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POSITIVE PERSPECTIVES MATTER: ENHANCING POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to shed light on positive organizational behavior and the significance of three psychological perspectives in fulfilling positivity in the workplace, namely the attribution theory of motivation and emotion, the Broaden-and-Build theory, and the emotional intelligence theory. The paper is based on the assumption that these three theories help individuals understand the causes and reactions of other human behavior. In organizations, the way people perceive daily responses or interactions affects everyone's judgments and actions. Awareness of self-emotions and appropriate attributions of others' reactions would enhance positive behavior within organizations. Reference to the most relevant literature review is discussed and linked to these

three theories as well as the positive impact they create when interrelated with cultural awareness. The main points in each theory are highlighted, followed by a claim that justifies their possible effectiveness in contributing to positive organizational and employee behavior. According to this paper, organizing workshops within the work environment that address positivity theories and their impact on positive behavior will help bridge the gap between individual and organizational cultural values, increase self-awareness and understanding, and boost togetherness, collaboration, and positive attitudes toward others.

Keywords

Organizational Behavior, Attribution Theory, Broaden-and-Build Theory, Emotional Intelligence, Cultural Awareness

1. Introduction: What Is Organizational Behavior?

Many definitions have been argued in the literature, but most of them show a consensus that OB is the systematic study of individual and group performance within an organization. No matter what occupational setting individuals have, people are considered the basic building blocks of an organization (Schermerhorn et al, 2012). Organizations aspiring to succeed in their proposed missions, visions, and organizational goals invest in their employees' talents, skills, experiences, and capacities and cater to their needs and work requests. There is no doubt that, like any other authority or entity, organizations are vulnerable to changes and challenges due to the nature of the ongoing changes affecting our world. The effects of these changes are bound to impact the members who work inside these organizations.

Put differently, the pace and nature of the resulting change in an organization may bring about demanding tasks and requirements. Human nature, as such, will vulnerably or confidently deal with a range of emotions. For example, stress, fear, uncertainty, disappointment, excitement, joy, happiness, as well as enthusiasm may overlap. That is to say, negative and positive emotions or feelings are inevitable and may be called "crisis-mates". On the other hand, the newly-born environment of change necessitates lots of attention, readiness, learning, upgrading of skills, and willingness to cope with these changes. All of these trends, including causes and effects, are what make up the OB.

It is believed that both individual and organizational performance would probably improve by creating an atmosphere of trust, collaboration, transparency, and shared vision among the different stakeholders. These aspired values of any organization would necessitate an element of positivity in the work environment. This paper is inspired by three positive psychological perspectives that may contribute to creating a positive OB for both the organization and the employees in the workplace; namely, the attribution theory of motivation and emotion, the Broaden-and-Build theory, and the emotional intelligence theory, together with an essential dimension of cultural awareness. The researchers assume that all of these factors are entwined together to play a vital role in enhancing and consolidating positive vibes within the workplace environment. Reference to the most relevant literature review is discussed and linked with the three theories. The main points in each theory are highlighted, followed by a claim that justifies their possible effectiveness in creating positive organizational and employee behavior. As a result, the paper will attempt to provide what are hoped to be practical guidelines that will benefit both the organization and its employees.

2. Literature Review

Positive psychologists believe that social ties with family, friends, coworkers, and wider networks, as well as membership in clubs or social groups, physical activity, and meditation practice, all contribute to happiness and subjective well-being. Positive personality features draw attention to a person's qualities and strengths. Individuals should develop new habits, explore new feelings, embrace diversity, and seek the help of others to motivate and encourage them.

