

Managers Using Positive Psychology to Maximize Productivity and Job Satisfaction

Dr. David E. Bartz

Professor Emeritus

Department of Educational Leadership

Eastern Illinois University

600 Lincoln Avenue, Charleston, IL USA

Dr. Patrick Rice

Director of Field Services

Illinois Association of School Boards

2921 Baker Drive, Springfield, IL USA

Abstract

Positive psychology concentrates on factors for which managers can have rewarding and motivating experiences. It is in contrast to much of the traditional emphasis of psychology that focuses on negative attributes such as weaknesses of people and mental illnesses. Aspects of positive psychology pertaining to managers are integrity, optimism, mindset, resilience, managing and regenerating energy, and maximizing satisfaction and enjoyment from work. Managers need to do everything possible to maximize productivity and job satisfaction. It is also important for managers to gain respect and credibility from those they directly supervise, others with whom they interact within the organization and business encounters with people outside the company. Effectively utilizing these positive psychology components will result in increasing the respect and credibility of managers. It will also create a positive work environment for those they supervise and enhance their productivity and job satisfaction.

Keywords: positive psychology, managers, productivity, and job satisfaction.

1.0 Positive Psychology

Positive psychology focuses on making the lives of managers better, while enhancing their job performance and satisfaction. It also creates a more productive and satisfying environment for those with whom managers work. Positive psychology stresses the use of emotions driven by meaningful purpose that result in positive and authentic relationships with others (Seligman, 2008). This contrasts with much of the traditional emphasis of psychology that focuses on negative attributes such as weaknesses of people and mental illnesses. The components of positive psychology addressed are integrity, optimism, mindset, resilience, managing and regenerating energy, and maximizing satisfaction and enjoyment from work. While each component is reviewed separately, it is important to note that there is a synergy between their interactions that holistically make for a more effective manager.

2.0 Integrity

Integrity is closely aligned with the personal success of managers. Integrity means being honest in relationships and interactions with all people in the work environment. It includes adhering to the concept of fairplay in that rules, at times, may have to be placed in the proper context to prevent staff from being harmed or victimized. Integrity is consistency between words and actions—behaving in a manner that is true to what the manager verbally expresses (Kaiser & Hogan, 2010). It must also be closely linked with ethical and moral behaviors (Shahid & Azhar, 2013). A manager “needs to be viewed as having high integrity in order to win the trust of followers [staff]” (Kaiser & Hogan, 2010, p. 218). Conversely, the absence of integrity undermines the trust and relationships required to build and maintain collaboration and a team environment. Integrity fosters a work environment of reduced stress and enhanced satisfaction, as well as keeping critical issues in a balanced perspective (Quigley, 2007).

Establishing trust is often a huge issue faced by managers, especially those new to the organization, their workgroup, or both. Being driven by integrity demonstrating it verbally and behaviorally is the foundation for managers to build trust with immediate staff and others throughout the organization. Five critical aspects of trust are: clarity, compassion, character, connection, and consistency.

Clarity illuminates a clear path, solidifies the actions of teams and staff, and motivates them to collaborate in producing high quality work.

Compassion is authentically behaving in a manner that emulates caring about the interests, needs, desires, issues, and problems of staff. It is understanding, and taking into consideration, the unique situation of staff members and working with them to be their best in producing work while enjoying their jobs.

Character is the perspective demonstrated by the manager to be honest, hardworking, and living the values of the organization so that a culture of “oneness” exists among staff.

Connection is the personal binding and respect between the manager and staff which inspires everyone to strive to be fully engaged in work and perform at peak efficiency.

Consistency means having clear and meaningful expectations for all and making sure that the manager behaves in a steady manner and stays the course for these expectations with staff, both individually and in teams (Shahid & Azhard, 2013, p. 69-71).

Peterson and Seligman (2001) note that integrity is buildable, meaning that with sufficient practice, persistence, and dedication a manager can cause integrity to grow. For managers to maintain integrity they may at times be viewed as stubborn and rigid as they stay on an unwavering course. Table 1 presents attributes indicative of managers with integrity.

