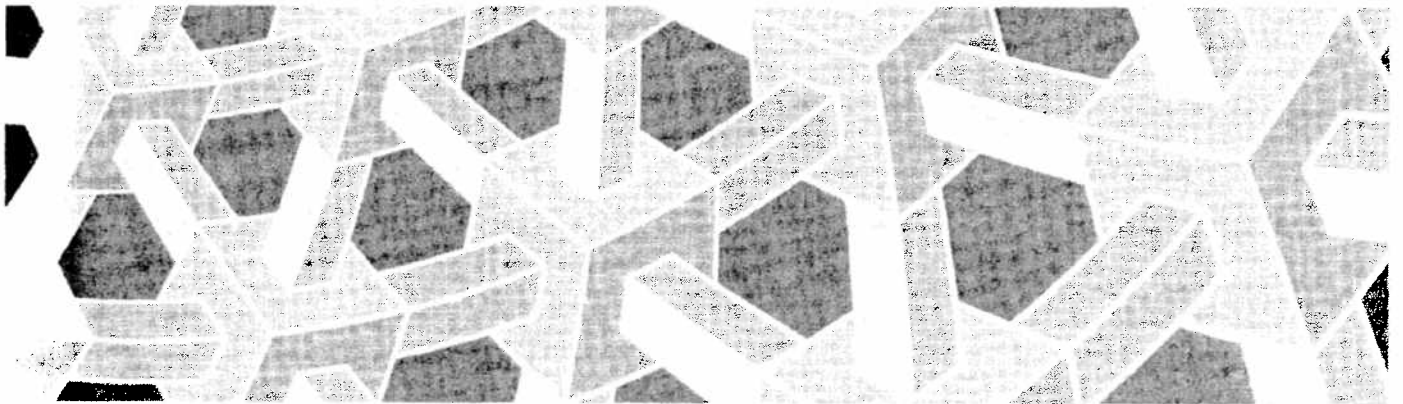


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Positive Organizational Scholarship

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Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) is a broad framework that seeks to explain behaviors in and of organizations. It focuses explicitly on the positive states and processes that arise from, and result in, life-giving dynamics, optimal functioning, or enhanced capabilities or strengths. There are three core aspects of a POS perspective:

- (1) a concern with flourishing;
- (2) a focus on the development of strengths or capabilities; and
- (3) an emphasis on the generative, life-giving dynamics of organizing.

First, POS is concerned with conditions that foster flourishing at the individual, work group, and organizational levels. Although Positive Psychology is similarly interested in flourishing (e.g., Gable and Haidt, 2005; Keyes, 2002), a POS perspective focuses on these states and processes as they unfold in and between organizations (Cameron et al., 2003). For individuals in organizations, flourishing may be indicated by

generativity, growth, thriving or resilience (Fredrickson and Losada, 2005). For collectives, flourishing may be indicated by creativity, innovation, growth, resilience, or any other state or condition that indicates that a collective is operating in a healthy, (near) optimal state. Inquiries into the factors that foster moments of collective creativity (Hargadon and Bechky, 2006), organizational resilience (Gittell et al., 2006) illustrate these POS dynamics.

Second, POS focuses on the development and expression of strengths at multiple levels to understand the features (both unique and shared) that are sources of excellence or positive deviance (Cameron et al., 2003). This POS focus includes interest in individual virtues in organizations (e.g., Hornstein, 1986) and organizational virtuousness as a collective accomplishment (Cameron, 2003; Chun, 2005). A POS approach is evident in research on collective wisdom (Weick et al., 1999; Weick and Putnam, 2006) and, in empirical accounts of compassion-organizing (Dutton et al., 2006)

and collective courage (Quinn and Worline, 2008).

Third, a POS lens looks at the generative (i.e., life-building, capability-enhancing, capacity-creating) dynamics in and of organizations that can explain flourishing and the cultivation of strengths across levels of analysis. For example, Glynn and Dutton (2007) identify the capability-building dynamics that characterized the improvised bricolage of NASA's Mission Control in enabling the rescue of the crippled Apollo 13 spacecraft and its astronauts (see also Useem, 1998). Sandelands (2003), Sandelands and Worline (2007) identify three 'moments' of social life in and of organizations (love, play and individuation) that lay the groundwork for understanding when and how capability and expressed vitality are likely to occur in organizations.

CORE ASSUMPTIONS OF THE POS PERSPECTIVE

Core POS assumptions include:

- (1) human flourishing is contextually embedded;
- (2) positive and negative states and processes are not necessarily asymmetrical but can be synergistic;
- (3) organizational resources (e.g., human, social, administrative) are not fixed but dynamic (Feldman, 2004) and can be endogenously created through processes and actions; and
- (4) normative aspects of organizational behavior (i.e., the 'good') are worthy of serious study.

We describe each of these.

First, POS assumes the contextual embeddedness of flourishing in and of organizations (Cameron et al., 2003; Roberts, 2006). POS assumes that contexts are central in explaining the creation, development and change of individual and collective strengths in organizations; these might include the nested (or situated) embeddedness of contexts that shape action (Dacin et al., 1999). As a result, POS takes seriously the call by positive psychology to study the role of institutions in producing positive outcomes.

Second, a POS perspective assumes that negative states can occur alongside positive states, but that the two are not necessarily asymmetric. Roberts (2006: 296) explains that 'positive dynamics will not emerge by simply reversing negative dynamics.' Questions about the potential asymmetry of the positive and negative are of interest to POS researchers, who might ask: Do the factors that underlie negative, problematic or undesirable conditions or states in organizations (e.g., organizational decline, corrosive relationships, injustice, social loafing or stress) also explain (or relate to) flourishing or positively deviant states (e.g., growth, energized networks, high quality relationships, positive organizational justice, or connectivity in teams or thriving)?

