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Positive Organizational Leadership:

Some Recent Findings in Positive Organizational Scholarship

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### Abstract

The study of positivity is multifaceted, with roots across psychology, philosophy, and more recently organizational behavior (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; 2014). This review article highlights the framework from which the study of positivity originates, and then explores positive behaviors in the workplace that have correlated to increases in fulfillment, productivity, engagement, and leadership capacity (Cameron & Dutton, 2003). This essay reveals core components of positive organizational scholarship (POS), notably the interaction of positivity within job demands and job resources, positive employee engagement, and positive deviance, and uncovers some recent findings of these POS components in empirical research and application within human resource management.

*Keywords:* positive organizational scholarship, positive psychology, leadership, positive organizational behavior, human resource management

### Positive Organizational Leadership: Some Recent Findings in Positive Organizational Scholarship

In spite of the growing popularity of positivity across Western academic research, collectively as a society, we are not any more positive. Despite earning an annual income roughly three times higher than in 1960, Americans have reported being less happy than ever before, mainly due to social reasons, including rising disparities in racial and economic equality, corruption, isolation, and political distrust (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2017). Contemporary social science researchers have expressed concerns regarding why we are so invested in our own mental models, and why it is often difficult to communicate our views to others (e.g. Allen, 2010). It seems that individuals and their organizations may be lacking both the informative tools and resources needed to broaden their perspectives of identity, particularly in their work environments, as they progress into latter phases of development in adulthood (Adams, Gullotta, Montemayor, 1992; Waterman, 1993).

Positive organizational scholarship (POS) is one discipline that seeks to expand one's perspectives of identity, and provides a framework for initiating, constructing, and analyzing positive concepts in the workplace (Cameron & Quinn, 2003; 2005). By linking performance and psychological capacities, such as integrating workplace productivity with fulfillment, positive organizational scholarship seeks to identify strategies that highlight one's overall strengths (Dutton, Glynn, Spreitzer, 2007). This approach taps into an individual's ability to concentrate on both subjective and objective patterns in behavior, and thus highlights alternatives to the ways in which we can act and think differently in organizations (Luthans, 2002).

POS highlights the notion that both organizational studies and subjective psychology research has historically tended to place a greater emphasis on identifying negative feedback to inform implicit role and identity changes in behavior (Kark & Dijk, 2007; Schilling, 2009; Reed & Bullis, 2009; Morrison, 2004). Constantly focusing on negativity creates conflict and anxiety, and the potential for cyclical negativism increases within work environments as individuals continuously seek out, and target faults in their behavior (Gordon, 2008).

POS proposes that while having an attention toward negativity is important, the simultaneous interaction of understanding positivity is also essential in creating more genuine and dynamic mental environments, relationships, and self-transcendent values (Cameron & Quinn, 2005). Moreover, exploring the workplace from a space of positivity and strengths-based approaches can aid in providing individuals with the framework for identifying more authentic ways to relate to one another, thus creating healthy and sustainable relationships as a byproduct (Cameron & Dutton, 2003). These relationships thus serve as resources for individuals, as roles, tasks, and identities are communicated more positively, increasing overall well-being and happiness across the various levels of an organization (e.g. Hobfoll, 2002).

POS defines the phenomenon as *emphasizing strengths*, an approach that features actively seeking, identifying, and utilizing strengths to inform our day to day actions (Luthans, 2002; Schueller, 2009; Seligman, 2002). POS proposes that this productive and internal exploration inherently reveals cognitive strengths that surface an individual's capacity for understanding constructs such as leadership, confidence, hope and resiliency, at a greater and more conscious depth (Layland, Hill, Nelson, 2017; Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003).

### **Historical Framework**

POS is largely rooted in Industrial and Organizational (IO) psychology, which is broadly known as the study and applied discipline of understanding, and improving individual and group behavior conditions in the workplace (Luthans, 2002). The field of IO psychology grew substantially in the devastating aftermath of both World War I and World War II, as American psychology as a whole saw an increase in clinical attention to diagnosing and treating mental illnesses (Pickren, 2007). IO surfaced in the early 1920s, and was primarily concerned with how to assess soldiers' performance, and soon evolved to help veterans reintegrate back into working society. As the field's popularization grew, IO psychology thus became a field of predicting, analyzing, and assessing workers' performance (Koppes, 2014).

