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## An OD Engagement at a Hospital in Bolivia

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In June of 2012, a small group of graduate students and two faculty members from the OD graduate program at Friends University (Wichita, Kansas) engaged in a weeklong transformational experience with Hospitals of Hope (HOH), a faith-based hospital outside of Cochabamba, Bolivia. The purpose of the engagement was two-fold: 1) explore the strategic needs of the hospital and 2) provide practical, hands-on learning for the graduate students, particularly in an international setting. HOH in Bolivia was struggling with the transition to a full-scale hospital and was seeking assistance with this strategic challenge. The partnership between the OD students and HOH Bolivia was facilitated by the US based headquarters of HOH, located in Wichita, Kansas.

The engagement highlighted several valuable lessons that included the applicability of the World Café methodology in Bolivia, the interaction and data/feedback obtained from individual coaching sessions and Appreciative Interviews, and the potential of having a positive impact during a short-term engagement between the consultants and the client system.

The engagement began a year before with Skype assisted meetings between hospital administration and the group of OD practitioners. Time was spent getting to know each other, learning about the hospital and the administrative team, and introducing the practice of organization development to the administrative team. Time also was spent discovering the dreams, needs, and presenting issues of the hospital

### Hospitals of Hope in Bolivia

Hospitals of Hope, Bolivia began as a small free clinic in 1999 as a ministry of Hospitals of Hope, a Christian nonprofit medical missions organization. By 2006, this small clinic was a 32-bed Level II trauma hospital on a campus outside of Cochabamba, Bolivia. Since that time the hospital has provided high quality medical care that is accessible to all those in need. The hospital is completely staffed by Bolivians and has been financially self-sufficient since 2008.

The hospital focuses on trauma and emergency medical care, and has developed a fully functioning Emergency Medical System with several ambulances. The hospital has also developed key partnerships with local police and fire departments to help provide increased emergency medical care in the region. The hospital receives medical, dental, and general volunteers, as well as students at various levels in their training, to serve alongside the Bolivian staff. However, the OD team was the first volunteer group to work with the hospital administration.

### OD in Bolivia

Despite the attempts during the Skype meetings to communicate the role of organization development and process consulting, the hospital administrative team was still unfamiliar with the concepts. A key part of the week long engagement was centered on sharing ideas and information about the field of OD and process consulting. Their experience with consultants was

consistent with the “expert” approach: an external consultant diagnoses the problems and offers solutions. The administrative team was expecting the same from our team of OD consultants, thus requiring some adaptive learning to occur as they realized that it was their own solutions and dreams that would be surfaced as a result of the engagement.

The hospital director and others associated with the hospital administration were interested in organizational growth, sustainability, and increased support from the community. They wanted to become a “model” hospital that lives out its mission in ways that meets the needs of patients, the community, and the governmental regulatory structure within which it must function. To achieve these outcomes, they wanted to deal with inefficiencies within certain organizational roles and structures, a perception that staff did not share the vision and mission of the organization, and various regulatory challenges. The objectives for the week and purpose of the interactions were to explore and uncover issues, explore possibilities, and envision the hospital’s future as a model hospital; assist the employees of HOH in realigning themselves with the hospital’s mission; and to assess the overall operation of the hospital and increase synergy.

### The Interventions

Hierarchical management structure is the custom in Bolivian culture. Attempts to address organizational challenges prior to the OD consultants’ involvement included traditional top-down directives. However, personal relationships are also of high value, which made it challenging for some administrators to be consistent in the enforcement of rules and practices. Because of this interesting dichotomy, the OD consultants decided that a variety of interventions were needed to create opportunities for staff from across the organization to communicate ideas, stories, and values in ways that had never been attempted prior to this engagement. The consultants believed it was important to facilitate increased communication and understanding about what was energizing

for people doing the work of HOH and to foster an environment in which those driving forces could be communicated openly. In addition, given that the timeframe of the OD engagement was limited to five days, the consultants needed to consider interventions that could have the greatest impact in a short amount of time. A multi-intervention approach allowed student consultant to gather input and data in real time as well as facilitate value-added discussions in timeframes that accommodated the unique staffing patterns of a hospital while engaging a variety of voices across the organization.

