



The Essence of Positive Organizational Scholarship: Unlocking the Generative Capabilities in Human Communities

Organizations are the mediating institutions that create most of what society needs – whether it is education, business enterprise or health. At the Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan, a growing cohort of faculty experts is challenging the traditional belief that good management equates with maintaining order and seeking conformity. These forward-thinking researchers are establishing the foundation for a new academic discipline that has wide-ranging and deep implications for how individuals think about human capabilities and organizational performance. This new discipline is called Positive Organizational Scholarship – POS.

Positive Organizational Scholarship is an exciting new movement in organizational studies that draws on path-breaking work in the organizational and social sciences. It focuses on the dynamics in organizations that lead to developing human strength, producing resilience and restoration, fostering vitality, and cultivating extraordinary individuals. Positive Organizational Scholarship is based on the premise that understanding how to enable human excellence in organizations will unlock potential, reveal possibilities, and facilitate a more positive course of human and organizational welfare. POS does not adopt one particular theory or framework, but it draws from the full spectrum of organizational theories to understand, explain, and predict the occurrence, causes, and consequences of positivism. Research findings to date indicate that enabling positive qualities in individuals leads to exceptional organizational performance.

At its core, Positive Organizational Scholarship investigates “positive deviance,” or the ways in which organizations and their members flourish and prosper in extraordinary ways. Indeed, the discipline’s name embodies the core values of the movement. “Positive” addresses the discipline’s affirmative bias. “Organizational” focuses on the processes and conditions that occur in organizational contexts. “Scholarship” reflects the rigor, theory, scientific procedures and precise definition in which the approach is grounded.

This positive approach does not ignore, deny, or denigrate the negative phenomena and problems found in organizations. It seeks, instead, to study organizations and organizational contexts typified by appreciation, collaboration, vitality, and fulfillment, where creating abundance and human well-being are key indicators of success. It seeks to understand what represents the best of the human condition.

Positive Organizational Scholarship is inclusive, attracting senior and junior scholars, specialists across a spectrum of disciplines, and practitioners from the public and private sectors. At the University of Michigan, scholars from the schools of Business, Education, Medicine, Public Health, Music, and Literature, Science & Arts meet regularly to foster collaborative research and to share ideas for application. A great deal of intellectual energy is produced by these associations and interactions, including conferences, research initiatives, and classroom teaching materials. The discipline’s unique focus on positive organizational dynamics will most certainly uncover additional new sources and forms of human capability.