1

Positive Relationships at Work

Introduction

Healthy, positive relationships are one of the five pillars of authentic wellbeing identified by Seligman (2011). Reis and Gable (2003) consider that relationships may be the most important source of life satisfaction and wellbeing. The quality of our relationships at work matters not only for our ability to flourish personally, but is also likely to enhance our sense of achievement. What is also becoming clear in the research is that pro-active intervention to promote high levels of social capital across all levels of an organisation can add value to business outcomes and embed the economic success of enterprises.

Our lives at work have changed dramatically, especially since the advent of digital communications. What people do, how they do it, the influence of technology, globalisation and female education, have altered both our relationship with work and consequently relationships at work. The first section of this chapter sets the scene by addressing this changing nature of work: what does work now mean in the context of people's lives? There are cultural differences but also many global similarities. We then look at the multiple relationships people have at work - with colleagues, clients and management, and how the changing relationship with work is influencing a new paradigm for relationships at work. Section one concludes with a summary of wellbeing in the workplace and how positive psychology research is defining practices that enable people to flourish at work.

Section two explores these in more detail and gives a rationale for the development of positive practices. Why is it valuable for both individuals and for the organisation? What motivates people to give of their best, to work collaboratively with others? What is the place of positive relationships in the bigger picture of productivity?

Section three brings us to the practices of positive relationships. How can we grow social capital in an organisation and what is the place of relational values and emotional literacy. What enables people to feel they belong and their contributions are valued? How do people learn to work effectively together and deal constructively with difference and conflict?

Finally we look at what still needs to happen to enable people from all walks of life to find meaning, purpose and satisfaction in their working lives. What research is needed to help us better understand this aspect of psychology at work.

In writing this chapter I have explored the research literature on promoting the wellbeing of employees and increasing social capital across all levels. What are the inter-related outcomes of a positive and pro-active relational approach and what does this mean?

Setting the scene

People's relationship with work

Since the industrial revolution many individuals in the 'developed' world would have been defined by what they did to earn a living. You were perhaps a miner, a policeman, a teacher or a banker - and that is what you did for most of your working life. You entered a certain profession and for the most part stayed put. Your workmates were a fixed feature and there was a clear delineation between work and home. Before the middle of the 20th century you were only likely to be in paid professional employment if you were a man; women certainly

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2

worked, but rarely with the status afforded by a higher education. What many people do every day and the conditions under which they do it has changed almost out of recognition in the last fifty years. There has been a significant decline in both agriculture and manufacturing jobs in many western countries. Between 1940 and 2002 the percentage of the US working population in manufacturing declined from 48% to 28% (Employment Policy Foundation, 2003) and in Australia between 1983 and 1999 it dropped from 18.1% to 12.8% (Pusey 2003). This is, however, the opposite of other countries such as Korea where it has increased by similar margins and China now has the highest number of employees in manufacturing across the world.

The decrease in manufacturing and agricultural employment in Europe, the US and Australasia has been replaced by a need for more professional, technical and administrative work together with service related occupations such as tourism, education and hospitality. Unskilled work is still needed but these jobs are particularly vulnerable to shifting demand.

The changing balance of public and private employment in the West and now increasingly in the East puts competitive advantage at the heart of many enterprises. Issues of accountability may undermine trust in individuals to give of their best. And when competition is between individuals within an organisation this makes it more difficult to collaborate or engage fruitfully in teamwork.

In the second half of the twentieth century most working people in the developed world belonged to their trade union or professional association, who negotiated with employers on their behalf. Governments in the UK and US have successfully reduced the power of the unions where there has been a steady decline in union membership (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2014). This has implications for both pay and working conditions that impact on a sense of security in the workplace (WHO, 1999). Some countries, however, such as Germany, Belgium and the Nordic countries, continue to have unions for specific trades affiliated to strong National confederations.

Incomes Data Service in the UK (October, 2014) found that between 2000 and 2014 the median total earnings for FTSE 100 bosses rose by 278%, while the corresponding rise in total earnings for full-time employees was 48%. Gender differentials also remain a concern in many but not all countries. In 2014 the average gender pay gap in the UK was 19.1%, with the gap in the private sector larger than in the public (Office for National Statistics, 2014a). In Australia the differential is 18.8 (Australian Government, 2015) and in the US 21.7% (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2015). As the wellbeing research consistently finds that equality matters (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010; Huppert and So, 2011) these figures are likely to impact on both relationships and wellbeing at work.

These days work is a more fluid activity (HSE, 2006). Some individuals will be working full-time, but part-time and job shares are increasingly common. Companies increasingly employ people on short-term contracts or as agency workers. Relationships at work might become more functional and role driven as people come and go.

In the past you often stayed put, not only working your way up the same organisation but probably staying in the same town and keeping the same network of friends and family. Today people may go where the work is - and this may not only be another town but even another country. Mobility for work across Europe has become a political issue. By contrast families in the US are more likely to live and work in the same town, or at least the same state in which they were born. Mobility there appears to be decreasing rather than

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3

increasing (Cohn & Morin, 2008). Relationships at work may take on greater significance when there is no access to socialisation with an established local network. Loyalty will be less towards a particular company than in the relationships that people form there (Ragins and Kram, 2007). The social and relational dimensions of work may therefore have more influence than economic considerations in retention of staff.

