

## Positivistic organizational behavior and research

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### Abstract

Management, in the third Millennium, requires a paradigm change from negativistic to positivistic in order to make optimal use of positive capacities, attitudes, and capabilities of human resources through organizational positive procedures and policies. Positivistic psychological movement has had the important accomplishments for managers and leaders in human resources area. It is also shown in practice that applying positivistic psychological principals is related to performance and efficiency. In the present paper, we will study the concept of positivistic psychology in work and its branches (Positivistic organizational behavior and research) and their results in workplace.

**Keywords:** Positivistic in work, organizational positivistic behavior, positivistic organizational research, positivistic psychology

### Introduction

Management and leadership in the third Millennium are facing some special problems and complexities. Issues such as increasing pace of changes and competitions, labor movements, quality-oriented management movement, customer's expectations and its variety increase, economic, political and security crisis, moral problems, globalization, resources 'shortage, increase in job displacements, etc., caused management and leaderships to be different in the third millennium than before. Being in such atmosphere until the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, made many managers to believe that in this rough situation the most important need of the organizations, to survive and retain the least standards, is to prevent such problems or crisis to happen, or to solve them, and their main focus was on this issue. However, in the area of human recourse the main consideration was to resolve weaknesses and problems of the staff.

In fact, the only approach was negative feedback and problem solving as most of the papers in business used to emphasis on the negative concepts. For example, a recent study in psychology magazine "health at work," indicates that about 94% of the papers are about negative concepts such as aggression, exhaustion, discrimination, humiliation, harassment, interpersonal conflicts, stress, and leaving organization (Schaufeli and Salanova, 2007). However, considering such issues and problems in workplace is important, but it is not enough in nowadays competitive and ever-changing environment. Organizations, to resolve such problem should find more affordable methods that help them to survive and remain stable, prosperous, and excellent. Such an attitude in workplace is derived from concepts, theorizations, researches, and applications of positivistic psychology literature. Martin Seligman evolved positivistic psychology, in 1998, to crisis classic and negative psychology.

In fact, after World War I & II, when despair, mental problems and negativism were spread over the world specially in the war-torn countries, he started a flow of thought and ideas about human the of which was life improvement and today is called "positivistic psychology", in 90s. This campaign recognizing the achievements of classic psychology in understanding and treating psychological disorders has introduced two new missions:

1) Helping people with healthy personalities, to enjoy a more happy and productive life.

2) To help, unlocking human potential ( Hodges, 2010).

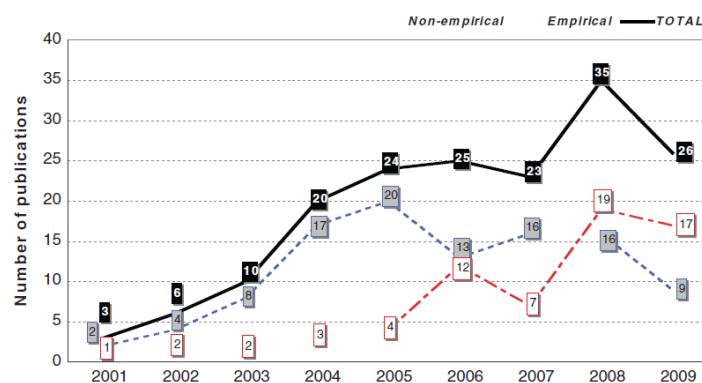
The issue of positivistic psychology is optimization of human dignity, and seeks to develop mental health, well-being, and personal development. Positivistic psychology is the science of positive mental experiences, positive individual characteristics, and positivistic organizations (Fernandez and Cornes, 2009).

