Efficacy, Hope, Optimism and Resilience at Workplace – Positive Organizational Behavior

Akshay Malik

Civil Engineering Department, IIT Delhi

Abstract- This paper will attempt to define positive organizational behavior and outline the role of self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience in maintaining positive behavior in an organization. Recent researches and findings by famous psychologists are stated at relevant points to relate the four coreconstructs to the positive organizational behavior (POB). The focus of the paper is also towards giving practical suggestions for creating a workplace that is conducive to being confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient and promotes a sense of well-being.

I. POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

It is 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 (Luthans, 2002a, p. 59). Luthans has argued that the inclusion criteria for POB are being theory and research based, measurable, developmental, and manageable for performance impact in the workplace¹. Wright (2003) argued that the mission of POB must also include the pursuit of employee happiness and health as viable goals in themselves.

Both individual and organizational performance is improved by developing good qualities like *self-confidence*, *hope*, *optimism and resilience*. When combined, these four positive psychological resources have been demonstrated theoretically and empirically to be a higher-order core factor that Luthans and colleagues termed as psychological capital or PsyCap, Luthans F, Youssef (2004).

II. SELF-EFFICACY

It is the first and most theoretically developed and researched POB construct. Stajkovic and Luthans (1998b) define confidence (or self-efficacy) as the "individual's conviction about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context²."

Self-efficacy, a key element in Bandura's(1977b, 1978b) social learning theory refers to one's belief in one's capability to perform a specific task. Self-efficacy arises from gradual acquisition of complex cognitive, social, linguistic, and/or physical skills through experience (Bandura, 1982). Self-efficacy has three dimensions – *Magnitude*, *Strength* and *Generality*. *Magnitude* applies to the level of task difficulty that a person believes he or she can attain. *Strength* refers to whether the conviction regarding magnitude is strong or weak. *Generality*

indicates the degree to which the expectation is generalized across situations.

Self-efficacy vs self-esteem: Self-esteem is a global construct of one's evaluation and belief of overall worthiness, whereas self-efficacy is one's belief about a task-and context specific capability. Self-esteem is aimed at any aspect of one's current self, whereas self-efficacy is a current assessment of one's future success at a task.

Self-efficacy vs. attribution/locus of control: Another construct that is often confused with self-efficacy comes from attribution theory, specifically locus of control. Bandura has argued that locus of control attributions are causal beliefs about action-outcome contingencies, whereas self-efficacy is an individual's belief about his or her abilities and cognitive resources that can be marshaled together to successfully execute a specific task.

Self-efficacy affects learning and performance in three ways (Bandura, 1982):

- 1. Self-efficacy influences the goals that employees choose for themselves. Employees with low levels of self-efficacy tend to set relatively low goals for themselves. Conversely, an individual with high self-efficacy is likely to set high personal goals. Research indicates that people not only learn but also perform at levels consistent with their self-efficacy beliefs.
- 2. Self-efficacy influences learning as well as the effort that people exert on the job. Employees with high self-efficacy generally work hard to learn how to perform new tasks, because they are confident that their efforts will be successful. Employees with low self-efficacy may exert less effort when learning and performing complex tasks, because they are not sure the effort will lead to success.
- 3. Self-efficacy influences the persistence with which people attempt new and difficult tasks. Employees with high self-efficacy are confident that they can learn and perform a specific task.

Sources of Self-Efficacy

Since self-efficacy can have powerful effects on organizations, it is important to identify its origin. Bandura (1997) has identified four principal sources of self-efficacy: past performance, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional cues³.

Past performance: Employees who have succeeded on jobrelated tasks are likely to have more confidence to complete similar tasks in the future (high self-efficacy) than employees who have been unsuccessful (low self-efficacy).

Vicarious experience: Seeing a coworker succeed at a particular task may boost your self-efficacy.

Verbal persuasion: This involves convincing people that they have the ability to succeed at a particular task. The best way for a leader to use verbal persuasion is through the Pygmalion effect. The Pygmalion effect is a form of a self-fulfilling prophesy in which believing something to be true can make it true

Emotional cues: A person who expects to fail at some task or finds something too demanding is likely to experience certain physiological symptoms: a pounding heart, feeling flushed, sweaty palms, headaches, and so on. Edwin Locke and Gary Latham suggest that goal-setting theory and self-efficacy theory complement each other. When a leader sets difficult goals for employees, this leads employees to have a higher level of self-efficacy and also leads them to set higher goals for their own performance.

