Workplace Positive Psychology Exercises: An Evidence-Based Guide to Implementation

Carolyn Winslow, PhD
University of California, Berkeley
Interdisciplinary Center for Healthy Workplaces
1. Introduction to Positive Organizational Psychology
2. Types of workplace positive psychology practices
3. Factors that may impact effectiveness
4. Guidelines for implementation
5. Questions from webinar participants
Positive Organizational Psychology (POP)

“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” (Donaldson & Ko, 2010, p. 178)
Positive Subjective Experiences & Traits

- Positive emotions
- Optimism
- Resilience
- Work engagement
- Social connectedness
- Job satisfaction
- Self-efficacy
- Organizational citizenship
POP: A Two-Pronged Approach

- Individual-level Practices
- Organizational-level Practices

Positive Organizations
Organization-Level Practices

Changing:

- Task characteristics
- Working conditions
- Social relationships
Individual-Level Practices

“Intentional activities that aim to cultivate positive feelings, behaviors, or cognitions” (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009, p. 468)

- Self-initiated/directed
- Discrete & ongoing
Individual-Level Practices

- Gratitude
- Kind Acts
- Job Crafting
- Personal Strengths
A Caveat...

- The POP science on what works, to what extent, for whom, and in which conditions is still evolving!
- Check out Dr. Seth Kaplan’s WWDPI webinar, “Employee Well-Being Interventions: What Does the Science Show Actually Works and what Doesn’t” for a more critical review: https://www.wwdipi.org/Webinars/Pages/Webinar.aspx?wbID=249
Gratitude Activities

“Acknowledgement that good fortune is attributable to someone [or something] else” (Armenta, Fritz, & Lyubomirsky, 2017, p. 184)

- Benefit-triggered
- General
Gratitude Activities - Forms

- Gratitude lists/journals
- Grateful contemplation
- Direct expressions
Kind Acts

“Actions intended to benefit others” (Curry et al., 2018, p. 321)

- Altruism
- Pro-social behavior
- Positive “deviance”
Kind Acts – (Some) Forms

- Sympathy/compassion
- Care/giving
- Cooperation

Examples of Kindness at Work:
"The process of employees redefining and reimagining their job designs in personally meaningful ways" (Berg et al., 2013, p. 179)
Job Crafting - Forms

- Task
- Relationship
- Cognitive

Job Crafting™ Exercise
https://positiveorgs.bus.umich.edu/cpo-tools/job-crafting-exercise/
“Identifying and building one’s inherent or natural strengths” (Ko & Donaldson, 2011)
Personal Strengths - Forms

- Values-In-Action (VIA) Classification:
  - VIAcharacter.org

- Clifton Strengths by Gallup:
  - Gallupstrengthscenter.com

- Reflected “Best Self” Exercise (RBSE):
  - https://positiveorgs.bus.umich.edu/cpo-tools/rbse/
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CREATIVITY</th>
<th>CURiosity</th>
<th>JUDGEMENT</th>
<th>LOVE OF LEARNING</th>
<th>PERSpective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WISDOM</td>
<td>Originality</td>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>Mastering New Skills &amp; Topics</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptivity</td>
<td>Novelty-Seeking</td>
<td>Thinking Things Through</td>
<td>Systematically Adding to Knowledge</td>
<td>Providing Wise Counsel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ingenuity</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Open-mindedness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Taking the Big Picture View</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BRAvity</th>
<th>PErseverANCE</th>
<th>HONESTY</th>
<th>ZEST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COURAGE</td>
<td>Valor</td>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>Vitality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not Shrinking from Fear</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speaking Up for What's Right</td>
<td>Finishing What One Starts</td>
<td></td>
<td>Energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling Alive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LOVE</th>
<th>KINDNESS</th>
<th>TEAMWORK</th>
<th>FAIRNESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HUMANITY</td>
<td>Both Loving and Being Loved</td>
<td>Generosity</td>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td>Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valuing Close Relations with Others</td>
<td>Nurturance</td>
<td>Social Responsibility</td>
<td>Social Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Care &amp; Compassion</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;niceness&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FORGIVENESS</th>
<th>HUMILITY</th>
<th>PRUDENCE</th>
<th>SELF-REGULATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TEMPERANCE</td>
<td>Mercy</td>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>Careful</td>
<td>Self-Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accepting Others' Shortcomings</td>
<td>Letting One's Accomplishments Speak for Themselves</td>
<td>Cautious</td>
<td>Disciplined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giving People a Second Chance</td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Taking Undue Risks</td>
<td>Managing Impulses &amp; Emotions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>APPRECIATION OF BEAUTY &amp; EXCELLENCE</th>
<th>GRATITUDE</th>
<th>HOPE</th>
<th>HUMOR</th>
<th>SPIRITUALITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TRANSCENDENCE</td>
<td>Awe</td>
<td>Thankful for the Good</td>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>Playfulness</td>
<td>Religiousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wonder</td>
<td>Expressing Thanks</td>
<td>Future Optimism</td>
<td>Bringing Smiles to Others</td>
<td>Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elevation</td>
<td>Feeling Blessed</td>
<td>Future-WEARDESS</td>
<td>Light-hearted</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXECUTING</th>
<th>INFLUENCING</th>
<th>RELATIONSHIP BUILDING</th>
<th>STRATEGIC THINKING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People with dominant Executing themes know how to make things happen.</td>
<td>People with dominant Influencing themes know how to take charge, speak up, and make sure the team is heard.</td>
<td>People with dominant Relationship Building themes have the ability to build strong relationships that can hold a team together and make the team greater than the sum of its parts.</td>
<td>People with dominant Strategic Thinking themes help teams consider what could be. They absorb and analyze information that can inform better decisions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achiever</th>
<th>Arranger</th>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>Consistency</th>
<th>Deliberative</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Restorative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activator</td>
<td>Command</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Maximizer</td>
<td>Self-Assurance</td>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>Woo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>Developer</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>Include</td>
<td>Individualization</td>
<td>Positivity</td>
<td>Relator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Domains Defined:**
Reflected Best-Possible Self Exercise (RBSE)™