Acknowledging that negative states are part of the organizational condition, POS seeks to complement the tendency to overweight the negative relative to the positive in the existing literature (Baumeister et al., 2001). Wang and Thompson (2006) point out that 'scholarly research makes more references to the shortcomings of leaders and groups rather than their successes' (p. 31). Greenhaus and Powell note a similar slant in work-family research, asserting that 'much of the work at the work-family interface continues to emphasize conflict, stress and enhanced well-being' (2006: 72). Although organizational researchers have historically attended to key positive states such as employee satisfaction, employee health, and quality of life (as Fineman, 2006 points out), a POS perspective points to a wider set of constructs.

In spite of its explicit emphasis, however, POS does not focus on the positive to the exclusion of the negative. Often negative and positive conditions co-exist and interact to explain flourishing and capacity-building. For instance, Fredrickson and Losada (2005) show that flourishing dynamics (in individuals, dyads, and groups) require the presence of both positive and negative expressions, roughly in a ratio of three (positive) to one (negative). This positivity ratio or 'appropriate negativity' (e.g., constructive

conflict or the emotion of guilt) can redirect actions in ways that promote rather than diminish flourishing. Similarly, the cultivation of collective strengths such as organizational mindfulness (Weick et al., 1999) or collective resilience (Sutcliffe and Vogus, 2003) requires attention to negative conditions, thoughts, and feelings that can contribute to the dynamics underlying these strengths.

Third, a POS perspective assumes that new insights about organizational behavior are possible when we account for human and collective resourcefulness. Rather than assuming that organizational resources are always static or scarce, a POS perspective treats assets as potentially varied, expansive, and emergent. Resources can be produced, unlocked, expanded or innovatively bricolaged via multiple organizing dynamics. Some of these generative resources include energy, hope, trust, and knowledge. This POS assumption, captured in the notion of endogenous resourcefulness (Dutton et al., 2006; Feldman, 2004; Glynn and Dutton, 2007; Glynn and Wrobel, 2007; Spreitzer et al., 2005), makes concrete the basic idea that it is possible to unlock latent potential from within systems so as to expand resource capabilities and strength-based skills.

This POS assumption of endogenous resourcefulness anchors core ideas that have been central to humanistic psychology for individuals (e.g., Maslow, 1968) and extends it to social collectives. POS models how various types of resources can be activated by organizational structures, processes, systems, cultures or leaders to aid in the development of strengths and the cultivation of flourishing. For example, Heaphy and Dutton (2008) show how positive interactions with others at work foster employees' physiological resourcefulness by strengthening the immune system, reducing demand on the cardiovascular system, and producing a healthier hormone pattern. At the business unit level, Worline et al. (2006) document how clusters of practices used by a hospital billing department cultivate the resourcefulness of the unit so as to

explain patterns of unit-level resilience over time. And, at the organizational level, Glynn and Wrobel (2007) show how an organization's portrayal of family relationships in its identity claims enriches the social capital of the firm and enables strategic adaptation.

Fourth, a POS perspective is normative in that it focuses on manifestations of states and dynamics considered 'good' or affirmative in some way (Cameron et al., 2003). Such a view is consistent with other theoretical traditions which have taken an explicitly normative posture. Institutional theory, for one, explicitly attends to processes of infusing value in organizations (Selznick, 1957) as well as the cognitive guidance systems that may lead to such valuations (e.g., DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). Business ethics literature can substantially contribute to debate and discussion about the meaning of good as applied in POS (Sonenshein, 2005). In addition, there is a rich heritage of organizational work that considers 'good' topics such as health, satisfaction, learning, creativity and other positive or normatively-defined constructs.

In making normative assumptions, POS researchers recognize the cultural embeddedness (and inherent challenges) of defining what is 'good' (e.g., Fineman, 2006); this, however, is part of the POS agenda for study. A quest to understand the dynamics of how individuals in organizational contexts acquire and deepen certain strengths should not arrest serious exploration of the 'contingencies of positivity across cultures' (Roberts, 2006: 298). Although all values may not be universally perceived as 'good,' Dahsgaard et al. (2005) found convergence among philosophical and religious traditions in China, South Asia, and the West in valuing six core virtues: courage, justice, humanity, temperance, wisdom and transcendence. Although POS makes no claims about the universality of virtues, it does seek to investigate which values organizations embrace, to what degree, and how they affect collective strengths (Cameron, 2003; Cameron et al., 2004).

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE POS PERSPECTIVE

The POS perspective contributes to organizational scholarship by supplying new constructs and processes for study, and by creating linkages among established (but often unrelated) constructs. Among the new constructs that POS implies are: compassionate organizing (Frost et al., 2006), cascading vitality (Feldman and Khademian, 2003), courageous collective action (Quinn and Worline, 2008), organizational healing (Powley and Cameron, 2006), organizational resilience (Sutcliffe and Vogus, 2003), peace-building (Spreitzer, 2007), thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005) and virtuousness (Cameron, 2003).

