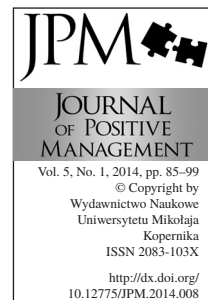# POSITIVE LEADERSHIP: ITS NATURE, ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract

Purpose: The field of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) experiences recently a dynamic growth. Many conceptual frameworks are created and empirically tested. Recently the model of positive orientation with positive leadership as one of its dimensions has been conceptualized and operationalized. The purpose of the paper is to measure the influence of some of the antecedents on positive leadership and the impact of positive leadership on some of its consequences.

Methodology/approach: Among antecedents we have chosen life orientation and resilience. Life orientation assesses individual differences in generalized optimism versus pessimism, resilience is the ability to bounce back or recover from stress. Among consequences we have chosen flourishing, satisfaction with life and subjective happiness. We test the conceptual model in the quantitative research with the use of reliability, correlation and linear regression methods.

Findings: Research results show that both optimism and high resilience positively influence positive leadership which in turn impacts flourishing, satisfaction with life and subjective happiness.

Implications/limitations: The results provide implications mainly for research and business practice. Implications for research include directing attention at some of the relations that have not been researched before. Research results provide practical recommendations on how to shape positive leadership and, in turn build positive outcomes in employees' lives.

Originality/value: Some of the relationships presented in the paper have not been researched yet. The main value of the paper is taking the next step in uncovering the nature, antecedents and consequences of positive style of leadership.

Keywords: Positive Organizational Scholarship, positive orientation, positive leadership, optimism, resilience, flourishing satisfaction with life, subjective happiness

Paper Type: Research paper

1. Introduction

Positive leadership as part of positive orientation seems to be one of the most important positive variables at organizational level. We argue that in the process of organizational positivity it is the trigger that create other positive phenomena,

such as culture, structure, strategy and human capital. Therefore, we ask the research questions: What are the antecedents of positive leadership? and What are the consequences of positive leadership behaviors? We do not believe that positive leaders are born, however, some of the characteristics that create them are deeply embedded in personality. The main objective of the paper is to conceptually hypothesize and empirically prove the impact of other variables on positive leadership and the impact of positive leadership on positive outcomes. The practical objective is to propose a method of shaping positive leadership indirectly, by working on leaders competencies.

Since 2003 the field of POS has grown rapidly, with more than ten papers published in Academy of Management journals. There has been much controversy concerning the term "positive". Cameron and Spreitzer (2012) argue that the convergence in understanding positivity can be summarized in four approaches: (1) adopting a unique lens or an alternative perspective that puts more emphasis on positive phenomena and attributes more importance to them, (2) focusing on extraordinarily positive outcomes or positively deviant performance, outcomes dramatically exceeding common or expected performance, (3) an affirmative bias that fosters resourcefulness – elevating the resources in individuals, groups, and organizations to build capacity, and (4) the examination of virtuousness or the best of the human condition with eudaemonic assumption. We believe that our paper fits exactly in positive vain of the research, as it puts more emphasis on positive phenomena, focus on extraordinary outcomes, appraises positivity and takes eudaemonic assumption.

We attempt to fulfill the objectives of the paper by conducting quantitative empirical research and analyzing its results using reliability, correlation and linear regression analysis. In following parts the paper presents the concept of positive leadership, its hypothesized antecedents: life orientation and resilience, its hypothesized consequences: flourishing, satisfaction with life and subjective happiness, conceptual model, research design and methods, research results and conclusions.

2. Positive orientation and positive leadership

The model of positive orientation has been proposed as the conceptualization and operationalization of positivity at organizational level. It is the extent to which the organization is positive in five main elements of its configuration – leadership, culture, strategy, structure and human resources (Zbierowski, 2012). Positive orientation was created using the philosophy of orientations at organizational level, such as entrepreneurial orientation (Covin and Slevin, 1988; Lumpkin and Dess, 1996), future orientation (Miller and Friesen, 1982), market orientation (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990), and stakeholder orientation (Maignan et al., 2011) and also build using underlying framework of

organizational alignment (Burns and Stalker, 1961; Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967; Chandler, 1962; Galbraith, 1973; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Bratnicki, 2001). Attributing the issues and processes to each of five dimensions was an arbitrary process based on extensive literature review. The attention was paid mainly to the place of issues in the framework according to POS scholars but also was looking for a more broader context of those issues in management studies. The result is the conceptual attribution of twenty five issues to five dimensions of positive orientation: positive leadership, positive organizational culture, positive strategy, positive structure and positive human capital.

