PSYCH 467-001
CURRENT TOPICS IN ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY:
POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Term: WINTER 2017
Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:00pm – 2:30pm
Location: 1046 DANA (Jan 17: G580 Dental School)
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Internet: Canvas site
Office: 1536 East Hall
Office hours: Tuesdays 10:30am – 11:30am
and by appointment

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Think about the best times you've had when working. What happened then? Your thoughts may go back to moments when you felt a deep connection to your work; you were doing something meaningful that resonated with who you are; with your strengths, competences, values, and interests. Perhaps you are thinking about a team you were a part of; that special connection with your co-workers, when you felt that you belonged. Or perhaps you think of an organization that you felt proud to be a part of, or a leader who motivated you and your colleagues to put yourself on the line for something that you all believed in. Whatever came to your mind, it probably had something to do with having an experience that connected you better to yourself, to your colleagues, and/or to those benefiting from your work, and that allowed you to grow and contribute. This is the topic we will focus on in this seminar: How work can be a positive, enriching experience in the present moment, but also resulting in positive long-term outcomes. In the seminar, we also ask how we can transform our own and others’ work from grey, meaningless toil into a meaningful opportunity.

Organizational psychology is “the science of psychology applied to work and organizations” (Kozlowski, 2012). Psychology, when applied to work, has often adopted a problem-focused perspective and focused on avoiding or alleviating negative consequences of work, such as stress, burnout, and social conflicts. However, during this seminar, we’ll focus on solutions and strengths – on the positively deviant (rather than only neutral or negative) psychological and also social phenomena and processes at work.

The emerging field of Positive Organizational Psychology (POP) has been defined as “...the scientific study of positive subject experiences and traits in the workplace and positive organizations, and its application to improve the effectiveness and quality of life in organizations.” (Donaldson & Ko, 2010). During the seminar, we will cover this whole definition as we explore individuals’ positive psychological states (e.g., thriving, work engagement), positive traits (e.g., character strengths), and positive activities at work (e.g., job crafting). In addition, we’ll explore positive inter-individual processes that build human and social resources (e.g., high-quality connections, psychological safety), and also consider positive leadership and organizing.

In addition to providing an in-depth look into this field, the seminar aims at encouraging you to consider why adopting the positive lens in organizational psychology might be conceptually interesting and practically beneficial. The seminar also aims at supporting self-reflection on how you could contribute to the emergence of positive workplaces as an employee or leader.

COURSE FORMAT
The seminar will consist of:

- **Introductory lectures**: The first sessions will set the stage for the seminar. We will get organized for the seminar and study some basic POP concepts and theories.

- **The Read & Discuss (R&D) sessions on Tuesdays**: Each week, we will focus on a specific topic. During the Tuesday session, we will discuss an assigned article/book chapter on the topic. I will act as the Discussion Leader, while your job is to read the assigned article in advance, submit one discussion question on it (see below), and participate in the class-room discussion in an informed and active manner. The discussion questions are graded.

- **Seminar Work sessions with Discussion Leaders**: On Thursdays, we will have two or three students acting as Discussion Leaders, presenting their Seminar Work on the week’s topic, and helping us to further understand both theoretical and practical aspects of the week’s topic. The Discussion Leaders can choose between alternative ways to do their Seminar Work, as outlined below.

- **Exams**: We will have two exams. The first exam focuses on the literature on Positive Organizational Psychology (the introduction) and the positive psychological states and traits, while the second exam will focus on the literature on positive inter-personal relations and positive organizing. Below, there is further information also on the exams.

- **Special Sessions**: We will have two Special Sessions with engaging content to be announced later.

READ & DISCUSS SESSIONS: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
You will participate in the seminar in two roles; as an **Informed Participant** and a **Discussion Leader**. Both roles require that you study the assigned material carefully in advance.

As an **Informed Participant**, you will read the material assigned for the week (see Table below), ponder its meaning along with its conceptual and practical implications, and prepare to discuss the material in the class. For each article, you should write **one discussion question** that you’d like to discuss in the class. Include also a short clarification of the question and/or an explanation on why you consider the question important/interesting.

