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Harnessing Positivity at Workplace from Perception to Action

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Abstract

This paper looks into the competitive organizational edge that organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB) create and attempts to answer why some organizations are high performers and others are not. Inspired by the positive psychology movement [1] the study explores the psychological processes that lead to OCBs by developing a conceptual framework of progressive stages of employee-organization relationship shaped by employees' perceptions of organizational support, evaluation of organizational self-worth, development of positive psychological resources, positive in-role behavior and finally organizational citizenship behaviors. The study observes OCB as a higher order organizational behavior which is proposed to be the concluding stage in the conceptual framework and occurs only after the successful fulfillment of the prerequisites of the lesser order organizational behaviors. The extent literature has been searched and case studies of high performing fortune 100 firms were examined viewing the employee-organization connection as a progressive multistage relationship. The framework is backed up by three supporting theories- Social Exchange Theory, Organizational support Theory, and Broaden and Build Theory. Both theory and empirical research affirms that OCB is potentially a higher order behavior and signals concluding stage of employee positive organizational experiences. It is also affirmed that positivity has a spillover effect and can be harnessed by understanding the dynamics of psychological processes that shape employees' perceptions and actions. Additionally it supports the proposition that positive self-evaluation and positive organizational behaviors have diminishing effects on counterproductive employee behaviors.

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Keywords: Positive Psychology Movement (PPM), Perceived Organizational Support (POS), Core Self Evaluation (CSE), Positive Organizational Behavior (POB), Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), Social Exchange Theory (SET), Organizational Support Theory (OST), Broaden and Build Theory (BBT).

1. Introduction to the Framework for Positive Organization

Organizations need positive employees who thrive with confidence, hope, resiliency and optimism even in the most turbulent times. In today's rapidly changing work environment, characterized by market instability, turbulent political-economic conditions, terrorism, wars and natural disasters, fueled by ever emerging globalization issues, the need to develop positive minded employees possessing greater confidence, resilience, hope and optimism and a nourishing workplace environment has emerged more than ever before [49]. Therefore, basic purpose of this study is to develop better understanding of cause-effect relationship of organizational support on the employees' workplace perceptions, emotions and behaviors to develop a framework that could help building positive, valuable and enduring employee-organization relationship.

This is explored by testing a) whether the effects of perceived organizational support with the mediation of core self-evaluation and positive organization behavior produce organizational citizenship behaviour? b) whether perceived organizational support, core self-evaluation, positive organizational behavior, and organizational citizenship behavior are developed in a sequential order corresponding with specific organizational outcomes?; and c) whether the employees with positive CSE are high performers and whether the high performers show high level of OCBs and eliminate counterproductive behaviors?

Building on [2] that the organizational effectiveness and performance depends upon three fundamental components of employees' behaviors, including; a) staying with the organization; b) successful accomplishment of in-role jobs; c) readily indulging in extra-role activities, the study develops its framework of positive organization. This study views these processes in a progressive order and establishes the link with four selected variables of the study. The proposed framework is supported by three corresponding theories- Social Exchange Theory (SET) [3], Organizational Support Theory (OST)[4], and Broaden and Built Theory (BBT)[5][6].

The stages pertain to employees' experiences, emotions and actions at workplace. *The first stage* refers to the employee stay with the organization, where the employee interactions and experiences with the organization develop his perceptions and emotions about the organization and are termed as perceived organizational support (POS) which is the independent variable in this study. The OST suggests that employees' perceptions of organizational support depend upon the quality of treatment that an organization extends towards its employees.

The second stage refers to the two sub stages linking CSE and POB- the two mediating variables in the framework. At this stage first the employee evaluates his organizational self-worth which results in his building psychological capital. At an individual level positive perception of organizational support will result in positive evaluation of self-worth or high core self-evaluation (CSE) in terms of enhanced self-esteem, self-efficacy, internal locus of control and reduced neuroticism. Secondly the positive self-evaluation subsequently results in high in-role performance or positive organizational behaviors (POB). In terms of reciprocity norm and social exchange, employees who believe that their organization values them and cares for their well-being are more likely to feel a sense of obligation toward the organization and, therefore, to reciprocate the favorable treatment with high in-role performance, increased loyalty and commitment [7].

