
Charles Darwin University

The role of positive psychology in improving employees' performance and organizational productivity

An experimental study

Kour, Jasleen; El-Den, Jamal; Sriratanaviriyakul, Narumon

Published in:
Procedia Computer Science

DOI:
[10.1016/j.procs.2019.11.118](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2019.11.118)

Published: 01/01/2019

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Kour, J., El-Den, J., & Sriratanaviriyakul, N. (2019). The role of positive psychology in improving employees' performance and organizational productivity: An experimental study. *Procedia Computer Science*, 161, 226-232. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2019.11.118>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



The Fifth Information Systems International Conference 2019

The Role of Positive Psychology in Improving Employees' Performance and Organizational Productivity: An Experimental Study

Jasleen Kour, Jamal El-Den*, Narumon Sriratanaviriyakul

Charles Darwin University, Ellengowan Drive, Casuarina, NT 0820 Australia

Abstract

Employees' productivity has been extensively addressed by psychologists for a long time. With the emergence of positive psychology (PS), positive psychologists started to fill the literature gap which addresses the influence of individual's positive traits on employees' performance and organizational productivity and how it could be improved by identifying these traits and building organizational policies based on them. Unlike traditional psychology, PS focuses on the employees' positive individual traits rather than on curing the negative psychological aspects of the individual. This research identifies three such positive traits, - Optimism, Well-Being and Personal Strength and analyses their impacts on employees' productivity, hence organizational productivity. The research explicitly investigates these three positive traits, their identification and the development of a policy based on these aiming at positive effects on increasing the employees' performance, hence their productivity. The research proposes a "process" and a "framework" which reflect the relationships between Positive Psychology traits, employees' performance and Organizational Productivity. Hypotheses were drawn from the framework and a questionnaire was prepared to collect data to verify the validity of the relationships proposed on the framework. The questionnaire was administered on employee in a selected organization. Each hypothesis was tested, and the results were analyzed using statistical approaches. The results demonstrated quite interesting findings which demonstrated that, implementing positive psychology concepts and individual positive traits such as optimism, well-being and personal strength at the workplace increase employees' performance hence organizational productivity, and this was verified by the acceptance of all the hypotheses following the data analysis.

© 2019 The Authors. Published by Elsevier B.V.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

Peer-review under responsibility of the scientific committee of The Fifth Information Systems International Conference 2019.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +61-88-946-6505; fax: +61-89-270-612.

E-mail address: jamal.el-den@cdu.edu.au

Keywords: positive psychology; positive traits; employees' performance; organizational productivity; organizational policies

1. Introduction

Mental processes such as thoughts, memories, dreams and perceptions are hard to be defined, seen or felt because what is in the individual's mind is highly complex and enigmatic. Many wonder how psychologists can study such an intricate, seemingly abstract and extremely sophisticated science. Even if scientists look inside the brain, as in an autopsy or during a surgical operation, all they see is grey matter (the brain). Contemplations, comprehension, feelings, recollections, dreams, recognitions, and so forth can't be seen physically, similar to a skin rash or heart deformity.

Psychology is the study of human behavior and mind state. Traditional psychology has been effective on the negative than on the positive side of patients' analysis state of mind. Psychologists develop an understanding of the mental state of the patient and identify the problem to cure it. Currently, mental anxiety and stress are the most common problems affecting the state and behavior of individuals. It is believed that these states and behaviors affect the individual's performance and productivity. In traditional psychology, the attention has been focusing on recognizing the emotional well-being of individuals, patients, such as depression and tackling the state with conventional methods and drugs. This is fundamentally essential for those facing psychological illness, it gives a deficient picture of emotional well-being. Positive psychology is a generally new branch of psychology that shifts the concentration from what is clinically wrong, to the advancement of prosperity and the making of a satisfying life loaded with significance, happiness, delight, engagement, positive relationship and achievement.

2. Positive psychology

Positive Psychology is the branch which comes into existence after learning useful lessons from earlier research and theorizing [1].

Positive Psychology is a current branch of psychology which stresses ordinary, successful advancement instead of the treatment of psychological sickness. The field promises to strengthen traditional psychology rather than replacing it as PS fundamentally focuses on what is "good" in the individual, positive traits, and strengthen them.