The consultants decided to utilize a World Café (Brown & Isaacs, 2005) format as well as use Appreciative Interviews (Whitney, Cooperrider, Trosten-Bloom, & Kaplin, 2005). These interventions assume that energy is generated within systems and organisms when they focus on what works and what gives life. This approach was a good fit with the mission and practice of the HOH and aligned with the wider needs of the community. Also, both World Café and Appreciative Interviews have been successful in international settings. (To see examples of tools developed from Appreciative Inquiry efforts internationally, visit <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/practice/toolsQuestions.cfm>.)

After consideration of the dynamics involved in the engagement, the consultants felt it would be useful to supplement the large group processes with individual engagements in order to respond to the identified areas of concern. HR and leadership consulting were two obvious areas mentioned several times during the Skype meetings. In addition, once the World Café questions were designed, it became apparent that HR and leadership would be significantly important in the ongoing success of the entire engagement.

An initial meeting with the hospital director began with introductions and a discussion related to a recommended strategy for process engagement. The director provided background information regarding the way hospitals are classified and structured in Bolivia. One desired change the director articulated for HOH related to

becoming a Level III hospital in order to increase long-term sustainability.

The director shared additional desired areas of focus for the week which included the following:

- » Budgets and economic creativity
- » Technical training for the Administrative Team
- » Increased partnerships with US-based colleges for volunteerism
- » Marketing
- » Legal issues
- » Human Resources
- » Capacity building in services provided, facilities, and number of patients served
- » Relationship-building within hospital and the community
- » Cohesiveness of leadership

The consultants worked with the director to mutually determine which of these issues the consultants could reasonably address given the timeframe and the consultants’ capacity. It was determined that reasonable follow-up interventions to World Café and Appreciative interviews would be to address the issues related to Human Resources, marketing, and leadership development.

### Celebration Café

The World Café event was titled, Celebration Café in recognition of the 7th anniversary of the hospital. The stated purposes were:

- » To engage a myriad of voices from across the hospital related to the topic of what a model hospital would be like.
- » To engage the organizational system in dialogue different from the usual ways of communicating.
- » To discern whether all staff were committed to the HOH mission.
- » To allow all to have a voice in the future of their hospital.
- » To celebrate what is going well with HOH.

About forty personnel representing doctors, nurses, specialists, technicians, cleaning staff, administrative/executive staff members, and international volunteers participated. The process was hosted and facilitated by the eight-member consulting

team. In addition, two translators assisted in the process as few of the hospital staff spoke English and only one member of the consulting team spoke Spanish.

The consultants rearranged the hospital waiting area for the Celebration Café. Eleven tables seating four people each were positioned around the space with room to move among them. Each table was covered with a large piece of paper. Chart paper, markers, and crayons were also provided. An introduction of the process was given, along with translated verbal instructions for each round. The process consisted of three rounds of questions which were projected onto a TV monitor on the wall in the waiting room.

As the first question was posed, participants were asked to capture their ideas with words or pictures on the paper provided at each table.

**Question 1:** What can each of us do to help the hospital achieve its mission of showing Christ's love by healing bodies and souls?

For the second question, participants were asked to move to other tables, with one person staying to be table host. For this second round, participants were asked to capture their ideas by drawing pictures and not using any words.

**Question for round 2:** What would an ideal hospital look/feel like?

For the third question, participants were asked again to “popcorn” around the room, with one person remaining at each table to serve again as the table host. Ideas were to be captured on Post-it notes with only three words or fewer and/or pictures per idea on each Post-it note.

**Question for round 3:** In this time of celebration, what is there to celebrate about HOH?

At the conclusion of the three rounds, the participants did a gallery walk—they walked around and viewed the display of papers from each table posted on the walls. Participants were encouraged to discuss what they noticed as they looked over the images and ideas presented on the wall.

After the gallery walk, participants were asked the following reflection questions:



Figure 1. Affinity Diagram

- » What was your most significant insight from today?
- » What did you most appreciate about this conversation?
- » What surprised you?
- » What challenged you?
- » What do we need more clarity about?
- » What is next?

Appropriately, the Café concluded with a full lunch. In Bolivia, this was important because lunch is considered the main meal so this contributed to the level of participation and engagement.

The World Cafe worked well in this setting and the feedback was very positive. The following outcomes emerged from the process:

- » Myriad voices engaged—range of staff from across the hospital interacting and dialoguing with each other. Individuals and groups that would not normally interact were engaged in deep, meaningful dialogue around their passion for the hospital.
- » Generation of many ideas reflected in text and pictures. Recognition across positions of similar dreams and concerns for the hospital's future.
- » Shared commitment for the mission of the hospital.
- » Indication from the themes generated that the staff has the desire and ability to become a Level III hospital.