Positive psychology's tendencies, theories, and viewpoints have spread to a variety of sectors, including OB. The positive approach to OB was pioneered by Fred Luthans (2002), who emphasized the necessity to build on human strengths at work rather than focusing efforts on managing and improving weaknesses. Nelson and Cooper (2007, p. 4) state that positive OB "seeks to understand human excellence and exceptional organizational performance". Positive psychology and positive OB have been combined to form what Luthans and Youssef (2004) termed "psychological capital". The term PsyCap is based on what (Luthans 2002, p.59) defined as "the study and applications of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace". The definition highlights positivity, human resource

strengths, and capacities. As Luthans and his colleagues (2007, p. 3) explained in further detail, the PsyCap is closely related to the individual's psychological state, which is characterized "by (1) having confidence... (2) making a positive attribution (optimism)... (3) persevering towards goals... (4) ...resiliency" in the face of adversity and challenges.

According to this paper, developing the psychological state and its positive characteristics, which are deeply rooted in the four constructs of the attribution theory of motivation and emotion, the broaden-and-build theory, the emotional intelligence theory, and cultural awareness, can improve both organizational and individual performance. These theories highlight the importance of acquiring self-adaptive skills in an open, complex, or multi-cultural context, as evidenced by various research findings (Weiner, 2006; Fredrickson, 2015; Goleman, 2011). In other words, how individuals interpret their own emotions and attributions, as well as the emotions and reactions of others in the same workplace, has an impact on mapping organizational relationships. Self-adaptation is a skill that may be honed through time. Positive attributions, positive attitudes, and self-awareness, according to psychological studies, influence the work environment and contribute to stronger workplace interactions. (Heider, 1958; Pishghadam et al, 2016). The fact that all people are prone to making incorrect judgments about others results in biases and undesirable conflicts or misunderstandings at work. Likewise, several research studies argue that individuals' judgments, behaviors, and decisions are hugely affected by their emotions (Pishghadam et al, 2016; Elfenbein et al, 2007). Therefore, understanding the major constructs of the positive theories, as the following sections will explain, may lead to a better interpretation of human behavior within the work environment, fewer judgments, and more positive reactions and decisions. It's important to note at this point that there is no universally accepted "gold standard" theory in positive psychology. However, the three theories adopted in this study are often quoted and acknowledged.

2.1 Attribution Theory of Motivation and Emotion

The Attribution theory's main focus is on people's interpretations of daily life events and situations. It is about people's explanations of their failures and successes (Weiner, 2006). The resulting interpretations and explanations of causation influence expectations and reactions. For example, employees who attribute their failure to get promotions to their lack of skills only and disregard other factors, are unlikely to succeed or exert more effort to look for other promotional opportunities. Employees, on the other hand, are more likely to work harder to become more familiar with those requirements and exert effort to polish their skills and fulfill the terms if they

attribute the event of not receiving the promotion to the likely reason that they have not fulfilled the organization's terms and requirements.

In other words, how we interpret our surroundings or translate our reactions into actions will undoubtedly have an impact on ourselves and others. Usually, our attributions may lie within three categories: the cause of the event, the "whose responsibility it is" category, and the personal and leadership qualities (Lord & Smith, 1983). Another typical self-attribution focuses on achievement in terms of ability, effort, tasks, or luck. Thus, one employee may attribute the clash that happened with his newly appointed line manager to a cultural misunderstanding that can be avoided in the future, whereas another employee may assume that the newly-appointed line manager acted insensitively and should have been reported. The individual's cognitive structure is claimed to affect the self's attribution within two dimensions: locus of causality and stability (Weiner, 2006). Locus refers to the individual's understanding of the causality of the event, whether it is within themselves or it is external. Stability refers to the degree to which the cause is likely to change over time. That is to say, a stable cause doesn't change, whereas an unstable cause does. The following figure 1 summarizes the concept of attribution.