Since then, the field of IO psychology has become more empirically based, with researchers collecting and analyzing data on how to improve the work environment. However, broadly preoccupied with developing existing negative capacities, IO has only recently focused more attention on highlighting strengths and positivity (Gilgen, 1982; Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

Though IO focuses on workplace behavior, it is similar to other areas of psychology in that it draws on both historical social science theory and application in fields such as philosophy, sociology, economics, and neuroscience (Riggio & Porter, 2017). Thus, IO's history resembles that of other social science fields, in that the structural history of the way behaviors have been studied are generally concerned with improving or analyzing existing negative issues, such as poor performance, weak behavior, or improving employee stress in corporate social environments (Landy, 1989; Gelfand et al., 2017). As such, it is important to note that there exists a plethora of theoretical approaches on why the study of IO has been, and still continues to

be inherently negative (e.g. Lefkowitz, 2017; Schneider, González-Romá, Ostroff, & West, 2017). Additionally, it is important to understand the physiological effects of negativity over time, to support the importance of POS and its application in contemporary workplace environments.

### **The Effects of Negativity In The Workplace**

One proposed theory on why the study of human beings, including workplace behavior, has gravitated toward a focus on negativity is the *evolutionary perspective*, which examines human beings' implicit focus on negativity as a developmental and progressive behavioral mechanism (Colarelli, 1998). This approach suggests that the cognitive focus on negative energy originates from the idea that humans adaptively learn from failures and shortcomings as a way to strategize more effective means of survival (Barkow, Cosmides and Tooby, 1995). Rozin and Royzman (2001) remind readers that humans have a dispositional tendency to possess a *negativity bias*. They propose the idea of *negative potency*, known as the phenomenon in which individuals, even when presented with stimuli of equal intensity, focus more heavily on conditions of a negative nature. When individuals are presented with negative, neutral, and positive stimuli, they are more aroused, otherwise known as more attentive, toward negative stimuli.

By applying this same framework to workplace behavior, inferences can be drawn that individuals will also focus more on things that are going wrong at work, versus things that are going well. For example, in human resource management, when managers give performance reviews, employees will possess a greater tendency to glance over positive comments from their supervisors, but spend more time reviewing negative reviews (e.g. Cameron, Bright, & Caza,

2004). This means that negative ratings draw more attention, and individuals invest more time into focusing on these negative comments. In addition, individuals seldomly acknowledge what they have done well to the same magnitude as they focus on unfavorable feedback.

### **Physiological Effects of Work Related Negativity**

Researchers have suggested that work related negativity, in the form of prolonged stress, can have profound long-term detrimental physiological effects (e.g. Cox et al., 2000). Cox et al. express physiological concerns with work related stress, which include increases in cortisol secretion, and impaired long term memory. Research using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scans and event-related potential (ERP) studies indicate that negative emotions (such as the effects of workplace stress related to organizational downsizing and job anxiety), activate the lateral and medial prefrontal cortex regions of the brain, areas that regulate emotions and complex cognitive behavior, to a higher extent than positive emotions (Ochsner et al., 2002). This entails that over time, a prolonged focus on negativity will produce psychosomatic symptoms, or symptoms related to aggravated mental states, and potentially create more irritability, hormone irregularity, depression, and lack of cognitive focus if not addressed appropriately (Pruessner, Hellhammer, & Kirschbaum, 1999).

An overstimulation of negative emotions also creates effects of robust arousal in the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) region of the prefrontal and parietal cortex, as well as the amygdala, a crucial area of the limbic system of the brain, responsible for emotions, immune system functional immune system survival instincts, and memory (Brooks et al., 2012). Chronic stress will thus not only feel physically taxing as it creates these psychosomatic symptoms, but specific effects on the limbic system over longitudinal periods of time can lead to higher blood

pressure and hypertension, which have been known to cause early death and heart attack (James et al., 2014).

