THE EFFECT OF APPRECIATIVE AUDITING ON AUDIT OUTCOMES AND EMPLOYEE ATTITUDE TOWARDS CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Originated from the theory of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), appreciative internal auditing is an organizational review process which focuses on the positive actions and best practices of an organization. Various claims have been made on the positive and negative effects of appreciative internal auditing on employees and on its results. However, little empirical evidence can be found on appreciative auditing, since its use is rather new. Therefore the aim of this study was to empirically investigate the effectiveness of appreciative internal auditing compared with traditional auditing in two different studies.

The first study investigated whether the appreciative audit has an effect on employees’ willingness and commitment to change. For this study a number of employees (n = 50) were randomly assigned to the appreciative audit method and the traditional audit method. To assess the effect of the audits on employees’ willingness and commitment to change, a pre and post audit questionnaire was completed.

The second study investigated whether an appreciative audit report results in different information compared to a traditional audit report. To assess the quality and usefulness of the final audit reports, four subject matter experts were interviewed.

The studies make strong empirical contributions to research on appreciative auditing and in what ways it differs from traditional auditing. Evidence was found that appreciative auditing is likely to have more effect on employees’ willingness and commitment to change. In addition, appreciative auditing seems to result in different output and is likely to be suitable for purposes with a focus on future possibilities in specific organizational cultures. Finally, the studies add support to the claim that AI may be an effective way of approaching change management.
INTRODUCTION

In the current complex business environment, organizations need to provide a close oversight in vital organizational issues in order to change successfully (Allen, 2008; Haagsma, 2008). In addition, there is a strong need for periodic review during change processes, especially when the change is uncertain and unclear (Burnes, 2004; Marks, 2001). Internal auditing is a frequently used powerful method for this review process. It provides assurance that internal controls are functioning well with regard to organizational goals, objectives, and change (Hirth, 2008; Wright & Baker, 2005). In internal auditing, the auditors are integral to the organization (Institute of Internal Auditor, 2009).

In the past, internal auditing has served purposes solely concerning the financial function of the organization (Jeffrey, 2008), while in the present time internal auditing also has a focus on monitoring, control, risk assessment, and employee participation. With internal auditing organizational information is gathered and reported in a structural, systematic, and formal manner. In this paper traditional internal auditing refers to this commonly used method of internal auditing.

A different and relatively new method to conduct auditing is the appreciative method. Appreciative auditing originates from the organizational theory of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). According to Cooperrider & Whitney (2005) AI offers a positive and strength-based approach to change management. At the heart of AI is the appreciative interview in which people uncover what gives life to the organization when it is at its best. These interviews are the core of appreciative auditing. Appreciative auditing focuses on the positive actions and best practices of an organization (Van de Wetering, 2007). According to field experts, important effects of this method are: a positive attitude of employees regarding organizational goals, more compelling images of the organization and its future (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005), the creation of a ‘learning organization’ (Van de Wetering, 2007), and eventually organizational change (Wright & Baker, 2005). Thus, it seems that appreciative internal auditing can be extremely valuable for organizations in two ways. First, it gathers information on the current state of the organization and its change process, which is eventually presented in an audit report. Second, it can help to motivate and inspire employees regarding the change efforts in the organization.

However, there is disagreement in how effectively appreciative auditing reaches these goals compared to traditional auditing. For example, some state that the appreciative audit has a negative effect on employees, since it rules out critical organizational reflection. Employees may experience this as negative, which is the opposite of the desired effect (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). In addition, concerning the final audit report, it is said that the appreciative audit does not detect and report non-conformities properly. In contrast, it is said that appreciative auditing inspires and motivates employees (Van de Wetering, 2007). Finally, some argue that the appreciative audit report
is more likely to receive attention of executives and to become input in the strategic planning process (Morris, 2008).

Although various authors have an opinion on the positive and negative effects of appreciative auditing on employees and on its results, no empirical evidence can be found on appreciative auditing. Therefore this study aims to empirically investigate the effectiveness of appreciative internal auditing in two different studies, which are focused on the audit process and content.

The first study focuses on the process of appreciative auditing and its contribution to change management. It is claimed that appreciative auditing contributes to change processes through motivating and inspiring employees (Van de Wetering, 2007). Therefore, we will focus on the effect of appreciative auditing on employees’ attitude regarding change compared to the traditional auditing method. More specifically we will investigate whether the appreciative audit has an effect on employees’ willingness and commitment to change, since willingness and commitment are necessary to bring about successful change. In order to measure these effects we will conduct a quasi experiment with 50 participants divided in an appreciative audit group and a traditional audit group. The effects will be measured with a pre and post audit questionnaire.

The second study aims to investigate the outcomes of the appreciative audit. It is claimed that appreciative auditing results in better and more useful information (Christie, 2006). Therefore, the second study will investigate if an appreciative audit report results in different information compared to a traditional audit report. The two audit methods will result in two different audit reports. We will use four subject matter experts to assess the reliability, content, and usefulness of the information from these audit reports.

These studies were conducted at a department of a local authority in the Netherlands. This department employs 526 people. In 2008 an organizational change program was introduced. Part of the change program was the introduction of an internal audit in order to gather information on the change program and involve employees.

In this paper appreciative and traditional auditing refer to appreciative and traditional internal auditing.
THEORY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Appreciative inquiry

The historical roots of AI are related to the early theories of planned change, and positive psychology. According to Cummings & Worley (2005), three theories of planned change have received widespread attention in the literature, which are Lewin’s three steps change model, the action research model, and the positive model. These models describe the activities that must take place in order to bring about successful change. The positive model is a reaction on the traditional problem solving models to change, such as Lewin’s change model and the action research model. The traditional models are primarily deficit and problem based (Cummings & Worley, 2005; Fitzgerald, Murrell & Miller, 2003). The positive model is focused on what the organization is doing right. This positive approach to change is consistent with a growing movement in social sciences which focuses on positive dynamics in organizations (Cummings & Worley, 2005). The idea that positivity can have profound implications for individuals and organizations is probably thousands of years old and was previously studied by ancient philosophers and pioneering psychologist (Luthans & Avolio, 2009). Recently, positive psychology received widespread attention from academics and practitioners. Positive psychology is an attempt to “urge psychologists to adopt a more open and appreciative perspective regarding human potentials, motives, and capacities” (Sheldon & King, 2001: 216). It was primarily focused on clinical applications, however its application in organizations and work settings is recently introduced in the literature as positive organizational behavior (POB) (Luthans & Avolio, 2009). According to Luthans & Avolio (2009) the challenge in POB is to become able to change the positive psychological resources in order to improve organizations. It can be said that AI aims to change these positive psychological resources.

AI explicitly contains a positive value orientation into analyzing and changing organizations (Cummings & Worley, 2005). The proponents of AI stated that traditional problem solving approaches to change are slow, rarely result in new vision, are conservative, create separation among stakeholders, and are notorious for generating defensiveness (Barrett, 1995; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). In contrast, AI helps members to understand and appreciate their organization when it is at its best and how to use this to achieve even better results in the future. According to Cooperrider & Whitney (2005) it is therefore a much healthier and more effective way of approaching change management and makes traditional change management approaches look obsolete.

