A Path Forward: Assessing Progress and Exploring Core Questions for the Future of Positive Organizational Scholarship

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Abstract and Keywords

In this concluding chapter, we survey this handbook’s abundant content to synthesize the many findings and highlight what has been learned from positive organizational scholarship research since its infancy. These findings are grouped into six key categories: complicating the meaning of positive; specifying mechanisms undergirding generative dynamics; noting key outcomes; identifying positive human resource and organizational practices; and advancing construct development. As we discuss various authors’ work, we include associated chapter number for your reference. We conclude this chapter by identifying core questions that can help shape an agenda for future research and help increase the impact and insights of a POS lens.

Keywords: positive, mechanisms, generative

Less than a decade ago, Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn (2003) published the edited volume titled Positive Organizational Scholarship. The volume helped introduce positive organizational scholarship (POS) as a new lens for understanding the conditions and processes that explain flourishing in organizational contexts. A POS lens enriches organizational studies by expanding the range of topics and constructs seen as valuable within organizational behavior and organizational theory (Dutton & Sonenshein, 2009). Positive organizational scholarship helps us see new possibilities for organizational studies—it helps move constructs and ideas to the foreground that are often in the background or are even invisible. Progress over the last decade indicates a coming of age, in which core questions are being raised and answered. Yet, there is still much to be learned and more maturing is warranted. In this concluding chapter, we highlight what has been learned from POS research since its infancy as we look across the preceding chapters. We also highlight core questions that can help shape an agenda for future research and help increase the impact and insights of a POS lens.

What We’ve Learned from the Handbook Chapters

In the sections that follow, we highlight some of this Handbook’s most important insights, which we have grouped into six categories: complicating the meaning of positive; specifying mechanisms undergirding generative dynamics; noting key outcomes; identifying positive human resource and organizational practices; and advancing construct development.

Complicating What We Mean by Positive

As we look across the preceding chapters, we see several different perspectives on positive. Most of the chapters do not explicitly provide a definition of positive, but many of the approaches to positive can be aligned with the four domains of positive offered in the introductory chapter. In other chapters, we see subtleties that enrich our
understanding of the term positive. Thus, here we come full circle to look at how the chapters address the four
domains of positive and discuss some nuances that have emerged.

A Positive Lens

A positive lens is an orientation toward, for example, strengths rather than weaknesses, optimism rather than
pessimism, and supportive rather than critical communication (Cameron, 2008b). A POS lens foregrounds
strengths, capabilities, and possibilities, and backgrounds weaknesses, problems, and threats. Indeed, Baumeister,
Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, and Vohs (2001) provided compelling evidence that human beings overattend to negative
events and dynamics. Counteracting this tendency, POS theory and research focuses more directly on strengths,
capabilities, and possibilities. Adopting a positive lens regarding traditionally nonpositive phenomena is particularly
explicit in the following chapters:

- Stansbury and Sonenshein (2011, Chapter 26) suggest that much research on ethics focuses on unethical
behaviors and the decision processes that lead to them. They counter such research by developing the notion
of good works.
- Mayer (2011, Chapter 24) notes how much of the justice literature focuses on one’s own reactions to injustice.
He counters by looking at third-party reactions, particularly in terms of constructive and prosocial responses.
- Hoffman and Haigh (2011, Chapter 72) make the case that sustainability is more than the absence
of unsustainable practices – something more is important for environmental flourishing.
- Godfrey (2011, Chapter 74) takes a historical look at economic theory to uncover clues to a positive
perspective to economics.
- Ramarajan and Thomas (2011, Chapter 41) articulate how the literature tends to foreground the problematic
nature of identity group dynamics in organizations. These groups create a more positive approach to diversity
research that foregrounds the positive influences of diversity on individual and organizational outcomes,
including intergroup equality, positive intergroup relations, and group performance.
- Kopelman, Avi-Yonah, and Varghese (2011, Chapter 44) propose moving beyond an instrumental, social-
exchange lens on negotiation to a mindfulness lens that focuses on developing the self and other parties.
- Biron, Cooper, and Gibbs (2011, Chapter 71) evaluate the potency of interventions that promote health and
well-being, rather than simply reduce or prevent stress.
- Baker (2011, Chapter 31) makes the case that more altruistic moral sentiments explain generalized reciprocity
just as much as traditional models of self-interested reputation do.

An Affirmative Bias that Fosters Resourcefulness

Adopting an affirmative bias is associated with resourcefulness, or with creating, unlocking, and multiplying latent
resources in individuals and organizations. Resourcefulness means that an amplifying effect occurs when
individuals and organizations are exposed to positivity (Feldman & Worline, 2011, Chapter 47, this volume). Some
chapters, for example, discuss POS as life-giving or life-enhancing (Lilus et al., 2011, Chapter 21, this volume;
Sandelands, 2011, Chapter 76, this volume; Spreitzer, Lam, & Quinn, 2011, Chapter 12, this volume). The focus is
on elevating life, whether physiological or psychological, and on life-giving resources such as positive energy.
Similarly, Keeney and Illies (2011, Chapter 45, this volume) articulate how positive work–family interconnections
enhance well-being in both contexts and how positivity spills over, enriches, and facilitates resourcefulness in work
and family life.

