FOSTERING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP IN THE WORKPLACE: A POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

*Sathyapriya Sakarias **Dr. Jeena Madhavan

*Research Scholar, Dept of Psychology and Allied Science, Jain deemed to be University, Bangalore, India
**Associate Professor, Dept of Psychology and Allied Science, Jain deemed to be University, Kerala, India

ABSTRACT

Positive workplace relationships contribute to personal well-being and facilitate collaboration toward achieving organizational goals. This article explores the significance of positive relationships in the workplace and aims to examine how principles from positive psychology can be applied to cultivate and strengthen interpersonal relationships in professional settings. Having healthy relationships at the workplace ensures well-being, engagement, teamwork, more productivity and good physical as well as mental well-being which, in turn, reduces absenteeism and quitting. Positive relationship in an organization is not just focused on interaction between employees but it also depends on different factors like leadership approach, policies and culture followed in the organization, norms for communication and more. Connection to others elicits motivation and happiness and reduces burnout. Thus restructuring the job alone does not improve productivity. Positive feelings about self and others along with positive experiences enhance the relationship. The integration of positive psychology principles in the workplace not only improves employee satisfaction but also drives organizational growth. Adopting a theoretical perspective, this paper reviews and integrates literature to examine how can employees and organizations promote positive relationships in the workplace.

Interpersonal relationships serve as a source of emotional support, contributing to a person's overall well-being and happiness. These relationships also act as a buffer against stress by providing comfort and support. Numerous studies have demonstrated that individuals with strong social connections experience lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression and report higher levels of life satisfaction. Interpersonal connections also provide a strong professional network which can

enhance professional growth. Additionally, positive workplace relationships contribute to effective teamwork, problem-solving, and conflict resolution which enhance organizational productivity and success.

This article explores the concepts in positive psychology that help in improving workplace relationships. Positive psychology offers many insights that support positive interactions among employees in the workplace and by understanding and applying these positive psychology concepts, organizations can foster a collaborative and thriving work environment. Positive interactions in the workplace play a crucial role in enhancing positive relationships among employees and contribute to overall work efficiency. Positive interactions contribute to a sense of trust, respect, and safety. Trust between coworkers is built when they engage in respectful communication, actively listen to each other, and provide constructive feedback. For positive interactions to take place it's important to develop an environment where individuals feel comfortable to express themselves, share ideas, and have healthy debates without worrying about negative consequences. By integrating the concepts of positive psychology into the workplace, organizations can create a culture that supports positive interactions among employees.

Despite growing awareness of the value of workplace relationships, organizations and existing research mainly focus on individual level outcomes such as productivity, employee engagement, and leadership effectiveness. While studies have examined aspects of daily employee interactions, they are rarely explored through the focused framework of positive psychology, which highlights elements such as gratitude, mindfulness, and strengths-based communication. This article addresses that gap by organizing and interpreting existing studies through a positive psychology lens, providing clearer insights into how organizations can actively and effectively build strong, positive relationships across the workplace.

Objectives

This article explores the application of positive psychology in enhancing workplace relationships. The objectives are:

1. To analyze the significance of positive workplace relationships in promoting employee well-being and improving organizational performance.
2. To review and organize literature on workplace interpersonal relationships from a positive psychology perspective.
3. To identify practical interventions that organizations and employees can implement to promote emotionally supportive and collaborative workplace environments.

METHOD

To explore the role of positive psychology in workplace relationships, this paper adopts a theoretical approach and organizes findings through a narrative review of existing literature. The literature included in this review was selected based on its relevance to two primary focus areas: the impact of interpersonal relationships on employee well-being and organizational functioning, and the application of positive psychology concepts within workplace settings. Sources were identified through academic databases such as Google Scholar and

ResearchGate, and include peer-reviewed journal articles, theoretical contributions, and empirical studies. The selection was purposive, prioritizing widely cited and conceptually significant works that reflect key positive psychology concepts.

The information gathered from the selected literature was categorized and organized under major headings titled Fostering Positive Relationships through Positive Emotions, Strength-Based Approaches, and Mindfulness in the Workplace, each section focusing on how these core positive psychology concepts support the development of strong and meaningful workplace relationships.

THE ROLE OF POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE WORKPLACE

Relationships with others contribute to overall well-being, Umberson and Montez (2010) observed that interpersonal relationships are a basic human need and they affect mental health, physical health, and health behaviors such as actions by an individual that lead to improved health as well as actions that might increase the risk of diseases. Positive relationships support both individual well-being and organizational collaboration (Roffey,2016). While exploring the positive sides of close relationships Gable and Gosnell (2011) found that close relationships with others at work are linked to an increased rate of motivation to help others and in response to social interaction, the brain releases oxytocin, a hormone associated with positive affect, trustworthiness, and subjective well-being. Increased motivation was identified in lower and higher-level employees who reported having good interpersonal relationships

within the workplace (Basford & Offermann,2012). Conversely, negative ties between employees lead to stress and job dissatisfaction. In an organization, employees might experience positive and negative connections but when individuals have more negative relationships it affects emotional well-being and results in psychological distress and exhaustion (Rosales, 2016).