As well, a POS lens offers explanatory mechanism for connecting previously disconnected topics in organizational studies. For example, a POS lens integrates traditional topics such as creativity or innovation (Drazin et al., 1999; Hargadon and Betchky, 2006), engagement (Kahn, 1990), health (Karasek and Theorell, 1990), justice (Greenberg and Colquitt, 2005), leadership (Selznick, 1957) prosocial behavior (Brief and Motowidlo, 1986), mindfulness (Weick et al., 1999), proactivity (Grant and Ashford, 2008), wisdom (Srivastva and Cooperrider, 1999), and well-being, among others. The underlying point of integration is an inquiry: Are there common processes or characteristics that help to explain these different forms of individual or collective flourishing and strength-building?

POS also deepens inquiry into veins of research that potentially explain flourishing and strength-building for individuals and collectives. For example, by focusing on positive relationships at work (sources, impacts, and manifestations at different levels of analysis), organizational researchers can theorize and research how the relational contexts and dynamics in organizations explain positive professional identities (Roberts, 2007), effective mentoring dynamics (Ragins and Verbos, 2007), learning across differences (Davidson and James, 2007), healthy teams (Ancona and Isaacs, 2007), attachment among temporary

employees (Blatt and Camden, 2007), effective organizational change (Golden-Biddle et al., 2007) and a positive (i.e., attractive, legitimate or desirable) organizational identity (Glynn and Wrobel, 2007). Viewing relationships through a POS lens illuminates links between more durable research topics (like cooperation, developmental relationships, LMX theory, network research, social support, trust) and newer ones (e.g., energy networks (Baker et al., 2003), energy dynamics (Quinn, 2007; Quinn and Dutton, 2005), or human physiology (Heaphy, 2007), all of which are central for explaining the dynamics of flourishing and the creation of individual and collective strengths.

In weaving together unconnected ideas, POS often takes a cross-level approach. This is evident in the work of Feldman and Khademian (2003: 358) who examine how organizational empowerment can create 'dynamic potential in the relationship between the individual, organization, and community.' They model how factors at the individual level (e.g., employee involvement) influence the organizational level (e.g., job redesign), which in turn, affects positive individual-level outcomes (increased meaningfulness; Caza and Caza, forthcoming).

POS also creates an empirical basis for the domain of organizational change and development work that has been labeled 'Appreciative Inquiry' (AI; Cooperrider and Srivastava, 1987). AI is built on assumptions that an organization has a positive core; that organizations are 'networks of relatedness'; and that these networks are 'alive' (Cooperrider and Sekerka, 2003). Moreover, appreciative inquiry assumes that a process, and set of practices around inquiry, can tap into, and build on, this positive core (Cooperrider et al., 2000) to enable a more positive future. As a research-focused perspective, POS helps to systematically integrate an understanding of the success of AI as a change practice with an understanding of why and when it works. For example, POS researchers indicate that energy networks in organizations can be meaningfully mapped and understood (e.g., Baker et al., 2003) and

that understanding how these energy networks are activated and changed over time could provide insight into AI change and successes. In a recent analysis of 20 cases of the use of appreciative inquiry interventions, Bushe and Kassam (2005) found that appreciative inquiry created transformational outcomes 35 per cent of the time. A POS lens helps to unpack why and when these kinds of change practices may be particularly effective.

WHY POS? WHY NOW?

The emergence of the POS perspective in the early 21st century can be explained by a number of factors, including: an observed shift in the applied social sciences away from deficit-based to more strengths-based approaches, a return to organizational fundamentals and optimism in the wake of highly visible and significant organizational scandals, notably that of Enron, and a focus on healing, compassion, re-engagement, resilience and hope in the wake of tragic events like 9/11.

The POS perspective is part of a much broader shift in the applied social sciences that is motivated by a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the reliance on theories that are deficit-focused (Cooperrider, 1990). A turn towards understanding the cultivation of strengths and the creation of extraordinary conditions (positively deviant from normal) is evident in numerous fields. For example, political scientists seek to understand peace-building conditions to augment conflict-reduction approaches (e.g., peacecenter.berkeley.com). In social work, there is a turn toward considering asset-building in neighborhoods and communities that can augment the focus on addressing community deficits (<http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html>). In education, renewed interest in cultivating student character and assets shifts the focus of education toward building up the strengths of students and student communities (<http://www.search-institute.org/>). Psychotherapy has seen rapid growth of solution-based therapy which shifts the aim of the therapeutic intervention from

diagnosing problems to finding workable solutions. The medical field more generally has witnessed a determined effort to focus on well-being and health—development rather than disease prevention. With escalating concerns about the costs of medical care by work organizations, there is likely to be an even more interest in wellness by business organizations.

Within the field of organizational research, there are several reasons why scholarly attention has turned POS, as well as Positive Organizational Behavior (Luthans, 2002; Wright, 2003), positive psychology and ethics (e.g., Giacalone et al., 2005), and positive perspectives on leadership (Avilio and Luthans, 2006; Hess and Cameron, 2005). First, POS (and other theoretical perspectives) may offer a natural corrective to the increasing concern with economics and financial considerations. Walsh et al. (2003) coded all articles published by the Academy of Management from about 1958–2001 and found a diminishing focus on social outcomes and a rising focus on economic outcomes over time. This emphasis on economic issues has also been observed in the leadership literature. For instance, Podolny et al. (2005) have decried the trajectory that leadership research has taken and urge a re-direction, because this shift has been problematic because ‘we need to assess the importance of leadership in terms of its ability to infuse purpose and meaning into the organizational experience’ (Podolny et al., 2005: 5). Consistent with these trends in the applied social sciences, POS re-emphasizes social and human-based strengths in processes and outcomes relevant to organizations.

