; du Toit & Buchanan, 2018; Jack et al., 2019; Sharp et al., 2018), the context in which the present action research project took place.

In addition, Laszlo and colleagues (2020) in their recent paper highlight how by using methods and tools based on AI with a focus on sustainable value, leaders and organizations will be able to face emerging challenges (such as pandemic, climate change, and many other social and global challenges).

AIM AND CONTEXT

We adopted a positive organization perspective (De Carlo et al., 2016), which acknowledges and appreciates the value of the staff and improves services and performance for guests and their families.

This AI intervention was carried out in the broader context of action research (Scaratti et al., 2018), that is, a constant educational process aimed to obtain the expected results, which can be summarized as the decisive contribution to the growth of a common heritage of concepts, skills, languages, and good practices for the shared creation of a positive work environment, in which to live and work with optimism, confidence, and full productivity.

Based on the knowledge of the organizational climate factors (for in-depth study of organizational climate in healthcare setting, see Bonacci et al., 2020 and Sein Myint et al., 2020; see also Falco et al., 2018), obtained through a preliminary empirical survey, whose objectives, methodology, and results were worked on together by all participants — the staff of the residential care home — through active listening and educational activities carried out in the classroom, new knowledge was generated on the positive factors that emerged, in their consistency and implications for the improvement and development of positive actions — change — for the organization and its users, as well as for the entire territory.

The expected results, typical of AI, are as follows:
- Thorough knowledge of the organizational climate factors that affect positive acting at both the individual and the organizational level. This is based on the preliminary climate survey (Discovery, Module 1).
- Imagination of how the existing organization could be better (Dream, Module 2); co-design and co-construction of what work within the care home should be like for the future (Design, Module 2); identification and development of concrete growth initiatives and improvement plans on the results that have emerged (Destiny, Module 2).
- In-depth analysis and verification of the sustainability of these initiatives and the plans, strengths, and obstacles encountered in their pursuit (Destiny, Module 3).

Stages and Participants

The stages of the implementation of the research-action inspired to AI, were preliminarily defined after various meetings promoted by the specialists who are part of the team involved in the activities. These meetings involved top managers of the residential care home, representatives of trade unions, and of workers. Based on what was previously shared in the meetings, the three educational modules described above were co-designed, and then carried out about one month from each other, and involved the workers of the organization ($N = 119$), 55.6% of whom are healthcare workers, 13.7% have supervision and/or professional functions (e.g., social worker, physiotherapist, psychologist), 12.9% hold roles related to the administration and general services, and 8.9% are nurses (8.9% did not respond).

Overall, because of the number of workers, 12 working groups were created, six days per module were planned, corresponding to a total of 18 days in the classroom of 4 + 4 hours each, testifying to the

considerable effort and determination of the organization in the implementation of the action research. The overall duration of the intervention was three months, preceded by a further three months for planning, preliminary meetings, and followed by feedback. Essential characteristics of the activities, decisive for their success, were: the constant and active stimulation and self-training between the specialists (working in teams) and the participants; the involvement of all workers, who had the right to choose whether to participate or not; the full participation of the management at different levels; the presentation of the three modules at short time intervals, so that participants may perceive and appreciate the continuity between the cognitive-training aspects of the first module (knowledge) and the training-programmatic and operational ones of the second and third modules (change).

Tools

The following tools were designed and/or used to generate new knowledge and possibilities for positive action. Positive Organization Questionnaire (POQ; De Carlo et al., 2015), for the "Discovery" phase (Module 1). It is a self-report tool aimed to detect organizational climate factors relating to the personal and organizational dimensions affecting positive action. In the form adapted to the specific context of the residential care home examined, it is made up of 68 items, plus a personal data item on the participant's function/profession. Participants are asked to express their degree of agreement/disagreement on a 6-point Likert scale, where 1 = *Strongly disagree* and 6 = *Strongly agree*, while for the evaluation of their work performance they are directed to their reply on a scale of 1 = *10%* of the objectives achieved during the year and 10 = *100%* of the objectives achieved during the year (Module 1).

