Research Proposal for the Application of Positive Psychology in Training Trainers

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MBA 5652 – Research Methods

Dr. Jensen
Abstract

“From 2002 through 2009, the Center for Dependable Strengths (CDS) trained nearly a thousand people to facilitate the Dependable Strengths Articulation Process (DSAP) (Center for Dependable Strengths).” Evaluations from these training sessions showed that 9 out of 10 trainees saw value in the process. However, the evaluation did not ask where the training contained areas of improvement. This research proposal seeks to prove that the omission of positive psychology theory in the instruction of the Job Magnet Tool causes trainers in training to drop the component from future training.

This research proposal will (1) determine which trainees experienced a negative response during their training sessions, (2) identify which trainees chose to omit the Job Magnet Tool from future presentations, and (3) Compare the frequency of omissions between those with a negative experience to those who received positive reactions from the Job Magnet Tool. The research also seeks to use these comparisons to justify a request for a change in program delivery methods of the Dependable Strengths Institute to ensure credibility when advertising the benefits of training using positive psychological methods.
Research Proposal for the Application of Positive Psychology in Training Trainers

Introduction

Education for some is a far reaching endeavor. In its most basic form in the United States, a person is encouraged to attend at least 13 years of school. Traditional students leave the educational system in their late teens and either embark on an educational or career pathway. But even as adults they encounter many opportunities for learning. College bound students opt for four or more years in the classroom, whereas others seek employment. Many organizations employ corporate trainers or Human Resources professionals to conduct short training activities in the form of orientations or job skills training. Even today’s unemployed adults are exposed to educational opportunities in local employment offices or from public assistance agencies.

In any of these face to face scenarios, a trainer, teacher or facilitator is needed. The Trainer’s role in educating adults can encompass many different areas including encouraging growth, assisting adults with problems, preparing adults for current or future work activities or assisting organizations with achieving change (Caffarella, 2002). Trainers are viewed by program participants as subject matter experts. As such, the trainer has a responsibility to create a learning environment that will ensure success for adult learners. Trainers should also be familiar with major principles of adult learning such as:

- Adults are not likely to willingly engage in learning unless the learning is meaningful to them
- Adults are more receptive to the learning process in situation that are both physical and psychologically comfortable
- Adults are pragmatic in their learning and want to apply their learning to present situations.
All adults learn have different learning styles, but Caffarella suggests a few key points when creating instructional plans including, “be flexible with your presentation, plans and techniques (Caffarella, 2002)” and “Recognize that emotions play an important part in the learning process (Caffarella, 2002).” With these few key concepts in mind we review the training program which certifies facilitators for the Dependable Strengths Articulation Process (DSAP) delivered by the Dependable Strengths Institute.

The DSAP Facilitator Training is an 18 hour workshop designed to train others to deliver the DSAP to others. The Facilitator Training involves a number of components and activities which, when performed by participants, will elicit positive results in defining personal strength characteristics and assist with the attainment of employment.

The Dependable Strengths (DS) Program was created by Bernard Haldane as a result of more than fifty years of research and work in the field of career counseling. Many of the concepts and activities are based on the theory of Positive Psychology. The training is organized so that aspiring facilitators spend their first day as participants and their subsequent days using the training manual to learn how to deliver the program. Therefore, no participant in any Dependable Strengths workshop will ever be asked to perform a task that the facilitator has not previously completed. This training style is intentional to further lend credibility of the program to participants. But what if a component of the training is not met with a positive response? Will future facilitators choose to omit crucial training because they are not comfortable with how they learned the process? This research proposal seeks to answer the question of whether negative learning activities have an effect on the choice to repeat the training for future participants.
Problem Statement

The Dependable Strengths Training (DS) for facilitators includes a Job Magnet component which requires trainees to enter a job market situation in order to find job leads or contacts. This activity is the culmination of the entire training program and includes the use of all new competencies learned. This activity is also considered a high-stress activity for some participants because it mandates leaving the safety of the training environment and applying the knowledge without any option for feedback.

The Dependable Strengths Institute performs facilitator training sessions a few times each year. These sessions are delivered in one of the three DS Regional Offices in Washington, Maryland and Oregon. The Washington training is held on the campus of the University of Washington. When trainees are given the job magnet, they are required to test the tool on the college’s campus which is not an acceptable job market substitute. As a result of the college demographics, trainees are given a skewed perception of how well the job magnet works. This negative response to the training affects the credibility of the program and causes trainers to alter the format to stay within their comfort zone.