Second, at a time when organizational scandals have become all too commonplace (Youssef and Luthans, 2005), there have been calls for relevance in organizational research. Some scholars have even suggested that current managerial theories contribute to unethical practices (e.g., Ghoshal, 2005). POS can suggest ways of addressing such problems and perhaps of preventing them; organizations grounded in virtuous and ethical actions by individuals and collectives may be

less vulnerable to such corruption (Cameron, 2003; Sonenshein, 2005).

POS redounds in many ways to some of the foundational work in organizational research. Like 'old' institutional theory, which focused on the value-based aspects of leading and organizing (e.g., Selznick, 1957; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Podolny et al., 2005), POS takes a normative stance and returns to core questions about how organizations can be sites of human and collective flourishing. POS invites researchers to do likewise and reflect on our conduct and practices as organizational scholars, considering not only how our research impacts the field but also ourselves as researchers. POS emphasizes that professional practices of research and teaching can be ways that foster learning, creativity, growth or aspects of healthy functioning (Dutton, 2003).

Relevant recent research

In many ways, the POS perspective has long been embedded in organizational studies; several established domains of research have looked at manifestations of flourishing or the cultivation of strengths. These are as diverse as job satisfaction (e.g., Judge et al., 2001), empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995), individual and collective integrity, and individual and collective justice. What connects each of these topics is a common focus on flourishing or strengths, across different levels.

Although POS is in its infancy, emerging research has begun to map the domain, theoretically and empirically. We categorize POS research (to date) into two areas: one that re-examines existing research domains, and a second that generates new research domains. For the former, we focus on three research domains that illustrate the POS perspective within well-established organizational domains: well-being and health, engagement at work, and creativity (as an individual and collective topic). For the latter, we focus on new, POS-informed research frontiers by discussing, first, new outcome or dependent variables (indicating flourishing or strength-building) and next, key

explanatory mechanisms of generativity or dynamic capability-building processes.

Well-being and health

There is long-standing interest by organizational scholars in employee well-being and health which is a critical domain for POS scholars (Turner et al., 2002). In a review chapter focusing on applications of positive psychology at work, Turner et al. (2002) suggest that several bundles of organizational and job-related features are critical to explaining well-being on the job. They note that work on the job characteristics model (e.g., Hackman and Oldham, 1980), the demand/control model (e.g., Karasek and Theorell, 1990), role characteristics (e.g., Jackson and Schuler, 1985), team and group research (e.g., Sonnentag, 1996), and transformational leadership (e.g., Bass and Riggio, 2005) all contribute to an expanded model of how work contexts can foster healthy outcomes and particularly, individual well-being. This domain of research points to rich pockets of studies on POS-related themes that aid in identifying and explaining individual flourishing at work.

Engagement

Engagement as a psychological state had been studied in several different ways, each a potential indicator of some aspect of individual flourishing. Kahn (1990) defined engagement as the state of bringing one's full self to work; Rothbard (2001) extended this definition to study relative engagement in both work and family roles. Britt et al. (2005) have looked at how engagement modified the effect of stressors on performance, sometimes playing a buffering, but other times playing an amplifying role. Engagement has become central to several applied efforts to improve employees' psychological experiences at work. The Gallup Organization has shown that engagement, measured as the degree to which employees believe they have the opportunity to do what they do best at work, is related to both customer loyalty and employee productivity (Harter et al., 2002). Loehr and Schwartz (2003) developed the concept of

full engagement at work to consider the important roles of replenishment, physical conditions, breaks and nutrition as important considerations, much like Sonnentag (2003).

Creativity and innovation

The hallmark of these twin processes is the production of novelty and usefulness; by their very nature, creativity and innovation result in expansive capacities for future action because they generate new resources or recombine old ones that can find new applications. Although earlier work on creativity and innovation in organizations tended to focus primarily on the production of creative outcomes, more recent approaches have focused on the organizational processes that undergird innovation; these involve positive states and processes. For instance, Drazin et al. (1999: 286) define creativity without regard to outcome, i.e., 'as the process of engagement in creative acts.' As such, it is intertwined with individuals' experience of engagement (Kahn, 1990), flow (Quinn, 2005) and intrinsic motivation (Amabile et al., 2005). Moreover, it is facilitated by the social relationships and networks in which individuals are embedded (Perry-Smith, 2006; Perry-Smith and Shalley, 2003), again pointing to the importance of context and connectedness in generativity.

In addition to informing traditional topics of organizational research, the POS perspective opens up (or re-activates) newer domains that center on outcome or dependent variables and on explanatory mechanisms of flourishing or strength-building in organizations. We discuss four examples of outcome variables at the individual level of analysis: thriving, flow, resilience and psychological capital. Given the relative newness of POS, most of these topics are in elementary stages of development. From outcomes we move to processes and examine ways in which POS can inform research.

Studying outcomes in organizations with a POS lens

Thriving describes the psychological state whereby organizational members experience

both vitality and learning simultaneously (Spreitzer et al., 2005). While failure to thrive has long been a serious interest of psychologists (Bergland and Kirkevold, 2001) organizational researchers have not given either failure to thrive or thriving much attention. Thriving as an optimal state is important because it captures individuals' sense of momentum and forward movement in organizations (and life more generally), either can be momentary or extended in time. Accordingly, thriving may be an important way that individuals gauge 'how are they doing' and whether they are on a forward path that can contribute to self-adaptation and growth at work (e.g., Tsui and Ashford, 1994). Thriving is also important in its own right; Spreitzer et al. (2005) propose that thriving (at work) may also be important in explaining health as a critical individual-level outcome.