A cognitive and action card "My contribution to my organization" called 3D Card (Dream-Design-Destiny) was designed to express a personal choice using the "like a garden" metaphor, and an action/behavior card "My contribution to my organization" called 2D Card (Design-Destiny) to report personal and group choice (Module 2 and Module 3 in the in-depth analysis and verification). Finally, a Behavioral Checklist was developed (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2011).[1]

A kit for the researcher-consultant with the steps to be taken to support the AI process (shown below) was also set up and used. Starting from it, teams of researchers and participants have further explored the sustainability of the identified initiatives and co-planned projects, using their strengths to overcome any obstacles encountered.

THE KIT "MAKE YOUR ORGANIZATION MORE POSITIVE!"

Premise

The educational session is inspired by a strength-based approach aimed to encourage the discussion and understanding of objectives, through the active involvement of all participants.

The focus is on solutions rather than problems, which is typical of the AI methodology (Cooperrider et al., 2008). The "there's no rose without a thorn" logic, which risks drawing immediate attention to the "thorns," is abandoned. The solution-based methodology is based on the principle that it is possible to learn more effectively by trying to understand what works and what could work, in different situations, ra-

ther than starting from evaluating what does not work (i.e., an approach based on problems and inadequacies and, therefore, on "thorns").

AI plans to follow a cyclical process consisting of the four phases described below:

- "Discovery," to get to know and appreciate the best of what exists;
- "Dream," to imagine how what exists could be better;
- "Design," to co-design and co-build a better reality;
- "Destiny," to identify concrete actions to support improvement.

Phase 1: Discovery

"Getting to know our strengths, organizationally and individually, and what we can learn from this evidence." Let's start with the sharing session: presenting the final report, examining the main results of the organizational climate survey conducted in this residential care home to understand the results on the basis of one's role within the organization. At this stage, it is essential to highlight the strengths, together with the aspects to be improved.

Possible questions: In what dimensions did you get the highest scores? What are your strengths? What dimensions need to be improved? Are these results in line with your expectations? Does anything about these results surprise you? What may have caused these results? Are there any external and/or internal elements that may have contributed to influence them? What do they portend for the future?

Phase 2: Dream

"Dreaming of what our organization could be like, as if it were a garden, 'why the garden?'"

Si hortum in bybliotheca habes, deerit nihil [If you have a garden in your library, nothing is missing] (Cicero). Because as Pierre Grimal (1974), an archaeologist and philologist passionate about gardens, points out in his book "The art of gardens. A brief history":

In the history of thought the garden has always been seen as a metaphor for life [...] the majestic trees, the sparkling fountains, the grassy squares, the scents, the multiplicity of forms and colors. A garden is not just this. Its beauty is given by the harmony that governs the relationships between the elements that compose it. It is the same harmony that makes a landscape "beautiful" or makes a panorama surprising. (p. XVI)

Duccio Demetrio (2016) believes that gardens:

In their majesty or in their modesty, have always been a mirror of our personality, of the mood and way of life of those who take care of them [...] in short, they remind us of something about ourselves, both when we grow one personally, and when we envy a person who owns a well-kept one; they are a metaphor, in the variety of their species […] of our acting and being in the world. (p. 8)

And, through the words of Hermann Hesse (1952/1994), he urges us to be creative: "In gardening there is something similar to the conceit and pleasure of creation: you can fashion a piece of earth as you wish" (Demetrio, 2016, p. 27).

The garden, its world, its spaces, its plants, the research, the disappointments, the victories, the attempts belong to a well-defined area. At any latitude. A garden and its gardener are accomplices and somehow

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friends. They will always have something interesting, pleasant, and lively to tell each other, share, pass on, and discuss. (Pejrone, 2002, p. 7)

This is how Paolo Pejrone, one of the most renowned landscape architects, describes the delicate relationship between the garden and its gardener in his "In the garden one is never alone. Diary of a curious gardener."

Participants are invited to read the incipit of "The garden party" by Katherine Mansfield (1922/2016) on the cognitive and action card (3D Card Dream-Design-Destiny), which also includes instructions and has been handed out to each:

And after all the weather was ideal. They could not have had a more perfect day for a garden-party if they had ordered it. Windless, warm, the sky without a cloud. Only the blue was veiled with a haze of light gold, as it is sometimes in early summer. The gardener had been up since dawn, mowing the lawns and sweeping them, until the grass and the dark flat rosettes where the daisy plants had been seemed to shine. As for the roses, you could not help feeling they understood that roses are the only flowers that impress people at garden-parties; the only flowers that everybody is certain of knowing. Hundreds, yes, literally hundreds, had come out in a single night; the green bushes bowed down as though they had been visited by archangels. (p. 13)

Describe your organization as if it were a garden and you were one of the gardeners who has been taking care of it for some years.