Career paths can take twists and turns and there are blurred boundaries around the working day for many. The culture of an organisation still matters but will depend less on history than on current processes of engagement and management.

According to Landy and Conte (2010) workplaces are far more diverse than ever. In most organisations there will be a range of social and cultural backgrounds. Also, many people do not go 'out' to work but carry out tasks in a 'virtual' environment, such as telemarketers.

Across the board industries engaged in manufacturing, retail, service provision, financial and artisan services use technology - even landscape designers use computer programs in their creative endeavours - so our primary communication at work may be with a computer: it is where we find information, record data, play with ideas, connect remotely with colleagues and clients and even manage human resources.

All these changes in people's relationships with work have implications for relationships at work. The next section addresses some of these.

Relationships at work

When individuals travel away to work their primary relationships as an adult are less likely to be with the people they knew in childhood including their original family. For some, work itself is away from home, perhaps for weeks at a time. Those in the military, working on oilfields or mines, employed as international consultants or as entertainers 'on tour' may leave children and spouses behind. This can put family relationships at risk (Green & Canny, 2003) and is particularly hard for maintaining positive contact with children after family breakdown - an issue for the wellbeing of young people (Dowling and Elliot, 2012). Primary relationships may be at work rather than at home - and even these may be short-term as people move on or out.

On the other hand, the location of work has become much more flexible. In the UK 13.5%of those in work are based at home (ONS, 2014b) and many employees work from home at least a few days a week. Initial research on working remotely (telecommuting) is mixed: there are positive outcomes for family relationships and a sense of autonomy but collegial relationships may not fare well when there is little chance for face-to-face interaction (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

An individual in an organisation will have relationships with line-managers, colleagues, team members, mentors, clients/ customers, trainees/apprentices and other employees such as cleaners and caterers. Although each of these roles will differ, some of the basic premises for a positive relationship are common across all of them. Knowing how to establish a positive relationship, use emotional literacy in everyday communications and address difficulties with a thoughtful 'win-win' approach can make all the difference to the working environment, even where communications are primarily conducted via technology. Although a strong industry specific knowledge base is still relevant in the workplace, personality and

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4

interpersonal skills are having more attention than ever. How people relate to each other matters, not only for personal wellbeing but also for meeting company goals.

Relational quality in an organisation is ecological - it does not depend solely on the micro level, which focuses on interactions between individuals, but also on management, organisational culture and expectations across the workplace. Leadership style, communication practices, strengths-based approaches and human services policies all contribute. This ranges from how diversity is valued, what happens when a female employee returns after maternity leave, how meetings are run, the norms for interaction and teamwork, consultation procedures, induction practices and how someone is acknowledged for long service. All these things - and more - matter to whether or not the working environment is healthy or toxic.

The nature of interactions can either promote trust, respect and collegiality, enabling mutually agreed goals to be met or do the opposite. Dutton and Heaphy (2003) talk about 'relational micro-moments' and how the experience of a high quality connection can leave people feeling more energised. Individuals seek out interactions that make them feel energised and avoid those that deplete them. This can mean that someone will approach a less knowledgeable colleague because that person feels more accessible (Casciaro & Lobo ,2008), Relational energy (Owens *et al.,* 2015) is a construct that captures how interactions impact on motivation and are positively associated with job performance,

Leadership

It is the executive group in an organisation who usually determine the goals and set the tone for the quality of the working environment. It is the values of leaders, either overt or covert, that predominate in the development of organisational culture.

The literature sometimes distinguishes those who are leaders from those who are managers (e.g. Channer and Hope, 2001). It has been said that managers are concerned with doing things right while leaders are concerned about doing the right thing: managers control while leaders facilitate, managers work in the organization, whereas leaders work on the organization (Ellyard, 2001). Managers focus on rules, leaders on relationships.

> "A leader sets the vision but doesn't stop there. A leader listens, understands, motivates, reinforces and makes the tough decisions. A leader passes out praise when things go well and takes responsibility and picks up the pieces when things fall apart. Leadership is about relationships." (Hoerr, 2006)

Armstrong (2012) argues for a new paradigm for future leadership - one that does not see a leader as a super-hero or hero-innovator or someone who has more knowledge than anyone else. She says that effective leadership is based less on technical expertise and hierarchical power, and more on relational understanding and facilitative skills. These are sometimes denigrated as 'soft skills' but comprise complex social and emotional intelligences that enable leaders to engage, motivate and stimulate people - both individually and in teams. This approach recognises that no-one is a 'born' leader but that leadership is a social endeavour - a leader does not exist without a follower and that the ability to connect well with others is paramount.

According to Wolff and colleagues (2002) leadership often emerges when someone is able to influence and manage emotions within a group, providing direction in times of ambiguity.

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5

This involves both empathy and modelling of emotional responses that increase solidarity and help others make meaning of a situation.

When Scott (2003) asked school principals about the most challenging aspects of their job they were primarily concerned with relationships. They ranked the qualities of effective school leaders as:

1. Emotional intelligence. This included staying calm, keeping things in perspective and maintaining a sense of humour. Resilience and bouncing back from adversity, learning from errors and being able to take a hard decision also came under this category - along with wanting to achieve the best outcome possible.
2. Social intelligence, including dealing effectively with conflict situations, being able to empathise and work productively with people from a wide range of respect and honour people's values and backgrounds, a willingness to listen to different points of view before making decisions, and contributing positively to team projects.
3. Intellectual abilities, including identifying priorities and being flexible. Generic and specific skills covered having a clear justified vision for the school and being able to organise and manage time effectively.