Explaining positive states such as thriving at work necessitates consideration of how the context (e.g., job, unit, organizational) makes a difference. In their socially embedded model, Spreitzer et al. (2005) identify features of the work unit context as critical because of their pivotal role in shaping the everyday experience of people at work. In particular, they focus on how three contextual features (decision making discretion; information sharing; and trust and respect) foster agentic behaviors on the job; in turn, these produce resources (e.g. positive meaning, relational resources, knowledge and positive emotion) that fuel the behaviors that make thriving more likely. Their model opens up inquiries of eudemonic approaches, which focus on how individuals achieve potential at work (e.g., Ryan and Deci, 2001), as opposed to hedonic approaches which focus on pleasure, such as employee satisfaction (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

Flow captures the 'holistic sensation people feel when they act with total involvement in the activity' to the point of losing awareness of time and surroundings (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975: 36). Although interest in flow has been focused on the individual psychological state (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), a POS perspective emphasizes the explanatory

power of context (e.g., whole organization, profession, unit, team) in flow experiences. In an empirical study of the flow experience of knowledge workers at Sandia National Laboratories, Quinn (2005) revised the definition of flow as the experience of 'merging one's situational awareness with automatic application of activity-relevant knowledge and skills' (p. 615), which has distinctive antecedents and consequences. By focusing on this positively deviant state, new possibilities for understanding subjective performance, learning and motivation in organizations (Quinn, 2005) become evident.

Resilience captures a system's capacity to bounce back after setbacks. It is a form of positive adjustment to adversity of different kinds, and can be thought of as an important indicator and predictor of human flourishing. Studied most often in the case of children (Masten and Reed, 2002) who managed to adjust effectively to trauma and other challenging life circumstances (Wolin and Wolin, 1993), and recently with adults (Bononno, 2004), there is a growing practical (e.g., Coutu, 2002) and theoretical interest in how aspects of context can foster resilience at work (Caza, 2007) as well as in the organization as a whole (Sutcliffe and Vogus, 2003). Understanding how work contexts enable resilience on the job could provide valuable insights into processes that build adult resilience in all kinds of circumstances. Because people spend so much of their days at work, work contexts are potent social settings for developing and sustaining resilience. Organizational researchers have significant opportunities for making theoretical contributions into understanding the conditions that foster or diminish this vital human capacity.

Psychological capital. Rather than focus on one particular indicator of optimal functioning in organizations, Luthans and colleagues (Luthans et al., 2004; Luthans and Youssef, 2004) have advocated for an amalgam of four psychological states, i.e., 'psychological capital,' that can be developed in employees and are important for individual and organizational performance. Borrowing from psychological research, they identify these

four states as efficacy (Bandura, 1997), hope (Snyder, 2002), optimism (Seligman, 1998), and resilience (Masten, 2001), which other researchers have extended to the dyadic and group levels.

At the dyadic level, there is a rich vein of research on LMX (leader-member exchange) which focuses on well-functioning relationships between bosses and subordinates. LMX research has documented the consequences of such high-quality relationships for performance, satisfaction and career outcomes (e.g., Graen et al., 1982; Graen et al., 1982). In addition, research on developmental relationships at work (e.g., Kahn, 1998) like mentoring (Higgins, and Kram, 2001; Kram, 1985) has also shown the importance of positive relationships. Psychological research has demonstrated the importance of a range of positive relationships for human flourishing, but also notes the gap in understanding how these relationships have their effects (Berscheid and Reis, 1998; Reis and Gable, 2003).

POS redirects researchers to examine the nature of high quality relationships in work contexts, as well as their antecedents and consequences. A recent edited volume offers a set of papers that look across levels of analysis (individual, group, organizational and community) to identify core themes and insights around the dynamics of positive relationships at work, as well as their enabling contextual features and impact (Dutton and Ragins, 2007). The intentional look toward cross-level and multi-level theories of high quality connections at work stresses the importance of different levels of context, types of processes, and individual differences in creating and maintaining this form of vital human connection in organizations.

At the group level, there are several possible research programs that center on group flourishing. Wang and Thompson (2005) note three areas of group and teams research: group synergy and transactive memory (e.g., Lewis et al., 2005; Liang et al., 1995); positive group emotions (an area we discuss later in positive emoting); and group flow. Ancona and Isaacs (2007) note the lack of

research on healthy functioning and outcomes in team and group research, characterizing current work as having a ‘disease orientation’ (p. 227). They propose a focus on team health, indicated by a team’s capacity to do divergent thinking, repair poor dynamics and build new repertoires of action. Finally, Losada and Heaphy (2005) note that team flourishing can be detected in patterns of interaction among team members that have a high degree of connectivity with regard to patterns in positive to negative utterances (similar to Fredrickson and Losada’s (2005) ‘positivity ratio’) as well as a balance of both inquiry to advocacy and self to other talk. All these studies encourage an examination of indicators of optimal team functioning that extend well beyond team or group performance.

At the organizational level, there has been an historical interest in studying organizational excellence, organizational performance or what some have called organizational effectiveness (Cameron, 2005). A POS perspective revitalizes and reaffirms this focus, offering new indicators of optimal organizational functioning or these as well as new notions of collective strengths such as compassion organizing competence (Dutton et al., 2006), mindful organizing (Weick et al., 1998), and collective courage (e.g., Quinn and Worline, 2008).

