

Positive Organization Scholarship: What does it achieve?

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Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) is a relatively new development in organizational studies, having formally begun with a 2003 edited collection of the same name (Cameron, et al., 2003b). Since that time, it has attracted considerable attention and discussion (e.g., George, 2004; Fineman, 2006; Caza and Caza, 2007; Roberts, 2006). The theoretical basis and scope of POS have been addressed quite recently (Dutton and Glynn, 2007; Dutton and Sonenshein, 2007), so this chapter only summarizes these issues, in favor of a more empirical focus. After discussing the domain and antecedents of POS, primary attention is given to what POS has accomplished to date. These accomplishments have two facets, as POS involves a research perspective and an approach to managing organizations. This chapter considers the accomplishments of POS in both areas.

Nature of Positive Organizational Scholarship

In the eponymous book that launched POS (Cameron, et al., 2003b), the editors began by contrasting two extreme, hypothetical worlds: one of greed, manipulation, and distrust; the other of appreciation, collaboration, and meaningfulness. They then characterized POS as recognizing the importance of the first world, but intentionally emphasizing the second. "POS is concerned with the study of especially positive

outcomes, processes, and attributes of organizations and their members" (Cameron, et al., 2003a, p.4). POS thus promotes the study of enablers, motivations, and effects associated with positive phenomena, with the aim of revealing positive states and processes that would otherwise be missed or obscured by traditional, "non-POS," perspectives.

The creation of the label POS was described as a deliberate one, with each element of the acronym intended to signify an important element of the perspective (Cameron, et al., 2003a). The use of "positive" declared "an affirmative bias and orientation [toward] exceptional, virtuous, life-giving, and flourishing phenomena" (Cameron, et al., 2003a, p. 5). The term "organizational" was meant to stress the emphasis on organized contexts, as opposed to purely individual phenomena (see Dutton and Glynn, 2007). Finally, the "scholarship" label was used to make theoretical explanation and empirical support an explicit requirement for inclusion. In sum, POS calls for scholarly research examining positive phenomena in organizations (Cameron, et al., 2003a, p. 11).

While the intended meaning of "organizational" and "scholarship" seem relatively straightforward, questions have been raised about what constitutes "positive" (e.g., Fineman, 2006; George, 2004). This issue is addressed in more detail later in this chapter, but the uncertainty about the precise nature of positiveness reflects the fact that no formal definition has been offered, either in the original book (Cameron, et al., 2003b) or in subsequent statements about the nature of POS (Cameron and Caza, 2004; Caza and Caza, 2007; Roberts, 2006). Instead, general descriptors and evocative examples have been used to suggest the meaning of positiveness. These include

references to elevating processes, excellence, human strength, resilience, vitality, and meaningfulness (Cameron and Caza, 2004; Cameron, et al., 2003a; Roberts, 2006).

In many ways, the POS emphasis on "how" to see, rather than exactly "what" to see, bears an affinity to the technique involved in seeing an auto-stereogram. Readers will recall the popular culture boom of "magic eye" pictures in the 1990s. In these pictures, if individuals focused their vision in just the right way, a three-dimensional image would seem to emerge from a field of random dots. With these pictures, those who had already seen the image tended to tell others how to look at the picture, rather than telling them to look for a specific object. Moreover, the act of properly seeing a given magic eye picture was initially difficult, but once one was able to see the image in the dots, it became hard to believe that anyone could fail to see it.

POS has been characterized in comparable terms. The POS perspective promises a different way of looking at familiar organizations to see that which has previously been missed, but which is clearly evident and important once one recognizes it. The notion of a different way of perceiving, and of subsequent revelation, is common in all statements of the aims and nature of POS (Cameron, et al., 2004, 2003a; Roberts, 2006). In this sense, POS is like many other conceptual labels in organization studies, serving as an umbrella term to unite a range of theories and investigations that share a common theme (Dutton and Glynn, 2007). "POS draws from the full spectrum of organizational theories to understand, explain, and predict the occurrence, causes, and consequences of positivity" (Cameron, et al., 2003a, p. 5).

The discussion below examines what this new perspective has accomplished so far. However, an important point about initial assumptions should be addressed first.

POS is premised on the belief that "the desire to improve the human condition is universal and the capacity to do so is latent in most systems" (Cameron, et al., 2003a, p. 10). Like the humanism movement in psychology (Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1980), POS takes it as given that individuals and their institutions are inherently eudemonic, that they seek goodness for its intrinsic value (Dutton and Sonenshein, 2007). This can be contrasted with other initial assumptions, such as the Freudian view of humanity's conflicted nature (Freud, 1938) or Hobbes' (1651) belief in humanity's essential brutishness. Postmodern assumptions about the subjectivity of experience also disagree with the humanism of POS, since postmodern views tend to reject the existence of any universal aspect of human nature (e.g., Giddens, 1979; Scheurich, 1997). This issue of initial assumptions is important, because all argumentation depends on beginning from some fixed point of first principle. An assumption of one kind or another is inevitable, and what follows from it only makes sense in the context of that assumption. Since POS begins with the assumption that individuals are inherently driven to seek that which is positive, most of its claims depend upon the truth of that assumption.