According to Fleishman and others (1991) for the few decades, about sixty-five different classifications have been developed to define leadership. Bass (1990 pp. 11–20) suggested that many definition explain that being a leader as the „focus of group processes". From this point of view, leadership is in the center of all activities and group change and joins and embodies group`s will. Other set of leadership definitions conceptualize it from „a personality perspective". It advocates that leadership is a mixture of some special characteristics and traits that individual possess. This set of traits allows a leader to induce subordinates to accomplish tasks. Another set of approaches define leadership as a behavior or an act – the things that leader does to bring change in a group.

When it comes to define a leader in a Positive Organizational Scholarship light there are few components which Mishra and Mishra (2011) rate as an essential for good leader to have. First of all is trustworthiness. Trust is very important because it allows collectives and individuals to manage the interdependence more easily by almost completely eliminating the need for formal agreements and contracts. Trust helps to manage complexity and reduces uncertainty (Luhmann, 1979, 1988). Furthermore it allows for very flexible work arrangements which promote innovation and risk taking (Mishra et al., 2009). Based on almost twenty years of research involving thousands of top executives, managers and other employees Mishra and Mishra (2011) define trust as a willingness to be vulnerable from other person, based on belief that the person is competent, compassionate, open and reliable. However trust alone is not enough to improve performance and to make changes last, courage, authenticity and humility are also needed.

Courage can be defined more precisely as a need to confront the status quo (Worline and Quinn, 2003) based on self-confidence about ability to make a difference (Mishra and Mishra, 2011) and confidence in the future (Luthans and Avolio, 2003). What is more, leader with greater courage is more willing to build trust with other people in order to try to overcome mistakes. Having courage based on confidence in the future induces leader to build the trust that is needed when involving employees in creating it.

Humility is an important personal quality which reflects the willingness to be aware and understand own weaknesses and strengths and understand the

perspective that being a leader does not mean that he/she is in the center of universe. According to Luthans and Avolio (2003) a humble leader is aware of vulnerabilities and ready to discuss them with other to be sure that he is heading in the right direction. Humble leader is also interested in knowing how he/she is perceived.

Authenticity is a key to leader who wants to build trust with others. Authentic leadership means a pattern of behaviors that promote positive ethical climate and positive psychological capacities, to foster self-awareness, balanced processing of information, fostering self-development (Walumbwa et al., 2008). What is more leader who is authentic, have no gaps between his/her actions and words and no hypocrisy (Luthans and Avolio, 2003). He/she possess a deep sense of self-awareness. Because of this, other people perceived authentic leaders as people aware of own and other their perspectives and values (Holland and Winston, 2005).

Positive leadership is therefore based on entrepreneurial and optimistic mindset of leaders (Youssef and Luthans, 2012), building trust between leaders and followers (Mishra and Mishra, 2012), creating the perception of fairness and justice among employees (Mayer, 2012) by following clear rules of appraisal, salaries and promotions. The last important component of positive leadership is hope (Carlsen et al., 2012). It is characteristic for leaders who are entrepreneurially alert – they monitor the environment searching for opportunities (Hayek, 2012), recognize them and utilize even where competitors perceive threats. We argue that trust, fairness and organizational justice are interconnected and are important in building the positive leadership.

We also argue that positive leadership is the beginning of the process of organizational positivity. Positive leadership therefore shapes positive organizational culture over time, which is necessary for the organization to formulate positive strategy, which, in turn, can be implemented and executed only by introducing positive organizational design and recruit or create among existing employees positive human capital. The question of antecedents of positive leadership becomes therefore even more important. It is also crucial to ask what, above aforementioned, are the positive outcomes of positive leadership.

3. Life orientation and resilience

Luthans and Avolio (2003) state that authentic leadership as well as other attributes like: confidence, capacity, hope, moral reasoning, optimism, future orientation and resiliency can be developed. It is an important assumption as it gives a practical sense to the research presented in this paper. We search for attributes that can be shaped to a certain extent and by that the positive leadership can be shaped. Among many others we have chosen life orientation and resilience as we believe that those attributes are not included in the model

of positive leadership but are closely related to it and we hypothesize that they influence it to a large extent.

Life orientation is the general expectancy toward future events and prediction of peoples' behaviors at the broadest level. After studying personality variables Carver and Scheier (1987) identified the dispositional optimism. According to them, it is the general expectation that bad things will be scarce in the future while good things, plentiful (Carver and Scheier, 1992). Life orientation therefore evaluates the differences between individual levels of optimism versus pessimism. It has been used in various researches on affective, behavioral and health consequences of personality variables. The earlier concept has been revised because it did not focus enough on future expectations as theory dictated (Sheier et al., 1994).