Virtuousness

Virtuousness is defined as the best of the human condition and that which human beings consider to be inherently
good (Cameron, 2008a). This definition captures the focus in POS on what is virtuous (Cameron & Winn, 2011,
Chapter 18, this volume), morally praiseworthy (Stansbury & Sonenshein, 2011, Chapter 26, this volume),
honorable (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004; Lavine, 2011, Chapter 77, this volume), and away from maximizing utility
(Godfrey, 2011, Chapter 74, this volume). Positive organizational scholarship research indicates that an array of
human virtues or character strengths are deemed to reflect the highest aspirations of humankind (Cameron &
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Winn, 2011, Chapter 18); Rego, Clegg, & e Cunha, 2011, Chapter 28, this volume; Owens, Rowatt, & Wilkins, 2011, Chapter 20, this volume; Bright & Exline, 2011, Chapter 19, this volume).

Extraordinarily Positive Outcomes or Positive Deviance

Positive deviance can be defined as successful performance that dramatically exceeds the norm in a positive direction. Positive deviance departs from the norms of a referent group in positive ways (Lavine, 2011, Chapter 77, this volume). This definition of positive is explicit in POS research that focuses on identifying and explaining spectacular results, surprising outcomes, and extraordinary achievements (Cameron & Lavine, 2006), including those in the context of change (Golden-Biddle & Mao, 2011, Chapter 58, this volume). This use of the term positive captures the optimal functioning of individuals, groups, or organizations (Dutton & Sonenshein, 2009) and is adopted by several chapter authors, including Pratt and Pradies (2011, Chapter 70) (on the unexpected positive outcomes that come from ambivalence), Asplund and Blacksmith (2011, Chapter 27) (engagement and productivity), and Stavros and Wooten (2011, Chapter 63) (organizational performance).

Fineman (2006) noted a lack of clarity on what is meant by the term positive, and the plurality in defining positive may be perplexing to those looking for focus and clarity (Kilduff & Brands, 2010). Although many of the chapters clearly illustrate one or more of the four domains of positive noted above, we do find a more complicated understanding of what positive means.

For example, Pratt and Pradies’ (2011, Chapter 70, this volume) perspective on positive is particularly insightful with regard to the value of plurality in definitions:

... [M]apping positive ambivalence responses also opens up dialogue for what “positive” means. We started our chapter by linking positivity with an individual outcome: enhanced individual functioning. However, we discovered that like ambivalence itself, positive can mean many things when it comes to ambivalence.... positivity can be both personal and social. While responding to ambivalence may make you feel better, more confident about how to act in an ambivalent relationship, or more wise; it can also help dyads (e.g., commitment and trust), or even larger systems (e.g., as creativity leads to innovation or openness to change). Positivity can even be thought of in terms of process and outcomes. Thus, we can think of the positivity of committing and of being committed, of trusting and of having trust, of creating and of having created something, etc. More generally, we even note how positivity can be contextual and temporal. Thus, while paralysis is often viewed as a negative response to ambivalence, it can lead to a positive outcome for an individual in the long run, especially if it is associated with more and better information processing (p. 934).

Similarly, Golden-Biddle and Mao (2011, Chapter 58) notice in their work on positivity in change processes that what constituted positive was not an universal condition. What some people perceived as positive in one situation (senior leadership being perceived as caring when asking for input), could be perceived as negative in another (senior leadership trying to placate employees by asking for input). They found it useful to

[C]onceive of positivity as a lens; a perspective-taking on our part as researchers, in which we pay attention when reading studies to people’s experiences in change that are or could be made more life enriching, and to how change processes enable (or not) the development of people and local capability (p. 764).

The chapters also offer insights on the subtlety and nuance in the meaning of positive—whether as a lens, an outcome, a value, or a process. They indicate that sometimes what is positive is in the eye of the beholder or is influenced by the culture or context.

Understanding the Core Outcomes of Positive Organizing

Several clusters of outcomes have been a primary focus of POS research. One cluster of outcomes has focused on individual flourishing and well-being. These kinds of outcomes capture a “pleasant life”—a life that successfully pursues positive emotions (Sekerka, Vacharkulksemsuk, & Fredrickson, 2011, Chapter 13) about the present, past, and future. People experience positive emotions, beyond just being satisfied with their work life, to be happy and joyful (Fredrickson, 2003), to thrive (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005), to develop higher
traits of extraversion and core self-evaluations (Bono, Davies, & Rasch, 2011, Chapter 10, this volume), to be fully engaged (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2011, Chapter 14, this volume), and to be healthy (Pressman & Cohen, 2005). Many of the chapters set their sights on understanding the individual and organizational factors that enable human well-being.

A second cluster of outcomes relates to a “meaningful life”—personal fulfillment through a life worth living. This includes theory and research on one’s calling/meaning (Wrzesniewski, 2011, Chapter 4, this volume), the fundamental state of leadership (Quinn & Wellman, 2011, Chapter 57, this volume), prosocial motivation (Grant & Berg, 2011, Chapter 3, this volume), identity (Morgan Roberts & Creary, 2011, Chapter 6, this volume), and spirituality (Sandelands, 2011, Chapter 76, this volume). In these chapters, the authors point to actions that individuals can take to “craft” more meaning into their work life and how organizations can provide opportunities for individuals to find their purpose and best contribute.