Individual work follows, then a small-group task, in which each participant presents their organization as if it were a garden and a discussion is initiated.

Possible questions: What makes my garden an ideal place? How do I feel in this garden? What emotions do I feel? Whom do I want to share these emotions with? What do I feel like doing? Is there anything that can threaten its beauty? What do I feel? What am I going to do?

In the small group, it may be interesting to highlight any similarities or differences in the descriptions. If we are surprised with something positive, or what actions/behaviors we can use to create a pleasant work environment within our organization.

Phase 3: Design

"Designing how my work within the organization should be for the future." Participants are asked to identify three goals and three future dates by which to achieve them to make improvements in the work environment, based on their personal commitment.

Possible questions: Why is it good to work here? What's going to happen? What has changed? What do I feel?

Phase 4: Destiny

"What makes the desired future possible?" Participants are asked to identify three concrete personal actions/behaviors necessary to implement change, in the perspective of a positive organization, starting from the possible gap between the current situation and the desired future, including these elements in the cognitive and action card (3D Card Dream-Design-Destiny).

Possible questions: How close are we to where we want to be? When does our role provide satisfaction? What are the characteristics and behaviors that make it so? Which ones could instead prevent us from achieving what we set out to do?

In this final phase of the process, it is important that the participants take responsibility for the actions identified to achieve their objectives and make them possible. These elements are to be included in the action/behavior card (2D Card Design-Destiny).

The researcher-consultant then proceeded to ask each group of participants to choose three objectives considered the most important to achieve change and three actions/behaviors that would obtain the imagined outcomes and objectives of personally and responsibly affecting their organization, and to write them on the flip chart. Each sheet, corresponding to a group, can be photographed by the researcher-consultant given that the 2D Card is kept by each participant.

Possible questions: How do I feel? What do I feel? What expectations do I have? What do I take home after this experience?

To conclude this process of knowledge and change, the researcher-consultant hands out and illustrates the "Behavioral Checklist," a valid tool to be used in daily practice, with examples of positive and negative behaviors that can be used to draw personal inspiration.

THE EVIDENCE

Discovery Phase

As part of the "Discovery" phase, when sharing with the participants the strengths highlighted by the POQ, a constant reference to the core values of the organization emerged, starting from its history, underlying its vocation for organizational innovation, and upholding an intense dynamic relationship with the territory, the families, and the local community in the social and economic sphere.

Within the positive organization framework, ample space was devoted to exploring the topic of responsibility, understood as a widespread and shared concept at all organizational levels, from workers to managers. It is a way to pursue organizational objectives, while at the same time guaranteeing respect and appreciation of the person and constitutes an added value for all stakeholders (De Carlo et al., 2016).

Results show positive levels of individual responsibility toward one's task ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 0.84$), as well as in relation to colleagues and collaborators ($M = 4.79$, $SD = 0.75$). At the same time, they reveal that there is room for further positivity regarding the responsibility that workers perceive from managers/supervisors ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.34$).

A "healthy" work situation is not only a consequence of the absence of risk factors, but of the presence and promotion of positive characteristics. In particular, strengths include some personal variables, such as self-efficacy ($M = 5.02$, $SD = 0.75$), optimism ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.13$), hope ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.92$), resilience ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 0.95$), spirituality at work ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.27$), whose levels constitute positive personal resources. If well combined with balanced job demands, these resources help stimulate personal growth, motivation, and learning.

Among the aspects to be improved, the results on the organizational factors perceived as most critical, because potentially limiting individual personal resources, were discussed. We, therefore, reflected together on the usefulness of further enhancing organizational commitment regarding the correspondence between the expected behavior and what is actually encouraged daily, as well as in the professional devel-

opment of each worker, the recognition of individual work needs, and the gratification for good results (Scaratti & Ivaldi, 2015).