Optimism is closely connected to positive leadership. It is important part of taking courageous decisions. Palich and Bagby (1995) argue that entrepreneurial managers perceive strategic events as less risky than other managers. That allows them to see opportunities where others see threats and take courageous decisions. Optimism is also a part of a construct called psychological capital (PsyCap) (Carver and Scheier, 2002; Youssef and Luthans, 2012). Optimism from the very beginning of positive notions has been attributed to positive behaviors, we therefore formulate the hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Optimism positively influences positive leadership

It should be noted here that maximalization of optimism might bring negative results. The answer to this is flexible optimism that includes the component of control over perception and attribution (Peterson, 2000) and realistic optimism that do not allow to externalize the antecedents of the failures (Schneider, 2001).

Resilience is the individual's ability to recover or bounce back from stressful events or failures. Resilience can be the key when explaining the how people deal with life challenges and their resistance to risk across lifetime. However, the construct itself is very complex (Windle et al., 2011). The term resilience has been defined in many different ways, including the ability to adapt to stressful environment, to recover or bounce back from strong stress, to function above norms and not to become ill even when functioning under stress (Carver, 1998; Tusaie and Dyer, 2004). The origins of the word "resilience" come from the word "resile" and means to spring back or bounce back. Whereas the words evolve with, the ability from recovering from stress or bounce is still important to assess.

Also resilience is the part of psychological capital (Youssef and Luthans, 2012). There is some more evidence that resilience is related to positive leadership behaviors (Maulding et al., 2012; Christman and McClellan, 2012). It is important to stress that resilience is related in literature to the type of leadership that is truly

positive, which means that it is highly effective (Wisner, 2011) and normatively positive (Campbell, 2011) and used in appreciative inquiry programs. We therefore hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2. Resilience positively influences positive leadership

4. Flourishing, satisfaction with life and subjective happiness

Cameron and Spreitzer (2012) encourage the POS researchers to look for positive consequences of phenomena at organizational level apart from economic effectiveness. We therefore ask the question of what is the impact of positive leadership on flourishing, satisfaction with life and subjective happiness.

Flourishing explores the socio-psychological prosperity in order to complement the concept of subjective well-being. Many theories concerning human flourishing have evolved recently. Singer and Ryff (1998) and Ryan and Deci (2000) based on psychology theories, proved that there are some universal psychological needs like relatedness, self-acceptance, competence, and some others characteristics reflected in flourishing. What is more, these theories are rooted in the humanistic tradition. Putnam (2000) and Helliwell and others (2009) discussed that social capital is fundamental when it comes to well-being of the societies. While Csikszentmihalyi (1990) claimed that interest, engagement and flow are necessary to human well-being and psychological capital. There are also many argument and research results supporting the view that having meaning and purpose are beneficial to human functioning (Diener et al., 2010).

Flourishing is perceived as one of the main positive consequences of positive behaviors at work, including positive leadership behaviors. There is some evidence that positive leadership results in increased flourishing (Norriss, 2010; Dhiman, 2011). Also Beck (2004) argues that positive leadership behaviors such as competence, integrity, consistency, courage, and humility, which are the result of focusing on what followers want, result in flourishing. We therefore hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 3. Positive leadership results in increased flourishing

Satisfaction with life scale provides researcher with an integrated judgments of how respondent's life is going as a whole. It refers to process, in which respondents evaluate their life quality based on their individual criteria. "A comparison of one`s perceived life circumstances with a self-imposed standard or set of standards is presumably made to the degree that conditions match these standards, the person reports high life satisfaction" (Pavot and Diener, 1993: 164). Researchers have identified two main aspects of subjective well-being which are: affective component and cognitive component. The first one can be further divided

into unpleasant affect and pleasant affect (Diener, 1990). The latter one can be referred to as satisfaction with life (Andrews & Whitney, 1976). There is rather little empirical evidence linking positive leadership behaviors to satisfaction with life, however some authors argue that the link is positive (Luthans et al., 2013), therefore we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4. Positive leadership results in increased satisfaction with life

Although people vary in the sources of what make them happy, there is an agreement as to what does this term means and whether someone has achieved it. However when it comes to happiness and well-being the biggest problem is how to measure individuals' happiness. Because the "appropriate happiness thermometer" does not exists and brain techniques and state-of-the-art psychophysiological measures are still not sufficient, researchers have to rely on self-reports. Similarly to satisfaction with life, there is little empirical evidence linking positive leadership behaviors and happiness. Some authors, however, argue that positive leadership behaviors result in happiness both concerning the leader and the followers (Fu et al., 2010; Kerfoot, 2012), there we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 5. Positive leadership results in increased subjective happiness

Above hypotheses can be depicted at the conceptual model (Figure 1).