You should **email** me your discussion questions (along with the short clarification and explanation) as a **pdf document by MONDAY morning 9am, each week**. Remember to include the topic of the session and your name to the pdf-document! I will collect together all Discussion Questions and create a document listing them in thematic groups (and without indicating who submitted which question). I will share this document with everyone, and we will use it as a starting point for the discussions on the articles in the class. The Discussion Questions will influence your grade (for 10 points out of 100 points, see below), while I also grade your informed participation in the class (max 10 points).
SEMINAR WORK SESSIONS: DISCUSSION LEADERS

The Thursday session of each week will have assigned Discussion Leaders presenting their Seminar Work. At the beginning of the term, we will form seminar groups and distribute the seminar topics to the groups. In case there are several seminar groups interested in the same topic, a lottery will be used to determine which group gets the topic. The groups of Discussion Leaders should contact me at least one week before their session to discuss their plans. You can earn a maximum of 40 points for the Seminar Work.

The Seminar Work consists of a literature review and an application (explained below). The emphasis of the Seminar Work should be on the application, while the literature review simply paves way for it and provides the application’s theoretical framework. The aim of the Seminar Work is to engage all the students in active and shared learning on the topic – its theoretical aspects but, above all, its practical meaning and implications to workers, leaders, and organizations. The Seminar Works should provide the participating students with tools to approach and address challenges and opportunities relating to the topic in the working life.

**Literature Review.** The seminar group carries out a literature review on their topic. Example articles have been provided for each topic (see the Table above), but you can also include references that you consider appropriate and interesting. The literature review should address issues such as the following:

- Describe what your topic is.
- What are the key concepts and theoretical models?
- Why is the topic important? Why do you find it interesting or relevant?
- What kind of research has been carried out?
- What kinds of findings have been made?
- What are the frontiers for research and practice – What should be studied next? What kind of development should be achieved in workplace?

**Application.** There are two alternatives for your seminar group to carry out the application part of the Seminar Work: (1) Carry out a small study on your topic in a real work setting, OR (2) Organize a class-room exercise on the topic. In both cases, your application does not have to cover the whole topic and all the literature on it, but it can focus on some especially important aspect of the topic.

**(1) A small study in a real work setting**

The seminar group explores how its topic manifests itself at work. Formulate a research question relating to your topic on the basis of the literature that you have reviewed. Find a workplace, a group of individuals, an especially interesting individual, or any work-related case where you can study your question. Conduct a small study by collecting some data (e.g., questionnaire answers, interviews, observations, documents to analyze etc.). You can use either quantitative or qualitative methodology to collect and analyze your data. Depending on
your research question, you can address e.g. following questions in the data collection and analysis:

- What can you learn about the topic in this context? For instance, what does it mean to the employees or leaders you are studying? What influence does it have for stakeholders such as customers?
- What kinds of practices or developments can you see that relate to the topic?
- Who is doing what? In other words, how do the actions of employees/supervisors/leaders/customers influence this topic in this work context?
- In the light of the chosen topic, what kind of further development is needed? For instance, what kind of obstacles can you detect regarding your topic in this particular context?

Hallmarks of an interesting study are: (a) It provides a truly appropriate and inspiring practical illustration of the topic in question and (b) The seminar group reflects on their empirical findings in the light of the theory. Do their findings problematize the theory? Or do they confirm, or extend it?

(2) A class-room exercise

The seminar group develops (or finds and applies) an exercise on the topic to be carried out in the class-room by the participating students. You can come up with the exercise yourself or use and apply an exercise found e.g. in the Internet or a book. And you can choose any aspect relating to the broadly framed topics (below) as the theme of your exercise. The seminar group coordinates the execution of the exercise in the class.

Here you really can use your creativity and choose freely what kind of an exercise you create. Your aim should be to engage and involve the whole class to some activities so that they learn more about the topic and maybe even something about themselves in relation to the topic. Your aim should be to provide them a chance to gain insights and experiences that can support them in their careers, or in their work as psychologists in various contexts. Some ideas of what you can do are:

- You can organize the participants into groups to discuss relevant question(s).
- You can provide case problems that the participants are to solve.
- You can organize a quiz on the topic.
- You can engage everyone to a role play to provide the participants an opportunity to experience the topic in practice.
- You can ask the participants to complete small surveys, analyze the responses on the spot, and provide feedback to support the participants’ self-reflection and development.
- You can find a coaching or training exercise relating to your topic in the Internet. Apply this exercise in the class and help everyone to learn more about the topic through their experiences in the exercise.
- Etc. Etc.
If you want, you can ask the audience to participate as themselves, or you can ask them to take a role (e.g., ‘how would you deal with this question as a HR manager...’).

