

## Promoting a Sense of Belonging and Engagement Through an Appreciative and Strengths-Based Culture

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### Abstract

In 2019, The College of Health Professions at Virginia Commonwealth University began to explore the use of employee strengths and Appreciative Inquiry within our leadership. The goal was to create an inclusive workplace culture in which everyone would want to work. Such employee engagement affects performance outcomes, the quality of work, recruitment, retention, and overall well-being (Clifton & Harter, 2021). This article describes an example from one college that facilitates an appreciative culture within a higher education setting through the use of Appreciative Inquiry and the Gallup Clifton Strengths. With over five years of practice, the College has been a model for supporting the broader application of strengths and Appreciative Inquiry across the health services campus.

### Keywords

Appreciative Inquiry, strengths-based leadership, belonging, higher education, culture development

The past five years, thus far, have signaled a crisis of struggling mental health and well-being, particularly as it relates to employment. When evaluating hybrid work environments, scholars (Teevan et al., 2022) reported that 50% of the American workforce is burnt out, stressed, and struggling, with managers reporting even higher levels. This recipe results in distancing from work, reduced professional efficiency, exhaustion, depression, anxiety, and negative attitudes toward work (World Health Organization, 2019). The workforce has also experienced "The Great Resignation" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022), with many workers leaving their jobs for better work-life integration, higher pay, and/or a greater sense of meaning and purpose since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hardy et al., 2025; Janicki, 2024; Moffitt, 2024). Similar findings from the American/Canadian regional workforce indicated that 50% of employees experience daily stress, with 50% reporting an intent to leave, and that manager disengagement was high (Gallup, 2025). Harter (2025) reported that approximately 31% of the American workforce reports being engaged. According to the American Psychological Association's 2023 Work in America Survey, 92% of workers said it is very (57%) or somewhat (35%) important to them to work for an organization that values their emotional and psychological well-being.

Culture matters. The literature is replete with accounts of the importance of workplace well-being. A positive culture, along with personal well-being and mental health, are among the top aspects of work that employees view as "very important" for an employer to provide (American Psychological Association, 2022; Teevan et al., 2022). The intersection of mental health, strengths, and well-being is critical to the development of thriving organizations (Clifton & Harter, 2021). Several studies have found that employees who are thriving value

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collaborative work environments, an inclusive culture with autonomy and flexibility, psychological safety, and well-being support (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Gallup, 2025; Wei et al., 2025).

In 2019, the College of Health Professions (CHP) relocated to a new building, housing nine disciplines under one roof for the first time in its history. It was a time of change and opportunity to develop a unique interdisciplinary culture. Before this move, the College lacked a unifying culture because employees were located across two campuses and in five different buildings. CHP began to explore the use of strengths and an Appreciative Inquiry framework within leadership, given that leadership is the single most predictive variable of employee engagement (Rath & Harter, 2010). The intended impact was to create an inclusive culture in which employees felt that they belonged and where everyone would want to be. In this article, we present two parallel initiatives: “Living and Working in Our Strengths” and “Co-creating a Culture of Belonging.” These initiatives aspired to integrate a strengths-based culture to promote employee belonging, engagement and wellbeing.

To frame the initiatives, we drew upon two evidence-based models of individual and organizational flourishing: Positive Psychology and Appreciative Inquiry. Positive Psychology is the study of what is working well in individuals when they are functioning optimally, or flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The PERMA Theory of Well-being, as introduced by Seligman (2012), consists of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement. David Cooperrider is an originating thought leader and practitioner of a strengths-based approach to organizational development known as Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry is a positive and sustainable model for change that focuses upon what is working well in an organization, a system, team and/or individual level (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003; Cooperrider et al., 2008). Appreciative Inquiry explores how people are at their best, enabling them to continue to aspire through creativity, collaboration, and innovation to meet the needs of the world. These frameworks were chosen because of the body of scholarship and applications that have produced evidence-based, generative organizational outcomes.

