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A R T I C L E S

THE CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL VALUE OF A POSITIVE LENS: AN INVITATION TO ORGANIZATIONAL SCHOLARS TO DEVELOP NOVEL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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This article articulates how a positive lens contributes to organizational studies by stimulating novel research questions to foster flourishing in individuals, teams, and organizations. We highlight how researchers have used a positive lens to transform the kinds of questions that are asked in three domains of organizational research: resources, learning, and ethics. We then draw out and illuminate three pathways indicative of applying a positive lens: resource unlocking, capacity creating, and strength building. In closing, we invite scholars to consider applying a positive lens to their own area of inquiry to bolster understanding of flourishing within and across organizations by offering a set of questions to help them determine if their own domains of inquiry might be ripe for a positive lens.

Conceptualizing work and organizations through a positive lens may state the obvious to some, appear naïve to others, or even seem counterintuitive to scholars who have become accustomed to studying how to fix problems inherent in organizational life. A positive lens to work and organizations is grounded in both positive organizational behavior and positive organizational scholarship. The term "positive organizational behavior" was coined by Fred Luthans as "the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace" (Luthans, 2002: 59). The term "positive organizational scholarship" was introduced in an edited volume by Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn (2003), titled *Positive Organizational Scholarship: Foundations of a New Discipline*. Both perspectives build on a strengths-based "positive psychology" (Seligman & Czikszentmihalyi, 2000) and are anchored in humanistic approaches to organizational behavior (e.g., McGregor, 1960). We bring together positive organizational behavior, positive organizational scholarship, and positive psychology by articulating how a positive lens for work and organizations enables the optimal functioning and flourishing of individuals, dyads, and teams at work, as well as the organizations in which they reside.

OVERVIEW

Conceptually, a definition of a "positive lens" has been relatively elusive in organizational research.

Myers, Kopelman, and Mayer were equal contributors and thus share second authorship.

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The term "lens" refers metaphorically to how an optometrist fits glasses or contacts to sharpen and clarify one's vision. Similarly, our goal for this article is to sharpen and clarify what a positive lens enables scholars to see when observing and studying work dynamics and organizations. We suggest that a positive lens enables scholars to better study human and team flourishing at work and in organizations. Positive psychology conceptualizes flourishing at an individual level as exceptional mental health and well-being (Keyes & Haidt, 2003; Seligman, 2011). According to Seligman's (2011) PERMA model, individuals flourish when they experience positive emotions (P), engagement (E), relationships (R), meaning (M), and accomplishments (A). While the five attributes have been applied to individual flourishing in the realm of positive psychology, our work applies them to individual and team flourishing at work and to organizational flourishing at a collective level. Thus, extending PERMA to organizational dynamics, organizations are flourishing when individuals and teams are experiencing positive emotions; are fully engaged in their jobs; have high-quality connections with coworkers, bosses, and customers; believe their work is meaningful and with purpose; and when they achieve goals and exceed expectations.

Our work extends earlier reviews on a positive lens in organizational studies. Prior reviews (Donaldson & Ko, 2010; Mills, Fleck, & Kozikowski, 2013) have focused on novel or understudied positive constructs and their effects at work and in organizations; examples include research on an array of virtuous states in organizations, such as compassion (Rynes, Bartunek, Dutton, & Margolis, 2012), forgiveness (Cameron & Caza, 2002), courage (Quinn & Worline, 2008), personal growth (Sonenshein, Dutton, Grant, Spreitzer, & Sutcliffe, 2013), humility (Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013), and prospection (Gilbert & Wilson, 2007) in work organizations. Prior reviews have also shown how a positive lens brings new insights to the field of organizational studies by directing the attention of scholars at the positive opposite of negative constructs (Donaldson & Ko, 2010; Mills et al., 2013). For instance, until recently, we knew much more about the crippling effects of high levels of negative emotions, such as anger and fear, in the workplace that occur amid difficult change and conditions of incivility (Pearson & Porath, 2009). A positive lens has focused attention on the experience of positive emotions in organizational life, as well as on the constructive consequences of negative emotions. For example, recent research has revealed the generative dynamics of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998) in domains such as creativity (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005), negotiations (Kopelman, Rosette, & Thompson, 2006), and reciprocity (Baker & Bulkley, 2014). This research suggests positive emotions are resource producing, health enhancing, and fueling of organizational structures, processes, and dynamics that foster human and collective flourishing. In turn, Kashdan and Biswas-Diener (2014) brought attention to the positive outcomes of negative emotions like anger and guilt, which both can produce positive change and lead to a more fulfilled life. Thus, both positive and negative emotions are a potential resource that fuels positive outcomes (Kopelman, 2014). In general, prior reviews have demonstrated how a positive lens inspires the examination of new constructs that are central to better understanding individual and organizational flourishing. Furthermore, prior reviews have focused on assessing what organizational interventions are most efficacious for creating more positive teams and organizations (Mills et al., 2013).

In this article, we build on and contribute beyond previous conceptual reviews by drawing on Roberts (2006) and Dutton and Glynn (2008) to focus our attention on *how* a positive lens helps us observe and study the generative conditions and processes in organizations. Our goal is to provide guidance to scholars who might want to apply a positive lens to their own areas of inquiry. To inspire innovative research illuminated by a positive lens, we highlight underlying assumptions and relevance to organizational scholars. Furthermore, by reviewing three literatures and identifying pathways by which a positive lens illuminates novel insights, offering examples of questions a researcher could ask to take a positive lens, and demonstrating how a positive lens might inform other domains, we provide a toolkit for researchers interested in applying a positive lens to their own work.

