

TOWARD AN APPLIED POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Marisa Salanova Soria and Susana Llorens Gumbau
Equipo WANT Prevención Psicosocial y Organizaciones Saludables
Universitat Jaume I, Castellón

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he term Positive Psychology is found in the book *Motivation and Personality* by Abraham Maslow, published in 1954, where a chapter is devoted to this subject. However, the humanistic approach driven by Maslow was not so grounded in research; the biggest surge in the research on which today's positive psychology is based occurred at the beginning of the 21st century, led by its top representatives in those early days: Martin Seligman and Mihail Csikszentmihalyi (2000). We say all this because we must not forget that positive psychology is psychology and, thus, it uses the scientific method basing its roots and objectives on knowledge and scientific research.

With regards to the object of study of Positive Psychology, we can appreciate that it cuts across different areas and fields of application of psychology (health, work, organizations, sports, leisure, education, etc.) And it focuses primarily on positive experiences, psychological strengths and positive communities in various contexts and applications. It is evident that the object of study focuses on the "positive", but it should be borne in mind that the positive goes beyond the purely hedonic or pleasurable. In this regard, we agree with Pawelski (2016), in that perhaps the defining feature of Positive Psychology is an interest in the positive¹, not from a simplistic perspective, but rather contemplating at least two meanings of the word: a more traditional meaning that relates to the presence of something that is positive due to its quality, such as serenity, joy, positive relationships with others, etc.; and another more novel meaning that has to do with preference, with something that is of value and has a sense of progress or proliferation.

It is true that, at least in the beginnings of Positive Psychology driven by its pioneers, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), there was a strong emphasis on studying only the positive aspects of human and social functioning, addressing issues of positive content such as positive emotions, character strengths and flow. This particular emphasis on studying only the positive constructs or the *bright side of human nature* has been called by some authors the First Wave of Positive Psychology (Lomas & Ivztan, 2015; Wong, 2011), which emerged as a particular kind of antithesis to traditional Psychology, with its focus on pathologies, trauma and problems. However, criticisms derived from the focus of Positive Psychology exclusively on the positive aspects, or considering that even the positive may lead to the negative (e.g., an excess of optimism could lead to risky behaviour) or the negative to the positive (e.g., a serious illness may increase the meaning of life or spirituality) have meant that positive psychology has developed in a very challenging way.

For example, Lomas and Ivztan (2015) point out that the criticism of Positive Psychology, instead of destabilizing it or make it disappear, has helped it to reach a new phase of maturity and development, which has been termed the "Second Wave" of Positive Psychology (Held, 2004) or positive Psychology 2.0 (Wong, 2011). This is characterized by a more nuanced approach towards positive and negative concepts and understanding well-being as a more dialectical construct. That is, it assumes that the relationship between positive and negative, or between the dark side and the bright side, need not be diametrically opposed, but rather that both elements are intimately connected through a process of thesis-antithesis-synthesis.

What seems clear is that, over time, positive psychology has matured and its object of study has expanded, including the very concept and content of what we mean by positive, which is not just

Correspondence: Marisa Salanova Soria. Email: salanova@uji.es
Susana Llorens Gumbau. Email: llorgum@uji.es

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¹ We do not hope to be exhaustive in this analysis since this is not the place for it. But for the reader who is interested in this exciting topic, we refer you to this author's two articles in which he makes a valuable contribution to clarify the descriptive and normative significance of what we mean by "positive".



that related to the hedonic or immediate but includes a more eudemonic, more complex, well-being, and that the valuation of the positive depends on the context, for example. The positive is not merely a supplement to the negative, but goes beyond that based on a genuine interest in understanding and discovering the foundations of human and social development from a practical approach, emphasizing the idea of being able to develop an authentic life, full of meaning and significance, but accepting the negative as an intrinsic part of the very process of living.

For example, some not-so-pleasant emotions and situations (e.g., sadness, anxiety, perseverance, etc.) can be important in achieving well-being, personal and professional development, family relations, the progress of societies, etc. The concept of resilience or post-traumatic growth involves, in the process itself, the existence of stressful and/or traumatic events in order to develop as a consequence the ability to continue to function positively and even emerge stronger after the trauma. Or for example, the idea of "good life" as an object of study of Positive Psychology, implies not only cultivating gratitude or other character strengths, developing optimism or having experiences of flow, but it also has to do with positive coping by dealing with guilt, disgust or envy, accepting these emotions but committing, for example, to continue to have goals that are consistent with one's own values in order to have a full and meaningful life.

