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Prosocial Practices, Positive Identity, and Flourishing at Work

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When you think of yourself at work, how do you think you are faring? Are you flourishing at work, feeling a sense of engagement, motivation, growth, and learning, or is languishing a better descriptor for your state of well-being? This chapter explores one important way in which organizations shape our ability to flourish at work. As employees we spend more time engaged with our work organizations than we do with our families, friends, or other institutions (Hochschild, 1997). New technologies are quickly blurring the boundaries between work and non-work, amplifying work immersion for the average employee. In such a world, how do work organizations leave their imprint on employees, or, from a positive organizational psychology perspective, how do work contexts cultivate employee flourishing? In this chapter, we explore how work contexts cultivate employee flourishing through the way they shape the identities that employees construct at work.

We address this link between work contexts, identity, and employee flourishing through a focus on organizational practices. Organizational practices refer to the situated, recurrent activities that people engage in at work (Orlikowski, 2002). For example, organizations have distinct socialization practices to assist newcomers to the organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Organizational researchers have explored how organizational practices affect an organization's strategy (Jarzabkowski, 2004), the design of work (Barley, 1986), organizational learning (Antonacopoulou, 2006), and organizational performance (Cameron, Mora, & Leutscher, 2009). More recently, researchers have been exploring this potentially important link between organizational practices and the construction of employee identity (Carlsen, 2006; Michel, 2007) but there has been a dearth of research on how organizational practices shape work-related identities in ways that foster employee flourishing. A focus on what we call prosocial practices and positive work-related identities permits us to build this important conceptual link.

We build the core arguments of our chapter in four sequential steps. First we introduce the idea of positive work-related identities (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; Roberts & Dutton, 2009). Next we review research suggesting that positive work-related identities are linked to various indicators of flourishing. We note at the outset that few of these studies establish truly causal effects, so additional empirical research is required to validate these links. We then focus on a category of organizational practices – prosocial practices – that seem to have a potent effect on the way employees construct their identities at work. Finally, we outline a research agenda for positive organizational psychology to contribute to society through increasing our understanding of how organizational practices affect employees' identities and their ability to flourish at work.

POSITIVE WORK-RELATED IDENTITIES

Because work is a key domain in people's lives, involvement in work organizations is a critical source of identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Gini, 1998). The term "identity" refers to the way in which an individual constructs or defines him or herself (Gecas, 1982) and "work-related" identities are the meanings that individuals take on through their engagement with aspects of work, including professions, occupations, work-roles, or organizations (Dutton et al., 2010). As employees come to identify with certain aspects of their professions, occupations, work-roles, or organizations, they often infuse their individual identities with the defining characteristics of these collectives or roles. For example, employees who joined Amway began to see themselves as free, family-oriented, altruistic, and successful as they engaged in various practices called "dream-building" (Pratt, 2000). Employees of the Port Authority (PA) of New York and New Jersey saw themselves as talented professionals who were building beautiful edifices and preserving New York City's symbols of global trade (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). As a result, employees felt personally insulted when the PA was criticized by the media for inhumane treatment of homeless persons who were frequenting PA-run buildings (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). These examples remind us that employees often take on qualities and characteristics of their work organizations and fuse them with their own self-constructions.

The desire to construct a positive identity is a central assumption in many psychological and sociological theories (Gecas, 1982; Turner, 1982). We build on this assumption by asking: What are the different ways in which an individual's work identity can be positive? A review of research published in organizational psychology reveals that work-related identities can be positive in at least four different ways (Dutton et al., 2010): content (i.e., the attributes or characteristics that one uses to define him or herself include character strengths and virtues); subjective evaluation (i.e., the identity is regarded favorably); development (i.e., a person sees him or herself as growing in ways that promote maturity and adaptation); or structure (i.e., the multiple facets of one's identity are related in harmonious and complementary ways) (Dutton et al., 2010). For example, a professor may find his or her professional identity to be positive because it is endowed with

the virtue of wisdom; because it is evaluated positively by students; because it is on a trajectory of constant learning and progression; or because it facilitates compatibility and balance between multiple identities (i.e., researcher, teacher, consultant, parent). Each one of these theoretical perspectives on identity points to several different antecedents that cultivate positive identities and different outcomes that are associated with positive identities.

