

# Positive Organizational Scholarship

## *Measuring Impact*

*A sampling of POS research that demonstrates the impact of POS principles and practices on individuals, teams, and organizations*

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# Research from Center for POS Core Faculty

## Reciprocity Ring Creates Dollar Value, Saves Time

The Reciprocity Ring, a tool that enables participants to find resources, solve problems, and get information, cuts costs, generates revenues, and saves time. The Ring enables participants to express the needs they have and tap the expertise and networks of others to meet these needs. In a single application, a drug development team in a large pharmaceutical company produced solutions estimated to be worth \$214,667 and saved 4,176 hours of time. Our analysis of many Rings demonstrates that, on average, each application of the Reciprocity Ring produces about \$152,000 and saves 1,600 hours of time.

From: Research conducted by Humax Corporation

## Energizing Others Key to Performance

Energizing others is more important than being in the right position in the flow of information in an organization. Based on analysis of annual human resource performance ratings in three companies—a management consulting firm, a credit card company, and a petrochemical company—we found that the most important predictor of performance was energizing other people. Energizing others gets peak performance from them—they are more likely to dedicate themselves to your projects, to devote their discretionary time to you, and to provide you with information and resources. When others do their best for you, you perform at high levels.

From: "What Creates Energy in Organizations?," with Rob Cross and Andrew Parker. *Sloan Management Review* 44(summer): 51-56, 2003; "Positive Organizational Network Analysis and Energizing Relationships," with Rob Cross and Melissa Wooten. Chapter 21 in Kim Cameron, Jane Dutton, and Robert Quinn (eds.), *Positive Organizational Scholarship* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers), 2003.

## Implementing Positive Practices Yields Financial Results

Research in 28 financial services organizations found that when scores improved from one year to the next in measures of positive practices and organizational virtuousness, six measures of financial performance (i.e., revenues, sales, return on investment) also improved. Forty-five percent of the variance in financial performance is accounted for by the implementation of positive practices. Customer retention and employee loyalty were also found to be significantly related to the implementation of positive organizational practices.

From: Kim S. Cameron & Carlos Mora (2007) "Positive practices and organizational performance." Working paper

## Organizational Virtuousness Yields Valued Outcomes

Studies of organizations in 16 different industries revealed a significant, positive relationship between the implementation of organizational virtuousness—e.g., forgiveness, trust, optimism, compassion—and six

outcomes in these organizations—profitability, productivity, quality, innovation, customer satisfaction, and employee retention. Organizations characterized by organizational virtuousness performed significantly higher on both hard measures (e.g., financial) and soft measures (e.g., satisfaction) of performance.

From: Kim S. Cameron, David Bright, and Arran Caza (2004) "Exploring the relationships between organizational virtuousness and performance." *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47: 766-790.

## Organizational Virtuousness Buffers Organizations from the Harm in Downsizing

The relationships between virtuousness and the deleterious effects of downsizing were investigated in a study of 52 organizations that had recently downsized. The significant negative effects of downsizing on organizational performance have been well-documented. Two kinds of virtuousness were studied—phasic virtues (such as forgiveness and compassion) which are relevant only in certain circumstances such as in the presence of harm, and tonic virtues (such as optimism and generosity) which are relevant regardless of circumstances. Virtuous practices were found to buffer organizations from the harmful effects of downsizing, and they also amplified the positive effects of virtuous practices on performance. Organizations were found to be more resilient when they are characterized by both tonic and phasic virtuousness.

From: David S. Bright, Kim S. Cameron, and Arran Caza (2006) "The amplifying and buffering effects of virtuousness in downsized organizations." *Journal of Business Ethics*, 64: 249-269.

## Virtuousness of Downsizing Fosters Recovery for Airlines During 9/11

A study was conducted of the recovery of the U.S. airline industry after the tragedy of September 11th, 2001. A strong relationship was found between the virtuousness of the downsizing strategy implemented by each company and stock price return. Airlines instituting virtuous practices recovered more quickly and more completely than did others.

From: Jody Hoffer Gittel, Kim S. Cameron, Sandy Lim, and Victor Rivas (2006) "Relationships, layoffs, and organizational resilience." *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 42: 300-328.

## Virtuous Organizational Practices Yield Extraordinary Results in Toxic Cleanup

A four year investigation of the cleanup and closure of a nuclear weapons production facility revealed that the task was achieved 60 years earlier than scheduled, \$30 billion under budget, and 13 times cleaner than federal standards required. The study records verbatim statements by employees engaged in the task over a four year period before task completion. The key factor accounting for the results which emerged from the interviews was the implementation of virtuousness organizational practices.