Selection/Promotion Decisions

Organizations should select individuals who have high levels of self-efficacy. These people will be motivated to engage in the behaviors that will help them perform well in the workplace. A measure of self-efficacy can be administered during the hiring/promotion process.

Training and Development

Organizations should consider employee levels of self-efficacy when choosing among candidates for training and development programs. If the training budget is limited, then greater return on training investment can be realized by sending only those employees high in self-efficacy. These people will tend to learn more from the training and, ultimately, will be more likely to use that learning to enhance their job performance.

Goal Setting and Performance

Organizations can encourage higher performance goals from employees who have high levels of self-efficacy. This will lead to higher levels of job performance from employees, which is critical for many organizations in an era of high competition.

III. HOPE

Snyder et al. (1991) defines hope as "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-oriented energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)." This meaning of hope consists of both the "willpower" (agency) and the "waypower" (pathways). Importantly, considerable research over the past several years indicates it has a very positive impact on academic achievement, athletic accomplishment, emotional health, the ability to cope with illness and other hardships.

There is a direct work-related impact of hope. For example, Snyder and colleagues, in an ongoing survey of U.S. firms, have found that those with higher-hope human resources are more profitable, have higher retention rates, and have greater levels of employee satisfaction and commitment. A field study we recently conducted found that managers with higher hope levels had correspondingly higher performing work units, better retention rates, and more satisfied employees. Moreover, a recent comprehensive study focused on hope across different types of jobs and industries found more hopeful sales employees,

mortgage brokers, and management executives had higher job performance, and the management executives also produced more and better quality solutions to a work-related problem⁶.

IV. OPTIMISM

Cranny et al. used the term happiness to refer to optimism. Scheier and Carver defined optimism as a set of generalized positive outcome expectancies. According to their conceptualization, people who generally expect that things will go their way and believe that they will have more good outcomes than bad, are dispositionally optimistic.

It is a major construct in positive psychology. There is a positive impact of optimism on physical and psychological health which leads to academic, athletic, political and occupational success. By the same token, pessimism is known to lead to passivity, failure, social estrangement, and, in its extreme, depression and mortality.

There have been only a small number of studies investigating the influence of optimism on performance or workrelated behaviors. Strutton and Lumpkin found that the optimism-performance relationship was moderated by the type of coping strategies used to deal with stress in the workplace. They showed that optimistic individuals used more problem-focused coping strategies and that they outperformed pessimistic individuals in the work environment 7 . This finding was replicated with a group of teleworkers in a study by Norman, Collins, Conner, and Martin. The participants in the Norman et al. study who were more optimistic and used more problemfocused coping reported a greater number of positive psychological and work-related outcomes as compared to the predominantly pessimistic individuals who used more emotionfocused coping strategies. Several other researchers have investigated the relationship of optimism to performance in other areas such as academics. The results of the studies gave overwhelming support for the hypothesis that optimism and academic performance were positively and significantly related to one another. As a result, it is believed these findings may be generalized to the work environment.

The importance of optimism to the human species is shown by Martin Seligman's work (Seligman, 1991) in analyzing USA political speeches using his CAVE technique - Content Analysis of Verbatim Explanations - where he analyzed the nomination acceptance speeches of candidates for the USA presidential elections. In the twenty-two presidential elections from 1900 to 1984, Americans chose the more optimistic-sounding candidate eighteen times. In all elections in which an underdog pulled off an upset, he was the more optimistic candidate.

Optimism in the Workplace

Optimism could be a very positive force in the workplace. For example, optimists may be motivated to work harder; be more satisfied and have high morale; have high levels of aspiration and set stretch goals; persevere in the face of obstacles and difficulties and make attributions of personal failures and setbacks as temporary, not as personal inadequacy. There are some jobs and career fields where optimism would be especially valuable (e.g., sales, advertising, public relations, product design, customer service, and in the health and social services fields).

Moreover, there has been recognition given in leadership theory to the importance of optimism.

Optimism and Well-Being

Optimism is a major contributor to employee well-being¹⁰. It affects our personal growth, our sense of purpose in work, our relations with others, our pride in our accomplishments, and our general level of happiness in work¹². These attitudes in turn contribute to personal satisfaction, good health, and work fulfillment¹³.