Table 1. Attributes Indicative of Managers with Integrity

-
- Even when pressured from above to act otherwise, they “do the right thing.”
 - Epitomize balancing dignity and accountability.
 - Perpetuate their integrity traits in others so as to develop a culture of integrity.
 - Respected by subordinates and superordinates, and especially so by the teams and individuals with whom they work closely.
 - Cement the organization’s and work unit’s cultural values and operationalize them.
 - Staff and others in the organization enjoy affiliation, are motivated to take pride in their work, and want to be their best in the eyes of the manager (Shahid & Azhard, 2013).

3.0 Optimism

Optimism is having positive expectations for the future. It means that managers maintain a positive mindset even when events go against them (Bartz, 2017). Optimism is a strength, rather than a trait. This means that a manager’s optimism can change over time, either positively or negatively. While optimism has some commonalities with hope, it is more concrete and realistic than hope because optimism has clear expectations and a path to actualize them. While hope anticipates success, it is often not accompanied with a plan for actualizing variables needed for success.

Optimism and its counterpart, pessimism, can be habit-forming and self-perpetuating (Seligman, 2006). Regarding optimism and pessimism, Bartz (2017) notes:

There are two fundamental ways to look at adverse events that happen. The manager can: (1) imagine the worst and wallow in self-pity; or (2) view such events as temporary, surmountable, and challenges to overcome. Pessimists believe that an adverse event will last a long time, make the person helpless, and is her/his fault. Optimists view an adverse event as only a temporary setback that does not permeate all aspects of their lives and, in most situations, is not their fault.

However, optimism in managers can be increased through development activities, assuming there is a desire to do so (Seligman, 2002). Table 2 summarizes the benefits of managers being optimistic as compared to being pessimistic.

Table 2. Benefits of Optimism Compared to Pessimism

- Overall better emotional and cognitive well-being in times of adversity or difficulty.
- Have “flexible engagement” for making changes to stressful circumstances and accommodate those circumstances that cannot be altered so that negative personal effects are neutralized or minimized.
- Have the confidence that working harder to solve problems will alleviate the negatives of a situation and even create positive outcomes. (optimism → confidence → working harder to solve problems)
- Possess the resilience to “stay the course” for actions needed to overcome adversity rather than going into denial or “giving up.”
- Likely to display the “expectancy value model” of motivation by identifying important goals that have the greatest value to achieving the outcomes needed to overcome the difficulties caused by adversity.
- Display higher level of engagement skills for effectively coping with adversity; and have a lower level of avoidance behaviors that cause disengagement from dealing with adversity.
- Take proactive actions to prevent physical and mental health problems and, when illnesses happen, take aggressive steps to “get well.”
- Are energetic, goal oriented, and pursue tasks to actualize goal accomplishment which often enhances socio-economic status.
- Are persistent in education, training, and personal development pursuits that often lead to higher income.
- Are likeable and good at building meaningful relationships with others.
- Are good at social networking (Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010).

4.0 Mindset Examples of Dweck’s Mindset (Fixed vs Growth)

ability is static	ability can be developed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● avoids challenges ● gives up easily ● sees effort as fruitless ● ignores useful criticism ● threatened by others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● embraces challenges ● persists against obstacles ● sees effort as necessary ● learns from criticism ● inspired by others’ success

Managers can believe that factors such as intelligence and personality are unchangeable (fixed mindset), or believe that these factors can be nurtured and developed (growth mindset) for professional and personal enhancement (Dweck, 2016). This represents the proverbial *Nature vs. Nurture* debate that has been discussed for centuries. Managers are impacted by both, but the growth mindset will likely enhance their expertise, performance, and job satisfaction (Bartz, 2016). Managers challenging themselves to develop existing attributes and being willing to put forth the needed effort is key to maximizing the growth mindset. Purposefully engaging in developmental activities indicative of the growth mindset is essential to managers maximizing potential and enhancing achievements.