ASSUMPTIONS OF A POSITIVE LENS AND WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Organizational scholarship, viewed through a positive conceptual lens, provides a different way of seeing phenomena and therefore facilitates and influences theoretical understanding (Roberts, 2006) of individual and collective flourishing in organizational contexts. To better understand how and why, it is important to consider underlying assumptions and logics. In contrast to a logic of *economic rationality*, which may be interpreted as narrowly confining human experience to maximizing self-interest, a culturally informed logic of *appropriateness* provides a way to conceptually

make sense of cooperative group-oriented behavior that enables positive outcomes (Kopelman, 2009). Assumptions embedded in economic theories of the firm (e.g., transaction cost economics) predict that people will generally act in their own self-interest, are largely motivated by their paycheck, and can't be trusted to work for the good of the team or organization, and can lead to a dehumanized, mechanistic organizational systems designed to minimize negative deviance and increase compliance. In contrast, a positive lens reflects a different logic and fundamentally different assumptions of organizing than are often seen in discussions of work organizations as mechanical entities, and individuals within them as rational "resources," motivated and bound to the organization only by simple, and often dehumanized, exchange systems (i.e., pay). Whereas assumptions of a predominant paradigm in organizational studies stress mechanisms of resource allocation, exchange, and control, with foundations in humanistic psychology, a positive lens views people as having potential for good, wanting to develop, and trustworthy to act in ways that promote personal thriving and collective well-being.

A positive lens is not value neutral (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012); it goes beyond traditional indicators of organizational performance, such as goal achievement or profitability, to also focus on life-giving, generative, and ennobling human conditions (Dutton & Glynn, 2008), regardless of whether they are attached to economic or political benefits. It also assumes that all human systems have an inclination toward achieving the highest aspirations of humankind (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII; Dutton & Sonenshein, 2009) and that living systems are "heliotropic" (von Erhardt-Siebold, 1937), defined as inclined toward positive energy (Cameron, 2008) and the good or exceptional in any system (Cooperrider & Srivastra, 1987; Diener, 2009). For example, whereas studying virtuousness means examining goodness for its own sake (Bright, Cameron, & Caza, 2006; Cameron & Caza, 2002; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007), in organizational contexts, a positive perspective may also explore how virtuousness can be aligned with profit maximization and other organizational goals. Studies of virtuousness in organizations include investigating character strengths, gratitude, wisdom, purpose, transcendence, elevation, hope, and courage (Emmons, 1999; Luthans, Norman, Avolio, & Avey, 2008; Park & Peterson, 2003).

Furthermore, a positive lens does not sublimate a focus on negative experiences, events, or relationships (Fineman, 2006), but instead recognizes that negative outcomes can stem from good intentions (Simpson, Clegg, & Pina e Cunha, 2013) and that positive practices within organizations can reinforce power dynamics (Simpson, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2014). Grant and Schwartz (2011) also described how too much of almost any good thing can have bad outcomes (i.e., a curvilinear effect whereby the positive dynamics decline at very high levels). Yet, to date, negatively deviant behaviors and outcomes have received far more attention in organizational studies than the generative, positively deviant dynamics inherent in viewing organizations from a positive lens. Moreover, positive outcomes occur amid adversity (Grant & Sonnentag, 2010) and can generate beneficial outcomes such as growth, acceptance, or self-insight (Maitlis, 2009) in the face of difficulty and hardship. As such, a positive lens can shed light on the opportunities and strength-building experiences that come from obstacles and problems (Gittell, Cameron, Lim, & Rivas, 2006; Lee, Caza, Edmondson, & Thomke, 2003) and brings to the foreground organizational contexts that enable post-traumatic growth and resilience (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003), compassion (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006), healing (Powley & Piderit, 2008), and forgiveness (Cameron & Caza, 2002).

Why is a positive lens particularly relevant to organizational studies now? A positive lens is relevant in both good times and in adversity, particularly as work organizations today are trying to do more with less (Dutton & Spreitzer, 2014; Sonenshein, 2017; Ton, 2014) and a positive lens can help unlock resources within the system. Human health and well-being at work have been documented as declining (American Psychological Association, 2014), but, through building strengths, individuals can be fortified against the increasing stress spilling over into people's personal lives and workplaces (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011; Gallup Corporation, 2013). Employee cynicism is increasing as the pace, pressure, and insecurity of work increases (Maestas, Mullen, Powell, von Wachter, & Wenger, 2017) but a positive lens can increase capacity for learning and growth. A positive lens likely undergirds employees' increasing desire for work that has greater purpose and meaning (Hurst, 2014). Movements like Conscious Capitalism, Branson's B Team, and B corporations reflect a desire for work organizations to be designed, organized, and run in ways that generate good in the world beyond solely financial performance (Kim, Karlesky, Myers, & Schifeling, 2016). We build on organizational research that has produced a nascent body of theoretical development on conditions that foster the *good* in organizations to articulate how a positive conceptual lens provides a

conceptual framework for novel research questions across a broad domain of research in organizational studies.

EXPLORING HOW A POSITIVE LENS ILLUMINATES FLOURISHING IN ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH

In this section, we provide in-depth examples of how a positive lens has advanced distinct topics in organizational studies: (a) resources, (b) learning, and (c) behavioral ethics. Our goal in providing these examples is to demonstrate how different literatures have benefitted from adopting a positive lens, and to encourage scholars to consider how a positive lens may contribute to their own area of inquiry.