A third cluster of outcomes has to do with exemplary performance, sometimes individual performance (Asplund & Blacksmith, 2011, Chapter 27, this volume; Kopelman, Avi-Yonah, & Varghese, 2011, Chapter 44, this volume), but more typically team (Dibble & Gibson, 2011, Chapter 54, this volume; Rhee & Yoon, 2011, Chapter 17, this volume) or organizational (Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004; Smith, Lewis, & Tushman, 2011, Chapter 61, this volume; Stavros & Wooten, 2011, Chapter 63, this volume) performance. In fact, Luthans and Avolio (2009) insist that to fall within the domain of positive organizational behavior, research must have a performance impact.

A fourth cluster of outcomes deals with adaptation and learning. Here, researchers are interested in how organizations build their agility/flexibility for innovation (DeGraff & Nathan-Roberts, 2011, Chapter 53, this volume) and creativity (Zhou & Ren, 2011, Chapter 8, this volume). Inherent in this theme of adaptation and learning is understanding how to build individual resilience (Barker Caza & Milton, 2011, Chapter 68, this volume), psychological capital (Yousef & Luthans, 2011, Chapter 2, this volume), personal growth (Asplund & Blacksmith, 2011, Chapter 27, this volume), and growth through trauma (Maitlis, 2011, Chapter 69, this volume). At the collective level, this set of outcomes also includes research on healing (Powley, 2011, Chapter 65, this volume), forgiveness (Bright & Exline, 2011, Chapter 19, this volume), and responding to crises (James & Wooten, 2011, Chapter 67, this volume). Through the dynamics generated by a POS lens, we see more transformation (Quinn & Wellman, 2011, Chapter 57, this volume), transcendence (Ritchie & Hammond, 2011, Chapter 78, this volume), and collective imagination (Carlsen, Landsverk Hagen, & Mortensen, 2011, Chapter 22, this volume) because the possibility for something dramatically new and better is revealed.

A fifth cluster of outcomes addresses the long-term sustainability of people, organizations, society, and the environment (Hoffman & Haigh, 2011, Chapter 72, this volume). Sustainability can be defined as ensuring our ecosystem supports life over time; it includes efforts to preserve, conserve, renew, and generate resources to support life (Pfeffer, 2010). The focus shifts from short-term performance results to longer-term outcomes that can be sustained over time. Here, the focus is on how to build in recovery (Sonnenstag & Neff, 2011, Chapter 66, this volume), so that the organization and individuals do not get bogged down with resistance, stagnation, or burnout.

Articulating Generative Mechanisms More Clearly

Perhaps the most substantial progress revealed in these chapters is that the explanatory mechanisms that enable flourishing within organizations are richly articulated. Mechanisms explain the how and why of something (Hedstrom & Swedberg, 1998). They describe “a set of interacting parts—an assembly of elements producing an effect not inherent in any one of them. A mechanism is not so much about ‘nuts and bolts’ as about ‘cogs and wheels’—the wheelwork or agency by which an effect is produced” (Hernes, 1998, p. 74). By generative, we mean life-building, capability-enhancing, and capacity-creating (Dutton & Glynn, 2007). In their chapter on symbols, Glynn and Watkiss (2011, Chapter 46, this volume) note three key mechanisms that enable flourishing within organizations: cognitive, affective, and relational. These are similar to Dutton and Glynn’s (2007) tripartite typology of positive meaning-making, positive emoting, and positive interrelating. Other chapters add agentic and structural mechanisms to the mix of explanatory mechanisms; we discuss each in the next section. In many of the chapters, these mechanisms operate within a single level of analysis, but are sometimes elaborated by crossing levels.

Cognitive Mechanisms
Cognitive mechanisms operate through changes in how people become aware, know, think, learn, and judge. Several chapters illustrate a variety of cognitive mechanisms that produce flourishing in organizations. One cognitive mechanism is meaning. For example, Wrzesniewski (2011, Chapter 4, this volume) describes how callings create meaning related to how people construct why they work, which this leads to positive outcomes. Taking another perspective on meaning, Carlsen et al. (2011, Chapter 22, this volume) describe how hope is rooted in creating meaning in ongoing experience by weaving stories of possibilities in new experience.

Identity is another cognitive mechanism. Again, Carlsen et al. (2011, Chapter 22, this volume) describe the importance of hope in constructing identity, as captured in the favorable progression in life stories of individual and organizations. Morgan Roberts and Creary (2011, Chapter 6, this volume) describe a range of mechanisms for constructing a positive identity that draw on four different theoretical traditions of identity scholarship (i.e., social identity, identity theory, narrative as identity, and identity work). Likewise, Barker Caza, and Milton (2011, Chapter 68, this volume) describe how identity is a key resource that enables individuals to be resilient at work. At an organization level, Harquail and Brickson (2011, Chapter 51, this volume) make a case for how organizational identities facilitate stakeholder flourishing.

Learning is a third kind of cognitive mechanism. For example, Hall and Las Heras (2011, Chapter 38, this volume) describe the self-discovery process in terms of the importance of aspirations, hopes, and dreams for positive career development. And Maitlis (2011, Chapter 69, this volume) describes how post-traumatic growth occurs through learning to create meaning from the loss of a person's assumptive world.

Sense-making or interpreting is another kind of cognitive mechanism. For example, Bono et al. (2011, Chapter 10, this volume) describe how extraverts flourish more at work because they tend to interpret or evaluate situations more positively. Glynn and Watkiss (2011, Chapter 46, this volume) describe how symbols encode positive meanings, beliefs, and interpretations to enrich strengths, virtues, and capacities in organizations.