Martin Seligman is considered the father of Positive Psychology, although the term is coined to Abraham Maslow, 1951, and he concentrated on the individuals' happiness, prosperity, well-being and how the individual's mental state could be improved by focusing on these traits. Seligman successfully amalgamated thoughts and ideas of past researchers, philosophers and scientists and related them to the consciousness. The concept of practical importance of positive psychology has been originated in late 90s in its cotemporary form. This took place when Martin Seligman as the president of American Psychological Association invigorated the necessity of including a strength-based approach to the field of Psychology [2].

Using thorough surveys, Seligman found that the most fulfilled, energetic individuals were the individuals who had found and exploited their exceptional mix of "signature qualities" such as humanity, moderation and persistence. This vision of happiness joins the ethicalness morals of Confucius, Mencius and Aristotle with present day psychological theory of motivation. Seligman stated that individuals' satisfaction has three measurements: The Pleasant Life, the Good Life, and the Meaningful Life.

3. Positive psychology at the workplace

The 21st Century workplace heavily depends on advancement on technology, hence putting pressure on both the employees and the organization in terms of performance and productivity. In such an environment, organizations are working hard to find ways to improve employees' performance and productivity. The paper proposes that both could be increased by building work policies which incorporate individuals' positive traits.

To accommodate for the fast-paced technological advances, organizations are expected to depend more on employees' creativity and expertise. This is integral for the overall organizational productivity. Individually, the identification of employees' knowledge, expertise, well-being and happiness become part of the organizational aim and develop processes which insure cross-talk and adaptability, undertaking plans that take benefit of human capital,

and a strategy to give the organization a special, competitive advantage. The quick changes in the world make huge vulnerability in business sectors, and this requires inventive arrangements and the capacity to decide to choose the organization direction.

Hence, this requires key choices that shape the objectives and mission of the organization, which influence the organization's structure, human capital needs and so forth [3]. Components that attempt to enhance physical health, knowledge, achievement and motivation among group members are to be suggested based on the assumption that a relaxed member engages more positively [4].

An individual spends a good part of their day at work i.e. almost 7 to 8 hours of his or her daily life where he/she works and performs the responsibilities assigned by the job or the organization. Spending such a long time of the day in the workplace reflects in different ways on the individual and exercise immense pressure on his/her mind. Consequently, the environment at work must be stress free and pleasant, otherwise it will have a serious negative effect on the basic psychology of the employee which ultimately impact his/her performance and hence, the overall the productivity of the organization. The paper addresses the increase of employees' performance from a positive psychology perspective. Three positive traits are identified and used as the basis for developing a framework which demonstrates the relationships between them and employees' performance/productivity and hence organizational productivity. The paper proposes that these traits are the roots for ensuring an environment which is stress free, friendly and motivating for the employees.

4. The need of positive psychology

The theories and ideas of positive organizational scholarship (POS) are used in the development and implementation of effective organizational strategies. POS provides an insight to understand the relation between organizational strategies and its employees', its impact on human behaviour on workplace and subsequently provides a vision to analyse why some strategies are more productive than the rest [5]. The role of positive psychology in improving positive organizational behaviour is undebatable and has gained more popularity in recent years [6]. Many companies/organizations develop their strategies and policies to identify employees' positive traits or attributes (e.g. trustworthiness, loyalty, resilience) to achieve their business goals and maintain sustainability [7]. Since positive psychology focuses on human strengths, such as, positive traits and personal strength for organizational prosperity, it is believed to create positive impact to develop organized system that values potential in their employees [8].

Positive organizational behaviour is defined as the study and application of positive human strengths and psychological capacities for a healthy organizational environment [9]. Luthans [9] stated that, there exists a never-ending relationship between work and happiness; positive organizational culture and its performance; and employees' attributes and their performance.

Traditional psychology find/cure the negative side of organizational behaviour such as violence in the workplace, organizational failures, and the like [5]. While organizational behaviour focuses more on issues related to uncertainty management, disorganization theory and chaos theory; POB put forward the concept of positive aspect of work; positive traits of employees and their interdependency which contributes equally in to the development of good work environment [10].

Based on the fact that POB applies in the organizational setting with a positive outcome and succeeded in realizing the positive employees' traits to maximum for a better organizational career, we posit that the employees' security compliance behaviour can be improved through positive organizational behaviour. If the organization embraces its employees' positive traits and strengths and develops organizational culture and security compliance policies' based on these traits, better security compliance can be achieved [10].

