

Positive organizational psychology, behavior, and scholarship: A review of the emerging literature and evidence base

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The positive psychology movement seems to have stimulated new research and applications well beyond the discipline of traditional psychology. Among various areas of inquiry, research and scholarship about positive organizations has received considerable attention from both researchers and practitioners. The current review examined the scholarly literature published between 2001-2009 on positive organizational psychology to provide a detailed picture of the current state of the field. This review sought to discover the overall growth rate, trends, and prevalent topics in the literature. It also aspired to provide an understanding of the empirical evidence for each topic through in-depth reviews. The findings suggest there is a growing body of scholarly literature and an emerging empirical evidence base on topics related to positive organizations. Strengths, limitations, and implications of building a practical knowledge base for making significant improvements in the quality of working life and organizational effectiveness are discussed.

Keywords: Positive organizational psychology, positive organizational behavior, positive organizational scholarship, positive psychology at work, industrial/organizational psychology, management, leadership, organizational development, literature review

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Introduction

Since its formal introduction at the American Psychological Association Convention in 1998, the positive psychology movement has blossomed, giving birth to a vibrant community of scholars and practitioners interested in improving various aspects of society (Donaldson, Csikszentmihalyi, & Nakamura, in press). The widely cited new millennium issue of the American Psychologist on *Happiness, Excellence, and Optimal Functioning* by Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has arguably helped fuel the passion for and emergence of a broad range of positive oriented activity across the social and human sciences (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Over this brief ten year period of positive psychology's earliest development, a wealth of new scholarly books, research studies, peer review journal publications, grant funds from major foundations and the National Institutes of Health, national and international conferences, and generous prizes for exemplary work have emerged (Donaldson, in press). This expanding domain of scholarship and a growing evidence base have inspired Universities across the globe to develop and offer courses and graduate programs in positive psychology.

Positive Psychology seems to have become an umbrella term used to stimulate and organize research, application, and scholarship on strengths, virtues, excellence, thriving, flourishing, resilience, flow, and optimal functioning in general. This focus on strengths, solutions, and what makes life worth living, provides a new focal point for developing a body of scholarship. This new orientation to social science seems complimentary to traditional problem-focused scholarship, and essential for understanding the full range of human experience in contemporary times.

The positive orientation to research, application, and scholarship inspired by the positive psychology movement escaped the disciplinary confinement of psychology, and has spread quickly across the disciplines and professions of education (Clonan, Chafouleas, McDougal, & Riley-Tillman, 2004; Gilman, Furlong, & Huebner, 2009; Liesveld & Miller, 2005), public health (Post, 2005; Quick & Quick, 2004; Taylor & Sherman, 2004), health care (Houston, 2006), social and human services (Radey & Figley, 2007; Ronel, 2006), economics (Frey & Stutzer, 2002; Marks, Shah, & Westall, 2004), political science (Linley & Joseph, 2004), neuroscience (Burgdorf, 2001), leadership (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004; Gardner & Schermerhorn, 2004; Luthans & Avolio, 2003), management (Ghoshal, 2005), and the organizational sciences (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; Dutton, 2003; Luthans 2002a, 2002b) among others. The purpose of this review is to isolate one of these new areas, positive organizations, in order to understand the nature of the scholarly literature that has been published since the positive psychology movement began at the turn of the new millennium. It is important to point out that there is plenty of research and scholarship prior to 2000 that could be retroactively classified as fitting within the definitions of positive organizational psychology, behavior, or scholarship. But, our focus in this paper will be placed on peer-reviewed publications published between 2001-2009. We are specifically interested in research and scholarship about positive organizations that is in some way linked to, or the result of, the new movement in positive psychology.

New positive research and scholarship applied to work settings in the last decade generally seems to fall under the headings of positive organizational psychology, positive

organizational behavior, and positive organizational scholarship. These terms appear to be used interchangeably in the literature at times (e.g., Hackman, 2009), and at other times to have distinct meanings. Below we will briefly describe and define these three interrelated concepts or frameworks for using a positive orientation to study the modern world of work and organizations.

Positive organizational psychology

Positive organizational psychology (POP) has not yet been clearly defined and widely used in the literature. It has been studied under several different labels and definitions such as positive psychology at work, positive workplace, and positive organization (Martin, 2005; Turner, Barling, & Zacharatos, 2002; Weigand & Geller, 2005). We refer to POP in this review as positive psychology focused on work and organizational issues. This description, however, requires understanding of what positive psychology is. Positive psychology is “the science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.5). As implied in this definition and further explained by Peterson (2006), positive psychology has three pillars. The first pillar, *positive subjective experience*, includes happiness, well-being, flow, pleasure, hope, optimism, and positive emotions. The second pillar, *positive traits*, encompasses talents, interests, creativity, wisdom, values, character strengths, meaning, purpose, growth, and courage. The third pillar *positive institutions* include positive families, schools, businesses, communities, and societies. Peterson (2006) maintains the last pillar facilitates the first two pillars to promote human flourishing. In this sense, POP can be viewed as scientific studies on positive subjective experience and traits in the workplace and positive institutions.