To nurture the growth mindset, managers need to focus on: (a) having purpose drive their work; (b) dealing head-on with deficiencies instead of hiding from them; (c) viewing setbacks as learning opportunities for future successes; (d) viewing staff members as collaborators and stressing the team approach; (e) nurturing a burning desire to keep learning new knowledge and skills; (f) finding inspiration from successes of others and learning from them; (g) understanding that everyone can change and grow through passion, effort, application, and experience; (h) being ready to take risks, confront challenges, and keep working to get better, even when feeling distressed; and (i) when relationships with people in the work environment go wrong, viewing such situations as learning experiences and identifying positive actions for future relationship-building. Dweck (2016) cautions that managers can inadvertently fall into the *false growth mindset* via two misunderstandings: (1) managers identifying attributes they like about themselves and calling them collectively a growth mindset [If these attributes are, in fact, indicative of a fixed mindset, adhering to them is counterproductive to acquiring a growth mindset.] and (2) that growth mindset for managers is solely about effort and praising effort. Managers putting more effort into present fixed mindset attributes will not result in a growth mindset. New strategies are needed.

Dweck (2106) reminds us that, simply put, “growth mindset is about believing people can develop their abilities” (p. 214-215). The Arbinger Institute (2016) in *Outward Mindset: Seeing Beyond Ourselves* describes mindset as being *inward or outward*. A manager’s mindset is essential to enjoying the job and performing exceptionally well. Mindset is how a manager views oneself, staff, and others according to the Arbinger Institute. With the inward mindset, managers are usually self-centered and pay little attention to the needs and wants of staff and others pertaining to what needs to be changed and improved in the work settings (Bartz, 2017). Managers with an outward mindset see staff and others as similar to themselves, whose efforts and work matter to everyone. With the outward mindset, the approach to establish and meet job targets is viewed as a collaborative effort that considers the creative and innovative ideas of all staff involved and causes an environment in which staff eagerly share ideas. Table 3 provides specific comparisons of the inward and outward mindsets for managers in the context of working with staff and others.

Table 3. Comparing Inward and Outward Mindsets for Managers toward Staff and Others

Inward Mindset	Outward Mindset
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strives to control people 2. Often blames others when things go wrong 3. Is narcissistic 4. Consistently defends one’s position 5. Interactions with staff and others focus on protecting oneself 6. Uses behaviors that sometimes try to manipulate staff and others in an attempt to improve one’s own image 7. Shows minimal regard for how to create “collective results” among staff and others 8. Views staff and others in a context as to how they can help oneself achieve goals 9. Assumes that to simply change one’s behavior is the best way to enhance the work productivity of staff and others 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strives to cause staff and others to be fully responsible and engaged in work 2. Takes responsibility for actions of oneself and staff in the work environment 3. Displays modesty toward staff and others 4. Works collaboratively with staff to solicit their opinions and collectively develop the best solutions for problems 5. Interactions with staff and others focus on building positive relationships with and among people 6. Strives to facilitate committed behaviors” collectively with staff and others to improve work produced and achieve goals 7. Is motivated about how to work with staff and others aboratively and for others to collaborate with each other and oneself 8. Focuses on the needs and challenges of staff and others to create a work environment that prompts individual and team cooperation 9. Understands that changing how oneself views staff and others is more beneficial to everyone in comparison to merely focusing on changing behaviors toward staff and others
Inward Mindset	Outward Mindset
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Focuses on how to make oneself “look good” for work produced, even at the expense of staff and others 11. Often creates competition between staff and causes them to work independently of each other 12. Focuses mainly on the job responsibilities of oneself 13. Focuses on getting the work “out the door” with little concern for its benefits 14. Is inclined to step in, take over, and direct the work of staff and others when not pleased 15. Creates conflict that keeps staff embattled with each other (divide and conquer for control) 16. Focuses on personal and professional goals and behaviors to protect and advance oneself 17. Advances one’s own agenda at the expense of staff 18. Identifies what can be taken from others to achieve objectives for oneself 19. Oftentimes tries to control the behavior of staff and others for self-benefit through power, authority, and fear 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Sees, thinks, and works on how to improve job performance through collaboration with staff and others that incorporates their needs and wants, and gains recognition for them 11. Focuses on the staff as an entity which has collective belief of working with each other for the common good of the work unit and organization 12. Assists staff and others in identifying their interests and being motivated to successfully achieve what they need for the betterment of the work unit and organization 13. Focuses on the meaning and purposefulness of the work and the positive impact it can have on the work unit and organization 14. Helps staff and others understand what they need to do; provides developmental training, when needed; and furnishes the necessary resources to accomplish the goals of the work unit 15. Focuses on preventing and resolving conflict among staff and others 16. Focuses on the goals of the work unit and organization, and objectives and behaviors that take staff and others into consideration 17. Focuses on working together with staff and others for collective results to benefit the work unit and organization 18. Identifies what can be given to help staff and others successfully achieve their work objectives 19. Relinquishes power and authority to empower staff’s and others’ abilities to be responsible and accountable for their work (Bartz, Thompson, & Rice, 2017)