Affective Mechanisms

Affective mechanisms operate through changes that evoke or elicit individual or collective feelings. Fredrickson's (2003) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions is the key affective mechanism in POS research (Sekerka, et al., 2011, Chapter 13, this volume). Unlike negative emotions, which tend to create tendencies to “fight or flight,” positive emotions such as joy, interest, or appreciation “function in the short term to broaden one’s attention and quell heightened bodily reactivity to build one’s cognitive, social, psychological, and physical resources over the long term” (Sekerka et al., 2011, Chapter 13, p. 169, this volume). To illustrate this mechanism, Porath (2011, Chapter 33, this volume) articulates how civility (even witnessing civility) facilitates negotiations, promotes teamwork, and spreads goodwill because it generates positive emotions toward the self and others. In another example, Baker (2011, Chapter 31, this volume) explains how the act of generalized reciprocity generates positive emotions, what is sometimes termed a “warm glow” that fuels future acts of giving.

The broaden-and-build mechanism is not only applicable at an individual level of analysis, but also at the organizational level through shared emotions and emotional contagion. For example, Rhee and Yoon (2011, Chapter 17, this volume) review various mechanisms (i.e., mimicry, shared experiences, and emotional comparisons) through which individuals share their emotions and moods with others within their workgroups. Golden-Biddle and Mao (2011, Chapter 58, this volume) also suggest a positive emoting mechanism of “acting with compassion” to buffer the uncertainty, loss, and anxiety inherent in change.

Relational Mechanisms

Relational mechanisms operate through changes in connections among people and groups. Although positive relationships can be one dimension of flourishing (an end in itself), many of the chapters describe how relationships act as the generative mechanisms to achieve flourishing within organizations. For example, chapters on high-quality connections (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011, Chapter 29, this volume), relational coordination (Hoffer Gittell, 2011, Chapter 30, this volume), trust (Mishra & Mishra, 2011, Chapter 34, this volume), and civility (Porath, 2011, Chapter 33, this volume) describe how connections with others can unlock resources endogenous to the system. For example, Keeney and Illies (2011, Chapter 45, this volume) describe how interpersonal capitalization (sharing positive work events with others) is a relational mechanism by which work experience
impacts the well-being of employees and their families. Williams (2011, Chapter 35, this volume) describes how the relational act of perspective taking facilitates high-quality connections and trustworthy actions in organizations. James and Wooten (2011, Chapter 67, this volume) build on the relational mechanism of perspective taking to show how it can enable opportunity in the context of crisis. Bono et al. (2011, Chapter 10, this volume) describe how extraverts are more likely to flourish given their tendency to develop and maintain rich social relationships and receive more social support from others.

Other chapters highlight social mechanisms that have been largely ignored in prior organizational studies. In particular, Vogus (2011, Chapter 50, this volume) describes mindful organizing as a social process grounded in interactions with coworkers for detecting and correcting errors and unexpected events. Poelw (2011, Chapter 65, this volume) describes healing as a process involving social interactions that mend the organization’s social structure and repair operational routines. Baker (2011, Chapter 31, this volume) demonstrates how reciprocity, particularly generalized reciprocity, generates moral sentiments and reputational effects that unlock latent resources in organizational systems and beyond. Finally, Dibble and Gibson (2011, Chapter 54, this volume) describe how the process of laterality (i.e., the ability to work effectively with others who are different), as well as a willingness to limit personal autonomy to achieve group goals, facilitates collaboration in teams.

**Agentic Mechanisms**

Agentic mechanisms operate through changes in how people interpret their relationship with their environment in terms of what they can do. When people take action, they co-create their world, rather than just being influenced by it. This includes not only bold, heroic actions, but also the fleeting, everyday micromoments of small acts in organizations (Golden-Biddle & Mao, 2011, Chapter 58, this volume). For example, proactive behaviors are a key agentic mechanism within POS. Proactivity is a goal-driven process of “self-initiated efforts to bring about change in the work environment and/or oneself in order to achieve a different future” (Wu & Parker, 2011, Chapter 7, p. 84, this volume). Proactive behaviors unlock capabilities by allowing individuals to transform the status quo. Through proactive behaviors, such as job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), individuals grow, develop, and learn to leverage strengths and capabilities in order to play out their passions at work (Perutto & Cardon, 2011, Chapter 15, this volume).

Endogenous resourcefulness (Dutton & Glynn, 2007) is another key agentic mechanism. Endogenous refers to coming from within the system rather than from outside of it. Feldman and Worline’s (2011, Chapter 47, this volume) resourcing perspective describes how resources are not merely innate qualities, but are things that may be assembled and reassembled creatively to enlarge the supply of resources. The endogeneity reflects that resources are created in the process of doing work in organizations (Vogel & Bruch, 2011, Chapter 52, this volume), not just supplied from outside the system (Spreitzer et al., 2005). The process highlights the mutability of resources through actions such as mutual adjusting, juxtaposing, and narrating that create amplifying cycles and positive spirals (Sekerka et al., 2011, Chapter 13, this volume). This endogenous resourcefulness demonstrates the accumulating generativity over time as small acts/outcomes build on one another. This is precisely the opposite of the dynamics that lead to failure in high-reliability work—where small events accumulate and build on each other to create trouble (Sutcliffe & Christianson, 2011, Chapter 64, this volume).