There were many thanks and a lot of hugs from participants to the hosts/facilitators. One cleaning lady, with tears streaming down her cheeks, thanked us, saying she had worked at the hospital for seven years and this was the first time anyone had asked her ideas, what she loved about the hospital, or what the hospital could become; for the first time, she was given a voice.

The day after the Celebration Café was held, members of the Leadership Team gathered to review the information collected and determine next steps. Consultants invited the Leadership Team to engage in their own Gallery Walk of the posters completed during the World Café. The team members were then asked to group the ideas generated by their staff into themes via an Affinity Diagram.

The themes identified were values, equipment, expansion of the hospital, teamwork, spiritual, and volunteers & work. From the discussion, the Leadership Team began to identify ways to continue to engage the hospital. It was important to the team to establish next steps that could be delivered within the short term in order to sustain momentum generated by the Celebration Café. Additionally, the team identified longer-term projects that would help the hospital make progress toward their mission and more aspirational goals that required more planning and stakeholder involvement.

## Appreciative Interviews

The next phase of the intervention involved exploring through Appreciative Interviews the powerful stories of staff experiences, dreams, and visions of the hospital that emerged during the Celebration Café. Conducting appreciative interviews is one strategy for discovering the positive experience of individuals within the organization in order to leverage those experiences for wider organizational success. It involves asking questions about times when individuals have experienced the greatest positive energy as a result of their work (Whitney, Cooperrider, Trosten-Bloom & Kaplin, 2005). The premise of this approach is that when a system is focused on what motivates and creates value, changes or improvements occur more quickly and with fewer barriers.

During the course of the interviews, the interviewers spent time listening to each staff person's experiences and discovering ideas and hopes for the future of this organization. The following four questions were used to guide the Appreciative Interviews:

1. Think of all of your years of experience, from the time you joined the hospital until now. Tell me about a time that was a real high point, a time when you felt most alive, most successful, most engaged. How did it feel? What was it about you and about others that made it so exciting for you?
2. The mission of Hospitals of Hope is to show Christ's love by healing bodies and souls. Describe a time when the hospital was the most effective in showing Christ's love by healing bodies and souls. Tell me a story that stands out for you that best embodies this ideal? What was most noteworthy?
3. What values would you say have distinguished Hospitals of Hope? How has the hospital kept those values alive?
  - a. Looking to the future, what values do you believe will inspire you to advance the mission?
4. Suppose this organization could choose just three things to do more of, or do differently, in order to show Christ's

love by healing bodies and souls. What would they be?

The interviewers conducted five interviews with staff internal to the hospital representing various position types across the organization (skilled, unskilled, and professional). A number of themes emerged across participant interviews:

### *Sharing the Gospel and witnessing Christian faith*

A high value for continuation of sharing the Gospel and witnessing Christian faith as a core component of hospital culture and provision of care was a theme across interviews. Some participants expressed concerns that the focus on this core value not be lost as the hospital grows and faces

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various challenges. The message was that sharing the Gospel must continue as a key aspect of all the hospital does in order to be true to its mission.

### *Prayer*

Related to the theme of sharing the Gospel was a theme of prayer. Several staff told stories about doctors, nurses, and other staff who prayed with patients and the positive impact it had. Integration of prayer as a key aspect of providing care, whether as a medical care provider, administrative staff, or skilled labor was a theme throughout the interviews.

### *Focus on Patient Care*

Dedicated focus on patient care, patient experience, and the ability to support patient needs effectively and efficiently also

emerged as a theme. Many interviewees spoke of the desire to be able to provide quality care that is both personal and supported by technology and skilled expertise.

### *Infrastructure improvement opportunities*

Some interviewees expressed a desire for improved infrastructure elements. These include having additional room to serve more patients; additional equipment or systems such as a tomographic unit and a better accounting system; a new blood bank unit so that additional services could be offered; and additional specialties. For example, if the hospital had a neurologist on site, patients requiring immediate neurological care due to trauma could be served on site rather than having to transit to the city.

Upon reflection, the themes and stories that emerged from the interviews continued to tell the story that had begun to emerge from the Celebration Café process, particularly the depth to which spirituality, faith, and core values are an orienting experience for staff of the hospital. In addition, the interviews further highlighted the need and desire for improved equipment, infrastructure, and expertise in order to not only achieve the hospital's mission, but to expand its service repertoire to be recognized as a Level III hospital by the Bolivian government.