POSITIVE WORK-RELATED IDENTITIES AND FLOURISHING

Dutton and colleagues argue that as employees' work-related identities become more positive, individuals are strengthened and become more capable of dealing with current challenges while identifying and taking advantage of new opportunities (Dutton et al., 2010). Here, we provide suggestive evidence that cultivating various forms of positive work-related identity also promotes employee flourishing more generally. These potential implications for flourishing help to justify why it is important to cultivate positive work-related identities. A variety of conceptual and empirical studies suggest that as employees' work-related identities become more positive, they experience enhanced psychological functioning, positive feelings, and social functioning (the three components of flourishing identified by Keyes' (1998) typology of mental health). For example, one indicator of healthy psychological functioning at work is work engagement. Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, personal state characterized by vigor (e.g., high levels of energy and mental resilience while working), dedication (e.g., significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge), and absorption (e.g., being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work; Hakanen, Perhoniemi, & Toppinen-Tanner, 2008). Research shows that positive self-evaluations of work-related identity are an important predictor of work engagement (Mauno, Kinnunen, & Ruokolainen, 2007; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). Moreover, cultivating an identity at work that is more virtue-based (e.g., understanding and utilizing one's strengths at work) is also related to work engagement (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2003). Research also shows that work engagement is associated with adaptive behaviors (e.g., personal initiative – see Hakanen et al., 2008) and ultimately affects "bottom line" outcomes (e.g., profits, productivity, employee retention, and customer satisfaction; Harter et al., 2003). Taken together, this research on work engagement suggests that cultivating a positive, work-related identity helps individuals to flourish at work.

Other indicators of enhanced psychological functioning include self-acceptance, personal growth, and environmental mastery, or the capacity to effectively manage one's life and surrounding world (Keyes, 1998; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Research on identity change during role challenges suggests that positive identities relate to employee flourishing. For example, Ibarra's (2003) study of professionals in major career transitions suggests that individuals who explore new possible selves at work adapt more effectively to the demands of changing work environments and experience more coherence between who they are and what they do.

This research on psychological functioning further strengthens the claim that cultivating positive identities at work helps individuals to flourish.

Positive identities also may link to flourishing through how they cultivate positive emotions. For example, Fine's (1996) work on restaurant cooks shows that individuals draw on different rhetorics to shape how they think of themselves as workers. These different self-views enable cooks to experience positive emotions such as pride, enthusiasm, and honor, which promote occupational satisfaction, creativity, and social cohesion (Fine, 1996). Positive emotions, in general, help individuals to build cognitive and social resources, counteract the impact of negative emotions, and expand the terrain of possibilities for who an individual can become (Fredrickson, 1998, 2009; see also Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy, & Quinn, 2005, for an organizational application).

A third way in which positive work-related identities promote flourishing is by enhancing social well-being and promoting the adoption of behaviors that build social coherence, social actualization, social integration, social acceptance, or social contribution (Keyes, 1998). For example, a study by Dukerich, Golden, and Shortell (2002) reports that physicians who evaluate their organization's identity (i.e., the health system) more favorably are more willing to engage in cooperative behaviors that will benefit other employees (e.g., extra-role behaviors) as well as the healthcare system as a whole (e.g., referring patients to doctors within the system). The work of Reed and Aquino (2003) suggests that as employees incorporate virtuous attributes and characteristics into their identity (what Reed and Aquino call a moral identity), they will minimize ingroup/outgroup distinctions and show increasing sympathy toward outgroup members. As these ingroup/outgroup distinctions break down, social cohesion can increase in organizations (Reed & Aquino, 2003). These studies on social functioning further substantiate the claim that cultivating more positive identities at work can help employees to flourish.

The preliminary evidence that positive work-related identities may be psychologically and socially beneficial to employees raises the next logical question: How do different workplaces influence the way employees come to understand who they are? How can organizational practices shape or cultivate these forms of positive identity? The next section focuses on a particular kind of work practice that may be a powerful contributor to the construction of a positive identity at work.

PROSOCIAL PRACTICES AND POSITIVE WORK-RELATED IDENTITIES

In organizational studies, there is a rich vein of research that examines organizational practices: the distinctive set of recurrent, patterned activities that characterize an organization (Orlikowski, 2002). These practices are part of an organization's signature, which shapes how the organization's knowledge is organized (Orlikowski, 2002), how resources are created (Feldman, 2004), how organizational learning occurs (Cherardi, 2006), and how organizational change occurs (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). While organizational researchers have focused on how specific human resource-related practices shape employee attitudes and

actions (Losey, Meisinger, & Ulrich, 2005; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005), they have devoted limited attention to how organizational practices impact employees' identities. Yet, because organizational practices are linked to employee doing, and employee doing is linked to employee becoming (Bem, 1972; Carlsen, 2006), it seems logical and productive to ask: What organizational practices are conducive to the cultivation of positive work-related identities?