AI can be defined as: “The cooperative, co evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. [Appreciative inquiry] involves systematic discovery of what gives life to an organization or a community when it is most effective and most capable in
economic, ecological, and human terms” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005: 8). AI highlights five concepts which originally form its basis: the constructionist principle, the principle of simultaneity, the poetic principle, the anticipatory principle, and the positive principle (see Table 1). It is argued that through AI, employees have a more compelling vision of the organization at its best which in itself will motivate new behaviors. Consequently, the final goal of AI is to generate self-sustaining momentum within an organization toward actualizing the values that lead to superior performance (Bushe, 1999). In this way organizations are able to cope with the current pace of environmental change.

**TABLE 1**

**The Five Appreciative Inquiry Principles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The constructionist principle</td>
<td>Based on post-modernist European philosophy that reality is socially constructed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principle of simultaneity</td>
<td>The idea that inquiry and change occur simultaneously and that inquiry (the nature of questions asked) has a determining impact on the nature of change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The poetic principle</td>
<td>A metaphor that human organizations are more like an open book than a machine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The anticipatory principle</td>
<td>The idea that the organization’s collective image of the future guides behavior and that positive images of the future lead to positive actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The positive principle</td>
<td>Reflected in the role and influence of the positive questions. The more positive the question, the more long-lasting and successful the change effort.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from Sorensen & Yaeger (2004)*

Proponents claim that AI has a positive effect on employees’ attitude towards change. For example, Wright & Baker (2005) mention that a collective vision of the future with firmly grounded foundations of collective experiences of what works well, removes much of the anxiety that is a major obstruction to change. In addition, Sorenson & Yeager (2004) said that the changed image of the organization created with AI has profound implications for the development of employee commitment. Finally, according to Johnson & Leavitt (2001), change is possible because it feels better for people to start from a point that goes well already.
Although there are many claims made on the effects and values of AI, little empirical research can be found (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). Bushe & Coetzer (1995) conducted a controlled experiment on AI as a team development intervention. They found a significant impact of AI on groups’ process and outcomes, and task performance. However, the traditional team development intervention they tested had similar results or scored even better. Head (2000) found that teams applying AI reported higher levels of perceived competence and lower self-oriented behaviors than teams using a problem-oriented intervention. However, AI did not correlate with improved performance or greater team-oriented behaviors. In addition, Peelle (2006) found that AI teams reported higher levels of group identification compared to (traditional) creative problem solving. These studies show that AI can make a potential positive contribution to organizations. However, they are primarily focuses on group behavior and are not directly related to change. Therefore, given the limited empirical research and the growing popularity of AI, the call for evidence on potential effects is increasingly urgent (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004).

Theoretically, AI change efforts flow through the 4-D cycle in which four key phases can be identified (see Figure 1): discovery, dream, design, and destiny (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Whitney & Torsten-Bloom, 2003). The first phase in this cycle is the discovery phase. In this phase, essential information is gathered from the organization’s members. This can be done by means of appreciative auditing.

**FIGURE 1**

Appreciative Inquiry 4-D cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discovery</th>
<th>Discovering the best of what is through appreciative interviews.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>Dreaming of what might be and sharing these dreams by presenting as dramatic enactments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Designing an ideal future by drafting possibility statements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destiny</td>
<td>The sustaining of the changes undertaken through communication of intended ideas and the utilization of groups in order to strategically plan and implement the required action.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Adapted from Willoughby & Tosey, 2007*

**Appreciative auditing**

Appreciative auditing focuses on evaluating and improving the organization in an appreciative manner. Similar to AI, the appreciative audit is a reaction on the traditional auditing method. Previous
studies found that the traditional method is viewed by many employees as a necessary evil and a
disruption of work, that it results in employee’s defensive behavior, that it increases employee’s
insecurity and their fear of judgment, that it refrains from structural analysis and solutions, that it
reveals too few opportunities for development, and that traditional internal audit reports tend to be
ignored as inputs to the strategic planning process (Morris, 2008; Van de Wetering, 2007; Van Roekel,
2007). In contrast, the appreciative audit process is built on the premise that revealing business system
effectiveness and best practices are just as important as revealing non-conformances (Morris, 2008;
Van de Wetering 2007).

In order to distinguish between appreciative and traditional auditing it is important to highlight the
differences between both methods. The differences can be clustered into four audit elements (see
Table 2). First, appreciative auditing focuses on improvement, positive deviance, storytelling, and
future possibilities. Traditional auditing in contrast, focuses on procedures and norms (for example
ISO-conditions), negative deviance, the current situation, risks, and governance. Second, the
appreciative auditing interview questions are derived from the ideal situation and have a free form. In
contrast, the traditional auditing questions are derived from process requirements and have a formal
basis. Third, the participants of appreciative auditing are the process owners complemented with
internal customers and suppliers. Traditional auditing’s participants are solely process owners. Fourth,
the desired result of appreciative auditing is to inspire members of the organization, while traditional
auditing’s desired result is to objectify organizational aspects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audit Elements</th>
<th>Traditional Audit</th>
<th>Appreciative Audit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audit Focus</td>
<td>Focus on procedures and norms</td>
<td>Focus on improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Search for negative deviance</td>
<td>Search for positive deviance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current Situation</td>
<td>Past/future and storytelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Risks</td>
<td>Possibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>No focus on governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audit question</td>
<td>Derived from process requirement</td>
<td>Derived from ideal situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formal basis</td>
<td>Free form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Process owners</td>
<td>Process owner, internal customer and suppliers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td>Objectifies</td>
<td>Inspires</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appreciative auditing can have important value for management. According to Burnes (2004) an internal audit can be another opportunity for improvement and can drive the change process forward. It can articulate financial, strategic and operational risk, rank them in order of impact and likelihood of occurring (Jeffrey, 2008), and establish that objectives are really being achieved (Burnes, 2004). This might help managers to anticipate on these risks and adjust strategic plans and objectives. Furthermore, it can appropriately control operations and increase the transparency of the governance processes for internal and external stakeholders (Archambeault, DeZoort & Holt, 2008). In addition, the organizational culture can be assessed as part of the control system (McNamee & McNamee, 1995) and internal auditing can influence employees’ attitude and behavior, such as inspiring, committing and mobilizing employees to change (INK, 2008; Van de Wetering, 2007). Finally, internal auditing can ascertain what lessons can be learned from past change projects (Burnes, 2004).

In conclusion, it seems that appreciative auditing might be an effective tool for organizations to reach two goals. First, appreciative auditing tries to stimulate organizational change through creating willingness and commitment to change. Second, its purpose is to give an overview of the current state of the organization and possibilities for improvement through focusing on the identification of best practices and the ideal future.

Willingness- and commitment to change

The first goal of the appreciative audit is related to the creation of employees’ willingness and commitment to change.