## **Organizational Culture**

Organizational culture is the set of values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, systems, and norms that inform how employees conduct their work to achieve the mission, vision, and goals of an organization. Positive Organizational Development (POD) and Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) are approaches in the study of management and organizations. The focus is on supporting leaders and organizations in creating positive/appreciative work environments that enhance workplace culture (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011; Caza & Cameron, 2008).

An essential element to facilitate a positive culture is the perception and reality of belonging (Henley, 2024). Belonging has been found to improve job performance, lower turnover risk, and result in fewer sick days (Carr et al., 2019). According to Theisen (2021), a sense of belonging cannot be separated from physical and mental health. Belonging serves as a protective factor, reinforcing interpersonal connections that can mitigate stress and loneliness, thereby enhancing resilience and coping abilities (Murthy, 2023), performance outcomes, the quality of work, recruitment, and retention, as well as overall well-being (Harter & Clifton, 2021). A culture of belonging is one in which individuals feel valued, respected, and welcomed (Efron, 2022). Belonging can be defined as a sense of happiness and comfort within a particular group, characterized by positive relationships with other group members who welcome and accept you (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). According to

Allen et al. (2021), a sense of belonging is the subjective feeling of a deep connection with social groups, physical places, and individual and collective experiences. It is a fundamental human need that predicts numerous mental, physical, social, economic, and behavioral outcomes.

Belonging encourages individuals to bring their authentic selves to the workplace. Belonging requires psychological safety (Andreatta, 2022). For the purpose of this article, we define psychological safety as a shared belief that the environment is safe for risk-taking, relationally and through innovation. Psychological safety emphasizes the importance of fostering learning, innovation, and effective teamwork (Edmondson, 2018). The work of CHP leadership was grounded in an aspiration to enhance psychological safety and cultivate a culture of belonging through strengths-based approaches. Employees would then begin to build confidence and recognize their contributions by utilizing their strengths. By identifying and supporting employees' strengths, leadership can facilitate a sense of trust, stability, hope, and compassion (Clifton & Harter, 2021).

CHP leadership believes that recognizing the strengths, talents, and contributions of all employees fosters a sense of belonging. According to Harter (2023), the following elements are needed to develop a strengths-based culture:

1. leadership is supportive (i.e., CEO, Dean, Executive Sponsor),
2. all employees have the opportunity to identify their strengths,
3. build an internal network of strengths coaches and champions,
4. integrate strengths with performance management, and
5. transforming internal programs.

### ***Beginning With Leadership***

According to Peter Drucker, "The task of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths in ways that make a system's weaknesses irrelevant" (as cited in Whitney et al., 2010).

In 2020, CHP leadership, including the dean, associate deans, chairs, administrative directors, and program directors, participated in a 4.0-hour strategic planning session using the SOAR model. SOAR is an Appreciative Inquiry strategic planning process that focuses upon Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009). The affirmative topic for the SOAR was "CHP Leadership: Co-creating an Inclusive Culture." The outcome of the SOAR was for each leader to develop one leadership commitment practice that would support the development of an inclusive culture. Upon completion of the SOAR, leaders shared the following impact to their practice: hosting listening sessions to respond to traumatic world events (e.g., political discord, social isolation and displacement, public health pandemic and poor mental health); conducting a SOAR for new team development within their department, focusing on the strengths of personnel and units specifically considering inclusive cultures; expanding student recruitment/admissions processes to enhance diversity; offering activities that focus upon wellbeing; celebrating successes as a team; sharing our inclusive values statements in prominent places (for example, "authentic, inclusive relationships, safely with humility"); individually assessing, regularly, how inclusive they are within the workplace; being authentic in relationships; approaching people with curiosity and asking more questions.

CHP leadership then continued to explore our individual and team strengths, as well as leadership practices that enhance employee well-being. The team conducted two follow-up

“advances” (retreats) with leadership to deepen our exploration of our strengths, strength-based leadership, employee engagement, and our commitments to facilitating an inclusive culture through hope, trust, stability, and compassion (see Table 1). This focus upon the role of leadership in culture development is ongoing. An example of an interview protocol for one of the advances is also provided (see Appendix A).

