

IMPLEMENTING POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY INTERVENTIONS TO INCREASE
EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING AND REDUCE ORGANIZATIONAL COST

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CAPSTONE ABSTRACT

Implementing Positive Psychology Interventions to Increase Employee Well-Being and

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TOPIC: Implementing Positive Psychology Interventions to Increase Employee Well-Being and Reduce organizational cost

ABSTRACT: Positive Psychology at the workplace captures the active positive interventions that an employee and/or employer can implement to foster a healthier and happier work environment. By focusing on elements of positive psychology such as work as meaning, positive emotions, character strengths, educational and professional development, job crafting, and work design, I have performed an integrative analysis of positive interventions that can be introduced at the workplace to create job satisfaction, resiliency, and human thriving. Through scholarly research, I have analyzed factors that help employees flourish in the workplace, and identified how that impacts the overall success of their organization. This paper explores the best and worst practices, as well as the effects those practices have on turnover rates, financial impacts, and how companies can avoid creating a toxic work environment.

Introduction

Due to the competitive nature of business and the need to recruit and retain the best and brightest the following questions then arise; 1) How do employers meet their objective without sacrificing the integrity of the company? 2) How can employers and employees create a more proactive and positive workplace that bridges human thriving with economic goals? The answer, simplified as my research will support is by implementing positive interventions under the premise of Positive Psychology. By introducing interventions such as work satisfaction, emotional intelligence, positive emotions, accessing character strengths, inclusion, job crafting, job design, and benefits, employers are able to create a happier, healthier work environment. More importantly, they are able to reduce the costs associated with employee turnover, thereby maintaining a proactive workforce while increasing productivity and revenue.

Problem Statement

Negativity at the workplace can have serious consequences for both the employer as well as the employees. If left unchecked, it can cause low morale, loss of productivity, substandard performance, high stress levels, turmoil amongst the staff, negative customer feedback, a toxic environment, and a high turnover rate. All things combined, negativity has been found to cost the U.S. economy an estimated three hundred billion dollars per year (Gordon, 2008). Thus it works to the benefit of both the employer and employee that they take a positive approach to improving the conditions of the workplace.

Background

All across the United States, companies strategize on ways to increase their profit margin, reduce their loss, and gain the biggest return on their investment. However, as many

scholars have noted, employers often pay little to no attention to employee satisfaction, happiness, and the well-being of their staff (McCrahey, 2015; Thompson, 2012; Froman, 2010; Diener & Seligman, 2004). Problematically, many employers fail to recognize that their employees are their most valuable asset, and thus they fail to treat them as such. As Hinkin and Tracey (2000) note, “Many managers do not understand the productivity increases that can be obtained by maintaining a stable workforce by providing employees with a meaningful and pleasant work place” (p.17). This shortsightedness is often a root cause of disgruntled employees and a dissatisfied workforce usually leading to inadequate service and a high turnover rate; indisputably making the place of employment a revolving door. Problematically, when a disgruntled employee departs from an organization, they take with them their knowledge, experience, and expertise, leaving the company at a disadvantage until a replacement can be hired and fully trained (Kantor & Crosser, 2017; Lawler, 2015; Boushey & Glynn, 2012; Tracey & Hinkin, 2008; Hinkin & Tracey, 2000).

It is no surprise that a high employee turnover rate comes at a significant cost to the employer. According to a report in Forbes magazine, “depending upon the complexity of the job and the level of management, the cost of turnover can equal anywhere from one month’s to several years’ salary of the departing employee” (Lawler, 2015). More specifically, a study conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management found that an estimate of the cost of turnover amongst the 30 case studies analyzed ranged from 5.8 percent to 213 percent of the departing employee’s salary, but typically one-fifth of their salary in recruitment and training expenditures (Boushey & Glynn, 2012). The formulas for turnover cost include separation cost, replacement costs,

orientation and training cost, and an estimated loss of productivity (Tracey & Hinkin, 2008). Added to the equation, employers should consider the significant influx of the cost associated with more expensive positions due to the training costs and loss of productivity in relation to the learning curve encountered for the more technical, more complex, higher level positions (Lawler, 2015; Hinkin & Tracey, 2000). There are two types of costs associated with employee turnover: hard-costs, such as newspaper advertisements, background checks and billboards; and soft-costs, which include the time it takes for interviews, reference checks, training and so forth. The extent of the cost associated with employee turnover, and the impact it has on the company can be very exorbitant (Kantor & Crosser, 2017; Lawler, 2015; Boushey & Glynn, 2012).

Recruiting in itself is very costly as it has negative impacts on manpower hours for both the management and staff. Interviews limit the amount of time managers have available to perform their everyday responsibilities because their time is consumed with reviewing resumes, scheduling interviews, conducting the interviews, and finally the selection process, leaving their subordinates to take on additional responsibilities during the interim. The overall time taken throughout the interview process comes at a lost to productivity. An additional cost to consider is the cost of travel expenses paid for by the prospective employer for out-of-town interviewees to include: transportation, hotel accommodations, meals and incidentals. If selected, some employers also agree to pay the relocation expenses of the new hire as an incentive, or bargaining chip for them accepting the job offer (Kantor & Crosser, 2017).