Figure 1.
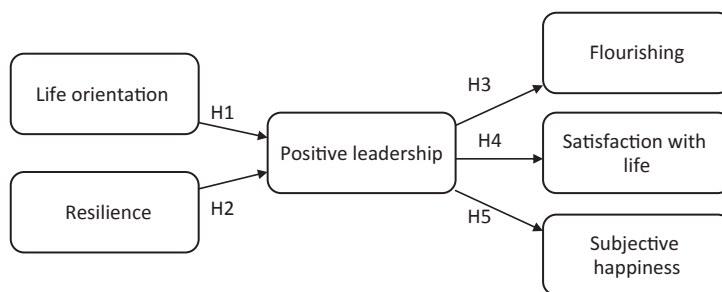Conceptual model

5. Research design and methodology

For the empirical research we employed cross-sectional design (social survey design). Each of the variables was measured by a part of the questionnaire that was administered to the sample of 59 managers. The sample consisted of middle-level managers and was a non-probability sample. Age and work experience were measured as control variables.

Live orientation was measured using 10-item, 5-point Likert scale Life Orientation Test – Revisited (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994) (α=.732).

Resilience was measured using 6-item, 5-point Likert scale Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008) (α=.752).

Positive leadership was measured by 9-item, 7-point Likert scale Positive Orientation Scale (Zbierowski, 2012) (α=.856)

Flourishing was measured by 8-item, 7-point Likert scale Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2010) (α=.878).

Satisfaction with Life was measured by 5-item, 7-point Likert scale Satisfaction With Life Scale (SwLS) (Diener et al., 1985) (α=.878).

Subjective happiness was measured by 4-item, 7-point Likert scale Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) (Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999) (α=.844).

To test the hypotheses correlation and hierarchical regression models have been employed.

6. Research results

Table 1 presents the results of correlation between the measured variables.

		positive leadership	resilience	life orientation	flourishing	satisfaction with life	happiness
positive leadership	Pearson's correlation	1	.350**	.535**	.514**	.469**	.451**
	Significance		.007	.000	.000	.000	.000
resilience	Pearson's correlation	.350**	1	.544**	.352**	.382**	.383**
	Significance	.007		.000	.006	.003	.003
life orientation	Pearson's correlation	.535**	.544**	1	.698**	.500**	.721**
	Significance	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
flourishing	Pearson's correlation	.514**	.352**	.698**	1	.784**	.717**
	Significance	.000	.006	.000		.000	.000
satisfaction with life	Pearson's correlation	.469**	.382**	.500**	.784**	1	.729**
	Significance	.000	.003	.000	.000		.000
happiness	Pearson's correlation	.451**	.383**	.721**	.717**	.729**	1
	Significance	.000	.003	.000	.000	.000	

Table 1.
Correlation matrix

** correlation significant at 0.01.

There are strong positive correlations among all measured variables. This suggests that they are related to each other. However, to test the hypotheses we carried out the hierarchical linear regression analysis. In each of the models we carried out analysis first with control variables (age and experience) and,

as the second model, the analysis with hypothesized variables as independent variables.

Tables 2 and 3 present the results of regression analysis with positive leadership as dependent variable.

Model	R	R-squared	Adjusted R-squared	Standard estimation error
1	.096[a]	.009	−.026	.78802
2	.540[b]	.292	.239	.67843

Model B	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	Standard error	Beta			
1 (Constant)	2.969	1.208		2.459	.017
Age	.020	.050	.169	.391	.697
Experience	−.010	.052	−.081	−.186	.853
2 (Constant)	.939	1.141		.823	.414
Age	−.010	.045	−.083	−.215	.831
Experience	.007	.046	.058	.151	.881
Resilience	.106	.163	.092	.652	.517
Life orientation	.697	.196	.492	3.554	.001

Control variables have no impact on positive leadership. Resilience and life orientation have serious impact on the other hand. The explanatory power of second regression model is 24%. However, only life orientation achieves an acceptable significance. The regression model of just life orientation as independent variable achieves explanatory power of 27% (not shown in the tables). This supports hypothesis H1 but falsifies hypothesis H2.

Tables 4 and 5 present the results of regression analysis with flourishing as dependent variable.