From: Kim S. Cameron and Marc Lavine (2006) *Making the Impossible Possible: Leading Extraordinary Performance—The Rocky Flats Story*. San Francisco: Berrett Koehler.

### **Compassion Counts at Work**

A study of 171 compassion stories from 239 employees of a midsized hospital shows that compassion from co-workers in the workplace matters. Experiencing compassion at work is associated with seeing oneself as more capable and stronger, viewing one's colleagues as caring individuals and with seeing the organization as more virtuous. A survey study at the same hospital suggests that experiencing compassion at work fosters commitment to the organization, which in many studies is associated with lower turnover.

From: "The Contours and Consequences of Compassion at Work" Lilius, Worline, Maitlis, Kanov, Dutton and Frost, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Jan. 2008.

### **Opportunities to Give to Others at Work Strengthen Employees' Ties to Their Work Organization**

In a survey and interview study of employees at a Fortune 500 retailer, we discovered that giving to colleagues at work (through deductions from paychecks donated to a corporate foundation) strengthens employees' attachments to their work organization. The increased attachment arises because giving to fellow employees at work changes how employees see themselves (e.g., seeing themselves as more caring) and changes how they see the organization (also seen as more caring). This research suggests that what employees can give to others at work can be as important as what they get from the organization at work, in fostering psychological attachment to their work organization.

From: "Giving Commitment: Employee Support Programs and the Prosocial Sensemaking Process" Grant, Dutton and Rosso, *Academy of Management Journal*. Forthcoming.

### **Business Practices Contribute to Peaceful Societies**

This study suggests that the leadership practices of business organizations (not just the leadership of governmental or civic organizations) may foster more peaceful societies. I develop the logic for positive relationships between participative organizational leadership, employee empowerment, and peace. Drawing on several cross-national databases, I find that countries where business organizations on average have more participative leaders and that engage the management practice of employee empowerment are associated with more peaceful societies.

From: Spreitzer, G. (2007). Participative Organizational Leadership, Empowerment, and Sustainable Peace. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 28(8): 1077-1096.

### **Thriving Matters for Employee Performance and Well-being**

A series of working papers examine why thriving matters to people and their workplace as well as how organizations can enable more human thriving at work. Thriving may be defined as the psychological state in

which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work. In a variety of different samples of employees, managers, and MBA students across many organizations in a variety of industries, we found that decision-making discretion, broad information sharing, and a climate of respect are associated with higher levels of employee thriving at work. We found that thriving predicts performance (as rated by managers), organizational citizenship behaviors (as rated by managers), and innovative work behaviors. We further found that when people report more thriving, they also have healthier habits and are more adaptive to changing situations.

From:

Spreitzer, G., Cobb, A., & Stevens, F. Construct Validation of a Measure of Thriving at Work. Working paper.

Porath, C., Spreitzer, G. & Gibson, C. Human thriving at work: Antecedents and outcomes. Working paper.

Carmeli, A. & Spreitzer, G. Trust, Connectivity, and Thriving: Implications for Innovative Work Behavior. Working paper.

### **Reaping the Benefits of Constructive Organizational Cultures**

In a survey and an in-depth case study of a large healthcare system, we found that constructive organizational cultures enhance both employee and patient satisfaction. These cultures support work environments where members have positive colleague interactions and approach tasks in a manner that helps them attain high-order personal satisfaction and meet organizational goals. Furthermore, the humanistic approach to work reinforces people centered values and empowers organizational members. Also, this creates resilience that buffers patients and group members from adverse bureaucratic management practices.

From: Wooten, L. & Crane, P. (2004). Generating Dynamic Capabilities through a Humanistic Work Ideology: The case of a certified-nurse midwife practice in a professional bureaucracy. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47(10) 848-866.

Wooten, L. & Crane, P. Nurses as Implementers of Organizational Culture (2003). *Nursing Economics Journal*, 21: 275-279.

### **In Crisis Situations Positive Leadership Practices Make a Difference**

The results of an experiment study of 132 MBA students suggest after a crisis, stakeholders rate firms' reputation higher, when leadership exhibits positive behaviors. In particular, stakeholders value leadership's ability to create a new corporate mindset that provides a roadmap for crisis recovery. In addition, stakeholders viewed taking courageous actions and learning as important crisis leadership competencies. Taking courageous actions may require leaders to make decisions and adopt behavior that is counter-intuitive. Also, leaders should approach the crisis situation as an opportunity to explore new possibilities and create a better organization.

From: James, E. & Wooten, L. (2005). Leadership as (Un)usual: How to Display Competence in Times of Crisis. *Organizational Dynamics*, 34(2): 141-152.