**Negativity and decision making.** An overstimulation of neural attention, also known as excessive stress or anxiety, creates cognitive imbalances of emotion, ethical decision-making, and impulse recognition (Astrand, 2003). In the presence of negative conflict, response data from numerous studies indicate that respondents have been reported to make fast, impulsive errors based on partial, incomplete analysis of stimuli (Van Veen & Carter, 2002; Reason, 1990). Thus, if the workplace is bombarded with negative stress, employees will react in unpredictable, adverse physiological ways when an abundance of stress and negative emotion is prevalent. Because the negative inhibitors in the brain are predisposed to react much quicker, and with much more velocity than with positive or neutral emotions, decision making is clouded by the brain's restricted access to making rational choices during these overly stressful states. Dysfunctional stress is not only detrimental to cognition, but it has also correlated to avoidable, unnecessary costs to an organization due to poor strategic thinking, and irrational decision making (Patterson and Ivancevich, 1987).

**Modern consciousness and negativity.** The evolutionary perspective also suggests that environmental and habitual changes since our ancestral environments, particularly those in advanced societies, have produced unintended consequences to our consciousness development, thus producing much higher levels of stress and anxiety than our ancestors experienced (Buss, 2000; Massimini, Delle Fave, 2000). In addition to our lives in our various work environments, researchers have proposed that migrating into diverse cities, much different from the nature of our original habitats, has led to behavioral changes that have also contributed to unprecedented

levels of stress and anxiety (Buss, 2015). This may be due, in part, because humans may not yet possess the necessary mental capacity to adapt to their new surroundings at a functional level (e.g. Tooby & Cosmides, 1989). Our subjective cognitive developments may not have evolved fast enough to comprehend our modern work environments and living habitats, which now include the stressors of living in large, complex interdependent cities, and a collective dependency on technology and instant gratification. Combined with the increase in diversity and culture, our professional networks are undoubtedly influenced by differences within these contexts (Cosmides & Tooby, 2000; Dunbar & Barrett, 2007). Thus, negativity in the form of information overload can lead to disruptions in organizational focus areas such as change management, particularly if organizations do not yet possess the ability to collectively maneuver rapid technological changes (Eppler & Mengis, 2004).

Given these aforementioned effects of negativity in the workplace, it is clear that the workplace environment can benefit from positive based approaches to balance the cognitive and physiological strains of these issues. Furthermore, while POS may still be in its infancy, the themes it draws upon are rooted in much older fields within psychology, organizational studies, and philosophy (Cameron & Dutton, 2003). Thus, understanding and studying the roots of POS is important in having a multidisciplinary approach to highlighting positive behaviors within individuals and their organizations.

### **The Shift From Negative to Positive**

POS draws heavily on positive psychology, which is known as the scientific study and application of positive behaviors that enable individuals and their organizations to thrive

(Compton, 2005). The field surfaced during the later part of the 20th century, and represented some psychologists' desire to shift the tone of social science research from a focus on negativity, to a more balanced approach that also highlights the best of human functioning (Seligman & Czikszentmihalyi, 2014). Recognizing the detrimental long term effects of negativity such as those previously mentioned, which include: stress, anxiety and depression on physiological health (e.g. McEwen, 2008, 1998), psychologists such as Dr. Martin Seligman and Dr. Mihaly Czikszentmihalyi provide an innovative approach to balance psychology's focus on negativity. Seligman in particular notes the desire to complement the field of psychology by studying positive human functioning, and reshifts the study of human behavior to also highlight and understand growth, resilience, and strength (Seligman, 2006). With the integration of Positive Psychology as the theme of his presidency of the American Psychological Association in 1998, the field of psychology saw a greater appreciation for ideologies such as happiness, freedom, and loyalty, particularly in relation to individual's lives at work (e.g. Peterson et al., 2010). Seligman notes that psychologists in the last few decades have become victimologists, or pathologizers, and tend to want to repair damage. He suggests that while these things are important, psychology should be just as concerned with building strengths, as it is focused on weaknesses (Seligman, 2006). Positive psychology thus grew in its empirical findings over time, and supported strength based approaches to understanding personality and behavior (Gable & Haidt, 2005).

Early findings suggest that people who are extremely social, virtuous, and tend to be interested in wanting more from their lives than just simply material wealth or gain, perform better not only at work, but also in other aspects of their life (Seligman et al., 2005).