How a Positive Lens Contributes to Understanding of Resources at Work and in Organizations

Although people (and theories) tend to perceive (conceptualize) resources as fixed and scarce, viewing resources through a positive lens aligns with a theoretical perspective that enables long-term Pareto-efficient economic—financial and relational—outcomes and fosters the well-being of people, organizations, and the environment (Kopelman, 2014). A positive lens illuminates the dynamic, endogenous, and emergent processes and actions of resourcefulness (Feldman & Worline, 2011), such as how resources can be produced, unlocked, expanded, or innovatively bricolaged (Baker & Nelson, 2005) and activated by organizational structures, processes, systems, cultures, or leaders (Quinn, Spreitzer, & Lam, 2012; Sonenshein, 2014).

Resources are critical to organizational survival and success. Traditional perspectives—such as resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991)—focus on the competitive advantage gained by controlling tangible and intangible resources that are valuable (because of the innate qualities they contain), rare, and neither easily imitable nor substitutable. Although a broad spectrum of assets is considered (e.g., intellectual property, equipment, human capital, organizational expertise), an underlying assumption is that sought-after resources are scarce and finite. Traditional perspectives may accurately describe some organizational resources; however, they overlook human-based intra- and interpersonal renewable resources such as compassion (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014; Dutton et al., 2006), energy (Quinn et al., 2012), and hope (Branzei, 2014). For example, hope mobilizes moral (Branzei, 2012), social, and relational energies in service of an imagined future (Ludema, Wilmot, & Srivastva, 1997). Furthermore, understanding social change agents suggests that hope is continuously renewed through relational mechanisms that infuse and reinfuse agents' images of the future with a sense of possibility (e.g., Branzei, 2012). Carlsen, Landsverk Hagen, and Mortesen (2012) enlivened and enriched the concept of hope by invoking several core qualities of it, including imagination, and seeing the process of hope as inherently relational, open ended, sustained by moral imagination, and producing positive emotions and actions. Traditional perspectives also neglect how resources may be sourced endogenously, or unlocked, from the social fabric of the organization (Dutton & Glynn, 2008).

A positive lens perspective on resources inspired the theory of resourcing, which focuses on how organizational members enact resources. Although resources do have innate qualities, according to resourcing theory, objects only become resources when an action is taken to use their qualities and fulfill their potential:

> This way of defining resources acknowledges that objects have innate qualities (e.g., rocks are heavy) and that these qualities give them potential as resources (e.g., rocks can be used as building material). Resourcing theory emphasizes that, until action is taken to use these qualities, the thing does not fulfill its potential and become a resource, or what we refer to as a resource in use (e.g., rocks just sit there until people develop the ability to use rocks to build). Moreover, how the potential resource is used determines what kind of a resource it becomes or what is resourced (e.g., rocks can be used to build bridges and resource connections or to build fortresses and resource defense). (Feldman & Worline, 2011: 620)

Thus, a positive organizational lens focuses on how a broader set of tangible and intangible, physical and social resources are created, restored, and enacted.

A core assumption characterizing a positive lens on resources is that people in organizations can generate, unlock, and co-create resources. To do so, they may need to overcome a "fixed-pie mindset" (Thompson & Hastie, 1990). Feldman and Worline (2011) described three processes that enable actions that transform a potential resource into a resource in use: (1) mutual adjusting of the action and the resource to enable mobilization (vs. matching fixed qualities); (2) juxtaposing the familiar with the unfamiliar to enrich the available frameworks of knowing; and (3) narrating as a way to make sense and shape new

realities. Creating resources through such mechanisms involves recognizing the potential of something that has not yet been put to use (Feldman & Worline, 2011) and creatively manipulating or recombining objects in useful ways to solve problems in practice (Sonenshein, 2014). Unlocking resources may also involve exchanging resources already in use by different actors in ways that maximize their potential benefit across actors. A vast literature on negotiations in interdependent social settings demonstrates that, even between two people who compete over resources, integrative approaches enable growing the sum of resources available to both (e.g., Pruitt & Rubin, 1986; Raiffa, 1982). This literature focuses both on objective economic outcomes as well as subjective utility models accounting for psychological value (Curhan, Elfenbein, & Xu, 2006; Loewenstein, Thompson, & Bazerman, 1989; Messick & Sentis, 1985) and, when conceptualized beyond the narrow lens of social exchange, a positive approach to negotiations (Kopelman, 2014) accounts for expanding and multiplying organizational resources to co-create energy, thriving, and well-being.

An insightful positive perspective on resources considers how human energy—a resource itself (Hobfoll, 1989)—promotes endogenous resourcing in organizational settings. An integrated model of human energy in organizations (Quinn et al., 2012) demonstrates multiple roles energy can play in motivational processes, and how energetic activation enhances and is reciprocally intertwined with organizational innovation and resourcing. In the form of energetic activation, it can manifest as positive emotions that broaden and build resources (Fredrickson, 1998), mobilize resources in new ways (Feldman & Worline, 2011), and recombine negotiated resources in synergistic ways by activating cooperation and competition simultaneously (Kopelman, 2014). When considered over time, oscillation of energy can help us endogenously understand burnout and resourcefulness—scarcity and abundance—as reflections not only of physiological energy, but also of adopted thought and action repertoires (Quinn et al., 2012) that enable thriving (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). Through such a lens, endogenous resourcefulness in organizations (Dutton & Glynn, 2008) is a function of people being able to broaden their repertoires of thoughts and actions, and those who seek out more resources can put more resources into use, feel more energized, and create more possible resources. Energy has the potential to amplify through recursive cycles of growth that multiply organizational resources.