Rational For Research

The Dependable Strengths Training (DS) for facilitators includes a Job Magnet component which requires trainees to enter a job market situation in order to find job leads or contacts. This activity is the culmination of the entire training program and includes the use of all new competencies learned. This activity is also considered a high-stress activity for some
participants because it mandates leaving the safety of the training environment and applying the knowledge without any option for feedback.

The Dependable Strengths Institute performs facilitator training sessions a few times each year at three DS Regional Offices in Washington, Maryland and Oregon. The Washington training is held on the campus of the University of Washington. When trainees are given the job magnet, they are only given the option of using it in the college campus environment. However, a college campus is not an acceptable job market substitute. As a result of the college demographics, trainees are given a skewed perception of how well the job magnet works. For instance 40% of my group had negative responses to the use of the tool.

This study intends to show that program participants who are learning to become Dependable Strengths facilitators are as much in need of positive outcomes as their future program participants. When faced with program activities that have negative results, trainers in training will experience discomfort. This level of discomfort will cause the trainer in training to choose to omit the negatively experienced task from future training delivery. However, program participants who experience positive results from assigned tasks are likely to choose to offer the task to future program participants.

By proving that positive learning environments produce trainers who are more willing to use the concepts learned, this research will be able to provide proof to an established institute that improvements are needed in areas of the training program and manual. Resulting changes to the program curriculum will then occur with future training participants.

The inclusion of a training component which is viewed negatively, affects the credibility of the Institute and affects the positive flow of learning for the trainees. The Dependable Strengths Articulation Process was developed with the inclusion of the Job Magnet Tool. If
future trainers omit this component from their training, they are then delivering an incomplete program as advertised by the Dependable Strengths Institute.

**Statement of the Research Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to identify whether trainees of the DSAP Facilitator training experienced negative results from a specific part of the training class, and if the negative results altered their future training programs. The facilitator training manual and program for the Dependable Strengths Articulation Process has been developed around the concept of using positive psychology in the classroom to provide better results for workshop participants who will leave the program and progress to a job search task.

The DSAP Facilitator Training was created so that social workers and employee specialists could learn the material, see the effectiveness of the material, and then be more likely to mirror and adopt the same strategies when teaching and modeling it to their participants. Hence, if program trainees are presented with a training situation that is negative, they will choose to alter their training methods from the original format.

Graduates of the program will complete a questionnaire to determine their emotional responses to the training components and the actions that followed. A comparison will be made between those with a positive or negative response to the training.

**Hypothesis**

The use of Positive Psychology is at the core of Dependable Strengths training; whether for participants or training trainers. The research will show that due to a lapse in the use of positive psychology and program planning when delivering train-the-trainer sessions,
respondents are negatively impacted during the instruction and use of the job search magnet tool, and therefore unwilling to complete or deliver this component of the curriculum due to a negative opinion of the benefits of the job magnet module.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this research, the following definitions of terms will apply.

1. **Positive Psychology** – The scientific study and promotion of well-being and optimal functioning for all individuals (Sniders, 2006).

2. **Dependable Strengths Articulation Process** - an intervention that increases a person’s self-esteem and motivation to achieve, and responsible behavior (Boivin-Brown & Haldane, 2009).

3. **Job Magnet Tool** – A written process used by job seekers. It includes a script and directions for use in the field.

**Summary**

The research will show that positive psychology methods for training are as important for participants of a program as they are for the trainers-in-training. Creating an atmosphere where positive psychological experiences can be modeled and experienced is necessary for trainer buy-in and will ensure that future delivery of the program will occur as written and intended by the Dependable Strengths Institute.
Positive Psychology: Let’s Get Happy

It’s no secret that happiness is important to many of us. In fact, Greek Philosopher Aristotle once said, “Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence.” Centuries later, psychologists have sought to study happiness and its effects. In 1998 the field of Positive Psychology emerged. Positive psychology is “based on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling loves and enhance their life experiences (Sniders, 2006)” This area of psychology focuses on eleven areas of traits and qualities. Many of these are addressed in the Facilitator Training for the Dependable Strengths Articulation Process including, optimism, hope, resilience, creativity, flow and peak experiences, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. “Positive psychology helps individuals recognize and build their major strengths in these areas (Sniders, 2006).”