**Table 1**

*Sequence of Leadership Training*

Session	Topic
SOAR: 4.0 hours, Zoom (2020)	CHP Leadership Co-creating an Inclusive Culture (focus on culture development)
Advance: Training Session, 4.0 hours, in person (2021). See Interview Protocol in Appendix A.	Building our Future Together: Using our Strengths in Our Leadership (intersection of leadership, strengths, and wellbeing).
Advance: Training Session, 2.5 hours, in person (2022)	Your/Our Strengths: Leadership & Team Grids (focus on inspiring teams)
Advance: Training Session: 3.5 hours, in person (2024)	Strengths-Based Leadership: Trust, Hope, Stability & Commitment (focus on leading in times of uncertainty).

***The Ripple: Expanding Beyond Leadership***

The following section presents an approach to organizational change and development, with a focus on enhancing organizational culture. The intent is to integrate an appreciative and strengths-based environment, beyond leadership, to include all employees.

**Creation of Inaugural Faculty Fellow.** In a strategic effort to build an infrastructure of resources to accomplish culture change, in the spring of 2022, the Dean of the College of Health Professions invited faculty to apply to participate in the inaugural CHP Faculty Fellows Program. The Fellow would work with the Dean, the Associate Dean of Faculty, and the College’s leadership team to develop and implement initiatives to support the College’s strategic plan. The selected fellows were asked to commit to serving for one year.

The Faculty Fellows Program provided selected fellows with opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration, leadership experience, and the development of higher education content expertise, while also contributing to and supporting CHP initiatives and the strategic plan. The Fellow selected proposed the development of Peer Pods to create a thriving, appreciative, and compassionate workplace culture, recognized as the best workplace in the United States for every CHP employee. Pods were established around each of the three CHP Strategic goals.

- **Pod 1: High Impact Education.** Pod 1 focused on creating substantive change and competence in students and faculty through extraordinary, high-impact education that allows all learners to embrace a safe and inclusive learning environment.

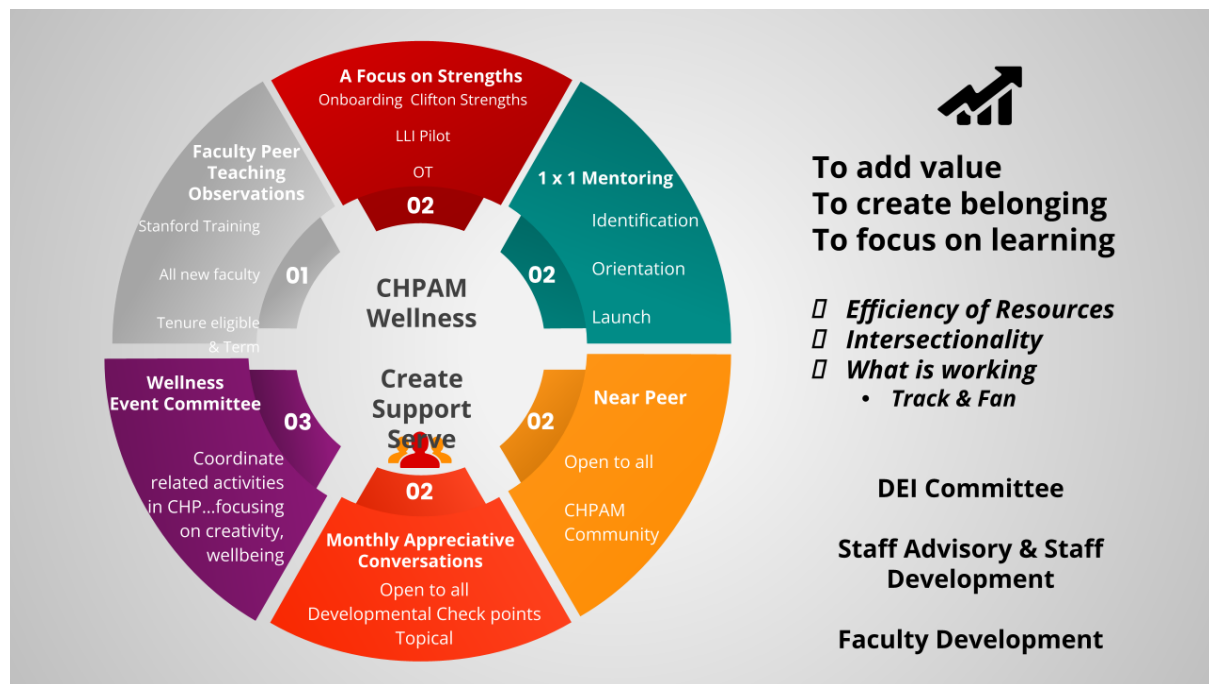
- **Pod 2: Appreciative and inclusive workplace culture.** Pod 2 focused on fostering a welcoming, diverse, and inclusive workplace by creating an employee-centered, employee-supported workplace that promotes open dialogue and transparent processes.
- **Pod 3: Creative workplace.** Pod 3 focuses on fostering a scholarly community that embraces curiosity, creativity, experimentation, generosity, and growth.

