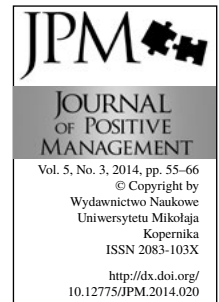# TOWARDS THE INTEGRATED CONCEPT AND MEASUREMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL POSITIVITY

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Abstract

Purpose: Despite the dynamic growth of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) there have been very few attempts to discover a structure of positive phenomena at organizational level and, taking a step further, conceptualize and operationalize organizational positivity. The paper attempts to fill that gap by proposing a coherent concept of positive orientation along with its measure.

Methodology/approach: To achieve the purpose the philosophy of creating and using orientations at organizational level has been reviewed, the underlying structure of organizational alignment has been selected and positive phenomena have been conceptually attributed to five dimensions of positive orientation: leadership, culture, strategy, design and human capital. The conceptually created framework has been empirically tested using factor analysis and reliability analysis.

Findings: The research results confirm that positive orientation is a multi-dimensional construct with five dimensions: positive leadership, positive culture, positive strategy, positive design and positive human capital.

Implications/limitations: The paper has main implications for further research. The concept of positive orientation can be used as a useful tool not only for measuring organizational positivity, but also for researching its antecedents and consequences.

Originality/value: The concept of positive orientation is one of the very few integrated concepts of positivity at organizational level. It is fully original and has been conceptualized and operationalized using commonly accepted methods of construct development.

Keywords: Positive Organizational Scholarship, positive orientation, organizational orientation, organizational alignment

Paper Type: Research paper

1. Introduction

During last ten years Positive Organizational Scholarship has grown rapidly. Many papers in this field were published in leading journals (Academy of Management Review, Academy of Management Journal), also some important books were published. Even though the field approaches maturity, it is still something that Cameron and colleagues (2003) describe as "umbrella project" that includes

many various issues from different levels of analysis and different places in organizational and meta-organizational life. I argue that there is a need of robust conceptualization and operationalization of positive phenomena at organizational level. This kind of concept will not only allow to measure organizational positivity but also will facilitate further research on the antecedents and consequences of positivity in organizations.

The objective of the paper is to conceptualize and operationalize the positive orientation. To achieve this I use the concept of orientation as a underlying philosophy and concept of organizational alignment as underlying structure. I then conceptually fill the dimensions of positive orientation with content and finally test empirically the conceptual model in the process of quantitative empirical research carried out on the sample of 379 randomly sampled organizations using exploratory factor analysis and reliability analysis. The following parts of the paper present the structure of organizational phenomena, the philosophy of orientations at organizational level, the content of dimensions of positive orientation, research design and methodology, research results and conclusions.

2. Structure of organizational phenomena

Cameron and Spreitzer (2012) present the areas of interest of POS aligned in nine categories (Table 1). It is quite clear that the scope of interest is very wide, covering all levels of SOGI model: individual (psychological capital, prosocial motivation, callings at work, work engagement, positive identity, proactivity, creativity, curiosity, positive energy, positive emotions, subjective well-being, passion, socioemotional intelligence), group (group emotions, justice, high-quality connections, relational coordination, reciprocity, intimacy, civility, trust, trustworthiness, humor, psychological safety), organizational (career development, mentoring, socialization, diversity, communication, conflict resolution, negotiating, the design of work, mindful organizing, goal attainment, organizational identity, organizational energy, innovation) and societal (economic models, social movements, international peacemaking). There is, however, little structure in that wide repertoire of positive phenomena.

Table 1.
Areas of interest of POS

Source: Cameron and Spreitzer (2012).