Another agentic mechanism inherent in POS research is the voice or participation that enables positive deviance (Lavine, 2011, Chapter 77, this volume). Positive deviance involves departing from the norms of a reference group (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004). These departures require self-empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995) and courage (Worline, 2011, Chapter 23, this volume) to step beyond normal patterns of behavior. The experience of psychological safety at work facilitates organizational learning, better performance, and more satisfying work by enabling employees to speak up or find a voice (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2011, Chapter 37, this volume). Likewise, more trust among leaders and followers creates more capacity for followers to be empowered (Mishra & Mishra, 2011, Chapter 34, this volume).

**Structural Mechanisms**

Structural mechanisms operate through routines and leadership. Structural mechanisms involve institutionalized practices, systems, and structures that enable positive outcomes. For example, Harrison (2011, Chapter 9, this volume) describes how routines such as brainstorming or problem solving can stimulate curiosity that in turn create
unexpected creativity. He further articulates how leaders can stimulate curiosity by deliberately problematizing followers’ view of the world. Likewise, Stavros and Wooten (2011, Chapter 63, this volume) identify several strategic processes that shape organizational reactions to their competitive environment which, in turn, enables organizational performance. Oldham (2011, Chapter 49, this volume) highlights how work design enhances positive outcomes and how relying on positive practices in work structure improves individual and organizational performance. Smith, Lewis, and Tushman (2011, Chapter 61, this volume) highlight the role of structural paradoxes and leadership in accounting for organizational performance.

These are just some of the ways the research that adopts a POS lens has helped uncover enriched cognitive, affective, relational, agentic, and structural mechanisms that explain desired outcomes.

Understanding the “O” in Positive Organizational Scholarship Better

Although a substantial number of the chapters focus at the micro level of analysis, we have seen progress on the macro front as well. There are several ways that the handbook’s authors offer new insights on theory and research relevant to the “O” in POS. The first is through increasing focus on organizational functions and practices; what Heath and Sitkin (2001) refer to as “Big O” in their commentary about making organizational behavior (OB) more organizational. The handbook chapters offer theory and research on organization practices such as socialization (Ashforth, Meyers, & Sluss, 2011, Chapter 11, this volume), mentoring (Ragins, 2011, Chapter 39, this volume), communications (Browning, Morris, & Kee, 2011, Chapter 42, this volume), career development (Hall & Las Heras, 2011, Chapter 38, this volume), leadership development (DeRue & Workman, 2011, Chapter 60, this volume), organizational development (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2011, Chapter 56, this volume; Bartunek & Woodman, 2011, Chapter 55, this volume), and diversity (Ramarajan & Thomas, 2011, Chapter 41, this volume).

These chapters look at how POS sheds new light on a traditional organizational function or practice. For example, Stavros and Wooten (2011, Chapter 63, this volume) review the role of POS in strategic management. They examine several strategy concepts (including the resource-based view, dynamic capabilities, and the balanced scorecard) through a positive lens to provide new insights into strategy. Baker (2011, Chapter 31, this volume) also uses POS in his research on networks. Typically, network research focuses on how power and information are distributed throughout the network. Baker brings a POS lens to network theory by adding positive energy as a key variable in network dynamics. Browning, Morris, and Kee (2011, Chapter 42, this volume) describe the integrative, constructive, and even therapeutic dynamics that can result from positive organizational communications.

Although these and other chapters advance our understanding of the field, we still have much to learn about the “O” in POS (Hackman, 2009). For example, to date, we know little about how POS might offer new insights to HR functions such performance management, compensation, hiring, staffing, training, labor/management relationships, and workplace safety. One interesting example of a promising approach is open-book finance—in which employees are educated and involved in the workings of an organization’s finances (Baker & Gunderson, 2005). Future research could look specifically at what new insights a POS lens might bring to core macro organizational theories such as institutional theory or transaction cost economics.

A second way that the chapters in the handbook offer insight on the “O” in POS is by transcending constructs that have been studied originally at the individual level of analysis to an organizational or collective level. For example, Goddard and Salloum (2011, Chapter 48, this volume) build on the work of others (e.g., Bandura, 1977) to understand the social cognitive underpinnings of collective efficacy—a construct most often studied at an individual level of analysis. Powley (2011, Chapter 65, this volume) moves the notion of healing to the collective level by focusing on healing as an organizing mechanism in which human action patterns help restore organizational functioning. Similarly, Lilius et al. (2011, Chapter 21, this volume) examine compassion from an organizational lens to understand processes of compassion organizing and how compassionate practices can be institutionalized.

Another point regarding the “O” in POS involves the need to understand how organizational context affects phenomena that have been studied largely without focus on the role of context or embeddedness (Maitlis, 2011, Chapter 69, this volume). Colloquially, this has been called “contextualized B” in the provocative commentary by Heath and Sitkin (2001), which discusses what is “organizational” about organizational behavior. For example, whereas courage has been studied from a psychological perspective (especially the courage of the hero), Worline
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(2011, Chapter 23, this volume) makes the case that everyday courage in a work context is a relevant and important area of investigation. Rather than studying the image of the “mythic hero,” we need to find courage in “every corner of every cubicle (Worline, 2011).” Courage goes beyond individual personality qualities and has implications for the organizational context and how it enables or impedes performance at work. Similarly Ybarra, Rees, Kross, & Sanchez-Burks (2011, Chapter 16, this volume) propose a model of emotional intelligence that “carefully, deliberately, and explicitly” considers the social world that people navigate. This focus on social context helps inform the “when” and “why” of emotional intelligence. As another example, Perttula and Cardon (2011, Chapter 15, this volume) drill down to understand passion in the specific context of entrepreneurial activity. In doing so, they examine a specific contextual embeddedness of passion at work.

