POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR →→

ACCENTUATING THE POSTITIVE AT WORK

EDITED BY

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Preface

Positive Organizational Behavior has a broad reach, from past organizational research streams buried deep by business school ideology, through the present with its pressing needs and emergent opportunities, to the positive institutions that the future can hold – if we act upon POB's principles.

POB reanimates a substratum of organizational research's ancient history. A long time ago, before business schools were the primary producers of social science research on organizations, personal growth, interpersonal connection, and worker–employer mutuality were some of organizational research's central themes. Consider Harry Levinson's notion of the psychological contract, as a mutual arrangement meeting deep-seated individual and collective needs; Chris Argyris's focus on authenticity and learning in developing functional interpersonal and organizational relationships; and Douglas McGregor's constructive view of leadership as partnership between managers and workers. To these three scholars, and many of their contemporaries, human growth and betterment were *de rigueur* in an effective organization. The ensuing years witnessed a change in the implicit model of effective organizations guiding scholarly thinking. Recent organizational research has reflected its business school context, falling more closely in line with traditional economic and financial notions of firm performance. The positive psychology movement, of which this book is a part, provides impetus for organizational behavior to revitalize the concern for human growth and relational mutuality as a mainstay of effective organizing.

Growth and mutuality are human needs of special import in our own times. The re-emergence of this line of inquiry is a healing reaction to the averse, often traumatic experiences to which global organizations have exposed many employees and their families. Individual growth, compelling future, and a just and supportive workplace are the anchors of a positive organization, features which contrast with those typically found in firms focused narrowly on stock holder interests at the expense of other constituents. Principles for designing positive workplaces may be especially valuable in helping to rehabilitate contemporary firms whose erstwhile strategies have left the workforce physically, emotionally, and economically depleted.

POB may also be about the future, leading to the design of new ways of organizing. As the colleagues who joined forces to write this book make

clear, POB points the way for designing work settings that play to people's strengths, where people can be both their best selves and at their best with each other. By combining positive psychology with an organizational perspective, this book helps make the principles of positive psychology actionable.

Denise M. Rousseau

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION AND FRAMEWORKS

1

Positive Organizational Behavior: An Inclusive View

Debra L. Nelson and Cary L. Cooper

> The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.
>
> *Marcel Proust (1871–1922)*

Moving away from a disease and dysfunction model to a new look at the world of work with a focus on positive attributes of people and organizations means looking at organizational behavior in a new light. Martin Seligman and his colleagues (cf. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) called for positive psychology, defined as a science of positive subjective experience. They acknowledged that psychology's early emphasis on the negative was a product of history, and was appropriate for its time. Still, they noted that individuals rose to challenges in traumatic times and that they retained their integrity and purpose. Characteristics such as courage and optimism seemed to buffer individuals from the negative consequences of traumatic experiences. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi included in positive psychology's mission the need to focus on both human strengths and positive institutions.

Fred Luthans (Luthans, 2002a, 2000b) pioneered the positive approach in organizational behavior by mapping out positive organizational behavior (POB), with its focus on building human strengths at work rather than only managing weaknesses. Luthans recommended that POB researchers study psychological states that could be validly measured, and that are malleable in terms of interventions in organizations to improve work performance. Luthans proposed that states such as hope, confidence and resiliency meet these criteria.

Kim Cameron and his colleagues (Cameron et al., 2003) championed the emerging area of positive organizational scholarship (POS), which calls for the study of what goes right in organizations, including an emphasis on identifying human strengths, producing resilience and restoration, fostering vitality, and cultivating extraordinary individuals. The POS movement

seeks to understand human excellence and exceptional organizational performance. 'Positive deviance', defined as the process by which individuals and organizations flourish and prosper in extraordinary ways, is encompassed within POS.