Organizational virtuousness, according to Cameron and colleagues (e.g., Cameron, 2003, Cameron et al., 2004), captures the pattern of organizational enablers or features associated with the virtuous actions of organizational members. Proposing that organizational virtuousness is positively associated with organizational performance, Cameron et al. (2004) found, in their sample of 52 organizations, that members’ reports of higher levels of optimism, integrity and trust in their organizations were associated with a greater level of perceived organizational performance. These researchers suggest that there are sets of practices and cultural values and beliefs that are associated with overall organizational strength, which, in turn, contributes to higher performance. Relatedly, through telling the story of ‘Rocky Flats,’

the cleanup of ‘America’s most dangerous nuclear weapons production facility’ (p 3), Cameron and Lavine (2006) show how positively deviant performance, ‘the achievement of extraordinary success well beyond the expectations of almost any outside observer’ (p. 3), resulted from widespread organizational leadership that worked to fulfill the highest potential of individuals and the collective.

Organizational resilience describes a systems’ capability of positively adjusting to setbacks, jolts and different forms of adversity (Sutcliffe and Vogus, 2003). In their review of the literature on organizational resilience, Sutcliffe and Vogus (2003) observe that this organizing competence does not always imply an organization is optimally functioning. Rather, it highlights the capacity of the organization to ‘rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful’ (p. 97). Thus, collective resilience captures a form of positive organizing that is a form of adaptive strength. Research points to the importance of everyday practices in cultivating the dynamics that undergird this capability (Worline et al., 2006), and implies that relational stocks and processes may be central in explaining resilience as a collective accomplishment (Gittell et al., 2006; Powley, 2005).

STUDYING PROCESSES AND MECHANISMS WITH A POS LENS

A POS lens offers a window on the mechanisms that explain flourishing and strength-building at different levels of analysis. Mechanisms are what Davis and Marquis (2005), borrowing from Elster (1989), refer to as the cogs and wheels in explanatory theories – for POS, this focuses on the motors of optimal functioning and the cultivation of strengths and capabilities for individuals, dyads, groups and organizations. We focus on the following three mechanisms because of their historical prominence in organizational studies, and because they are particularly relevant to the dynamics central of flourishing: positive meaning-making, positive emoting,

and positive interrelating. We use verbs (rather than nouns) to emphasize the importance of *process* in accounting for flourishing at different levels of analysis. We define each of these process mechanisms next, and provide illustrations from current research.

Positive meaning-making

This refers to processes in which people imbue stimuli with significance, implications, and consequences that imply something is good, desirable or beneficial in some way. Researchers refer to positive meaning making using a variety of terms, including appraisals, sensemaking, interpretations, and belief formation. Positive meaning is often associated with beliefs such as heightened controllability, optimism and a greater sense of meaningfulness (e.g., Taylor et al., 2000), and states such as hopefulness (Feldman and Snyder, 2005). This type of meaning-making is also positive in that it is associated with resourcefulness (psychological and physiological) that fosters effective coping during traumatic events or diseases (Taylor et al., 2000), and in the case of work organizations, may contribute to individual or collective flourishing.

The potency of positive meaning-making as an important mechanism is revealed in multiple research domains in organizational research. For example, positive-meaning making is seemingly central to understanding the meaning and importance of work. Employees may come to understand the significance of what they are doing (e.g., their work, the project, the issue they are addressing) in ways that are positive (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003) which, in turn, activates emotions, motivations, and patterns of behaving that contribute to flourishing. Research on the meaning of work has increasingly focused on the variability in how people construe and craft jobs to derive different meanings (e.g., Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski, 2003; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). One study suggested that interpretations of work as a calling (e.g., defining work in ways that contribute to the common good or as an end in itself; Wrzesniewski, 2003)

were associated with more enjoyment, greater satisfaction and spending more time at work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). In a study of independent workers, people who framed their work positively (e.g., as having positive effects on others, as an opportunity for growth and personal development, or as a part of a larger enterprise) were more effective at sustaining productive action and were more resilient in the wake of setbacks (Blatt and Ashford, 2006). In both studies, making positive meaning of one's work produced outcomes that were associated with greater capacity to enjoy and take action at work.

In a very different research context, imposing positive meaning on ambiguous events and issues can affect flourishing or cultivate strengths. For example, managers' positive interpretation of strategic issues was associated with heightened capacities for action. Dutton (1993) argued that framing issues as opportunities (as an illustration of a positive categorization and interpretation of issues) is potent psychologically and organizationally because it (1) increases a sense of control; (2) increases positive affect; (3) suppresses threat, which increases search for, and use of, peripheral information; (4) focuses on the future; and (5) attracts involvement all of that contributes to a positive momentum for change. Barr and Glynn (2004) have shown that these perceptions tend to hold across different cultures. A variety of empirical studies lends further support. For example, Ginsberg and Venkatraman (1992) found that interpreting the issue of electronic filing as an opportunity by tax preparation firms was associated with a greater commitment to acquire new technology. In the context of strategic change implementation, Sonenshein (2007a) demonstrated empirically that employees who understand the change in terms of greater levels of hope and a greater sense of strategic significance evidence greater levels of effective change implementation behaviors. Sonenshein (2007b) posits a resource creation theory of change, where effective change implementation is due in part to the resourcefulness of individuals cultivated through positive meaning making about the change.