Additionally, positive people perform actions that reflect a tendency to highlight the authentic,

valued conditions of human functioning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). These findings reinforce the importance of studying positivity, as researchers apply it to the workplace first with IO (Luthans, 2002; Frederickson, 2009), and then with POS (Cameron & Dutton, 2003; Dadich et al., 2018).

### **Roots of Hedonic and Eudaimonic Psychology**

Despite its popularity in the last few years in social science research, the study of positivity and human flourishing can trace some of its lineage as far back as Ancient Greek philosophy, with ethical definitions characterizing overall happiness as a foundational component of well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). An inherently subjective and abstract construct closely related to positivity, traditions of well-being can broadly be based into two areas: hedonia and eudaimonia (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Given that POS largely combines similar ideas of both hedonic and eudaimonic psychology, noting the history of these traditions is important in understanding the interaction of positive behavior in the workplace (Froman, 2010).

**Hedonic well-being.** Ryan and Deci (2001) define hedonic happiness, or subjective well-being (SWB), as a repetitive focus on seeking positive experiences, while minimizing or decreasing painful experiences. In relation to POS, hedonic goals can be seemingly miniscule accomplishments in one's everyday life, such as minor appreciation and reward. These accomplishments can undoubtedly serve as positive reinforcements, and beneficial to one's psychological health (e.g. Daniels, Tapscott, & Caston, 2011). In human resource management, achieving high ratings on performance appraisals, and excelling on benchmark assessments are examples of hedonic goals in the workplace (Grant, Curtayne, & Burton, 2009). Hedonic goals

are important in creating scalable solutions, and provide clear, distinct targets and deadlines for strategic planning in both setting and framing goals (Cascio, 2018).

**Eudaimonic well-being.** Eudaimonic happiness, or psychological well-being (PWB), can be defined as autonomous control, and the prolonged feeling of meaning, purpose, and the prevalence of self-transcendental growth (Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2008). More concerned with the expressiveness of purpose, eudaimonic happiness is closely related to altruism, in the sense that actions should represent virtuousness that lead to the greatest common good (Kashdan, Biswas-Deiner, & King, 2008). Eudaimonic well-being requires reflective action, in addition to pursuing a sense of fulfillment through a higher capacity for systems thinking, otherwise known as thinking about an individual's role within larger organizational systems (Senge, 2006).

Similar to positive employee engagement in POS, pursuing eudaimonic happiness is consistent with having the ability to apply positive, state like resource capacities such as courage and confidence to one's actions (Bobonich, 2010). Eudaimonia is virtue centric, thus expressing the importance of inherent qualities related to honor and integrity, such as self control, courage, and wisdom (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

**Hedonic and eudaimonic principles of positive psychology.** Similar to the division between the two general areas of well-being, positive psychology can also be broadly categorized with similar hedonic and eudaimonic traditions (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Hedonic psychology can be defined as the study of what maximizes human potential at the objective and subjective level unit of analysis (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999) Subjective well-being (SWB) as a major outcome variable and has been popularized as the primary method of operationalizing hedonic happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Hedonic well-being

research has also focused on the interpretation of the emotional experience, including the *emotion space*, described as the complex interaction of emotion in the dimensional, categorical, and multi componential environments (Frijda, 1999). The *emotion space* is particularly important in human resource management, because successful managers require the capacity for understanding others, particularly in relation to stress management techniques, and providing supervision (e.g. Murphy, 1996; Naseem 2018).

In conjunction with hedonic happiness, eudaimonic principles focus on qualitative well-being, with the focus on the highlighted *fulfillment* that the pursuits of happiness bring (Biswas-Diener & Wiese, 2018). Eudaimonic well-being (EWB), was first used by Ryan and Deci (2000, 2001) as a construct to explore metacognition, otherwise known as higher order consciousness, in which one can seek and conceptualize self-transcendent values and awareness. Carol Ryff (1989; 2002; 2013) also presents a eudaimonic model of psychological well-being (PWB), a construct with six components comprised of: environmental mastery, positive relationships, autonomy, personal growth, self acceptance, and purpose in life. Empirical analysis supports that the interaction of these components, mainly positive relationships, are crucial to living a healthy and purposeful life (Ryff, Singer, & Love, 2004). The idea of fostering positive relationships is also crucial for thriving work environments, as trust and effective communication amongst employees is beneficial to organizational health (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2007)