According to above definition, Peterson (2006) considers three essential pillars for positivistic psy-

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chology. The first one includes positive mental experiences such as happiness, prosperity, joy, hope, flexibility, and positive emotions. The second one includes positive characteristics such as appeal, wisdom, values, meaningfulness, purposefulness, growth, and courage. Third one includes positive institution or organizations such as Families, schools, organizations, societies, and communications (Peterson, 2006). Positivistic attitude toward research, application and psychology of knowledge has been derived from positivistic psychology movement that got itself out of the limitations and disciplines of the classic psychology, and is rapidly spreading in the areas such as Education, hygiene,

public health, human and social services, economics, political science, neurological science, leadership, management, organizational science, etc (Donaldson and Ia Ko, 2010). Today, this attitude benefits from theories, measurement tools, applications and interferences in workplace, and is being a competitive advantage for organizations that are practicing positivistic psychology principals in work. Hence has attracted many researchers and theoreticians. A review on the published papers in the recent decade in the positivistic psychology area reflects emergence of a flow of interests towards positivistic psychology concepts in work (Donaldson and Ia Ko, 2010).



**Figure 1. Interest in positive psychology-oriented publications**

Positivistic movement in work is a revolution in the areas of management and leadership in organization and workplaces, has proved its significant effects on many of classic or obsoleted procedures in the organization, and due to these considerable achievements in the workplaces has attracted many theoreticians and researchers. For example, researches has shown that these changes from organizational pure sciences to paying more attention to positive characteristics of the staff results in effectiveness of the management procedures (Luthans *et al.*, 2010) and policies and improvement in staffs 'mental and physical health (Wright *et al.*, 2009). Researches indicate that paying attention to capabilities and capacities of staffs in both work and private life with lead to operation improvement, happiness increase, self-confidence, self-esteem, flexibility, freshness and joy, job efficiency, goal achievement, personal growth and development, and stress reduction. That is why researchers and theoreticians support the attitudes towards creating competitive advantages through employing staffs 'capabilities and capacities and management and leadership procedures in workplaces (Lewis, 2011). Broaden theoretical supports such as, theory of

construction and development by Fredrickson (2001), indicates that positive emotions expand thinking procedures (e.g. Brain Storm Technique) hence result in creating resources and this process will be repeated in a cycle, so that utilizing some aspects of positivistic psychology in workplace will increase the possibility of experiencing its other aspects (Mills *et al.*, 2013). This theory is in the line with emotional contagion approach (Hatfi *et al.*, 1994). For example, theory offers a simple behavior such as demonstrating their feelings to staff, will not only reinforce positivism in themselves but will reinforce this attitude in the staff (Johnson, 2009). This is also true about a group, that is, a positive experience between two members of a group will be spread among all group member and all of them shortly start to share their positive feelings (Walter and Bruch, 2008). In this stage, different components and areas are working together like a chain, in workplace and give an increase to the potential abilities of each component.

Hence, it is obvious that identification of positive organizational 'capabilities, attitudes, procedures, and policies can cause growth and development of positivism at work and achievement of considerable

results and consequently help in creation of a competitive advantage in the rough workplace.

Now, we will discuss positivistic psychological approaches, positivistic organizational behavior, and positivistic organizational research as some novel positivistic psychological approaches at work.

### Organizational positivistic psychology

Although there is no clear definition of organizational positivistic psychology provided yet, this term function in the subject literature is being common. It has been studied under different titles and definition such as positivistic psychology at work, positivistic workplace, and positivistic environment (Martin and Jackson, 2008; Wiegand and Geller, 2005). Donaldson and Co (2010) have referred to positivistic organizational psychology as a branch of positivistic psychology that is focusing on business issues in organization. This definition requires determining the quiddity and nature of positivistic psychology. As indicated previously, positivistic psychology is the science of positive mental experiences, individual characteristic, and institutions. However, it also requires more clarification on the definition and purpose of institutions, because institutions do not only consist of organizations (Donaldson and Ia Ko, 2010). Searle (2005) has defined constitutions and institutions, in term of economics, as any system of accepted cumulative law (procedures and methods) that enable us to create constitutional facts provided by them (Huang and Blumenthal, 2009). Some facts such as be an American citizen, owning a house in California, 14<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2010 that is New Year Day of Christian in some Asian countries, are all constitutional facts because are true just in some specific constitutions. Constitutions can be variable form big companies to Marriage registration office. On the same basis, organizations can be considered as constitutions but the vice versa is not true (Donaldson and Ia Ko, 2010). Peterson (2006), also in support of Spretl's (2005) definition, defines constitutions as groups of organizations as a whole with extensive and stable effects in a specific society or the whole world. He introduces free Press and Democracy as some examples of constitutions in the western countries. In facts, he had distinguished Organizations and constitutions. He has considered organization as a stable and structured group that has its own customs, and its members have different and specialized roles (Peterson, 2006). It seems that some studies conducted on different positivistic constitutions are in accordance with Peterson theory (Huang and Blumenthal, 2009). Donaldson and Co (2010), according to theories of Sirel (2005) and