This collection represents the best work of many travelers on the voyage toward a more positive view of organizational life. In reviewing the contributions to this volume, we were struck by the variance in the many perspectives and points of view, and the many agendas within the field. Some chapters use positive psychology as their point of departure; some use Luthans' perspective on POB; and still others use POS. We welcome this variance and strongly believe that it enriches the whole domain of positive organizational research. We see no need for a fixed or narrow identity for POB. There is room for a host of players and contributors who can elevate the study of the positive to its rightful place in organizational behavior. In fact, like Diener (2003), we hope that sometime in the future POB will be fully developed and absorbed within organizational behavior (OB) such that both positive and negative are studied in a balanced way.

Meanwhile, challenges await us. Foremost among these is determining what is positive. We take an inclusive view, and believe that there is room for the study of positive states, traits and processes within POB. Another issue is this: should we limit ourselves to the study of only positive outcomes? Although positive outcomes have been understudied and deserve emphasis, we call for a balanced view. Positive states, traits and processes should be studied in their own right, but again, not at the expense of the negative (Lazarus, 2003). Some positive states, for example, taken to the extreme, could result in negative consequences. In addition, the role of valence must be explored. What is positive to one person may be experienced as negative by another individual. Inseparable from valence is the importance of the social context, which shapes the individual's experiences, both positive and negative. We also need to know more about the simultaneous existence of some positive and negative variables, and their interplay. Positive states, traits and processes that prevent or buffer negative outcomes should legitimately be a part of POB research. Are we advocating abandonment of the study of dysfunction and suffering at work? Absolutely not. It's a necessary and vital part of OB to understand, resolve and prevent negative outcomes. We are merely suggesting that the positive side be given equal time, which is essential for a more fully integrated domain of organizational behavior.

In this pursuit, concerns about scientific rigor become paramount. These concerns are not unique to POB; however, they warrant careful attention. Measurement issues must be attended to. Although the above-mentioned variance in the field is positive, it brings with it a caution. We need to ensure that we are defining and measuring these variables appropriately and consistently so that we all may understand the impact of our results. Multiple levels of analysis are essential as we endeavor to stake out

the domain of optimal individual, group and organizational functioning. Processes take place over time and demand that we employ longitudinal designs.

The contributions to this volume represent the variance in POB and speak to the challenges that POB researchers face. The first section of this book, consisting of this chapter along with three others, presents broad and over-arching works that show the breadth of applications from the positive movement.

- Fred Luthans, Carolyn Youssef and Bruce Avolio put forth their description of psychological capital (PsyCap), which consists of the states confidence/efficacy, hope, optimism and resiliency. They further provide guidance as to how the four PsyCap components can be developed and managed in organizations to foster enhanced performance and competitive advantage.
- Jim Quick and Marilyn Macik-Frey investigate the current state-of-the-science-and-practice concerning healthy, productive work by examining the attributes of healthy individuals and organizations, and by analyzing the current dominant models. They expand the POB arena by introducing individual traits and interpersonal processes into the dialogue. Specifically, they propose interpersonal interdependence and communication competence as critically important factors in studying healthy, productive work.
- Bret Simmons and Debra Nelson present the Holistic Model of Stress, which accentuates the positive form of stress (eustress) and provides a more comprehensive view of the stress experience, including both positive and negative stress responses and consequences. They introduce the concept of savoring eustress as a contrast to coping with distress, and call for research on eustress generation; that is, ways to enhance the pleasurable and motivating aspects of stress at work. Their chapter illustrates the way that the positive movement can bring about a more balanced perspective (positive and negative) to the study of stress, which has consistently focused on the negative.

The second section of the book, which focuses on positive states, traits and processes, highlights the inclusive perspective we advocate by encompassing a wide range of variables reflecting the diversity within positive organizational research.

- Neal Ashkanasy and Claire Ashton-James outline how organizations can engender positive emotion, a necessary precondition for positive organizational behavior. Their multi-level model of emotion includes neuropsychological and cognitive correlates of positive emotion, individual differences, communication of positive emotion, promulgation of

positive emotion within groups and creation of positive emotional climates in organizations.