Like Dutton and Spreitzer (2014), Armstrong highlights the minutiae of interactions - the everyday conversations that make a difference. Whether those connections are public or private, formal or informal the feelings engendered by them are critical. Dutton (2014) refers to high quality connections (HQC) as those that:

- listen attentively to what they have to say
- are constructively responsive
- make requests rather than demands
- are task enabling
- show trust by relying on others to meet their commitments
- encourage playfulness!

Cameron (2014) says that the key tasks of effective leaders are to model and foster HQC amongst all their employees. They can do this by providing professional development in relational skills, acknowledging and rewarding those who demonstrate HQC and embedding good practice in meetings, induction programs and conversations around values such as kindness, compassion, acceptance, honesty and forgiveness.

Even when difficult decisions have to be made, such as downsizing leading to job loss, a high level of trust in the executive can limit the adverse reactions of this for employees (Brockner *et al*., 1997). The effects of what we do depend on how we do it. Brockner's research suggests that if downsizing is done with fairness, justice and compassion it can lead to significantly more positive outcomes for both those who leave and those who stay.

Wellbeing at work

The New Economics Foundation in the UK (2014) summarised the literature on wellbeing at work, and concluded that people's personal lives and working lives are inextricably intertwined and that there is a need for a more well rounded approach to fostering well-being at work. Their specific findings and recommendations include:

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6

- People who achieve good standards of wellbeing at work are likely to be more creative, more loyal, more productive, and provide better customer satisfaction than those who have lower standards of wellbeing.
- The different features of working lives have varying degrees of influence over different aspects of wellbeing - a sense of purpose, positive emotions, motivation, morale, job satisfaction and life satisfaction.
- There is a strong association between good health and wellbeing - employers could encourage physical activity and healthy eating and ensure that work does not get in the way of good sleep.
- Getting the right work-life balance reduces stress and its negative outcomes.
- Organisational wellbeing is promoted by fair pay structures as does job security.
- Employee morale is heightened when they feel tasks are achievable.
- By taking steps to improve relationships at work - with a particular focus on relationships between staff and managers and by encouraging positive feelings, it appears to be possible to improve not only job satisfaction but also life satisfaction.

Section two: why promote positive relationships?

A meta-analysis of research appears to indicate that when people experience high levels of job satisfaction there is lower absenteeism, higher retention rates and better performance (Judge *et al.*, 2001).

The following are specific but inter-related reasons for the promotion of positive relationships in the workplace. Some are primarily concerned with the individual and others with the quality of their interactions. All contribute to promoting the effectiveness of the organisation. They include:

- enhancing subjective wellbeing - the ability of the individual to flourish and thrive
- the reduction of stress and promotion of mental health
- the promotion of good physical health and consequent reduction of absenteeism
- retention of staff
- the promotion of effective collaboration and team-work
- reducing conflict and resolution of difference
- motivation
- the development of conditions which maximise creative innovation
- optimal client and customer interactions

Enhancing individual flourishing

Flourishing at work is a complex construct including engagement, motivation, growth and learning. Dutton et al (2011) talk about how work-related identities are formed in the workplace, and that when they become more positive there is enhanced psychological and social functioning and more positive feelings. Work engagement promotes greater adaptive behaviour and innovation that consequently affects productivity, profits and customer satisfaction.

Promoting mental health and wellbeing

There have been a number of studies (e.g. Twenge, 2000) illustrating that the focus on economic prosperity and growth has not been matched by an increase in people's wellbeing. The World Health Organisation estimates that over 400 million people worldwide

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7

experience mental health difficulties (WHO, 2001) although only a small proportion have complex and debilitating conditions.

Czabala et al (2011) reviewed studies published between 1988 and 2009 that addressed mental health promotion in the workplace. The authors identified 4,865 studies and selected 315 for abstract screening and 79 for final detailed review. They found that interventions were still predominantly focused on stress reduction rather than mental health promotion and also that strategies were overwhelmingly individual, including education programs, relaxation techniques, coping skills and mindfulness. Others were concerned with organisational structure such as guaranteed breaks but few addressed social dynamics.

Physical wellbeing, attendance and retention of staff

Positive relationships not only improve psychological wellbeing - they also impact on physical health. Positive emotions and a consequent reduction in stress impact on our hormonal, cardiovascular and immune systems (Lewis, 2011). One principal who actively promotes healthy relationships throughout his school has enough in his budget to pay for a high level of professional development for staff - he says that this is because of a routine under-spend on sickness cover (Roffey, 2007). Teacher attrition is a concern in Europe, Australia and the US. Buchanan et al (2013) explored the experiences of 329 early career teachers and identified six factors that made a difference. These included collegiality and support and how this impacted on their own self-worth and levels of isolation.

The promotion of effective collaboration and teamwork

Fay et al (2014) analysed data from 45 UK organisations in the manufacturing sector, and discovered that the more widespread the use of teamwork the more innovation in the organisation. However, putting people together does not necessarily form an effective team.