Once a new hire has been selected, he or she may be required to attend an offsite training course and/or orientation, which can be relatively expensive, costing in the

thousands (Kantor & Crosser, 2017; Lawler, 2015; Boushey & Glynn, 2012; Hinkin & Tracey, 2000). The costs associated might include the cost of the airfare, lodging expenses, facilitator, location, etc. Onsite training, while more fiscally prudent, requires current and more senior staff members to provide on-the-job training. This disruption to their daily duties usually results in the staff feeling overworked and underpaid as they are forced to pick up the slack of the vacancies while also attempting to train the new hires. As is evident, productivity will suffer, which leaves unsatisfied customers likely to take their business elsewhere, and staff members likely to quit (Kantor & Crosser, 2017; Lawler, 2015; Boushey & Glynn, 2012; Tracey & Hinkin, 2008; Hinkin & Tracey, 2000).

An additional cost often overlooked in regards to employer-employee relations is the cost connected to employee well-being. Whether psychological or physical, negativity at the workplace causes unnecessary stress. This stress often takes a toll on the mental and physical well-being of the staff causing stress-induced ailments such as headaches, migraines, loss of appetite, weight gain, depression, anxiety, hair loss, fatigue, early signs of aging, insomnia, alcoholism, and a lack of motivation (Cabrera, 2012; Diener & Seligman, 2004; Layard, 2005; Michalos, 1997). Even worse, stress can cause chronic illnesses such as a weakened immune system, high blood pressure, heart disease, and other cardiac issues. According to the 1999 NIOSH report published by the CDC, the “early signs of job stress are usually easy to recognize. But the effects of job stress on chronic diseases are more difficult to see because chronic diseases take a long time to develop and can be influenced by many factors other than stress. Nonetheless, evidence is rapidly accumulating to suggest that stress plays an important role in several types of chronic health problems-especially cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders,

and psychological disorders”. *The Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* reports that “health care expenditures are nearly 50% greater for workers who report high levels of stress. Sadly, little to no emphasis has been placed on the role of workplace stress in the high cost of healthcare (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Layard, 2005; Michalos, 1997).

In a recent study conducted by Goh, Pfeffer, and Zenios (2016) 10 factors of stress that can potentially affect one’s health were identified. Out of the 10, eight were directly related to on-the-job dynamics. After the 10 factors of stress had been established, the researchers thoroughly examined medical literature to determine how those factors affect health. The results were grouped into four possible outcomes: self-reported physical problems, self-reported mental problems, doctor’s diagnoses, and mortality rates. However, taking into consideration that employees usually experience more than one form of stress factor at any given time, the researchers developed a mathematical model that enabled them to thoroughly evaluate the impact of co-occurring factors against the cost of negative health outcomes. The most significant findings of their research were as follows:

- 1) Workplace stress contributes to 120,000 deaths each year; 49, 000 of which are directly attributed to lack of health insurance, effectively causing a lack of treatment. Followed by unemployment, which accounted for 34,000 deaths, and finally high work demands and lack of job security which accounted for roughly 30,000 deaths a year.

- 2) Despite the variation found when estimating the costs associated with stress researchers found that workplace stress costs additional expenditures ranging from \$125 billion to \$190 billion a year nationwide.

High stress, inadequate work performance, and a high turnover rate are most commonly attributed to negativity at the workplace which includes but is not limited to: poor supervision, little-to-no responsibilities, mundane work, unpleasant work conditions, low wages, and a toxic environment (Lino, 2016; Froman, 2010; Diener & Seligman, 2004). These factors can have a detrimental effect on the overall health and well-being of the employees as they create stressful conditions.

While many employers consider stress at the workplace to be a necessary evil, as noted in the NIOSH (1999) report, turning up the pressure and not taking into consideration the health and well-being of your employees in order to remain productive and profitable will only have the opposite effect in the long-term. In the short-term employers may achieve the desired results, however long-term results will show a decline in productivity, motivation, creativity, and lead to an increase in work-related stress, tardiness, absenteeism, and the intention to quit. However, by embracing and incorporating positive psychology interventions such as providing employees with meaningful work and creating a pleasant workplace, organizations will not only increase productivity, and reduce loss, but they'll also be able to maintain a stable workforce (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000).

Positive Psychology Defined

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) described positive psychology as “a science of subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions that promises to

improve the quality of life and prevent pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless” (p. 5). Pioneered by Professor Martin Seligman, “Positive psychology is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play.” (Donaldson *et al*, 2015, p.187). Thus the goal of Positive Psychology is to make an active conscious attempt to explore where positive interventions, and happiness are possible, rather than accepting negativity as a foregone conclusion. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) classify positive psychology as an umbrella term for the study of positive emotions, positive character traits, and enabling institutions (2000). The intention of the research findings in positive psychology is not to replace or undermine human suffering, weaknesses or disorders, but instead to have a more complete balance of the human experience and build on positive qualities (Seligman *et al.*, 2005).

Under the premise of Positive Psychology, a problem can be fixed by not merely focusing on the problem, but by instead focusing on positive interventions that lead to a more desired outcome. However, positive psychology does not imply that the other genres of psychology are wrong, ineffective, or invaluable, but rather that most genres of psychology focus purely on illness, distress, dysfunction, and disease (Gable & Haidt, 2005). “For example, more attention has been given to negative as opposed to positive affectivity, stress and burnout as opposed to eustress, resistance to change as opposed to acceptance/celebration of change, and the deficiencies, problems and dysfunctions of managers and employees rather than their strengths and psychological capacities for development and performance improvement” (Luthans, 2002, p. 698). This does not imply that practice of positive psychology is to avoid or characterize negative feelings as

medically or psychologically abnormal but instead serves to remind society of the bigger picture, encouraging society to take the steps to achieve positive feelings of happiness, and growth (Gable & Haidt, 2005).

