Positive organizational psychology: an overview

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ABSTRACT

Positive organizational psychology has many different definitions by different scholars, but in a nutshell, it is an area of psychology that explores how to create a positive, life-giving work environment. While it focuses more on the employee side of the work environment, there are many examples of how a positive work environment for employees also benefits the organization financially. In this presentation, we will talk about some terms and variables that are important in positive organizational psychology. In a work environment, there are countless work-related traits with regard to a worker. The most important ones include: Positive work-related identity, pro-social motivation, and psychological capital. Positive organizational psychology also includes positive emotion and positive behavior in the workplace. As the words suggest, these terms are about having positive emotions and exhibiting positive behaviors in the work setting. An important term under positive emotion is emotional contagion. This refers to how employees mimic their leader's emotions and how those emotions spread from person to person. A positive leader would spread positivity, whereas a negative leader would cause the opposite to happen. An example of positive behavior is "job crafting", which includes making positive changes in one's cognition and behavior to make the job better-fit one's needs. For example, a cleaner can choose to perceive their job as a great contribution to the work environment, instead of seeing it as "just a cleaning job". We will also talk about "flow at work" and "work engagement", which are strongly connected with one's job satisfaction. In conclusion, we will talk about the importance of expanding positive organizational psychology as a field, its future, and give some real-life examples from companies that already started implementing this field of psychology.

Keywords: Organizational psychology, positive psychology, positive organizational psychology, psychological contract, psychological capital.

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, most psychologists in the workplace were more concerned about the financial gains of an organization. But today, awareness surrounding the psychological impact of one's working life made a lot of progress. We spend a third of our life in our jobs. In order to have a fulfilling life, it is very important to have a positive work environment. And this is where positive organizational psychology comes into play. Positive organizational psychology is a relatively new field but it's growing steadily. Positive organizational psychology examines the workers in terms of a number of variables. Through our literature reviews, we are going to examine and see which variables are getting more attention and which are more relevant in this emerging field. Some of these variables include positive work-related identity, pro-social motivation, and psychological capital. By

examining these variables, we hope to uncover the secrets of happiness in the workplace, while pointing out some traps that positive organizational psychology might encounter, so that it becomes easier to avoid them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Positive organizational psychology emerged as an application of positive psychology concepts on organizations (Bakker, 2013; Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Donaldson, & Chen, 2021; Donaldson, & Dollwet, 2013; Donaldson & Ko, 2010; Donaldson et al. 2021; Gruman & Saks, 2019; Ko, & Donaldson, 2011; Lewis, 2015; Niessen, & Zacher, 2022; Salanova et al., 2016; Sezen-Gultekin et al., 2023). It is "a research area that focuses on the positive aspects of optimal functioning at work" (Martín-Del-Río et al., 2021, p.5222) or "the study of that which is positive, flourishing, and lifegiving in organizations" (Cameron, & Caza, 2004). Through a bibliometric analysis, Martín-Del-Río et al. (2021) discover that positive organizational psychology scholarship involves 4 major areas: "well-being at work, positive leadership, work engagement, and psychological capital" (p.5222).

Gagné, & Vansteenkiste (2013) discuss positive organizational psychology with regards to self-determination theory, while (Gómez-Baya & Lucia-Casademunt, 2018) apply concepts from the latter to the former. According to W. Unanue et al. (2021), various models of happiness predict organizational citizenship behavior.

Yavuz (2020) compares and contrasts transformational and authentic leadership with regard to positive organizational psychology converging with Kumari, & Sharma, (n.d.). Larjovuori et al. (2016) investigate the role of leadership in organizational change, while Hannah et al. (2009) delineate the notion of positive leadership, while Sainz et al. (2021) research the link between authentic leadership and work-related stress. Nelson (2021) discusses the influence of positive leadership development over building positive organizations. Petkevičiūtė et al. (2018) is a review of the notion of authentic leadership, while Krumov et al. (2015) is a research study on toxic leadership.

Wagstaff (2019) and Wagstaff et al. (2012a, 2012b) apply positive organizational psychology concepts into sports management, while Meyers and Rutjens (2022) use these concepts to understand employee green behavior. Benites (2022) runs a positive organizational research with teachers, whereas Cameron (2021) uses the concepts to develop the notion of positive education. Lucas and Goodman (2015) utilize the concepts and connect with leadership education.

Wu et al. (2023) run a statistical analysis over a set of positive organizational psychology concepts such as autonomous motivation to work, work engagement, and organizational commitment and discover that they mediate the relationship between organizational support and job satisfaction, while Cameron (2017) connects positive organizational research with cross-cultural studies. Luthans and Youssef (2007) review positive organizational behavior through investigating a set of concepts such as positive traits, positive state-like psychological resource capacities, positive organizations and positive behaviors; while Gruman, & Saks (2013) investigate organizational socialization. Ceja-Barba (2014) applies positive organizational psychology concepts into family-owned business. Crain and Hammer (2013) study work-family enrichment, while Morganson et al. (2014) investigate work-family balance from positive psychological perspective. Oerlemans, & Bakker, (2013)'s research is rather methodological, where 2 methods to measure subjective well-being at work are delineated. Khatri, & Dutta (2022)'s study is psychometric whereby they develop a scale to measure positive organizational behavior. Likewise, a new scale (The Leader Vitality Scale) is presented in Shapiro and Donaldson (2022).