Juxtaposing to Negative Events

As several chapters suggest, good things can emanate from negative events or circumstances, such as compassion (Lilius et al., 2011, Chapter 21, this volume), resilience (Barker Caza & Milton, 2011, Chapter 68, this volume), healing (Powley, 2011, Chapter 65, this volume), post-traumatic growth (Mahtlis, 2011, Chapter 69, this volume), and crisis response (James & Wooten, 2011, Chapter 67, this volume). These handbook authors embrace, rather than ignore, the limits, setbacks, and problems that occur in organizations by looking at the good that result from them. Positive organizational scholarship treats positive phenomena as figure rather ground (Dutton & Sonenshein, 2007). Rather than viewing negative events as failures and threats, POS researchers often theorize they are catalysts or opportunities that can facilitate adaptation, resilience, and growth.

In addition, several chapter authors demonstrate how positive phenomena are not merely the opposite, or even the absence, of negative phenomena. For example, peace is not merely the absence of war. It requires something more in terms of the relationship between two parties or nations (Spreitzer, 2007). Indeed, positive and negative phenomenon may have different mechanisms that drive different outcomes (Biron, Cooper & Gibbs, 2011, Chapter 71, this volume). Yet, positive emotions may buffer and even undo the untoward effects of negative phenomenon, as has been shown in research on individual resilience after the U.S. terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (Fredrickson, 2003).

Advances in Developing Positive Organizational Scholarship Constructs and Measures

For POS to mature as a discipline, clear definitions and validated measures of core constructs are required. Hackman (2009, p. 312) asserted that “construct validity is the sine qua non of theory development.” In the first POS volume (2003), several constructs were newly developed or transplanted from other disciplines into organizational studies. These included empowerment, compassion, virtuousness, relational coordination, transcendent behavior, high-quality connections, positive energy, meaning, resilience, positive deviance, relational coordination, and authentic leadership. Almost a decade later, we have made substantial progress in defining, grounding in the literature, differentiating from conceptually similar constructs, and measuring these and other constructs of interest. Numerous chapters in this handbook highlight the explicit progress made to date in more clearly understanding definitions and inherent dimensions. Examples include:

- Articulating the three subjective experiences (vitality, positive regard, and felt mutuality) and three structural features (emotional carrying capacity, tensility, and connectivity) of high-quality connections (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011, Chapter 29, this volume)
- Defining humility as “a deeply held belief of shared human limits and worth that shapes how individuals view themselves (objectively), others (appreciatively), and new information (openly)” (Owens, Rowatt, & Wilkins, 2011, Chapter 20, p. 262, this volume)
- Conceptualizing organizational healing as a process and an outcome that results from effectively managing liminality (Powley, 2011, Chapter 65, this volume)
- Articulating the different roles for appraisal-related, affective, and cognitive perspective taking (Williams, 2011, Chapter 35, this volume)
- Uncovering the four dimensions of trustworthiness: reliability, openness, competence, and compassion (Mishra & Mishra, 2011, Chapter 34, this volume)
- Conceptualizing compassion as a three-part process consisting of noticing suffering, demonstrating empathy,
and acting to reduce the observed suffering (Lilie et al., 2011, Chapter 21, this volume)

- Describing resilience at work as a developmental trajectory characterized by competence in the face of, and professional growth after, experiences of adversity (Barker Caza & Milton, 2011, Chapter 68, this volume)
- Conceptualizing calling as a source of intrinsic fulfillment and a way to contribute in the wider world (Wrzeniewski, 2011, Chapter 4, this volume)
- Defining positive deviance as “uncommon behavior that does not conform to expected norms but would be deemed positive by a referent group” (Lavine, 2011, Chapter 77, p. 1023, this volume).

We have also made progress on measuring and validating several POS-related constructs including psychological capital (Youssef & Luthans, 2011, Chapter 2, this volume), mindful organizing (Vogus, 2011, Chapter 50, this volume), and thriving at work (Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson & Stevens, 2010). Validated measures are crucial for research studies to build upon one another to compile a coherent body of evidence. Many of these constructs have been operationalized at an individual level of analysis, but several are specifically organizational in their focus, including relational coordination (Gittell, 2011, Chapter 30, this volume), virtuousness (Cameron & Winn, 2011, Chapter 18, this volume), civility (Porath, 2011, Chapter 33, this volume), and resourcefulness (Feldman & Worline, 2011, Chapter 47, this volume). Given the importance of the “O” in POS, however, our hope is that future research will escalate the conceptual and empirical development of POS-related constructs at the group, unit, or organizational levels.

Puzzles and Core Questions: Articulating a Path Forward

Are Virtues and Character Strengths Culturally Determined?