- Gretchen Spreitzer and Kathleen Sutcliffe note that there is more research on slow death at work than exists about thriving, a process characterized by a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work. The authors examine key antecedents of thriving, and present the features of the work context that produce thriving. They also discuss the positive outcomes of thriving, including self-development, health and performance, and propose that groups, units and organizations can experience collective thriving, which can lead to group and organization-level salutary outcomes.

- Arie Shirom points out that vigor has long been studied as a reflection of physical strength, but it has hardly been studied at work. His focus is on vigor as an affective experience at work reflecting three types of energetic resources: physical strength, emotional energy and cognitive liveliness. Shirom's model of vigor includes antecedents, probable moderators and positive consequences of vigor, including health, life and job satisfaction, job performance and organizational effectiveness.

- Linda Treviño and Michael Brown take a uniquely positive approach to ethics and leadership. In their chapter, they develop the construct of ethical leadership and differentiate it from the transformational and authentic approaches to leadership, acknowledging some overlaps. Ethical leadership specifically looks at leadership from the followers' perspectives. The authors also present their 10-item instrument for measuring ethical leadership.

- Pam Perrewé, Gerald Ferris, Jason Stoner, and Robyn Brouer argue that political skills comprise a central role in the positivity movement because they encompass a positive skill set that is essential for success in contemporary organizations. Political skills have both a dispositional element and an element that can be shaped and developed. The authors demonstrate that political skills have positive effects on job performance, leader effectiveness, reputation and career success, and also that political skills reduce experienced stress in the workplace.

- Kim Cameron analyzes the complexities of forgiveness at both the individual and organizational levels. Forgiveness is an internal state, an interpersonal act and a process. Dispositional forgiveness is the institutionalized capacity to move past trauma and take on a positive orientation. This chapter emphasizes the positive effects of forgiveness on employee behavior, productivity and quality.

- Thomas Britt, James Dickinson, Tiffany Greene-Shortridge and Eric McKibben provide a balanced look at the construct of engagement at work. In reviewing several conceptualizations of engagement, they note that the common factor is that the engaged individual is dedicated to successful work performance through emotional investment. They review the research on predictors of job engagement, and its

effects on health and performance. Although engagement is a positive psychological state, it can have negative consequences under certain conditions. Britt et al. remind researchers to build these conditions into their models to provide a more comprehensive view of adaptive functioning at work.

- Tim Judge and Charlice Hurst also take a balanced approach in reviewing the positive aspects and possible costs of positive core self-evaluations (CSE) at work. CSE is a constellation of four traits – self-esteem, locus of control, neuroticism and generalized self-efficacy – and it underscores the idea that some individuals are born with predispositions toward positive feelings and behaviors. Although CSE is related to a host of valued individual and organizational outcomes, the authors note that future research should explore its limitations and costs more fully.

In the third and final section of the book, we focus on the methodological challenges that researchers face as they advance the positive movement. Although these challenges may not be unique to positive organizational behavior, they are formidable and must be acknowledged and dealt with if the positive movement is to go forward.

- Tom Wright tackles two important methodological challenges faced by researchers in the positive movement. One challenge is the decision of whether the variable of interest is a state (typical of the POB domain) or a trait (typical of the POS domain). He suggests supplementing the typical test–retest analysis with tests for parallel and strictly parallel models in order to achieve conceptual clarity and empirical rigor. Further, he suggests moving away from the disease model to study cardiovascular health, using pulse pressure, the composite cardiovascular health measure.
- Laura Little, Janaki Gooty and Debra Nelson bring us full circle in terms of this book by returning to the four variables comprising psychological capital (PsyCap) and examining their construct validity in two separate studies. Convergent, discriminant and predictive validity is investigated for commonly used measures of hope, optimism, resiliency and self-efficacy. Unfortunately, the news is not positive, and they call for more rigorous theory development and measurement development in order to advance the study of POB.

In sum, this book offers a platform for an impressive blend of scholarly research and discussion in the domain of studying positive phenomena at work. Such research should ultimately guide us towards enhancing the experience and consequences of work itself. Our aim in this book is to ensure that the study of POB continues to be a voyage of discovery, and, therefore, a subject of great interest.