“The driving force behind workplace positive psychology is the notion that happier employees are more productive, more innovative, and create a more attractive working environment” (Thompson, 2012, web). Positive psychology helps one to reflect, providing insight and growth in a complex world. It teaches coping and resiliency skills, current and future mindedness, optimism in the face of negativity, faith, work ethic, the importance of trust, and finding meaningfulness in a life that seems meaningless. It encompasses psychology principles such as character strengths, emotional intelligence, positive emotions, positive communication, and fostering a healthy environment that ideally will improve one’s work and home life. Interventions for achieving positivity in the workplace include: work as meaning, character strengths, emotional intelligence, job design, job crafting, and making one’s staff feel valued.

The Importance of Work Satisfaction

Accounting for 20% of one’s life satisfaction, one’s work has the potential to affect their home and social lives, and most importantly their well-being. Hence, it is especially important that adult humans learn how to pay more positive attention to the workplace in order to achieve work satisfaction (Wrzesniewski *et al.*, 1997). As one of the aims of positive psychology includes creating healthy institutions, it is important to assess how work satisfaction can be achieved in the workplace. There is a common misconception that pay increases and promotions lead to a higher work satisfaction. To the contrary, research has suggested that pay increases lack sustainability in terms of job satisfaction,

and are only effective short-term (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Layard, 2005; Michalos, 1997). Following a pay raise or promotion, most employees maintain the same expenditure dynamic they had prior, just at higher level, thus they will not truly reap the benefits of the pay increase because the additional income is already spent. Even more so, research has shown that there is a diminishing return on promotions. As with any promotion there is an increased workload and thus additional stress (Mirowsky & Ross, 2003).

One could argue that as his or her work life only constitutes as one-third of their waking life, the other two-thirds should have a greater influence on their overall happiness and well-being. Thus the two thirds represented by friends, family, recreational activities, and hobbies should have the greatest impact on one's happiness. According to Wrzesniewski (2003), major life satisfaction is derived from hobbies, outside commitments, and personal relationships. Others could argue that work provides a means to enjoy the finer things in life or at minimum meet their basic needs to sustain their desired quality of life thus it makes their life meaningful, without having meaningfulness at the workplace. In her article, "Finding Positive Meaning in Work" Amy Wrzesniewski (2003) states that for those who classify their work as a "job," it is basically the source of material benefits (economic) that bring satisfaction in other areas of their lives. Of course, in both instances there is the rollover effect, in which case a person who is unhappy with their work-life lets the negative feelings consume them to the point that they are unable to enjoy the other two-thirds of their waking life. Which is why it is especially important that the concept of positive psychology is embraced and adapted in the workplace.

Despite the emphasis on the monetary value of work, the real value lies in how one perceives the work they do. "Satisfaction with life and with work may be more dependent on how an employee sees his or her work than on income or occupational prestige" (Wrzesniewski *et al.*, 1997, p.31). Exploring the positive interventions both the employer and employee can introduce at the workplace will help to develop and maintain work satisfaction amongst the staff. Staw and Ross (1985) wrote that "work constitutes for more than one-third of the waking life for most human adults" (p.469). Thus, it is only appropriate to draw the correlation between work and one's own happiness. An employee's inability to derive satisfaction from their workplace will more than likely result in inadequate performance, repeated tardiness, absenteeism, and impending departure. "Work plays a powerful role in how people understand their lives, the world around them, and the unique niche they fulfill" (Steger & Dik, 2010). Without that understanding, an employee will lack fulfillment, commitment, pride, the desire to perform their assigned tasks, or continue within an organization.

Solution 1: Positive Interventions Executed By the Employee

The success of positive interventions being implemented by the employer relies heavily on the employee's own mindset, behavior, and willingness to enact their own positive interventions. Doing so will ensure that he or she makes an active effort to create, support, and build upon a healthy work environment where all employees have an opportunity to flourish and thrive. Positive Psychology interventions that the employee themselves can execute to improve their own well-being and achieve happiness within the workplace can include: *emotional intelligence*, one's ability to recognize and control his/her emotions while having insight about the emotions of others; *character strengths*,

an individual's signature strengths; and *job crafting*, changing the meaning of one's work.

Emotional Intelligence

In a turbulent environment characterized by economic uncertainty, 24/7 competition, ever-changing advancements in technology, increased geo-political unrests and threats, and an unpredictable job market, it is fair to say that there is not much stability in today's economy. Added on negative work conditions, it is no surprise that U.S. continues to see a growing rise in depression, stress, obesity, and cardiovascular diseases amongst Americans nationwide. In any case, the easy way to overcome the negativity is to use emotional intelligence in the workplace to cope. Coined by Peter Salovey, and John Mayer in 1990, emotional intelligence (EQ) refers to one's ability to identify, analyze, and manage the emotions of one's self as well as others. Salovey and Mayer (1990) developed a four dimension ability-based EI model. Ranked in order sequentially from the lowest to the highest.

- 1) **Perception of emotions**- refers to the individual's ability to accurately identify and perceive emotions in self and others.
- 2) **The use of emotion to facilitate thought**- refers to the individual's ability to generate and use emotions in productive ways, as an aid to judgement and memory.
- 3) **Understanding and analyzing emotion**- refers to individual's ability to label and understand deep and complex emotions, and how these emotions change, combine, and progress.