However, this definition still requires further clarification on what an institution is, since institutions do not necessarily involve organizations. From the institutional economics perspective, Searle (2005) defines institutions as “any collectively accepted system of rules (procedures, practices) that enable us to create institutional facts (p.21). Institutional facts usually “require structures in the form of constitutive rules X counts as Y in C” and “only exist in virtue of collective acceptance of something having a certain status, where that status carries functions that cannot be performed without the collective acceptance of the status” (Searle, 2005, p.9). In this sense, the fact that someone is a U.S. citizen, the fact that someone owns a house in California, and the fact that February 14, 2010 is the New Year’s Day in some Asian countries are all institutional facts because they exist only within certain institutions. From this perspective, institutions range from corporations to government to marriage. This implies that organizations can be seen as institutions, but not necessarily vice versa. Peterson (2006) seems to agree with Searle’s argument. He defines institution as “a set of like organizations with especially sustained and pervasive influences within a society or even the world as a whole” (Peterson, 2006, p. 280). He provides democracy and a free press as examples of institutions in the Western world. In fact, Peterson differentiates an institution from an organization, an enduring and structured group that has traditions, customs, and members with differentiated and specialized roles. Some of the latest works on different types of positive institutions seem to be in agreement with Peterson (e.g., Huang & Blumenthal, 2009; Huebner, Gilman, Reschly, & Hall, 2009; Schreiner, Hulme, Hetzel, & Lopez, 2009; Sheridan & Burt, 2009). Based on Searl (2005), Peterson (2006), and current literature on positive institutions, we

consider positive organizations as a subset of positive institutions. Therefore, we define POP as the scientific study of positive subjective experiences and traits in the workplace and positive organizations, and its application to improve the effectiveness and quality of life in organizations.

Positive organizational behavior and positive organizational scholarship

Positive organizational behavior

Positive organizational behavior (POB) refers to “the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (Luthans, 2002a, p.59). POB capacities are open to development and should be something one can measure, develop, and use to improve performance (Luthans, 2002b; Nelson & Cooper, 2007). Such core POB capacities include hope, optimism, resiliency, and self-efficacy (Luthans, 2002b; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Luthans & Youssef, 2004; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). POB may contribute to positive organizational outcomes. For instance, hope, optimism, and resilience have been linked to higher job satisfaction, work happiness, and organizational commitment (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Also, positive employee characteristics such as optimism, kindness, humor, and generosity are expected to relate to higher levels job performance (Ramlall, 2008).

Positive organizational scholarship

Positive organizational scholarship (POS) is “concerned primarily with the study of especially positive outcomes, processes, and attributes of organizations and their members”

(Cameron et al., 2003, p. 4). The basic idea of POS is that understanding the drivers of positive behavior in the workplace would enable organizations to rise to new levels of achievement (Roberts et al., 2005). POS seeks to study organizations characterized by “appreciation, collaboration, virtuousness, vitality, and meaningfulness where creating abundance and human well-being are key indicators of success” (Bernstein, 2003, p. 267). POS focuses on positive dynamics that bring positive effects like exceptional individual and organizational performance (Cameron & Caza, 2004; The Essence, n.d). Examples of research subjects within the POS include strength, resilience, vitality, trust, organizational virtuousness, positive deviance, extraordinariness, and meaning (e.g., Cameron, 2003; Spreitzer & Somenshein, 2003; Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003).

Differences between POB and POS

As described, both POB and POS study organizations and work lives with positive approaches and put primary emphasis on the workplace and the accomplishment of work-related outcomes. However, they differ from each other in several aspects. Most distinctly, their research interests are on different topics. Whereas POB has been mainly concerned with individual psychological qualities and their impact on performance improvement, POS has been mostly concerned with the positive aspects of the organizational context (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Cameron, 2005; Luthans, 2002b). The emphasis on performance improvement is central to POB, but not necessarily to POS. Furthermore, their research methods and level of analysis have been slightly different. POB studies have been conducted primarily at the micro- and meso- levels of analysis using survey research, while POS studies have usually been conducted at the organization-level of analysis using diverse

qualitative and quantitative research methods (Luthans & Avolio, 2009a, 2009b; Luthans & Youssef, 2007). Of course, this is not to say POB studies are *only* at individual-level and POS studies are *only* at organizational-level. In fact, they both consider constructs at multiple levels. However, they do so differently. POB has tended to develop in an inductive way (i.e., from individual to group to organizational levels of analysis), while POS has developed in the opposite direction (Luthans & Avolio, 2009a). In summary, POB and POS share the common root of positive psychology and highlight the importance of scientific process in the development of the knowledge. However, they are distinguishable in their core topics of interest, the degree of emphasis on performance improvement, and the level of analysis. In the current paper, we suggest POP as an umbrella term that covers both POB and POS in terms of research topics, foci, and the level of analysis.

The study of positive organizational psychology and evidence

For simplicity, we are going to refer to the scholarly literature on positive organizations using the term POP. We will locate and examine the scholarly literature on positive organizations published between 2001-2009. All work that falls under one or more of the overlapping definitions of POP, POB or POS will be included. There are a number of specific questions about this literature we will address in this review:

- How many articles have been published between 2001-2009?
- What percentage of the publications in this new area is based on empirical investigations?
- Have the number of journal publications in this area increased over the ten year period?

- What percentage of the studies is conducted by scholars based in the United States?
- Which other countries are represented by authors in this new area of scholarship?
- Which universities are most often affiliated with the publications in this area?
- Which journals are publishing studies in this field?
- What are the most popular topics addressed in this new body of scholarship?
- What are some of the key findings that have emerged in this new literature?

Our aim is to find the answers to these questions in an effort to help guide further research and develop the area of positive organizational psychology.

Method

A search of the extant literature was conducted using the search terms of positive psychology, POP, POB, and POS. Peer review journal publications between 2001 and 2009 were identified by searching the following databases: Academic search premier; Business source premier; ERIC; PsycINFO, and PsycARTICLES. The search was limited to studies on adults (18+ years).