V. RESILIENCE

The capacity to "bounce back" from adversity or even dramatic positive changes is particularly relevant in today's turbulent business environment. As a component of positive organizational behavior, resiliency is viewed "as the capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, failure or even positive events, progress and increased responsibility." Organizational resilience is the ability and capacity of a workplace to withstand potential significant economic times, systemic risk, or systemic disruptions by adapting, recovering, or resisting being affected and resuming core operations or continuing to provide an acceptable level of functioning and structure.

Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. Resilience involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone. Resilience is tremendously influenced by a person's environment.

Factors Promoting Resilience: A Theoretical Model

Kumpfer (1999) describes a model for identifying and managing the factors influencing resilience. Her model has six main components: *stressors*, *environmental contexts*, *personenvironment transactional process*, *internal resiliency factors*, *resilience process*, and *adaptation and re-integration*. These components are outlined below 15.

Stressors: stress arises not from the situations people encounter, but from people's perceptions that they are not able to deal with the situation they encounter in a way they deem satisfactory. When people encounter a demanding situation, they evaluate the nature and intensity of the demand, the resources available for dealing with the demand (i.e., their own skills and other people they can draw on for help), and the likely consequences that will result, especially if the demand is not dealt with satisfactorily. Stress results from a person's appraisal that the demands outweigh their available coping resources and negative consequences are likely to result.

Environmental contexts: some situations are more demanding than others, and are hence more likely to overtax one's resources for dealing with the situation satisfactorily. Wolpe (1969) identified three categories of situations in which people predictably feel overtaxed: intensely unpleasant events, situations where there is ambiguity about what is expected, and situations where the consequences are uncertain¹⁶. Typically, people do not develop extensive coping repertoires for dealing with these types of situations, and therefore often experience stress when engaged in these three types of environments.

Person-Environment Transactional Process: Two people can be in the same situation, and experience differing degrees of stress because they have differing skills and resources for dealing with those particular demands. In cases where there is a good match between a person's knowledge and skills, and the demands of the workplace they are in, stress levels likely will be low and vice-versa. A resilience outcome will be more likely when people have the resource base for dealing with the demands they face, and when there is time between periods of intense demand for people to recover.

Internal Resiliency Factors: Personal agency is related to many constructs in the literature, some of which include: self-directedness, self-confidence, self-efficacy, internal locus of control, hopefulness, and optimism. Kumpfer(1999) notes that people who possess these qualities tend to be more persistent and have greater determination, both of which influence resiliency. Resilience Process: People who believe that they can influence their world, and that their own actions are largely responsible for the experiences they encounter, tend to have greater ability to bounce back from unexpected adversity.

Adaptation and Reintegration: People who have adequate repertoires for dealing with the demands they face, and an ability to bounce back from the challenges they encounter, tend to be more flexible and adaptable, qualities which most career theorists and career practitioners see as essential for success.

Creating Resilient Workplaces

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of those in leadership roles (managers and supervisors) to create a workplace climate that fosters well-being and facilitates resilience. Intense and unpleasant demands tend to overload people, especially when the demands are unrelenting and there is insufficient time to regain balance. Even when people are coping well and stress levels are low, prolonged over-demand can lead to burn out and a subsequent negative impact on workers as well as the economy of an organization (Hiebert, 2006)¹⁷. It is managers who are charged with making sure that workplace demands are reasonable and that employees have the appropriate skill and knowledge for dealing with the demands they face.

VI. CONCLUSION

Self-efficacy (beliefs about one's ability to accomplish specific tasks) influences the tasks employees choose to learn and the goals they set for themselves. Self-efficacy also affects employees' level of effort and persistence when learning difficult tasks. Four sources of self-efficacy are past performance, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional cues. Managerial and organizational implications of self-efficacy in the workplace include hiring and promotion decisions, training and development, and goal setting.

In human resource management, hope may play an important role in selection, especially for certain types of jobs and because it is learned and statelike (can change) rather than a stable trait, it can be enhanced by training and development to improve on-the-job performance and retention of valuable employees.

Leaders who understand the organizational and psychological constructs of power, influence, modeling, and

culturalization are well suited to foster optimism. In the face of negative or adverse events, individuals and cultures with optimistic explanatory styles are typically highly motivated, task oriented, socially interactive and supportive, resilient, able to persevere, less prone to stress and depression, able to make effective decisions, and solution focused. With this range of positive organizational influences, taking the time to adopt optimistic explanatory styles within an organization would likely produce efficient, effective and successful work forces.