In brief, we noted that personal characteristics and organizational dimensions interact with each other, determining significant effects at the individual and organizational level, in terms of job satisfaction ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.28$) and perceived performance ($M = 6.85$, $SD = 1.97$). These consequences will be positive in so far as the individual and organizational factors are perceived as ever-improving or at least such as to counteract "critical" situations. Finally, if among the effects, personal characteristics have mostly positive results, some criticalities emerge in organizational factors.

Dream Phase

By analyzing the content of the "Dream" phase in the participants' description of their organization through the "like a garden" metaphor, some recurring themes emerged — care, weather and time, geometry, the restful break, the legacy — significant examples of the potential of using metaphors (Alshaer & Kaviani, 2019; Atsumi et al., 2019; Gao et al., 2020; Rodriguez & Bélanger, 2014) to direct each individual's attention, further research, and desire for ever more positive actions, overcoming the widespread tendency to focus essentially on "what is wrong." Following, the transcript of some sentences used by participants and, between brackets, the participant's identification code.

Care

"I am quite satisfied with my garden, I like greenery and helping to make it more resilient and brighter makes me feel good" (P15).

It is very easy to love a garden, to watch it bloom. For all this to happen, though, you need to look after it, make sure you water it, taking care of every little plant every day and understanding that no two plants are alike, each plant needs different nourishment. What brings them together is taking care of them with lots of love and respect. (P28)

"It is one of the most beautiful gardens, but it needs a lot of care" (P37).

I would like to plant different plants so that at each season their blooms can cheer up those who happen by the garden. It is therefore important that we gardeners work together, so that the symphony of colors and scents may be expressed in the best way. However, an area should be left not to chance, but to the free initiative of nature itself, so that the precise rule of symmetry may make sense alongside spontaneity. The garden requires care and respect and I would make sure that occasional careless passers-by could not damage it, although I would consider a fence unsuitable. (P75)

I look at my garden with satisfaction; I had to wait patiently for it to become the way it is. With some expert advice and my creativity, it has got really beautiful. I look after it every day, I examine every plant, every flower. I remove dead branches and weeds when needed. I fertilize and water it. I regularly add something new and keep it well mowed. It's part of my world and I feel well there. (P79)

Now my garden looks much better. Plants that previously struggled to grow seem to feel the care and gentleness I've tried to use so that they could grow strong, healthy, and yield the best fruit. I then stop to look over all its small flowers and notice with joy that now they, too, have bloomed and with their

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colors they seem to tell me that sometimes you don't need to be an expert gardener but that love, perseverance, and commitment can lead to (great) satisfaction. I don't know whether my garden will be like this next year, but I'm enjoying it fully right now. (P85)

"My garden requires constant care to always look beautiful" (P91).

Weather and Time

Certainly, the weather is a variable that should not be underestimated either: sun, wind, rain, storms are conditions that influence the growth of the garden. Yet you can find a remedy even for the weather. Just convert it into something functional. And, fortunately, seasons keep changing. (P15)

"Having a beautiful garden certainly requires dedication, but if you try to always look after it, keep it in order by devoting some time to it every day, it will always be beautiful" (P19).

"I have been working in this garden for a long time" (P30).

"Luckily I've noticed that someone's planted roses that scent the air. (Still,) I keep spending some peaceful time in this garden" (P52).

"Planning and observing fertilization and maintenance schedule are important and therefore the contribution of other gardeners is essential to better results" (P54).

I have been in this garden for a short time compared to most of the people closest to me. When talking with them about the past, their eyes light up and they have happy memories. Now it seems that the sun is not shining all the time. However, I believe that the plants are strong and tenacious and want to go back to their former glory. (P71)

"The garden requires to be looked after and you need to devote time to it" (P82).

Geometry

"The garden I imagine is diverse and its size is constantly evolving" (P1).

The garden must be set up by considering the position, the areas that are or aren't exposed to the sun and wind, the space available, so it will be easier to decide what to plant or sow and where, and get satisfactory results. (P3)

"Mine is a small garden, I don't need a lot of space to feel good. But I want to see color, flowers blooming at any season. And this is happening" (P10).

"The garden is large and very colorful. There are some beautiful flowers, but they grow at random, without any order" (P15

"Like every garden, to be beautiful it must be colorful, a harmony of structure, heights, and colors" (P17).