Although it was not established as a true “field” of study until 1998, positive psychology theories and the study of its effects have been around for many years. It was this commitment to the pursuit of happiness that led Bernard Haldane to dedicate his life’s work to creating the Dependable Strengths process and tools for using it in the job search. One unique area of positive psychology suggests that “engagement and meaning provide the most significant contributions to happiness (Sniders, 2006).” With this in mind the Dependable Strengths Articulation Process Training Program was designed to provide engagement to trainees as well as provide personal meaning and rewards to those who completed the training. Therefore, a focus on “positive” experiences will be crucial for any training participant.
Helping Adults Apply What They Learn

In this article Alan Knox discusses the idea that “adults tend to be more open to changes they perceive as desirable and more resistant to changes they perceive as undesirable (Knox, 1988).” This may seem a simple statement, but it is of crucial importance to a trainer. Unlike children who are forced into a learning environment (school classrooms) where they are to listen and be attentive, adults as learners approach learning and their trainers with the burning question of what’s in it for them. Knox notes that “Identifying and dealing with resistance to change can help trainers become more effective in helping adults learn (Knox, 1988).” In order to complete the Dependable Strengths Articulation Process Facilitator Training, participants were given a surprise activity which required each person to travel into an unfamiliar location and perform an activity. The participants are given minimal exposure to the intricacies of the activity and asked to have faith and be optimistic when trying the activity.

This directive is met with high resistance because of barriers including shyness and mobility barriers. Knox states that for effective learning to occur, trainers must work to identify this resistance and seek to minimize it before assigning the task. For the purposes of this research, it is important to note that traditional articles in Training and Development journals as well as the belief in the benefits of positive psychology recommend exposing program participants to positive, strengths-based activities and avoiding those which will meet resistance. If this is not an option, then it is suggested that trainers have alternatives in place to help reduce resistance.
Facilitators and Outcomes of Student Engagement in a College Setting

This article in the Journal of Psychology is especially important to this research because of its emphasis on getting facilitators to use positive psychology techniques such as “creating flow” to ensure engagement of learners. Although it was a review of a college setting, it can also be applied to adult learners in other educational settings including the DSAP Facilitator Training.

The term flow is defined as “the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement (Fullager & Steele, 2009).” Flow requires a balance between challenges that are found within a task, and the current skills that are needed to meet the challenges. In other words, a trainer should set up an activity that will not be too hard (and would cause stress) or too easy (and would cause boredom). This state of absorption in a task provides motivation to the learner. But there are other components of flow which will affect whether a learner becomes motivated.

“Autonomy refers to the degree to which the individual has independent discretion in determining the pace and process of the task (Fullager & Steele, 2009).” This is an important piece for trainers to provide. In their hypothesis, Fullager and Steele posit that “an instructor’s support for autonomy is positively and significantly related to the experience of flow among students (Fullager & Steele, 2009).” If flow is a component of positive psychology, and autonomy is needed to ensure flow, then it is reasonable to say that a training program which seeks to promote positive psychology would need to provide autonomy to its participants. In the case of the DSAP Facilitator Training, participants are not given the autonomy to decide the location of their Job Magnet Tool activity. This lack of autonomy impedes the process of positive psychology in the learning environment.

The Dependable Strengths Articulation Process (DSAP) is a training program which is hailed as an “intervention that increases a person’s self-esteem and motivation to achieve, and responsible behavior (Boivin-Brown & Haldane, 2009).” There are 62 steps in the process, which is based on the research and life experiences of Bernard Haldane. The training uses facilitation, small group activities and individual tasks and has extremely high ratings from graduates of the course. “Evaluations over the last ten years show that over 90 percent of the participants claim that the DSAP made them feel renewed, more hopeful, more cooperative with others, and more self-confident (Boivin-Brown & Haldane, 2009).” But when reviewing the evaluation forms for participants of the program, an option is not given to respond to any negative experiences which may have occurred (Appendix G). Although a focus on positive experiences is beneficial for training participants, those who are learning to teach the process need an arena in which to question the methods and activities as well as receive time to process new ideas and items learned.

An activity called the Job Search Magnet is part of the DSAP training and involves travelling into the community to perform a task. In one training group, 40 percent of those who completed the task reported negative experiences from using the tool. No further discussion or response was given by the trainers except to focus on the 60 percent who had a favorable experience. This is a significant number of failures of this tool. At the end of the training session participants were asked to discuss how they planned to implement the DSAP training in their own work environments. More than 40 percent noted that they would not choose to use the Job Magnet Tool. With such an emphasis on positive outcomes, it was disappointing to see no discussion or option for feedback on this questionable activity.
A Summary of Selected Positive Psychology Literature Supporting Strengths-Articulation

“When the focus of your attention is directed to your own strengths or the strengths of another person, you are almost sure to be positive in your approach (Forster, 2005). Gerald Forster has worked in the field of positive psychology, specifically with Dependable Strengths for more than 20 years. As a professor emeritus from the University of Washington, Dr. Forster has written dozens of articles and conducted studies of the effects of focusing on strengths in order to create happier people. In this summary, Dr. Forster reviews the many areas of study in which positive psychology has had an effect including, optimistic advantage, flow, subjective well-being and a focus on strengths. In one paragraph, Dr. Forster notes the many benefits of strengths based training.