A positive lens on resources identifies recursive cycles in unexpected places, particularly when referring to social resources. Intra- and interpersonal dynamics connected to identity and relational processes can create resources in practice by enabling actors to enact schemas or knowledge structures. For example, relational resourcing theory suggests that personal positive forms of interacting at work generate conditions that enhance individuals' capacities for discretionary actions (Dutton & Ragins, 2007; Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010). As such, dynamics such as respectful engagement between supervisors and employees can enhance discretionary actions of help-seeking behavior as a relational resource that can facilitate processes and enhance performance (Carmeli, Dutton, & Hardin, 2015). Identity can also be resourced to enhance organizational goals. Likewise, multiple identity resourcing suggests that people draw on their internal diversity of identities to bring resources to bear in practice (Caza & Wilson, 2009; Creary, Caza, & Roberts, 2015; Kopelman, 2014). Furthermore, in the face of pain and suffering, compassionate organizing suggests that "the amalgam of contextual features that constitute the social architecture of the organization enables and constrains members' ability to extract, generate, coordinate and calibrate resources" (Dutton et al., 2006: 84). In these examples, the social architecture of the organization and the agency of individuals who are engaged in activation and mobilization intertwine to exponentially multiply potential resources.

To summarize, a positive lens on resources in organizations suggests that resources are abundant, and has begun to identify organizational capabilities that enable activating them in a sustainable way that maximizes benefits. A positive lens expands the possibilities around (a) what is a resource, (b) the process of resourcing, and (c) what it means to be resourceful. And, yet, there are many outstanding research questions and opportunities for theoretical integration. For example, research on how leaders can encourage resourcing within a system to generate new and creative ideas for mobilizing and activating resources is needed in order to better understand how individuals, teams, and organizations put into action resources. Ironically, discussing resourcefulness explicitly may trigger a fixed-pie mindset, given that the words "resource" and "negotiation" conjure fixed objects and a competitive, rather than generative, process. To this end, theoretical integration between the organizational literature on resources and the negotiation literature on value creation might help us understand the moderating and mediating variables that may

come into play during the processes of resourcing. Furthermore, a better understanding is needed of what combinations of positive leaders and people need to simultaneously pursue high aspirations with regard to resource potential, alongside collaboration and creativity. Are there people who are positively deviant in their ability to successfully engage in resourcing in organizations? And, if so, what can we learn from them? Resources are abundant in organizations, and yet the enduring challenge is recognizing them, creatively putting them into action in practice, and exchanging them in ways that maximize the potential to everyone involved (individuals, teams, organizations, social systems) in the moment and in the future.

How a Positive Lens Contributes to Learning at Work and in Organizations

Understanding how people learn and develop at work has been a core goal of organizational studies since its inception. The learning and development of individual employees is a key driver of organizational success, building an organization's human capital resources into a source of competitive advantage (Kogut & Zander, 1992; Noe, Clarke, & Klein, 2014). Research on employee learning and development typically appears in the organizational literature in the domains of training, career development, and leadership development, and these streams of research have built a considerable knowledge base regarding the benefits of learning and development for individuals, teams, and organizations (see Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009; Noe et al., 2014; Salas, Tannenbaum, Kraiger, & Smith-Jentsch, 2012, for reviews). Yet, underlying this research is a core set of assumptions regarding individual learning in organizations. For instance, many studies define learning simply as the acquisition of relevant "knowledge, skills, or abilities" (KSAs), casting these KSAs as well-articulated, tractable, and seemingly finite resources that "exist" in much the same way that other tangible resources exist. This view is illustrated well by the choice of verbs commonly used in studies of learning at work, which describe these KSAs as being acquired, maintained, refined, shared, or transferred by individuals. At the same time, these verbs highlight the individual-centric nature of prior research on learning at work, viewing learning as a largely independent, intrapsychic, and cognitive process that takes place within individuals. This approach has led to a focus in the literature on individual differences, such as the motivation to learn, as the factors underlying differences in learning (see Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000, for a meta-analysis in the context of training). The net result is a view of learning as an individual effort—for which certain individuals are more or less able and willing—to acquire the KSAs necessary for effective performance at work.

Applying a positive lens allows us to articulate an alternative conceptualization of learning at work, built on a different set of assumptions of individual learning, growth, and development. Specifically, a positive lens on learning highlights that individuals learn and develop at work in multiple dimensions—growing not only in their KSAs, but also (for instance) in their identities and helping relationships with others in the organization. In this sense, developing at work involves a multifaceted, interpretive individual perception of self-change (Sonenshein et al., 2013), wherein a change in a work-relevant identity (e.g., a change in how musicians come to see themselves following a traumatic accident; Maitlis, 2012) is just as important to individual development and growth at work as is a change in skills or abilities.

This multifaceted view of development also highlights the important interplay between the work context and individuals' differing perceptions of learning and growth. The context of learning and development—whether the culture and practices of the organization, or the structure of a particular development opportunity at work—serves as an important role in the learning process, guiding individuals' perceptions of learning and growth (e.g., focusing on gaining new skills vs. on better helping others; Sonenshein et al., 2013). Indeed, in contrast to the assumption that individuals vary in their ability and willingness to learn, a positive lens assumes that individuals all desire to learn and grow at work, but that they may view this growth differently at various points in time and engage in learning efforts that may be more or less salient in different work contexts. Whereas a one-dimensional view of learning, such as acquiring KSAs, prescribes a fairly consistent, linear set of learning efforts (e.g., attending a training to acquire skills necessary to reduce a perceived deficiency in one's ability to perform a task), a positive lens recognizes that individuals may seek to grow and develop in different ways—such as by engaging in identity construction practices (see Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006, for examples) or further refining a set of well-honed skills to be able to teach other employees. These individuals are not unable or unwilling to learn (because they choose not to attend a particular training, for instance); on the contrary, they too desire to

learn and grow, but through different means that might be less well recognized in different work contexts.

