Positive Organizational Behaviour

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Since the historical APA address by Seligman in 1998 on the need to off load psychology from disease and dysfunctional model to adopt a more balanced approach to human functioning, the field of positive psychology is growing at a very fast pace. Some important events that followed Seligman’s address were the publication of the special issue of American Psychologist (2000 & 2001), a number of books on positive psychology, publications of handbooks, journal articles and a comprehensive website (www.positivepsychology.org) on positive psychology. The implications of positive psychology for workplace, however, remained a neglected issue in the “mainstream positive psychology”; the Handbook of Positive Psychology by Snyder & Lopez (2002) has just one chapter out of fifty-five on the work domain. However, parallel developments notably by Luthans (2002a, 2002b) in the name of Positive Organizational Behaviour (POB) and Cameron et al. (2003) in the name of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) have tried to fill this gap. The present volume edited by Nelson and Cooper is a welcome addition in this direction. It starts with the quote, “The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes”, of Marcel Proust (1871-1922) which rightly reflects its key theme i.e. seeking an understanding of organizational behavior from the ‘eyes’ of Positive Psychology.

The volume comprises of three parts. Part 1- “Introduction and Frameworks” has four chapters and presents broad and over arching works that showcases the various applications of the positive movement in the context of work. Part 2- “Positive States, Traits and Processes” has eight chapters focusing on positive states, traits and processes that encompass a wide range of variables and issues reflecting the diversity within the positive organizational research. Part 3 deals with “Methodological Issues and Challenges in POB Research” and it comprises of two chapters.

The first chapter entitled “Positive Organizational Behavior: An Inclusive View” is basically an introduction to the volume. The first line of the chapter - “moving away from a disease and dysfunctional model to a new look at the world with a focus on positive attributes of people and organizations means looking at organizational behavior in a new light”, sets the tone for the entire book. The chapter traces the root of positive movement in organizational behavior to Luthans and Cameron in their advocacy for POB (Positive Organizational Behavior) and POS (Positive Organizational Scholarship) respectively. POB focuses on building human strengths at work rather than only managing weaknesses. POS is more concerned with understanding human excellence and exceptional organizational performance. The chapter also tries to define what is ‘positive’in POB and POS. Instead of getting carried away with ‘positive’ at the expense of ‘negative’, it sets the agenda for the remaining chapters by stating that positive side be given equal time and equal importance as the negative side. Therefore, what is required is the more inclusive view of organizations and organizational behavior. The remainder of this chapter presents the thematic representation of the rest of the chapters covered in the book.

The second chapter by Luthans and others is on Psychological Capital (PsyCap). Luthans is one of the founding fathers of positive OB and defined the field as “the study and application of positive oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace.” PsyCap has been proposed as the key construct to realize this goal. Four psychological states such as self-efficacy/confidence, hope, optimism, and resiliency have been identified by the authors to tap the essence of PsyCap. The chapter then deals with the theoretical framework of the four constructs and how
they can be managed and developed in the organizational context. The authors also proposed a Psychological Capital Intervention (PCI) model to realize the goals of sustainable performance in the organizations.

The third chapter by Campbell and his associates takes the debate a bit further by including the notion of ‘healthy organization’ besides the ‘healthy person’ into discussion. They discussed the attributes of healthy individuals and healthy organizations. An overarching and three-dimensional model of health (both individual and organizational) has been presented. The key attributes of the model are 1) leading a life of purpose, 2) quality connection to others, and 3) positive self-regard and mastery. These attributes may sound absurd in the context of organization, but the authors have diligently explained the use of these in the organizational context. There is a chapter on ‘Eustress at work’ which is refreshing as it talks about a holistic notion of stress instead of stress per se that one is so accustomed to. The chapter ends with how to generate and savor eustress in the organizational context besides managing stress. It is then followed by a chapter on ‘Positive emotion in organizations’. To build positive emotion in organization, a 5-level model of emotion in organizations have been presented starting from within person level of analysis at the neuro-psychological level to the organizational level of analysis. “Thriving in organizations” is the title of the next chapter, which introduces a new concept in the literature analysis. "Thriving in organizations" is the title of the next chapter, which introduces the concept of engagement at work, its various conceptualizations, dimensionality and its measurement. The authors also highlighted the weaknesses of the existing models and proposed their model on the engagement at work.

The last two chapters in the book are about methodological issues in POB research. The first of the two chapters deals with the challenges of conducting positive based research in a rigorous and methodological sound manner. Two important challenges have been raised. The first is about the temporal distinction between POB and POS. Using Psychological well-being (PWB) as an example, the authors have meticulously shown how one can methodologically determine whether PWB or any other psychological construct exhibits more state like or trait like qualities. The second important issue raised in the chapter is how to better use the cardiovascular health indices in positive organization research. The last chapter presented the convergent, discriminant, and predictive validities of the four psychological capital measures using exploratory, confirmatory factor analysis as well as structural equation modeling with some success.

Indeed the present volume is a pleasant voyage to positive organizational behavior. Nelson and Cooper have provided an alternative framework to the existing literature in OB, which is very positive in its spirit and outlook and written with utmost sincerity and honesty, keeping the tradition of positive psychology alive. Since many concepts in the book such as thriving, ethical leadership, engagement at work, etc., are very ambiguous and almost overlapped with many existing constructs, so the issue of discriminant and incremental validities really needs to be addressed. However, one can give them liberty at this stage as the concepts are just growing and all these processes are part and parcel of the knowledge development. But it should