The initial search generated 1353 entries (after deleting duplicates). Among these, 172 entries (106 non-empirical, 66 empirical) met one or more of the following search criteria:

- (a) the article was linked to the POB literature;
- (b) the article was linked to the POS literature;
- (c) the article reported about a study that applied positive psychology topics in an organizational setting; and

(d) the article reported about organizational studies that revisited established/pre-existing topics from positive psychology perspectives.

A total of 172 publications were analyzed to determine the amount and type of articles published, the authors' geographic location, and the nature of the journals publishing this type of work. Further, a content analysis was conducted to determine the most common POP topics addressed during 2001-2009. More specifically, a total of 36 topics were identified through a content analysis procedure. Each article was first coded with one main topic, based on the title, keyword(s), abstract, and the body contents. This initial analysis resulted in 51 topics within POP. These 51 topics were then re-categorized into 36 broader themes, which were used to analyze the contents of the articles that met the inclusion criteria. In an effort to shed light on some of the key empirical findings in the POP literature to date, a more in-depth review was conducted on the empirical studies of the 14 topic areas that had more than three publications and at least one empirical study.

Results

General overview of the literature

Amount and type of publications

A total of 172 peer-reviewed articles published during 2001-2009 met our search criteria. Of the 172 articles identified, a total of 38% were based on empirical studies while the other 62% were conceptual in nature. Figure 1 illustrates how the number and type of publications have changed over the period of interest. For example, there were only three publications identified in 2001, compared to 35 in 2008. During the period of 2001-2007

conceptual studies out-numbered empirical studies, with the largest gap of 20 conceptual vs. four empirical occurring in 2005. However, empirical studies (19) out-numbered conceptual publications (16) for the first time in 2008. While it is uncertain at this point if this pattern reflects a trend toward an emerging evidence based for POP, it does offer promise that more researchers are pursuing empirical evidence to confirm/disconfirm conceptual claims.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Authors' geographic location

Of the total of the 172 publications identified, 72% (124) of the authors were based in the U.S. Of the 38% located outside the U.S., the majority were based in the United Kingdom (23%), Australia (15%), Canada (15%), Netherlands (13%), South Africa (7%), and Spain (7%). To gain a sense of which universities in the U.S. have been most active in supporting POP over the past decade, the top four Universities were identified. It was revealed that the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (23 publications), University of Michigan-Ann Arbor (19 publications), Central Washington University (six publications), and Harvard University (six publications) were the universities most often affiliated with publications in this area.

Journals publishing positive organizational psychology

Another question we set out to address is which journals have published articles in POP. For example, we wondered whether these publications mainly appeared in a limited number of specialty journals, or if they were accepted more broadly across the organizational sciences literature. Twenty-five different journals published two or more articles related to

POP during 2001-2009. This only represents 74% of the total number of articles published, another 45 journals have published one article and a total of 70 different journals have published work in this area. The top 7 journals publishing in this area were *Journal of Organizational Behavior* (19 publications), *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* (10 publications), *The Journal of Positive Psychology* (nine publications), *Academy of Management Review* (eight publications), *Academy of Management Learning & Education* (eight publications), *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management* (eight publications) and *OD Practitioner* (eight publications).

Most popular topics in positive organizational psychology

Content analysis was conducted to determine which topics were most often addressed in the articles published between 2001-2009. Six topics seemed to emerge as the most popular: positive leadership (17 publications), positive organizational development and change (16 publications), positive psychology at work (14 publications), introduction and overview of POB (10 publications), and psychological capital (10 publications). Table 1 displays the top 19 topics; all of these topics were addressed in at least three different publications during the period of analysis.

Insert Table 1 about here

Key Empirical Findings

In this section, we highlight some of the key empirical findings from each of the POP topic areas. We omitted three topics – positive psychology at work, overview of POS, and

overview of POB – reviewed in earlier sections, and two other topics, critique and education and training, as there were no empirical studies.

Positive leadership

Seventeen publications were classified as belonging to this topic. They take a positive approach to leadership and study different types of positive leadership, including authentic (Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner & Schermerhorn, 2004; May, Chan, Hodges, & Avolio, 2003; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008), transformational (Gooty, Gavin, Johnson, Frazier, & Snow, 2009; Peterson, Walumbwa, Byron, & Myrowitz, 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2008), charismatic (Glynn & Dowd, 2008), and altruistic (Sosik, Jung, & Dinger, 2009) leadership. These studies show the characteristics of positive leadership and the potential benefits of positive leadership on the leader, employees, and the organization.

First, an authentic leader is confident, hopeful, optimistic, future-oriented, resilient, moral/ethical, and gives priority to developing associates to be leaders (Avolio et al., 2004). Authentic leadership promotes various positive organizational behaviors, which in turn enhance organizational performance (Yammarino, Dionne, Schriesheim, & Dansereau, 2008). It is linked to positive organizational outcomes such as organizational citizenship behavior, organizational commitment, and follower satisfaction with supervisor, even when controlling for transformational leadership or ethical leadership, as well as follower job satisfaction and performance (Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Transformational leadership refers to “those who inspire confidence, communicate a positive vision, and emphasize their followers’ strengths” (Peterson et al., 2009, p. 349). Peterson et al. found leader’s positive psychological traits such as hope, optimism, and

resiliency predicted transformational leadership, which in turn contributed to firm performance. In this study, transformational leadership had a greater impact on firm performance for start-up firms than for established firms. Moreover, transformational leadership may play a major role in the followers' psychological capital development. In addition, Gooty et al. (2009) revealed follower's perceptions of transformational leader behavior was linked to the follower's psychological capital, which was related to their in-role performance as well as organizational citizenship behavior.