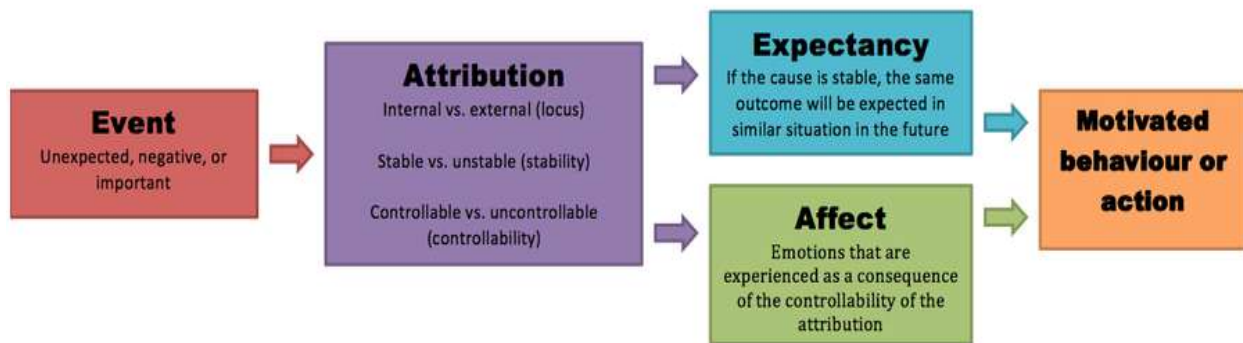


Figure 1. *Expectancy and effect are influenced by attributes, which stimulate future behavior*
(Source: Weiner, 2006)

Several theories of attribution have found their way into organizational literature, particularly those concerning responsibility and how employees attribute to others' behaviors and reactions. However, little emphasis has been placed on the measurement of attributions and their relevance to organizational research, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Based on the above discussion, if employees' perceptions and interpretations of events, their own and others' reactions, and outcomes are negative, it is unlikely they believe they can

impact their organization or be positively impacted by its endeavors or organizational plans and visions. As a result, the employees' beliefs, intentions, and attitudes are heavily influenced by how they explain those of others. Therefore, two employees in the same workplace would judge the same event differently. As a result, biases and errors in attributions may lead to unfavorable results in the work environment. This explains why a leader or a manager may address two people differently even when doing the same thing (Robbins & Judge 2019). These distorted biases may creep into other organizational decisions (i.e., based on gender, race, work rank, etc.) and create a tense atmosphere. However, the attribution theory of motivation and emotion has been criticized for not addressing other factors that may affect individuals' attributions, such as beliefs, cultural or social backgrounds. It is not always easy to adapt to the way people perceive, interpret or behave within certain circumstances.

Positive OB can be developed by raising cultural awareness within the organization. Cultures differ in a variety of aspects. Unless the organization and its employees are appropriately oriented towards these differences, negative vibes will hover around and the workplace environment may turn into a battle ring. It would probably be of help for organizations to run workshops and orientation sessions that highlight the attribution theory dimensions, and emphasize the importance of adaptation and the need to train ourselves to accept others, avoid biased judgments and seek positive interpretations as much as the situation may require.

It is not claimed, though, within the scope of this paper, that these workshops or orientations would create an immediate positive impact on the organization and employees, but they would raise awareness about possible opportunities for contributing to a better atmosphere in the workplace by making attempts to understand and interpret daily work events and incidents in a more objective and unbiased way.

2.2 The Broaden- and- Build Theory

Negative emotions usually bring with them undesirable outcomes for individuals, their work, and their social environments. The Broaden-and-Build theory of positive emotions (B & B) proposed by Barbra Fredrickson claims that when individuals feel positive emotions, "their momentary thought-action repertoires broaden and the experience builds enduring personal resources" (2003, p. 166). Positive emotions like joy, happiness, and excitement are central dimensions of the human experience. They broaden people's thought-action repertoire and allow them to be happier, more creative, and more open to new opportunities. On the contrary, it is

expected that increased stress, demanding tasks, lack of support or understanding trigger negative thoughts, emotions, and reactions which would narrow the attention span, collaboration, and productivity rate within any particular environment. Negative emotions like anger, frustration, and anxiety, for example, narrow people's thought-action repertoire. Being unable to manage or deal with negative emotions can be destructive. This claim implies that strong positive bonds should be created if individuals were to experience and expand positive feelings and react accordingly (Fredrickson, 2015). Besides, positive conditions will flourish and productivity may be enhanced in the work environment.