Our literature search revealed that a certain category of practices – prosocial practices – have a particularly potent influence on the way employees construct their identities. Prosocial practices are designed to protect and/or promote the welfare of other people and provide a conduit for employees to participate in routine helping and giving at work. Research in positive psychology indicates that engaging in helping others and giving to a cause that is larger than oneself promote flourishing (see Piliavin, 2003, for a review of the positive impacts of volunteering on the volunteer). While the direct effects of prosocial behavior outside of the workplace have been examined, such effects within the workplace have received far less attention. A ground-breaking line of research in this vein by Grant (Grant, 2007; Grant, Campbell, Chen, Cottone, Lapedis, & Lee, 2007) and colleagues shows that engaging in prosocial practices at work often increases psychological and social functioning, as indicated by greater persistence, performance, and citizenship behaviors on the job (e.g., Grant, 2008a, 2008b; Grant et al., 2007; Grant & Mayer, 2009).

In this chapter, we expand this line of research by examining organizational practices that cultivate prosocial behavior and, more importantly, locate identity as a central mechanism that can explain why prosocial practices might promote flourishing at work. While a few studies show that engaging in helping behaviors increases self-evaluations (e.g., Newman, Vasudev, & Onawola, 1985), the central role of identity remains underexplored. We suggest that organizations that routinize employees' prosocial thoughts and behaviors through participation in institutionalized practices are more likely to cultivate employees' positive work-related identities. We detail findings from three field studies of employees' identification and/or commitment to their work organizations that provide evidential support for these core claims.

EMPLOYEE SUPPORT PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEES' POSITIVE IDENTITIES

Many work organizations have provided opportunities for employees to participate in different types of employee support practices. Employee support practices include institutionalized procedures and routines that provide emotional, financial, and/or instrumental assistance to employees beyond pay, benefits, or recognition (Grant, Dutton, & Rosso, 2008). For some employee support practices, assistance to employees is provided directly by the organization, such as in childcare or elder care programs (e.g., Cascio, 2003; Goodstein, 1995). Other practices provide opportunities for employee-to-employee helping or giving, such as when organizations allow employees to donate their vacation time to co-workers who need it

(e.g., Griffin Hospital, as cited in Cameron, 2008, p. 11). Organizational researchers often examine how these practices shape employees' performance, commitment, or attachment to the organization (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000; Trice & Beyer, 1984). For our purposes, we are interested in how these practices shape the kinds of identities that individuals construct at work.

Grant et al. (2008) conducted a survey and interview study of a Fortune 500 retail company (called Big Retail) to assess how employee participation in an employee support program (called the Employee Support Foundation, ESF) affected employee commitment. Participants in this program voluntarily granted permission for the company to deduct a dollar from their weekly paycheck. The company matched employee donations at a rate of 50 cents per dollar and donations were pooled in a fund that employees could potentially draw from during crises such as illnesses, family deaths, or financial hardships. The ESF also provided educational scholarships and a bereavement response initiative. Therefore, this form of employee support program allowed employees to both receive and give support to their colleagues when faced with special needs. The 40 interviews and the employee survey revealed that there was a relationship between participation in the ESF and the employees' affective commitment and attachment to the organization. The results also suggested that participation in these programs changed the way individuals viewed the organization's identity and, by association, their own identity as an organizational member (Grant et al., 2008).

First, the interview study (20 store managers and 20 employees) consistently suggested that individuals took on a more positive identity by seeing themselves and the organization as more helpful, caring, and benevolent. While some researchers have called this a prosocial identity (Grant, 2007; Grant, Molinsky, Margolis, Kamin, & Schiano, 2009), this type of identity content implies that people are defining themselves with virtuous strengths or qualities such as kindness, generosity, care, compassion, niceness, and love (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Several quotes illustrate the connection that employees felt between the ESF program, the company, and their identity. For example, managers discussed how participation in the program changed their capacity to help others:

I have an employee . . . she was a young single mother . . . During the pregnancy, she switched from part-time to full-time, and in the process lost her insurance because she didn't read the packet completely . . . When we found out, I grabbed the ESF paperwork and started calling the ESF, and it was just the ability to help her through her pregnancy . . . It was good that there was somebody there that I could call and say, "Hey, this is what I've got, and can I help?" and to know that I was going to be able to help my employee . . . Because of the help that they've been to the employees . . . I feel good, because I know that there's somebody out there that it's helping. (Manager #11)