The logic for grounding POS in the eudemonic assumption was based on the heliotropic effect. This effect is shown when organisms move away from darkness toward light or positive energy (e.g., a plant bending toward the sun). Heliotropism is defined as the tendency in all living systems to seek that which is life-giving and away from that which is life-depleting. Evidence of the heliotropic effect has been observed in a variety of disciplines, with examples from the social and physical sciences.

In the social sciences, almost all learning and motivation theories are grounded in an assumption of heliotropism. Every learning theorist's version of learning maintains that activities that are positively reinforcing are repeated, while activities that are punishing or unpleasant are extinguished. Positive phenomena are learned faster and more accurately than negative phenomena, and they are recalled more easily and accurately from both long-term and short-term memory. Positive words predominate and are more numerous in virtually every language, and individuals are more attracted to positive terms than to negative terms. Positive reinforcement is more effective in promoting behavior than is negative reinforcement in extinguishing it, and human beings develop psychological defense mechanisms (e.g., repression, denial, displacement) in order to protect against the negative (see Matlin and Stang, 1978 for a review of the heliotropic effect in psychological processes).

In the physical sciences, evolutionary processes are also based on the assumption of heliotropism, that living systems strive to perpetuate and reproduce (Smith, 2005). Evolution theory posits that organisms persist to the extent that they achieve life-giving processes and attributes. Similarly, photosynthesis, the molecular process of using the sun's energy to create oxygen and biological energy, also illustrates the relationship between positive energy, in the form of light, and life-giving processes (Blankenship, 2002).

The approach taken in this chapter is to accept the assumption that human beings are naturally inclined toward positive energy and heliotropism. The purpose here is to take stock of POS on its own terms. However, to the extent that one believes some other initial assumption is more appropriate, he or she will view POS as inherently

flawed because it begins from a "mistaken" assumption. It is beyond the scope and concerns of this chapter to debate the relative merits of one initial assumption over another, but this issue has been discussed elsewhere (Fineman, 2006; Roberts, 2006).

Antecedents of Positive Organizational Scholarship

Obviously, POS did not create the notion of positive behaviors, processes, and outcomes in organizational settings. Numerous research traditions addressed such phenomena before POS was established. The most relevant of these are discussed here, including positive psychology, community psychology, positive organizational behavior, prosocial organizational behavior, organization development, and corporate social performance.

Positive Psychology is a movement initiated in 1999 by then-president of the American Psychological Association Martin Seligman (Seligman, 1999). In his address, he called for psychologists to study positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions. The stated intent of positive psychology was to counter the overwhelming research focus on pathology, and to develop "a science that takes as its primary task the understanding of what makes life worth living" (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 13). In the years following Seligman's call, positive psychology has showed considerable popularity and success, generating extensive research and education (Peterson, 2006; Snyder and Lopez, 2002), including a positive companion to the established handbook of mental pathology (American Psychiatric Association, 1994; Peterson and Seligman, 2004) and several validated interventions for increasing happiness (Seligman, et al., 2005). POS is often described as the

organizational equivalent of positive psychology (Cameron, et al., 2003a; Dutton and Sonenshein, 2007; Roberts, 2006), and positive psychology scholars were invited to offer advice in the initial POS book (Peterson and Seligman, 2003).

Community Psychology is a predecessor of positive psychology. Community psychologists have advanced principles and practices for fostering wellness, such as positive self-attitudes, wholesome growth, and personal integration (e.g., Jahoda, 1958). The emphasis in community psychology has been on preventing illness, rather than curing it, with the goal of enhancing wellness, instead of reducing sickness (see Durlak and Wells, 1997 for a review). In this way, community psychology shares the POS emphasis on increasing what is good.

Positive Organizational Behavior. Building on the work of the Gallup organization and its emphasis on strengths in the workplace, Luthans (2002) called for organizational research on individuals' state-based strengths and capacities, under the label of positive organizational behavior. Self-identified researchers of positive organizational behavior describe themselves as distinct from POS on the grounds that POS is "more macro-oriented" (Luthans, et al., 2005, p. 251) than their emphasis on psychological capacities (Luthans and Avolio, 2003). Nonetheless, the inaugural POS book (Cameron, et al., 2003b) addressed both macro and micro topics and included a chapter from the leading scholars of positive organizational behavior (Luthans and Avolio, 2003). As such, this chapter makes no distinction between positive organizational behavior and POS.