Peterson (2006), and the literature of positivistic organizations, have considered positivistic organizations as a subset of positivistic constitutions. They have defined organizational positivistic psychology as scientific study of mental experiences and positive individual characteristics in workplace and positivistic organization with the aim of efficiency improvement and quality increasing of the life in organizations. Moreover, they believe that positivistic organizational psychology is a title that covers organizational positivistic behavior and organizational positivistic knowledge at the same time according to the research subject and studios level (Donaldson and Ia Ko, 2010).

### Organizational positivistic behavior

Organizational positivistic behavior is derived from studies of leadership institute of Nebraska university (Luthans and Avolio, 2003). Luthans, has proposed a new approach of organizational positivistic behavior by combination of two factors of positivist psychological attitudes and positivistic organizations. He defines organizational positivistic behavior as study and application of positivism in capabilities of human resources and psychological capacities that can be measured, improved, and be managed to improve efficiency in workplaces (Luthans, 2010). In fact, the main aim of organizational positivistic behavior is to pay more attention and to improve abilities and capabilities of human resources rather than focusing on their weaknesses and inefficiencies and attempting to solve them. Therefore, according to the main theoreticians of this new study area, organizational positivistic behavior can be considered as a response to such achievements (Youssef and Luthans, 2009) and attempts to fill the void left by such approaches in workplace through its new insights, theorizations, and studying. Psychological capital is the main consideration of organizational positivistic behavior. Psychological capital, is an extensible psychological attitude with the following characteristics: be committed and do the necessary efforts to be successful in challenging duties (self-confidence/self-efficiency); have enough positive supporting on present and future successes (optimism); stability in goal achievement and changing direction, if necessary, in goal achievement to be successful (hopefulness); and stability when encountering problems and difficulties to achieve success (flexibility).

Theories and studies indicate that four elements, including: hopefulness, optimism, flexibility and self-efficiency, are correlated and coming together can shape a high level component to that researches refer

as psychological capital. In addition, researchers support the convergence and distinctions between these four positive psychological elements (Luthans *et al.*, 2007). Researches show that these elements can be synergetic, and will have a more variation than organizational expected result. In fact, the whole psychological capital is larger than its components (Luthans, 2010). Psychological capital refers to the concept of “who you are (Real Ego)” and “who you want to be (possible Ego)” on an extensible and developable basis (Avolio and Luthans, 2006). Followers of psychological capital argue that its development in all the organization levels is of a high potentially HR management strategy to invest on human resources for present and future (Toor and Ofori, 2010). According to Luthans *et al.* (2007), today, for an efficient management it is required to change their direction towards a new paradigm in which excellence and maintaining competitive advantage is not provided through classic resources (Physical, Financial and technologic). They claim that, what is referred to as psychological can be proposed as competitive advantage through investment on human resources. Results of researches indicate, though financial resources and investments are necessary for development, cannot be good predictors of organization’s efficiency and development when are considering solely, and high efficiency can be achieved just through investment on non-classical, inconspicuous resources (specially psychological investment) (Avolio and Luthans, 2006). Hence, the most efficiency will be achieved by investment on staffs ‘potencies. Therefore, Luthans, *et al.* (2004), indicate that by avoiding focusing on weaknesses and inefficiencies of the staff by managers and colleagues, then it is possible

to pay attention to their potencies and desirable qualities and increase their level of self-confidence, optimism, hopefulness, and flexibility to improve their organizational and individual efficiencies (Luthans, *et al.*, 2004).