(Grant et al., 2008, p. 903)

The bolstered capacity to help and care for others allowed managers to see themselves as more caring individuals. This connection is clearly evident in the quote below:

I think it will always, I mean for the rest of my life, I will always be a more compassionate person. I always was, but more so now. Definitely nonjudgmental. You know like there's that saying "There but for the grace of God go I," you know, because I could be in their shoes tomorrow, and it doesn't really matter your education level, things happen to people, unexpected things. So they may not be prepared for them properly with insurance or whatever. So I think . . . I don't think a day will go by the rest of my life, that I won't think about the employees that were helped by the Foundation while I was involved. (Manager, K8)

While the interview study suggested that participation in the ESF increased employee commitment by changing how employees defined themselves and the company, the survey study provided an opportunity to test this association more rigorously (Grant et al., 2008). Using structural equation modeling to analyze survey responses from 240 employees, the authors found that the link between employee participation in the ESF and affective commitment to the company was partially mediated by the extent to which employees interpreted their identity and the organization's identity as caring and benevolent. Thus, in both qualitative and quantitative analyses there was evidence of a link between employees' participation in a prosocial practice and defining themselves and their organization in more positive, virtuous terms.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEES' POSITIVE IDENTITIES

Many organizations have also implemented community outreach practices for their employees. Community outreach practices refer to programs and routines that allow employees to provide assistance to groups outside of the employing organization in order to build ties between organizations and their communities (Bartel, 2001). These programs can be highly variable in terms of the kind of work (e.g., mentoring children, building structures, or delivering meals) and the length of time that they engage employees with outside groups (e.g., single-day encounters to year-long commitments). Depending on the organization, these programs may be called corporate citizenship programs, employee involvement programs, or corporate volunteer activities. As with the employee support programs, the practices enable and encourage employees in work organizations to engage in helping and contributing to others. However, for these programs, the recipients of help are individuals outside of the organization's boundaries.

Bartel (2001) was interested in whether employee participation in community outreach practices influenced employee levels of organizational identification, interpersonal cooperation, and effort. She designed a longitudinal field study to examine the impact of participation in outreach activities on employees at Pillsbury Company. The participants in her study completed pretest and post-test surveys along with self-report diaries at regular intervals. Supervisors also filled out surveys at the beginning and end of the employees' participation in the program.

Bartel's (2001) results suggest that employee participation in the program was associated with an increase in levels of identification, cooperation, and effort exerted on the job. When she analyzed what accounted for these changes, three mechanisms related to positive identity construction were apparent. First, interacting with members of other organizations while doing community work facilitated more intergroup comparisons. These intergroup comparisons left employees feeling better off and more fortunate than those with whom they compared themselves. Thus, this downward comparison process enhanced the participants' identities. Second, participation in these programs altered the employees' evaluations of their organization's identity. Participants began to see their organization as more cooperative, socially responsive, and innovative. Third, participation in the programs increased the employees' use of the organization's identity as a source of self-definition (as indicated by stronger levels of employer identification). As a result of these three different mechanisms, participants in community outreach programs developed more positive work-related identities.

BENEFICIARY CONTACT PRACTICES

Finally, some work organizations grant employees exposure to the beneficiaries of their work. Grant and colleagues (Grant 2008a; Grant et al., 2007) have been exploring how this contact with the beneficiaries of work affects motivation and performance. This series of studies suggests that one reason why beneficiary contact practices lead to increased persistence and motivation on the job is because they alter how employees define themselves. In particular, this work implies that practices facilitating awareness and learning about the positive impact that one's work has had on others helps employees to evaluate who they are more positively and can change the content of their identities. While none of these studies was designed to study positive identity mechanisms directly, the set of studies are suggestive that identity may partially account for how and why these practices have their effects.

One field experiment examined the impact of contact with the beneficiaries on call-center workers who were raising money for a university. In the experimental condition, the callers were provided with 10 minutes of contact with a scholarship recipient (the beneficiary) who explained to callers the difference the scholarship had made in his life. There were two control conditions – one with no beneficiary contact and one involving a letter from a beneficiary that described impact. Just 10 minutes of direct contact with the beneficiary resulted in significantly greater persistence (142% increase in phone time) and job performance (171% more money raised) one month later, when compared with individuals in the two control conditions (Grant et al., 2007). In a second study designed to deepen understanding of why the interpersonal contact with beneficiaries was so important, Grant et al. (2007) used an experimental study to explore how interpersonal contact with beneficiaries affected an individual's self-perception (Grant et al., 2007, experiment 2). In this laboratory experiment, the subjects were exposed to the beneficiary of their work through a casual four-minute conversation before the experiment began. Again, the study showed the significant effect of beneficiary