Much debate has ensued on whether virtues and character strengths are universal or culturally dependent (Rego, Clegg, & e Cunha, 2011, Chapter 28, this volume). Indeed, Fineman (2006) argued that even the term positivity may have a “monocultural tint.” As such, we need to understand the cultural distinctions that may be at play across a globe based on varying traditions, rituals, values, and religions. We need a clearer understanding of how positive dynamics may be universal or culturally dependent. In this handbook, we sought a global set of contributors, with the hope of generating a better cultural understanding of a POS lens in a global context. Clearly though, more cross-cultural comparative theorizing and research is warranted.

Can There Be Too Much Positivity?

Grant and Schwartz (2011) suggested the possibility of positive state, traits, and experiences having an inverted-U relationship with key outcomes. They suggest that positive phenomenon can reach inflection points at which their effects may turn negative. For example, too much persistence can lead to escalated commitment. Or, too much choice can lead to decision paralysis (Lyengar & Lepper, 2000). Indeed, this non-monotonicity may be true for many things in life; humans can, indeed, experience too much of a good thing. In their chapter on virtuousness, Cameron and Winn (2011, Chapter 18, this volume) provided a possible answer to this question. They suggested a distinction between strengths and virtues. Focusing too much on a particular strength, they suggested, can create negative dynamics. Yet, they argued that virtues are different. One should not put an upper limit on compassion or forgiveness when others may be suffering. These virtues enable an upward spiral of positive dynamics that can lengthen the distance to the point of inflection. Future research could examine how much of a given positive trait, state, or experience may be too much, including if and when a tipping point might occur.

It may also be the case that fine-tuning our theories can help us see important nuances that explain why we might see unexpected negative dynamics from what appear to be positive states. For example, Perttula and Cardon (2011, Chapter 15, this volume) review Vallerand et al.’s (2003) research, which demonstrated that there are two different manifestations of passion: harmonious and obsessive. Although harmonious passion is related to positive outcomes such as performance and health, obsessive passion is related to negative outcomes such as shame and interference with social relationships. These important theoretical distinctions can help clarify the ambiguity and disagreements associated with the question whether there “can there be too much positivity?”

Targets for Positive Organizational Scholarship
To whom does POS research apply? Primarily to managers and executives as opposed to front line workers or even people who are not even at the line. Positive organizational scholarship research and, indeed, organizational scholarship more broadly, has been accused of neglecting nonmanagerial and nonelite populations and perspectives. Positive organizational scholarship research can do more work to benefit our understanding of how to create more a more positive work context for those in the lower rungs of society—for example, low-wage workers, older employees, workers without a home, employees with salaries that put them below the poverty line, noncore/temporary workers, invisible and marginalized workers (e.g., those with mental health problems), or stigmatized populations (e.g., felons) (Caza & Carroll, 2011, Chapter 73, this volume). This concern aligns with a recent editorial by Bamberger and Pratt (2010), which called for enhanced understanding in organizational studies of critical organization phenomena by focusing on lower-echelon employees or contexts outside for-profit business organizations, such as health care, schools, nonprofits, and social movements.

Researchers in this handbook offer theorizing that may be helpful to people with little power and material resources in organizations. For example, research on compassion (Lilis et al., 2011, Chapter 21, this volume) offers insights regarding how sympathy can move people to action that makes a difference in the lives of others who may be suffering. Research on psychological safety (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2011, Chapter 37, this volume) articulates how leaders can create a context whereby those with low formal power can have voice. Additionally, Ramarajan and Thomas (2011, Chapter 41, this volume) discuss how practices that retain and develop members of stigmatized and disadvantaged groups can increase intergroup equality that in turn improves the performance of the group as a whole.

What about the Full Range of Virtues?

Although the chapters in this volume suggest progress on understanding the role of several virtues in organizational contexts, other virtues have received considerably less attention in organizational studies (although some have received more attention in positive psychology). We use Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) typology of virtues and character strengths to inventory the current state of research on this domain. They developed a classification to organize 24 character strengths into six categories of virtues: courage, justice, humanity, wisdom, temperance, and transcendence. Although other typologies of virtues exist, the Peterson and Seligman typology is best known. Note, too, that Asplund and Blacksmith (2011, Chapter 27, this volume) also use the term strengths, but they are referring to building human competence and capacity rather than virtues or character strengths per se.

Several of the Peterson and Seligman virtues have received attention in this handbook: courage, justice, and humanity.

- Courage deals with accomplishing goals in the face of opposition. This handbook includes chapters on courage (Worline, 2011, Chapter 23, this volume), behavioral integrity (Simons, Tomlinson, & Leroy, 2011, Chapter 25, this volume), passion (Perttula & Cardon, 2011, Chapter 15 this volume), and energy (Spreitzer, Lam, & Quinn, 2011, Chapter 12, this volume). Although there is no chapter on persistence (an additional component of courage), we know quite a bit about this topic thanks to the extensive research on motivation.
- Justice deals with building a healthy community. The handbook includes chapters on justice (Mayer, 2011, Chapter 24, this volume), trust (Mishra & Mishra, 2011, Chapter 34, this volume), leadership (DeRue & Workman, 2011, Chapter 60, this volume; Quinn & Wellman, 2011, Chapter 57, this volume), prosocial motivation (Grant & Berg, 2011, Chapter 3, this volume), and ethics (Stansbury & Sonenshein, 2011, Chapter 26, this volume).
- Humanity deals with befriending and tending to others. This handbook includes chapters on social-emotional intelligence (Ybarra et al., 2011, Chapter 16, this volume), high-quality connections (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011, Chapter 29, this volume), compassion (Lilis et al., 2011, Chapter 21, this volume), civility (Porath, 2011, Chapter 33, this volume), generalized reciprocity (Baker, 2011, Chapter 31, this volume), prosocial motivation (Grant & Berg, 2011, Chapter 3, this volume), and intimacy (Kark, 2011, Chapter 32, this volume). We note, however, that we know less about love, generosity, or charity.