Personal agency is a central ingredient in resiliency. Resiliency is the ability to bounce back when faced with an unexpected challenge. Resiliency comes in people, but in some contexts it is easier to be resilient, while others make it more difficult. It is in our own personal best interest for each of us to take steps to create a wellness-oriented workplace that fosters resiliency. It is important for all people at all levels of an organization to develop a resilient personal and professional identity. The intrapersonal factors identified by Kumpfer (1999) are all personal characteristics that can be cultivated and enhanced. It is in everyone's best interest to take charge of that part of their own personal and professional development.

REFERENCES

Journals articles:

- [1] Fred Luthans, "The Need for and Meaning of Positive Organizational Behavior," Journal of Organizational Behavior, Vol. 23, 2002, pp. 695–706.
- [2] Albert Bandura, Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control, W. H. Freeman, New York, 1997.
- [3] Stajkovic, A. D., & Luthans, F. (1988). Self-efficacy and work-related performance: A meta-analysis. Psychological Bulletin, 124(2), 240-261.
- [4] V. H. Adams et al. "Hope in the Workplace," in R. Giacoloneand C. Jurkiewicz (Eds.), Workplace Spirituality and Organizational Performance, Sharpe, New York, 2003.
- [5] Suzanne J. Peterson and Fred Luthans, "The Positive Impact and Development of Hopeful Leaders," Leadership and Organizational Development, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2003, pp. 26–31.
- [6] Suzanne J. Peterson and Kristin Byron, "Exploring the Role of Hope in Job Performance: Results from Four Studies," Journal of Organizational Behavior, Vol. 28, 2007, pp. 785–803.
- [7] Strutton, D., and J. Lumpkin. Relationship Between Optimism and Coping Strategies in the Work Environment. Psychological Reports, Vol. 71, No. 3, 1992, pp. 1179-1186.

- [8] Norman P., S. Collins, M. Conner, and R. Martin. Attributions, Cognitions, and Coping Styles: Teleworkers' Reactions to Work-Related Problems. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1995, pp. 117-128.
- [9] Seligman, M.E.P., (1991), Learned Optimism, Alfred Knopf, New York.
- [10] Harter JK, Schmidt FL, Keyes CL. Well-being in the workplace and its relationship to business outcomes: a review of the Gallup studies. In: Keyes CL, Haidt J, eds. Flourishing: the positive person and the good life. Washington, DC: APA, 2003.
- [11] Gavin JH, Mason RO. The virtuous organization: the value of happiness in the workplace. Org Dynam2004; 33:379 –392.
- [12] Chiok Foong Loke J. Leadership behaviours: effects on job satisfaction, productivity and organizational commitment. J Nurs Manag 2001; 9:191 – 204.
- [13] Podsakoff PM, MacKenzie SB. Impact of organizational citizenship behavior on organizational performance: a review and suggestions for future research. Human Performance 1997;10:133–151.
- [14] F. Luthans, "The Need for and Meaning of Positive Organizational Behavior," Journal of Organizational Behavior, Vol. 23, 2002, pp. 695–706.
- [15] Kumpfer, K. L. (1999). Factors and processes contributing to resilience: The resilience framework.
- [16] Wolpe, J. (1969). The practice of behavior therapy. New York: Pergamon.
- [17] Hiebert, b. (2006). A contemporary look at stress and burnout: Clarifying the nuances. The Alberta Counsellor, 29(1), 16-25.

Websites:

- [1] http://www.nationalforum.com/Electronic%20Journal%20Volumes/Lunenburg,%20Fred%20C.%20Self-Efficacy%20in%20the%20Workplace%20IJMBA%20V14%20N1%202011.pdf (Date of access: 26/10/2012)
- [2] http://www.mountain-plains.org/pubs/pdf/MPC97-75.pdf (Date of access: 26/10/2012)
- [3] http://www.tms.com.au/tms10z.html (Date of access: 27/10/2012)
- [4] http://www.ajronline.org/content/190/3/565.short (Date of access: 27/10/2012)
- [5] http://creativewellnessworks.com/wpontent/uploads/CreatingResilientWorkplace.pdf (Date of access: 28/10/2012)

Books:

[1] Organizational Behavior, Fred Luthans, 12th Edition

AUTHORS

First Author – Akshay Malik, Civil Engineering Department, IIT Delhi