Prosocial Organizational Behavior. A variety of altruistic "citizenship" behaviors have been studied in organizations (see Ilies, et al., 2007 and Podsakoff, et

al., 2000 for reviews). This research tradition grew out of the early recognition that organizations depend upon individuals to do much more than is formally required of them (Katz, 1964), and led to the study of voluntary or "extra-role" efforts to benefit coworkers and the organization. The focus of this research was thus consistent with, and supportive of, the eudemonic assumption of POS, given that extra-role behaviors were defined as benefiting others while providing no formal reward to the individual engaged in them (Smith, et al., 1983).

Organization Development (OD) provides a series of techniques for changing and enhancing organizational functioning (Cummings and Worley, 2005) and is thus concerned with many of the same matters as POS. Of particular importance to POS is the OD approach known as Appreciative Inquiry, originated by Cooperrider and Srivastava (Cooperrider, et al., 2000). Appreciative Inquiry is a technique for guiding organizational change based on previous successes and peak performance. Designing a future state based on the best of the past serves as a source of learning and power for future organizational growth (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005). Thus far little empirical research has been conducted on the effects and contingencies of Appreciative Inquiry, but it is widely employed among OD practitioners.

Corporate Social Performance. Federal governments and international bodies have urged large organizations to assist in promoting social welfare (e.g., OECD, 2000), although opinions about doing so remain divided. While this debate about the social responsibilities of corporations predates the discipline of organization studies (e.g., Berle, 1932; Dodd, 1932), corporate social performance has become an active research literature among organization scientists. Margolis and Walsh (2003) identified 127

studies of the relationship between companies' social and financial performance. Similarly, stakeholder theories of organization examine the potential social benefits that large organizations can produce (Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Hoffman, 1996; Morris, 1997).

Positive Organizational Scholarship: Research

As noted earlier, this chapter focuses on the empirical accomplishments of POS, so only research articles are reviewed here. Consideration of purely theoretical treatments of POS have been addressed elsewhere (Dutton and Glynn, 2007; Dutton and Sonenshein, 2007). In particular, this section summarizes the findings of POS research identified through three search techniques: listings on the web page of the Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship (<http://www.bus.umich.edu/Positive>); an ISI Web of Knowledge search for works citing the three published statements of POS (Cameron and Caza, 2004; Cameron, et al., 2003b; Roberts, 2006); and a search of both the PsycINFO and Proquest databases using variations of the term "positive organization" in the years 2003 to 2007. From this, twenty articles were identified as conducting research explicitly aligned with the POS perspective (see Table 1). The discussion of these articles is organized in six themes.

Insert Table 1 here

Individual Virtue and Social Concern. A survey study of white-collar workers examined the relationship linking hope, gratitude, and responsibility (Andersson, et al., 2007). Hope was defined as a motivational state of felt agency, as the belief that one could achieve a desirable effect. Gratitude was a moral affective state, in which the

individual feels motivated toward prosocial behavior, to "give back" in return for whatever caused the feeling of gratitude. In this study, the researchers found that gratitude led to greater feelings of responsibility for employees and social issues if high hope was present. That is, if individuals felt both grateful and hopeful, then they also felt greater responsibility for other members of the organization and for extra-organizational social matters.

Similar results were shown in two surveys that linked positive psychology character strengths to concern about corporate social performance (Giacalone, et al., 2005). In the first survey, consumers who scored high on trait-based gratitude and hope were also more concerned that organizations serve multiple purposes so as to benefit society, rather than simply maximizing profits. The second survey linked similar concerns about corporate social performance to the traits of spirituality (transcendent ideals and a desire for meaning in community) and generativity (concern for future generations). Together, these results suggest that individual virtue is an important explanatory factor in understanding how individuals judge organizations.

Leadership. There have been several investigations of the role of positive phenomena in explaining leadership. Bono and Ilies (2006) described a series of studies showing that leaders who express more positive emotions engender the same emotions in followers, who then perceive that leader as more charismatic and effective. Similarly, another study found that Army leaders who expressed more vision and love satisfied their followers' needs for the same, fostering greater well-being, commitment, and productivity among followers (Fry, et al., 2005). In the fast food industry, leader hope has been linked to follower satisfaction and retention (Peterson and Luthans,

2003). Similarly, a simulation study showed that group members' assessment of an individual's leadership ability was influenced by that individual's displayed level of empathy (Kellett, et al., 2006). As a set, these studies indicate that positive phenomena can assist in predicting and explaining effective leadership.