Within the OB literature, the claim postulates that positive emoting produces resources that nurture prosperity (Barling & Cooper, 2008). This could imply that if we can't avoid the negativity around us, we can work on our thoughts and attitudes and change how we react to them. However, positive emotions are not generated by a "press-a-button technique", as the term "positive" can be controversial. That is to say, what may seem positive to someone may bring nothing with it but negativity to someone else.

One approach to understanding the term "positive", as proposed by Cameron and Spreitzer (2012, p.2), is by "adopting a unique lens or an alternative perspective". In this case, it is the positive lens that determines how one reacts or behaves in times of adversity and difficulty, not the crisis or problem itself. Fredrickson's theory of positive emotions is based on the assumption that positive broad thinking in life inspires people, in the long run, to create resources such as "social connections, coping strategies, and environmental knowledge" (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005, p. 679). The claim of the Broad-and-Build theory takes its construct to a further level of flourishing and posits that people who approach daily situations with positive emotions are likely to be happier, more productive, and more sociable at work. They are aware of their potentials, weaknesses, and strengths, and they know how to seek opportunities for self-improvement while becoming more attentive to enhancing their sense of creativity and innovation.

Positive emotions, according to the Broad-and-Build model, can surpass the individual experience and expand into the work environment to encompass the community and people's organizational lives. Research validates the impact positive emotions have on people. It is believed that positivity creates favorable attitudes, and supports learning and task accomplishments (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2013). In this sense, positive emotions can also influence the individual's cognitive outcomes, including creativity, flexibility, or receptivity. The "broadening effect" of the

theory of positive emotions lies in the assumption that these emotions broaden the individual's mindset and expand their views of self and others, allowing for more openness, adaptability, and growth of inter/intrapersonal relationships. A new employee in an organization, for instance, with a positive mindset, can capture learning opportunities in every assigned task or role. The "build effect", on the other hand, assume that a broadened mindset can build on enduring personal resources that enhance professional and personal growth at all levels (i.e., cognitive, psychological, physical, and social).

Fredrickson's theory, however, has been criticized for ignoring the influential role that negative emotions play in developing individuals' novel skills. Rathunde (2000), for instance, claims that the way positive emotions have been discussed by Frederickson seems to be simplistic when compared to human nature and its complexity. Negative and positive emotions are not distinct or exclusive. Anger or despair can bring about positive results if they are righteous or managed appropriately. Although Rathunde's critique has examined positive and negative emotions from a different perspective, Fredrickson's theory has gained popularity and support in the field of positive psychology.

Having stated this, we claim that positive emotions can effectively influence OB and impact productivity, attitudes, and work relationships, and are likely to encourage collaboration, initiative-taking, readiness for change, and voluntary work. The understanding of one's emotions and how these are interpreted within a certain situation or event, would facilitate the flow of work in any organization and allow for a more conducive work environment.

2.3. Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Emotional intelligence became well-known almost a decade ago, owing to its association with modern leadership theories. It is considered one significant key that will affect the way people perceive their own and others' emotions and reactions, and how they navigate their social relationships accordingly. Many models have been proposed, of which Goleman's EI is the most popular.

Goleman's EI (2011) model proposes four domains focused mainly on two competencies: the social and the personal. The key domains identified are self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship management. Empathy is said to be a major dimension of the EI construct. Leaders who are aware of this dimension and practice it have been recognized in the literature as effective leaders (Bratton, 2015).

To begin with, it is believed that "where our reason is needed to make a decision, a variety of emotions may interfere and affect that decision" (Abou-Assali & Kushkiev, p. 28, 2016). Extensive research has addressed the positive impact of individuals' EI on various aspects of their lives and well-being, including jobs, community, and inter/intrapersonal relationships (Goleman, 2011, Abou-Assali, 2015). Research also affirmed that low levels of EI may interfere with the individual's responses, reactions, and the way they attribute causality of events. Negative emotions, in this sense, are associated with the individual's reactions to any type of stress or challenges they encounter, and their inability to cope or adapt to emergent situations (Jordan et al, 2002).