- 4) **Reflective regulation of emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth**- refers to an individual's ability to be open to both unpleasant and pleasant emotions, monitor their emotions and those of others reflectively.

Similar to Salovey, and Mayer, Daniel Goleman (2001) takes it a step further in developing the mixed model which classified the five key principles of emotional intelligence:

- **Self-awareness**- the capability to recognize personal emotions, emotional triggers and limitations
- **Self-regulation**- the capability to manage emotions so they do not have a negative effect
- **Motivation**- an inner drive that comes from the gratification experienced after an accomplishment
- **Empathy**- the capability to recognize, understand, and experience the emotions of another person
- **Social skills**- the capability to interact and negotiate with other individuals in order to find the best way to meet the needs of each person

All things combined, the intent of emotional intelligence is for the individual to recognize, and manage their emotions in a way that is beneficial, and not counterproductive. In doing so, employees will be able overcome the mental barriers associated with negativity, thereby allowing them to remove the limitations and gain a new prospective. Essentially, emotional intelligence likely results in the desired outcome which is the fundamental basis for positive psychology; seeing beyond the negative, past the foregone conclusion. Researchers have found that employees with high levels of

emotional intelligence are generally better team players, show more flexibility, increased perseverance and problem solving capabilities, and the ability to manage work-related stress.

Although emotional intelligence calls on the individual to identify, analyze, and manage their emotions, special attention should be spent on reinforcing positive emotions specifically. “Positive Psychology has shown how positive emotions are linked with numerous benefits including improved health, wellbeing, longevity, and a greater quality of life. On the flip side anger, anxiety, depression, and worry are related to poor health outcomes” (Lino, 2016). In a study conducted by Danner *et al.* (2001) they found when reviewing the autobiographies of Catholic nuns written in their twenties, that their life expectancy could be predicted based on the positive or negative emotional content in their journals. Nuns whose autobiographies contained positive emotional content lived longer than those whose autobiographies lacked such content or had negative emotional content permeating throughout.

In addition to extending one’s life expectancy, positive emotions also broaden people’s thought process, ridding them of the psychological mental barriers that negative emotions often impose on them. Thus widening the array of thoughts, options, and actions that come to mind (Fredrickson, 2001; & Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005).

Whereas focusing on the problem can cause an individual to find themselves overwhelmed with feelings of anxiety and stress. These negative emotions can influence the decision making process in an adverse way, causing an individual to make brash or irrational decisions that further result in a negative outcome.

Positive emotions such as joy and gratitude can be achieved amongst co-workers by simply committing unexpected acts of kindness. Doing so opens your heart and carries the urge to give back, to do something good in return, either for the person who helped you or for someone else (Fredrickson, 2001). Thus it becomes a ripple effect, improving the climate of the workplace. “Some organizations have adapted these ideas in innovative ways. For example, by listing ‘appreciations’ as a standing agenda item at the beginning of staff meetings, individuals can be invited to nominate someone, or something for which they are grateful” (Lino, 2016).

Another positive emotion *hope*, enables an individual to see the possibility of a more desirable outcome looking beyond the forgone conclusion, helping employees to become more resilient and able to overcome adversity (Froman, 2010; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). As Luthans notes “It is a duality of both the willpower (agency) and waypower (pathways) that sets apart hope as a positive psychological capacity from the common usage of the term and from other conceptually close positive constructs such as self-efficacy or optimism” (p. 701). Hope helps employees to set higher goals, work to achieve their goals, and when they encounter roadblocks find ways to overcome them. Research has proven that an individual’s level of hope is related to anticipation of goals, one’s sense of control, and positive affect (Luthans, 2002; Curr et al., 1997).

Another positive emotion similar to hope is *optimism* with the major conceptual difference between the two being that optimism expectancies are formed through external forces outside the self, whereas hope is an intrinsic force. By being optimistic and choosing a positive attitude, an employee is able to achieve their goals. In the opposition, when employees hold on to negative emotions, it can become somewhat of a mental

barrier, blocking them from being able to consider possible solutions. Whereas, positivity breeds creativity, providing a clear mindedness necessary to generate new thoughts, ideas, and solutions. Freeing your mind from negativity allows you to see endless possibilities to what would otherwise be a hopeless situation. “People high in optimism tend to have better moods, to be more persevering and successful, and to experience better physical health.” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Overall, Seligman suggest that “those who refrain from expressing negative emotions and in turn use different strategies to cope with the stresses of life also tend to be happier (Seligman, 2002). By practicing the five key principles of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills) and embracing positive emotions such as *hope*, *gratitude*, and *optimism* employees can identify, analyze, and manage their emotions in way that is more productive and beneficial to their health and well-being. In doing so they are able to see beyond the negative as positive psychology demands and look to where positivity is possible. Thus, employees are able to broaden their thoughts, increasing creativity, productivity, and overall performance. In doing so, they will earn the respect of their colleagues, management, and those they serve. The praise, and self-gratification they’ll find in a job well done is a reward in itself. “A person can be happy while confronting life realistically and while working productively to improve the conditions of existence” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.11).

Assessing Character Strengths

Henry Ward Beecher once said “A man’s character is the reality of himself; his reputation, the opinion others have formed about him; character resides in him, reputation

in other people; that is the substance, this is the shadow”. Character strengths are the equivalent of signature strengths. No two individuals in the world have the same exact character strengths. Everyone has their own unique strengths, not to be confused with physical strengths, but more so inner qualities imbedded deeply in one’s core that influence how they perceive a situation, person, or thing and the actions that follow.