Interpersonal and team communication is important for work efficiency and effectiveness. Communication style or norms followed in an organization can lead to the destruction or improving relationships (Langley, 2012). To improve communication individuals should acquire emotional awareness, self-control, trustworthiness, empathetic listening, ensure mutually satisfying agreements, and assertive communication skills.

Relational System Theory states that workplace relationships promote attachment to the organization, work engagement and commitment. Employees' relationship with one another in the organization helps them to fulfill different relational needs. Relational needs include the need for belonging, intimacy, support and validation in relationships, individual seek to attain these through workplace relationships (Kahn,2007). Having healthy relationships at the workplace ensures well-being, engagement, teamwork, more productivity and good physical as well as mental well-being which in turn reduces absenteeism and quitting (Seppala & McNichols, 2022). Informal interactions with each other including superiors develop more positive relationships and this influences employee satisfaction and individuals who are satisfied with workplace relationships are found to be

more attached to their organization (Sias,2005).

STRENGTHENING EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIPS BY APPLYING POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY CONCEPTS

Positive psychology provides a framework that supports positive interactions among employees in the workplace. By promoting positive emotions, such as happiness and gratitude, positive psychology helps create a positive atmosphere at the workplace that nurtures cooperation and understanding (Fredrickson,2001). Emphasizing strengths-based approaches encourages individuals to recognize and utilize their unique strengths, fostering a sense of confidence and fulfillment that positively impact their interactions with others (Hammond,2010). Positive psychology also emphasizes the importance of positive communication, including active listening, empathy, and understanding, which enhances effective and respectful dialogue among colleagues (Pitts and Socha,2013). Also, by promoting mindfulness, and self-awareness, positive psychology helps individuals develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others, which allows them to engage in more meaningful and positive interactions. Thus, by integrating positive psychology principles, organizations can create a workplace culture that nurtures positive interactions, leading to enhanced collaboration, trust, and overall well-being.

Fostering Positive Relationships Through Positive Emotions

Experiencing positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, hope, etc. influences an individual's perception of themselves and others. Cultivating positive emotions helps employees feel valued, understood, supported, trusted, and connected. When individuals experience positive emotions it becomes easier to actively listen to others, understand different perspectives, and express ideas and feedback in a supportive manner (Seligman,2002). Positive emotions also help to regulate stress and provide individuals with a more optimistic outlook, which helps to manage conflict situations by finding a solution that is mutually acceptable (Yang,2022). This ultimately strengthens the relationship between employees and reduces conflicts within the organization.

Positive psychology interventions can be implemented in organizations to cultivate positive emotions and promote positive relationships among employees. Focusing and understanding what they are grateful for in their job, including supportive work relationships helps employees maintain positive connections (Kaplan et al., 2014). Gratitude exercises such as gratitude journaling, gratitude letters, and gratitude sharing spaces encourage reflecting on and expressing gratitude towards positive aspects of work, colleagues, and the organization and enhance interpersonal relationships by promoting appreciation and connection among employees (Passmore and Oades,2016).

Developing a culture of positive feedback and recognition within the organization nurtures positive emotions and strengthens the relationship. This can be done by publicly appreciating employee's efforts and success through awards or appreciation ceremonies and thus developing a supportive and appreciative work environment.

Organizing team-building activities that focus on positive aspects such as skill development, trust exercises, collaborative games or activities that promote enjoyment fosters positive emotions and enhances social connections (Fredrickson,2001).

Prioritizing employee well-being through wellness programs and promoting work-life balance helps raise awareness about the importance of taking care of physical, mental, and emotional well-being. These factors directly affect employees' ability to experience positive emotions and thus well-being initiatives help in building a positive relationships with others.

Fostering Positive Relationships Through Strength-Based Approaches

Strength-based interventions focus on identifying, developing, and utilizing employees' strengths. By adopting a strength-based approach, organizations foster a culture that values individual strengths, it involves a shift in focus from fixing weaknesses to taking advantage of strengths and using them to develop work efficiency. According to Van Woerkom and Meyers (2015), when employees who feel encouraged to identify and use their strengths at work tend to experience more positive emotions, which leads to better job performance and greater willingness to go beyond their assigned duties.