Research on individual and organizational identities lends further evidence on the impact of positive meaning on flourishing and strength-building. Most individuals desire to create positive identities or self-construals at work (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 1999). When people are able to claim and be granted a more positive self-identity (e.g., by being affirmed as having desirable and valuable attributes; Bartel and Dutton, 2001), several psychological consequences result that may foster flourishing. Through a positive identity, people are able to construe possible selves in ways that foster the accomplishment of tasks (e.g., Ingelhart et al., 1988) and motivate and enable desirable career progressions (Ibarra, 1999). For example, the reflected best self intervention (e.g., Roberts et al., 2005) is designed to help individuals create a positive self identity based on assembling and integrating behavioral accounts from multiple people to show how the (target) individual has added value and had an impact. This purposeful use of 'real stories' to compose a positive identity is argued to foster well-being by better equipping people to socially construct jobs and situations so that they might fit their strengths. In this account, positive self meaning fosters an expanded capacity for action as a person feels more competent, efficacious and has a better sense of the strengths that they exhibit in the eyes of others (Roberts et al., 2005).

In the organizational identity literature, there has been interest in how the attractiveness of an organization's identity (as one indicator of positive meaning associated with an organization's identity) impacts on outcomes such as levels of employee commitment and cooperation (Dutton et al., 1994). Dukerich et al. (2002) found that attractiveness of physicians' construals of a health care system's identity was associated with greater levels of cooperative behaviors by physicians. Thus the positive meaning that organizational members impute to their collective (e.g., a positive organizational identity or image) can foster certain forms of flourishing through heightening levels of cooperation.

Organizations also impute positive meaning through a statement of 'corporate purpose' that integrates business and social needs so as to reframe work and position the organization in its environment. A statement of corporate purpose speaks to how a business meets social needs in the community in which it operates, provides goods or services that meet societal needs and aspires to something greater (Glynn and Smith, 2007). For instance, Chick-fil-A, a fast-food restaurant, cogently sums it up: 'We're here to serve. And not just sandwiches.' The organization implements policies and procedures consistent with its core purpose, including providing the cleanest dining rooms in the industry, kids' meals with a 'premium' that is designed to 'educate, build character, and foster interaction between parent and child,' responding to customer requests or thank-you's with 'My Pleasure,' and awarding over \$19 million in college scholarships to Team Members (employees) since 1973. While individually these tactics seem like just good customer service and admirable employee relations, viewed within Chick-fil-A's purpose, there is a powerful message for employees and customers – this is who we are and what we stand for (Glynn and Smith, 2007).

Finally, individual efficacy and collective efficacy are positive beliefs about the ability of an individual or collective to produce desired outcomes (Bandura, 1995). Perceived efficacy enables positive meaning because the confidence in one's effectiveness often prompts actions (or yields outcomes) that are desirable; in turn, ongoing, efficacious action can increase the capabilities of a system through performance outcomes or psychological well-being. At the individual level, Bandura and colleagues (e.g., Bandura, 1997, 2002) have demonstrated how self-efficacy is related to a host of positive psychological states (including optimism, well-being and self-esteem), inversely related to negative outcomes (such as stress and performance outcomes). Moreover, general self-efficacy that extends beyond specific tasks has been shown to have similar effects across many different countries (Luszczynska et al., 2005).

Work in school settings has shown that the perceived collective efficacy of teachers is a major determinant of student learning at the school level (Goddard et al., 2004). Even when controlling for a wide range of rival explanations for student achievement (including school SES, size, demographic composition), perceived collective efficacy remained a key predictor of different forms of student achievement in a sample of 96 high schools. While this study did not test the mechanisms that account for these results, past research suggests that perceived collective efficacy is associated with resources such as greater commitment, collaboration, and more effective group processes (as cited in Goddard et al., 2004). Thus positive collective meaning, like greater perceived collective efficacy, is associated with a variety of resources that should contribute to manifestations of flourishing, such as higher levels of learning.

Positive emoting

The second major category of mechanisms is positive emoting, which refers to the felt experience of positive emotions for actors (individuals, dyads or groups). Positive emotions are short term states of felt activation by individuals or collectives that are associated with 'a pleasantly subjective feel' (Fredrickson, 1998: 300) and which trigger response tendencies that are manifest in subjective experiences and physiological changes (Fredrickson, 2003). Illustrations of positive emoting would include individual or group feelings of interest, joy, contentment, gratitude and excitement.

Fredrickson's 'broaden-and-build theory' of positive emotions proposes that when individuals feel positive emotions, their 'momentary thought action repertoires broaden' and the experience builds 'enduring personal resources' (2003: 166). This core claim, along with its empirical support, demonstrates that through the process of positive emoting, conditions for flourishing and strength-building are present. For example, Fredrickson and her colleagues

have argued that the emotion of joy prompts play which builds social bonds and physical strength which are resources that individuals carry forward beyond the event or circumstance that prompted the joy (Fredrickson, 1998). Fredrickson and her colleagues have empirically demonstrated that feeling positive emotions in the wake of trauma (in this case, students dealing with the aftermath of 9/11) is associated with resources (optimism, life satisfaction) that foster resilience (Tugade and Fredrickson, 2004).

Other research in organizational studies lends support for the idea that positive emoting creates resources that foster flourishing. At the individual level, researchers suggest that positive emotion is associated with creativity (Amabile et al., 2005). Fredrickson and Losada (2005) argue that this effect arises because positivity (a higher ratio of positive to negative emotions) prompts exploration in the moment leading to greater knowledge. At the group level, the induction of positive emotion in a group fosters distinctive ways of interacting (which Rhee identifies in three forms – building on ideas, morale-building communication, and active affirmation), which have been found to be associated with more creative solutions in a group problem solving task in the laboratory (Rhee, 2006). Thus, positive emotion increases resources through fostering creativity in individuals and groups.