Category	Phenomena
positive individual attributes	psychological capital, prosocial motivation, callings at work, work engagement, positive identity, proactivity, creativity, curiosity, positive traits, the neuroscience underpinnings of POS
positive emotions	positive energy, positive emotions, subjective well-being, passion, socio-emotional intelligence, group emotions
strengths and virtues	virtuousness, forgiveness, humility, compassion, hope, courage, justice, integrity, positive ethics, leveraging strengths, character strengths in global managers

Category	Phenomena
positive relation-ships	high-quality connections, relational coordination, reciprocity, intimacy, civility, trust, trustworthiness, humor, psychological safety
positive HRM	career development, mentoring, socialization, diversity, communication, conflict resolution, negotiating, work-family dynamics
positive organizatio-nal processes	resourcefulness, collective efficacy, the design of work, mindful orga-nizing, goal attainment, organizational identity, organizational energy, innovation, organizational boundaries
positive leadership and change	appreciative inquiry, positive change attributes, implementing positive change, authentic leadership, leadership development, peak performance, strategic change, strengths-based strategy
positive lens on problems and chal-lenges	managing the unexpected, healing after trauma, organizational recovery, responding to crisis, resilience under diversity, post-traumatic growth, ambivalence, responding to stress
expanding POS	sustainability, critical theory, economic models, social movements, spiritu-ality, positive deviance, international peacemaking

Another approach to the structure of positive phenomena was presented in the early years of POS by Cameron and colleagues (2003) who align them according to causes, enablers and consequences of positivity at three levels of analysis (Table 2). That approach suggests that positivity works as a process in organizations, it is also clear that there may be some relations between levels of analysis, e.g., individual positive experiences and traits through positive organizational institutions may bring positive consequences at individual and organizational levels, that might also be reflected at societal level through accumulation of positivity over longer periods of time.

	Individual	Organizational	Societal
Causes (experiences and traits)	trustworthiness, resilience, wis-dom, humility, high levels of positive energy, unselfishness, altruism, positive experiences	appreciation, collaboration, virtuousness, vitality, meaning-fulness, creating abundance, experiences of past successes	compassion, loyalty, honesty, respect, forgiveness
Institutions (enablers)	positive norms, attitude towards work, meaning of work, positive motivation, leadership behaviours	processes, capabilities, struc-tures, methods virtuousness, flexible organization design	good laws, wisdom of society, support and positive perception and feedback
Consequences	human fulfilment, ennobled human behaviours, human well-being, knowledge and wisdom	excellence, transcendence, po-sitive deviance, extraordinary performance, positive spirals of flourishing	social welfare and stability, happiness

Perhaps the most comprehensive approach to POS so far was presented by Stankiewicz (2010). The presented model of Positive Organizational Capacity

containing eight categories of intangible resources: strategy, structure, human resource management, knowledge and democratization of management, control, innovation, integration and identification with company and leadership. Despite the presented models there is still need for coherent conceptualization and operationalization of organizational positivity. This is also answer to a call to create new constructs in the field of POS, develop new measures, take the psychological capital and positive organizational behavior analysis to organizational level (Spreitzer and Cameron, 2012; Youssef and Luthans, 2012).

3. Orientations at organizational level and organizational alignment

In conceptualizing the organization's overall inclination towards a certain phenomenon a concept of orientation is very often used. Miles and Arnold claim that "a firm's business orientation consists of those underlying philosophies that determine the nature and scope of its activities and plans. (…) Hence, an organization's business orientation is its underlying philosophy, which tends to flavor the overall decision-making framework of its management" (1991: 49).

The concept of orientation is well suited to conceptualized positivity at organizational level. It assumes the existence of multiple dimensions, so positive orientation is not a single phenomenon and a single measure, but a set of limited, interconnected variables and measures. In conceptualizing positive orientation I used other orientations on organizational level as an analogy: 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).

One important question in building orientation is its dimensionality, and more specifically, relationships between dimensions. Covin and Slevin (1988) even though assuming the existence of three dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation claim that they are so closely connected that the concept is uni-dimensional in nature. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) on the other hand argue that dimensions can vary independently and so the concept is multi-dimensional. Similarly, Narver and Slater (1990) tend to treat market orientation as uni-dimensional concept and Kohli and Jaworski (1990) as multi-dimensional. In the conceptualization of positive orientation I tend to argue that the concept is multi-dimensional, however, the dimensions are connected and influence each other.

Searching for the underlying structure of positive orientation I decided to investigate a number of theories of organizational alignment and fit as they provide a limited number of elements of organizational design that span most of the phenomena and behaviors at organizational level. Burns and Stalker (1961) focus on external alignment and argue that different designs should be applied in different environments. Also Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) follow that lead

focusing on differentiation and integration. For Chandler (1962) strategy and size are predictors of organizational design.