Cleveland et al. (2016) study positive organizational psychology and aging, whereas Barner and Barner (2013) inquire mindfulness in organizations. Newstead et al. (2018) discuss definitions of virtue for work settings, while Meyer (2016) focuses on organizational virtuousness. Organizational virtuousness is found to be associated with

organizational commitment and work engagement (Moshabaki Esfahani, & Rezaee, 2014) and with both perceived and objective measures of organizational performance (Cameron et al., 2004). Müceldili et al. (2015) in this context critically evaluate the notion of collective gratitude in work settings, while J. Unanue et al. (2021) find that gratitude at work is associated with materialism at work "which refers to a higher importance attached to extrinsic (e.g., money, fame, image) versus intrinsic (self-development, affiliation, community participation) employees' 'aspirations' (p.3787).

Taştan et al. (2020) conduct research on the role of psychological capital, social capital and organizational trust on happiness. Sekerka et al. (2013) investigate positive organizational ethics. Cameron, & McNaughtan (2014) concentrate on positive organizational change while Uyan & Aslan (2019) review organizational readiness within this context. Another issue is positive performance evaluation which is based on strengths-based goal setting according to positive organizational scholarship (Grammer, & Bernhardt, 2021).

Psychological capital is "a core factor consisting of hope, efficacy, optimism, and resilience" (Avey et al., 2008, p.48). Donaldson et al. (2020) investigate psychological capital through hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (HERO) model across 15 countries (Australia, Brazil, China,

France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Philippines, South Africa, and the United States), and conclude that there is a strong association between psychological capital and a set of variables such as workplace proactivity, proficiency, adaptivity, and overall work performance. The findings suggest that employees' meaningful work and a supportive work environment positively influenced psychological capital, which in turn led to high levels of psychological well-being and job satisfaction (Kim et al., 2019). In a meta-analysis Reichard et al. (2013) conclude that the relationships between hope and work performance and employee well-being are significantly positive. In another study, results suggested that receiving leadership training may have an effect on PsyCap capacities (self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resiliency) (Goertzen & Whitaker, 2015).

From a Foucaldian perspective, positive organizational scholarship is criticized as it ignores sociocultural context and power relations in organizations (McDonald et al., 2017). We can add more to this point: In many companies, capitalism brutally applied with profit-maximization at any cost, at the expense of employee well-being. Considering the dark nature of capitalism, positive organizational psychology interventions can be misused to legitimize social injustice, when the staff are told to look positively without changing anything in the work environment and society at large. Exploitation can't be hidden behind a positive outlook. We need change at macro level (organization, community and society) rather than micro level (individual employee).

Flow is an experience in which an individual has clear goals, gets immediate feedback on progress, engages in challenging but not impossible tasks, has deep concentration, is in the present moment, has a sense of control, and is absorbed so much in the task that their sense of time changes. Unfortunately, flow is not something that happens very often in a workplace, or while someone is doing his or her job. Jobs in general don't have the conditions that would make flow possible (Burke et al., 2016). When it comes to employee well-being, flow and self determination are important variables (Ilies et al., 2017).

Prevention of psychological problems in the workplace is also getting more and more recognition (Mykletun et al., 2012). Sirgy et al. (2018) make an integrative review of work-life balance. They propose an integrated definition of the term, arguing that work-life balance comes with an increased level of role engagement in the work vs nonwork life, and a minimal amount of conflict in these roles. They also find links between work-life balance and overall life satisfaction. Apart from the employee side of things, they also talk about policy and managerial implications, stating that managers should monitor their employee's work-life balance regularly.

According to a study by Arogundade et al. (2015), creating a psychologically empowering work environment is beneficial for the career satisfaction of the employees, work outcomes, and sustained productivity.

Job crafting involves behaviors that make a worker's job more satisfactory, and more engaging. This in turn increases resilience, making the worker thrive. In a job that is designated formally, workers usually have the motivation to personalize their jobs to better fit their strengths, desires, and other motives. This also involves actively changing their interactions with others and their tasks in the workplace. Researchers call this behavior as job crafting, and call these individuals job crafters. There are three main ways of job crafting. First way of job crafting is changing the boundaries. This means a worker can expand or diminish the scope of their work, but they can also change the way they perform tasks. Second way of job crafting involves changing one's relationships. A worker can interact with other workers outside of their area or not. We believe that the most interesting way of job crafting is the third one. This involves changing one's perception of the job. For example, a cleaner working in a hospital can see his or her work as a way of helping ill people, instead of seeing it as just cleaning (Berg et al., 2008).