Identifying strengths helps individuals to recognize their unique talents, skills, and positive attributes, as Niemiec and McGrath (2019) highlight, this enhances self-awareness, builds confidence, and enables more intentional and effective use of these strengths in both workplace performance and interpersonal relationships. Strengths could be identified through assessments, self-reflection, or discussion with others (Niemiec & McGrath,2019). This helps individuals to attain self-reflection and better self-awareness and helps individuals to understand how their strengths contribute to workplace relationships. Clifton and Harter (2003) states that when individuals become aware of and use their strengths, they show increased confidence, higher engagement, and greater contribution to team success. Applying signature strengths at work is positively associated with job satisfaction and better coping with stress, indicating that strengths-based approaches support productivity and emotional resilience in relationships (Harzer & Ruch 2013) .Understanding the overuse and underuse of specific character strengths helps identify which aspects are out of balance in challenging situations and relationship conflicts (Niemiec,2019).

Providing feedback that highlights individual strengths is an effective strategy superiors can adopt to reinforce confidence, foster a sense of belonging, and strengthen workplace relationships (Costantini,2019). Rather than focusing on shortcomings while giving feedback focus should be given on how the individual's strengths influenced their work. Mentioning or publicly appreciating specific instances where their strengths have led to positive outcomes creates a positive emotional climate and strengthens interpersonal relationships.

Strength-based coaching and training initiatives empower employees (Pang and Ruch,2019). Offering resources, training, or mentoring helps individuals to develop and apply their skills more effectively. This technique fosters a positive relationship between mentors and colleagues. Mentors can also inspire and motivate employees by recognizing and

supporting their strengths. At the workplace, leaders can delegate work according to employee's unique capabilities, and by empowering employees to make meaningful contributions a positive work environment can be created and this helps to strengthen employee's relationships with the organizational leaders.

Fostering Positive Relationships Through Mindfulness in the Workplace

Mindfulness involves observing one's thoughts and emotions without reacting, and accepting and acknowledging the present as it is. Practicing mindfulness encourages a non-judgmental and compassionate attitude toward others. Mindfulness promotes active listening and this allows an individual to be fully present in the conversation. This helps in understanding and responding in a better way which promotes effective communication, understanding and empathy, leading to a stronger relationship (Hyland et al., 2015)..

Mindfulness also helps to regulate emotions and avoid impulsive reactions. When individuals are aware of their thoughts and emotions, they will have better clarity during challenging situations, this enables them to manage the situations without harming their relationship with others (Glomb,2012). Mindfulness allows an individual to pause, reflect and respond thoughtfully rather than reacting impulsively (Pang and Ruch, 2019). Research by Celestin and Vanitha (2020) highlights that mindful leadership, characterized by emotional regulation, self-awareness, and intentional communication, enhances workplace performance by improving task efficiency, productivity, employee engagement, and

organizational loyalty. Thus, By incorporating mindfulness into the organizational culture a positive work environment can be developed by promoting open communication, respect, empathy, and collaboration.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, fostering a positive relationship in an organization through the lens of positive psychology has far-reaching benefits, enhancing both individual well-being and overall organizational success. The review highlights that fostering gratitude, giving strength-based feedback, and practicing mindful communication can create a supportive and collaborative work environment where individuals feel a sense of belonging and are motivated. Positive relationships in an organization are not just focused on the interaction between employees but also depend on different factors like leadership approach, policies, culture followed in the organization, and norms for communication. Interpersonal relationships elicit motivation, happiness, and reduce burnout; thus, restructuring the nature or design of the job alone does not improve productivity.

These findings have important implications for organizational leaders, HR professionals, and programs focusing on workplace well-being. Integrating positive psychology principles into workplace policies, communication practices, and leadership strategies can create an environment where positive relationships flourish, benefitting employees and the organization. Future research should examine the long-term implications of positive psychology interventions in various organizational settings and

cultures. Additionally, empirical studies that provide evidence for the effectiveness of positive psychology interventions to improve workplace relationships could provide stronger evidence for organizational policy

REFERENCES

Basford, T. E., & Offermann, L. R. (2012). Beyond leadership: The impact of coworker relationships on employee motivation and intent to stay. Journal of Management & Organization, 18(6), 807–817.

Celestin, M., & Vanitha, N. (2020). Mindful leadership: Harnessing mindfulness to boost workplace performance. International Journal of Advanced Trends in Engineering and Technology, 5(2), 18–25

Clifton, D. O., & Harter, J. K. (2003). Investing in strengths. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 111–121). Berrett-Koehler.

Costantini, A., Ceschi, A., Viragos, A., De Paola, F., & Sartori, R. (2019). The role of a new strength-based intervention on organisation-based self-esteem and work engagement. *Journal of Workplace Learning, 31*(3), 194–206.

Emmons, R. A., McCullough, M. E., & Tsang, J. (2003). *The psychology of gratitude*. In R. A. Emmons & M. E. McCullough (Eds.), The psychology of gratitude (pp. 59–78). Oxford University Press.

Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology. The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *The American Psychologist, 56*(3), 218–226. https://doi.org/10.1037//0003-066x.56.3.218

Fredrickson, B. L. (2003). Positive emotions and upward spirals in organizations. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship* (pp. 163–175). Berrett-Koehler.

Gable, S. L., & Gosnell, C. L. (2011). The positive side of close relationships. In K. M. Sheldon, T. B. Kashdan, & M. F. Steger (Eds.)*, Designing positive psychology: Taking stock and moving forward* (pp. 265–279). Oxford University Press.

Gallup. (2015). *State of the global workforce* [Report]. https://www.gallup.com/workplace/238079/state-global-workplace-2017.aspx

Glomb, T. M., Duffy, M. K., Bono, J. E., & Yang, T. (2012). Mindfulness at work. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management, 30*, 115–157.

Hammond, W. (2010). Principles of strength-based practice. *Resiliency Initiatives, 12*(2), 1–7.

Harzer, C., & Ruch, W. (2013). The application of signature character strengths and positive experiences at work. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 14*(3), 965–983. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-012-9364-0

Hyland, P. K., Lee, R. A., & Mills, M. J. (2015). Mindfulness at work: A new approach to improving individual and organizational performance. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 8*, 576–602.

Kahn, W. A. (2007). Meaningful connections: Positive relationships and attachments at work. In J. E. Dutton & B. R. Ragins (Eds.), *Exploring positive relationships at work: Building a theoretical and research foundation* (pp. 189–206). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Luthans, F., Youssef, C. M., & Avolio, B. J. (2007). *Psychological capital: Developing the human competitive edge*. Oxford University Press.

Mertika, A., Mitskidou, P., & Stalikas, A. (2020). "Positive relationships" and their impact on well-being: A review of current literature. *Psychology: The Journal of the Hellenic Psychological Society, 25*(1), 115–127.

Niemiec, R. M. (2019). Finding the golden mean: The overuse, underuse, and optimal use of character strengths. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 32*(3–4), 453–471.

Niemiec, R. M., & McGrath, R. E. (2019). *The power of character strengths: Appreciate and ignite your positive personality*. VIA Institute on Character. https://thegipsy.ir/wp-content/uploads/Ryan_M_Niemiec_Robert_E_McGrath_The_Power_of_Character_Strengths.pdf

Pang, D., & Ruch, W. (2019). Fusing character strengths and mindfulness interventions: Benefits for job satisfaction and performance. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 24*(1), 150–162.

Passmore, J., & Oades, L. G. (2016). Positive psychology techniques: Gratitude. *The Coaching Psychologist, 12*(1), 34–35.

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Oxford University Press.

Pitts, M. J., & Socha, T. J. (2013). *Positive communication in health and wellness*. Peter Lang Publishing.

Roffey, S. (2016). Positive relationships at work. In L. G. Oades, M. F. Steger, A. D. Fave, & J. Passmore (Eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell handbook of the psychology of positivity and strengths-based approaches at work* (pp. 171–190). Wiley Blackwell.

Rosales, R. M. (2016). Energizing social interactions at work: An exploration of relationships that generate employee and organizational thriving. *Open Journal of Social Sciences, 4*(10), 41–52.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. Simon & Schuster.

Seppälä, E., & McNichols, N. K. (2022, June 21). The power of healthy relationships at work. *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2022/06/the-power-of-healthy-relationships-at-work

Shapiro, S. L., Astin, J. A., Bishop, S. R., & Cordova, M. (2005). Mindfulness-based stress reduction for health care professionals: Results from a randomized trial. *International Journal of Stress Management, 12(2)*, 164–176. https://doi.org/10.1037/1072-5245.12.2.164

Sias, P. (2005). Workplace relationship quality and employee information experiences. *Communication Studies, 56*(4), 375–395.

Umberson, D., & Montez, J. K. (2010). Social relationships and health: A flashpoint for health policy. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 51*(1), S54–S66.

Vaillant, G. E. (2008). Positive emotions, spirituality and the practice of psychiatry. *Mens Sana Monographs, 6(1)*, 53–62. https://doi.org/10.4103/0973-1229.40565

Woerkom, M., & Meyers, M. C. (2015). My strengths count! Effects of a strengths-based psychological climate on positive affect and job performance. *Human Resource Management, 54*(1), 81–103. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21623

Wood, A. M., Joseph, S., & Linley, P. A. (2007). Gratitude – Parent of all virtues. *The Psychologist, 20(1)*, 18–21.

Wood, A. M., Maltby, J., Gillett, R., Linley, P. A., & Joseph, S. (2008). The role of gratitude in the development of social support, stress, and depression: Two longitudinal studies. *Journal of Research in Personality, 42(4)*, 854–871. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2007.11.003

Yang, Y. (2022). The association of daily stressors and daily emotions to daily optimism: The role of emotion differentiation. *Journal of Individual Differences, 43*(4), 216–227.