## **The Power of Collective Leadership in Reducing Birth Outcomes Health Disparities**

Despite federal, state and local efforts to improve the quality and access to prenatal care among African Americans, race-based disparities in infant mortality—driven by poverty, poor access to medical care, environmental hazards, stress and racism—persist in the United States. However, when community leaders, healthcare providers, family members and individuals come together and make a concerted effort, birth outcome health disparities are reduced. This form of collective leadership succeeds because it incorporates a diversity of interventions that go beyond traditional medical practices and considers factor, such as the socio-cultural and psychological needs of patients. Furthermore, our research discovered that often an effective collective leadership approach to reducing birth outcome health disparities utilizes kinship networks and patient empowerment as a strategy.

From: Wooten, L. Shultz, C., Ford, B. Anderson, L., Waller, A. & Scott Ransom (2005). Leadership and Prenatal Health Disparities: It Takes a Village. *African American Research Perspectives*, 11(1) 17-30.

## **Research from Center for POS Affiliated Faculty**

### **“Connecting the Dots” Enhances Employee Motivation**

Meeting the people who benefit from their efforts can increase employee motivation. In a field experiment with fundraising callers soliciting alumni donations to a university, I gave a group of callers the opportunity to meet a scholarship student who benefited from their work. In the following month, these callers more than doubled in the amount of time they spent on the phone and nearly tripled in the amount of money that they raised each week. Connecting them to a beneficiary of their efforts enhanced their motivation by increasing their feelings of making a difference and their attachment to the people who benefit from their work.

From: “Impact and the Art of Motivation Maintenance: The Effects of Contact with Beneficiaries on Persistence Behavior,” Grant, Campbell, Chen, Cottone, Lapedis, and Lee, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, May 2007.

### **Making a Difference in Others’ Lives Makes a Difference in Employee Performance**

Stories can be powerful enough to increase performance by helping employees see how their work makes a difference. In two field experiments with fundraising callers, I gave a group of callers the opportunity to read stories about how the funds benefited scholarship students. In the following month, these callers more than doubled in the number of pledges they obtained and the amount of money they raised each week. In a field experiment with lifeguards, those who read stories about other lifeguards performing rescues worked more hours and were rated

by supervisors as more helpful toward pool guests. For the fundraisers and lifeguard, the stories increase performance by enabling employees to understand the social impact and social value of their jobs.

From: “The Significance of Task Significance: Job Performance Effects, Relational Mechanisms, and Boundary Conditions,” Grant, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, January 2008.

### **Three Narratives Necessary for Courageous Collective Action**

An analysis of the communication that occurred aboard United Airlines Flight 93 and with people on the ground is analyzed and then compared to an everyday example of courageous collective action in a work organization. The analysis suggests that three narratives enable people to be able to take such action: (1) a narrative of personal identity, (2) a narrative that explains the situation, and (3) a narrative of collective action. A narrative of personal identity enables people to ground themselves in situations outside of the immediate duress and therefore to manage their emotions. A contextually accurate narrative that explains the situation enables people to make moral judgments about appropriate responses. And a collective action narrative organizes, mobilizes, and empowers the action of a collective. Trends in business organizations today suggest that courageous collective action may be an increasingly valuable asset to organizations moving forward.

From: “Enabling Courageous Collective Action” Quinn & Worline, *Organization Science*, Forthcoming.

### **High Performance Work Experience Consists of the Merging of Situation Awareness and Skilled Automatic Response**

An experience sampling method survey of over 100 of the scientists, engineers, and managers who build nuclear weapons components at Sandia National Laboratories found that flow—a subjective experience of high performance, consists of merging an awareness of the situation with automatic skilled response, and is enabled by clear goals and feedback, concentration, and challenges and skills that are high and in balance. This understanding of flow can be useful to managers and employees because it suggests that clear goals and standards are important to experiencing flow in one’s work because of the way in which they enable a deep awareness of the situation, and also because it suggests that the relationship between flow and performance will be dependent on how similar a person’s understanding of their task is to the person who will be evaluating that task.

From: “Flow in Knowledge Work: The Merging of Awareness and Application in the Design of National Security Technology” Ryan Quinn (2005). *Administrative Science Quarterly*.

### **Interpreting Organizational Actions as Virtuous Increases Organizational Attachment**

In a survey study of 196 students enrolled in a Midwestern University after the tragedy of September

11th, 2001, we found that virtuousness of organizational actions in response to the tragedy influenced members' responses, which led to attachment to the organization. Members can use virtue frames in interpreting organizational actions, and organizational actions interpreted as humane, just, and courageous enhance members' positive emotions and their virtuous self-concept. These member responses, in turn, increased members' identification with and attachment to the organization. Our study sheds light on how interpretation of organizational actions as virtuous influences members' cognitive and emotional connection to the organization.