According to Kelloway et al. (2013), positive leadership is a type of leadership in which a leader makes their followers feel positive emotions. They find in their study that positive leadership behaviors predict positive employee affect. They argue that it is more effective to increase positive affect, when it comes to employee well-being. So it might be better for employers to focus on the positive, rather than just trying to eliminate or reduce negative affect. Some researchers also define positivity in a leader in terms of the leaders' psychological capital. Other researchers define it as employee perception of their leaders' psychological capital. We believe that this can also be connected to emotional contagion. Emotional contagion happens when a person's emotions and/or behaviors influence someone else's.

This can happen between groups as well. Emotional contagion also has multiple dimensions and each of them are backed with compelling evidence. Emotional contagion can happen at a conscious or an unconscious level (Barsade et al., 2018). It is not hard to imagine that emotional contagion from leaders to followers, or from managers to employees, will be very strong and will have an important impact on employee well-being.

Decent work is another term associated with positive organizational psychology. It is defined as a work life in which the worker has opportunities, has a fair income, feels secure, has chances of personal development and social integration, freedom of expression, and participate in the processes of making important decisions. It was not intended as a psychological concept at first, but it later served as an important variable for positive psychology and positive organizational psychology (Pouyaud, 2016).

Richard and Hennekam (2021) talks about positive work-related identity. They argue that disabled individuals try to manage their stigma-identity through downward social comparison. For example, they try to construct a positive work-related identity by comparing themselves with an individual who perhaps has a more severe, and more stigmatizing disability. We believe that this can be generalized to non-disabled individuals, because it shows the importance of building a positive work-related identity, and how important it is for employee well-being. Even if someone does not have a disability, for example, they can compare themselves with employees in higher ranks, and feel worse about themselves. Indeed, since people are clever, they might just try to cope with this by trying to create a positive work-related identity, by engaging in downward social comparison, e.g. a low ranking officer comparing himself or herself with a cleaner. But these may not always be effective and may not create the positive work environment that we hope for. That's why we believe it is also in managerial responsibility to create a work environment where is easier for all the workers to construct positive work-related identities. This might include having no underpaid employees, not making anywone overwork, and so on.

Pro-social behavior is thought to be associated with both positive and negative outcomes. If the employees feel it's necessary for them to help others, it might become a burden for them, and even go as far as to cause a burnout (Reizer et al., 2020). But we believe that this is not the only way pro-social behavior in an organization can occur. It is possible that pro-social behavior is more like a consequence of other variables, such as having a good work-life balance, positive work-related identity, positive leadership, and so on. But if a company is only superficially trying to look good on the outside, and make force their employees to exhibit pro-social behaviors, this becomes a problem. Indeed, this problem is not just possible for this variable, but for other variables as well. It's in human nature to fake positive things, when in fact, all the negativity still reside on the inside.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As we have talked about in this paper, these variables are about both the happiness of the employee and work productivity. Even though there are some valid criticisms about the field, such as the weakness of the field in terms of socio-cultural context and power relations in companies, the future of the field looks promising. In an ever-changing, fast-paced world, positive organizational psychology comes as a contrast, and as a balancing element compared to most of the other perspectives which mainly puts emphasis on the work outcome and the monetary benefits of an organization. Regarding the future of positive psychology in general, Liney et al. (2006) talk about integrating the positive and the negative in psychology. They argue that positive psychological approaches can also talk about trauma and suffering. We believe that this is an important factor for the future of positive organizational psychology as well. "There is also much that can be learned, we suggest, by revisiting earlier humanistic and existential ideas (methodological concerns notwithstanding), and seeing what insights they might offer us about positive psychology's current remit" (Linley et al., 2006, p. 12).

Succesful companies such as Google, Zappos, and Genentech are said to be implementing some aspects of positive organizational psychology (Dimitrakaki, I., 2022; Perschel, A., 2010; Stackpole, 2022). Genetech received positive results, for both the employees and the company, by implementing well-being in its organizational culture. At Genentech's Immunology and Opthamology (GIO) division, a culture change process was implemented to create a more positive and supportive work environment (Chatman, 2016). These companies have also seen positive business results by focusing on emotional intelligence, which is crucial for understanding and managing emotions in the workplace (How Emotional Intelligence Helps the Bottom Line - Knowledge at Wharton, 2012). It is not to say that these companies are without problems. But it is also evident that they are making an effort to implement some aspects of positive organizational psychology with varying, but not to be underestimated, degrees of success. Even though these companies are a few in numbers for now, there is hope that more companies will be implementing positive psychological aspects in the near future. As scientists uncover the importance of these variables for both employees and employers, the awareness that this is something that will benefit everyone, is bound to spread.

Finally, we believe that further research is needed to improve definitions of some variables, and also establish the connections between variables better. Because positive organizational psychology is a relatively new field, many people use some terms interchangeably, and this can cause confusion. But every new field goes through these steps before establishing a stronger theoretical framework, so while these can be considered as criticism, it is a constructive criticism that is intended to serve as a guide to the future of the field.

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