Eudaimonic psychology also suggests that the richness in the quality of one's life pursuits results in the enhancement of wellness and vitality (Martela & Ryan, 2015). Akin to Csikszentmihalyi's concept of *flow*, or complete mental absorption in one's current experience,

(Csikzentmihalyi, 1997; 2014), eudaimonic mental states are self-transcendental experiences, and represent euphoric focus and clarity. Salanova, Bakker and Llorens (2006) research the concept of “flow at work,” and found that “positive work-related experiences as flow build organizational and personal resources, and that sometimes these positive experiences are reciprocally influenced by these resources”.

It is with a combination of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being that results in becoming that which makes an individual more engaged and conscious (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). By applying and studying what morality and virtuousness can do to everyday life, particularly at work, an individual can become a healthier person, and potentially a happier person as a byproduct (Fredrickson, 2001; Snyder & Lopez, 2009).

### **Positive Organizational Scholarship**

Building on the trend of studying positivity in psychology and organizational behavior, management and business scholars developed POS as the application and assessment of positive psychology and behavior in the workplace (Cameron & Dutton, 2003). Defined as the interaction of self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resiliency, POS draws heavily on orienting behaviors toward optimizing peak performance at all three levels of the workplace: individual, team or group, and organization (Nelson & Cooper, 2007). Additionally, POS focuses on positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance (Luthans, 2002).

For example, virtuous behaviors and positive fulfillment are variables thought to increase innovation, profitability, productivity, customer satisfaction, employee retention, and quality control (Carlson et al., 2006; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Like its counterpart positive psychology,

POS can be best understood as an integral network of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being principles, and it is meant to complement existing organizational behavior and management approaches (Cameron & Dutton, 2003).

POS is influenced heavily by the idea of positive fulfillment, and emphasizes meaning making, or positive engagement, as a foundational source of individual's motivation regarding their lives at work (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011). The notion of benchmark assessments, or setting and achieving sales targets are essentially hedonic goals, and work in parallel to the more qualitative, eudaimonic goals that exist within an organization, such as seeking and maintaining positive growth and relationships within teams and clients.

### **Some Core Components of Positive Organizational Scholarship**

#### **Job Demands and Job Resources**

One fundamentally important component of POS pertains to the balance of job demands and positive job resources (Cameron & Dutton, 2003) The *job demands - resources (JD-R) model* developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) asserts a model for categorizing job factors into two integral associations: *job demands* and *job resources*. They define *job demands* as the “physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job”, that require prolonged attention in physical and/or mental capacities, while *job resources* are the “physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job” that serve as functional resources in “achieving work goals; reducing job demands and the associated physiological and psychological cost” while promoting the subjective growth of the employee.

Though job demands are not inherently negative, the overproduction of demands serves to create unsatisfactory environments for optimal employee well-being, and can lead to job

burnout and job dissatisfaction (e.g., Maslach, Schaufeli, Leiter, 2001). Thus, a thriving work environment has a balance of both job demands and resources that will allow an individual to craft meaningful and engaging work, and become more positively engaged as a result. Bakker, Demerouti and Verbeke (2004) emphasize the essential characteristics of job resources, and define three broad categories that comprises these resources: job resources must be beneficial in employee functionality, they must result in the reduction of job demands and costs (both physiological and psychological), and the resources must stimulate personal growth, learning, and development. Analogous to eudaimonic happiness, a main focal point of the (JD-R) model pertains to autonomous control in the workplace, and thus the employee must have the opportunity to flexibly choose what ways to mold their own work experience to find a balance of demands and resources that structure a fulfilling work environment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