On the other hand, according to researchers, importance of psychological capital is more than social capital and human capital (Luthans *et al.*, 2004; Enkvick, 2005). Because, economic capital emphasizes on “what do you have?” human capital emphasizes on “what do you know?” and social capital emphasizes on “who do you know?” while psychological capital emphasizes on “Who you are?” and “who you can be?”. For example, researches show that psychological capital may have more effects on positive occupational attitude, than known approaches, i.e. human and social capitals it also is more effective in creating occupational commitment and satisfaction. As researchers also have indicated, effective, psychological capital management has the capacity of developing abilities and capabilities of staff, and is potentially helpful for organization in achieving to a stable level of competitive advantage (Toor and Ofori, 2010). According to Luthans *et al.* (2007), new approach of psychological capital, to achieve competitive advantage is based on the fact that most of the organization have not known the real potentials of human resources yet. These organizations have not a good understanding of the value of human resources, so they neither make investment on them nor effectively develop or manage this resource. According to Berni (1991), when an organization is implementing an strategy that their rivals cannot mimic or model it at the same time it is claimed that they has achieved a competitive advantage.

**Table 1. Comparison of institutional investors on the basis of competitive advantage of Berni (1991)**

	Resources	Durability	Unique	Additive	Associate	Renewable
Cultural Resources	Financial	Not	Not	Yes	Not	Not
	Financial, structural / physical	Yes	Not	Yes	Perhaps	Perhaps
	Technology	Not	Not	Perhaps	Not	Not
Human capital	Tacit knowledge	Perhaps	Not	Yes	Not	Perhaps
	Explicit knowledge	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Social Capital	Networks	Perhaps	Yes	Yes	Yes	Perhaps
	Norms and the norms	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Trust	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Efficacy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Psychological Capital	Hope	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Flexibility	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Optimism	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

As can be observed in table 1, among different type of capitals (Financial, social and human) the only one includes all criteria of Brain's stable competitive advantages is psychological capital. As it was mentioned previously, the most important advantage of positivistic organizational behavior components (psychological capital) is their state nature, and it is necessary to explain their differences with psychological characteristics. Generally, it seems that combination of synergy of human, social, psychological capitals is the central aim in achieving human resources (i.e. achieving possible Ego) capacities in nowadays workplaces, and like individual capacities, in the interactions psychological capital solely have more effectiveness than social and human capital, and the whole psychological capital is larger than its components (social and human capital).

### Differences of psychological characteristics and psychological states

Through all these years, in the field of psychology, there had been significant discussions and disagreements on the differences between characteristic and state (Allen and Potkay, 1981). Even though, these two concepts are often discussed and analyzed separately and independently, some researchers believe that they likely are the two ends of a continuum. At one end there are characteristics that cannot be simply changed and developed and at the other end there are states for which the possibility of development and change is much more

(Luthans *et al.*, 2010). Luthans *et al.* (2004) described the properties of the continuum a following:

In the latest section of the states, there are transient and very changeable states that are, in fact, indicator of emotions (joy, mental and happiness). In the section of state continuum, there are flexible and extensible states, which re indicators for psychological capital (self-efficacy/self-confidence, hopefulness, optimism, flexibility) (Luthans *et al.*, 2010), moving through psychological characteristics continuum, we will find stable psychological characteristics that are very difficult to change and are indicators for character and capabilities (e.g. five significant personality attributes including central self-assessment, virtuosic and strong character) at the end of characteristics continuum there are more stable psychological characteristics that are not likely to be changed (intelligence, talent and Hereditary traits) (Luthans, 2010; Luthans *et al.*, 2010).