Stewart's (2006) meta-analysis of the relationship between team design features and performance found that factors that correlated with higher performance were autonomy, intra-team co-ordination and transformational leadership.

According to Richardson and West (2010) an effective team needs to have a task that inspires and engages team members, be able to both value and use diverse strengths of individuals, ensure clarity of expectation and that roles evolve as the task progresses. Positive team relationships and a sense of belonging are encouraged by frequent interaction, quick successes, appreciation of each person's efforts, and shared rewards.

Quick et al (2004) summarise the pros and cons of a competitive versus a collaborative working environment, believing that each have a place in the achievement of excellence. They come to the conclusion that a win-lose paradigm can lead to a lose-lose one and that a balance between both paradigms can be found in competition between teams. Intergroup competition has better outcomes for both.

Paradigm	Co-operation	Competition
	Win-win	Win-lose
Benefits	Positive interdependence Mutual support Experienced security	Personal challenge Personal competence Experienced mastery
Emphasis	Interpersonal support	Individual achievement

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Chapter published in L.Oades and J. Passmore (2017) T*he Wiley Blackwell Handbook of the Psychology of Positivity and Strengths-Based Approaches at Work*

8

Required skills	Open communication Trust and trustworthiness Interpersonal relations	Monitor one's position Fair play - playing according to an agreed set of rules Individualistic skills
De-emphasises	Individual competence	interpersonal comfort

Table 1: Paradigms of cooperation and competition

Reducing conflict

Poor quality connections can leave people feeling "diminished, frustrated, demotivated, demoralised, disrespected or worse - this can lead to being revengeful, despairing or annihilated" (Lewis, 2011, p 180). Not only do poor relationships cost individuals in terms of their psychological wellbeing, they also cost organisations in lack of collaboration, reduced innovation, wasted time and absenteeism. Conflict is normal - differences between people are inevitable in any relationship; it is how this difference is managed that matters. Both intra and inter-personal skills are needed to reduce the frequency, intensity and destructiveness of conflict (Edmund, 2012). Effective approaches include acknowledging interdependence, exploring intention and analysing communication - especially how misunderstandings might have developed. The promotion of positive feelings and behaviours can also mitigate the more unpleasant and undesirable aspects of conflict.

Restorative approaches to address conflict in schools and courts are familiar to many, but there is now interest in how such approaches might be integrated into the workplace. This is a way of addressing behaviours that are seen as undermining community connectedness, and acknowledges the ripple effect of the impact on those who might not be directly involved. In seeking to repair harm and resolve conflict, relationships and feelings are paramount. Lambert and colleagues (2011) carried out action research in an organisation in Hull, U.K., and found that although there were challenges, and the process of implementation and training were critical, there were some promising developments over time. These included an understanding by staff in how to address problematic issues themselves, usually before they were referred to management; increased engagement in team meetings and decision-making. It resolved some poor communication practices between departments and integrated restorative approaches and language throughout organisational culture. This saved time, greatly reduced grievance procedures and freed managers for more constructive tasks.

Motivation

Pink (2009) challenged the idea that people were mostly motivated by extrinsic rewards and that the more you paid someone the more productive they would be. He summarises motivation at work as a combination of purpose, meaning and mastery. Once you pay people enough - and fairly - people give of their best for intrinsic reasons. Dik et al (2013) distinguish between meaning in work (how meaningful is your work?) and meaning of work (what makes it so?). For many, the source of meaning is those with whom you work, whether these are your co-workers, clients or the community you serve (Wrzesniewski *et al*., 2003). Khan and Fellows (2013) outline four dimensions that describe people who are fully engaged in what they are doing: they are fully present and attending closely to what is happening; they are connected either with others working towards the same ends or to the bigger picture or purpose; they are integrated so that they bring their thoughts, intuitions,

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Chapter published in L.Oades and J. Passmore (2017) T*he Wiley Blackwell Handbook of the Psychology of Positivity and Strengths-Based Approaches at Work*

9

energies and feelings to the work; and they are absorbed - fascinated and focused - the opposite of being distant or standing apart. This brings to mind Csikszentmihalyi's construct of 'flow' (1990). Relationships at work can enable or inhibit the conditions that promote such engagement.

Creativity and innovation

In a competitive global environment, creativity and innovation are a foundation of competitive advantage. Saccheti and Tortia (2013) explored the organisational features that favour the accomplishment of creativity and creativity-related satisfaction with work. They define creativity as the ability to see and enact in new ways. Self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000) suggests that such fulfilment relies on specific contextual conditions that allow individuals to pursue ends harmoniously with their own needs and aspirations. Saccheti and Tortia however, found that satisfaction with creativity is supported by teamwork, autonomy, domain-relevant competences, inclusive, fair processes and relationships. Janssen et al (2004) reviewed the factors that contributed to innovative teamwork. These include knowledge sharing and job rotation, a climate of trust and reciprocal respect, support and backing from management and participation in decision-making.

Customer relations

Seybold et al (2001) suggest that customers now have greater control in how they choose and use services. They have access to many sources of information giving them both options and a level of expertise. The relationship with clients and their experience therefore matters even more than it used to (Gillies, 2012). Brand loyalty in the market depends on customer satisfaction and this includes both price and service. Hanif and colleagues (2010) concluded in their study of mobile phone providers that "if customers are provided with courteous behaviour of sales person or complaint officer then they feel emotional attachment with their brand of cellular company. Similarly, if their complaints are solved promptly and commitments fulfilled then it would provide a sense of belongingness to the brand" (p 50).