At the same time, a positive lens challenges the treatment of knowledge as exogenous and that it must be "acquired," instead viewing knowledge (and other developmental outcomes, such as a new or changed workplace identity) as endogenous and generated in concert with others at work. The positive perspective thus brings to the fore alternative conceptualizations of both the learning and development process (as a generative relational practice) and the outcomes of learning (as emergent and endogenous to particular learning relationships). This perspective builds on theories of situated learning and communities of practice (e.g., Brown & Duguid, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991), which reject transfer-based views of learning and suggest that knowledge (as a key outcome of a learning process) is built from the particular "materials at hand" (Brown & Duguid, 1991: 47), as well as prior research viewing learning as occurring through interaction and dialogue among individuals (e.g., Nonaka, 1994; Tsoukas, 2009). Contrasting views of learning as the one-way transmission of stable knowledge, typically from the top downward (i.e., from mentor to mentee, or trainer to trainee), a positive lens supports a view of learning at work as an interpretive process whereby learning (and corresponding changes in knowledge, abilities, identities, etc.) is co-constructed through discourse between individuals that is influenced by the quality of individuals' relationships (Myers, 2018). Exemplifying this perspective, Carmeli and Gittell (2009) demonstrated that high-quality relationships enhance individuals' learning from failures at work, as these high-quality relationships increased individuals' feelings of psychological safety (which in turn facilitated learning), meaning that they felt freer to share problems and ask for help—key aspects of the relational, co-constructed learning proposed by applying a positive lens.

A positive lens thus clearly suggests a different view of learning and development at work, and, though it integrates and builds on prior research, this lens also raises a variety of important new research questions for scholars of learning in organizations. For example, the multidimensional view of learning and growth advanced by a positive lens invites consideration of how various organizational practices, such as onboarding or training, might intersect with different dimensions of learning. Recent evidence has revealed that onboarding tied to individuals' authentic "best self" identities can lead to enhanced performance outcomes for employees, relative to traditional skill-based onboarding (Cable et al., 2013), suggesting that these different dimensions of learning and growth are salient to individuals during learning opportunities at work and can have vastly different consequences for their performance. Likewise, this multidimensional view suggests that individuals who are focused on a domain of development other than acquiring KSAs may not desire or benefit from other developmental practices, such as assignment to challenging job roles. Press reports have noted trends in employees turning down promotions or other challenging opportunities (e.g., Nishi, 2013), and this may be due to individuals focusing on other areas of their learning and development, or desiring to hone existing strengths (i.e., staying in a role to further refine an existing skill to better help others) rather than addressing a perceived deficiency (i.e., accepting a new role in a different division to make up for a "weak" area of experience). Indeed, a positive lens on learning emphasizes the developmental benefits of positively deviant experiences (exceptional successes) as well as negatively deviant ones (failures)—and this reorientation could open up a number of pathways for future research.

Similarly, adopting a positive lens on learning as a relational, co-construction process writes in the central role of relationships and interactions in the study of learning and development, moving research further out of individuals' heads (i.e., the cognitive, intrapsychic perspective) and into "the space between" individuals (i.e., the interactions between people at work). This can help refocus researchers' attention to elements of the organization, such as differing structures of the network of interactions between people (as a key shaper of employee relationships), and how these elements might alter or expand the patterns of learning and growth among individuals in the organization. At the same time, this perspective on learning calls for greater attention to the micro-moves of learning and development—the specific patterns of interaction and behavior that help individuals learn and grow—and how these might contribute to the different dimensions of learning (i.e., do relationships with certain people at work contribute more to identity development, while others contribute more to skill development?).

These questions and domains for research highlight the unique benefit of applying a positive lens to the study of learning and development at work. This lens brings to the fore multidimensionality and interactive relationships as foundations for the study of learning and growth. Indeed, though prior work has examined positive characteristics, such as zest, as

key individual differences impacting learning (Noe et al., 2014), these approaches (coming from a positive psychology tradition) tacitly accept the existing model of learning (i.e., as independent, cognitive, and driven by individual differences in willingness or ability to learn). Applying a positive lens fundamentally reshapes the framework, articulating a new way of thinking about learning, development, and growth in the workplace that opens up a myriad of possibilities for research and the practice of learning in organizations.

How a Positive Lens Contributes to Ethics at Work and in Organizations

Perhaps the most important strength an individual can build concerns improving the connection between their core values and virtues and their actual behavior. Inspired in part by the introduction of the term "behavioral ethics" by Treviño, Weaver, and Reynolds (2006), in the past decade, there has been an increase in research trying to understand when people at work are at their best, in terms of adhering to their espoused values, and when they act in ways that are inconsistent with their best self. The majority of this literature, both in organizational behavior and psychology, focuses on biases and pitfalls that lead otherwise good people to engage in unethical behavior. We highlight areas of behavioral ethics research that are taking a positive lens to understand ethics in organizations, encompassing leadership, motivation, individual differences, and interventions.

Leadership is one of the most studied topics in the field of organizational studies over the past century (see Lord, Day, Zaccaro, Avolio, & Eagly, 2017, for a review). A considerable amount of the research on leadership falls under the broad umbrella of behavioral ethics (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Much of this research focuses on unethical forms of leadership, such as abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), supervisor undermining (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002), toxic leadership (Frost, 2003), and tyrannical leadership (Ashforth, 1994). Most of these constructs focus on unethical interpersonal treatment by leaders that are unfair, do not convey dignity or respect, and have damaging behavioral, attitudinal, and affective outcomes for employees (Mackey, Frieder, Brees, & Martinko, 2015). Although this research is important and highlights the perils of unethical forms of leadership, the reality is that many of these leadership styles, such as abusive supervision, are relatively low base-rate phenomena.