Hoveyda *et al.* (2011) also indicated that, though sometimes awareness about psychological characteristics that are more ingrained with the character can be a general predictor in finding a right person for the role, sometimes psychological states can be better predictors of successful implementation and development of the assigned role. Some researches show that psychological capital has more considerable added value for organization's desirable results, than demographic, self-assessment characteristic and characteristic aspects, and proportion between person and organization (P-O) and person and job (P-J) (Avey *et al.*, 2010).

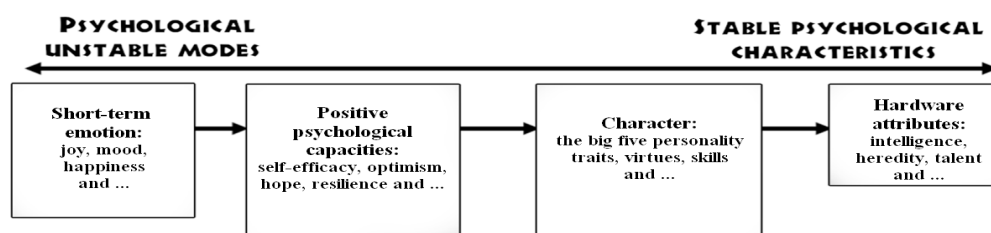


Figure 2. The relationship between psychological attributes and modes

Yossef and Luthans (2009), also suggest, against the emphasizes on technical skills, positive psychological states and characteristics should be used as a criteria for designation of the best managers and staff (Youssef and Luthans, 2009). Hung and Lee (2013) also represented in their research that psychological capital works as an intermediate in work-path capital and work-path success. They added that, psychological capital will cause individuals to use their cognitive resources to maintain motivating energy to adopt with the job in the whole

work-path (Hodges, 2010). Psychological capital, considering theoretical and experimental aspects is potential for growth and development through implementation of interventional program called PCI (Luthans *et al.*, 2004). Hodges (2010), has showed in a research that trial courses have a significant psychological effects on job enthusiasm and organizational efficiency. These interferences related to development of psychological capital has been examined primarily, in online courses and led to positive results (Luthans *et al.*, 2008). Luthans

*et al.* (2007), used Scarliffkey approach (1996) in order to calculate rate of capital return of 74 managers who participated in micro-financing interference psychology. Researches indicate high rate of effects of this interferences on business efficiency. Some research results indicate considerable positive effects of psychological capital on staff and organization efficiencies. For example it is determined that psychological capital has a positive relationship with facilitation of organization reformation, efficiency increase, job commitment and satisfaction increase, citizen behavior increase and has a relationship with absence in workplace, organizational behavior deviation. Walumbwa *et al.* (2010), also showed in their research that high level of psychological capital of organizational managers has a significant positive effects on staff efficiency (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2010).

### Positivistic organizational research

This had derived from researches of study group of Michigan university (Cameron *et al.*, 2003). Positivistic organizational research rooted in organizational, psychological, and sociological studies and is focused on the organizational dynamicity that improve human ability, flexibility, improvement and restitution (Cameron *et al.*, 2003). In fact, it seems that this concept includes the main values of positivistic movement and. The word “organization” is focused on procedures and conditions that occur in the content and background of the organization. The word “study” is referring to the accuracy, theory, scientific procedures, exact definitions, and credit research, that this approach is based on it (Bernstein, 2003). Positivistic organizational research perspective, assumes that secrete detection, making human excellence and development in organizations will cause fulfillment of potential capacities, facility achievement, and movement towards organizational and individual positive efficiency. In fact, the main aim of this approach is to make a positive deviation through methods that help organizations and their members to in their growth and prosperity