Character strengths can be identified using scientific surveys. There are numerous character strengths surveys available, but the most commonly used is the VIA Classification of Character Strengths Survey which is comprised of six broad virtue categories: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. The six virtue categories encompass 24 universal character strengths embedded within each and every individual. What makes individuals differ is the degree to each strength they possess. By assessing their own character strengths and weaknesses, employees are better equipped to take on such tasks such as self-evaluation, self-improvement, and self-motivation. By understanding both their character strengths and weaknesses employees should have a better idea of what work, or career field they are better suited and most effective, as well as an understanding of how they perceive the world. This understanding, although not guaranteed may also result in a change in perspective, and the actions to follow, thus producing positive effects (Steger & Dik, 2010).

To the benefit of the company, assessing their staff’s character strengths and weaknesses will assist with job placement, assigning tasks, and pairing up team members ensuring that the prospective employee is the right fit for the organization or a particular position (Steger & Dik, 2010). This knowledge adds value to how the employer will manage and motivate the team. More importantly, by assessing an employee’s character

strengths, employers can introduce positive interventions to make their employees stronger in the weaker areas, while heightening their character strengths. “Managers can help employees build on their strengths by providing feedback and developmental opportunities” (Cabrera, 2012, p. 52). According to a study by Hodges and Asplund (2010), organizations that focus on understanding and utilizing their staff’s strengths rather than their weaknesses will be able to engage their intrinsic motivation using their interest, values, and strengths to motivate them. High levels of motivation often tend to increase creativity which expands the level of productivity versus an employee who lacks motivation who typically has a mental block limiting their creativity and their ability to produce both efficiently and effectively thereby decreasing their level of performance.

Job Crafting

One of the more important interventions that an employee can take to help create meaningfulness where there is none is by embracing the concept of job crafting. Job crafting is essentially the process by which employees voluntarily perform tasks that do not fall within their realm of responsibility. According to Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), employees job craft their jobs in order to change the meaning of their work, and their job identities (Wrzeniewski & Dutton, 2001). By embracing the concept of job crafting employees are able to foster job satisfaction, as well as engagement, thriving at work, and resiliency. Job crafting which is interchangeable with job control, to a certain extent provides the employee with a sense of control, and a perceived ability to exert some influence over one’s work environment thus allowing them to make their work more rewarding (Bond & Bunce, 2003; Ganster, 1989). Whereas job design is the top down theoretical approach of managers designing their employees work similar to a job

description. Job crafting allows the employees to change the dynamic of their workplace.

Berg, *et al.* (2008) categorize three different forms of job crafting:

1. Job crafters can alter the boundaries of their jobs by taking on more or fewer tasks, expanding or diminishing the scope of their tasks, or changing how they perform the tasks (e.g., an accountant creating a new method of filing taxes to make their job less repetitive).
2. Job crafters can change their relationships at work by altering the nature or extent of their interactions with other people (e.g., a computer technician offering help to co-workers as a way to have more social connection and teach new technicians).
3. Job crafters can cognitively change their jobs by altering how they perceive tasks (e.g., cooks viewing their work as art rather than just preparing food) or thinking about the tasks involved in their job as part of the collective whole in opposed to as separate tasks.

It is important that managers consider the impact job crafting has on how employees experience and conduct their work. The freedom to job craft alleviates negative feelings linked to boredom, or mundane work. For example, a randomized study conducted by Bond & Bunce (2003) found that “higher job control levels at Time 1 predicted better mental health, job satisfaction, and performance at Time 2” (p. 1064). Thus employers should encourage positive job crafting amongst their employees because it has the capacity to positively influence the individual and organizational performance. This gives the employee the power to reassess how they see their work and what they do. They may look deeper to find ways of making what they do more meaningful, thus

increasing their interest, commitment, and pride while improving their job performance and productivity.

Solution 2: Positive Interventions Enacted By the Employer

Any good CEO, manager, or supervisor knows that their employees are the most valuable resource within their organization. When the employees are happy, confident, and find satisfaction in what they do, they put more thought, effort, and emotions into their assigned tasks, which in turn helps them to be more creative, and productive at work (Fredrickson 2001). As previously discussed, the employer plays an imperative role in the employee's happiness and well-being. Thus, a remedy to creating a positive work environment, while mediating stress factors that would often result in employee burnout, or high turnover would be to implement positive interventions at the workplace. Positive interventions at the workplace might include: *work as meaning*, the meaning an employee assigns to their work; *education and professional development*, investing into the happiness and professional betterment of your staff and overall organization; *creating an atmosphere of inclusion*, thru transparency, open communication, and encouragement of collective input; *job design*, the consideration an employer takes when building one's job description; *Making employees feel valued*; by taking into consideration the staff's basic needs management can implement policies that benefit their staff and the overall organization.