**Recent findings of the JD-R model in human resource management.** Demerouti, Bakker, and Gevers (2015) found that increasing job resources was positively related to both supervisor ratings and self reports of worker's performance and creativity. In particular, they found that administrative support as a job resource produced consistent effects on positive employee behaviors such as performance and motivation. Findings also linked the idea that the more individuals actively seek resources related to work, the higher their engagement, and the more likely they are to experience flourishing in life. Ravenswood, Douglas, & Haar (2018) found that an abundance of job demands increase physical and verbal abuse in the aged-care workforce within healthcare, suggesting that proper job resources such as training and conflict mediation techniques are essential for the retention and job satisfaction of employees. They note that training is especially important in job crafting because employees can then utilize their

education to inform their own management and delivery techniques in application. Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2018) also highlight that human resource practices such as increases and frequency of training are important positive job resources for employees. They found that combining training and consistent, transparent communication between leadership and employees as an additional resource helps to make an organization more trustworthy, positively correlating to increases in employee engagement. Santa Maria et. al., (2018) used the JD-R model as their structural equation framework to study 843 German law enforcement officers with citizen encounters, and found that increases in job resources, mainly healthy “social support by colleagues, shared values, and positive leadership climate” alleviated the effects of job demands on emotional exhaustion, and reduced officer’s levels of depression and anxiety. This reinforces the notion that social support in the work environment as a job resource, even in one as physically and emotionally demanding as law enforcement, can help to establish a productive culture as these positive job resources mediate the effects of stressors in the workplace. Mäkikangas (2018) supports this notion further, and asserts findings of “temporal stability” in the phenomenon that active job crafters exhibit patterned, repeated behaviors to continuously seek additional job resources over time. This means that if an organization establishes a culture of seeking positive job resources, employees and their departments will continue to look for, and help provide favorable resources to help balance their job demands.

### **Positive Employee Engagement**

Positive employee engagement, also directly linked to eudaimonic happiness, is another foundational component of POS (Cameron & Dutton, 2003). Positive employee engagement is important because it is associated to the measurement of how emotionally committed an

employee is to an organization's success, which includes an individual's willingness to seek feedback and communicate with superiors (Attridge, 2009). Cartwright and Holmes (2006) remind that the meaning of positive work engagement encompasses an individual's willingness, along their level of investment, to help an organization succeed in its goals. They assert that positive engagement is directly related to an employee's ability to generate a unique sense of meaning and purpose, through themes of proactive communication such as seeking and establishing positive feedback climates. In human resource management, positive employee engagement is largely concerned with the effectiveness of an individual's direct manager, in addition to how willing the organization is to establish an environment that supports a culture of allowing different perspectives to be voiced (Alfes, Shantz, Truss, & Soane, 2013). Establishing an environment where employees are actively engaged is important because increases in productivity emerge as a result, and innovations are more likely to develop (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Positive engagement also increases retention rates, communication, and performance, highlighting the notion that engagement helps organizations keep employees who are enjoying and finding meaning in their work, and are fitting into the strategic direction of their organization's goals (e.g. Council, 2004; Kompas & Sridevi, 2010).

**Recent findings of positive employee engagement in human resource management.**

Albrecht, Breidahl, and Marty (2018) recently studied 1,578 employees working in a range of different industries, and found that six organizational resources consisting of: perceptions about HR practices (PHRP), senior leadership, clarity of organizational goals, organizational adaptivity, strategic alignment, and organizational autonomy, served as a framework for fostering positive employee engagement. Their findings support the hypothesis that employees

model the behavior that they perceive from their direct managers and senior level leaders, suggesting that institutional engagement from the top management levels of an organization are important for establishing a positively engaged workplace culture. They also found that the more human resource departments informed employees about the existing organizational climate, including organizational problems and overall performance, the more likely employees were to participate in offering their own perspectives, in turn promoting the generation of new and innovative ideas.

Lin and Sun (2018) build on the notion of positive employee engagement by emphasizing the importance of establishing a positive feedback seeking climate, as individuals in their study who were less engaged tended to exhibit feedback avoidance behavior. One method to combat feedback avoidance is to support leadership empowerment behavior, otherwise known as a leader's ability to foster meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact with their direct reports, which has been shown to have a positive effect on individual and team creativity (eg. Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005; Kim, Beehr, & Prewett, 2018). Enhancing creativity leads to more productive communication and innovation between a leader and their teams, further supporting the benefits of a positive feedback-seeking climate (Li, Wang, & Huang, 2018).