As well, research indicates that positive emotions foster positive interrelating, which, as elaborated below, cultivates a variety of resources beyond the immediate connections. For example, the presence of positive emotions is associated with greater levels of cooperation and more integrative solutions in bargaining contexts. The most extensive work on this link has been conducted in the context of negotiations research. Carnevale and Isen (1986) showed that bargainers in the positive emotion conditions achieved greater joint gains by more accurately communicating their preferences and more accurately reading each other's interests. Anderson and Thompson (2004) demonstrated that negotiators who were higher in trait positive affect (and more

likely to engage in positive emoting) induced greater mutual trust in the negotiation; this finding was used to help explain the higher integrative outcomes achieved when high power negotiators had more positive affect.

The patterns above are amplified through conditions of social contact and emotional contagion, as well as social influence through power and status differences. Simply put: Positive emotions are contagious. For example, Sy et al. (2005) found that leaders' positive moods spread to followers, resulting in greater levels of coordination and less effort expended. Further, positive emoting can be propagated by people in more powerful positions who express positive emotion. When groups are led by leaders who evoke positive emotion in others, people with less power likely feel more positive emotion (Anderson et al., 2003); as well, leaders expressing positive affect seem to foster better performance in group tasks such as negotiation (Anderson and Thompson, 2004).

Positive interrelating

The third mechanism focuses on what happens in the 'space between individuals' (Josselson, 1996), that is, in their patterns of interrelating. Positive interrelating captures modes of interacting where the parties engaged experience their connection as mutual, trusting, respectful of other high quality attributes and they experience some form of mutual benefit (Dutton and Ragins, 2007). A variety of studies suggest that positive interrelating contributes to flourishing or strength-building by fortifying people physiologically (e.g., Heaphy and Dutton, 2008), fostering greater collective mindfulness (Vogus, 2004), generating greater energy (Baeker et al., 2003; Quinn, 2007), allowing more efficient and effective coordination (Gittell, 2003), and in general, fostering trust which enables the favorable resource flows and exchanges that build economic, financial, reputational, human, and social capital (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001)

SOME FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Hopefully, future researchers will extend the reach of POS both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, the manifestations and dynamics of flourishing merit far more elaboration; there is a need for more nuanced understandings of the moderators and conditions that contribute to flourishing. As well, the articulation of additional generative mechanisms, beyond the three we have discussed (positive meaning-making, positive emoting, positive interrelating), is much needed. Moreover, it is important to examine the relationships between these and other mechanisms. More finely-grained modeling is also needed, relating these three mechanisms (either separately or interactively) to particular types of POS manifestations such as creativity, learning or thriving.

Empirically, the study of organizations using the POS lens is in its formative years. There are new opportunities to link research across the disparate and established domains in which researchers are studying POS-related outcomes and processes. In addition, emerging work in new POS-related topics attests to its vitality in organizations and offers explanations for the underlying dynamics of organizing. Further work is needed to distill some of the core processes and outcomes at multiple levels of analysis. And, although researchers to date have tended to use field studies and rich ethnographies in the service of model development, hypothesis testing awaits.

Finally, the POS perspective suggests important connections between theory and practice. Broadly speaking, POS is actionable. A POS lens focuses on creating organizational practices that enabling flourishing and strength-building. Aspects of the organizational culture, norms, structures, networks and other organizational features contribute to capabilities at the organizational level that might be considered collective organizational strengths. Organizations can get traction on flourishing by leveraging the mechanisms that underlie the processes, i.e., positive meaning-making, positive emoting,

and positive interrelating. Cultivating these positive mechanisms can occur in a variety of ways. One important way is through leadership. The POS perspective alerts us to how leadership shifts from purely individual decision making and an exclusive focus on the instrumentality of results to the social, relational, and generative aspects of leadership that 'breathe life' (Snook, 2002) into organizations. In many ways, this view of leadership redounds to Selznick's view of leaders as involved in the work of institution-building, i.e., 'the reworking of human and technological materials to fashion an organism that embodies new and enduring values' (Selznick, 1957: 153). Like Podolny et al., (2005), POS takes an admittedly normative stance towards leadership that might be directed to the cultivation of positive states and process in organizational settings of benefit to the 'common good.' More generally, if leaders are to succeed in giving life to the organizations they lead, leadership must be generative, value-based, and social.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have sought to capture the emerging perspective of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS), which at its core focuses on flourishing, strength- or capacity-building, and generative dynamics, across levels of analysis in organizations. A POS perspective rests on several core assumptions, which include: *contextual potency*, such that organizational states and conditions affect individual and collective processes of strength and capacity-building; *negativity and positivity in relationships* that can be complementary and asymmetrical; *endogeneity and dynamism of resources* that enables creative bricolage for flourishing and the expansiveness of possibilities for action; and finally, a *normative basis* that favors what is 'good' or valued.

As promising as a POS perspective is we recognize its limitations. Within the field of organizational studies, there are debates as to its usefulness, generalizability and

moralistic overtones (e.g., Fineman, 2006; George, 2004; Roberts, 2006). In addition, there are challenges to seriously accounting for the culturally-embedded nature of what is good or what is 'optimal.' And yet, in spite of such concerns, the POS perspective seems to have found a footing in the field, as reflected in emerging publications, edited books, teaching content and cases, doctoral dissertations, professional conferences and workshops. All of these activities suggest interest and a vibrant research future.

NOTE

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