

# Creating a Healthy Work Environment by Implementing Positive Organizational Behavior

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## Article Info

**Page Number:** 10831-10837

**Publication Issue:**

**Vol. 71 No. 4 (2022)**

## Article History

**Article Received:**

15 September 2022

**Revised:** 25 October 2022

**Accepted:** 14 November 2022

**Publication:** 21 December 2022

## Abstract

The concepts of positive organization and positive organizational behavior emphasize creation of optimal workplace environments that build individual assets and support individual and collective human potential. Rather than focusing on individual weaknesses, they emphasize individual strengths and potential. Based on appreciation and positive emotions, Psychological Capital is a main concept in positive organizational behavior and a core construct for well-being and thriving. This paper outlines its main characteristics along with insight into hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism as four elements of psychological capital; considers the value and importance of the concept as a whole and seeks to provide real life examples on how to incorporate positivity and positive virtues approach into every day work environment.

**Keywords:** healthy work environment, positivity, positive organizational behavior, psychological capital.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Organizations strive to create a work environment that will support both mental and physical employee wellbeing. This kind of environment affects employees' attitudes and behaviors toward organization but also leads to increase in organizational health seen through employee performance and turnover [1]. Wright and Huang [2, p. 1188] sum up the existing applied research and conclude that employee wellbeing is connected to different work related outcomes such as "job performance, employee retention, workplace accidents, absenteeism, customer engagement, quality defects, profitability, and health outcomes such as cardiovascular health, obesity, and disease burden". Krekel et al. [3] in their meta-analysis find that more business-unit level profitability can be expected with higher levels of wellbeing at work. Therefore, creation of a healthy work environment that enhances employee wellbeing have become one of the central issues in organizational research and practices.

In the last decade, the concept of positive psychology has been incorporated into organizational settings as a novel approach [4]. It emphasizes individual strengths and organizational environment that aims to help organizations enhance employees' functioning and experience at work [5], leading to creation of a positive healthy work environment. Positive psychology is the

underlying element of positive organizational behavior scholarship and this paper aims to provide insight into main concepts of the field, emphasizing importance of psychological capital development as a central concept for wellbeing and creation of a healthy work environment. The paper analyses main elements of psychological capital, examines the concept's overall value with providing examples of possible practices aimed at implementing this positive approach in the workplace environment.

## **II. POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR**

For decades, negative aspects of behavior have been mostly emphasized in the organizational behavior field. Practitioners and researchers were mostly concerned about problems and negative aspects of work, as well as issues towards resolving them. With the emergence of positive psychology approach, that emphasizes positive aspects of optimal functioning at work [6], and that is oriented towards building positive qualities [7], a movement towards understanding how positive approach to work environment can boost individual strengths, potential and psychological capabilities was created. In the workplace environment, implementation of positive psychology implies that it is possible to develop an environment that employees consider enjoyable and that leads to greater productivity [7]. The objective of positive psychology is to identify, through theory and research, elements that enable individuals, as well as groups and organizations to prosper and achieve optimal functioning [8].

Empirical research shows that implementation of positive practices inside organizations can lead to better individual performance and organizational effectiveness. Cameron et al. [9] in their paper, by summarizing previous empirical research, stress that on individual level, positive practices lead to positive effects such as work satisfaction and personal well-being, but also that positive emotions can lead to higher job performance, organizational citizenship behavior, engagement in occupational activities, social interactions with others and lower intention to work withdrawal and engagement in deviant workplace behavior. Tate-Wilson [10] study shows that positive work environment resulted in increased employees' productivity, increased satisfaction, and motivation. In their study, Cameron et al. [9] also show that application of positive practices inside organizations can have a substantial effect on organizational effectiveness. For instance, their research shows that the effects are seen in financial performance, work climate, turnover, and senior executive evaluations of effectiveness (in financial sector) or improvements in turnover, patient satisfaction, organizational climate, employee participation in the organization, quality of care, managerial support, and resource adequacy in nursing sector [9].

Following the prime of positive psychology, both positive organizational behavior (POB) and positive organizational scholarship (POS) fields have simultaneously emerged [11]. While POS scholars center on positive aspects and practices that occur within more macro, organizational contexts [12], human strengths and psychological abilities that influence employee performance are more emphasized in the POB field [13].

POB is defined as "the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths

and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's work-place" [13, p. 59]. It „emphasizes the need for more focused theory building, research, and effective application of positive traits, states, organizations, and behaviors“ [14, p. 322]. Psychological capital (PsyCap), and its elements, in the POB field have been recognized as its main components.

PsyCap presents an individual's positive psychological state of development, a second order construct, consisting of hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism. Four constructive elements have been chosen because they best satisfy the requirements for the definition of POB [15]. Luthans et al. [16] have demonstrated that PsyCap as a higher-order construct has a greater influence on employee related outcomes as their performance and job satisfaction, than its four individual components, and thus higher order construct is more emphasized.

### III. PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL

Traditionally, material, tangible resources were considered as determinants of organizational success. In today's business, however, human capital, individual strengths, skills, knowledge and capabilities are seen as a source of advantage. Luthans et al. [17] additionally emphasize that understanding of competitiveness needs to go further than human and social capital, introducing the concept of PsyCap. As seen in the following figure they emphasize it is not important "what or who you know (human and social capital), as it is important to understand "who you are" (psychological capital).