Behavioral ethics scholars are also examining leadership from a positive lens—instead of focusing on the deleterious effects of unethical forms of leadership, these scholars are examining ethical forms of leadership. Perhaps the most well-studied ethical form of leadership is aptly called "ethical leadership," defined as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005: 120). Ethical leaders are *moral people* who try to be fair and trustworthy, and are also *moral managers* who model and reinforce ethical conduct to influence their followers. These leaders work on their core strength of acting with character. In just over a decade, more than 100 studies have been conducted that provide robust support for the link between ethical leadership and positive outcomes such as increased performance, citizenship behavior, and job attitudes, as well as decreased levels of negatively deviant behavior (Bedi, Alpaslan, & Green, 2016). This research on ethical leadership demonstrates the value of studying the ethical conduct of leaders as opposed to solely focusing on unethical behavior from organizational authorities.

What motivates people at work is another core topic of organizational studies. When thinking about what drives conduct, the majority of research on behavioral ethics explicitly or implicitly assumes that people are motivated by self-interest. As an example, research on moral hypocrisy suggests that people like to be seen as ethical but do not like the hard work of being ethical (given it could mean the loss of self-interested outcomes [Batson, Thompson, Seuferling, Whitney, & Strongman, 1999]). Similarly, research on moral disengagement suggests that the impetus for rationalizing unethical conduct is usually some form of self-interest such as getting valued outcomes or maintaining a positive view of oneself (Bandura, 1999).

A much-needed counterpoint to this perspective is the work on prosocial motivation (Grant, 2007). Grant and colleagues have convincingly demonstrated that, although self-interest is relevant, we have vastly underestimated the role of prosocial motivation to positively impact others (Grant, 2008). For example, research demonstrates the desire for "contact with beneficiaries"—the prosocial power of seeing how one's work has a positive impact on others' lives (Grant, Campbell, Chen, Cottone, Lapedis, & Lee, 2007). Learning how one's work makes a positive difference drives motivation, effort, and performance (Grant, 2008). To be acting in line with our best self,

research suggests it is useful to assume the best in others.

In addition to leadership and motivation, individual differences are an important part of organizational studies and the behavioral ethics literature. Some of this research has focused on how individual differences such as moral disengagement (Moore, Detert, Treviño, Baker, & Mayer, 2012) and the "dark triad" (i.e., narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) contribute to aggressive and unethical conduct. In contrast to this research focusing on dysfunctional individual differences, several scholars have sought to understand individual differences that concern virtuous characteristics. For example, "moral identity" (Aquino & Reed, 2002), defined as a self-schema organized around a set of moral trait associations (e.g., honest, caring, compassionate), has been linked to more prosocial behaviors and less unethical conduct (Hertz & Krettenauer, 2016). Cohen and Morse (2014) presented a model of moral character in the workplace that suggested that there are motivational, ability, and identity components of demonstrating moral character, and they explained how moral character is associated with ethical conduct. A third relevant individual difference concerns the virtue of humility (Owens et al., 2013). Humble individuals see themselves accurately, appreciate others, and are coachable. Perhaps not surprisingly, leaders who possess this virtue are more effective at work (Owens et al., 2013). These individual differences that focus on the best of the human condition provide a useful counterweight to research on the dark side of people.

Finally, the bulk of behavioral ethics research focuses on the moral biases and decision-making errors that lead to unethical behavior (Moore & Gino, 2015). However, there is an increasing body of work on "interventions" to help people act better. Zhang, Gino, and Bazerman (2014) provided a useful review and framework for understanding how to overcome temptation and tendencies to be unethical. They discussed two main approaches: (1) "values-oriented" approaches, which appeal to individuals' desire to be more moral, and (2) "structure-oriented" approaches, which concern how to structure tasks, processes, and incentives to reduce the likelihood of misconduct. This research provides a positive lens because, instead of noting the ways ethical decision-making can go awry, this intervention-based framework highlights what we can do personally and structurally to improve our ethical conduct—to develop this moral strength. For example, by simply changing the questions people ask themselves in difficult situations from "What should I do?" to "What could I do?" generates higher levels of moral insight (Zhang, Gino, & Margolis, 2018).

Behavioral ethics is a growing subfield of organizational studies. Much of the research has focused on why people are unethical. As noted, there is considerable extant research about unethical forms of leadership, a self-interested view of motivation, a plethora of individual differences that are related to unethical conduct, and a large number of ethical decision-making biases that increase unethical behavior. This work is important. The purpose of the present review, though, is to highlight research on behavioral ethics that takes a positive lens by focusing on the best of humans in terms of upholding values, expressing virtues, and expecting the best from others.

There is still much more work to be done regarding taking a positive lens on behavioral ethics. For example, although anecdotally many believe that people have certain habits, mantras, and rituals that improve the connection between their espoused values and their behavior, this is a topic that has received little empirical attention. Aristotelian views of ethics suggest that ethical conduct is a function of habit, and it would be useful to understand these personal actions as a form of inoculation against temptation. In addition, scholars have spent surprisingly little attention on understanding the characteristics of the most ethical people at work. Approximately 10–15% of people in most studies do not lie, steal, or cheat even when heavily tempted. We could learn a lot from studying these moral exemplars. In general, the field of behavioral ethics could be rejuvenated if scholars would focus on what's right about people and organizations, and not just on what is wrong.

Pathways through which a Positive Lens Illuminates These Domains

Looking across these examples of how a positive lens illuminates the literatures of resources, learning, and ethics, we draw out three pathways that capture how a positive lens fosters flourishing in individuals, teams, and organizations: (1) resource unlocking, (2) capacity creating, and (3) strength building.