Those companies who encourage staff to respond to queries promptly, take clients views seriously and are clear and courteous at all times are likely to have a competitive advantage. In an ecological model it is easier to relate well to customers if that is modelled within the organisation and everyone feels valued by managers and colleagues.

Section three: positive relational values and practices

What makes people want to get up, go to work and give of their best? What feelings do they have about themselves, their colleagues and what they are doing? What do we know helps to promote the positive in the workplace?

As Dutton and Ragins (2007) acknowledge, there is no overarching consensus on the definition of a positive relationship at work. It is a complex and multi-faceted construct with differing emphases depending on specific perspectives and positions.

The relational beliefs and behaviour of everyone in an organisation, however, matter in the creation of a relational culture, and each affects the other in a bi-directional ecological

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10
model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Roffey, 2008). The way teachers are treated in a school by the executive, for instance, has impact on how they relate to students (Roffey, 2012).

Social capital

There are, however, commonalities for positive relationships that apply across various contexts and together lead to an increase in social capital. A toxic environment develops where people are silenced, intimidated, unvalued and demotivated. Social capital is the opposite of this but requires awareness and active intervention to promote in the workplace.

Lewis (2011) defines social capital as the quality of relationships and interactions within organisations, and that the key to building good reserves of social capital is an affirmative bias within organisational life. Social capital facilitates respectful communication and cooperation and enhances employee commitment. According to Lewis, a high level of social capital has benefits for individuals in that it can inoculate against a range of dysfunctional behaviours and promote the factors than enhance both psychological resilience (Werner & Smith, 2001), and optimal physical wellbeing (Baker and Dutton, 2007; Heaphy and Dutton, 2008). At an organisational level social capital helps organisations be connected, optimistic, pro-active and effective.

Positive relationships are imbued with positive feelings about the self and others. Positive feelings lead to behaviours that grow social capital. So how can we enhance the relationships that promote both the behaviours and feelings that enable people to give of their best in the workplace and have an optimal working experience? The following summarises the research and mirrors my experience working in educational establishments.

- When people feel respected they are more likely to listen to what others have to say
- When people feel included they are more likely to actively participate
- When people feel valued and their efforts acknowledged they are more likely to seek opportunities to contribute and more able to value others
- When people feel cared for they are more likely to have consideration and compassion for others
- When people feel a sense of belonging they are more likely to be committed to the group that includes them
- When people laugh together they are less stressed and more resilient
- When people feel accepted they are likely to be motivated to develop their strengths for the benefit of the organisation
- When negative feeling and concerns are acknowledged and heard they are more likely to be addressed so there is less need to maintain and increase the negativity.

The ASPIRE principles for positive relationship building

The ASPIRE principles have provided a framework for the development of positive relationships and group interaction in educational contexts (Roffey, 2013; Dobia *et al*., 2014), but are applicable across a range of organisational settings. ASPIRE is an acronym for Agency, Safety, Positivity, Inclusion, Respect and Equality. This section explores how these relational values are validated in the research, incorporate relevant constructs such as self determination, trust, compassion and fairness and how these might be translated into relational practices.in the working environment. There is overlap between these principles and they foster each other in a virtuous cycle.

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Chapter published in L.Oades and J. Passmore (2017) T*he Wiley Blackwell Handbook of the Psychology of Positivity and Strengths-Based Approaches at Work*

11

Agency

This principle in a relationship refers to the amount of control someone has over actions and decision-making. Empowerment of employees in a work context gives them encouragement to take initiative, take pride in their work and experience ownership (Wagner *et al*., 2010). It would appear to be beneficial to both the individual and the organisation (Seibert *et al*., 2011).

Agency incorporates one of the determinants of wellbeing - self-determination. Those who see themselves as choosing to engage in a task rather than being controlled by demands or being externally regulated are more likely to see meaning in what they do. Those who are given some choice in the way a task is undertaken, and find that task both challenging within their sphere of competence and in line with their goals will experience a degree of autonomous motivation. This contrasts with pressure that comes from external non-negotiable demands and extrinsic rewards. These are insufficient to enhance motivation and work performance (Gagne and Deci, 2005). Deci *et al*. (1989) found that managers supported autonomy when they acknowledged subordinates' perspectives, provided relevant information in a non-controlling way, offered choice, and encouraged self-initiation. This was associated with employees being more satisfied with their jobs, having a higher level of trust in corporate management, and displaying other positive work-related attitudes. An example of agency / autonomy in practice is Google, who give their employees one day a week to work on whatever they choose: The outcomes have been a range of new ideas and solutions (Pink, 2009).

Safety

A hallmark of a healthy relationship is where people feel physically and emotionally safe. This does not happen in workplaces imbued with a culture of bullying and intimidation. Workplace bullying occurs where an employee is subjected to systematic and negative behaviours that cause humiliation and distress (Trepanier *et al*., 2015). This can include persistent criticism, belittling competencies, unreasonable deadlines, exclusion, excessive teasing, shouting and threatening behaviours. The outcomes of workplace bullying include absenteeism, poor retention of staff, psychological stress and physical ill health. It is associated with poor employee functioning, expressed through disengagement, job dissatisfaction, and symptoms of anxiety, depression, and burnout. As organisations can condone, and even reward, bullying behaviours there is a need to rethink organisational culture to promote collaboration over rivalry, enhance social support and foster a safe environment (Yamaha, 2010). Workplace safety is exemplified where there are high levels of trust in which people are able to acknowledge vulnerability and ask for guidance.