5.0 Resilience

Resilience is managers overcoming adversity. It is “staying the course” when events go against the manager’s efforts to accomplish job targets. Adverse events can be random, meaning that they occur for no logical reason. They can also occur as the result of those above the manager in the organization’s hierarchy changing goals, reducing resources, or expanding the manager’s job responsibilities.

Resilience is composed of four characteristics: (1) accepting the harsh realities facing managers in their jobs, including challenging and discouraging events; (2) finding meaning and learning from situations that are difficult; (3) having the skills to improvise and make do with whatever resources are at hand, as limited as they may be, to be effective; and (4) having unwavering optimism (Coutu, 2010).

Facing a harsh reality means a manager is a “positive realist” rather than being pessimistic about the difficulties and barriers (e.g., finances and other resources) that sometimes exist to make the accomplishment of important job targets difficult. The resilient manager creates an optimistic and positive attitude that prompts sustained effort to move forward when things go wrong and does not let negative events have a lasting effect on motivation. (Remember that optimism is motivational and breeds a *can-do* attitude, whereas pessimism leads to a lost sense of control and a *cannot-do* attitude) (Bartz, Thompson, & Rice, 2017). Outward mindset managers do not view themselves as victims in difficult situations. Rather, they view such situations as learning experiences and are not overwhelmed by them. When events do not go according to plans, it is important for the manager to improvise or have alternative plans of action. Being resourceful during difficult times means the manager is constantly looking for immediate and additional resources by networking with staff. Throughout such times, the manager remains unequivocally optimistic.

6.0 Managing and Regenerating Energy

Managers need to periodically assess their human capital (personal assets) by reflecting on how to maximize their strengths, manage their weaknesses, and develop additional human capital for enhancing job performance and satisfaction. Human capital is not a fixed quantity because it can decrease or increase as a function of the manager’s efforts, experiences, and developmental activities. Managers often try to “outwork” increased job demands, which results in an energy drain. In the long run, putting in more time is not the answer to effectively addressing an increased workload. The bottom line is that managers need to allocate their energy so that it is not depleted and consciously focus on how best to use it for maximizing productivity (Bartz, 2017).

Goleman (1995) indicates that the capacity for work energy comes from four sources: (1) body, (2) emotions, (3) mind, and (4) spirit. Energy can be expanded and renewed with “intentional practice” for each of these sources. Taking periodic breaks throughout the work day to rest the mind can regenerate a manager’s energy. Managers must condition themselves to relax in order to regenerate energy. Reducing interruptions by others and interruptions managers create on their own (e.g., hyperpaced tech-enabled activities such as emails, cell phone calls, texts, and tweets) are crucial to controlling depletion of energy (Kogon, Merrill, & Rinne, 2015).