Proprietary Tool:
https://positiveorgs.bus.umich.edu/cpo-tools/rbse/

Open-access Harvard Business Review Article:
https://hbr.org/2005/01/how-to-play-to-your-strengths
Other Individual-Level Practices

- **Mindfulness**
  - See Giluk (2009) for a review

- **Psychological Capital ("PsyCaP")**
  - E.g., Luthans & Youssef-Morgan (2017)

- **Goal-setting**
  - E.g., Macleod, Coates, & Hetheron (2008)
Mindfulness

Key components:

- Present-moment attention
- Non-judgmental acceptance
Factors that Influence Effectiveness

- Person
- Activity
- Organizational
Activity and Person Factors

Lyubomirsky & Layous (2013)
Organizational Factors

- Supportive leadership

- Organizational climate & culture:
  - Health and well-being emphasis
  - Personal development/growth-focused
  - Purpose-driven
Guidelines for Implementation

1. Facilitate choice
2. Provide appropriate support/structure
3. Measure effectiveness
4. Solicit participant feedback
5. Address well-being systemically
1. Facilitate choice

- Let people choose from their options!
- Encouragement vs. coercion
  ...Resist “voluntelling”
2. Provide Appropriate Support/Structure

- Informational/instructional resources
  - Activity completion guidelines
- Supportive technology
  - Systems to log progress
  - Paid user access
- Supervisor support
  - Time to engage
  - Encouragement
  - Buy-in/Involvement (as appropriate)
3. Measure Program Effectiveness

Example (Positive) Outcomes:

- Positive emotions
- Engagement
- Work-related meaning
- Social connectedness
- Job satisfaction
- Organizational commitment
Measuring Effectiveness: Basic Design

Assessment Type: Baseline 1 Month 2 Months 3 Months

- Randomize
  - Interventions
  - Wait-list*Control
  - PP Program
  - End

*Key for maintaining equity!!
Measuring Effectiveness: Key Considerations

- Pilot test
- Follow-up surveys
- Match between practices and outcomes
- Professional, third-party assistance as needed
  - Possible resource is the SIOP Consultant Locator: http://www.siop.org/Business-Resources/Consultant-Locator
4. Solicit Participant Feedback

- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Interviews
Example Feedback Questions

- How did you learn about the program?
- What motivated you to participate?
- Did you enjoy participating?...Why or why not?
- How did your participation impact you personally?
- Did anything prevent your full participation?
- What changes would you recommend making to the program?

SHRM Best Practices for Focus Groups:
5. Address Well-being Systemically

- Supportive management
- Decision latitude/autonomy
- Fair pay
- Social support
- Manageable workload
- Quality health insurance
- Safe working conditions
- Developmental opportunities

Individual-level positive psychology practices
Employees and organizations have a wide range of positive psychology exercises to choose from in the workplace based on their needs and preferences.

- Gratitude
- Kind Acts

Workplace positive psychology practices are not "one-size-fits-all" – several factors influence their effectiveness.

- Person factors
- Activity factors
- Job crafting
- Personal strengths
- Organizational factors
Key Takeaways (2)

Guidance from research and best-practices can help to shape the effective implementation of positive psychology practices in organizations

1. Facilitate choice
2. Provide appropriate structure/support
3. Measure effectiveness
4. Solicit participant feedback
5. Address well-being systemically
Positive Organizational Psychology Resources

- Greater Good Science Center (Univ. of California, Berkeley)
  - https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/
- Center for Positive Organizations (Univ. of Michigan)
  - https://positiveorgs.bus.umich.edu/
- Positive Psychology Center (Univ. of Pennsylvania)
  - https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/
Thank You!

C.WINSLOW@BERKELEY.EDU