One of the first integrated framework for organizational alignment was presented by Galbraith (1973). He argues that the five main components of organizational configuration are: (1) strategic tasks that organization faces as part of organization's strategy, (2) people that organization needs, (3) compensation system, (4) structure and channels of communication that facilitate productive interactions among people, and (5) processes necessary to take efficient and effective decisions. Probably the most widespread framework of organizational alignment was created by Peters and Waterman (1982). Their model consists of three hard elements: (1) strategy, (2) structure, (3) systems, and four soft elements: (4) skills, (5) style, (6) staff, and (7) shared values. Bratnicki (2001) uses five elements in his framework: (1) organizational culture, (2) strategy, (3), organizational power and managerial leadership, (4) people, and (5) organizational structure, systems and material resources.

I decided to integrate above views and propose a model with five elements: (1) leadership, (2) organizational culture, (3) strategy, (4) structure, and (5) human capital. I assume that five-dimensional model of positive orientation explains in the best way the positive phenomena at organizational level and therefore I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1. Positive orientation is a five-dimensional construct.

4. Content of dimensions of positive orientation

Attributing the issues and processes to each of five dimensions was an arbitrary process based on extensive literature review. I paid attention 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 (see Table 3): positive leadership, positive organizational culture, positive strategy, positive structure and positive human capital.

Dimension	Meaning
Positive leadership	• Entrepreneurial mindset of managers who are entrepreneurially alert – monitor the environment searching for opportunities, recognize them and utilize even where competitors perceive threats • Leadership based on trust between managers and followers • Fair management that creates the perception of justice among employees in terms of following clear rules of appraisal, salaries and promotions • Looking into the future with hope and optimism

Table 3.
Dimensions of positive orientation

Source: own study.

Dimension	Meaning
Positive organizational culture	• Open communication, allowance to speak with no fear • Knowledge and experience sharing among employees • Social integration – close relationships among employees, willingness to cooperate and help • Civility and humor in relationships • Organizational culture characterized by creativity and inventiveness, especially with limited resources • Ability to work under pressure, taking risk and fast reactions to problems • Self-development of competencies
Positive strategy	• Salient vision that distinguishes from competitors, creates strategic challenges, is an outcome of consensus between top management and internal stakeholders especially middle managers, is known to employees and is executed by managers • Vision and strategy based on key values that are clear and commonly known • Strategic goals that are clear, allow employees to reflect their actions, reconcile contradiction between achieveableness and ambition • Strategy based on the system of relationships with stakeholders that is consciously created and maintained, creates relationships based on devotion of attention to stakeholders, analyzing their strategy, understanding their needs and creating value for them
Positive design	• Organizational structure that assures high degree of autonomy and freedom in setting goals for employees • Functional flexibility and decentralization that allows employees to influence the activity of their departments, creating teams and working in them • Organizational structure and systems that allow employees to influence the company's activities based on bottom-up decision making and connecting individual actions to organizational success • Placing the employees in organizational structure that creates high self-assessment of competencies • Assuring cooperation between departments
Positive human capital	• Job involvement and organizational commitment, organizational identification and pride from working for organization • Perception of high meaning of job for organization and for private life • Spontaneity and persistence: action orientation, resilience • Intrinsic and prosocial motivation – satisfaction from job, creating value for stakeholders, searching for more effective ways of work

Table 3.
Continued

In the process of attribution of positive phenomena and processes to each of the five dimensions of positive orientation based on literature review I paid attention to internal coherence of each of the dimensions and to link them to each other. I argue that positive orientation is a multi-dimensional construct and hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2. Positive phenomena and processes at organizational level are attributed to dimensions according to proposed framework of positive orientation.