Similar to the attribution theory of motivation and emotions, and Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, the theory of emotional intelligence has been criticized. Although plenty of research claims that EI is a useful construct, several research studies have argued that emotional intelligence is poorly defined and not adequately measured. A balance is needed when addressing the drawbacks and benefits of EI, as it has become one of the tools used by corporates and organizations worldwide to hire or dismiss employees (Murphy, 2014).

However, in OB research, it is still believed that employers hire job applicants for their high IQ scores and terminate their contracts for a lack of EQ skills. What matters in the EI theory is the resulting outcome of mastering the EI skills. Some empirical studies show that social interaction, negotiation skills, and the extent to which an employee may pursue his OB are related to EI skills (Elfenbein et al., 2007; Goleman, 2011). It is also believed that emotionally creative people are more flexible and able to create their coping strategies. Likewise, emotionally intelligent leaders excel in creating a positive work environment that nurtures employees and their initiatives, invests in their talents and skills, and encourages them to exert their full potential (Avinash et al, 2019).

To sum up, learning to reason about events and behaviors, understanding our feelings, being able to control the way we react to events and situations, understanding how to use interpretation skills with others, understanding how others feel, and being able to deal with them, are all skills that an individual can develop and improve within the emotional intelligence model (Abou-Assali & Kushkiev, 2016).

2.4. Cultural Awareness

For a long time, the term "culture" has been contentious in the field of anthropology. One of the definitions of culture we deem relevant to the scope of this paper is what Richerson and Boyd (2005, p.5) state as "information capable of affecting individuals' behavior that they acquire from other members of their species through teaching, imitation, and other forms of social transmission." It is the cornerstone of the individual's building and an honest mirror that reflects reality and does not freeze it. It is the experience that individuals acquire as a result of their interaction with the environment in which they work, and it affects their behavior, morals, and production.

Within the context of the positive perspective discussed in this paper, culture is believed to be made up of elements, principles, values, ideas that are refined and developed. It consists of the experiences acquired by individuals through interaction with the surrounding environment. And since culture has several characteristics which are basically and specifically related to human beings, it is assumed that culture determines the lifestyle of individuals and affects their surrounding environment. This environment is affected further by others, in addition to environmental and technological factors.

Another type of culture within an organization is the culture of quality and experience, where this culture is a source of employee formation and behavior, as well as the development of their professional and effective ethics. In other words, when employees are knowledgeable and educated in their field of work, they enhance their skills to reach optimal performance and work within the required ethical and professional behavior. When they adhere to the prevailing culture within the organization, they become stronger and more productive.

In addition, the so-called organizational culture has been on the rise within organizations and is concerned with the culture that brings together the staff and the leaders of the organization, together with a set of customs, values, ethics, rules, and expectations. Organizational culture has several elements, including the expected values that need to be demonstrated in the work environment, such as equality, respect for others, recognition and reward, and a set of shared beliefs and ideas related to issues like teamwork and its role in achieving the organization's goals, or participation in decision-making.

Therefore, the importance of cultural awareness in an organization stems from the need to understand and appreciate the culture of others. Adopting a positive perspective on existing

differences, rather than similarities, is likely to broaden employees' imagination, horizons, and knowledge of what happens at work. It may contribute to predicting the behavior of the employees in any situation because they will act based on the positive culture acquired and consolidated in the work environment.

No matter what the cultural background of an employee, the organization's culture will play a significant role in guiding his/her behavior within the organization. For example, a positive organizational culture towards daily pressures and demanding tasks will probably provide the employee with a sense of identity and belonging to the organization, making him/her more committed to teamwork, and, consequently, shaping positive behavior at work.