The Appreciative Interview process achieved a desired outcome of engaging personnel of the hospital in the telling of their experience through personal stories as they related to the overall mission of the hospital. In initial conversations with

the Executive Director, it was reported that staff across the organization did not share a commitment to faith which he believed was central to achieving the mission. The interviews confirmed that faith and spirituality as a value and a practice were indeed being demonstrated across many facets of the organization from administration, to service providers, to support personnel. This was key data and feedback for the director and his leadership team.

The Appreciative Interviews were well received and the feedback was positive. The outcomes from the process included individuals feeling like they had a voice and their ideas and dreams were heard. This was especially powerful given the hierarchical nature of their society, because this was the first opportunity many in the organization had a chance to be heard. In addition, the themes from the Celebration Café were validated. Specific suggestions and ideas were also obtained from the interviews.

### Interviews/Public Relations and Marketing Consulting

In order to address other needs shared by the hospital administration, interviews were conducted with the Medical Director whose additional responsibilities included public relations and marketing for the hospital. Discussions with the director revealed two immediate issues: an upcoming event needing promotion and budget support and concerns around challenges of internal communication that result in missed opportunities that could otherwise promote the hospital to the community.

The suggested next steps included:

- » Scheduling regular meetings to discuss objectives for the hospital,
- » Developing a strategic plan for the hospital,
- » Deepening understanding of marketing and public relations,
- » Clarifying roles and responsibilities, and
- » Continuing efforts toward hospital classification changes.

### Shadowing/HR Consulting

Organizational challenges surrounding the human resource (HR) function also surfaced during interactions with the leadership. As a result, three members of the consulting team shadowed the HR Director for an afternoon to gain insight into his daily activities. The discussion started with the following questions:

- » What is your understanding of your role, responsibilities, and duties in HR and how do you think your performance matches the expectation?
- » What level of HR training have you received; self-directed or formal?
- » What level of understanding do you have of HOH policies, procedures, HR laws, and discipline of employees?

These questions unlocked his need to express and explore frustrations and concerns.

He focused a great deal on the pressures of his job, the lack of formal policies and procedures, and his lack of formal training. The team discussed his concerns and two action items were identified: 1) a self-evaluation by writing a draft of a job description for his position and 2) drafting a disciplinary policy so that he can compel accountability throughout the hospital.

In the next meeting, the HR Director presented an entire book full of policies and procedures, including job descriptions for all positions within the hospital that he had discovered. The director expressed to the team that their recommendations, suggestions, and questions had provided him with hope that the issues presented could actually be resolved. As a result of these interactions with the consultants, a suggested plan of action was developed focusing on professional development and strategies for developing a strong HR function. He indicated that he was able to better understand his role and how to better succeed to help the organization achieve its goals.

### Leadership Coaching

Two members of the management team chose to participate in individual coaching sessions in order to address leadership challenges they faced in their roles. Using a blend of leadership development and appreciative coaching techniques, the coaches posed questions so the clients could articulate their leadership dilemmas and generate insights. The following process was used:

- » What coaching is and is not
- » Describe our approach
- » How does this fit with your expectations?
- » Ensure confidentiality
- » What led you to request coaching as one of the activities of this week?
- » What is it that you desire that isn't a reality for you right now?
- » What brings you joy and energy?
- » What saps your energy?
- » What do you most want to achieve in the next 6 months?
- » Name 5 adjectives that describe you at your best.
- » How might these be resources for you in making progress on your issue?
- » Describe some of your greatest accomplishments to date.
- » How can/do you use what you learned from these accomplishments to help you make the future change you want?
- » What steps do you want to take in the next month?
- » Who will help you stay on task or can be available to you for support?

In addition, the coaches supported clients to name specific actions they wanted to take as a result of new insights. A significant aspect of the process was for the coaches to explain the nature of coaching and how it was different from consultation, given that this type of leadership development activity does not exist in the Bolivian culture. Much of the focus of the coaching sessions was generating insights related to dilemmas for which formal training had not been sufficient to resolve.