The remaining virtue categories in Peterson and Seligman’s framework have more obvious gaps: wisdom, temperament, and transcendence:
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• Wisdom deals with acquiring and using knowledge. Several of our chapters fit this bill: curiosity (Harrison, 2011, Chapter 9, this volume), innovation (DeGraff & Nathan-Roberts, 2011, Chapter 53, this volume), creativity (Zhou & Ren, 2011, Chapter 8, this volume), ambivalence (Pratt & Pradies, 2011, Chapter 70, this volume), and perspective-taking (Williams, 2011, Chapter 35, this volume). Still missing is research on open-mindedness and love of learning.

• A second underresearched virtue category is temperance, which protects against excess. The handbook includes chapters on forgiveness (Bright & Exline, 2011, Chapter 19, this volume) and humility (Owens, Rowatt, & Wilkins, 2011, Chapter 20, this volume). We know little, however, about other components of temperance such as prudence, patience, honor, moderation, tolerance, sacrifice, and wisdom.

• The final virtue category with significant research gaps is transcendence, which focuses on meaning and seeking connections to the larger universe. Chapters in this handbook focus on spirituality (Sandelands, 2011, Chapter 76, this volume), calling (Wrzeniewski, 2011, Chapter 4, this volume), transcendence through hope (Carlsen et al., 2011, Chapter 22, this volume), humor (Cooper & Sosik, 2011, Chapter 36, this volume), mindful organizing (Vogus, 2011, Chapter 50, this volume), peace (Ritchie & Hammond, 2011, Chapter 78, this volume), and virtuousness (Cameron & Winn, 2011, Chapter 18, this volume). We know less about calmness, harmony, consciousness, faith, gratitude, appreciating beauty, and gentleness.

In addition to filling these gaps on specific virtues and strengths, future research could conceptualize the key distinctions between virtues and strengths better and can focus more precisely on the “O” level of analysis.

Methodological Issues

Are certain methodological issues of interest for the discipline of POS? We conclude this section articulating a path forward by offering some insights on methods for future POS research. Much quantitative research on POS topics is still cross-sectional in nature (although frequently research employs other outcome assessments to avoid common method bias). Research that is nonlongitudinal by design limits our ability to study fluidity and dynamics over time. We need more longitudinal research that looks at trajectories, delays, and accelerations. More longitudinal or field experiments with interventions can also enable us to examine the direction of causal influence among constructs.

A more qualitative process focus could also help us understand people’s actual lived experiences (Golden-Biddle & Mao, 2011, Chapter 58, this volume). For example, Worline (2011, Chapter 23, this volume) discusses courage as an emergent pattern of activity in context. It can also help POS researchers think about studying verbs rather than nouns (e.g., resiliing rather than resilience; forgiving rather than forgiveness). For example, Carlsen et al. (2011, Chapter 22, this volume) recommend a phenomenological approach to studying “acts of hoping” (a verb) rather than the state of hope (a noun). By following people in their work settings over time, we can understand the process of hoping or even “hope organizing.”

Much of POS research operates at a single level of analysis, be it individual, team, unit, or organization. Organizational dynamics, however, do not operate within a single level of analysis. Positive organizational scholarship research needs to address the cross-level interactions among individuals, their work relationship, and the broader organization, cultural, and societal context in which they are embedded more effectively. As Hackman (2009, p. 313) suggested, “robust explanations more often than not require simultaneous attention to factors that operate at both higher and lower levels than the level of the focal phenomenon itself ... the most satisfying explanations for the dynamics of positive organization phenomena will require cross-level analyses.” One particularly good example of a chapter that takes a cross-level approach is Carlsen et al. (2011, Chapter 22, this volume). They look at three paths of hope research, each at a different level of analysis: hope as an individual attaining goals, hope as a relational possibility, and hope as an organizational process. In this way, they open up a more positive vocabulary of hope across levels for organizational studies.

Finally, although progress has been made on defining constructs, we still need better instrumentation. We need validated measures of core POS constructs inasmuch as this is a crucial requirement for building a cumulative body of research knowledge.

Conclusion
In summary, in this concluding chapter, we hope to convey the progress achieved over the last decade, but also convey the energy and excitement about what questions have been raised as we move beyond the first decade of POS. Positive organizational scholarship provides an enriching lens for organizational studies. It encourages organizational scholars to expand their horizons in theorizing about and empirically investigating OB and OT topics. It expands the range of topics seen as valuable and legitimate in organizational science.

The plethora of emerging research questions highlighted in these chapters primes us to invite other scholars to look for the POS-related issues in their own research programs. We hope this can build a “deluge” (Wright & Quick, 2009, p. 147) that can dramatically escalate a promising trajectory of POS research. We invite you to join us as we continue the POS journey in organizational studies.

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