**Pilot Goals & Aims.** Participants were encouraged to come together as colleagues with shared interests and brainstorm implementable project ideas to move forward with their selected CHP strategic priorities. We had several college-level aims:

1. create a culture of appreciative mentorship in CHP,
2. build long lasting relationships that promote mutual flourishing,
3. support the creation of a thriving, appreciative, and compassionate workplace culture recognized as the best workplace in the United States for every CHP employee.

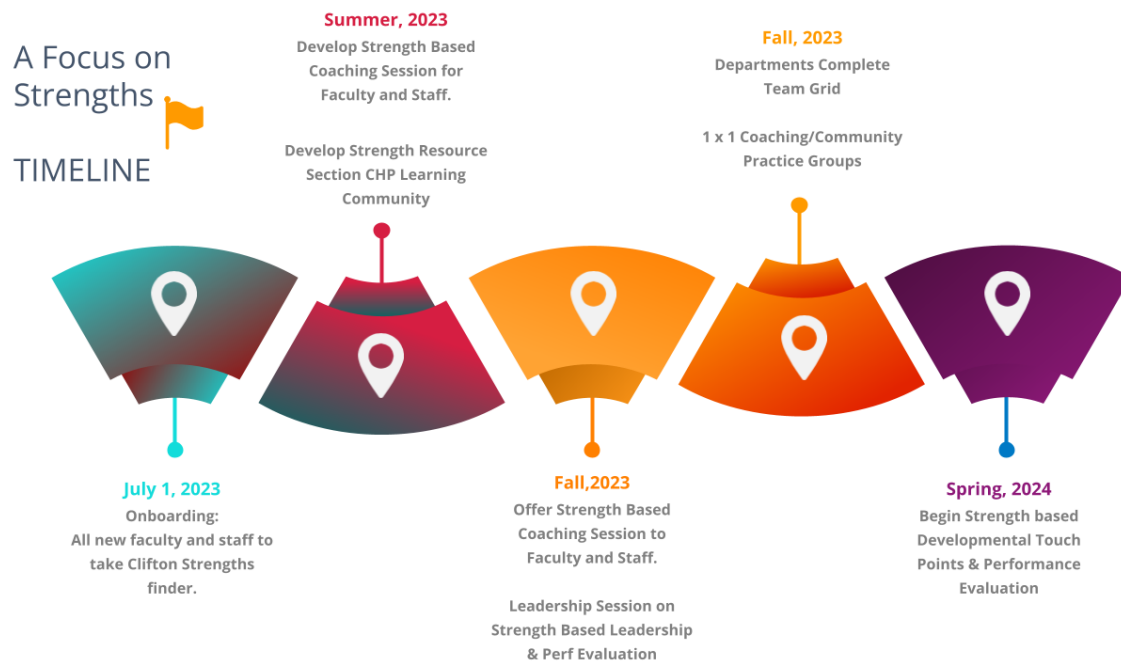
Ultimately, 33 participants (out of approximately 160 employees) registered, including six staff and faculty facilitators across the three pods. Pod members met throughout the year to build belonging, brainstorm, share ideas, and exchange mentoring moments. Through the work of the pods, we made numerous discoveries about the wellbeing landscape in the college, including opportunities to build wellbeing and to enhance existing initiatives, as well as to create a more collaborative approach. People wanted opportunities to gather and pause, to participate in coaching conversations, and share successes through recognition and appreciation events. Upon completion of the Faculty Fellow pilot, the following projects were identified to continue supporting the goals outlined in the initial proposal. We ultimately focused on four sections of the wheel. For the purpose of this article, we focus on Strengths (Pod) through faculty and staff strength assessments and development (Pod 2), Appreciative Coaching through monthly conversations (Pod 2), and Wellbeing/Wellness (Pod 3). See Figure 1.