There are two types of culture in the organization: a strong culture and a weak culture. Each one of them is identified by some qualities. A strong culture, for example, is distinguished by the intensity with which employees hold values and beliefs that contribute effectively to the development of active and productive ethical behavior. Other characteristics include sharing the same values and beliefs as the employees and the organization, as well as contributing to the building of moral behavior effectively and productively. Hence, a strong culture does not let employees rely on systems and instructions that are not clear. Employees would rather know what to do and pursue clear goals. In other words, they know these goals, believe in them and strive to achieve them within their organization.

Having said that, it is obvious that increasing cultural awareness among employees within the organization will add power to the strong culture, and boost more productive and effective professional ethical behavior in the workplace. This would be achieved by building a sense of shared history and vision of the organization. In this sense, positive attitudes are claimed to unite behaviors and create true meaning for what is known as positive OB. The attribution theory of motivation and emotion factors will intertwine with the positive broaden – and- build dimension, as well as the sympathy and self-regulation domains of emotional intelligence, to strengthen communication and support shared values, as well as promote a sense of belonging, stability, career stability, participation in decision-making and work development.

In this way, we believe that a strong positive culture at work can be created. This culture, we assume, contributes to the building of productive and effective professional ethical behavior. It represents a common language among employees and promotes performance and values. It encourages competition, strengthens organizational cohesion, and ultimately makes employees

more committed to professional ethical behavior-which drives motivation, development, and creativity.

3. Implications

Employees need to feel that they are fulfilling their potential, are appreciated, and acknowledged. This is central to being positive and productive in the workplace. Therefore, it is of paramount consideration that both organizations and their respective employees exert efforts to:

- self-reflect and work with a more efficient set of positive and emotional skills to contribute to a better understanding and interpretation of others and their reactions at the workplace. This entails the adoption of a new paradigm at work under which both organizations (including leaders and staff of authority) and employees are well aware of their own emotional and developmental capabilities and areas for improvement. In other words, positive and negative experiences should be attributed to the correct source to avoid misunderstanding and/or undesirable negative attributions. Hence, it is strongly believed that emotions are influential powers that may boost or negatively impact work relationships and interactions.
- bridge the gap between individuals' cultural values and organizational cultural values. The smaller the gap between these two dimensions, the better productivity, success, and innovation will be at the workplace and vice versa. Adopting the correct attributional perspective would allow employees to work from the cultural perspective of others. As a result, mutual understanding will boost positive organizational behavior, and enhance collaborative and teamwork opportunities.
- arrange and conduct workshops that address the theories of positivity and their impact on creating positive OB. Individuals' attitudes impact their careers, work, and social relationships. To put it differently, individuals must raise their sense of self-awareness, understanding of their emotions, and their regulation of negative feelings. When it comes to making decisions, organizations are more inclined to work with individuals who can handle their emotions, cope well with stressful situations, and work effectively in multi-cultural environments. Spreading the culture of positive emotions and appropriate attributions at work is not an act of magic, but it will contribute to a better understanding

of ourselves and others. Understanding is the key to helping to promote collegiality, initiatives, and collaboration.

4. Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, the three constructs of the theories examined could be a very positive force in the workplace that should promote perseverance in the face of adversity, understanding of oneself and others' attributions and emotions, adaptability to changes and challenges, and openness to alternatives with a broadened positive perspective. According to this paper, positive psychology can help improve positive OB. Positive emotions' strengths in the workplace have been highlighted. The findings of this study strived to increase our understanding of human behavior. However, professionals and practitioners will need to do further research to fully understand the application of these three theories. The perspectives of the theories should shift away from good bench science and toward more empirical investigative solutions that benefit people. Implementing these constructs in the workplace, along with a level of cultural understanding, may result in more positive behavior and resilience. Further research on the influence these components may have at work, as well as the consequent boost in positive OB adopted when combined with the cultural awareness dimension, is regarded as beneficial and required.

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