A charismatic leader "not only leads the organization strategically but also articulates (and sometimes embodies) the positive values that enliven the organization, thus imbuing the business with rich meaning" (Glynn & Dowd, 2008, p. 72), and they do so by offering emotive statements of mission and values. Glynn and Dowd examined how organizational context correlate with the emotional expression of charismatic leaders. They discovered charismatic leader's positivity (i.e., relative ratio of the expression of positive to negative emotions) in the discourse both correlates with and counters organizational change. Through this complex process of simultaneous mirroring and compensating for the emotional tone of business conditions resulting from organizational threats related to economic downturns and scandalized leadership, the leader kept and strengthened the charisma, authority and leadership rather than letting the situation menace the authority or diminish the extent and positivity of emotive discourse.

Finally, altruistic leadership behavior refers to "helping behavior directed at a specific follower that role models a service orientation" (Sosik et al., 2009, p.402). Sosik et al. discovered managers' altruistic leadership behavior rated by their subordinates was

positive related to job performance rated by their supervisors. Moreover, the more a manager values self-transcendence (i.e., an altruistic interest in the welfare of others), the more salient the person's collective-self becomes, and the more likely he or she engages in altruistic leadership behavior. Overall, the empirical research has shown that positive leadership takes different forms, and that some of these leadership forms are linked to important employee and organizational outcomes.

Positive organizational development and change (ODC)

Studies belonging to this topic are mostly focused on the application of positive psychology to develop and change organizations. Examples of specific topics include appreciative inquiry (Boyd & Bright, 2007; Haar & Hosking, 2004; Skinner & Kelley, 2006) and crisis management (Brockner & James, 2008; Powley & Piderit, 2008). The positive approach to ODC was identified as one of latest trends in organizational development (Greiner & Cummings, 2004). Empirical studies on positive ODC largely focus on discovering positive aspects and processes that can alleviate stressful organizational change. Organizational downsizing, for example, may become less stressful and more productive when the organization members are more optimistic. A recent study found generalized optimism is related to positive organizational outcomes (e.g., higher future success expectancy, better coping with stress, job performance, job satisfaction during and after downsizing; Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2008). Also, an organizational tragedy such as school shooting can be recovered more effectively through organizational healing process that strengthens organizational relationships and the future capacity for recovery (Powley & Piderit, 2008). In summary, these findings suggest that efforts to improve

organizations can become more effective and less stressful when interventionists use positive ODC approaches and processes.

Psychological capital (PsyCap)

With 10 publications, PsyCap was ranked as the fourth most popular topic. PsyCap is a core construct of POB (Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006; Luthans & Youssef, 2004) and is defined as:

An individual's positive psychological state of development that is characterized by:

(1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals, and when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resiliency) to attain success. (Luthans, Avey, Avolio, Normal, & Combs, 2006, p. 388)

Empirical findings from recent studies show the important role PsyCap may play in yielding positive outcomes: job performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Larson & Luthans, 2006; Luthans, Norman, Avolio, & Avey, 2008); engagement and organizational citizenship behavior (Avey, Wernsing, & Luthans, 2008); lower voluntary and involuntary absenteeism records (Avey, Patera, & West, 2006); lower cynicism and deviance (Avey et al., 2008); and less stress symptoms, intentions to quit, and job search behavior (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009). Moreover, a recent study on team level PsyCap suggest optimism may be the most functional team level POB capacity for

newly forms teams as it was positively linked to cohesion, cooperation, coordination, and satisfaction (West et al., 2009). These findings suggest PsyCap contributes to positive organizational change by promoting positive attitudes and behaviors while countering dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors. Also, PsyCap may provide more insights on positive work attitudes currently being recognized by human and social capital, as it was found to predict job satisfaction and organizational commitment beyond human and social capital (Larson & Luthans, 2006). It has also been found that PsyCap can be developed through short training sessions or a short web-based training (Luthans, Avey, Patera, 2008; Luthans et al., 2006). Overall, the evidence suggests PsyCap is open to development and may lead to positive employee attitudes and behaviors, which in turn are expected to contribute to positive organizational outcomes.

Organizational virtuousness

Organizational virtuousness was ranked as the sixth most popular topic with eight publications. Cameron, Bright, and Caza (2004) conceptualize organizational virtuousness from two levels; virtuousness *in* organizations relates to organizational members' transcendent, elevating behavior, whereas virtuousness *by* organizations refers to organizational features that enable virtuousness of organization's members (Cameron et al., 2004). Taken together, organizational virtuousness refers to "individuals' actions, collective activities, cultural attributes, or processes that enable dissemination and perpetuation of virtuousness in an organization" (Cameron et al., 2004, p.768) where virtuousness means "what individuals and organizations aspire to be when they are at their very best" (p.767). Virtuousness is important to individuals and organizations because it

helps them cope effectively and achieve positive outcomes even in turbulent conditions through its amplifying (i.e., self-perpetuating) and buffering effects (Caza, Barker, Cameron, 2004; Cameron, 2006). Perceptions of organizational virtuousness have been found to be positively related to objective indicators of organizational performance (i.e., profit margin) as well as perceived organizational performance such as innovation, customer retention, employee turnover, and quality (Cameron et al., 2004). In summary, these studies suggest organizations can achieve higher levels of desired outcomes when their members display virtuous behaviors, enabled by organizational systems and processes.