Trust is a critical facet of a strong relationship. This multi-dimensional construct is being given increasing attention in the literature on wellbeing at work (e.g. Helliwell and Huang, 2011). Mayer *et al*. (1995) suggest that components include trust in someone's ability and competence to carry out a task, trust in their benevolence and goodwill and in their integrity - a belief that they will act within a set of ethical principles. According to Frost and Moussavi (1992), having power without being trusted diminishes a person's influence within the workplace. Church and Waclawski (1999) go on to say that, in today's less authoritarian environment, individuals must work within relationships that require trust and the ability to influence others in both lateral and hierarchical relationships

Helliwell and Huang (2011) report on studies that found that trust in management has a value in terms of life satisfaction of more than a 30% increase in monetary income. There is a significant gender difference across the US, Canada and the UK with women rating social relationships at work more highly than men.

When someone is trusted, their actions are seen as predictable and dependable. There is a tension in many workplaces between levels of trust and the need for accountability (Ammeter *et al*., 2004) and a suggestion that formal mechanisms for accountability that ignore the social and value dimensions of work have undermined trust, initiative and wellbeing in the workplace (Berryhill *et al*., 2009). As Lee and Teo (2005) found in their study in Singapore, trust is under threat when significant changes are required of employees. This can be mitigated by involving personnel in re-structuring.

Positivity

Relationships and emotions exist within the workplace all day every day, impacting on both human and social capital. It makes sense to actively promote the positive, both for the individual and the effectiveness of the organisation.

Relationships are enhanced by both the experience and expression of positive emotions (Barsade and Gibson, 2007), whereas negativity undermines the ability to 'think straight' Frederickson (2001) found that positive emotions promote problem-solving and creative thinking. This can help organisations come up with fresh ideas that give them the edge over competitors (Caruso and Salovey, 2004). Positive emotions also facilitate collaboration, reduce conflict, raise resilience, promote socially responsible and helpful behaviour, increase the ability to learn and integrate complex information, enhance more thorough decision-making and enable change (Isen, 2005). But positive emotion is a broad term: what do we mean by this? Some aspects are addressed in other sections of this chapter so our focus here is on the specific emotions generated by presence, playfulness, kindness, gratitude and celebration.

The Fish philosophy, initiated originally in the Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle, is a framework for developing more positive relationships at work - both within the organisation and in providing customer service. These four pillars summarise much of the literature on positive organisational practice, especially that developed by Dutton (2014) on high quality connections.

> **Be there** - being present in the moment in order to get the most out of it. This means focusing and paying attention; being fully engaged with the person that you are with rather than responding to interruptions or paying attention to other things -

> **Make their day** - turning an everyday interaction, whether this is with a colleague or a client, into a more pleasant experience - a smile, a small kindness, courtesy or acknowledgement. Kindness is not a passive state but an active practice. According to Lyubomirsky (2007) kindness not only changes self-perception leading to more confidence and self worth, it can also jumpstart a range of positive social consequences.

> **Play** - Injecting a sense of fun into the working day can put problems into a different perspective and enhance both creativity and resilience. The act of laughing together releases oxytocin into the body. Oxytocin is the 'feel-good' neurotransmitter that is

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13

often implicated in social attitudes and behaviours such as couple bonding, relaxation, trust and cooperativeness (Olff *et al.*, 2013). Not all tasks in the workplace are inherently engaging, sometimes it is helpful to approach something creatively so that it becomes challenging or fun. Organisations can promote opportunities for play in the workplace, from team-building activities to social events and celebrations. This needs careful introduction as individuals with a negative social bias may find playfulness threatening rather than rewarding.

You can choose your attitude - If you look for the positive you will identify factors that energise and engage you. Both are self-fulfilling prophecies in that the person is not passive in fulfilling expectations but acts to make it happen. Part of this strategy is to not only mindfully identify individual strengths and engage these in the workplace but also acknowledge and utilise the diverse strengths of others. In appreciative inquiry and solution focused thinking, it is the difference between thinking 'this always happens' to what is happening in those times when it doesn't, and to begin to build small steps to a solution by looking at what already works

Positivity and gratitude: Grateful people feel better about themselves and the world they are in; they feel more support from others and give more support. Studies on the efficacy of gratitude-related exercises have shown that noticing what you can be thankful for promotes a sense of optimism and reduces depression (Seligman *et al*., 2005). Rather than gratitude simply being a way of thinking, Howells (2012) suggests that it is relational: her work, based within educational settings, turns gratitude into action to impact on organisational culture. Buote (2014) cites an American study that found 29% of respondents never thank a co-worker and 35% of respondents never thank their boss. Gratitude begins by noticing - one of the five ways to wellbeing suggested by the New Economics Foundation (2014). Noticing a clean office, contributions by colleagues, a supportive gesture by a manager needs to be followed by an expression of gratitude. "A simple ' thank you for …' can have a spiral of positive consequences for promoting pro-social behaviour and a sense of connection" (Grant and Gino, 2010).