Organizational Virtue and Performance. A number of studies have linked organizational manifestations of virtue to performance outcomes, with virtue broadly defined as selfless action taken for the sake of social betterment and that which is best in humanity. One study within a health care network showed how units that were supportive of their members' spirituality produced higher levels of customer satisfaction (Duchon and Plowman, 2005). Similarly, O'Donohoe and Turley's (2006) interview study of newspaper staff dealing with bereaved clients found the staff engaging in "philanthropic emotion management," in which they made personal sacrifices for the sake of grieving clients, even though these sacrifices were neither required nor rewarded by the organization. Another study, among Dutch sales staff, found that pride was a source of self-worth, motivation, creativity, and altruism, and thus led to higher levels of adaptive selling, individual effort, self-efficacy, and citizenship behavior (Verbeke, et al., 2004). Consistent with each of these studies, Cameron and colleagues' (2004) report of survey data used organizational forgiveness, trust, optimism, compassion, and integrity to predict measures of innovation, quality, turnover, customer retention, and profitability. And in a related paper, Bright and colleagues (2006) found that leaders who took responsibility for the disruptive effects of downsizing received more forgiveness from followers, and this forgiveness reduced the performance losses usually created by downsizing.

One feature that all of these studies have in common is a consideration of the organizational nature of virtue. While it was obviously individuals experiencing or expressing virtuous behavior, these studies suggest that such expressions of virtue have the potential to become collective phenomena. Through emotional contagion, reciprocity, and institutionalization, organizational contexts can potentially engender virtuous behavior in individuals (also see Dutton, et al., 2006).

Positive Relationships and Performance. Relationships are another important source of potential performance benefits investigated by POS. A study of the airline industry found that carriers with better internal relations showed greater resilience in the post-9/11 economy; airlines with better internal relations had lower costs, fewer layoffs, and quicker recovery to pre-9/11 stock prices (Gittell, et al., 2006). Similarly, an ethnographic study of a midwifery practice showed how that practice's emphasis on social relationships and humanistic values benefited patient service and staff development (Wooten and Crane, 2004). And in a study of management teams, Losada and Heaphy (2004) described how the highest performing teams on unit profitability, customer satisfaction, and 360-degree evaluations were characterized by more positive communication and interpersonal connection among members.

Interestingly, the performance effects observed in all of these studies resulted from combining positive relationships with some other "non-POS" factor. For example, Gittell and colleagues (2006) found that airlines recovered more quickly when they had positive relations and greater financial resources. Similarly, the successful management teams in Losada and Heaphy (2004) could be identified by their ratio of positive to negative communication. Interactive effects of this sort suggest the need to

simultaneously consider both positive and “non-positive” phenomena in studying organizational behavior.

Psychological Capital. This is a second-order construct comprised of resilience, optimism, self-efficacy, and hope (Luthans, et al., 2007). Several studies have examined its effects in organizations. One study linked psychological capital to reduced absenteeism, and found it was a better predictor of involuntary absenteeism than job satisfaction or organizational commitment (Avey, et al., 2006). In another study, nurses' psychological capital predicted their own intentions to stay in their job and their supervisors' ratings of their organizational commitment (Luthans and Jensen, 2005). A third study found that psychological capital predicted supervisory ratings of worker performance (Luthans, et al., 2005). As such, the positive individual state of psychological capital has been linked to improved health, motivation, commitment, and performance, suggesting its potentially broad importance in understanding organizational behavior.

Absence of Negativity. The POS perspective depends on positive phenomena involving more than the absence of negative ones (Cameron and Caza, 2004; Dutton and Glynn, 2007). If one can achieve positive outcomes simply by eliminating ineffective practices, then there is little that is unique about positive phenomena. However, if there are important differences between reducing the negative and increasing the positive, then distinct study of positive phenomena is merited (Roberts, 2006).

Britt and colleagues' (2007) results suggest that indeed there is a difference between positive and an absence of negative. Their survey study of soldiers deployed in Kosovo tested the idea that morale, defined as an individual's motivation and

enthusiasm to accomplish the organizational mission, was distinct from depression (Britt, et al., 2007). The authors challenged the prevailing view that morale and depression were opposing anchors of a single dimension and used their survey results to show that the two were distinct constructs. While both were influenced by individuals' confidence in their leaders, meaningful work was only important to morale, whereas stress was only a predictor of depression. Since morale and depression had different antecedents, they were distinct phenomena, and this implies that positive is not simply the absence of negative.

In a similar vein, Pittinsky and Shih (2004) presented indirect support for the value of a POS perspective. Their survey of Internet and software workers showed that, contrary to traditional expectations, job change did not reduce commitment to the organization during tenure. In an era of portfolio careers and high organizational mobility, most individuals can expect to work for multiple companies, and this would seem to reduce the potential for commitment to any particular organization, especially in contrast to an individual who has lifetime employment with one organization. However, Pittinsky and Shih (2004) showed that this is not necessarily true, and that commitment was possible even among highly mobile knowledge workers.

However, not all results were so clearly supportive. Ellis and colleagues' (2006) lab study suggested that a positive focus is not helpful for task learning. They used a computer-based business simulation to test the effect of different after-event review strategies. Participants completed the simulation, and then took part in facilitated interventions to help them improve their performance. There were three interventions, one each focusing on successes, failures, or both success and failure. The results from

a second round of the simulation showed that those who focused only on success did no better than a control group with no intervention, and that an analysis of failures tended to produce the greatest increase in subsequent performance. These results may raise some questions about success-focused OD interventions, and certainly serve to emphasize the need to address both positive and negative phenomena in organizations (e.g., Bagozzi, 2003).