5. Research design and methodology

I employed qualitative research methods at the early level of the research in order to conceptualize the construct of positive orientation. I carried out two series of qualitative research to establish the list of most important positive phenomena at organizational level. In the first series I carried out twelve unstructured interviews with owners-managers or managing directors of high-performing SMEs. The reason to choose high-performing organizations is consistent with one of the approaches of POS to focus on extraordinary results (Cameron and Spreitzer, 2012). During unstructured interviews interviewees were asked about their understanding of organizational positivity and about the phenomena that they consider as positive. The result of this stage of qualitative research was a list of 31 positive phenomena at organizational level. In the second stage interviewees were asked in semi-structured interviews about the importance of each of positive phenomenon and about their contribution to achieving organizational success. Interviewees were also asked to fill in and comment on the questionnaire measuring positive phenomena. As a result of the second stage of the research the list of positive phenomena was limited to 25 items that were later attributed to five dimensions of positive orientation.

Some of the measures of positive phenomena were adapted from previous works, the rest of them has been developed. The questionnaire with 49 questions measuring 25 phenomena was administered to random sample of 379 firms using CATI technique by contracted research firm. In each of the firm senior manager was asked to answer the questions. The average time of one interview was 25.5 minutes. The methods of statistical analysis include factor analysis and reliability analysis. Statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS software.

6. Results

The number of factors in factor analysis was determined by the Keiser criterion – five factors reached eigenvalues over 1.0, therefore hypothesis 1 is confirmed. The loadings of items into factors are presented in Table 4.

Matrix of rotated components					
	Factor				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
open communication	0.690	0.196	0.051	0.238	0.091
knowledge sharing	0.735	0.188	0.091	0.103	0.187
social integration 1	0.791	0.161	–0.035	0.201	0.100

Table 4.
Dimensions of
positive orientation

Source: own study.

	Matrix of rotated components				
	Factor				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
social integration 2	0.761	0.244	0.076	0.215	0.072
civility	0.714	0.160	0.095	0.122	0.109
humor	0.692	0.099	0.067	0.150	0.084
creativity 1	0.558	0.024	0.454	0.266	0.076
creativity 2	0.592	-0.047	0.410	0.232	0.104
ability to work under pressure	0.627	0.153	0.382	0.147	0.052
striving for development	0.417	0.143	0.394	0.319	-0.012
salient vision 1	0.109	0.527	0.379	0.230	-0.058
salient vision 2	0.205	0.622	0.298	0.204	–0.048
salient vision 3	0.204	0.631	0.323	0.235	-0.023
clear and challenging goals	0.325	0.495	0.465	0.050	0.198
stakeholders 1	0.083	0.666	0.394	0.078	0.119
stakeholders 2	0.096	0.711	0.339	0.135	0.066
stakeholders 3	0.042	0.657	0.304	0.149	0.009
clear and strong values	0.318	0.494	0.477	0.074	0.210
optimism 1	0.135	0.092	0.561	0.183	0.180
optimism 2	-0.033	0.122	0.568	0.212	0.242
trust 1	0.242	0.129	0.620	0.157	0.299
trust 2	0.089	0.386	0.558	0.179	0.236
trust 3	0.099	0.296	0.602	0.083	0.290
trust 4	0.363	0.193	0.610	0.036	0.304
hope	0.197	0.311	0.379	0.178	0.221
fairness 1	0.269	0.133	0.645	0.114	0.271
fairness 2	0.281	0.275	0.545	0.118	0.222
self-determination 1	0.173	0.250	0.107	0.501	0.287
self-determination 2	0.063	0.181	0.021	0.607	0.421
self-determination 3	0.198	0.128	0.107	0.694	0.288
decentralization 1	0.242	0.151	0.199	0.756	0.037
decentralization 2	0.270	0.152	0.152	0.670	0.046
cross-functional cooperation	-0.037	0.352	0.437	0.457	0.226
impact 1	0.092	0.205	0.020	0.594	0.453
impact 2	0.185	0.205	0.142	0.650	0.156
impact 3	0.233	0.194	0.238	0.725	0.192
competence 1	0.116	0.173	0.093	0.741	0.194
competence 2	0.233	0.143	0.186	0.670	0.149

Table 4.
Continued

Matrix of rotated components					
	Factor				
	1	2	3	4	5
organizational commitment 1	0.096	0.254	0.191	0.282	0.607
organizational commitment 2	0.090	0.357	0.175	0.285	0.628
meaning 1	0.053	0.456	0.189	0.201	0.478
meaning 2	0.246	0.377	0.208	0.356	0.432
spontaneity and persistence 1	0.228	0.163	0.439	0.131	0.494
spontaneity and persistence 2	0.203	0.276	0.360	0.033	0.447
intrinsic motivation 1	0.341	0.181	0.321	0.024	0.584
intrinsic motivation 2	0.341	0.136	0.482	0.084	0.504

Method of extracting factors – Main components.
Method of rotation – Varimax with Kaiser normalization.