For instance, it is not a matter of motivating employees to do their work, yet rather how to inspire them to do better work, or their best work. Today, organizations expect employees to be creative, cooperative and contribute to the knowledge sharing and at the same time do their routine work while only 14% of employees globally exhibit highly engagement. Approximately, about a quarter are vigorously disengaged, and 62% are only moderately engaged. Then the questions arise like by what method can such groups build up an innovative cooperative energy that will benefit from the numerous visions available, in what capacity would businesses be able to and bunches benefit from their diversity and so far as that is concerned, what would organizations be able to do to ensure that the correct individuals get on board and remain with the organization. However, when organizations grasp the option of diversity, they

experience issues bringing the essential mind-set and culture into the organization. What these inquiries have in common is that they are trying to go beyond fixing complications and into encouraging excellence and quality. It is basically a direct result of this point of view that the business world needs to swing to the branch of psychology named as Positive Psychology that deals with human prosperity and human abilities [11, 12].

5. Optimism in the workplace

Optimism is an important psychological trait that plays an important role in the life of individuals. Optimism helps an individual in terms of his/her power to influence actions whereas the pessimism makes a person feels helpless. According to Scheier and Carver [13], optimism is a set of over-all positive result outlooks. In their invention of the concept of optimism they stated that people who usually expect that anything in the life will go according to its way and be certain of the fact that it will always have more good outcomes than bad, are optimistic in the real sense. Accordingly, optimism is considered as one of the pillars of positive psychology. Optimism at the organizational level has its origin in the administrative realism. Hawthorne studies were part of a refocus on managerial strategy incorporating the socio-psychological aspects of human behavior in organizations which deals with how variations in the workplace environment might increase productivity. These experiments ultimately resulted that by paying attention to workers and their requirements, organizational management would expect increase in the employees' performance.

People with positive informative style are better ready to deal with the vulnerability of change. Accordingly, these people show more controlled observations and execute more dynamic coping strategies at their work, and that employees with positive perspective reinterpret the negative occasion as an opportunity for growth and development. As a result, an employee with positive perspective can deal with the problems in a successful manner which in turns keep him/her free from stress and anxiety thus his/her performance increases. These findings strengthen the fact that encouragement and recognition by management and acknowledging their work positively influence their performance.

6. Well-being and employees in the workplace

In the implementation of positive psychology, employees' well-being is a significant factor to be considered by organizations. The workplace environment plays an integral role on the employees' overall well-being, hence their performance and productivity. Fifth of the people exercise better life if they are satisfied at their work [14]. The properties of work such routes, management, and intricacy, are used to measure and control the individual's depression [15]. Employees' well-being is likewise to the greatest advantage of businesses that spend considerable resources to hire the employees and make efforts to produce their products, get benefits, and sustain their reliable clients. To prevail with this regard to hire employees, managers must give tangible advantages. Though, employees need more than a fixed employment with pensions and various other benefits. Researches of later and forthcoming generations of employees undoubtedly reveal a larger part of employees want more prominent significance and self-awareness from their work and recommend numerous other workers to see their work comprises of enjoyable, satisfying, and socially helpful [16]. While the type of work affects the damage risks in a working environment, a limited characteristic basic to all working environments influence the work environment wellbeing risks to employees. Universal procedures of well-being are useful when researchers are interested in the employees' level of affecting well-being in general.

Work environments strengthen employee wellbeing and prosperity from various perspectives, including by giving sick leaves and graduated come back to-work programs. Paid sick leave enables employees to get medical care, recover faster, and keep the work environment free from communicable serious health issues and preventing the spread of illness and disease in the work environment. While paid sick leave gives surety to workers, it likewise adds to expanded efficiency by enabling unwell employees to recover even more adequately and come back to full profitability more quickly. Graduated return-to work programs help to prevent employees from the effect of long-term illness and determine the value of the employee to the workplace.

Well-being in the workplace is, overall, a purpose of serving employees to do what they feel is right by giving them a freedom to do so with the help of actions that effect workers' engagement and therefore that rise the rate of positive emotions.

7. Research framework

The main aim of this research is to identify employees' positive traits and develop a process where these traits will help to improve their performance and consequently the organisational productivity. After identifying positive traits, the focus is to develop a policy based on these traits in order to achieve better employee's satisfaction, which in turn, affect the employee performance positively. As a result, overall performance of the organisation can get improved. In this research, it gets clear how the innovative evolving field of Positive Psychology helps to manage workplace environment effectively and to increase productivity in the organization.