In any complex change process, those concerned to change have to be willing to act in the interest of the organization and accept new arrangements (Cusack, 2009). In addition, willingness is a critical issue in starting change, because people seek to preserve the status quo (Cummings & Worley, 2005). This willingness to change might be achieved through appreciative auditing. For example, Morris (2008) argued that the nondefensive and thoughtful responses that results from appreciative auditing have the effect of sowing the seeds of change in the employees’ minds and influencing the employees’ willingness to improve business processes. Therefore, appreciative auditing may be a useful tool for organizations to create willingness to change. Willingness to change is defined as “a positive behavior intention of an employee regarding the implementation of changes in the structure of an organization’s administrative processes, resulting in an effort of employees to support or accelerate the change process” (Metselaar, 1997: 175). It is the opposite of resistance to change. According to Metselaar (1997) people will be more prepared to talk about willingness, because of the negative connotation of the resistance construct. Although there is no research conducted to assess the effect of appreciative auditing on willingness to change, there is some evidence from positive psychology that positivity influences people’s attitude and behavior. For example, people’s positive affect fosters openness to ideas and flexibility (Estrada, Isen & Young, 1997). Furthermore, employees’ positive emotions are associated with desired attitudes and behaviors, such as emotional engagement and
organizational citizenship, which facilitate and enhance positive organizational change (Avey, Wernsing & Luthans, 2008). Finally, positive expectations for the change can play an important role in creating motivation for change (Cummings & Worley, 2005). Therefore, willingness to change may be positively related to appreciative auditing since appreciative auditing is characterized by positive and appreciative questions.

Moreover, commitment of a critical mass of individuals or groups is necessary to bring about successful change (Burnes, 2004; Cummings & Worley, 2005). It is claimed that this commitment to change might be achieved through appreciative auditing. For example, according to Van de Wetering (2007) appreciative auditing will stimulate employees’ learning and commitment, through asking positive questions on their personal contribution. Therefore, appreciative auditing may be a useful tool for organizations to create commitment to change. It might be achieved through appreciative auditing. Commitment to change is defined as “a force (mind-set) that binds an individual to a course of action deemed necessary for the successful implementation of a change initiative” (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002: 475). This mind-set can reflect three independent constructs of commitment to change, namely affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). It is important to distinguish between these forms of commitment to change since they can have different implications. First, affective commitment to change is a desire to support the change on a belief of its inherent benefits. Employees are affectively committed when they feel that the change offers the organization some form of advantage. Affective commitment is likely to be required for stimulating employees to exert extra effort for reaching the objectives of the change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Second, continuance commitment to change is a recognition that there are costs involved with failure to provide support for the change initiative. Employees’ continuance commitment is high when they experience high personal costs, pressure and risks if they decide not to support the change. According to Irving & Coleman (2003) continuance commitment may be a source of stress itself and may exacerbate rather than buffer the perceived negative effects of change. In addition, employees who remain at the organization primarily to prevent costs may do little more than is required from them (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Organizations that use retention strategies to convey a high continuance commitment, might create a workforce that experiences negative effects of stress and does not adapt well to change (Irving & Coleman, 2003). Therefore, it can be said that high continuance commitment is not necessary beneficial for the organization. Third, normative commitment to change is a sense of obligation to support the change. It develops when there is an imbalance in the employee/organization relationship. It causes employees to feel an obligation to support the organization by committing themselves until the debt has been repaid (Scholl, 1981). People who remain at the organization for the reasons of obligation see this as a part of their duty or as a means of reciprocation for benefits received (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Therefore, it can be
argued that normative commitment is viewed by employees as negative since they may perceive it as a constraint.

No research is present on the effects of appreciative auditing on these three scales of commitment to change. However there is a source of theories and empirical evidence on the influencing factors on commitment to change. For example, DeCotiis & Summers (1987) stated that affective commitment can be influenced by participation in decision making. In addition, the personal importance of the employees to the organization has an influence on affective commitment (Steers, 1977). Concerning continuance commitment little empirical evidence is present. However, it is stated that anything that increases the perceived costs can be considered as an influencing factor (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Similarly, literature on normative commitment is theoretical rather than empirical (Meyer & Allen, 1991). For example, it may develop when an organization incurs significant costs in providing employment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Since the appreciative audit actively stimulates employee participation and highlights the importance of the individual employee, it is likely that appreciative auditing has a positive effect on affective commitment to change. In contrast, it might decrease continuance and normative commitment, since its focus is on positive aspects, revenues, and does not refer to a negative feeling of obligation.

Appreciative audit information

The second goal of appreciative auditing is related to the gathering of information concerning the current situation of the organization. This is traditionally the major goal of internal auditing. However it is claimed that the resulting data from appreciative auditing are often more contextual, rich, meaningful and at times even better than traditional auditing (Christie, 2006). According to some, appreciative auditing gives a more cohesive picture of the organization since the method tends to report stories of best practices, actions, and results (Van de Wetering, 2007). In contrast, traditional auditing is focused more on incidents because solely nonconformities are reported. Furthermore, Van de Wetering (2007) argued that appreciative auditing is more effective for reflecting and inspiring, while traditional auditing outcomes tend to be experienced as pedantic and judgmental. Finally, according to Sawyer (1981) executive management generally gives serious attention to traditional audit reports. In contrast, Morris (2008) argued that traditional audit findings are ignored as inputs to the strategic planning process. He stated that key appreciative findings are more likely to become inputs into the corporate strategic plan.

Although various authors have an opinion on the benefits of appreciative auditing with regard to the resulting information, no supporting evidence is present. No effort has been done to structurally compare the appreciative audit outcomes with the traditional audit outcomes. It seems logical that management prefers positively formulated audit reports with several best practices included, since this might be less confronting. However, it can be questioned whether this information gives a reliable and representative picture of the organizational situation or, in contrast, a rather rosy picture. According to
Willoughby & Tosey (2007) a balance of critical and positive thinking is necessary in audit reports. In
addition, it is possible that the differences in the resulting information are as such, that both methods
may be useful in different situations or for different purposes. Therefore, it is important to know
whether the claimed effect of appreciative auditing can be supported and if appreciative auditing
indeed outperforms traditional auditing.

The final audit report contains the auditor’s observations presented in a final document. Various
authors mentioned criteria which the audit report must meet (see Table 3). According to Doesema
(1996) and INK (2008) the report should represent objective findings without socially desirable
answers. In addition, it is argued that the report must be recognizable for the reader (INK, 2008; Van
de Wetering, 2007). Put differently, the report should be the intellectual ownership of the entire
organization, especially of the management. Furthermore, it is stated that the report should be a factual
representation of the organization (Doesema, 1996; INK, 2008). According to INK (2008) the audit’s
goal, which is stated at the start of the audit process, should be reached properly, and the report must
give more insight in the coherence of the organization’s problems. In addition, the report must clearly
define which goals are reached and which efforts were needed to do so (INK, 2008; Spenser Picket,
up should be included in the audit report. Finally, the report should be inspiring and give practical
information (INK, 2008; Van de Wetering, 2007). We have clustered these criteria according to three
terms or variables, which will be used to assess the audit report information.

