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PSYCH > Vol.3 No.12A, December 2012

OPEN ACCESS

## Appreciative Inquiry: An Effective Training Alternative to Traditional Adult Learning?

PDF (Size: 143KB) PP. 1125-1130 DOI: 10.4236/psych.2012.312A166

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### ABSTRACT

While the practice of positive psychology has flourished in the last decade, critics still point to the lack of intervention-based research and empirical evidence as a shortcoming of this field. Appreciative inquiry (AI), an intervention with similar theoretical underpinnings as positive psychology, has the capacity to expand what is known about the impact of positivity in the study of organizations. AI is an intervention that uses reflective questions of positive experiences to create new opportunities. However, there is scant research on its effectiveness in real-world settings. This study extends this line of research by evaluating the effectiveness of AI as an alternative to conventional adult learning methodologies, as well as an applied example of an intervention based on positive psychology to study organizational change. Results from changes in pre- and post-assessments following three AI-based interventions, when compared to those from a control group, suggest AI can lead to significant gains in participants' perceived attitudinal, behavioral, and cognitive learning similar to traditional adult learning methodologies. In addition, these results suggest AI interventions paired with real-world problem solving opportunities yield greater gains in participants' perceived confidence to demonstrate positive interpersonal skills. Implications for using AI in the course of adult learning are discussed.

### KEYWORDS

Appreciative Inquiry; Positive Psychology; Adult Learning

### Cite this paper

Day, J. & Holladay, C. (2012). Appreciative Inquiry: An Effective Training Alternative to Traditional Adult Learning?. *Psychology*, 3, 1125-1130. doi: 10.4236/psych.2012.312A166.

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