During monthly Appreciative Coaching Conversations (Pod 2), Staff and Faculty were encouraged to come together to share and problem-solve together in an appreciative coaching space. See Table 2 for additional information. CHP Wellness Events Committee (Pod 3) combined existing initiatives such as Powerups, Growth and Learning Opportunities, and skill shares from the staff advisory board into one cohesive group to review event and project proposals for CHP Events Calendar. Following Faculty Peer Observations (Pod 1), the College of Health Professions implemented a teaching assessment framework to enhance teaching across the health disciplines within the College. The framework is designed to build teacher self-efficacy and support instructional innovation through a formative assessment process. The Strengths work became central to our work. Information follows regarding this focus (Pod 2).

**Figure 1***CHP Wellbeing Wheel****Strengths in Practice***

In addition to leadership sessions and to complement the work of the Faculty Fellow, CHP leadership employed a bottom-up, sideways-in approach to our culture change process to further integrate and scale up our work. This approach consists of faculty and staff working across all position levels to effect change. The College prioritized the growth and professional development of employees. A commitment was made to including all faculty and staff to strengthen our recognition of the value each of us contributes to the success of our College. This also served to equalize antiquated status differentials often associated with higher education. This process reduced the judgment often associated with elite perceptions of faculty and faculty ranks relative to staff operational/administrative contributions.

According to positive organizational scholarship, a key feature of a flourishing organization is a focus on growth and development (Clifton & Harter, 2019). Therefore, development efforts focused on integrating the Clifton Strengths assessment for new and existing employees. As a part of the onboarding process for new faculty and staff, employees took the Clifton Strengths assessment. Current faculty and staff were also encouraged to take the Clifton Strengths assessment. The Human Resources (HR) Director became a Certified Strengths Coach, and the College purchased the Clifton Strengths Management software through Gallup. The College had two other certified strength coaches, as well as an Associate Dean experienced in Appreciative Inquiry, Appreciative Leadership, and Positive Organizational Development. These individuals became strengths champions and provided awareness sessions and coaching. Refer to Figure 2 for an illustration of the implementation process.

**Figure 2***Strengths in Practice Timeline*

Two faculty and staff strength sessions were offered. These were 90-minute, in-person sessions, entitled “Living and Working in our Strengths, Part 1, ” which focused on a review and introduction to Clifton Strengths and how employees can use them in their personal and professional lives. Attendees explored the meaning of the strengths, first impressions, and characteristics that employees bring to the workplace, as well as what they need from the workplace in relation to their strengths. Part 2 focused on a deeper practice and implementation of their strengths, including how participants may utilize them to contribute to tasks, projects, and teams. Employees also had the opportunity to schedule one-on-one coaching sessions. Departments also received an educational session on Team Strengths, which included a Team Grid (describing how each person’s strengths contribute to the team's overall performance and the work they do) for employees. To reinforce a strengths-based identity, many faculty and staff shared their strengths in their email signatures and/or posted them outside their office doors. New employees shared that the use of Clifton Strengths has been a recruitment tool for the College. Candidates were informed of the work in this space during the interview process, including the availability of strengths coaching.