**TABLE 3**

*Internal Audit Report Criteria*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Report criterion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>- Objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Recognizable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Factual presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>- Goal is reached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Give insight in coherence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Presentation of goals with regard to content and efforts to reach these goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usefulness</td>
<td>- Possibilities of improvement presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Possibilities for follow up</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Inspiring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Practicability of information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Based on INK (2008); Spenser Picket (2005); Doesema (1996); Van de Wetering (2007).
Research questions

The current study aims to investigate the effect of appreciative auditing. More specifically the following research questions were formulated:

**Study 1.** Does appreciative auditing has an effect on employee’s willingness- and commitment to change compared to traditional auditing?

**Study 2.** Does appreciative auditing lead to different information with regard to its reliability, content and usefulness, compared to traditional auditing?
STUDY 1

Method

Research setting. This study was conducted at a department of a local authority in the Netherlands. This department employs 526 people. In 2008 the board of the organization decided to introduce a change program to create a balance between on the one hand a focus on employee autonomy, encouragement, commitment and entrepreneurship, and on the other hand a focus on results and efficiency. Part of this program was the introduction of internal auditing. The first goal of the internal audit was to offer employees the opportunity to give their opinion on organizational issues.

Study design. We used a pre-test, post-test quasi experimental design to test the effect of appreciative auditing on willingness and commitment to change. A sample of 50 randomly selected employees was asked to participate in the study. These employees were randomly assigned to one of the two methods. The traditional audit group consisted of 18 employees (6 women, 12 men) and 7 managers (2 women, 5 men) with a mean age of 47.8 years ($SD = 8.8$) and a mean work experience of 25.2 years ($SD = 9.7$). The appreciative audit group consisted of 17 employees (8 women, 9 men) and 8 managers (4 women, 4 men) with a mean age of 47.3 years ($SD = 8.8$) and a mean work experience of 23.6 years ($SD = 10.2$). Since the participants came from different divisions of the organization, they did not represent existing or naturally assembled groups.

All participants were informed about the audit’s goal and that it was part of a university graduation study. The participants were not aware of the experimental conditions. They were told that their participation included the completion of two questionnaires before and after the audit, with a duration of 5 to 10 minutes. Finally, it was explained that participation in the study was on a voluntary basis and that individual responses were kept confidential.

The audit interviews had a duration of approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The number of employees that were interviewed in the same time varied from 1 to 4 persons. Whenever possible we preferred interviews with more than one (but maximal four) persons, since this stimulates conversation and discussion among the participants and remained manageable for the auditor. Each audit interview was conducted by the same auditor, who was trained for both the traditional and the appreciative method. The participant responses were gathered by means of annotation and digital recordings.

Intervention. The audit methods as used in the present study were based upon existing audit literature. In the traditional audit method there was a focus on monitoring and control (Sawyer, 1981). The questions were asked in a closed-end manner. After the participants responded, the auditor followed to ask questions on the deficits, their cause, the participant’s responsibility and points of improvement (Doesema, 1996; Kempen & Kips, 1983; Metha, 1994; Spenser Pickett, 2005). An
example of a question was: “Is there a procedure for knowledge transfer from interim managers and employees leaving the organization?” The appreciative audit was based on publications of consultants with experience in appreciative auditing (Morris, 2008; TNO Management Consultants, 2009; Van de Wetering, 2007). In contrast to the traditional method, only open-ended and positively formulated questions were asked such as: “How is knowledge transferred from interim managers and employees leaving the organization?” These questions were focused on the experiences of participants concerning best practices and points of excellence of the organization. Therefore, the follow up questions were extremely important to stimulate employees to share their stories and experiences. In addition, an appreciative question was asked at the beginning of the interview: “What gives you a lot of energy in your work?”

Data collection. To assess the effect of the audit on employees’ willingness and commitment to change, two questionnaires were completed. First, the participants were asked to complete a questionnaire one or two days before the actual audit interview took place (pre-test). Within two to ten days after the audit interview, the participants were asked to complete the same questionnaire again (post-test). Five out of 50 people did not complete the second questionnaire for unknown reasons. The questionnaire consisted of 22 items measuring willingness to change and commitment to change. Each item contained a statement that needed a score on a likert scale ranging from 1 to 7. The numbers corresponded to the following descriptions (translated from Dutch): 1 – completely disagree, 2 – largely disagree, 3 – somewhat disagree, 4 – not disagree/not agree, 5 – somewhat agree, 6 – largely agree, 7 – completely agree. The items can be found in Appendix A.

Willingness to change. Questions to measure the individual’s willingness to change were based on Metselaar (1997). Four items were used to measure the willingness to change. An example of a question was: “I put a lot of energy in the change to make it successful”. The Cronbach’s alpha for this variable was 0.88.

Commitment to change. Commitment to change consisted of three independent variables which were affective-, continuance-, and normative commitment. The variables contained items that were based on a questionnaire developed and rendered valid by Herscovitsch & Meyer (2002). Affective commitment and continuance commitment were measured by 4 items, and normative commitment was measured by 3 items. An example item is: “I belief in the value of this change”. Cronbach’s alpha’s for the affective-, continuance-, and normative commitment variable were respectively 0.92, 0.83, and 0.73.

Data analysis. To investigate the effect of internal auditing on willingness and commitment to change, we used a general linear model with repeated measures. Throughout the analyses $p < 0.10$ (two-sided) was considered to be statistically significant, since the relatively small sample size may influence the likelihood of finding significant results. SPSS 14.0 software for Windows, (SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL) was used for all the analyses.
Results

We first assessed differences between pre and post audit measurements (the time aspect) regardless the method that was used. Second we added the method factor (the condition) to assess the effect of the methods. The results on the repeated measures regarding willingness and commitment to change are shown in Table 4.

Willingness to change. The first aim of this study was to investigate the effect of appreciative auditing on employees’ willingness to change. The results in Table 4 indicate that there was a significant difference between the traditional and the appreciative audit method concerning willingness to change. The appreciative audit method showed an increase in willingness to change (Pre AAM mean = 4.32, Post AAM mean = 4.98), while the traditional audit method showed a slight decrease (Pre TAM mean = 4.77, post TAM mean = 4.63, $F = 3.481$, $p < .10$).

Commitment to change. In addition, we aimed to investigate the effect of appreciative auditing on employees’ commitment to change. Therefore, we first tested the effect of appreciative auditing on affective commitment. Affective commitment decreased significantly in both the traditional and the appreciative audit group ($F = 5.508$, $p < .05$, Table 4). Although the appreciative audit group showed a slightly higher decrease, this effect was not significant. Second, we tested if there was an effect of appreciative auditing on continuance commitment. We found that there was a decrease in continuance commitment ($F = 3.822$, $p < .10$) in the whole group. When comparing the auditing methods, the appreciative audit group showed a significant decrease compared to the traditional audit group on continuance commitment (Pre AAM mean = 3.18, Post AAM mean = 2.57, Pre TAM mean = 2.70, Post TAM mean = 2.77, $F = 5.706$, $p < .05$). Third, we tested the effect of appreciated auditing on normative commitment. Normative commitment was decreased in both the traditional and the appreciative group ($F = 10.428$, $p < .05$). The appreciative audit group showed a higher decrease compared to the traditional audit group, although this effect was not significant.