Hallmarks of an interesting class-room exercise are: (a) You come up with a good idea for the exercise, (b) You are able to execute in well in the class – Everybody knows what is happening and why, and they find it easy to take part, (c) You guide the class well, and coordinate and summarize well the activities in the class.

**Leading the Discussion.** The Discussion Leader group has the whole session to present their Seminar Work. Include separate parts for the literature review and for the application. In other words, present first your topic and its theoretical starting points. Then, proceed to present your application. Prepare slides or visuals to support your presentation! Remember that the emphasis should be on the application part. Aim at creating an engaging, active, safe, and even fun learning experience to everyone!

**EXAMS**

We will have two exams: The first focuses on the introduction to the Positive Organizational Psychology and the Read & Discuss material on positive psychological states and traits (2/21), and the second exam focuses on the Read & Discuss material on positive interpersonal relations and organizing (4/11). The aim of the exams is to test how well you have learned the concepts and theories in the Read & Discuss articles and the lecture slides of Dr. Kira (uploaded in the Canvas). The two exams will contain single-choice questions (i.e., multiple choice questions that have only one correct answer) and/or short answer questions.

**ATTENDANCE**

On-time attendance is mandatory each week. You have two excused absences in your disposal during the term in cases of illness, when representing the University in an official capacity, or for religious observance. In special cases, I will also allow an excused absence for a job interview (but I expect you to do your best to schedule job interviews such that they do not collide with our sessions).

Contact me a minimum of 24 hours in advance to apply for an excused absence, and you will have to hand in evidence of an excusable cause for the absence (e.g., a doctor’s note, proof of officially representing the University, indication of what religious observance is in question, confirmation email for a job interview). In case of a sudden illness, you should contact me asap and hand in the doctor’s note as soon as you have it available.

Make sure to schedule your Discussion Leader session such that it will not collide with a pre-seeable excused absence. Also, there are no excused absences for the two exam sessions. In case you fall seriously ill when it’s your turn to lead the discussion or when we are having an
exam, let me know as soon as possible, and I will assign a make-up task to you at that time. You will need to hand in the make-up task within a week.

POLICY FOR LATE ASSIGNMENTS
Late project and section assignments will not be accepted, no exceptions.

OTHER REMARKS
I will follow the usual LSA and U of M policies for Special Considerations. I will also follow the usual LSA and U of M policies for cheating, plagiarism, or other violations of the academic code of integrity.

CLASS CLIMATE AND POLICY FOR ELECTRONIC DEVICES
In addition to input from me and the material studied, the aim is that the seminar participants have opportunities to learn from each other and to learn together. Your informed participation is vital for the success of this seminar!

It also is my aim that, together, we create a psychologically safe class climate. Psychological safety has been defined as “feeling able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career” (Kahn, 1990: 7083). When psychologically safe, students are able to engage in their learning authentically as themselves and express their ideas more freely. Psychological safety therefore fosters individual learning and also collective learning. As the lecturer, I will support a safe climate by being accessible and open, and by inviting input and contribution from everybody, but also you as a student can foster psychological safety by being respectful and attentive towards the other students and by actively listening to their insights (Edmondson, 20034).

Being respectful and attentive also has to do with not allowing electronic devices to distract you from listening to others and participating in discussions. Therefore, please, refrain from using electronic devices during the sessions (e.g., laptops, cell phones, iPads/tablets, etc.).