contact on task persistence. Importantly, the key mediator of this effect was perceived impact, which involved subjects seeing themselves as a helpful contributor to others. While perceived impact was not measured as an indicator of positive identity, discussions with subjects suggested that participants in the study who were exposed to the beneficiary saw themselves as more generous and helpful. Thus, these studies suggest that beneficiary contact makes prosocial characteristics (i.e., kind, benevolent, helpful, etc.) more accessible for self-definition.

In a related study designed to assess the effects of beneficiary impact on the employees' job dedication and helping, Grant (2008b) conducted a field experiment with lifeguards working at a community pool. In the beneficiary impact condition, Grant exposed lifeguards to stories of rescues performed by other lifeguards as a means of making salient the significance of their impact on others. One month later, supervisors' ratings of the lifeguards showed that lifeguards who received this task significance treatment were more dedicated to their jobs and more helpful to others. Debriefs with the lifeguards in the beneficiary impact condition suggested that these lifeguards had begun to see themselves more positively (what Grant, 2008b, called perceived social worth). Again, this study provides indirect evidence that exposure to the beneficiaries of one's work increases the positivity of an employee's work-related identity.

DISCUSSION

This trio of studies provides suggestive evidence that organizational practices can shape how employees define themselves in ways that might pave the way for employee flourishing. The three studies we reviewed showed a pattern of how prosocial organizational practices cultivate more positive work-related identities. These prosocial practices – employee support, community outreach, and beneficiary impact practices – promote thoughts and actions that influence two aspects of identity: identity content and identity evaluation.

Identity content becomes more positive as individuals who participate in prosocial practices come to define themselves in more virtuous ways. Dutton et al. (2010) introduce the virtue perspective on positive identity to encompass certain qualities that are indicators of what some scholars have called the “master virtues” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Drawing from virtue ethics (e.g., Aristotle, 1984; MacIntyre, 1981), and discussed by philosophers and religious leaders across time, virtues are assumed to be morally good qualities that distinguish people of good character (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005). When individuals use or claim these morally good qualities as self-defining features, then an identity becomes more positive. In the studies that we presented here, the individuals came to define themselves as more helpful, caring, generous, and benevolent as a result of engaging in prosocial organizational practices that benefit other employees and the external community.

As individuals engaged in prosocial organizational practices, the changes in identity content were often accompanied by changes in identity evaluations. Dutton et al. (2010) introduce the evaluative perspective to explain that identity evaluations are another important source of positivity in work-related identities.

Identification with favorably regarded social groups such as organizations helps individuals to feel more positively about themselves, which is important for psychological and social functioning (Baumeister, 1999; Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Gecas, 1982; Hogg & Terry, 2001). As such, individuals strive to construct and maintain positively regarded identities at work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Kreiner, Ashforth, & Sluss, 2006; Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Prosocial organizational practices facilitate behaviors that enhance the esteem in which employees hold their employing organization as a sponsor of such practices and themselves as members of the organization.

The links we have proposed in this chapter open up multiple opportunities for future research. First, research needs to consider and test *how* prosocial practices exert their effects on positive identities. The research we have reviewed suggests that multiple cognitive and behavioral pathways may be important. One pathway is the route of attribute salience. This account suggests that employee participation in certain organizational practices makes certain attributes (such as caring or generosity) more salient and accessible for self-definition (Markus & Kunda, 1986). A different cognitive path suggests that participation in certain prosocial practices makes social group memberships more salient and attractive for self-definition (e.g., I am a member of Big Retail). If the social group has desirable qualities (i.e., generous or caring), individuals will identify more strongly with the social group and incorporate these attributes into their own self-concepts. Prosocial practices can also cultivate positive identities via social comparisons, as we saw in the Bartel study. In this case, intergroup comparisons that are elicited during participation in the programs elevate regard for one's own group, thus creating a more positive work-related identity. Prosocial practices may reinforce ways of doing that create the foundations for ways of being (Carlsen, 2006). Thus, individuals who engage in behaviors that are more caring, generous, and giving actually become more caring, generous, and giving.