To summarize, these results indicate that appreciative auditing has a positive effect on willingness to change, while it has a negative effect on commitment to change.
### TABLE 4
Means, Standard Deviations, and $F$s from 8 Repeated Measures Analysis of Covariance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>TAM (and SD)</th>
<th>AAM (and SD)</th>
<th>TAM (and SD)</th>
<th>AAM (and SD)</th>
<th>Time $F$</th>
<th>$C \times T$ $F$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to change</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4.77 (1.13)</td>
<td>4.32 (1.67)</td>
<td>4.63 (1.10)</td>
<td>4.98 (1.29)</td>
<td>1.398</td>
<td>3.481*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Commitment</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.28 (1.22)</td>
<td>4.53 (1.10)</td>
<td>4.06 (0.86)</td>
<td>4.11 (0.88)</td>
<td>5.508**</td>
<td>0.558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance Commitment</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2.70 (0.85)</td>
<td>3.18 (1.17)</td>
<td>2.77 (0.81)</td>
<td>2.57 (0.82)</td>
<td>3.822*</td>
<td>5.706**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Commitment</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3.45 (1.20)</td>
<td>4.15 (1.12)</td>
<td>3.15 (0.80)</td>
<td>3.34 (0.91)</td>
<td>10.428**</td>
<td>2.201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The $F$ for time tests the linear contrast between the pre- and post audit measurement (PRE and POST) and the $F$ for the interaction $C \times T$ tests the Linear Condition (the audit method used) x Time contrast.

TAM=Traditional Audit Method, AAM=Appreciative Audit Method.

**$p < .05$ (two-sided)**

* $p < .10$ (two-sided)
Discussion

The first study aimed to investigate the effect of appreciative auditing on willingness and commitment to change compared to traditional auditing. Our findings show that appreciative auditing has an effect on willingness and commitment to change and that it therefore differs from traditional auditing.

First, in contrast to traditional auditing, appreciative auditing seems to have a positive effect on the willingness to change. Given the knowledge from extended research conducted on behavioral intention, this effect might be created by the positive and appreciative manner of the appreciative audit. Evidence is found that positivity is related to positive behavioral intention (Isen & Shalker, 1982; Kenneth, 1979). It seems that the positive aspect of appreciative auditing might have influenced the way people look at the change, and consequently their intention to support the change process. Our results are in correspondence with the appreciative audit expert opinions, who argued that appreciative auditing may have a positive effect on willingness to change (Morris, 2008; Van de Wetering, 2007). Although this effect only concerns an intention, it can be assumed that this intention is related to actual behavior (Metselaar, 1997).

Furthermore, we found that appreciative auditing had a negative effect on commitment to change. To explain this result we will focus on the three scales of commitment to change.

In contrast to traditional auditing, appreciative auditing seems to be negatively associated with continuance commitment. Put differently, through the appreciative audit the employees did experience less costs associated with failure to provide support for the change. Meyer & Allen (1991) propose that people with high continuance commitment give support because they have to do so. According to Herscovitch & Meyer (2002) continuance commitment involves an awareness of constraints of behavior. In addition, it is stated that continuance commitment can be a source of stress and negatively associated with change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Irving & Coleman, 2003). Therefore, it can be questioned whether a high continuance commitment is desirable. The negative effect of appreciative auditing on continuance commitment might be explained by the fact that the focus of appreciative auditing is on proceedings and future visions and positive deviance instead of costs, pressure and risk. During the audit interviews the emphasis implicitly was placed on which ‘revenues’ the employee should encounter when supporting the change. Therefore, it seems that the appreciative audit effectively removed a possible undesirable negative feeling to support the change.

In addition, appreciative auditing was also negatively associated with normative commitment. However the traditional method also led to a decrease in normative commitment. Employees felt less obligated to support the change after the appreciative audit. Herscovitch & Meyer (2002) stated that similar to costs, obligations can be seen as constraints by employees. Therefore, according to Meyer & Allen (1991) employees who feel obligated to belong to the organization are less likely to exert effort on behalf of the organization. In addition, normative commitment develops through the receipt of
benefits and the need to reciprocate (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Therefore, it can be argued that employees perceived lower benefits through the audit, which diminished the need to reciprocate. In addition, it can be argued that the audit participants perceived the obligations to change as a constraint which might have raised a feeling of responsibility and guilt. It can be suggested that appreciative auditing removes the undesirable feeling of obligation as a constraint and as such may have a positive effect on the attitude towards the organizational change.

It was striking that we found that appreciative auditing had a negative effect on affective commitment. This was not predicted in the context of appreciative auditing. Since affective commitment represents the individual’s emotional attachment towards the change and highlights the benefits attached to supporting the change, we expected a positive effect of appreciative auditing on affective commitment. However, the results showed a decrease in affective commitment caused by both the appreciative and the traditional audit method. According to Clugston (2000) affective commitment is an attitudinal process whereby people come to think about their relationships with the organization with respect to value and goal congruence. Put differently, people are affectively committed when they agree with the organization’s values and goals. Therefore, the decrease of affective commitment might be explained by the change program itself. In the organization under study different change programs were introduced in the past years. Therefore, it might be that employees may not see the benefits of the current change program for the organization. Although they felt less attached to the particular change program after the audit, this does not mean that the employees are not willing to support organizational change in general. The internal audit interviews might contribute to the increase of employees’ awareness with regard to their skeptical ideas towards the current change program. This is supported by Herscovitch & Meyer (2002) who stated that even in the absence of commitment, people might be reluctant to resist a change unless they see it as having profound negative implications for themselves. In addition, employees indicated that they experienced augmented communication about the current change program. Communication is an essential element of change activities and a key to gaining people’s involvement, however it has to be effective. This also involves listening to people’s responses and reacting seriously upon them (Burnes, 2004). Employees might have had the feeling that their opinions were not heard. Due to the speed of change initiatives and the lack of communication they might have become indifferent towards the change.

In conclusion it can be said that both appreciative and traditional auditing yield a certain effect on employee’s willingness and commitment to change. However, appreciative auditing seems to be more effectively, since it has a larger effect on every aspect. In addition, the negative effect of appreciative auditing on continuance and normative commitment to change seems to be beneficial to the organization. Finally, the negative effect of appreciative auditing on affective commitment might be related to the employees’ attitude towards the content of the current organizational change program, since the employees are willing to change. In this way the audit might create a growing awareness of the program’s content and may alter the employees’ attitude.
STUDY 2

Method

Research setting. The second study was also conducted at the department of the local authority in the Netherlands. Part of the previous mentioned change program was the introduction of internal auditing. The second goal of the internal audit was to assess the progression of the organizational change program and to gather input for further management decisions with regard to the change program.