Considering the objectives and the aim that has been established for the conduction of the research, there are some of the questions regarding it. This is a portion of some real issues that are considered; by leading this exploration and this research provide detailed discussion on such issues.

Based on the framework (Fig. 1) a set of hypotheses were developed in order to find out the validity of the assumptions of the framework.

- H1: Organisational policies positively affect the employees' positive traits.
- H2: Optimism positively affect the employees' performance.
- H3: Personal strength may positively affect the employees' performance.
- H4: Well-being may positively affect the performance.
- H5: Employee's performance may increase the productivity.
- H6: Organizational Productivity positively affected by the employees' positive traits.

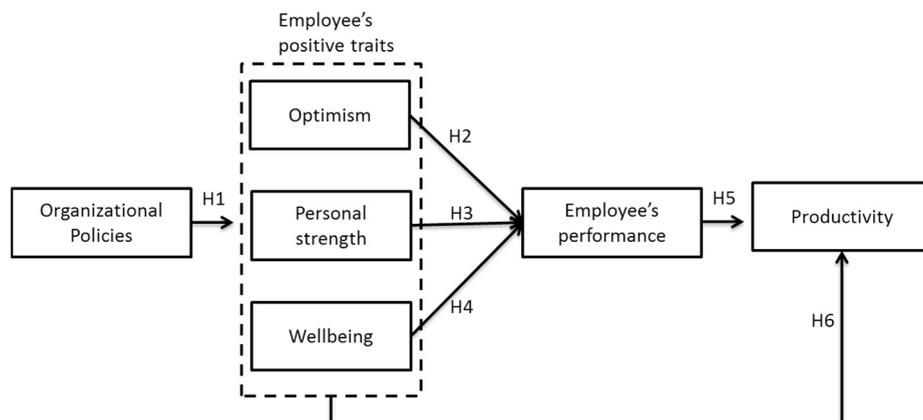


Fig. 1. Research Framework.

8. Methodology

The problem statement of this research is to identify the use of Positive Psychology and the individual positive Traits (Optimism, Personal Strength and Well- Being) to the questionnaires have been designed for each of the hypothesis and there are about ten questions per hypothesis on an average. An online survey for the employees has been conducted by sending an e-mail with the survey link to all the employees individually with the concern of the confidentiality of their answers for the survey and preventing any physical contact with the employees. In order to design the survey, an online tool 'SurveyPlanet' has been used. To plan this survey, numerous standard questionnaires are eluded. The questions in the survey were written in the plain language. The respondents have the alternative to choose the choice most ideal to them on a Likert scale of 1-5. The employees have not given choice to avoid answering any questions from the survey.

The responses have been submitted completely by the employees. After the successful completion of the survey, all the data is exported to the excel sheet so as to investigate the responses of the employees. The data is demonstrated

by converting the responses in terms of percentages for Agree and Disagree answers for all the respondents ignoring all the neutral responses as neutral responses is related to the confusing state of mind where the employees cannot reach on an agreeable or disagreeable result. Enhance employees' performance and in turns the productivity of the organization.

9. Data analysis

A survey was developed and conducted on a sample of 97 participants. The data was analysed using the z-test where the results for each hypothesis implemented an agree/ disagree response ignoring the neutral responses. The percentage of agree and disagree has been calculated for each of the six hypotheses. A Null hypothesis has been designed for each hypothesis. The averages for the 'agree' responses have been calculated for each hypothesis and the mean and standard deviation also been calculated by incorporating its values in the respective formulas. Because of the z-test analysis, the z-score was calculated, and the results were achieved in every hypothesis. All hypotheses were validated and based on the z score both the hypotheses and/or the null hypotheses results are provided in Table 1. The critical value for all the hypotheses is set to 1.65 as the value of α is 0.05. This value is considered due to the reason that the accuracy is assumed to be 90% and the upper tail test has been taken into practice.

Table 1. Summary of hypotheses & outcomes.