## Outcomes for the Hospital

In an initial meeting, the hospital director stated that his first goal was to share the gospel. This was a recurring theme of interest of staff and leadership throughout the various activities of the week, indicating an alignment to the mission across the organization. In early conversations with the hospital director, there were concerns shared about the staff having a different interest or purpose for working at the hospital. Recognition of aligned interests was an important outcome for HOH. Secondly,

**The hospital staff and leadership experienced a variety of discoveries related to organizational goals through their interactions with the student practitioners. Organization leaders encountered an array of possibilities and had their assumptions challenged as they faced a particular vulnerability and self-reflection not commonly encouraged in Bolivian culture. Hospital staff were especially energized as they participated in events that would not normally be afforded in the traditional hierarchical nature of the system.**

engaging in the methods of the Celebration Café, Appreciative Interviews and coaching dialogues introduced ways of communicating that were new and effective for the HOH staff and leadership. Exposing the members of the hospital staff to different ways of engaging in conversation and communicating concerns opened them up to new tools they can use independent of consultants in the future.

Finally, the OD interventions employed during the week indicated a similar desire across staff to increase their capacities, services, and structures in order to become a Level III hospital. The hospital director believes that becoming a Level III hospital will lead to longer-term sustainability and a broader scope of services they can offer to patients who have restricted or limited access otherwise. Having staff engaged and desirous of the effort to reach Level III status was an important outcome for the hospital.

It will be important for HOH to continue to build on the outcomes and power

of engagement via the Celebration Café, Appreciative Inquiry interviews, coaching sessions, and the staff interactions. Future actions could include engaging the staff in the affinity diagram developed by the administration, displaying the gallery walk posters created by staff, and sharing the reflection question responses with all of the staff. These activities could help leadership build the capacity to engage differing and or often unheard voices within the hospital. This creates an environment where this dialogue can be sustained to help create a great future for HOH.

## Lessons learned for the field of OD

The World Café process worked well in Bolivia. This is consistent with the success of this intervention in other international settings and particularly other Latin American countries. According to the World Café website ([www.worldcafe.com](http://www.worldcafe.com)), the World Café conducted by the Friends University practitioners was the first held in Bolivia. Initial concerns by the consultants related to a potential language barrier did not turn out to be a challenge. Translators were able to help introduce the questions and instructions were provided visually on a screen in Spanish. The most important learning about this process and the power of language is that the dialogue at each table was important and it was not necessary for the facilitators to understand individual conversations. The importance of remaining flexible and adjusting as the process evolves was evident. The need to be creative and allow the time to be flexible was essential in the Bolivian culture. It was

also essential that a meal was provided, given the cultural context. The process also drew in participants (mainly doctors and specialists) who did not originally plan to participate. It was important to schedule the engagement during the middle of the day so that the highest number of staff would have an opportunity to engage. The trade-off for the consultants was the need to understand there might be interruptions so that the needs of the hospital and patients would not be put on hold. It was a transformational experience for the hospital as an organization, for the participants, and for the students, translators, and faculty who facilitated the process.

Consultants who led the coaching dialogues were impacted deeply by the mere need to explain the coaching process to individuals who had no previous professional or cultural experiences by which to compare it. In a culture where technical knowledge and expertise is rewarded and where consultants are expected to provide such, the coaching relationship was a foreign concept. For the consultants, coaching via translators was a rich learning experience as one had to be open to tone, non-verbal language, and the various ways of communicating without words in order to be responsive. The practice of presence was of vital importance and a critical learning component for these budding practitioners.

Appreciative interviews are a powerful tool and intervention. In this setting, creating a process for individuals to tell stories of their experiences of the hospital carrying out its mission in meaningful ways created energy and synergy. It is sometimes difficult to capture in various reports or data points the impact an organization is having, but with appreciative interviews, the stories become the heart of discovering what is working well.

The OD engagement in Bolivia was a groundbreaking experience for the hospital and university students. The hospital staff and leadership experienced a variety of discoveries related to organizational goals through their interactions with the student practitioners. Organization leaders encountered an array of possibilities and had their assumptions challenged as they faced a particular vulnerability and self-reflection

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not commonly encouraged in Bolivian culture. Hospital staff were especially energized as they participated in events that would not normally be afforded in the traditional hierarchical nature of the system. Partaking in the bottom-up development of the hospital's future was unprecedented.

University students learned that although the language barriers of the international engagement presented slight logistical challenges, the language of organization development was universally applicable in the Bolivian context. Each student was challenged to set aside assumptions and to keep flexible with a fluid

schedule as the week unfolded in a way that exceeded each practitioner's expectations as the organization took to the events with great enthusiasm. The mutual benefit of the international engagement for client and student practitioners made this project a resounding success.

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