Table 4.
Continued

The results of factor analysis also confirm hypothesis 2. All the conceptual attributions of items to positive orientation dimensions are confirmed by research results. Positive leadership consist of optimism, trust, hope and fairness, positive culture consists of open communication, knowledge sharing, social integration, civility, humor, creativity, ability to work under pressure and striving for development, positive strategy consists of salient vision, clear and challenging goals, stakeholders' relations management and clear and strong values, positive design consists of self-determination, decentralization, cross-functional cooperation, impact and competence, and positive human capital consists of organizational commitment, meaning of work, spontaneity and persistence and intrinsic motivation. It should be noted, however, that some of the loadings are below the level of 0.7 which suggest that the attribution of the item to dimension is questionable. This concerns mainly striving for development, clear and challenging goals, clear and strong values, hope, and cross-functional cooperation.

Factor analysis was followed by reliability analysis. The Cronbach's α coefficients have reached following values for dimensions of positive orientation: 0.856 for positive leadership, 0.907 for positive culture, 0.886 for positive strategy, 0.884 for positive design and 0.866 for positive human capital. All the values are well above the level of acceptance.

7. Conclusions

Research results prove that there is a framework of positive phenomena at organizational level – positive orientation – and it has five dimensions: positive leadership, positive culture, positive strategy, positive design and positive human capital. Research results also confirm the conceptually created content of each of

the dimensions. I argue that positive orientation is a multi-dimensional and not uni-dimensional construct. The dimensions of positive orientation form a coherent configuration, the change in one of the dimensions also forces another dimensions to change. There seems to be, however, some causal order among the dimensions of positive orientation. I assume that positive leadership is the key to creating positivity at organizational level. Positive transformational leaders act as agents of change, they unleash the positive potential of the organization, mainly through their attitude that is optimistic and full of hope. Leaders in positive culture create positive strategy. Culture that is creative and not afraid of challenges is transferred to strategy. Organizational structure and design have to be adjusted to strategy and as a result the positive human capital is created and allows promotion of positive leadership.

I believe that the paper contributes to the theory of positive organizational scholarship. It is one of the first attempts to create an integrated framework of positive phenomena at organizational level. I argue that this kind of framework is important both for theory and practice. It allows to measure the positivity of organization and relate it to other organizational constructs. For practice it provides an integrated set of recommendations on what to pay attention to in order to build more positive organizational environment and achieve higher performance.

The process of conceptual creation of positive orientation and empirical research is not free of limitations. At the conceptual level one of the limitations is the subjective attribution of positive phenomena and processes to dimensions of positive orientation. Phenomena were selected in literature review and qualitative research process, but those processes are subjective and strongly dependent on researcher and interviewees. Possible limitation in empirical part of the study is the measurement of positive phenomena. So far, little instruments have been developed to measure positive issues, therefore some tools developed earlier were used. It meant adjusting the measures to work at organizational level. Also the loadings of some items to certain dimensions raise the question of some possible ambiguity.

I am aware that proposing and researching positive orientation is just the beginning of the process of categorizing the positive phenomena at organizational level. I believe that the meaning of each of dimensions might be further expanded. For the future research I suggest a number of possible directions. First of all, the construct of positive orientation should be validated in other national contexts. Also measurement of positive phenomena should be developed. Taking into consideration one of the approaches of POS that focuses on extraordinary performance the possible direction of future research is using the notion of high performance organization (HPO) in researching organizational positivity. This also allows to use mathematical methods designed especially to measure high

performance, such as data envelopment analysis (DEA). I also believe that the approach to organizational performance should be extended in positive way which would mean focusing on softer and more social measures of performance, such as corporate social performance (CSP) measures.

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