7.0 Maximizing Satisfaction and Enjoyment from Work

Seligman’s (2002) model for happiness is an excellent source for managers to embrace regarding how to enhance enjoyment and satisfaction flowing from their jobs. Seligman’s model is PERMA—Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment.

Positive emotions include the manager being optimistic about the here and now, while seeing positives in the past and future, and nurturing the development of positive emotions in staff members. Enjoyment and satisfaction through intellectual stimulation and creativity also enhance a manager’s positive emotions. Managers participating in work activities and tasks that fully challenge them to learn, grow emotionally, and feel good about their work experiences represent meaningful engagement.

Relationships are represented through managers socially connecting with others via authentic and meaningful interactions. Having positive feelings about relationships with others at work during difficult and challenging times is crucial to this factor. Meaning refers to managers truly understanding the important and positive impact their work has on the organization, immediate staff, and others in the organization with whom they interact. Accomplishments encompass managers feeling good about pursuing their career and enjoying experiences coming with their job from their achievements and positive relationships with others.

Rubin (2017) indicates that “Happier people [managers] are more likely to help others, have more energy, and be better leaders and team members” (p. 25). She also believes that managers who authentically help others and develop substantial relationships with people in the work environment will gain enjoyment from doing so. Satisfaction and enjoyment from work is motivational to managers and is likely to enhance their productivity, as well as the productivity of those they supervise.

8.0 Concluding Thoughts

Managers need to do everything possible to maximize job productivity and their job satisfaction. It is also important for managers to gain respect and credibility from those they directly supervise, others with whom they interact within the organization and business encounters with people outside the company. Effectively utilizing these positive psychology components will result in increasing the respect and credibility of managers. It will also create a positive work environment for those they supervise and enhance their productivity and job satisfaction.

9.0 References

- Arbinger Institute. (2016). *The outward mindset: Seeing beyond ourselves*. Oakland, CA:Berrett-Koehler.
- Bartz, D. (2017). Using positive psychology to enhance job performance and satisfaction for school administrators. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 7(5), 1-6.
- Bartz, D.E. (2016). What is your “mindset”? And do you have “grit”? *Leadership Matters*, 26-27.
- Bartz, D., Thompson, K., & Rice, P. (2017). Managers helping themselves “be their best.” *International Journal of Management, Business, and Administration*, 20(1), 1-7.
- Bartz, D., Thompson, K., & Rice, P. (2017). Principals managing and developing their human capital. *National Forum of Education and Supervision Journal*, 35(4), 1-8.
- Carver, C.S., Scheier, M.F., & Segerstrom, S.C. (2010). Optimism. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 30, 879-889.
- Coutu, D.L. (2010). How resilience works. In Harvard Business Review, *On managing yourself*(pp. 105-118). Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation.
- Dweck, C. (2016). *Mindset: The new psychology of success* (updated edition). New York, NY: Galantine Books.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Kaiser, R.B. & Hogan, R. (2010). How to (and how not to) assess the integrity of managers. *Counseling Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 62(4), 216-234.
- Kogon, K., Merrill, A., & Rinne, A. (2015). *The 5 choices: The path of extraordinary productivity*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Peterson, C. & Seligman, M. (2001). Values in action (VIA) classification of strengths. Retrieved from <http://www.positivepsychology.org/taxonomy.htm>
- Quigley, J.H. (2007). Trust—an essential asset: Creating individual and corporate values. *The Raytheon Leadership in Business Ethics*, Waltham: Bentley College, 1-24.
- Rubin, G. (2017). In T. Lytle What’s your work style? (p. 24-250), *HR Magazine*, 62(7).
- Seligman, M.E.P. (2008). Positive health. *Applied Psychology*, 57, 3-18.
- Seligman, M.E.P. (2006). *Learned optimism: How to change your mind and your life*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Seligman, M.E.P. (2002). *Authentic happiness: Using positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York: NY: Free Press.
- Shahid, A. & Azhar, S.M. (2013). Integrity and trust: The defining principles of great workplaces. *Journal of Management Research*, 5(4), 64-75.