Work As Meaning

Meaningfulness can be defined as the meaning a person assigns to different facets of their life. Finding meaning in life provides a sense of purpose in a world where one feels there is none. "Meaning in life refers to people's perceptions that their lives matter, that they

make sense, and that they unfold in accordance with some over-arching purpose” (Steger & Dik, 2010, p.133). According to Steger & Dik (2010), meaning consists of two primary components: *comprehension* and *purpose*. In relation to work as meaning, *comprehension* refers to one’s ability to understand who they are, how the world works, and how they fit in with and relate to the world around them. “*Purpose* is the identification of, and intention to pursue, particular highly valued, over-arching life goals” (Steger & Dik, 2010, p.133). It is the employer’s responsibility to provide a clear understanding of the unique and crucial role that every individual employee plays in fulfilling the mission of their organization. “A leader who draws on a sense of work as meaning will be able to generate prudent and needed purposes for his or her organization” (Steger & Dik, 2010, p. 138).

Research has shown that people who are engaged in meaningful work lead more fulfilling lives. Work can have a positive impact on one’s life regardless of income and tasks performed. When people see how their efforts impact the greater good they tend to find satisfaction in the work they do, no matter how mundane the tasks or what the remuneration. Thus, the employee will feel connected and develop an interest in something greater than themselves. “If people understand how they fit with and relate to their organization, they should be better socialized and better at working on teams, as well as to feel more identified with, and more committed to their organization” (Steger & Dik, 2010, p.136). This connection becomes their motivation and drive to be a contributing member of their team. Although research continues to be conducted into meaningfulness in the field of positive psychology, according to Steger and Dik (2010) “the most common results are that people who are engaged in, or anticipate engaging in,

meaningful work report more desirable work attitudes: greater certainty and self-efficacy about career decisions, intrinsic motivation to work, feeling greater work satisfaction, and greater meaning in life as a whole” (p.137).

Education and Professional Development

Employers who promote individual professional development by offering educational assistance, or technical training foster a workplace of professional and personal growth. This provides a sense of pride, commitment, and appreciation for the employee, while contributing to the overall success of the company. Well-trained and developed employees tend to flourish as they are more productive and better performers overall (Berg *et al.*, 2008). An employee who feels like their company is investing in their professional and personal betterment will feel more valued, be more productive and is more likely to remain with their company. While many companies might be concerned with the monetary cost of embracing the professional development of their employees, the monetary gain far exceeds the monetary investment. That’s how most employers should perceive funding professional development, as an investment. However, for such programs to be successful, the employee must possess the ability, drive, and willingness to take advantage of the available resources that will help them get more enjoyment and meaning out of work, improve their work identities, cope with adversity, and perform better (Berg *et al.*, 2008).

Creating a safe & inclusive atmosphere

It is important that employers create a place of inclusion where everyone is welcome to contribute ideas. Creating an atmosphere of inclusion includes encouraging open dialogue, collective input, and transparency. Employers should commit to safe and open

dialogue where every employee's input is valued and considered, not just noted. "When employees are allowed and encouraged to share their thoughts, business processes can become streamlined, new products can emerge, and communication can improve" (Thompson, 2012, web). As Hackman and Oldham (1976) point out in *Motivation through the Design of Work: Test of a Theory*, direct involvement in initial concept to finished product affords employees the opportunity to be 'internally motivated to perform effectively on their jobs'.

Creating an atmosphere of inclusion also requires that employers be transparent offering clear, and consistent communication. Employers should provide clarity on their intentions, goals, and the future of the company. By doing so, the employer will not only motivate the team to be more productive, but they'll also provide a sense of security in an uncertain job market. Including employees in the decision making process provides a sense of security and a clear understanding of the objectives at hand. It also introduces new ideas that may have not previously been considered or expressed thus producing favorable outcomes for both the staff and management.

Employers can also make the work place safe by taking strong consideration when selecting new hires for employment or offering a promotion from within. Beyond the normal criteria, one should also consider whether or not that individual will be a good fit amongst their prospective coworkers and management. Employers should perform an analysis to determine what qualities the prospective hire possesses, and how that individual handles conflict and stressful situations. Most importantly, employers should note whether or not the individual is a team player or will their attitude lean more towards project ownership. During the Sep 8, 2016 episode of Good Morning America's Work

Alert the question was asked, ‘What do you do about toxic employees?’ During the news segment they referenced the Philadelphia Inquirer (Von Bergen, 2016) which had reported that a business had terminated one of their top performers as a result of that individual creating a toxic environment. Despite the fact that the employee was a leader in sales, the employer found that it was counterintuitive to continue to employ an employee simply based on them meeting their goal, while negatively impacting the company morale and overall mission.

Other ways of dealing with a negative employee might include reassignment or offering mentoring, or coaching sessions. In any case, it is absolutely necessary to take action in regards to dealing with a toxic employee. Negativity in the workplace, either by behavior, management, or design can have a detrimental effect on productivity. Failure to take an appropriate action can result in employees feeling insecure, threatened, stressed and unhappy which will in turn lead to a high turnover rate. Costing the employer more in the long run.

Job Design

Job design, not to be confused with job crafting is intended to motivate and empower the staff. The difference between the two is that job crafting is an internal intervention, whereas job design is an external intervention implemented by the employer to have a positive effect on the employee. According to Turner, Barling, and Zacharatos (2002) there are three job characteristics that relate to how work is experienced: *role clarity* - sufficient information and predictability in one's work; *role agreement* - restricted sets of demands and expectations; and *role load* - work that is challenging and yet manageable. “A clear fit between the employees and their roles is critical for employees’ sense of

commitment to the organization and indirectly their ability to work toward organizational goals” (Turner, Barling, and Zacharatos, 2002, p.719). Employees should have a clear understanding of the intent of the company and the purpose of their contributions. Role load should also entail the realistic aspects and challenges that accompany one’s job. It is vital to both the employee and organization that realistic expectations are set and challenges are identified between both entities to avoid work dissatisfaction. The ideal result is that with the proper job design an employee will perform better and increase productivity.

Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) call attention to the efforts employees make to craft their jobs and the importance of recognizing these actions when considering an employees’ job design. Managers should design jobs with the mindset that there should be some level of flexibility for the employee to perform job crafting. Providing leeway leaves room for the employees to tailor their jobs to fit their individual character strengths, interests, passions, and motivations (Berg *et al.*, 2008).

Making an Employee Feel Valued

In addition to creating a place of inclusion, employers should consider other ways to make their employees feel like a valuable member of the company. They should strive to learn the needs and perhaps the wants of their employees. While you can’t please everyone, there are simple ways to make employees feel like their needs and wants are being met. Two common categories amongst employees are flexibility and benefits.

Flexibility. Whether due to family, illness, or other outside obligations, the employer should show flexibility in each individual employee’s schedule. Employers should show flexibility by offering alternative schedules outside of the traditional nine to

five work day. However, flexibility should not be limited to the employer. The employee should also be willing to be flexible with their time in order to finish a product, meet a deadline, or fulfill the overall mission. This will require a willingness to work extra hours or days when necessary putting the needs of their mission before their own.

Benefits. The employer should consider benefits that meet the basic needs of all, such as complimentary daycare, paid time off, overtime, and maternity leave. Federal law does not require employers to pay employees for time not worked, such as: vacation time off, sick leave, federal or other holidays. These benefits are a matter of agreement between the employer and the employee. Luckily for the employee, due to the competitive nature of business and the need to recruit and retain the best and brightest, most companies offer at minimum paid sick leave and vacation time off.

Today many companies offer less conventional benefits to achieve workplace satisfaction such as dining in and dining out functions (e.g. family day picnics), offering physical fitness sessions within the 8-hour workday, discounted or free gym memberships, sponsoring wellness fairs, yoga and meditation sessions. Additionally, employers across the board are making improvements to the workplace such as playing music, having free snacks or treats available in the common area or breakroom, or providing onsite childcare accommodations at no cost to the employee. The opportunities for less conventional benefits to be offered to an organizations staff are endless, but are likely to result in a happier, more productive staff. As an example, in a study conducted by Cornell University happy songs and a comfortable or warm work place were linked to happy employees. Hence, whether small or large, the slightest improvement to workplace conditions or policies can improve the work satisfaction amongst the staff.

In 2009, Ohio State University conducted a study on the benefits of low-impact yoga and meditation at the workplace. The results were overwhelmingly positive. “On average, mindfulness increased by about 9.7 percent, and perceived stress decreased by about 11 percent among the group that experienced the intervention” (Thompson, 2012, web). The participants in the test group also reported that as a result they had less sleepless nights, and experienced less daytime dysfunction in comparison to the participants of the non-intervention group. The decrease in sleep deprivation typically results in employees being less exhausted, and therefore better able to function, be more creative, innovative, and overall productive. In a separate report on workplace wellness programs conducted by CNBC in 2012, it was found that of the employees who routinely participated in wellness programs sponsored by their employer, over half said they were more productive, 40 percent said they were likely to remain with the company; and 30 percent reported taking fewer sick days (Thompson, 2012). Both reports prove substantively that wellness programs not only improve the well-being of staff, but also work to the benefit of the company by helping to promote work satisfaction and increase productivity.

As employers will find, the introduction of any of these new incentives or programs will prove to be beneficial to their employees as it will improve their health and overall well-being. Thus it will reduce associated health cost, tardiness, absenteeism, and impending departure reducing the cost associated with high turnover, while increasing productivity. All to the benefit of the employer, as well as the employee. However, the true success of any such interventions can only be achieved if those companies are not at the same time undermining the positive results with stress-inducing management

practices (Blanding, 2015). In doing so, all attempts at improving workplace conditions will fail, and will only bridge a further gap between the management and the staff causing the opposite effect, as such gestures will look fictitious.

The Wrong Way to Practice Positive Psychology

Having discussed the possible ways that positive psychology can be introduced, it is important to note how not to use it. In April 2016, the National Labor Relations Board issued a ruling against T-Mobile on the basis that the telecommunications company had violated the law by including a provision in their employee handbook mandating that employees “maintain a positive work environment in a manner that is conducive to effective working relationships” (Konnikova, 2016). Instead of T-Mobile encouraging growth, transparency, engagement amongst the staff, and healthy work relationships, they forbid any meetings that discussed employee discontent and hampered union organization. T-Mobile therefore impeded on their employee’s rights for freedom of speech and freedom to organize. T-Mobile’s policy was not to create and maintain a positive environment, but rather an attempt to abolish and prevent any shared negativity against the company from being voiced.

Alicia Grandey an organizational psychologist from Penn State cautions that it is incredibly difficult to impose positivity from the top-down and actually achieve positive results (Konnikova, 2016). In short she contends that anything forced or externally controlled tends to have a reverse negative effect. Positive provisions as mandated by management cause employees to constantly worry about whether or not they are violating the company’s ‘feel good’ policies. “More than two decades of research suggests that thought suppression, or trying to stifle your initial impulses in favor of something else,

can result in a mental strain and may also impair other types of thinking—memory, self-control, problem solving, motivation, and perceptiveness” (Konnikova, 2016). As seen with T-Mobile, in mandating positive environment provisions an employer is promoting their own agenda while reprimanding anyone who does not fit the company’s concept of positive environment.