Summary. The studies described above include a wide range of methods and contexts and cross all levels of analysis. It is therefore clear that POS is not a focused analytic approach in the way that population ecology or network theory are defined approaches. However, there are notable regularities across these studies. One concerns the location of positive phenomena. Eighteen of the papers used positive phenomena for explanatory purposes (i.e., as the independent variable), while only five concerned themselves with explaining a distinctively POS outcome (dependent variable). Therefore, although POS has been described as the study of positive enablers, processes, and outcomes, the research conducted thus far has been primarily concerned with using positive phenomena to explain familiar, "non-POS," outcomes such as profit and retention.

Another general conclusion to be drawn from these studies is consistent with the claimed need for a POS perspective. The evidence reviewed here suggests that positive phenomena involve more than the absence of negative ones, and that studying the positive aspects of organizational behavior offers explanatory power. At the same time, it seems clear that the ideal approach would be to study relevant "positive" and "negative" phenomena simultaneously. It has been shown that, under some conditions,

positive phenomena can produce undesirable results (e.g., Ellis, et al., 2006; Verbeke, et al., 2004). Likewise, the benefits of positive behaviors may be contingent on the presence of other behaviors that are more traditionally studied in organization studies (e.g., Britt, et al., 2007; Gittell, et al., 2006).

Positive Organizational Scholarship: Practice

Practicing and applying POS in organizations has taken a variety of forms, including the writing of case studies to document especially positive organizational performance, developing specific tools and techniques for generating positive effects among workers, and designing university courses and executive education programs centered on POS knowledge. For example, Hess and Cameron (2006) published case studies of the positive practices used in a variety of organizations which led them to be widely recognized as outstanding organizations (e.g., Best Companies to Work For, Most Admired Companies in America). Case studies of extraordinary leaders or organizations also have been produced for teaching purposes (e.g., Baker and Gunderson, 2005; Bek, et al., 2007; Dutton, et al., 2002;). In addition, specific tools and techniques aimed at enhancing positive outcomes for individuals or organizations have been developed, such as the Reflected Best-Self Instrument (Quinn, et al., 2003; Roberts, et al., 2007), the Reciprocity Ring (Baker, 2007), Appreciative Inquiry Summits (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005), and supportive communication techniques (Dutton, 2003a; Cameron, 2007). These tools, and others, are beginning to be applied in a variety of organizational settings. In addition, undergraduate and graduate courses based on POS have been designed and taught in several colleges and universities

(syllabi for many of these courses are available at from the Center for POS at <http://www.bus.umich.edu/Positive>).

In contrast to this applied work, formal investigations of POS practice are few, primarily due to the constraints of detecting effects from planned organizational interventions while controlling for possible confounds. Moreover, organization-level interventions have been rarer than individual-level ones. However, some studies have been reported, with results suggesting that positivity in practice is associated with higher levels of performance.

For example, Cameron and Lavine (2006) studied the exceptional performance of a company that cleaned up and closed a nuclear production facility 60 years ahead of schedule, \$30 billion under budget, and to standards 13 times greater than federally required. This was arguably the most remarkable example of organizational success in recent memory. More than three million square feet of buildings had to be decontaminated and removed, over 100 tons of plutonium residues had to be neutralized and disposed, and numerous protesters had to be transformed into supporters and advocates. During the cleanup, union members were motivated to work themselves out of a job as quickly as possible, an approach contradictory to traditional union priorities, while maintaining levels of morale and safety that exceeded industry averages by a factor of two. Cameron and Lavine (2006) explained this remarkable performance as a product of 21 different positive organizational practices.

Another intervention study was reported in which two different organizations which had been suffering through periods of downsizing and deteriorating performance each implemented a new change agenda grounded in POS practices. In both of these

organizations performance improvements were significant, and employees attributed the success to the implementation of POS principles (Cameron, 2003). Of course, causality could not be determined in either of these two organizations because data were collected after the turnaround had begun to occur.

There have also been some reports of POS-oriented interventions at the individual-level. For instance, Emmons (2003) induced feelings of gratitude in students by having them keep journals as part of a semester-long assignment. Some of the students were required to keep “gratitude journals” on a regular basis. That is, they wrote down events that happened for which they felt grateful. Other students were assigned to write down events that were frustrating, and still other students were assigned to write down only neutral events. Compared to the frustrated and neutral students, students keeping gratitude journals experienced fewer physical symptoms such as headaches and colds, felt better about their lives as a whole, were more optimistic about the future, had higher states of alertness, attentiveness, determination, and energy, reported fewer hassles in their lives, engaged in more helping behavior, experienced better sleep quality, and had a sense of being more connected to others. In addition, they were absent and tardy less often and had higher grade point averages. In this case, inducing feelings of gratitude had significant impact on students’ classroom performance as well as on their personal lives.