“Studies of strengths-based development show significant impact on valued outcomes in educational and workplace settings. In the workplace, strengths-based development appeared to have a direct impact on employee engagement. Focusing on strengths also impacted other positive psychological measures such as hope, subjective well-being, and confidence. Many of the studies reported in this chapter show that the strengths-based practices caused changes in the behavior of subjects. This is different from many of the studies of optimism, hope and happiness, which are correlational in design. These studies indicate that behavior can be changed by focusing on strengths. (Forster, 2005)”

With the DSAP Facilitator Training, participants are given training using these strengths based methods in an attempt to change behaviors. This research study seeks to determine if a
negative response in the training process prevents a change in behavior. With so much emphasis on the ability to help people through positive experiences, it seems questionable that the creators of this training would choose to keep an activity in place that has a history of negative performance.

**Methodology**

This non-experimental research project is a form of descriptive research. Descriptive research is “used to describe the current state of affairs at the time of the study (Salkind, 2009).” In this case the research is determining how many current Dependable Strengths Facilitators are using the Job Magnet Tool in their training programs. A control group will not be needed. A questionnaire will be used to survey the attitudes and chart the results of previous activities. Open and closed ended questions will be used in addition to opinion survey questions. Less than fifty participants will be contacted, and each is required to be a graduate of the DSAP Facilitator Training Program.

**Participants**

Participants in this research project will consist of persons who completed the DSAP Facilitator Training. The Dependable Strengths Institute requires that all facilitators report the results of each training session performed. The data is kept on a password protected webpage accessible only by graduates of the program. Current date range for the participant pool is August, 2006 to January 2010.
Research Design, Instrumentation and Data Collection Plans

Data collection will begin with obtaining access to the list of potential research participants. This list is stored on the website of the Dependable Strengths Institute’s website and is password protected. Further contact with the Institute will be needed in order to obtain contact information for the program graduates. Once received, contact will be made with the participants to explain the purpose of the project and ask for their cooperation. The second step of the process will include creating the questionnaire and distributed via email, or paper mail as needed. A letter of permission will also be included in this email.

Results will be emailed back to the researcher and analyzed. Proposed analysis will look for direct or positive correlations to the question “if more people experience negative results from the Job Magnet Tool, then more people will choose to omit the training from their future programs.” The questionnaire will be created using free software from the website www.surveymonkey.com. This software will allow the researcher to track who had completed the questionnaire, and will also compile the data for analysis.

Proposed Analysis of Data

Expected results from this research include the proof that training participants who did not have a positive experience with the Job Magnet Tool will not provide training of this tool to their program participants. Variables in this project include, (1) the location of the training, (2) if trainees completed a Job Magnet Activity, (3) whether positive or negative experiences occurred during the Job Magnet activity, (4) whether the tool was delivered in future training sessions.
Decision criteria will be based on two variables; whether positive or negative experiences occurred and if the tool was delivered in future trainings. Additional variables will be compared to see if any correlations are found between negative experiences and location of training.

The comparisons of these results will be used to establish predictive validity. If training participants do not like an activity, they will choose not to repeat it. Reliability of this study will occur if the outcomes (future training of the Job Magnet) are the items being questioned (does a negative experience cause one to refrain from teaching?).

**Implications and Limitations**

**Implications**

The sample population for this research project is a unique group since everyone has completed DSAP Facilitator Training. However, certain assumptions are being made in order to complete this research including the assumption that all DSAP Facilitator Training graduates would deliver training in the future whether a positive or negative experience occurred. The validity of the instrument’s (questionnaire) ability to measure the desired variables rests solely on the idea that a negative response to a training variable would be the sole reason for omitting the training in the future. The questionnaire does not provide options for respondents to note that they did not teach the Job Magnet Tool due to time or budget restrictions. It is assumed that respondents will be willing to answer the questionnaire truthfully since confidentiality will be maintained, and personal information is not needed for this project; only opinions.
Limitations

It is possible that some respondents will choose not to complete the survey. Responses may also indicate other reasons why changes were made to program delivery methods. There will be no limitations on finding participants, because as a trained facilitator, I have access to the records of all who have completed the training for the past 5 years.
Appendix A