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your grade will be determined by your performance as a discussion leader and informed participant, by the quality of discussion questions you submit, and by your exam results. Below, I’ve indicated how each of these influences your grade, summarized the relevant deadlines, and outlined the grade distribution:

- Discussion Leadership (40 points)
  - Will be scheduled during one of the first sessions.
- Exams (40 points)
  - 1st exam on the introduction and the positive psychological states and traits on Feb 21 (20 points).
  - 2nd exam on positive inter-personal relations and organizing on April 11 (20 points).
- Discussion Questions (10 points):
  - Deadline: Hand in each Monday by 9am.
- Informed participation in the class-room discussions (10 points).
  - I will pay attention to your attendance and participation in the class.
  - The participation grade will take into account the quality of your contributions, not merely the quantity, so please connect your participation in the class to the course material.

Letter grades will be assigned using the following distribution:

- A+ 97 – 100
- A  94 – 96
- A- 90 – 93
- B+ 87 – 89
- B  84 – 86
- B- 80 – 83
- C+ 77 – 79
- C  74 – 76
- C- 70 – 73
- D+ 67 – 69
- D  64 – 66
- D- 60 – 63

COURSE SCHEDULE, PROGRAM, READINGS, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Below you can find a Table with detailed information on the course schedule, topics, activities, readings, and – as we organize for the seminar – I will include the names of the Discussion Leaders.
Table. Course schedule, program, readings, and responsibilities. The Read & Discuss readings are the articles that everyone reads and submits their question on. Suggestions for Seminar Groups are proposed further readings and resources for the Seminar Work groups.

### INTRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Discussion leader(s)</th>
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</table>
| 1/5  | Introduction | Getting organized:  
- Introductions  
- Seminar topics  
- Learning activities and grades  
- Division of tasks | Dr. Kira |
| 1/10 | Introduction | Lecture:  
- Getting organized  
- What is Positive Organizational Psychology (POP)? | Dr. Kira |
| 1/12 | Introduction | Lecture:  
- Positive Organizational Psychology: Some key concepts and theories | Dr. Kira |

### POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES AND TRAITS AT WORK

#### THRIVING AT WORK: VITALITY AND LEARNING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Core Article (Tuesdays)/Suggestions for Seminar Groups (Thursdays)</th>
<th>Discussion leader(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/19</td>
<td>1. Seminar Work on Thriving</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Core Article (Tuesdays)/ Suggestions for Seminar Groups (Thursdays)</td>
<td>Discussion leader(s)</td>
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• [https://www.fastcompany.com/3063404/hr/why-your-hiring-process-keeps-missing-candidates-character-flaws](https://www.fastcompany.com/3063404/hr/why-your-hiring-process-keeps-missing-candidates-character-flaws) |                      |
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<tr>
<td><strong>GROWING THROUGH ADVERSITIES AT WORK &amp; RESILIENCE</strong></td>
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<td><strong>JOB CRAFTING</strong></td>
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• https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_igfnctYjA  
• http://positiveorgs.bus.umich.edu/events/positive-links-speaker-series-session-engage-in-job-crafting/ |                      |
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Discussion leader(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>2/21</td>
<td>EXAM ON POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES</td>
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<td>Dr. Kira</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/23</td>
<td>Special Session I</td>
<td>To be announced later</td>
<td>Dr. Kira</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/25-3/5</td>
<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
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**EXAM & RECAP POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES AT WORK**

**POSITIVE INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONS AT WORK**

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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• Watch also the TED Talk by Amy Edmondson on Psychological Safety: http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/Building-a-psychologically-safe- | Dr. Kira |
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<tr>
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• http://www.thecompassionlab.com/ |                      |
<p>|       | <strong>POSITIVE ORGANIZING</strong>                                               | <strong>POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY</strong>                                                                          |                      |</p>
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• http://www.davidcooperrider.com/                                                                                   |                       |
|       |                                            | **AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP**                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                       |
|       |                                            | **EXAM & RECAP ON POSITIVE INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONS AT WORK AND ORGANIZING**                                                                                                                                                  |                       |
| 4/11  | EXAM ON POSITIVE INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONS AT WORK AND ORGANIZING |                                                                                           | Dr. Kira              |
| 4/13  | Special Session II                         | To be announced later                                                                        | Dr. Kira              |
| 4/18  | Wrap Up                                    |                                                                                           | Dr. Kira              |

**WRAP UP**