From: "Making sense of organizational actions in response to tragedy: Virtue frames, organizational identification and organizational attachment" Rhee, Dutton and Bagozzi, *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion* (Special Issue on Virtues in Organizations), 2006, pp. 34-59.

### **Shared Positive Emotions Among Team Members Increase Team Creativity**

An experiment study of 72 teams of employees and students shows that team members that share positive emotions of joy and happiness exhibit two types of interactions (i.e., building on each other's ideas and actively affirming each other's ideas) that broaden the cognitive scope of ideas and build trust and friendship among the members. In turn, these interactions among team members increased team creativity and members' satisfaction with the team but decreased team decision quality. The enhanced team creativity arises because building on each other's ideas involves combining different ideas creatively, and because active affirmation of ideas implies a team environment with constructive feedback, support and openness. The decreased quality of team decisions arises because building on each other's ideas and active affirmation can result in biases such as illusion of control and overconfidence. These biases attenuate members' effort to reduce inaccuracy or ambiguity in making decision, resulting in poor decision quality.

From: "Shared positive emotions and group effectiveness: The role of broadening-and-building interactions" Rhee, KAIST Business School Working Paper Series No. 2007-012, Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1015698>, 2007.

### **Making Meaning of Change Enables Successful Change Implementation**

While most research on change finds that employees resist change, I find that employees who make meaning of change as having affective and cognitive benefits develop motivational resources that enable them to act in discretionary ways to make change successful. I develop and test this approach using a three-part, mixed-method study with data from a large retailer.

From: Scott Sonenshein, "A Meaning-Making Approach to Implementing Strategic Change:

Antecedents, Mechanisms and Outcomes." Under review.

### **Bundles of Positive Work Practices Reduce Medication Errors**

A survey study of 1,033 registered nurses (RNs) and 78 nurse managers in 78 hospital nursing units examined the joint effects of safety organizing, trusted leadership, and care pathways (standardized care protocols) on the incidence of medication errors. Bundling safety organizing with trust in one's manager amplifies the positive effects of safety organizing because when RNs trust their manager they are more likely to fully engage in the behaviors of safety organizing (e.g., discussing errors and ways to learn from them, questioning assumptions and current modes of operating). Similarly, coupling extensive use of care pathways with safety organizing also begets fewer medication errors because care pathways clarify responsibilities and provide a "big picture" of the care process such that RNs can better detect emerging and manifest errors and intervene more quickly to correct them. In sum, this research finds that when safety organizing is coupled with other supportive work practices, its benefits are amplified.

From: "The Impact of Safety Organizing, Trusted Leadership, and Care Pathways on Reported Medication Errors in Hospital Nursing Units" Vogus and Sutcliffe, *Medical Care*, October 2007, pp 997-1002.

### **Safety Organizing Reduces Medical Errors**

A survey study of 1,685 registered nurses in 125 hospital nursing units developed and validated a nine-item survey measure of the processes of safety organizing. Safety organizing is critical in health care delivery because it entails behaviors including collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information from errors as well as proactive checks on the organization's vital signs that bring a safety culture to life. Using archival data provided by the hospitals, safety organizing was also linked to substantially fewer medication errors and patient falls on these units over the subsequent six months.

From: "The Safety Organizing Scale: Development and Validation of a Behavioral Measure of Safety Culture In Hospital Nursing Units." Vogus and Sutcliffe, *Medical Care*, January 2007, pp. 46-54.

### **The Benefits of Experiencing Work as a Calling**

We present evidence suggesting that most people see their work as either a Job (focus on financial rewards and necessity rather than pleasure or fulfillment; not a major positive part of life), a Career (focus on advancement), or a Calling (focus on enjoyment of fulfilling, socially useful work). Employees surveyed at two work sites with a wide range of occupations from clerical to professional were unambiguous in seeing their work primarily in terms of a Job, Career, or Calling. Calling-oriented respondents reported higher life and job satisfaction, worked more hours, and missed fewer days of work.

From Wrzesniewski, A., McCauley, C. R., Rozin, P., & Schwartz, B. (1997). Jobs, careers, and callings: People's relations to their work. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 31, 21-33.



The Center for POS is a community of scholars devoted to energizing and transforming organizations through research on the theory and practice of positive organizing and leadership. They are passionately dedicated to the development and dissemination of POS research. The center's main functions include fostering research and building the community of POS researchers worldwide; teaching POS principles; engaging in research, and publishing and presenting results; and producing case studies and other materials that exemplify POS principles.

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