Time Schedule

The estimated time for this project is less than 3 months. The creation of electronic materials, and the distribution of surveys is expected to take less than 10 hours to complete, however, time must be factored for late returns of surveys, invalid emails or other contact information, and the estimated limitation of conducting a survey to international respondants. Traditional mail systems may need to be utilized and time must also be allowed for the analysis and creation of the report of results. Participants in the research project are estimated to need less than one hour to complete the survey.
Appendix B

Personnel

This small scale research project will only require the use of one researcher who will create, distribute, analyze and report on the surveys. Additional services may be needed from outside vendors including postal workers and employees of printing facilities. Costs for these additional personnel have been estimated and are included in the project budget (Appendix C).
Appendix C

Budget

Costs for this research project will be low since the entire project can be completed by one researcher with Internet, Email, and telephone access. The following items are estimates derived from the author’s current monthly Internet and cellular bills. A capped hourly rate is given as well.

Total Cost Projected $1,710.00

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Appendix D

Resources

A number of resources will be required for this research process, but they are not unique and should be easily available. Tangible items include a computer with word processing software, Internet access, and an email account. An additional account from Survey Monkey will be used. This free software allows people to create surveys and questionnaires and then stores and compiles the data or analysis. Access to the Center for Dependable Strengths online database will also be required. This online database contains the names and contact information for the prospective project participants. Access to this database can only be obtained by graduates of the Facilitator Program. I am a graduate of this program.

Additional resources that may be required include telephone and long distance access and the ability to print and mail hard copy documents to any participants who cannot be reached via email or telephone.
Appendix E

Needed Assurances / Clearances

Columbia Southern University
Department of Business Administration
Research Methods Class – Dr. Jensen
Student Researcher: Tiffany Williams

December 5, 2011

Dear _______________________

My name is Tiffany Williams and I am a graduate student in the Department of Business Administration at Columbia Southern University in Orange Beach, Alabama. I am currently enrolled in a class on Research Methods and am required to create a research proposal based on an area of interest.

Earlier this year I completed the facilitator training for Dependable Strengths at the University of Washington. As a result of my experience I have decided to complete a research project on the job magnet portion of the facilitator training. During my training, our group encountered barriers to the job magnet process. I am asking for other facilitator graduates to complete a short questionnaire about their experiences so that I may create options which will enhance the training process.

All inquiries and responses to the questionnaire will be kept in complete confidence. Copies of the report and program suggestions will be provided to all participants once they have been received by the college and the Center for Dependable Strengths Master Trainer Board. If you would like additional information about this project, please contact me by phone or email. Thank you for your willingness to assist with this research.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Williams
Phone: (***)-****
Email: Twilliams@clar.edu

Please reply to this email address and note in the subject line,

Permission Granted for Your Research
Or
I Do Not Wish To Participate In This Research Project
Appendix F

Questions for the Questionnaire

Date of DSAP Training

Location of DSAP Training   WA   OR   MD   Other

Did you complete training on the Job Magnet Tool?   Yes   No

Did you practice the Job Magnet Tool in the field (outside of the classroom)? Yes   No

Where did you use to Job Magnet Tool?

   Campus   Mall   Neighborhood   Business   Other

Did you choose the location(s) for your Job Magnet Activity?   Yes   No

Please provide the results of your Job Magnet Activity.

   Contacts Made   0   1   2   More than 2

   Type of Contact(s)   Student   Person at Work   Business Owner/Manager

   Unknown   Other

Number of Job Offers   

   Did your contact(s) read your report or offer to take a copy of the report?   Yes   No

Would you rate your experience using the Job Magnet Tool as... Positive   Negative

Would the choice of location have changed your opinion about the Job Magnet Tool? _____

How Many DSAP sessions have you facilitated since your certification? ____________

Do you teach the job magnet tool in your sessions?   Yes   No
Appendix G

DSAP Instructor Training Evaluation Form

_This training for DSA Instructors has:_  
*Very Much*  
*Some*  
*Not Sure*

Helped me understand the DSA process.

Prepared me for planning and implementing the DSA process.

Helped me clarify and articulate my own Dependable Strengths.

Given me new ideas about how to help others find work.

Helped me learn new things about myself.

Been a valuable experience for me.

**What would you say to a friend who asks, “What happened at that DSA Training?”**

Thinking back over the FULL five-day workshop, what TWO things have been most helpful in preparing you to lead DS with your constituents?

**Comments:**
References


http://www.dependablestrengths.org/assets/documents/field_work.pdf