Faculty and staff were encouraged to write strengths-based performance goals, and leadership is bridging strengths into performance excellence (management) conversations. Leadership has participated in sessions on strengths-based leadership, and several leaders are integrating employee strengths into performance evaluations. This integration of strengths into annual performance evaluations ensures optimal contribution and recognition of each employee’s value, requiring each individual to identify a respective strength and align it with a work deliverable. For example, if strategic thinking is a strength, an employee can develop a goal such as working with students to optimize their networks and to become aware of available resources as they dream, design, define, and deliver their gerontological niche. The supervisor can then support the faculty member in achieving this goal. This approach also

incorporates an Appreciative Inquiry framework for performance management. For example, a supervisor might ask appreciative questions such as, What was a high point moment for you this past year? And how did you use your strengths?

**Appreciative Coaching Conversations.** Complementing the strengths initiative is the Appreciative Coaching Conversations Series. These sessions are offered monthly throughout the academic year (August through May). They are framed using Appreciative Inquiry practices and offer staff and faculty additional opportunities to explore and discuss. Sessions are offered across a variety of topics and are holistic in nature, supporting both personal and professional domains. Sessions are offered on Friday mornings via Zoom, lasting for no more than one hour. Sessions begin with a quick background on a topic and facilitators provide prompts or inquiries to open it up for interactive and organic conversations (see Table 2), which provides an opportunity for open dialogue about using strengths in practice, sharing experiences to support growth, learning and development, creating a culture of belonging, and flourishing. Participants are invited to identify a specific takeaway or practice to implement. Facilitators have expanded beyond the Faculty Fellow and the Associate Dean to include staff and faculty who wish to serve as facilitators. Examples of monthly topics are included in Table 2. Anecdotally, participants have reported that they look forward to these sessions, feel supported, and find them useful in both their work and their lives.

**Table 2**

*CHP Appreciative Coaching Conversation Session Topics*

CHPAC Session Topic	Description	Inquiries
My Hope or Aspiration: An Intention for the Semester	Priming for the semester, focusing on what we hope or aspire to achieve, is an intentional commitment.	<p>What hope or aspiration do you have for the semester?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How might you use a strength?</li> <li>• What might you learn?</li> <li>• How might you contribute to others?</li> <li>• What do you want to achieve? Or work toward?</li> </ul> <p>What might it look like if you were successful in reaching your hope or aspiration? How would you know you were successful?</p> <p>What is one intentional change or practice you can begin to do today, to support reaching your hope or aspiration?</p>
Co-creating a Culture of Belonging	Exploring practices that facilitate a culture of belonging.	<p>Think of a time in your work or life when you experienced inclusion or an inclusive environment. This would be a high point moment when you felt you were really part of something, a project, a team, a larger mission.</p> <p>How do you widen and deepen meaningful relationships?</p> <p>How do you move from Me to We to create inclusion and a sense of belonging?</p>



Strengths in Practice: Tools and Lessons Learned from Team Strengths Focus	Developing inspiring teams	What are the features of an inspiring team? How do you inspire others to be their best?
Resilience: Creating a sense of belonging in a shifting landscape	Explored features and characteristics of resilience, and navigating uncertainty through one person's story.	How did you use your strengths to move through a challenging time? How do you uplift others?
Wintering: the Power of Rest and Retreat in Restoring Compassion Satisfaction	Based upon K May's (2020) concept of Wintering, Compassion Satisfaction and the 7 types of rest.	How do you support moments of rest in your life? What golden nuggets remind you to give yourself and others permission to rest?
Growth Mindset: Pushing Beyond our Comfort Zone	Introduced C. Dweck's (2007) Growth Mindset and how we might push ourselves beyond our comfort zones.	Think of a time you left? A time when you pushed yourself to do something you did not think you could do, what was the situation? How did you feel? What did you learn? How might you continue to push yourself outside of your comfort zone?
Using our Strengths to be Brave: Unleash your awesomeness	Showed the trailer from the movie "Brave."	What is your big bear? Tell us about a time recently when you felt you were brave. Did you ask for help? Show some vulnerability? Take on a challenge? Speak up? How do you use your strengths in moments of challenge?