"The garden is impressive, potentially very significant. Large spaces, all kinds of trees, colorful and fragrant flower beds, even a small pond with water lilies" (P18).

"A large, green garden, full of beautiful flowers and plants with shapes suited to their functions. Flowers of all kinds in various flower beds, protected by plants, some of them majestic. It was much envied by many people" (P30).

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"That lawn was huge! I decided to set some boundaries by planting tall trees. Along the perimeter created, I planted some, exclusively white, flowers" (P61).

"The garden is quite large, luxuriant, sunny, with flowering plants, some longer-lived, others younger. I imagine it multicolored, with a variety of flowers, some easy to grow, others more challenging" (P72).

"The garden is large, indeed it looks larger every day, luckily there are many of us taking care of it" (P75).

The Restful Break

"The most beautiful thing, however, is the water lily pond and often, at the end of my working day, I sit next to it to rest" (P18).

"Roses are my passion — though I'm afraid of the thorns — I smell their scent and admire the harmony of their colors. I like to think that I'll stay here like this for a long while" (P72).

The legacy

There is a lot of work to be done, you need a team of well-coordinated gardeners, but the core is good, the initial idea is still alive and must be preserved. We add new plants, treat the unhealthy ones, clean the fountains, and restore the systems. It is a lot of work, but we must do our best to leave a more beautiful garden to those who come after us. (P31)

"It is an image of a public garden, where everyone is responsible for taking care of each individual plant, because one day that garden will be handed down to others" (P66).

Design and Destiny Phases

By imagining one's organization through the metaphor of the garden, planning how one's future work should be has led participants to more easily identify improvement objectives to be achieved within their organization by a specific date, through personal contribution and concrete actions/behaviors. The action research was carried out in March, therefore the time references below start from that month. In analyzing the content, some categories of objectives have emerged, hinging on "what I can do to improve my job." The present study is based on them, in a context of interventions applicable to every level of the organization, from the top management down.

Following, between quotation marks, some sentences used by participants and chosen by the small group and, between brackets, the number identifying the group and the letter the subgroup.

a) Feeling better at work, working serenely, with positive commitment, with a correct assessment of the difficulties while appreciating the good/useful aspects of one's job with the awareness of the importance of recharging one's energy in the family, with friends, in the spare time.

"Working with calm is necessary for our psychophysical wellbeing, as well as for our guests (May)" (1c).

"Working with serenity (starting from tomorrow)" (8c).

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"Collaborating and communicating with serenity (one year)" (9t).

"Achieving serenity and balance at work (immediately)" (10v).

"Getting in and out of the care home with serenity (March)" (12z).

"Identifying critical issues in one's specific area (6 months)" (1a).

"Engaging with guests so that their family members can leave serenely (from now on)" (1b).

"Working toward the prestige and credibility of the care home (from yesterday onwards)" (1b).

"Getting to know the guest in order to work safely (April)" (2c).

"Having greater trust in one's ability to solve difficulties (6 months)" (5l).

"Bringing back the satisfaction of doing one's job well (1 year)" (5j).

"Being positive (from March)" (8q).

"Managing to recharge away from work, so as to arrive here serene and give our best (from now on)" (6m).

Among the actions to take to feel better at work, are the following: the "observing and assessing results to bring about changes, if needed" (1a), "seeking a dialog" (2b), "recognizing one's personal and professional skills" (3e), as well as "one's limitations and mistakes" (4i), and "complaining less" (6m).

b) Improving the management of one's work through better activity planning, constant updating of information and knowledge, as well as by tidying up the common areas.

"Work planning, including details (May 31)" (7o).

"Timely updating of data (starting immediately and to be carried out regularly)" (7o).

"Updated planning of activities (April, 2-3 months)" (12z).

"Learning not to want to do it all and right away (from now on)" (11w).

"Need to be informed and trained (June)" (11x).

"Tidying up one's office, desk… (3 months)" (7o).

"Keeping the work environment tidy, improving it and increasing its value (2-3months)" (7p).

"Materially tidying up and organizing the warehouse and its different units (from Friday)" (8s).

"Tidying up the common areas (the kitchen, the warehouse…) (June)" (12z).