and blossoming some perfect methods (Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2004). The main consideration of positivistic organization a research is to study the result, procedure and positive communication between organizations and their members (Cameron *et al.*, 2003). The main idea of research on organizational positivistic behavior is to understand the triggers of such positivistic behaviors in workplace, so that enable organizations to achieve new levels of success (Roberts *et al.*, 2005). One of the similarities between organization a positivistic research and organization a classic behavior is its attention toward staff efficiency and their motivational responses to workplace (Ramlall, 2008). Positivistic organizational research is looking for studying organizations that are defined by flexibility, vivacity, trust, organizational superiority, positive changes, excellence, and meaningfulness (Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2004; Fullagar and Kelloway, 2009) and achieve success by creating welfare and prosperity for human resources (Bernstein, 2003). Moreover, Remral (2008) indicates that, staffs that characterized by positivistic attitude make better prediction of higher job efficiency. For example, the importance of excellence for organizations is due to its effectiveness in helping organizations to overcome problems and achieving positive results even in crisis because of their bolstering nature (Donaldson and Ia Ko, 2010). Moreover, researches conducted on American firms after 11<sup>th</sup> September accident indicates that firms that do not follow classic and ordinary procedures in crisis and instead of that follow positivistic organizational procedure (organizational excellence) will act more successful and not only survive and maintain their stability, but can achieve more significant successes (Lewis, 2011).

### Difference between positivistic organization behavior and organizational research

Though these two approaches are practically complementary of each other, they are different in some aspects as they have been explained in the following table:

**Table 2. Positive organizational behavior and research-oriented approach to organizational differences (Hoveyda *et al.*, 2011)**

Features	Approach	Positive organizational behavior-oriented	Positive organizational research-oriented
Surface analysis		Micro level (individual)	Macro level (organizational)
Methods		Survey Research tools: Questionnaire	Qualitative and quantitative Research tools: More interviews
Impact on performance		Of certain	Possible effect
Capability development		Possible	Is likely to be

The most important difference is that positivistic organizational research mainly focus on macro problems and positivistic organizational behavior mainly focuses on micro or individual level problems that affects level of staff efficiency (Cameron, 2003).

Another distinctive aspect is that positivistic organizational researches consider concepts such as compassion and excellence that may enables extensibility and efficiency affection or not (Luthans and Avolio, 2009). In other words, it cannot be said that concepts of positivistic organizational research can positively affect efficiency undoubtedly, whilst, a concept to be in accordance with criteria of positivistic organizational behavior should have stative criteria or in other words, it should be expandable and be associated with the efficiency results this two approaches are also different in their study and research methods. As, in positivistic organizational behavior, micro-level and middle analistic methods are applied, survey research is used in this approach and positivistic organizational research mainly consider higher organization level and use qualitative and quantitative methods (Luthans and Avolio, 2009). Of course, it cannot be said definitely that positivistic organizational behavior just study individuals and positivistic organizational research just study organizations. In fact, they consider components in multiple levels. But, this two approached accomplish that in absolutely different ways. positivistic organizational behavior employs inductive method (e.g. from individual to group and then organization) while positivistic organizational research has vice versa movement (Donaldson and Ia Ko, 2010). Simply, positivistic organizational behavior and knowledge, share general roots of positivistic psychology and unveil the importance of scientific procedures in developing the science of positivistic psychology.

## Conclusions

Classical approaches of human resources have mainly focused on error correction and used to pay less attention to positive capacities of staff. In this regard, and parallel to the philosophy of positivistic psychology in considering individual positive capacities some researchers had paid more attention to importance and capacity of utilizing the principals and achievements of positivistic psychology at work, which resulted in emergence of two movements of positivistic organizational behavior and positivistic organizational research. Positivistic organizational behavior mainly emphasizes on the individual area and positive and extensible states of the staff, whilst positivistic organi-

zational research mainly emphasizes on procedures, policies, and macro-levels of organization. It seems that, now to achieve optimal results and accessing stable competitive advantage both of the approaches are considered by managers and human resources leaders.

Combination of these two approaches will lead into creation of a positivistic and inspiring organization in which staff feel more joy and blossoming that in turns leads into increase in efficiency and productivity of the organization.

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