**Well-being committee.** The College offered well-being activities prior to the Faculty Fellow initiative. As a mechanism to solidify, coordinate, and integrate these activities, one outcome was the formation of the Well-being Committee. This committee's membership is composed of representatives of both faculty and staff across the nine disciplines and the central College staff. The committee coordinates college-wide activities focusing on creativity, restoration, health, and well-being. Examples of activities include Mandala Coloring, Snow Globe Creation, Wednesday Walks, Ice Cream Truck, Mindfulness Breathing, Zoom Trivia with Teams, Coffee Chats, and Adopt a Family Giving during the holiday season.

**Tracking and Fanning Appreciative Inquiry & Strengths.** Several departments within the College have requested additional trainings and sessions beyond Team Strengths. One department requested a three-hour session during their annual Advance (retreat). The topic was Appreciative Resilience, based on the model developed by McArthur-Blair & Cockell (2018). Another requested a session on facilitating belonging and a strengths-based approach to challenging conversations. The CHP Faculty Fellow became a Certified Appreciative Inquiry Facilitator and is now incorporating Appreciative Inquiry frameworks into curriculum, advising, and professional development opportunities that she offers to her department, college, and the community. CHP faculty and staff associated with the initiatives have been invited to other schools and colleges at Virginia Commonwealth University to

present on Appreciative Inquiry, appreciative leadership, strengths-based leadership, resilience, and well-being. CHP faculty and staff have also been invited to the University's staff professional development event to share the model with Human Resources and other staff members. The College has been a co-facilitator and leader on the medical campus as we work to further expand a culture-change model focused on employee flourishing.

### **Discussion**

Facilitating a strengths-based culture is a journey; it is emergent and requires sustained, strategic effort. Several considerations, including potential challenges, warrant attention in a change initiative within a single academic setting.

#### **Consistency & Adaptability**

Culture development is an ongoing process; it takes time and requires consistency and adaptability concurrently. Consistency in the form of an intentional commitment, and those who champion the effort. It is reinforcing to align relevant goals with strategic planning processes and priorities, as well as with an organization's mission and vision. That is, building off a strategic plan provides credibility, accountability, and infrastructure for achieving priorities. It is adaptable, given that this process is emergent and organic. The original concept of the work morphed. Although change processes offer a guiding pathway to success, with Appreciative Inquiry, it is essential to trust the process so that the most comprehensive, relevant, and powerful results transpire. This strengthens sustainability.

#### **Leadership and an Open Invitation**

Leadership support is a vital aspect of culture development. It typically ensures the beneficial infrastructure and resources (including dedicated time and funding), that support a successful outcome. The CHP dean supported this work as a strengths-based leader. Some funding was allocated to licensing the software management system and to well-being events. Faculty and staff have not typically been assigned a Full Time Equivalent (FTE); however, time is provided to focus on these initiatives.

Welcoming others to participate, utilize their strengths, and exercise autonomy in co-creating the workplace environment is paramount. This helps sustain and scale up, creating a contagion where members feel relevant, valued, appreciated, and recognized. When beginning such efforts, an effective strategy is to identify "energizers," that is, individuals already living and working in practice who have an interest, preference, skills, and motivation to support the development of organizational culture. Energizers often are the champions. Employees are hungry for environments that enhance flourishing and engagement, which creates a spark and generative energy. One can engage in "bottom-up, sideways-in" work, which can also generate a contagion. This means employees who do not hold leadership positions can advocate and engage in practices that support change, rather than relying on top-down leadership. For example, staff and faculty were encouraged to write strengths-based goals to advance the integration of strengths into performance excellence. Several leaders were developing strengths-based performance feedback; however, employees writing goals in this way is an open invitation to leaders.

