WHAT ARE THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES RESULTING FROM THE RESPECTIVE APPLICATIONS OF MARKETING THEORY AND APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY TO NONPROFIT ORGANISATION PRIMARY ACTIVITY – AND DO THE DIFFERENCES MATTER?

Ian Bruce¹, Hanna Nel²

¹Cass BS, City University London, London, United Kingdom, ²University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

Good intentions exist in abundance, but converting these into effective action has proved problematic. Two theoretical frameworks used increasingly by nonprofits to implement “doing good” are marketing theory and appreciative inquiry (AI).

Marketing applied to nonprofit activity was first proposed by Kotler and Levy in 1969. A simple definition of nonprofit marketing suitable for nonprofits is “meeting customer needs within the objectives of the organisation” (Bruce 1996 and 2009). More sophisticated ones have been proposed by Kotler and Andreasen; Lovelock and Weinberg; and Sargeant.

Appreciative Inquiry was developed by Cooperrider and colleagues at Case Western Reserve University, Ohio in the 1980s. A simple understanding of AI is that as a theory and application, it builds on people’s strengths (or assets) and encourages them to co-construct and deliver actions that will satisfy their dreams (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Appreciative Inquiry attempts to strengthen community members’ coping skills, bolster their potential, and negate the difficulties they experience (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2008; Mathie & Cunningham, 2002).

At first sight the two approaches have similarities: they focus on people’s views; they cluster people into segments; they regard people’s wishes as key guides to action; and they see people as co-constructers of the actions which arise. However they are very different in that marketing starts from people’s needs (AI from their strengths); from an assumption of dependency (AI from competence/independence); from an exogenous approach (AI from an endogenous one); from largely top down (AI from bottom up); and from people as recipients (AI as collaborators or partners).

When looking at practical experience, are these differences real or imagined? If they are real do they produce different results? And if they produce different results, do people mind or are people equally satisfied? Do both approaches lead to equally sustainable activities?

These questions are being explored through four in-depth case studies: two in England where marketing theory has been applied (one a grant giving trust in Bourne in Lincolnshire with a rural catchment and the other a national nonprofit serving blind people); and two in South Africa where AI has been applied, both in Soweto township, south from Johannesburg. One organisation is Age-in-Action, focusing on aged people, and the other organisation is a community-based organisation providing home-based services to HIV/AIDS sufferers and their families.

A qualitative approach was utilised with a semi-structured interview schedule. In depth interviews were conducted with different role-players at different levels of the organisations and in different relationship with the organisations. So far there are indications of real differences of perception of the processes, arising from the differential assumptions
(particularly of dependence/independence); which, in turn, impact on how the results are perceived by the people involved.

REFERENCES


Kretzmann, JP and McKnight, JL (1993). Building communities from the inside out: A path toward mobilizing a community’s assets. Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research: Northwestern University, Evanston, IL.


