



APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY FOR "MANO A MANO" ASSOCIATION

Mano a Mano (Hand in Hand) is an association comprised of a group of young people from the Argentine provinces who study in Buenos Aires. Its mission is to foster the thoughtful appreciation of values in the community. Up until September 2002, Mano a Mano had organized an array of community-assisting activities, through the EDISOL program (Solidarist Edifice), primarily related to operating a soup kitchen funded through donations.

Despite favorable response, some of the association's members felt that they hadn't accomplished enough, basing themselves on the dire economic situation of the country. They were also concerned about their reduced membership (seven) and slow growth rate.

After a talk with one of its members, Fabián Bassoti, we agreed to design and coordinate an appreciative inquiry to shed some positive light on the intense events that breathe life into the organization.

As we were designing the process, we pondered whether the entire mechanism would be workable with such few people, whether it would work at all, and whether or not we would be better off using some other methodology. The need of the members, however, to reaffirm their identity and change the prevailing negative outlook for a positive one led us to keep to the appreciative inquiry proposal. This was the first appreciative inquiry we ever performed for an NGO.

The process was developed as two Saturday sessions held in September 2002. Facilitator Guillermo González, assisted by facilitator Sergio Abrevaya, coordinated the first and the latter led the second.

During the first session, the participants concentrated all their efforts on keeping within the bounds of "positive wording" with great success. After we concluded the dreaming up or imagining phase, we were astonished to hear them say that "the atmosphere and concepts that sprang from the session truly represent our innermost spirit; it has been almost groundbreaking." They latched on to the positive nucleus and the dream as their mission, and inaugurated their very own "who we are" demeanor to the outside world.

The second session focused on projects, ideas on how to proceed and broaden the EDISOL program, and the building of activities to boost organizational growth.

In July 2003-nine months later-Mano a Mano asked us to set up yet another workshop. Again, the workshop was led by Guillermo González, and assisted by Alejandra Stern.

During the session we reviewed the issues worked on at the first appreciative inquiry for the benefit of two new participants, and we evaluated the impact of the prior inquiry, stressing the significance of "groundbreaking benchmarks." Participants pointed out that the prior inquiry had "...enabled us to get to know one another, helped us build the positive nucleus, set goals and objectives, and map out the work to be done..."



In terms of activity development, the participants made it known that they had carried out two Edisol programs, they had collaborated with the people of Santa Fe province for flood relief, and they had organized a traditional locro dinner for the 9th of July (Independence Day).

During the session, the group proceeded to work on the organization's mission and its work methodology.

One year after the initial sessions, the organization has managed to triple its membership, increase the number of solidarist edifices, and put positive wording into regular practice during meetings.

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