The third stage is the concluding stage that refers to extra-role behavior which corresponds with the employee indulgence in OCBs as organizationally most desirable higher order employee behavior. This study takes up OCB as a dependent variable. According to social exchange theory [3], organizational citizenship behaviors comprise valuable employee's contribution to an organization in exchange for organizational rewards they obtain. The exchanges are based upon the norm of reciprocity and a felt obligation to reciprocate [8] [9]. [5] supporting this notion through the 'broaden and build theory of positive emotions' state that positive experiences have a broadening impact on a persons' ability for adopting valuable behaviors and also building up useful personal capabilities and psychological resources. The positivity that spills out of the dynamic positive link between positive perceptions of organizational

support, positive self-evaluation, positive organizational behaviors and organizational citizenship behaviors is believed to be contagious in nature and proposed to have diminishing effects on the dysfunctional, counterproductive and negative emotions and behaviors barricading employees from achieving organizational goals [10, 50].

2. The Proposed Framework of Positive Organization

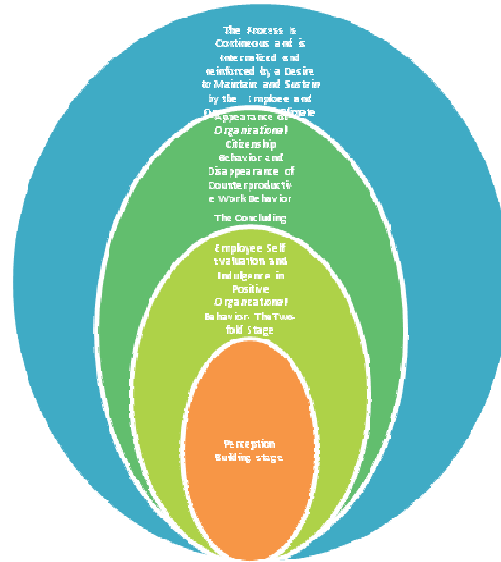


Fig 1 Framework for positive organization

The study proposes that high POB and CSE of employees translate into high in-role performance which is their core-job. Once they achieve their core performance objectives, they strive to indulge in OCBs to further support and enhance organizational performance and effectiveness. This important distinction is made on two assumptions; first that stimulated by POS, employees with high POB and CSE would most likely to prioritize between their in-role and extra-role behaviors. It is more logical that being under obligation to respond positively they will focus what is most important for the organizational effectiveness and this would direct them to first attend to their core-jobs or in-role jobs. Once they accomplish their in-role goals, they will be attending to their extra-role jobs or OCBs more positively and confidently. And this may be viewed as spill over effects of positivity in terms of positive work experiences, positive states and positive behaviors at work place.

Therefore, in-role and extra-role performance are highly interlinked and interdependent. One cannot think of an employee high on CSE and POB, who would prefer his extra-role performance on the cost of his in-role. Similarly a manager or leader would be quite sceptical to evaluate positively an employee who would be helping out a colleague leaving his own work unattended. It is important to argue that employee high in CSE and POB are employees with high competencies and skills and thus highly valued by their organization, thus they would be more likely to behave in a manner that would best support and further enhance their pre-established organizational worth, which means they will be high performers both in their in-role and extra-role behaviors and would contribute effectively in both roles. Thus the study attempts to establish a hierarchical link between perceived organizational support, core self-evaluation,

positive organizational behaviors and organizational citizenship behaviors as the final outcomes or concluding stage of this relationship and propose this framework to harness positivity at workplace.

The study examines the mediating effects of core self-evaluation on the relationship between perceived organizational support and positive organizational behaviors and then the mediating effects of positive organizational behaviors on the relationship between core self-evaluation and organizational citizenship behaviors. The basic assertion of this study is that POS produces OCBs only when employees have positive work behaviors and positive core self evaluation. The study also suggests that positive CSE and POB have diminishing/reducing effects on counterproductive work behaviors.

Thus the present study has the following objectives to pursue; a) whether the effects of perceived organizational support with the mediation of core self-evaluation and positive organization behavior produce organizational citizenship behavior and b) whether perceived organizational support, core self-evaluation, positive organizational behavior, and organizational citizenship behavior are developed in a sequential order corresponding with specific organizational outcomes and c) whether the employees with positive CSE are high performers and whether the high performers show high level of OCBs and eliminate counterproductive behaviors?

3. Key Constructs

3.1. Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

POS indicates that “employees develop beliefs about the degree to which the organization gives importance to and value their role by taking care of their interest and welfare” [11]. It has been a producer of optimistic employee attitudes and behaviors at work place with high job satisfaction, organizational commitment and intention to stay at work [7]. POS is extensively researched in terms of its relationship with numerous job-outcomes.