Among the actions to improve the management of one's work are the "chance to take a break and to better organize work, without getting involved in negative dynamics" (2c), "proposing solutions based on the identified criticalities" (3e), "encouraging coffee breaks to promote socialization" (4h), "taking time to adequately receive and exchange information" (5k), "preparing the material needed for the following shift" (5k), "entering data methodically and periodically" (7o).

c) Improving relationships with others, increasing open-mindedness toward and a respectful, sincere dialog with colleagues as well as other professionals and guests.

"Respect to be given and received (1 month)" (3g).

"Respect for co-workers (immediately)" (5k).

"Sincerity (immediately)" (4i).

"Not getting carried away by chatter and gossip (immediately)" (11w).

"Collaborating and communicating with serenity (1 year)" (9t).

"Having greater cooperation and understanding among colleagues (soon)" (6n).

"Improving collaboration across the board (1 year)" (9t).

"Sharing knowledge, experience, and practice to work synergically" (10v).

"Enhancing the quality of relationships (July)" (11x).

"Increasing empathy toward guests (6 months)" (3f).

Actions to improve the relationship with others include "thanking colleagues" (3e), "appreciating, enhancing, and sharing each colleague's skills" (3f), "striving to understand the other person's essence" (3g), "accepting that there may be diversity" (8q), "establishing a dialog through multidisciplinary team meetings" (9i), "organizing friendly happy times around a table" (11y).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Self-efficacy, responsibility toward one's task and toward colleagues and collaborators, optimism, hope, resilience, spirituality at work are strengths of the organization, a solid basis supporting the organizational development in the present and in the near future, albeit with some differences between professional categories.

In-depth analyses and classroom educational activities detected the participants' full willingness to accentuate their personal commitment in relation to the three categories of objectives. Regarding the best management of one's work, behaviors on which to intervene are: finding ways to take advantage of the right moments and places to rest, transmitting information and updating it, enhancing the environments and spaces. With reference to feeling better and better at work, we propose to act specifically on other behaviors, including knowing how to transmit positivity and work with the necessary serenity, relying on oneself, being tolerant, and taking advantage of free time to recharge. In reference to the desire to improve relationships with others, it is important to encourage collaboration between functions and dialog with colleagues, non-judgmental listening and interpersonal respect, positive acceptance of inter-individual differences and increased empathy, peculiar to the contexts of assistance and care.

In terms of the growth objectives of the organization, suitable interventions aimed to improve and strengthen the contents and contexts of work appear to be appropriate, both on an individual and an organizational level (Falvo et al., 2013). As highlighted above, it is possible to count on the participation, ethics, and commitment of the staff, which will certainly facilitate the further growth of management styles and governance models closer to individuals and workgroups.

In this perspective, it is first of all useful to improve health and care organizations, in particular by enhancing better and more effective relationships between the various professional areas, helping the pursuit of an ever-increasing quality of service toward guests and, outside the organization, in terms of social responsibility toward the territory and its community.

On an individual level, educational interventions are advisable for all functions and organizational levels, with particular reference to interventions improving horizontal and vertical communication. Furthermore, whenever possible, sharing, coaching, and continuing professional education actions for the various functions operating within the organization are desirable (Falco et al., 2008; Ivaldi & Scaratti, 2019), as repeatedly highlighted by the participants.

The emphasis on the collaborative management of relationships and the specific actions identified by the participants through the AI methodology will allow us to achieve ever higher and consistent goals in terms of positive organization and quality of services, promoting job satisfaction and performance.

From the research point of view, the present work is also an interesting application of a quantitative survey method (through POQ) to set off the 4D cycle (in the Discover phase), showing that, although the literature on AI, and more generally on action research, considers them qualitative methodologies, these two modes of knowledge production can coexist and integrate profitably (Dal Corso et al., 2010, 2013; Falco et al., 2012, 2013).

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Considering interventions, companies using the AI methodology in a combination of methods, as implemented and strongly advised in this work, will have a more positive organization, as this residential care home exemplifies. Despite being today called to face the challenge of the pandemic, their staff as a whole, positively determined and committed to constant improvement, are a certain, generous, and fundamental strength in the organization.

NOTE

1. The 3D Card, the 2D Card, and the Behavioral Checklist are available, both in Italian and English, upon request to the corresponding author.

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