Steelman and Wolfeld (2018) suggest that managers can support positive employee engagement by adopting the role of a coach, consequently establishing a consistent process of healthy communication that includes mindful listening and giving clear and consistent ongoing assessment. Moreover, they contend that managers are most effective when they create meaningful, high quality relationships with that those they are leading, which in turn creates a

climate of positive engagement by inspiring and guiding workers to perform optimally at their fullest potential.

### **Positive Deviance**

Deviant behavior has long been associated with rebellion and negativity (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003). POS however, suggests that while negative deviance undoubtedly exists within workplaces and organizations, applying a statistical approach to deviance is a complementary method to addressing deviant behavior (Cameron & Dutton, 2003; Dutton, Glynn, & Spreitzer, 2007). In statistics, the bell curve, a common metric of deviance in statistical analysis, possesses a parameter of positive deviance in the upper bound section to the right of the mean, which is otherwise known as skewed right to the middle of the distribution. Linking the idea of positive deviance in organizations, it is found that those who excel in their roles tend to think and act beyond that of the norm, with the tendency to be more proactive, constructive, productive, and possess an innate problem solving ability (Cameron, 2012). These individuals who are positively deviant tend to possess heightened levels of conscientiousness that motivate them to perform at higher levels, and with a greater desire for accomplishment (Judge et al., 2002). In addition, positively deviant individuals tend to be inherently optimistic, and seek different opportunities that establish patterns of resilience (Pascale, Sternin, & Sternin, 2010). Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2004) emphasize that positive deviance is an evaluative term, and focuses on behaviors with honorable intentions regardless of the outcome.

**Recent findings about positive deviance in human resource management.** Dadich, Collier, Hodgins, and Crawford (2018) examined positive deviant behaviors, or “prosocial rule

bending”, in the healthcare industry. They found that clinicians in community-based palliative care who deviated from the norm of organizational protocols by establishing trust and personal relationships in a positive manner, consistently helped to improve both patients’ treatment, and their quality of life. More importantly, workers’ strategies to apply positive deviant behavior was then used to provide training and development for other employees, thus promoting teamwork and collaboration. Marshall, McCarthy, McGrath, and Claudy (2015) build on this further by asserting that possessing an entrepreneurial orientation, or a possessing a proactive mental state, is beneficial to supply chain management and establishing a culture of sustainability. This supports the role of positive deviance in human resource management, as individuals who are positively deviant are more enthusiastic about wanting to provide additional support and social sustainability to their organizations and teams.

### **Conclusion and Future Implications of Positive Organizational Scholarship**

As society continues to progress with technology, leaders in all environments, not just the workplace, should not only see their organizations as physical, but adopt a positive, metaphysical approach to understanding positive behavior in the technology era. By leveraging the use of technology, or quasi-virtual settings, leaders can aid in finding new ways to build trust and community within an organization, in addition to promoting aspects of positivity, health, and wellbeing.

It is reasonable to expect that the new age of IO, positive psychology, and POS will be based in how we understand human behavior in the context of dynamic virtual and artificial environments. Cyberpsychology, how we understand one another through virtual and digital settings, will be the next frontier of studying positive human behavior and consciousness, and an

important field to draw on when seeking insight into psychological capital, positivity, and meaning making both in the context of personal and professional life.

Future research in POS and positive psychology should seek to continually develop theoretical understandings of how individuals behave differently at work in virtual settings at the micro, group, and organization levels. The layered interaction with new innovations such as artificial intelligence (AI) creates unprecedented dynamic and rich behavioral environments, and further highlight the importance of cross-cultural and evolutionary perspectives to studying POS.

The integration of positive capacities in this regard could fundamentally shift the way that technology is moderated as a stressor to the workplace, particularly in non-technological industries, such as many humanitarian or social service organizations.

Additional research should utilize the field of POS to introduce revolutionary ways in which managers in the workplace can heighten their sense of metacognitive awareness, in order to lead from a space of deep connectivity. Drawing on both hedonic and eudaimonic principles, leaders should seek to continuously develop new innovations to provide altruistic meaning to their work environments.

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