Prosocial practices may also engage a different form of motivation that Crocker and colleagues (Crocker, 2008; Crocker & Canevello, 2008) call an ecosystem perspective. These researchers provide evidence about the benefits of taking an ecocentric perspective toward life – placing greater importance on the needs and concerns of others than on the desires and drives of one's own ego. Prosocial practices provide a conduit through which employees can cultivate and exercise this type of ecocentric orientation at work by making compassionate instead of self-image goals more salient (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). When compassionate goals are operational, individuals behave differently towards each other (in terms of giving and providing support: Crocker & Canevello, 2008), which is likely to foster a more positive work identity in terms of defining oneself as being a more caring and generous person.

A final path through which prosocial practices may affect self-definition is suggested by Lyubomirsky (2007), who argues that kindness “can jumpstart a cascade of positive social consequences” (p. 130) by enabling people to take on the identity of someone who is compassionate and altruistic, and enhancing their experience of self-acceptance, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. These claims are supported by our analysis of the impact of organizational prosocial practices on positive work-

related identities. Moreover, participating in programs that institutionalize prosocial behaviors (e.g., volunteering) has been shown to have several positive psychological and social benefits, and at times these benefits are more pronounced for those who are giving than for those receiving help (see Piliavin, 2003, for a review).

Future research should also consider a broader range of prosocial practices that may contribute to how employees construct themselves positively. Organizations have institutionalized various developmental practices that shape how employees see and define themselves at work. For example, mentoring practices create opportunities for more seasoned organizational members to facilitate the growth and development of new members (e.g., Ragins & Kram, 2007), thus allowing mentors to see themselves as contributors to others. Organizational evaluation and reward practices could also play a role in encouraging prosocial behavior, and thereby affect the kinds of positive identities that employees construct. For example, some work organizations explicitly encourage and reward co-worker helping (e.g., Southwest Airlines fosters peer-to-peer contributing; Gittell, 2003). Future research might consider which types of prosocial practices have the most potent and/or most enduring impact on employee self-constructions. Future research might also consider whether the mechanisms by which different types of practices shape employees' positive identities are similar or different.

Not all organizational practices designed to have prosocial impact are likely to motivate and engage employees to the same degree. Future research needs to systematically consider factors that limit the capacity of prosocial practices to cultivate positive identities. For example, Grant (2008a) has shown that when employees have choice and discretion over participating in prosocial actions they have higher levels of sustained motivation to act than when such choice or discretion is limited. In addition, some practices may have less impact on employees' self-construals because beneficiaries are more distant, which can undermine the meaning and pride that a person derives from beneficiary contact in prosocial actions. Keyes and Haidt (2003) also suggest that intense – rather than sporadic – involvement in prosocial behavior (i.e., several times a day rather than one day a month) is likely to have a greater impact on those who engage in such behavior.

Finally, future research needs to consider how other features of work organizations are likely to amplify or depress the impact of prosocial practices on positive work-related identities. For example, we know that an organization's leadership plays a significant role in shaping the meaning that individuals make of the work organizations they are a part of (Podolny, Khurana, & Hill-Popper, 2005). A leader's actions can reinforce the significance of acting in a prosocial way, and his or her actions can model appropriate actions that make it easier for employees to act prosocially. In organizations where leaders' actions are consistent with the purposes and values implied by the prosocial practices, there should be stronger links to the positive identities of employees. For example, an in-depth study of how one organization responded compassionately to harm incurred by its members provided evidence of this link (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006). A leader's symbolic actions made at a critical time amplified organizational members' awareness of acting in a caring way, speeding up and magnifying the prosocial (compassionate) response of individuals.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has begun to till the fertile ground in applied organizational psychology that asks: How do work organizations make a difference for employee flourishing? It has begun to address this question by considering how institutionalized programs and practices shape how employees define themselves. When organizational practices institutionalize ways of doing and being that involve helping, giving, and contributing to others (inside or outside the organization), then work organizations create the content and context for individuals to take on more positive work-related identities. Our hope is that work organizations can participate in improving society through a more mindful consideration of how the practices they deploy shape the identities that employees construct, and how these positive identities can be vital personal resources that contribute to flourishing at work and beyond.

In sum, our focus on the impacts of prosocial practices illuminates relationships between the three pillars of positive psychology: positive subjective experiences of the past, present, and future; positive individuals (i.e., a strengths-based conception of human nature); and positive institutions (Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The third pillar -- positive institutions -- has received relatively less attention in the field of positive psychology compared to the study of positive emotion and individual strengths. This chapter develops work on positive institutions and illuminates one way in which positive institutions (prosocial practices) help to create more positive individuals (by facilitating positive identity construction), leading to more positive subjective experiences (employees flourish at work).

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