Study design. The appreciative and traditional audit methods were performed in the same manner as explained in study one. After the audit interviews were finished, the auditor’s observations from the audit interviews were summarized in an audit report, without reporting the auditor’s judgments or recommendations. Furthermore, a description of the audit procedure, the number of participants, and the goals of the audit were repeated. In contrast to the traditional audit report, the appreciative report included positive aspects of the audit process and behavior of participants such as: “The participants were enthusiastic to talk about their work”.

In order to assess the quality and usefulness of the final audit reports, four subject matter experts (SME) were interviewed. All SMEs were working within the organization at different positions. Three of them were managers, one was a highly educated employee with a financial background. They all had several years of work experience within the organization. The SMEs individually would be responsible for using the audit report and were familiar with and actively involved in the current organizational change program. They represented different groups in the organization, such as board members, change managers, middle managers, and senior employees. Therefore, they were perfectly suitable to assess the value of the resulting audit information.

Data collection. The resulting information from the reports was assessed by interviews with the SMEs. The SMEs were asked to assess the reports on three variables and their underlying criteria, which were explained and presented earlier in Table 3.

Reliability focused on whether the report was objective, recognizable, and gave a factual presentation.

Content focused on the goal achievement, insight in organizational coherence, and if efforts with regard to the achievement of goals were presented.

Usefulness focused on the presented improvement and follow up possibilities, whether the report was inspiring and practical.

One week before the interviews with the SMEs took place, the two final audit reports were send to the SMEs. A description of the variables and interview questions was included. The interviews had a
duration of approximately 60 minutes. During the interviews the expert opinions were recorded. An example of a question was: *Is the content of the report recognizable?* To quantify and illustrate the SMEs’ opinions, we asked them to grade the reports on the three variables from 1 – very poor to 10 – excellent. The interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

**Data analysis.** The SMEs’ answers on the interview questions were compared and analyzed by focusing on similarities and remarkable differences, which will be reported in the results. To illustrate these results, the reliability, content and usefulness of the audit reports were measured comparing the means and standard deviations of the SMEs’ grades.

**Results**

The grades assigned by the SMEs, their means and standard deviations are presented in Table 5.

**Reliability.** In the interviews with the SMEs we found that both the appreciative and the traditional auditing report were experienced as reliable. However, half of the SMEs preferred the traditional report, and half was indifferent and perceived both reports as equally reliable. Concerning the objectivity and factuality of the report the SMEs experienced the traditional audit report to be more clearly written in a compact and point by point manner. In addition, this report was experienced as more easy to read and more easy to apply. Consequently, the traditional report was experienced as objective and factual. In contrast, the appreciative audit report was experienced as biased. Most SMEs argued that because of its more narrative character and the focus on positive aspects and best practices, the appreciative report tended to be one-sided. In addition, the appreciative report included the qualitative aspect of the audit, since employees’ opinions and experiences were explicitly mentioned. This contributed to the fact that the appreciative audit report was evaluated as less reliable. Finally, most SMEs recognized the information presented in the reports from their current situations. However the traditional report tended to report more negative aspects of the organization, while the appreciative report tended to report more positive aspects.

**Content.** Similar to the reliability scale, the content of both methods was sufficient according to the SMEs. The audit’s goal was to gather information on the current state of the organization and on possible points of improvement and follow up actions for the future. First, the SMEs indicated that both reports achieved this goal to greater or lesser extent. However, most SMEs argued that the traditional report gave a clearer presentation of the current situation of the organization, for it enumerated the current organizational flaws and point for improvement more clearly. Contradictory, the appreciative audit gave more follow up improvements and instructions for the future. In addition, the appreciative audit report was experienced to give more coherence in organizational issues. This was primarily caused by its narrative character, and the linkages between subjects through examples of experiences from colleagues. Finally, the SMEs indicated that the efforts and realization of goals were more explicitly stated in the appreciative audit report. This was primarily caused by the examples and quotes given in the report.
Usefulness. Similar to the previous variables, the SMEs indicated that both audit reports were useful. However, most SMEs experienced the appreciative audit report as more useful. Although they found that the traditional audit report presented the points for improvement more clearly, because of the explicit and point to point writing style, the appreciative audit report gave more explicit follow up possibilities. The appreciative audit report stimulated the reader to think, and referred more to follow up possibilities such as: “a first step towards improvement is...”. These possibilities were invented by the audit participants and this added extra value to the appreciative audit report. In contrast, in the traditional audit report the reader had to think of own follow up possibilities. Furthermore, three SMEs experienced the appreciative audit report as significantly more inspiring. They indicated that it was easy and pleasant to read because of the narrative character, the positive examples, and quotes of colleagues. They stated that the appreciative audit was more communicative and gave more input for a positive and constructive dialogue in the organization. In contrast, all SMEs experienced the traditional report as being negative, which consequently developed a negative and defensive attitude. Most SMEs argued that meetings and actions following from the traditional audit report would be unpleasant and counterproductive. The results indicated that the appreciative audit report would be more useful for the organization, since it focused more on the future, provided follow up possibilities, stimulated positive and constructive dialogue, and was more inspiring.

TABLE 5
Subject Matter Experts’ Report Evaluation Grades, Means, and Standard Deviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>SME 1</th>
<th>SME 2</th>
<th>SME 3</th>
<th>SME 4</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TAR AAR</td>
<td>TAR AAR</td>
<td>TAR AAR</td>
<td>TAR AAR</td>
<td>TAR AAR</td>
<td>TAR AAR</td>
<td>TAR AAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>8 8 7 5</td>
<td>8 6.5 8 8</td>
<td>7.75 6.88</td>
<td>0.50 1.44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>7 8 7 5</td>
<td>6.5 8 7 8</td>
<td>6.88 7.25</td>
<td>0.25 1.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usefulness</td>
<td>6 8 6 5</td>
<td>7 8 8 8</td>
<td>6.75 7.25</td>
<td>0.96 1.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. TAR=Traditional Audit Report, AAR=Appreciative Audit Report.

Additional results. Some additional results were found during the interviews. First, all SMEs indicated that the appreciative audit report was more susceptible for personal interpretation. It was more difficult for the reader to distill the flaws and points of improvement for the organization, since the report was more narratively written and supported by positive quotes and examples. This might tempt the reader not to extract the negative aspects of the organization from the report. However, some SMEs indicated that this own interpretation may stimulate discussion and dialogue.

Moreover, as showed in Table 5, one SME gave the appreciative audit report remarkably low rates on all variables, which resulted in high standard deviations. This indicated that this person did not experience the appreciative audit report as valuable and useful. This particular SME experienced...
growing irritation during reading the report and considered to stop reading. This was primarily caused by the focus on positive aspects, while according to the SME other urgent (negative) aspects from the organization needed direct attention at the time. In addition, one SME argued that the preference for a report might be dependable on the individual and type of organization. The traditional method would be more suitable for a result driven organization, while the appreciative method would be more suitable for a coaching and learning organization.

Discussion

The second study aimed to investigate whether appreciative auditing leads to better and more useful information compared to traditional auditing. The results indicated that the appreciative audit does generate useful information for the organization. However, the results also indicated that the appreciative audit report does not lead per definition to better information compared to the traditional method.