Celebration is one step on from gratitude. Couple research indicates that active constructive responses when one person has been successful strengthens relationships (Gable *et al.*, 2004). This contrasts with disinterest, envy or pointing out the negatives. Acknowledgement and celebration of team success bonds people together, shares the good feelings in accomplishment and reinforces expectations for the future. We are not as good at celebration in the workplace as we might be - the term is absent from much of the literature.

The neurology of emotion: Mirror neurons in our brains make us hard wired to respond and replicate the emotions of others. This has major implications for the emotional climate of the workplace (Mukamel *et al*., 2010). As all emotions are contagious, an emotionally literate leader will know that their emotional presence will have an impact on the team and will do what they can to promote the positive. Our experiencing of emotion and the embodiment of this is bi-directional. This means that we do not only smile when we feel good - the very act of smiling increases our sense of wellbeing (Wenner, 2009). The opposite is also true - frowning increases our negative mood - and can affect the demeanour of others. Anyone who injects gentle humour into the workplace, greets others as valued colleagues or celebrates another's success is not only doing a service to individuals, they are promoting a more successful organisation.

14

Inclusion

A sense of connectedness is increasingly recognised as a basic psychological need (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) and a protective factor in resilience and wellbeing (Werner and Smith, 2001).

Putnam (2000) extends the concept of social capital into bonding capital that relates to in-group connections and bridging capital - inter-group connections. He illustrates this with a vivid metaphor: bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a 'sociological WD-40' (Putnam, 2000, p 23).

Healthy relationships require both but the former can lead to 'exclusive' belonging where those who are not part of the 'in-group' can be demonised and scapegoated (Roffey, 2013).

In order to feel we belong others must act in a certain way (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). We are unlikely to experience a deep sense of belonging if others are simply pleasant but do not put themselves out in any way. They need to be positively welcoming and not distant of indifferent to our presence. When they attend to what we say and treat us an ally then we will feel we are significant to the organisation and it matters that we are there. We also need to be able to rely on others to be supportive and committed to our welfare. Catalano and colleagues (2004) say something similar about connectness in the school environment: a safe, supportive environment is essential for belonging, but organisations also need to be places where strengths are identified and each individual sees themselves as progressing, achieving and contributing.

There are particular challenges for promoting a sense of belonging in an organisation when employees work remotely or on restricted hours.

Respect

> "We have discovered that in order to get respect you have to give respect" (Feedback from the Aboriginal Girls Circle, Dobia *et al*., 2014)

The first pathway to building high quality connections at work (Dutton and Spreitzer, 2014) is to 'respectfully engage with others'. Respect is no longer a 'given' that comes with authority: it is demonstrated by giving messages that the people with whom you are engaging are important. Both verbal and non-verbal messages can be subtle but powerful: they can make people feel acknowledged, heard and valued or the opposite. Being fully attentive to another is hard for busy people - especially leaders - as it is assumed that this will take up valuable time that could be better spent. Relationships can be built, however not by doing more but by small changes in how interactions take place and with a greater sense of awareness of the longer-term benefits. Simply greeting someone by name and with a smile can promote feelings of value (Roffey, 2005). Acknowledging a mistake, poor judgement or lateness and offering an apology prioritises the relationship rather than the ego. The seating arrangements in a meeting can give messages of power and position in the same way that the depth of a bow in Japan let's everyone know who is most important. Egan (2002) defines a respectful interaction as one in which one person does not overwhelm the other with their own agenda and does not rush to judgement. Active listening means turning off your phone, tuning into what is being said, asking for clarification and building on ideas. Respect means showing interest in the other person and what they can offer. Beginning both conversations and emails with a positive comment or query

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15

personalises the interaction, shows value to the individual and makes it easier to focus on what comes next.

Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider *et al*., 2001) is a way of putting respect into practice and is congruent with positive psychology approaches by building on strengths, focusing on an imagined ideal future and making meaning within a collaborative framework. It is particularly valuable when work environments are undergoing changes (Lewis, 2011). As the name suggests, it is more about asking, finding out and collaboratively crafting ways forward, than making statements and demands.

Chinese working practices are imbued with the principle of Guanxi - which acknowledges the centrality of relationships. Business transactions can only proceed once a level of trust and familiarity has been established. Multinational companies need to understand how this operates in order to conduct successful discussions that the Chinese regard as respectful. (Gold *et al*., 2004)

Equality

> "The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say 'I' … they don't think 'I'. They think 'we'; they think 'team'. They accept responsibility and don't sidestep it, but 'we' gets the credit." (Peter Drucker, cited in Collins and Thompson, 2008)

McCashen (2005) talks about the essence of the strengths based approach as being 'power with', rather than 'power over'. It is about having a high regard for uniqueness and diversity and also respect for the commonalities between people. An inclusive and democratic work culture needs opportunities to discover commonalities in values and goals.

Such activities can acknowledge shared vulnerability and this can promote empathy. Everyone makes mistakes occasionally and we all face adversity and challenges from time to time. There is often a denial of this in the workplace where people have to be seen to be on top of everything.