Hypothesis	μ	σ	Critical value	Average	Z-score	Results
H1	31	3.937	1.65	41.14	2.575	Accepted
H2				38.634	1.87	Accepted
H3				38.308	1.85	Accepted
H4				42.636	2.95	Accepted
H5				40.6	2.438	Accepted
H6				38.571	1.923	Accepted

10. Discussion and conclusion

The paper addressed an interesting topic incorporating the implementation of positive individual traits in organizational policies to increase employees' performance and as consequence organizational productivity. Three such positive traits were identified as discussed in the paper. A framework was introduced which incorporated the three positive traits and showed their relationships to the employees' performance, organizational policies and organizational productivity. The paper proposed that organizations are to develop strategies which identify its employees' positive traits and build their policies accordingly. These traits are integral for the employees' well-being and if nurtured by the organization will eventually makes employees more eager to engage and increase their performance. This paper lay down a comprehensive investigation of the concept of Positive Psychology and the role of positive traits to Optimism, Well-Being and Personal Strength. Based on the framework, questionnaires were developed to find out whether the relationships on the framework are valid hypotheses test the hypotheses using analytical methods. The survey was conducted on employees in a selected organization and results of the survey were analyzed following a statistical approach that has followed to accommodate for the outcome of each of the hypothesis. The primary results demonstrated that building Organizational Policies based on Positive Psychology concepts increases the employees' performance, hence their overall productivity. The results also demonstrated that Individual Positive Traits such as Optimism, Well-Being and Personal Strength leads to more focused employees with better performance and Organizational Productivity.

We concluded that implementing positive psychology concepts and individual positive traits such as optimism, well-being and personal strength at the workplace increase employees' performance hence organizational productivity, and this was verified by the acceptance of the hypotheses. As a result, implementing Positive Psychology in Organizational policies focusing on the positive traits (Optimism, Well-being and Personal Strength) would result in happier, more focused, and satisfied employees.

References

- [1] Joseph, S., and R. Worsley (2005) “A Positive Psychology of Mental Health: The Person-Centred Perspective.” *Person-centred Psychopathology: A Positive Psychology of Mental Health*. pp. 348-357.
- [2] Seligman, M. (2016). *Pursuit of Happiness*. Available from: <http://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/history-of-happiness/martin-seligman-psychology/>. [Accessed 12th Sep 2017].
- [3] Rousseau, D.M. (1997) “Organizational Behavior in The New Organizational Era.” *Annual Review of Psychology* **48** (1): 515-546.
- [4] El-Den, J. (2012) “Applying Positive Psychology To Knowledge Management”, in *ECKM 2015 Proceedings of the 16th European Conference on Knowledge Management: ECKM2015*, Academic Conferences Limited.
- [5] Cameron, K., and J. Dutton. (2003) *Positive Organizational Scholarship: Foundations of a New Discipline*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- [6] Seligman, M.E., et al. (2005) “Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions.” *American Psychologist* **60** (5): 410.
- [7] Fryer, B. (2004) “Accentuate the Positive.” *Harvard Business Review* **82** (2): 22.
- [8] Peterson, S.J., and B.K. Spiker. (2005) “Establishing The Positive Contributory Value of Older Workers:: A Positive Psychology Perspective.” *Organizational Dynamics* **34** (2): 153-167.
- [9] Luthans, F. (2002) “The Need for and Meaning of Positive Organizational Behavior.” *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior* **23** (6): 695-706.
- [10] El-Den, J., and K. Dangi. (2016) “A Comparative Study and Analysis Between the (Positive Traits and Personal Strengths) PP Model and Current Security Compliance Models”, in *ECIC2016-Proceedings of the 8th European Conference on Intellectual Capital: ECIC2016*, Academic Conferences and publishing limited.
- [11] Csikszentmihalyi, M. and J. LeFevre. (1989) “Optimal Experience in Work and Leisure.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* **56** (5): 815.
- [12] Seligman, M.(2000) *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*, Atria Books.
- [13] Scheier, M.F., and C.S. Carver. (1985) “Optimism, Coping, and Health: Assessment and Implications of Generalized Outcome Expectancies.” *Health Psychology* **4** (3): 219-247.
- [14] Campbell, A., P. Converse, and W. Rodgers. (1976) *The Quality of American Life: Perceptions, Evaluations, and Satisfactions*, Russell Sage Foundation.
- [15] Kohn, M.L., and C. Schooler. (1982) “Job Conditions and Personality: A Longitudinal Assessment of Their Reciprocal Effects.” *American Journal of Sociology* **87** (6): 1257-1286.
- [16] Avolio, B.J., and J.J. Sosik. (1999) “A Life-Span Framework for Assessing The Impact of Work on White-Collar Workers.” in *Life in the Middle*, Elsevier. pp. 249-274.