Source: [17, p. 46]

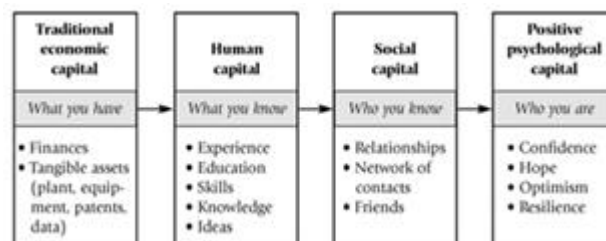


Figure 1. Importance of positive psychological capital

As mentioned, literature defines PsyCap as an individual positive psychological state of development [16]. It meets the criteria to be a major construct in the POB as it is established in the light of well-known theoretical frameworks as the social cognitive theory, it is measurable with great validity, open for development and strongly impacts work related outcomes [17-18].

As a second order construct the PsyCap is characterized by [17, 19]:

- **HOPE** - one's personal determination towards achievement of goals but also personal belief that achievement of these goals is possible with a good designed plan. In other words, a person is positively motivated by successful (a) agency (goal-oriented energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals).

- *EFFICACY* –confidence in personal abilities in successful execution of given tasks.
- *RESILIENCE* – capacity to return and try again when encountered with adversity, failure, conflict or even dramatic positive changes.
- *OPTIMISM* - a generalized positive outlook, a positive explanatory style towards different events and situations.

Literature suggest that higher levels of these positive states can lead to greater confidence, better stress management and adversity, lead to higher level of motivation, and greater pursuit for individual growth and development [7]. Empirical research found that positive PsyCap predicts organizational commitment [20], organizational citizenship behavior [15], can result in greater levels of job satisfaction and psychological well-being [21], as well as workplace well-being [4] and task performance [22]. Furthermore, PsyCap has been seen as an important element leading to employees' life satisfaction [23]. Meta-analysis of Avey et al. [24] indicates also negative relation to deviant workplace behavior, lower voluntary and involuntary absenteeism, turnover intentions, stress, anxiety and cynicisms for change.

One of the questions that can emerge is how to practice positive organization and develop PsyCap in the workplace? Luthans & Youssef-Morgan [19] present the importance of PsyCap development interventions aimed to encourage constructive thought patterns that, with time, might solidify into one's core assumptions and beliefs. In their paper [19, p. 30] they describe „goal-setting, generation of pathways, mental rehearsals of goal pursuit and contingency planning to overcome obstacles“ as main elements of PsyCap intervention, with „stressing approach-oriented goals (e.g., “I will do this”) as opposed to avoidance oriented goals (e.g., “I will stop doing that”)“. As regard to intervention in PsyCap elements, following is stressed [17, 25]:

- Increase self-awareness of one's own assets, such as abilities, skills, and social networks, in order to increase resilience. Moreover, individuals should work on creation of positive thinking when found in a problematic situation, test the veracity of opinions about issues and effective ways to solve them, and maintain composure and concentrate when under intense emotional or stressful pressure.
- Hope can be impacted and influenced by goals, pathways, and agency. It is important to attain acceptance and commitment to concrete stretch goals through participation and involvement; make clear goals and pathways towards achieving them. Individuals should work on their ability to identify specific goals, ability to create pathways and the capacity to recognize and prepare for difficulties.
- Concerning optimism, it is necessary to building efficacy and confidence, together with the development of generally positive expectations. It is necessary to identify self-defeating beliefs during a challenge and replace them with developed-based ideas that are more truthful and productive.
- Develop efficacy by setting up stepwise techniques to accomplish goals. Individuals can

work on mastery experiences or performance attainments, and not just by personal experience but also by indirect positive experiences or modeling relevant others. Positive social persuasion regarding one's efficacy that includes positive feedback and information towards goals achievement helps develop confidence as PsyCap. Additionally, there is a significant impact of physiological and psychological arousal since people frequently judge their capabilities based on how they feel physically and emotionally.

In organizational context, organizations can, for instance [26]: empower employees and reassure them to express their opinions on organizational issues; develop and maintain optimism in workplace; develop a more comprehensive recruitment or appraisal system, analyze strengths rather than weaknesses; educate managers to be good coaches and communicators; express interest in the employees, recognize their effort, needs and personal well-being as well as to treat all employees equally.

## CONCLUSION

Organizations and academics search constantly for new sources and approaches on how to capture and seize the full potential of their employees as today human capital plays a significant role in building of organizational sustainability and long-term competitiveness. By incorporating positive psychology into the workplace environment, POS and POB both aim to seize and use the most of individual capacities and strengths. Today's leaders and managers need to emphasize positive aspects both on individual and organizational level. A positive virtue approach in developing a healthy work environment is strongly emphasized. In that sense, POB brings new light on individual assets and contribution to a healthy work environment. This can enable better organizational functioning and lead to development of individual positive- psychological states, which have an effect on the attitudes, behaviors, and performance that the organization seeks from its employees. Through this paper, elements of positive approach to organizations have been emphasized, with special emphasis on the PsyCap and its development. This core construct in POB plays an important role, with hope, efficiency, resilience and optimism as the main four psychological resources that lead to desired employee attitudes, behaviors and performance, but also a general healthy work environment.

The main objective was to provide an insight into theoretical framework of positive approach to work environment. As such, the main limitation of this paper lies in its theoretical essence. It does not include any empirical analysis. Still, providing insight into the value of the concept as a whole, with several directions of positivity development inside organizations, can be helpful as a starting point for practitioner and researchers in understanding and analysis of this interesting, emerging new scientific area of research.

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