In another investigation, Crocker and colleagues (2006) found that goals focused on contributing to others produced different effects than self-serving goals. During a several-month observation period, the researchers found that contribution goals led to significantly more learning and development, higher levels of interpersonal trust, more

supportive relationships, and less depression and loneliness than did self-interest goals. Importantly, when contribution goals predominated, the meaningfulness of activities was substantially higher than when self-interest goals predominated (Crocker, et al., 2006).

Grant and associates (2007) found that the perceived meaningfulness of work can be enhanced by personal interaction. Workers who had direct contact with the beneficiaries of their work subsequently displayed more task persistence. These workers also had significantly greater productivity in routine tasks, producing more than one and a half times the output of those who did not have contact with beneficiaries.

Baker, Cross, and Wooten (2003) discovered that “positive energizers” (individuals who uplift and boost others) had higher performance as employees than “negative energizers” (people who deplete the good feelings and enthusiasm of others). In fact, individuals who provided positive energy to many people were four times more likely to succeed than individuals who were at the center of information or influence networks. Moreover, the performance enhancement associated with positive energy was also conveyed to those interacting with the energizer. Baker, Cross, and Parker (2004) further reported that high performing organizations have three times as many positive energizers as average organizations. Because positive energy is not a personality trait, but rather a behavioral attribute, training in the enhancement of positive energy was reported to be part of an intervention agenda in some of these organizations.

The strengths-based research of the Gallup Organization has also led to a number of training activities. Reports from this training suggest that identifying employees' strengths and then providing them the opportunity to use those strengths

produces significant performance enhancements. For example, managers who spent more time with their strongest performers, as compared to spending it with their weakest performers, achieved double productivity in their units. Likewise, in organizations where workers were given a chance each day to do what they do best, productivity was one and a half times greater than in the typical organization (Clifton and Harter, 2003).

Taken together, these examples provide some support for the benefits of POS-related practices in real-world settings. As yet, not enough is known to draw firm conclusions regarding the what, how, or when of such interventions, but there is suggestive evidence that practices based on positivity can benefit individuals and organizations. Thus, in addition to the personal benefit, there may be organizational reasons to enhance virtues such as gratitude, foster positive energy, increase work meaningfulness, and build on individual strengths.

Challenges and Opportunities

The most fundamental challenge to POS is clearly whether (or when) its fundamental humanistic assumption is appropriate. As noted earlier, Fineman (2006) provides a cogent discussion on this topic, so it will not be duplicated here. However, even when one accepts the starting premise of POS, a number of important challenges and opportunities remain. These are discussed below.

Clarifying "Positive." As noted at the outset, POS has yet to offer a definitive statement about what constitutes positiveness in organizations. The language used often implies that there is some universal standard by which positiveness can be

judged, but that standard has yet to be specified (e.g., Cameron, et al., 2003a; Cameron and Caza, 2004). Most likely there is no easy resolution to this matter, as shown by the challenges of definition faced in other fields. Biologists, engaged in the study of life, do not have a universally accepted definition of life, and most of their proposed definitions involve outcomes rather than independent criteria (e.g., it is alive if it metabolizes, reproduces, and adapts). Similarly, Justice Stewart's (*Jacobellis v. Ohio* 1964) famous remarks about not being able to define pornography, but knowing it when he saw it, suggest that recognizing a phenomenon and succinctly defining are very different endeavors (also see Dutton, 2003b).

At present, consistent with the humanism at the heart of POS, it seems to be assumed that enabling the inherently eudemonic nature of individuals and their organizations will lead to positive behavior, create positive dynamics, and produce positive results. Unfortunately, the empirical evidence suggests more complex relationships. Positive emotions can produce negative behaviors (Verbeke, et al., 2004), negative emotions can produce positive behaviors (Bagozzi, 2003), and positive behaviors may produce negative results (Ellis, et al., 2006; Lee, et al., 2003). Given this, one has to wonder what ultimately counts as positive. If a cause or process is only labeled positive when it produces a positive result, then the definition threatens to become circular or meaningless. For example, if it is true that positive phenomena rarely arise from blissful or tranquil circumstances (Cameron and Caza, 2004), then discord and turmoil play a crucial role in generating positive phenomena. Given this, if a positive process is defined by its positive product, then discord and turmoil would be positive enablers.