3.2. Core Self-Evaluation (CSE)

[12] defined core self-evaluation as “basic conclusions or bottom-line evaluations that individuals hold about themselves”. Bono and Judge observe that core self-evaluation is a multidimensional construct having high order traits of self-esteem, locus of control, emotional stability and generalized self-efficacy that are greatly interlinked. These traits are correlated with job satisfaction and job performance and can potentially predict both (Bono). A number of constructs are related to CSE indicating strong relationship between CSE and various individual and organizational outcomes. The CSE has been found highly linked with employee workplace attitudes and behaviors and has significant impacts on Job satisfaction (Bono), [13][14][15][16][17][18] [19], commitment [20], motivation [16], goal commitment [16], self-concordant goals [21], stress [22], job performance [23], leadership [24], and happiness and life satisfaction [25]. But up till now no study has tested CSE as a mediator between POS and POB and POS and OCB.

3.3. Positive Organizational Behaviors (POB)

The second mediating variable of the study POB is defined as the “study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” [26]. These capacities include hope, optimism, resiliency, and self-efficacy [27][28][29][30]. The important aspect of these psychological capacities relates to their flexibility for being developed, groomed and to be easily measurable in terms of performance improvement [26] [31]. POB is positively related to a number of individual and organizational outcomes. The studies show positive relationship between hope, optimism

and resiliency with job satisfy action, work commitment, and work happiness [30], positive leadership and authentic leadership [32] [33] [34], LMX [32], positive leadership [35], transformational leadership [36][37], altruistic leadership [38] and charismatic leadership [39], follower job satisfaction and performance [40], organizational performance [41] [42]. Positive relationship is observed between organizational outcomes and generalized optimism with greater expectancy for future success, coping stress, job-satisfaction, and job-performance during and after downsizing [43] building future capacity for rapid recovery after organizational tragedy like shooting [44].

3.4. Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Organ defined OCB as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and in aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” [3][45]. [46] later modified his earlier definition of OCB and incorporated features of Contextual performance [47] redefining OCB as “contributions to the maintenance and enhancement of social and psychological context that support task performance”. OCB is a distinct and higher order behavior which is a result of employees’ positive workplace experiences, in turn produce positive core self-evaluation, promotes positive psychological capital, and are demonstrated through positive organizational behaviors. At a higher level these positive experiences, positive core self-evaluation, positive psychological capital and positive organizational behaviors accumulate in a higher order behavior – called organizational citizenship behavior. Numerous studies have suggested that OCB is significantly related to employee workplace affective states, attitudes and behavior and thus is a significant indicator of individual and organizational performance [48].

4. Methodology

The sample data is to be collected from three service sectors of education, banking, and telecom including private and public organizations in Pakistan. Data analysis will be done by using SPSS software applying multivariate hierarchical linear model (MHLM).

5. Conclusion

By examining the extent literature it is concluded that both theory and empirical research support the basic assertion of this study that OCB is a higher order behavior which signifies a concluding stage of employee positive perceptions of organizational support, positive core self-evaluation, and positive organizational behavior. POS produces OCBs only when employees have accomplished the targets of their in-role performance. It also support the notion that positivity is potentially self-sustainable as the employees positive experiences generate a desire for maintaining and sustaining positive workplace climate, which establishes an on-going cycle of reproduction of positive workplace perceptions, emotions and behaviors that eventually become incorporated and internalized in the workplace environment. The study also suggests that positive CSE and POB have diminishing reducing effects on counterproductive work behaviors. In short the literature clearly highlight that efforts to improve organizations can be more fruitful and less taxing if the dynamics of employee-organization relationship are managed with the application of positive approaches and processes. The study concludes that organizations need to create positively interdependent employee-organization relationship through care and respect and expect the same in return.

The study is making three significant contributions to the organizational behavior literature: i) to the knowledge of the researcher up till now no study has checked CSE and POB together as mediators between POS and OCB, while OCB is taken as a highest order variable and the concluding stage of positive employee experiences; ii) no study has proposed the relationship between the selected variables

of this study in a progressive-stage model of emotions and actions in an organizational context; and iii) the study proposes to test this framework in a non-western country that may add new cultural and geographical perspective to the existing body of knowledge on positive organizational behavior.

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