Equal access to information enhances trust. McCashen refers to this as transparency. It enables personnel to be open and honest about both possibilities and challenges and not engaging in cliques and secret agendas. Such 'empire-building' undermines ownership of organisational development and can foster a toxic environment.

The human need for fairness is hard-wired. The brain's reward centre is activated when fairness and cooperation are experienced (Tabibnia and Leiderman, 2007).

Fairness does not however mean rigid sameness - it means acknowledgement of different circumstances and flexibility in response to these. This includes recognition and understanding for those who have young families or ageing parents who may be on call at any time. Supervisors who model good home-life balance have employees who feel they are able to do the same and are consequently less exhausted and more engaged in the workplace (Koch and Binnewies, 2015).

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16

Effective Communication

Communication in an organisation covers a number of functions, some of which overlap. These include information giving and seeking, sharing ideas, decision making, persuading, directing, motivating and supporting, resolving difficulties and otherwise relationship building.

Communication is however, not an event so much as an unending social and emotional process of sense-making (Lewis, 2011). It takes place within a context of history, relationships, expectations and the present setting. And communication is not merely verbal or written - it exists in timing, gestures and settings. Effective communication processes require a level of emotional literacy that enables the participants to tune into their own reactions to what is being discussed, the emotional context in which interactions are taking place and to be able to read and take account of the responses of others. The quality of communication at work can create or destroy relationships (Langley, 2012). The language used can either expand or contract conversation and not only does this have an outcome on the generation of ideas but it also promotes or inhibits the ASPIRE principles described above. Expansive communication includes acknowledging the value of what someone has said and asking others their views. It is putting into operation the 'no put down' rule which does not denigrate or dismiss someone but engages with 'personal positives' instead

Losada and Heaphy (2004) found that high performing teams had a ratio of five positive interactions to each negative one. They also had an equal balance of inquiry to advocacy statements and the same for self- to other-oriented comments. Poorly performing teams had a ratio of 20 to 1 for advocacy and self-orientation, indicating a lack of collaboration or connectivity. Lewis (2011) makes the observation that high performance does not depend on public criticism when someone underperforms but on generosity, forgiveness, appreciation, encouragement and positive feedback - especially when times are tough.

People need to disagree - but how this takes place matters as much as the positive. Giving critical feedback is challenging for some supervisors, which is why some may go at this with all guns blazing - but ignoring rather than addressing poor practices just condones and increases them. Negative feedback needs to be on actions never on personalities and blame fairly apportioned - what could you have done differently, what could others have done differently and what part did chance play. Listen to what the other person says but getting into arguments or going on the defensive does not help. Importantly ensure that the person knows what future expectations are and the rationale for these - linked to organisational values and goals,

Summary and futures

There are many challenges for the future of relationships at work as the nature of working lives continues to change. Amongst the issues that have arisen in this chapter are the balance of relationships at work with those at home as boundaries become increasingly blurred, the dichotomy between competitive and collaborative cultures in a world were work is increasingly focused on economic advantage, new paradigms for leadership, the nature of high quality connections and how these are perceived and promoted and how to understand and work with relational differences across cultures.

The vast majority of studies on positive psychology at work are based in the developed world - within a Western and capitalist ideology. We therefore do not know so much about

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17

the working lives of those in the third world. There also appears to be a preponderance of studies related to professional, white-collar occupations.

Positive psychology at work is a broadening field and needs to be to keep pace with a rapidly changing world. The values and beliefs within a positive psychology paradigm however are not always congruent with those often espoused in a business environment. A positive psychology approach may need to address these bigger issues such as how do you continue to maintain a focus on the wellbeing of those who work across a wide range of roles when economic imperatives undermine this. How can people continue to be treated as valuable human beings when their role becomes redundant?

Many of the constructs within the field such as empowerment, gratitude and emotional literacy have traction in the evidence for relationships at work although contextual factors matter to their impact and sustainable efficacy (Mills *et al.*, 2013). You cannot impose a positive psychology intervention without taking account of organisational culture. This is exemplified in many studies within education where a whole school approach for wellbeing is advocated (Noble *et al*., 2008). Organisation culture is ecological - and combines the structural with the psychological - what part do relationships have to play in the changes that lead to both individual wellbeing and flourishing enterprises and what is the interplay between them?

The ASPIRE framework addresses how relational values might impact on behaviours. Although not specific to the workplace this takes account of the multiple interactive factors that support high quality connections across contexts. As an entity, however, it requires empirical validity.

Although the literature on positive relationships has offered significant insights there are still questions to be answered on how to identify, deconstruct and maintain the positive across time and place. Relationships are complex, bi-directional and fluctuating: how people feel about themselves and others is embedded in an ecological and often chronological framework. Measuring outcomes of specific interventions does not guarantee efficacy across contexts or time. More information about people's lived experiences would be valuable. Much of the data is positivistic and linear so does not capture the narratives that illuminate the minutiae of difference.

There is much evidence on what works for wellbeing in relationships but how does this translate into policy and practice holistically across large institutions and at the macro socio-political level? On the one hand, for instance we have evidence for positive outcomes for a flatter organisational structure and more equality, but hierarchical cultures and management behaviours persist. How do we address power issues in relationships at work and what is the impact of individual psychologies on organisational systems. (Case and Maner, 2014)? How can we make the evidence of what enables both individuals and organisations to flourish become a reality for everyday working lives?

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