First, concerning reliability the traditional report is regarded as superior to the appreciative audit report. This is primarily caused by the seemingly more accurate, objective and factual character of the traditional audit report and the narrative writing style of the appreciative audit report. Sawyer (1981) stated that accuracy implies, apart from objective observations, also refraining from puffing up that which is not relevant. Most SMEs recognized that the appreciative audit was more biased and one-sided. The positive aspects of the organization were exaggerated or received too much attention, which influenced the perceived reliability. Since the traditional audit report was perceived as more reliable, it is likely that its content is taken more serious. This increases the chances of becoming input in management decisions.

The appreciative audit report seems to be more useful for the purposes of gathering information on follow up possibilities to improve the organization, to provide valuable input for positive, constructive dialogue throughout the organization, and to inspire the organization’s members. This study shows that the appreciative audit report might create more coherence in the presentation of different organizational aspects and gives more follow up possibilities and suggestions on how the flaws of the organization can be improved. This supports the claim that appreciative auditing gives a more cohesive picture (Van de Wetering, 2007). In addition, the appreciative audit report is more likely to result in input for discussion and is expected to stimulate dialogue. This supports the argument that the appreciative audit report is more likely to become input in strategic decision making (Morris, 2008). In contrast, the traditional audit report seems to be more useful to assess the current situation of the organization. The traditional report is short, easy to read and sums up the discovered deficits in the organization. This provides the reader with a clear and list wise oversight of necessary points of improvement. However, possible solutions or follow up actions are not presented. In addition, since its focus is solely on deficits, the traditional report is likely to raise more defensive reactions and
negativism, which eventually may prevent organizations from reaping the best performance from its employees (Robert, Spreitzer, Dutton, Quinn, Heaphy & Barker, 2005).

Furthermore, in contrast to the traditional audit, the appreciative audit report’s perceived usefulness may be more suggestible to individual’s preferences and interpretation, and organizational culture. Although the anticipatory principle of AI states that positive images of the future leads to positive actions (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005), this is seemingly not the case in the present study. Our results showed that some people might even develop a negative attitude towards appreciative auditing. This might be explained by personal interpretation. The scope for interpretation is generally large in audit reports (Kempen & Kips, 1983) and the appreciative audit report is even more susceptible for personal interpretation. The reader needs to distill the points of improvements and deficits from the report, since these are not clearly stated. When from the individual’s perspective other negative aspects in the organization need emergent attention, this person might not be able to value the positive aspects of the organization. Others may consciously or unconsciously not detect or extract the organizational deficits from the audit report. Therefore, initially not every person may be able to effectively use and interpret the appreciative audit report. In addition, organizational culture may be important to consider when performing appreciative auditing. This can be further explained by looking at five different organizational perspectives highlighting different organizational characteristics, which are of influence on the realization of change, namely yellow-print thinking, blue-print thinking, red-print thinking, green-print thinking, and white-print thinking (De Caluwé & Vermaak, 2004). Further elaboration of these perspectives goes beyond the scope of this paper, however according to Van Nistelrooy, De Caluwé & Schouten (2007) auditing resembles the blue-print perspective, which is based on rational design and control processes. Therefore, people favoring this perspective may probably also favor the traditional audit report and method. On the other hand, the appreciative audit is likely to resemble the red-print and green-print thinking, which focus respectively on human resources (motivating employees) and learning. People who favor these perspectives probably also favor the appreciative audit.

In conclusion it can be said that appreciative auditing can result in valuable and useful information for the organization’s change project. The information from appreciative auditing is focused on future possibilities and is likely to stimulate positive dialogue and inspires people throughout the organization. However, the effectiveness of appreciative auditing seems to be dependent of the purposes, the individuals and organizational cultures. Therefore, to solely assess the current organizational situation and points of improvement, the traditional audit report seems to be more suitable. Traditional auditing is likely to be accepted by all organizational members since it is probably a more standard, familiar, and usual way.
GENERAL DISCUSSION

This thesis aimed to investigate the effectiveness of appreciative internal auditing compared to traditional internal auditing. We have found evidence that appreciative auditing is likely to have more effect on employees’ willingness and commitment to change. In addition, we found that appreciative auditing is likely to result in different output and that it might be more suitable for purposes focused on future possibilities and in specific organizational cultures.

These results make an important contribution to research in understanding and demonstrating the effects of AI in practice. Our studies indicate that AI is likely to be a valuable and effective way of realizing positive change. It seems that the positive and appreciative character of AI contributes to the development of a workforce that is willing to voluntary support organizational change. Furthermore, it can remove negative expressions of employee commitment. In addition, AI can gather valuable and useful information on points of excellence and future possibilities, which is likely to become input in corporate decisions. Therefore, these studies add support to the claim that AI may be an effective way of approaching change management (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

However, this thesis does not unconditionally support the use of AI in every type of organization. We found that successful application of AI may be dependable on individual preference and organizational culture. This supports Diepenmaat & Van der Woude (2007), who stated that AI may not be applicable in every organization, since some negative organizational cultures may not be compatible. In some cases AI may cause negative reactions. For example, when people have a negative attitude towards the organization and solely positive aspect are discussed during AI. Therefore, people may experience it as tedious.

LIMITATIONS

Some marginal notes towards the results of these studies are in place. First, the studies have been conducted at one organization within the public services sector. It is reasonable to expect that organizational culture and structure may have influenced the results. Second, the performed audit for these studies was the first audit conducted in the organization. Concerning willingness to change and commitment to change it might be possible that results are different after conducted multiple audits at the same organization, because employees will be more familiar with auditing. In addition, the sample size was sufficient, although rather small. Third, the results might be affected by organizational activities that took place between the audit interviews and the completion of the second questionnaire. In quasi-experimental studies it is difficult to totally exclude potential influencing factors from within the organization. However during the time of study no remarkable activities concerning the organizational change were introduced. Moreover, these studies focused solely on employees’ and managers’ intentions. Our studies showed that people confronted with appreciative inquiry had positive intentions and attitudes. However, the studies did not contribute to the understanding of the
relation between AI and actual positive behavior. Although it is likely that intention will lead to behavior (Metselaar, 1997). Finally, one remark can be made on the differences in gender and function (manager or employees) in the sample group. We did not distinguish between these variables, because in practice an audit must be able to assess the information from a randomly selected group of employees regardless gender and function. In addition, it is common to assess both managers and employees in audits in order to gather information from all levels in the organization. Concerning the appreciative audit, dissimilarity of groups does not have an effect on results since AI is based on storytelling and no special skills or technical language are necessary to take part (Wright & Baker, 2005).

Conclusion and further research

The current studies aided in highlighting the potential of AI and positive change. The studies make strong empirical contributions to research on appreciative auditing and in what ways it differs from traditional auditing. It showed that appreciative auditing yields more effect on employees’ willingness and commitment to change compared to traditional auditing. In addition, the studies showed that appreciative auditing is more useful in gathering information for future development, in stimulating dialogue, and in inspiring the members of the organization.