Job satisfaction / happiness

There were seven publications on job satisfaction and happiness in our analysis. Empirical studies show the potential positive consequences of job satisfaction and antecedents of happiness (Meyer, Enström, Harstveit, Bowles, & Beevers, 2007; Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Using positive psychology as the underlying approach, Harter et al. (2002) discovered the positive link between business-unit-level employee satisfaction and the business-unit outcomes including customer satisfaction, productivity, profit, and employee retention among 7,939 business units from 36 companies. Also, these relationships were generalized across organizations. A more recent study examined whether occupational context impacts employee happiness. Meyer et al. (2007) found that fashion models, compared to non-models, reported lower need satisfaction, less psychological well-being, and less optimal personality adjustment. They explain this may be because occupational context of modeling provides fewer opportunities to fulfill models' needs on the job. In addition, Money, Hillenbrand, and da Camara (2009) found employees' approaches to

happiness at work related to their organizational commitment and work satisfaction. The studies on job satisfaction and happiness highlight their importance for promoting various positive organizational outcomes, and for providing employees with opportunities to fulfill basic needs at work to maintain or increase their happiness.

Well-being at work

Well-being at work refers to “the quality of subjective experience at work” (Grant & Campbell, 2007, p.668). We identified seven publications falling under this topic. The importance of well-being in the workplace can be seen from the positive outcomes (e.g., life satisfaction, health, job performance) of well-being and negative impact (e.g., absenteeism) when it is not fulfilled (Grant & Campbell, 2007). Empirical studies on well-being captured in our analysis largely focus on what facilitates and hinders well-being. Among various antecedents of well-being, job demands and lack of job resources were found to be linked to cynicism and burnout that in turn contributed to ill-health, whereas job resources were related to work engagement that contributed to organizational commitment (Jackson, Rothmann, & Van de Vijver, 2006; Richardsen, Burke, & Martinussen, 2006;). A sense of coherence may lead to well-being by mediating the negative relationship between job stress and work wellness (Rothmann, Steyn, & Mostert, 2005). Grant & Campbell (2007) found that well-being can be increased by the experience of helping others. In addition, it was discovered that emotional intelligence, vertical trust, and organizational support predicted well-being among middle-level executives (Jain & Sinha, 2005). In summary, this research has shown that well-being at work can bring several benefits to organizations and employees. It was also found that well-being can be

increased by fostering such factors as job resources, organizational support, trust, emotional intelligence, and helping experience, and by reducing such factors as excessive job demands, job stress, and perceived antisocial impact.

Work engagement

In our analysis, we found seven studies belonging to this topic. Although work engagement may have various meanings, much of work engagement research included in our analysis follows Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R model; Hakanen, 2002; Korunka, Kubicek, Schaufeli, & Hoonakker, 2009; Rothmann & Joubert, 2007). In this model, work engagement is defined as “a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006, p.702). According to JD-R model, employee motivation and health impairment are determined by working conditions that can be classified into job demands (i.e., job aspects that require sustained physical or psychological effort) and job resources (i.e., job aspects that are functional in achieving work goals, stimulating personal growth and development, and reducing job demands) (Hakanen, 2002; Korunka et al., 2009; Rothmann & Joubert, 2007). Job resources stimulate employees’ motivation and foster engagement and organizational commitment, while high job demands lead to depleted employees’ resources, job burnout, health impairments, and sick leave (Korunka et al., 2009). Empirical studies included in our analysis provide evidence for these dual processes (Hakanen, 2002; Korunka et al., 2009; Rothmann & Joubert, 2007; Schaufeli et al., 2006). Moreover, the basic structure of these paths from job resources leading to work engagement and from job demands to burnout stay robust regardless of age, gender, and occupational level (Korunka

et al., 2009). Interestingly, although job resources, especially organizational support, may facilitate work engagement (Hakanen, 2002; Rothmann & Joubert, 2007), the impact might be different due to a systematic difference in engagement level among different occupational groups (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Also, a recent study revealed engaged employees are more likely to involve in organizational citizenship behavior, but also tend to experience more work interference with family because of greater investment of resources at work (Halbesleben, Harvey, & Bolino, 2009). However, the relationship between work engagement and work interference with family was weaker for highly conscientious employees. On the whole, these findings stress the role of job resources in facilitating work engagement and its potential benefits.

Stress

With six publications, stress was ranked as the 12th most popular topic. This topic consists of studies on stress with a positive emphasis, including coping with stress, positive impact of coping, and eustress. Stress (or distress) refers to “the negative response to stressors that results from appraisals where stressors are perceived by the individual to be either threatening or harmful”, in which stressors mean “the physical or psychological stimuli to which the individual responds” (Simmons, Nelson, & Neal, 2001, p.64). Coping strategies assuage the negative impact of work stressors on psychological well-being. For instance, it was found that direct action coping (i.e., active, problem-focused coping to directly remove the threat) predicted higher job satisfaction (Fortes-Ferreira, Peiró, González-Morales, & Martín, 2006). Fortes-Ferreira et al. (2006) also revealed that direct action coping was linked to lower distress but the relationship depended on another coping strategy, palliative

coping (i.e., passive, emotion-focused coping to reduce the emotional discomfort). Combined use of high direct action coping and low palliative coping predicted lower levels of distress than when high direct action coping and high palliative coping were used. Moreover, in highly stressful situations, use of high palliative coping was associated with higher levels of psychosomatic complaints than low palliative coping, whereas in situations of low perceived stressors, the opposite was the case. These interactions indicate that each coping strategy may play a different role; direct action coping may contribute to well-being by counteracting the potential harm of stressors, and in the absence of direct action strategies, palliative coping may help to reduce psychosomatic symptoms (Fortes-Ferreira et al., 2006). Furthermore, the benefit of each coping strategy might be different for men and women (González-Morales, Peiró, Rodriguez, & Greenglass, 2006). González-Morales et al. (2006) found women benefited more from social support coping (i.e., similar to palliative coping) although both genders used direct action coping more often. For women, social support coping predicted less distress. Higher direct action coping predicted less psychological distress more strongly for men and psychosomatic complaints only for men.