The first pathway we call "resource unlocking," which captures a generative and organic view of organizations that envisions a resourcing, living system. Here, people and organizations can generate new resources endogenously rather than looking outside the system for new and often expensive resources. This resource unlocking is evident in recent theories of job design that are agentic and resourceful, highlighting the roles that individuals can play in

crafting their jobs to make them more engaging by altering relational, cognitive, or task boundaries of the work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). This resource-unlocking pathway offers insights relatively invisible in prior theories of job design that assumed the design of work was largely the prerogative of management, who designed jobs to be efficient, ergonomic, reliable, and satisfying (Campion, 1988).

The second pathway we label "capacity creating," which describes an emergent, discursive view of development and growth wherein capacity is co-created through interactions with others (vertical and horizontally), rather than just knowledge transfer of information. There is growing recognition that many forms of growth in organizations take place outside of training contexts and involve social relations with others (Noe, Clarke, & Klein, 2014). But most theories of growth and development in organizations are still focused on cognitive processes of transferring discreet information from one person to another, through training sessions or formal transfer conduits. Applying this capacity-creating pathway to organizational studies reveals more emergent processes at work, whereby relationships become a key site of growth, not only for transfer of information but also for a dynamic, discursive process of knowledge co-creation.

Finally, a third pathway we call "strength building" focuses on leveraging strengths, seeing the best in the self and others, and living by core virtues as the path to a more positive self and system. This pathway can be highlighted, for example, in how encouraging employees to express their authentic personal identities during onboarding (a strengths-focused mechanism), compared to an onboarding process focused on conforming to company-dictated identities and expectations (a mechanism of control and resource provision by the organization), improves both employee retention and customer satisfaction (Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013). Another example is research studying the double-edged sword of personal callings, which both ennoble and bind people to work (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). This work showed how zookeepers experienced callings in ways that infused broader meaning and significance to their work, but also led them to hold their zoos to a higher standard of animal care through higher identification. Similarly, a strength-building pathway motivates research on psychological processes underlying workplace courage that include how social identification and perceived relative power advantage contribute felt responsibility for wrongdoing, which prompts people to stand up to authority, uncover mistakes, and speak up for those in need (Schilpzand, Hekman, & Mitchell, 2014).

To help scholars consider how these pathways may inform their domains of research, we provide examples of questions they inspire (see Table 1). Building on how a positive lens has transformed three areas of inquiry—resources, learning, and behavioral ethics—we hope to inspire scholars of diverse areas of inquiry in organizational studies to explore how a positive lens and the pathways we identified might promote innovative research. Furthermore, as a positive lens is applied to more areas of organizational studies, additional pathways may become evident.

APPLYING A POSITIVE LENS TO ORGANIZATIONAL STUDIES: DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

To help researchers apply a positive lens and the positive pathways to their realm of research, we articulate a set of questions to guide this process of inquiry and serve as a "how to" for applying this lens to diverse domains of research. The first question elicits a positive lens overall. The next four questions are particularly helpful in illuminating the resource-unlocking pathway. The following three questions shine light on the capacity-creating pathway. And the final four questions help apply the strength-building pathway. We invite you, the reader, to consider this set of questions to see if a positive lens might be beneficial to your own area of research:

Does my area of research …

- have a narrow view of effectiveness or performance that does not include elements human flourishing?
- assume that people are powerless victims of their environment?
- take an individual rather than relational view of the human experience?
- assume that people and organizations are competing for fixed or finite resources?
- believe resources, such as knowledge, are fixed, static, or exogenous?
- adopt a view that people do not want change and/or are incapable of growth?
- see development at work as simply accumulating information or knowledge?
- dehumanize employees with the language used (e.g., resources, cogs, mechanistic language)?
- assume the worst of the human condition?
- focus on what is wrong with people or organizations?

TABLE 1
Questions Drawn from Three Pathways

Topic	Pathway: Resource Unlocking	Pathway: Capacity Creating	Pathway: Strength Building
Resources	How can organizations embrace a culture of resourcefulness and abundance?	How do people overcome hierarchical and role-related constraints on resourcefulness, and build parallel communication channels that explore resourceful solutions?	What can be learned from reflecting on the simultaneous needs to be collaborative and assertive at work?
	What enables people at work to overcome a fixed-pie perspective and view conversations around resources as opportunities to create value?	How do leaders provide examples that prioritize flexibility of rules and processes that enable success?	What practices enable people to better understand compatible interests and differences in priorities that can be traded off to generate integrative agreements?
Learning	How can organizations support multifaceted learning and development (vs. requiring particular competencies)?	How do employees generate new capabilities in complex work settings (vs. apply already-known strategies)?	What can be learned from reflecting on successful performance (vs. only from failures)?
	What motivates employees to seek unconventional growth opportunities at work (vs. preexisting, well-known paths)?	How can organizations embed learning in day-to-day interactions (vs. only in prescribed training)?	How can individuals learn and develop their strengths (vs. merely addressing skills gaps)?
Behavioral ethics	How does inspiring, virtuous behavior from others at work help employees to resist temptation even if they are fatigued?	What is the best way to structure conversations about ethical dilemmas to help employees discover the best course of action?	What are the effects of assuming the best of others (i.e., that others are driven to be virtuous)?
	What can leaders do to help unlock an employee's desire to contribute to something bigger than themselves?	How can informal and formal training be used to help leaders grow not only in terms of specific job capabilities but also in terms of their character?	What can leaders do to make sure employees live by their core values and the values the organization espouses?

- think people are motivated primarily by self-interest?
- suggest that people only work for a paycheck?

If you answered "yes" to one or more of these questions, there is potential for a positive lens to contribute to your own area of inquiry. What if you asked questions such as "What research questions would emerge if my area of research assumed the best of the human condition?" or "What would I test if I assumed that resources can exponentially grow?"