#### **Build Upon What is Working Well**

Identifying what is working well in the organization leverages development and future efforts, which is a core worldview of Appreciative Inquiry to determine the life-giving forces within a system (MacGruder-Watkins et al., 2011). The CHP positive core include energizers who have contributed to an appreciative culture and activities that were already occurring (e.g., wellbeing sessions, professional development with a focus on

strengths/wellbeing/leadership, central HR already using strengths-based feedback, growth and development models). Carrying forward what is already working well informs aspirations and supports practices that will lead to success.

## Challenges (Reframe to Opportunities)

This section describes the challenges encountered during the change process. Depending on the organizational context, such challenges may vary.

**Infrastructure.** It is helpful to have funding (even seed funding) and staff resources, including a dedicated time commitment. Such financial support will serve to protect the effort allotted to the project.

**Scaling up.** Expanding awareness and knowledge beyond energizers and champions. Beyond college-wide events, CHP faculty and staff provided team-strengths learning sessions in five of nine departments and have been invited to three additional departments. These sessions move beyond introductions and practice to strengths-based applications across teams. Activities include reviewing team grids to discuss the strengths and interplay of all team members. New employees are readily onboarded by taking Clifton Strengths. Leadership support is vital to the adoption and sustained implementation of this work. Employees are also including their top five strengths in email signatures, Zoom templates, and outside office doors.

**Sustainability.** Continuing to institutionalize practices. Creating policies and procedures that integrate strengths-based approaches, such as performance management. Recognizing the contribution of this work toward promotion, using strengths-based performance management, and allowing specific personnel to continue the work.

**Application/Intentionality.** Behavior change is difficult; however, people naturally gravitate toward the positive / the light (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Cooperrider et al., 2008). This work is relational. For some, it may be considered soft stuff. Some may not recognize its utility. The terms "generative" and "positive" are often used to emphasize the life-giving nature of this work. As noted, identifying early adopters is essential for creating momentum. The evidence-based models associated with POS lend credibility to this work (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Measuring the actual impact may be challenging. A frequently quoted phrase (often attributed to Jack Welch), "the soft stuff is the hard stuff," sums up the inherent challenges. Yet, as humans, when we feel better, we do better. Focusing on the energizers for those with a growth mindset who are eager to learn and develop is a logical place to begin.

## Conclusions, Implications, Next Steps

Organizational development and personal and professional growth are a journey. Employees place value upon opportunities for growth and development; they value a sense of belonging, well-being, and engagement. Day-to-day practices matter. Any beginning may create a spark that launches synergy for change and growth on a larger scale.

We invite people to join us from where they are. This work may speak to some more than others; it is voluntary. However, for those involved, it is meaningful. Anecdotally, employees have shared how exposure to strengths-based and appreciative models is validating and energizing. Employees express gratitude for the focus on flourishing within our workplace.

This work is gaining interest within the university. The ultimate goal of the college, to prepare competent healthcare providers, is both meaningful and attractive to students and

employees. Our strengths-based and appreciative focus is a recruitment and retention tool. Central HR employee data reflects our experience that staff value their leaders and their work at the college.

There is more work to do. CHP leadership needs to systematically evaluate well-being and engagement efforts. In the future, focus groups and employee surveys will be conducted, as well as examining retention data. CHP is also developing a new college-wide strategic plan. Leadership will also support an expanded, intentional role at the associate dean level, focused on the success, well-being, and engagement of staff and faculty, which will become a full-time position.

The College has an opportunity to invite students to participate. Facilitating a culture of belonging through strengths and appreciative practices will affect the quality of our students' educational experience and, hopefully, their well-being and engagement.

The College of Health Professions has an opportunity to move beyond the college and flow across the medical campus to create and support the work being done to facilitate an engaged and flourishing workplace. The college is a model, and we are also learning from the work of other schools on our campus. CHP is leveraging what is working well already and exploring how to track and fan our efforts. It is believed that this work will continue to enhance our belonging, well-being, and engagement while ensuring the quality of the work we do to support our students and the work they will do within their communities. Our hope is to create a contagion of generativity.

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