Some studies approach stress with more a positive emphasis and distinguish distress from eustress, good stress that preserves or enhances well-being (Nelson & Cooper, 2005; Simmons et al., 2001). Examples of eustress indicators include hope, positive affect, meaningfulness, manageability, satisfaction, and trust, whereas for distress they are negative affect, anger, job alienation, and frustration (Simmons et al., 2001). Although there is not much evidence regarding antecedents and consequences of eustress, workload and role ambiguity were negatively linked to eustress indicators (Simmons et al., 2001). In

short, empirical evidence from the stress research included in our analysis demonstrated how different strategies help employees cope with stress, the role gender plays in coping, and potential determinants of eustress.

Flow at work

Flow also ranked as the 12th most popular with six publications. Flow means “the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1977; cited in Demerouti, 2006, p.266). Based on this Csikszentmihalyi’s initial definition of flow and subsequent theoretical and empirical research, Bakker (2004) later gives a new definition to flow at work, focusing on the core elements of flow, “a short-term peak experience at work that is characterized by absorption, work enjoyment, and intrinsic work motivation” (Cited in Demerouti, 2006, p.267). Flow is receiving increasing attention from researchers because of its potential positive effects (e.g., Demerouti, 2006; Salanova, Bakker, & Llorens, 2006). Demerouti (2006) revealed frequent flow experiences were beneficial for both in-role and extra-role performance, but only for employees high in conscientiousness. Also, flow was related to motivation, enjoyment, participation, aspirations, and buoyancy (Martin & Jackson, 2008) as well as positive mood (Fullagar & Kelloway, 2009). Besides, job characteristics and job resources may facilitate flow. Flow was significantly related to such job characteristics as autonomy, skill variety, job feedback, task identity, and task significance (Demerouti, 2006; Fullagar & Kelloway, 2009). Moreover, organizational and personal resources fostered future flow experiences, which then influenced the gain of future resources (Salanova et al., 2006). Overall, these empirical findings suggest that organizations may increase employee flow experience by

providing support and resources, and benefit from flow in term of improved employee job satisfaction, motivation, and job performance.

Coaching

Coaching ranked the 14th most popular topic with five publications, most of which focus on leadership or executive coaching (Grant, Curtayne, & Burton, 2009; Linley, Woolston, & Biswas-Diener, 2009; Wood & Gordon, 2009). Some highlight the similarities between positive psychology and coaching psychology and contend coaching psychology is a form of applied positive psychology (Grant & Cavanagh; 2007; Linley et al., 2009). For instance, Grant and Cavanagh assert both positive psychology and coaching psychology are abundance-based and solution-focused, and assume people have a natural tendency to want to grow and develop their potential, and they thrive within the supporting environment.

Grant et al. examined the effects of coaching programs among executives and senior managers and used a randomized control waitlist design. They compared the coaching group that received coaching immediately after the initial workshop (time 1) and finished it 10 weeks later (time 2) to a waitlist control group that received coaching 10 weeks (time 2) after a training workshop (time 1) and finished it in another 10 weeks (time 3). Compared to the control group, the coaching group reported higher goal attainment, lower depression, and higher workplace well-being at time 2. However, when the control group completed their coaching at time 3, they reported significantly increased goal attainment and workplace well-being. The coachees also reported other benefits of coaching such as increased confidence, gained applied management skills, being better able to deal with organizational change or stress, personal or professional insights, and feeling helped with

finding ways to develop their career. Overall, these results show short-term coaching can be effective, and as applied positive psychology, coaching is important in helping people cope with the uncertainty and challenges during organizational change.

Identity

Our analysis had four studies on identity from a positive perspective, such as identity construction (Carlsen, 2008), subgroup identity and decision-making (Huo, Molina, Sawahata, & Deang, 2005), and positive outgroup attitudes (Brickson, 2008). Identity is important because it can influence employee attitudes towards leaders and outgroup members (i.e., people part of a different identity group such as an ethnic outgroup). Positive reactions to and satisfaction with an authority's decision, especially negative one, may depend on the acknowledgement of identity and treatment (Huo et al., 2005). Fair treatment can make employees respond positively to an outgroup authority's decision only when both the common identity shared with the authority and the subgroup identity distinguishing one from the authority are recognized (Huo et al., 2005). Moreover, positive outgroup attitudes may be formed from a short direct interaction with someone from outgroup. Brickson (2008) found a synergistic effect of the relational identity manipulation and direct outgroup contact on more positive outgroup attitudes (e.g., less bias). This implies relationships that are not necessarily deep or long-term can promote positive intergroup relations. Overall, acknowledging shared and subgroup identities and promoting direct interactions among different identity groups within an organization can facilitate employees to build positive relationships with outgroup leaders and members and ultimately help organizations manage potential between group conflicts.

Compassion

With four studies, compassion was ranked as the 16th most popular topic in this study.

Dutton, Worline, Frost, and Lilius (2006) described compassion as a multi-dimensional process that comprises three elements, “noticing another’s suffering, feeling the other’s pain, and responding to that person’s suffering” (Kanov et al., 2004, p. 812). A recent study found a positive relationship between compassion and positive emotion, which in turn predicted affective organizational commitment (Lilius et al., 2008). It was also discovered that employees who receive, witness, or participate in compassion, tend to make sense of instances of compassion by reshaping understandings of themselves, co-workers, and the organization.