These questions are intended to be a sample of prompts—not an exhaustive list—that invite scholars to examine the logics at play and fundamental assumptions about their area of research, and subsequently prompt innovative new research through the application of a positive lens. To illustrate how to garner value from a positive lens and the three pathways, we next examine briefly the potential for research in three domains: relationships, organizational culture, and human resource management. These represent only a sampling of the domains of organizational scholarship that might be illuminated by a positive lens; our goal is to stimulate scholars across the organizational disciplines to consider how adopting a positive lens could enhance their area of inquiry.

Relationships at Work

A positive lens may offer new insights to traditional assumptions inherent in relationships at work. Recent research has focused on connections or discrete interactions that may transpire on a single occasion (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2012). A focus on the micro-moves of interrelating helps researchers understand and theorize the impact of small actions to

unlock resources that are consequential for developing and strengthening relationships over time. Research on relationships (including trust and social support) has traditionally been embedded in theories of exchange, which assume an instrumental exchange of resources, reciprocity, and obligation that occur in interactions between people or groups. A positive lens on relationships can also draw on the capacity-creating pathway to show how relationships are embedded in more developmental theories of connection (e.g., Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991), where connections are a source of growth (Sonenshein et al., 2013), identity development (Dutton et al., 2010), and thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005) for both parties. This expands the account of why positive connections between people (e.g., mutual, respectful, trusting) are consequential for individuals, teams, and organizations. We know quite a bit about the consequences of high-quality connections, but we know less about how to develop, sustain, and nourish high-quality relationships at work. A positive lens might help. For example, the strength-building pathway might elucidate how to turn around dysfunctional relationships to become respectful and generative. Further, a positive lens might offer insights about how to unlock resources to jump-start positive relationships when teams are just forming, or when new employees are joining a firm.

Organizational Culture

Opportunities abound for applying a positive lens to different aspects of organizational culture and open up new ways of understanding how cultures foster flourishing in and of organizations. A focus on norms, shared values, and shared beliefs (Schein, 1996) has tended to focus on culture as a homogenizing force that constrains human behavior and fosters certain patterns of collective organizational behaviors. An application of the strength-building pathway to organizational culture can open up new questions about how culture enables collective strengths, such as a capability for compassion (e.g., Dutton et al., 2006), collective empathy (e.g., Muller, Pfarrer, & Little, 2014), or virtuousness (Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004). Relatedly, Lawrence and Maitlis (2012: 653) implicitly unlocked resources as they drew from a focus on the ethic of care to suggest that teams (or other collectives) can shape how people in teams narrate and construct the future in terms of how "hopeful, supportive, empowering" people's stories of the future are, influencing the paths that individuals imagine and actually follow. A positive lens could also invite inquiry into how artifacts and the materiality of culture are contributors to flourishing at work. While researchers have explored how organizational life can be detrimental to human health (Michel, 2011), there is much that could be done in future research to explore how physical objects, small (e.g., pictures) and large (e.g., buildings), set the cultural stage for dramas in which flourishing is encouraged or muted (Carlile, Nicolini, Langley, & Tsoukas, 2013). For example, how can the resource-unlocking pathway of a positive lens help organizations stimulate culture change to enable more flourishing? How can the capacity-creating pathway help develop a more agentic perspective on organizational culture that grants individuals more voice in the formulation of organizational cultures?

Human Resource Management

A positive lens is also fueling practical interest in creating more positive work environments (e.g., we see a myriad of blogs, consultancies, or TED talks on positive workplaces). Indeed, we know little about how a positive lens might infuse recruitment, retention, or performance reviews. A positive lens could provide the theoretical underpinnings of what has been termed a "good jobs" HR strategy (Ton, 2014). The strength-building pathway of a positive lens might reveal important insights in taking a strengths-based approach that encourages positively deviant behavior, rather than a gap-based focus on bringing subpar performance up to acceptable levels (Spreitzer, 2006). Recent research on people's best selves, for example, emphasizes the possibilities that come from the development of strengths/capabilities, in contrast to the more common approach focused on overcoming weaknesses, for employee and organizational development (Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy, & Quinn, 2005). For example, how could a positive lens help transform HR practices like employee development, onboarding, disciplinary actions, and culture building to unlock more resources within the system to create more employee flourishing? A positive lens might also prompt us to think about the labels "human resources" or "human capital," which associate people as a type of resource or capital for the firm's use. These terms may have originated to affirm the importance of employees, but, today, they may connote dehumanizing people as just one other kind of resource or capital to be commoditized or manipulated in the interest of profits and performance.

CONCLUSION

A positive lens, applied broadly to magnify previously underexplored phenomenon in organizations, illuminates organizational pathways that foster flourishing in everyday organizational life. Every lens through which organizational life is viewed has embedded assumptions, expectations, and biases. Complementing research that was grounded in a variety of theories and approaches with novel questions highlighted by a positive theoretical lens can generate novel insights in organizational studies. We have provided concrete examples of how the literatures on resources, learning, and behavioral ethics have been transformed through adopting a positive lens, and shifting focus beyond traditional approaches that privileged attention to organizational problems, challenges, and the self-interested nature of human behavior (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). We drew out three pathways that elucidate the transformative power of a positive lens to enable flourishing of individuals, teams, organizations in societies: (1) unlocking resources, (2) creating capacity, and (3) building strengths in organizations. We have invited scholars to consider how a positive lens might uncover new research angles in their own areas of inquiry by offering a series of questions they might ask, and have demonstrated how asking and answering these questions might add value in three additional literatures: relationships, culture, and human resources. We conclude with our hope that organizational scholars will be inspired to study questions that generate a novel "complementary positive" perspective when engaging in their own research spanning diverse literatures and research domains.

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