There seem to be at least two possible responses to the challenge of defining positiveness. One would be adopting some prescriptive norm of positiveness. Some POS researchers seem inclined in this direction (e.g., Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2003), and this is the solution used by positive psychology. Although there is some debate about specifics (e.g., Beutler and Malik, 2002), the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) provides a broadly accepted description of normal psychology. As such, it is straightforward for psychologists to define negative as worse than normal and positive as better than normal. One option for POS is to develop a comparable standard to serve as the basis for judgments of positiveness. The other option would be more contingent, requiring specification of the factors and processes that condition the local meaning of positiveness (e.g., Bagozzi, 2003; Lee, et al., 2003). Whichever solution is adopted, clarity about positiveness seems crucial to the continued development and coherence of POS as a perspective.

Positive-Negative Interactions. It has been observed that the most dramatic examples of positive outcomes are observed amidst poor conditions (Cameron and Caza, 2004). Moreover, it is intuitively obvious that some positive behaviors require negative conditions. There is no need for forgiveness without offense and resilience is meaningless without hardship. Consistent with this, statements of POS stress the intent to counter an undue emphasis on negative phenomena, but not to call for an end to such study (Cameron, et al., 2003a; Dutton and Glynn, 2007). Nonetheless, the excitement generated by POS has the potential to lead to over-correction, and the failure to consider the role of non-positive phenomena (e.g., Bono and Ilies, 2006). Such over-correction should be avoided, as behavior in organizations is complex, and reliably

multi-causal (Mohr, 1982). The full insight of the POS perspective can likely only be realized in interaction with non-positive phenomena, as shown by the results reviewed earlier. Consider, for example, that pride can produce positive and negative outcomes simultaneously (Verbeke, et al., 2004), and that group performance is explained by the ratio of positive to negative communication (Losada and Heaphy, 2004). As these examples show, organizational behavior may be best understood by addressing all relevant phenomena, whether positive or not.

Integration. One of the early concerns raised about POS was construct proliferation (George, 2004). This concern is an instance of a more general issue facing POS, one which is both a challenge and opportunity, and that is the integration of POS research. Even just within POS, there are exciting possibilities for integration. For example, the study described above by Ellis and colleagues (2006) found that focusing only on success produced little improvement in subsequent task performance. This seems to suggest that focusing on failures is the best way to learn from experience. However, one may interpret these results differently in light of the findings in Losada and Heaphy (2004). This latter study found that management teams were most successful when their communication consisted of approximately 85% positive comments and 15% negative comments. As such, one wonders if the best post-event learning strategy might not require finding the optimal ratio in which to focus on success and failure. Moreover, this example shows the potential to be had from tighter integration within POS research. The excitement of a new perspective may create a heady, open frontier feeling, but it seems that theory would advance more quickly with closer connection between studies.

Of course, the benefits of integration with the larger field of organization studies are of the same sort, only many times greater (see Dutton and Glynn, 2007). POS faces the need to carefully link its new constructs to relevant existing ones. The work on leadership offers an easy example, where the findings about emotion and mood (e.g., Kellett, et al., 2006; Peterson and Luthans, 2003) seem quite consistent with pre-existing treatments of leadership (e.g., Pescosolido, 2002). Similarly, there would seem to be natural affinities between the POS work on how virtues influence expectations of corporate social performance (e.g., Andersson, et al., 2007; Giacalone, et al., 2005) and the existing work on how corporate reputation influences individuals (e.g., Albinger and Freeman, 2000; Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Turban and Greening, 1997). This sort of integration will also be important for establishing the discriminant validity of POS constructs. While there is evidence that hope and self-efficacy are distinct, despite their apparent similarity (Magaletta and Oliver, 1999), many other POS constructs have yet to have their independence verified.

Cultural Specificity. POS has been promoted, and primarily studied, in developed western cultural settings. However, given the POS assumption that *all* individuals share an inherent desire for that which is positive, cross-cultural and comparative research seem essential. For example, comparative anthropologists have shown that nearly all human societies have some form of incest taboo (Wolf and Durham, 2005) , experimental psychologists have shown that the fear of snakes and spiders is a universal human trait (Ohman, et al., 2001), and positive psychologists have found evidence of shared values in world religious traditions (Dahsgaard, et al., 2005). Demonstrating similarly wide-ranging findings would greatly bolster POS claims about

universal drives. Without such evidence, any particular researcher's description of a positive behavior or outcome is subject to criticisms of being culture-bound, or even hegemonic (e.g., Fineman, 2006). Moreover, exploring the dynamics of positive organizing in other cultures would serve to enhance the underlying theory as refinements would surely be required to correct the cultural idiosyncrasies unconsciously included in the initial theory.