Model	R	R-squared	Adjusted R-squared	Standard estimation error
1	.124[a]	.015	−.020	.81018
2	.519[b]	.270	.230	.70411

Model B		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
		Standard error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	5.024	1.242		4.046	.000
	Age	.021	.051	.177	.411	.683
	Experience	−.007	.054	−.057	−.132	.896
2	(Constant)	3.473	1.136		3.057	.003
	Age	.011	.045	.092	.244	.808
	Experience	−.002	.047	−.016	−.043	.966
	positive leadership	.522	.119	.507	4.375	.000

Table 5.
Coefficients in
regression analysis

Control variables have no impact on flourishing. Positive leadership has a strong impact on it and the model with it as sole independent variable achieves the explanatory power of 25%. This confirms hypothesis H3.

Tables 6 and 7 present the results of regression analysis with satisfaction with life as dependent variable.

Model	R	R-squared	Adjusted R-squared	Standard esti-mation error
1	.142[a]	.020	−.015	1.10661
2	.481[b]	.232	.190	.98887

Table 6.
Summary of
regression analysis

Model B		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
		Standard error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	3.020	1.696		1.781	.080
	Age	.070	.070	.432	1.002	.321
	Experience	−.062	.074	−.360	−.835	.407
2	(Constant)	1.083	1.595		.679	.500
	Age	.057	.063	.353	.917	.363
	Experience	−.055	.066	−.322	−.838	.406
	positive leadership	.652	.168	.462	3.890	.000

Table 7.
Coefficients in
regression analysis

Control variables have no impact on satisfaction with life. Positive leadership has a strong impact on it and the model with it as sole independent variable achieves the explanatory power of 20%. This confirms hypothesis H4.

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Tables 8 and 9 present the results of regression analysis with subjective happiness as dependent variable.

Model	R	R-squared	Adjusted R-squared	Standard estimation error
1	.100[a]	.010	-.025	1.20667
2	.461[b]	.213	.170	1.08566

Table 8.
Summary of
regression analysis

Model B		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
		Standard error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	3.650	1.850		1.974	.053
	Age	.055	.076	.311	.719	.475
	Experience	–.060	.080	–.326	–.752	.455
2	(Constant)	1.591	1.752		.909	.368
	Age	.041	.069	.234	.601	.550
	Experience	–.054	.072	–.289	–.742	.461
	positive leadership	.693	.184	.453	3.766	.000

Table 9.
Coefficients in
regression analysis

Control variables have no impact on subjective happiness. Positive leadership has a strong impact on it and the model with it as sole independent variable achieves the explanatory power of 19%. This confirms hypothesis H5.

7. Conclusions

There are a few conclusions that could be drawn from the study. First of all, the age and work experience have no impact on positive leadership, flourishing, satisfaction with life and subjective happiness. This is an important finding in terms of the field of research on ageism. It means that both young and senior managers can be positive and achieve a high level of flourishing, satisfaction with life and subjective happiness.

Positive leadership is under the strong influence of life orientation. It means that leaders who are optimists are much more likely to be positive leaders. There are a few possible explanations for this relationship. Optimistic leaders tend to be more courageous. They also perceive situations as less risky than other managers. Moreover, they perceive opportunities where other managers perceive threats and that sometimes allows them to the be the first-movers and achieve the first-mover advantage.

Positive leadership has a strong impact on positive outcomes of managerial practices: flourishing, satisfaction with life, and subjective happiness. The strongest impact is on flourishing. All of those relationships show that positive

leadership has influence not only on followers but on leaders themselves. In other words, not only followers are more motivated, thrive and work more efficiently. Also leaders benefit from positive behaviors. They achieve higher levels of well-being, satisfaction with life and happiness.

All the above findings help to realize how important is positivity at the workplace, especially positive leadership behaviors. Apart from higher performance, they also result in positive outcomes. It also shows that positivity in organizations is a process that starts with optimistic leaders and ends with leaders that are happier and more satisfied with their work and life. Future research in the field should probably focus solely on antecedents or consequences of positive leadership, not to blur the picture of positive processes in organizations.

The study brings a number of practical recommendations for practitioners. First of all, positive model of leadership should be promoted in organizations. It not only supports "soft" outcomes concerning managers, such as flourishing, satisfaction with life and subjective happiness, but indirectly positively impacts performance. Secondly, it shows a way of promoting positive leadership. Life orientation is mostly embedded in personality, therefore this recommendation concerns mostly recruitment and selection. Finally, as previous research shows, optimism is closely connected to corporate entrepreneurship, therefore promoting it also supports organizational positivity.

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