In order to further explore the effect of appreciative auditing and AI in general, several possibilities for further research can be suggested. First, it is necessary to conduct comparable research at different organizations in the private and public sector and with larger sample sizes to investigate if results can be generalized. Second, in order to assess the effect of multiple appreciative audits in organizations multiple measurements are necessary. Finally, further research is needed to investigate the actual behavior of employees with regard to appreciative auditing and to investigate to what extent the appreciative audit report information is used in strategic plans.

Practical implication

This research indicates that AI can be an effective approach towards organizational change. In particular, managers can use appreciative auditing to gather information on organizational processes and the progress of change programs, and simultaneously involve employees and create willingness to change. In addition, it may be useful for decreasing the negative associations of commitment to change, such as constraining costs and obligations. However, appreciative auditing may decrease affective commitment to change when organizations fail to develop value and goal congruence with individual employees. Furthermore, managers must carefully assess which purpose the internal audit needs to fulfill, since appreciative auditing is likely to be less effective in assessing the current situation. AI changes the organizational culture from a problem-solving towards a positive strengths-based culture. When change managers focus on the best practices of the organization, it is more likely that the organization differentiates from competitors. Furthermore, through a positive organizational culture, change can be reached more rapidly since members are more willing to support and participate
in the change. However, it seems important that organizations gradually introduce AI in their organization, since a sudden change of culture is likely to result in negative responses. Managers have to support and educate organizational members before and during the implementation of AI aspects to create a fully cooperative workforce and optimal effectiveness.
REFERENCES


Van Roekel, E. 2007. Stop met interne audit: De interne audit onder de loep. In J. Hamers, Bosscher & De Witte (Eds.), *Praktijkboek kwaliteitsmanagement voor zorginstellingen*: 8.4.4. Amsterdam: WEKA.


APPENDIX A

Items in Scales

For each scale in the questionnaire the original items are given in Dutch, supplemented by a translation in English. Items marked (*) were removed from the final data set for methodological reasons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dutch</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Willingness to change</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ik stop veel energie in de verandering om ervoor te zorgen dat hij succesvol verloopt</td>
<td>I put a lot of effort in the change to make it successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ik doe moeite om de doelen van de verandering te bewerkstelligen</td>
<td>I take effort to reach the change’s goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ik volg een ‘eerst maar eens aankijken’ strategie</td>
<td>I follow a “see first” strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met mijn collega’s praat ik niet over de verandering</td>
<td>I do not talk about the change with my colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commitment to change</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective commitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ik geloof in de waarde van deze verandering</td>
<td>I believe in the value of this change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deze verandering is een goede strategie voor deze organisatie</td>
<td>This change is a good strategy for this organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ik denk dat het management een fout begaat door deze verandering te introduceren*</td>
<td>I think that management is making a mistake by introducing this change*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deze verandering dient een belangrijk doel</td>
<td>This change serves an important purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Het zou beter gaan zonder deze verandering*</td>
<td>Things would be better without this change*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deze verandering is onnodig</td>
<td>This change is not necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance commitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ik heb geen andere keus dan mee te gaan met deze verandering</td>
<td>I have no choice but to go along with this change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ik voel druk om mee te gaan met deze verandering</td>
<td>I feel pressure to go along with this change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Er staat te veel op het spel om me tegen deze verandering te verzetten</td>
<td>I have to much at stake to resist this change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Het zou me te veel kosten om me tegen deze verandering te verzetten</td>
<td>It would be too costly for me to resist this change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Het is te risicovol om tegen deze verandering in te gaan</td>
<td>It would be risky to speak out against this change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weerstand bieden tegen deze verandering is geen optie voor mij</td>
<td>Resisting this change is not a viable option for me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Normative commitment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ik zou me niet slecht voelen als ik me tegen deze verandering zou verzetten*</td>
<td>I would not feel badly about opposing this change*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ik denk dat het niet goed van me is om tegen deze verandering in te gaan</td>
<td>I do not think it would be right of me to oppose this change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Het zou onverantwoordelijk zijn om tegen deze verandering in te gaan</td>
<td>It would be irresponsible of me to resist this change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ik zou me schuldig voelen als ik tegen deze verandering in zou gaan*</td>
<td>I would feel guilty about opposing this change*.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ik heb een plichtmatig besef om te werken naar deze verandering*</td>
<td>I feel a sense of duty to work toward this change*.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ik voel geen verplichting om deze verandering te ondersteunen*</td>
<td>I do not feel any obligation to support this change*.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Interview Question Subject Matter Experts

The original questions are formulated in Dutch, supplemented by an English translation.

Verschillen tussen rapportages/differences between reports
Wat zijn de meest opmerkelijke verschillen tussen beide rapportages?/what are the most remarkable differences between both reports?

Vragen per rapportage/questions per report
Kenmerken rapportage/characteristics report

• Hoe zou je het taalgebruik van de rapportage kenmerken?/hoe would you characterize the use of language of the reports?
• Welke focus heeft de rapportage volgens jou?/what is the focus of the report?
• Worden er geen waardeoordelen en gevolgtrekkingen gegeven?/Are no judgments or consequences given?

Betrouwbaarheid van de rapportage/report reliability

• Wat kun je zeggen over de betrouwbaarheid van rapportage?/what can you say about the reliability of the report?
• Is de inhoud van de rapportage herkenbaar?/is the content of the report recognizable?
• Wordt er in de rapportage een feitelijke weergave gegeven van de huidige stand van zaken?/Does the report give factual information on the current situation of the organization?
• Heb je de indruk dat de rapportage onpartijdig is en dat er eerlijke informatie gegeven wordt zonder sociaal wenselijk te zijn?/Do you have the impression that the report is objective and that fair information is given without being social desirable?
• Geef de betrouwbaarheid van de rapportage een cijfer van 1 tot 10: ……./give the report’s reliability a grade from 1 to 10.

Content van de rapportage/content of the report

• In hoeverre is het doel van de audit bereikt gezien deze rapportage?/How is the goal of the audit reached regarding this report?
• Geeft de rapportage meer inzicht in de samenhang tussen problemen in de organisatie?/Does the report give more insight in the coherence of organizational problems?
• Wordt de realisatie van inhoudelijke doelen en welke inspanningen daarvoor geleverd zijn gemeld?/Does the report give the realization of goals and which efforts were needed to do so?
• Geef het resultaat van de rapportage een cijfer van 1 tot 10: ……./give the report's content a grade from 1 to 10.

Nut van de rapportage/report usefulness

• Op welke manier zie je verbeteringsmogelijkheden terug in de rapportages?! How do you see possibilities for improvement mentioned in the report?
• Biedt de rapportage mogelijkheden voor vervolgstappen aan?!Does the report offers possibilities for follow up?
• Wordt je geïnspireerd door de rapportage?!Are you inspired by the report?
• Hoe ervaar je de bruikbaarheid van de informatie uit de audit?!How do you experience the usability of the report?
• Geef het nut van de rapportage een cijfer van 1 tot 10: …. /give the report’s usefulness a grade from 1 to 10.