Hope

Hope was briefly mentioned as a part of PsyCap in an earlier section. There were three additional studies on hope not directly related to PsyCap. Hope has three core components: agency or a sense of willpower, pathways or a sense of waypower, and a goal (Juntunen, & Wettersten, 2006; Luthans & Jensen, 2002). Agency refers to the determination to start and sustain the effort required to achieve goals, whereas pathways denote the belief in the ability to create alternatives and appropriate plans in the face of obstacles to obtain goals (Luthans & Jensen, 2002). These three components of hope comprise the recently developed Work Hopes Scale (Juntunen, & Wettersten, 2006). Potential positive consequences of hope show the importance of hope in the workplace. Hope predicted job performance beyond cognitive ability and self-efficacy (Peterson & Byron, 2008). More hopeful employees were better at problem solving, engaged in thoughts and behaviors that

may translate to higher on-the-job performance, and were more successful at goal achievement (Peterson & Byron, 2008). In summary, the empirical evidence suggests the potential power of developing hope in the workplace to motivate employees, facilitate job satisfaction, and to achieve other desirable work outcomes.

Work-life relationships

This topic includes three studies on the relationship between work and different facets of life such as personal well-being and family responsibilities (Muse, Harris, Giles, & Field, 2008). Empirical studies shed light on positive aspects of the work-life relationship or interference. Positive interference, in addition to job resources and social support from supervisors, may contribute to lower burnout and higher engagement, while negative interference due to job demands may lead to burnout (Montgomery, Peeters, Schaufeli, & Den Quden, 2003). Moreover, organization provided work-life balance improvement programs have been found to lead to positive attitudes and behaviors at work (Muse et al., 2008). These studies suggest that job resources, organizational support, and work-life programs can create positive relationships between work and non-work life.

Discussion

The results of this review confirm there is a growing body of literature on topics related to POP, POB and POS that has been published in a wide range of mainstream and specialty peer review journals. More than 172 articles have appeared since positive psychology began to build momentum at the turn of the century, and the increasing number of empirical investigations suggests that a stronger evidence base to confirm or disconfirm theoretical

and conceptual claims in this area is likely to develop in the coming years. While the majority of articles have been published by scholars with U.S. affiliations (72%), we found evidence that there is growing scholarly interest and activity in Europe and other regions of the world.

Scholars from two universities in the United States, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, were found to have been the most active in publishing about POP over the past decade. Scholars from Harvard University and Central Washington University were also found to be major contributors to this emerging literature and evidence base. Overall, 70 different journals have served as outlets for work in this area, with the most popular outlets being the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management*, and *OD Practitioner*. Content analysis of the 172 articles published across these 70 journals identified 19 distinct topics that were addressed in at least three articles. The most popular topics to date in this emerging literature were positive leadership, positive organizational development and change, positive psychology at work, introduction and overview of positive organizational behavior, and psychological capital.

Some Overall Trends in the Empirical Literature

While the majority of the peer-reviewed journal articles analyzed in this review were conceptual in nature (N=106), we did locate and summarize the findings from 66 empirical articles that met our search criteria. Looking across these empirical studies on POP topics,

we noted several trends. First, the majority of the POP literature to date aims to investigate whether or not POP constructs – constructs from positive psychology, POB, POS, or POP – such as hope, flow, and optimism are related to positive employee and organizational behaviors. Some examples of these behaviors include job performance, work engagement, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and customer satisfaction. Second, several but fewer studies were focused on the antecedents of POP constructs. For example, they sought to answer questions about the personal and organizational resources needed to enhance flow at work (Salanova et al., 2006) and the type of occupational contexts that enhance happiness (Meyer et al., 2007). Third, most studies to date in this literature rarely go beyond the individual level of analysis. We found that approximately 80% of empirical studies we examined were focused at the individual level. Some of exceptions included work conducted at the group level of analysis (Harter et al., 2002; Grawitch et al., 2003), the organizational level (Cameron et al., 2004; Gittell, Cameron, Lim, & Rivas, 2006), and at multiple levels of analysis (Glynn & Dowd, 2008; Meyer et al., 2007). Fourth, most of the empirical work we reviewed (approximately 72% of the empirical studies) was correlational in nature and relied solely on cross-sectional self-reported survey data. Some of the exceptions included a few experimental studies (Brickson, 2008; Huo et al., 2005; Luthans et al., 2008), a study based on systematic interviews (Powley & Piderit, 2008), and a mixed method design (Carlsen, 2008). Finally, we found that only a few of the empirical studies have focused on the effects of interventions to create or increase POP constructs (e.g., Luthans et al., 2008).

Strengths and Limitations

This is the first review we know of that documents and analyzes the peer review literature on positive organizational psychology since the positive psychology movement began around the turn of the millennium. Using contemporary search engines and a systematic procedure, we are confident that the studies reported offer a reasonable sample of the peer review work that has been published using the platform of POP, POB, or POS during 2001-2009. The analyses reported should help researchers take stock of the evidence base for claims about POP, the range of topics that are being pursued, where this work is located, and to identify needs and opportunities for future research.

It is important to point out that we deliberately focused our research questions, keywords, and search criteria on capturing peer review articles explicitly linking their work to POP, POB, or POS. We acknowledge that there may be some exemplary work that did not meet our search criteria, but might fit broadly under the definitions of POP, POB, and POS (e.g., Quinn, 2005; Quinn & Worline, 2008). Furthermore, searching any one of our topic areas (e.g., flow, engagement, hope) without regard for whether the work was linked to POP would yield many more entries. Many of the topic areas we identified in our analyses have been studied from various perspectives long before the movement of positive psychology began at the turn of the century. Nevertheless, our findings are important for documenting the progress of positive organizational psychology from 2001-2009, and for providing positive psychology researchers with a better understanding of the conceptual and empirical work that has focused on positive organizational psychology since the positive psychology movement began.

