ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores a generative approach to organizational improvement methodologies through the integration of problem-based and strengths-based methods. To date very little exists in the literature concerning the integration of these methods or the potential benefits derived through their integration. This exploration of integrated improvement methods enables new perspectives and approaches to the development and application of improvement methods (Schultz & Hatch, 1996).

This study extends current theory and develops new insights on improvement methods by exploring the meaning and conceptual frameworks of problem-based and strengths-based methods and developing a model and mechanism for their integration and use. In addition, this study utilizes an appreciative lens to explore the potential for the application of an emergent framework for integrating Total Quality Management’s derivative Six Sigma and Appreciative Inquiry (Marash, Berman, & Flynn, 2004).

Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis methodology were utilized to analyze the data from a survey sent to 88 subject matter experts, and in-depth post-survey interviews with four subject matter experts. The findings from this study and published case study exemplars from the literature found that problem-based methods and strengths-based methods had strengths and weaknesses. It was further determined that the weaknesses of each could potentially be offset through leveraging the strengths of each as the two approaches were integrated.

The findings in this study strongly support and extend the work done by Kenneth Gergen with Social Construction, David Cooperrider with Appreciative Inquiry, and W. Edwards Deming with Total Quality Management.