The Benefits of Positive Psychology

Research has proven that positive psychology fosters healthier attitudes, greater work satisfaction, and a healthy work environment where people tend to be happier. According to Steger and Dik (2010) engagement in meaningful work should give people a greater well-being, satisfaction with work, less work and family conflict, and less stress. Thus they are more motivated to contribute more, perform well, be more efficient, be a team player, and overall be productive. Theoretically, positive interventions such as meaningful work are believed to improve work motivation, performance, and productivity (Roberson, 1990; Steger & Dik, 2010). Whereas a negative workplace can have the opposite effect: negative impact on your work performance, loss of productivity, conflicts at the workplace, work-related stress, work dissatisfaction, a toxic environment, a high turnover rate, and increased organizational loss in revenue.

In addition to increased productivity, positivity at the workplace also improves one’s overall health, both mental and physical. Whereas traditional psychology is more reactive, more concerned on fixing the negative. Positive Psychology is proactive, working at essentially creating and maintaining positive emotions and a positive mindset. As one is able to incorporate positive psychology into their everyday behavior at the workplace they’ll find that they are less stressed. A decrease in stress will lead to less

sleepless nights, reducing the employee's levels of exhaustion and anxiety. Ideally, to the benefit of the employer a decrease in stress should also result in a decrease in tardiness and absenteeism, and an increase in creativity, and productivity, thus reducing the organizational loss, while increasing the gain.

Medically speaking, practicing positive psychology significantly reduces the risk factors associated with stress such as high blood pressure, a weakened immune system, the probability of cardiac issues, diabetes, or stroke. Research has shown that people who live happier lives tend to have a longer life expectancy, living an estimated 10 years longer than their negative counterparts (Cabrera, 2012; Danner *et al.*, 2001). Thus, as Cabrera (2012) notes, positive psychology is beneficial to one's well-being and quality of life, giving employees a greater chance of having a long healthy prosperous life. To the benefit of the employer having a positive healthier staff reduces tardiness, absenteeism, and increases overall productivity. More important than reducing tardiness and absenteeism, positive psychology is aimed at reducing the turnover rate amongst employers and the associated cost, such as separation costs, replacement costs: *hard costs* such as newspaper advertisements, background checks and billboards and *soft costs*-the time it takes for interview, reference checks, training costs, and the estimated loss in productivity.

As the entire basis of any institution is to show end results that end in profit and gain, productivity is especially important for the employer. Unfortunately, productivity suffers gravely when a new hire who lacks the experience and expertise requires training. The frustration is felt amongst the trainee, trainer, management, and their coworkers. Furthermore, productivity for even the more tenured staff members will suffer as they

will have an increased workload until the vacant positions are filled and new hires are fully trained. This can lead to a burnout amongst the remaining workforce who feels overworked and undercompensated making them more likely to leave. All of these components combined ultimately degrade the level of productivity, and quality of service (Tracey & Hinkin, 2008). A degraded quality in service results in unhappy customers increasing the probability that they will take their business elsewhere resulting in a loss in revenue.

Recommendation

It is recommended that employers and employees alike approach the core concepts of positivity in the workplace with an open-mind. Letting go of any preconceived notions, doubts or skepticism will allow the program to flourish and every action to follow to be implemented successfully (Berg *et al.*, 2008). By doing so employers will create a healthier, happier, more productive, and sustainable workforce. As noted by Alicia Grandey, employers should avoid taking a “top down” approach to positivity in the workplace. Instead through the use of surveys, and open dialogue together they can work with employees to find ways to improve work satisfaction, and employee well-being. In doing so, the employers will create a workforce that will work toward achieving the company’s goals, ensuring success (Thompson, 2012). Thus, they will achieve the desired end result increasing their gain, while minimizing losses of both personnel and profit.

Conclusion

While it is nearly impossible to satisfy the complaints of every dissatisfied employee, others will appreciate the company’s willingness and attempts to make the workplace

healthier. “Positive psychology with its forward-looking orientation, suggests that the potential for a more hopeful, productive, and satisfying future can emerge for people who are struggling to find their way through tough times, as well as for many others who are somewhat more secure, but find themselves coasting along without much joy or fulfillment in their day-to-day work lives” (Froman, 2010, p.60). As Professor Zeynep Ton from the Harvard Business School recently wrote in the Harvard Business Review:

Highly successful retail chains ... have demonstrated that ... bad jobs are not a cost-driven necessity, but a choice. And they have proven that the key to breaking the trade-off is a combination of investment in the workforce and operational practices that benefit employees, customers, and the company ... I believe that the model these retailers have created can be applied in other service organizations ... [such as] hospitals, restaurants, banks, and hotels.

By implementing the interventions introduced within this paper employers and employees are encompassing the practice of positive psychology. As the employer incorporates positive psychology into their mission, the employees will feel more valued, as a result they will perform better, show more pride in the work they produce, and greater loyalty and commitment to the company (Cabrera, 2012). As previously mentioned there must be a genuine commitment from both the individual and the organization to improve the quality of work life, creating opportunities for flourishing and optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Turner *et al*, 2002). While this analysis has helped provide useful and meaningful examples of what positive interventions can be introduced by the employer as well as the employee to

improve workplace conditions, and create a long-term sustainable force it can only be successful if both parties pose an interest, willingness, and desire to do so.

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