We do not mean to imply that we have data to support that the positive psychology movement caused the scholarship reported in this review. While it was certainly published after the positive psychology movement began, other factors occurring in these disciplines could be at least partially responsible for this new robust area of research activity. Furthermore, our review is limited to peer review journal articles. There is another emerging literature consisting of scholarly books, book chapters, popular press books, and popular press articles that was beyond the scope of this review, but future reviews might consider analyzing this domain of activity.

Conclusions

There are many signs now that the positive psychology movement – the science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions – is continuing to build momentum (Donaldson, *in press*). This review documents that the number of peer reviewed articles related to understanding POP appear to be growing. While it is encouraging that we found a total of 172 published peer review articles on POP between 2001-2009, most were conceptual in nature suggesting opportunities for future empirical work to support claims about the promise of the new field of POP. However, the number of empirical studies has increased sharply in the last couple of years, surpassing the number of conceptual articles for the first time in 2008 (19 empirical, 16 conceptual). It will be interesting to observe in the next few years if this trend continues.

While the majority of the literature we identified was published by scholars with U.S. affiliations, we found evidence that researchers in other parts of the world are interested and beginning to publish at higher rates on topics in POP. The range and quality

of the journals publishing articles was surprising and impressive. Many articles in this area are being published by top tier journals, which bodes well for the future of the discipline and practice. The list of topics in these articles, including positive leadership and organizational development among 19 others, seem to have the potential to invigorate research and applications in the traditional fields of industrial/organizational psychology and organizational behavior. It is our hope that the systematic documentation and analysis of the initial literature in the new area of POP inspires more high quality empirical research and scholarship published in top tier journals. These efforts are needed to work out the limits and boundary conditions of this new focal point of inquiry, and to build a practical knowledge base for making significant improvements in the quality of working life and organizational effectiveness.

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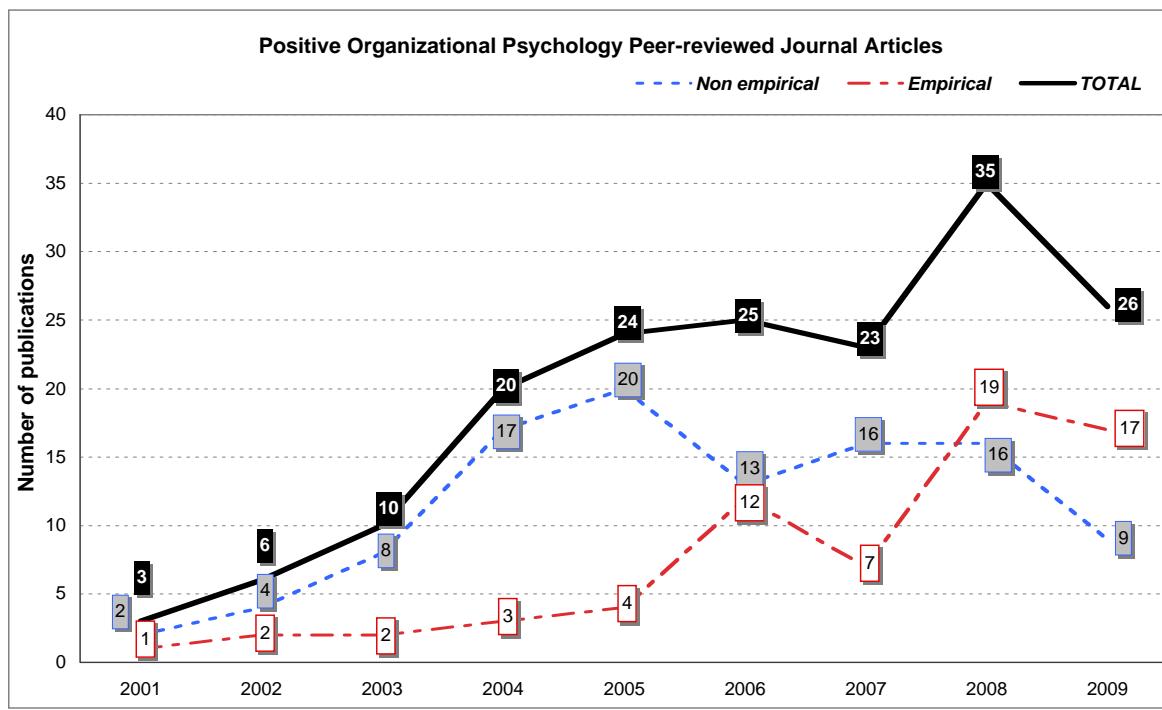


Figure 1. Positive organizational psychology peer-reviewed journal articles from 2001 to 2009

Table 1. Peer-reviewed journal article publications by research topic

Topic	Total
1. Positive leadership	17
2. Positive organizational development and change	16
3. Positive psychology at work	14
4. Introduction and overview of POB and its topics	10
- Psychological capital	10
6. Introduction and overview of POS and its topics	8
- Critique	8
- Organizational virtuousness/ethics	8
9. Job satisfaction/Happiness at work	7
- Well-being at work	7
- Work engagement	7
12. Stress	6
- Flow at work	6
14. Coaching	5
- Education and training	5
16. Identity	4
- Compassion	4
18. Hope	3
- Work-life relationships	3
Total	148

Note: Topics with less than three publications are excluded from here. Total number of POP research topics included in the analysis = 36; Total number of publications = 172