Psychological capital provides an illustrative example of this potential (also see Schaufeli, et al., 2006). When researchers tested the four-part construct of psychological capital in China, they found that only three of the four components were relevant; resilience, optimism, and hope were measured as usual, but self-efficacy was dropped from the analysis (Luthans, et al., 2005). Although the authors did not explain this omission, it presumably reflects the unique nature of Americans' self-concept. Kitayama and colleagues (1997) found that American self-esteem benefited from positive feedback, whereas the absence of negative feedback was more beneficial to Japanese self-esteem. If the same is true in China, then it is not surprising that the American notion of positive self-efficacy was uninformative among Chinese workers. Moreover, since the three-part measure of psychological capital had the predicted relationship with performance, it suggests that self-efficacy may be ancillary to the core construct. Self-efficacy may be highly correlated with psychological capital in America, but not on a global scale. As this example shows, POS needs cross-cultural research, both to buttress its claims of universality and to refine its theory.

Other Boundary Conditions. Cultural specificity is only one example of potential boundary conditions relevant to POS. This is clearly recognized in most

theoretical treatments. For example, Cameron and colleagues (2004) stress that "virtuousness does not refer to an all or nothing condition, because neither individuals nor organizations are completely virtuous or non-virtuous, nor are they virtuous all the time" (p. 768). However, relatively little research effort has been directed to such issues as yet, though some interesting possibilities have been identified. For example, Andersson and colleagues (2007) found that hope and gratitude predicted concern for employees and social problems, but not for economic, safety, or financial issues. Understanding why would surely enrich theories of hope and gratitude. An important direction for POS will thus be defining boundary conditions, and particularly why positive phenomena are so rare.

The issue of rarity is also important because it raises a potential paradox at the heart of the POS perspective. When thinking about positive phenomena, one may reasonably ask whether the positiveness derives from the activity or its rarity. In other words, is an exceptional behavior positive because it produces a desirable outcome, or because it produces a desirable outcome that is also rare? Most discussions have described POS as the study of positive deviance, as the study of that which is both positive and exceptional (Cameron and Caza, 2004; Cameron, et al., 2003a; Dutton and Sonenshein, 2007; Peterson and Seligman, 2003). Given this, suppose that an intervention succeeded in making a positive behavior commonplace. Would that behavior stop being relevant to the concerns of POS? If anyone could do it, would it still be positive? Of course, this returns to the issue of defining positiveness, and thus underscores how fundamental that issue is for the advancement of POS (also see Weick, 2003).

POS Outcomes. As noted in the literature review, most POS research attention has been devoted to understanding how positive phenomena produce familiar outcomes such as profit and retention. This is presumably to be expected, as the new perspective seeks to establish its validity within the larger field. However, it may be that POS can make its most important contributions by offering alternatives to the familiar outcomes. Given growing public concern about the social role of large organizations (Margolis and Walsh, 2003; Mitchell, 2001), POS may be ideally positioned to contribute to this discussion by suggesting precisely what else organizations should be concerned with, in addition to profit and retention (e.g., Dutton, et al., 2006).

In concluding this chapter, it is worth noting that the discussion has thus far omitted what may be the most important accomplishment of POS, both in practice and research: excitement. In its first four years, POS has generated books, articles, presentations, cases, workshops, undergraduate and graduate curricula, corporate programs, and dedicated research centers. Moreover, anecdotal evidence indicates that many of those involved in POS derive great motivation and satisfaction from it (e.g., Bernstein, 2003; Dutton, 2003b; Luthans, 2002). For these reasons, it seems wise to remain conscious of the tension between the specificity demands of theoretical precision and the openness that allows the widest range of inclusion and discovery.

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Table 1. Summary of POS research articles

Source	Relevant Findings
Andersson, et al., 2007	Given hope, gratitude increases organizational concern for social issues
Avey, et al., 2006	Psychological capital reduces absenteeism
Bono and Ilies, 2006	Positive emotion is a source of charismatic leadership
Bright, et al., 2006	Leadership responsibility increases organizational virtue; organizational virtue buffers against the negative effects of downsizing
Britt, et al., 2007	Morale is distinct from depression; meaningful work fosters morale
Cameron, et al, 2004	Organizational virtue improves organizational performance
Duchon and Plowman, 2005	Unit spirituality leads to greater customer satisfaction
Ellis, et al., 2006	Failure teaches more than success
Fry, et al., 2005	Leader spirituality increases follower well-being, commitment, and productivity
Giacalone, et al., 2005	Virtuous consumers are more concerned with the social performance of organizations
Gittell, et al., 2006	Positive relations improve organizational performance
Kellet, et al., 2006	Empathy is a source of leadership ability
Losada and Heaphy, 2004	Positive communication creates interpersonal connection, leading to better group performance
Luthans and Jensen, 2005	Psychological capital increases commitment to the organization
Luthans, et al, 2005	Psychological capital improves individual performance
O'Donohoe and Turley, 2006	Organizational compassion leads to more care for customers
Peterson and Luthans, 2003	Leader hope increases profit, retention, and satisfaction
Pittinsky and Shih, 2004	Career mobility does not reduce commitment to the organization
Verbeke, et al., 2004	Pride can benefit individual performance
Wooten and Crane, 2004	Valuing relationships improves unit performance