The scientific evidence on topics that capture the interest of Positive Psychology continues to grow, as we have shown above. In 2013, Rusk and Waters found approximately 2,000 publications on Positive Psychology representing 4% of the documents found in PsycINFO. They also noted that Positive Psychology was in that year close to the mean of all of the disciplines that are listed in the *Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports, Social Sciences Edition*, with an aggregate impact factor of 2.64. Meanwhile, another review of the studies on Positive Psychology by Donaldson, Dollwet and Rao (2015), published in *The Journal of Positive Psychology* noted that between 1999-2013 there were 1,336 articles published on various topics of Positive Psychology in peer-reviewed journals; which means a there is great deal of scientific research, it being from 2008 onwards when the frequency of publications exploded. In addition, during 2014 and 2015, articles were still being published on this subject that are sure to grow the scientific knowledge in this area exponentially.

To end this introduction to the special issue and before proceeding to show the basic aspects of the studies presented, we wish to point out other elements that we believe mark the identity of Positive Psychology: its interdisciplinary and applied nature. Firstly, it is interdisciplinary, since most of its central issues, such as well-being and happiness, character strengths, optimism, resilience, flow, positive education, positive therapies, and positive organizations and communities are clear examples that are not issues specific to a single area of psychology but that received large contributions from the different areas and sub-disciplines.

There are examples of the multidisciplinary nature of Positive

Psychology in the great researchers from different areas of psychology (e.g., Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi, Diener, Pavelski, and Fredrickson) or specific journals in the field such as *The Journal of Positive Psychology* which emerged in 2006, with a current impact factor of 1.9 and located in quartile 2, and dedicated to basic and professional applied research on the optimal conditions of human functioning and development, as well as promoting well-being. Positive Psychology includes studies in different areas of psychology (e.g., social, personality, clinical, development, health, and organizations). The *Applied Psychology: Health & Well-Being* journal, with a current impact factor of 1.75 and located in quartile 2, addresses issues on best practices in the application of psychology to the promotion of well-being and optimal functioning from various perspectives and areas such as clinical, health, counselling, educational, sports, environmental, etc. Other publications focus on specific aspects of Positive Psychology. This is the case, for example, of the *Journal of Happiness Studies*, with a current impact factor of 1.68 and located in quartile 2, which focuses on the scientific study of subjective well-being from subjective assessments of well-being (e.g., life satisfaction) to the emotional enjoyment of life (e.g., moods and emotions). Finally, we note the *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, with an impact factor of 1.40 in quartile 2, which deals with principles based on research to support positive behaviour and behavioural adaptation in different contexts, such as the school, family or community.

In addition, the scientific associations and specific congresses held on Positive Psychology also have this interdisciplinary nature. The scientific associations include the SEPP (Spanish Society of Positive Psychology, <http://www.sepsicologiapositiva.es/>) in our country, the ENPP (European Network of Positive Psychology; <http://www.enpp.eu/>) and the DGPPF (German Association for Positive Psychology Research; <http://dgppf.de/konferenz/>) at the European level and, finally, the IPPA (International Positive Psychology Association; <http://www.ippanetwork.org/>) and the IPEN (International Positive Education Network, <http://www.ipositiveducation.net/>) internationally. These associations organize various Positive Psychology conferences worthy of mention: the *Congreso Nacional de Psicología Positiva* [National Congress of Positive Psychology] in Spain, the European Conference of Positive Psychology, the World Congress on Positive Psychology and the Festival of Positive Education. Specifically, this year and in 2017, the Third National Congress on Positive Psychology was held in Baeza, Jaén (April 2016), the Eighth European Conference of Positive Psychology in Angers, France (June-July 2016), the Festival of Positive Psychology was held in Dallas, Texas (July, 2016), and the Fifth World Congress on Positive Psychology in Montréal, Québec (July, 2017).

Secondly, it is interesting to note that since its inception Positive Psychology has been characterized by a strong emphasis on its practical applications. For example, in the Akumal Manifesto, which was written by a group of academics at one of the annual meetings on Positive Psychology held in Akumal (Mexico) (Sheldon, Fredrickson, Rathunde, Csikszentmihalyi, & Haidt,



2000), a set of Positive Psychology applications were reported that remain in force even today. These include:

- ✓ Improving children's education, making greater use of intrinsic motivation, positive affect, and creativity within schools.
- ✓ Improving psychotherapy by developing approaches that emphasize hope, meaning, and self-healing.
- ✓ Improving family life through an improved understanding of the dynamics of love and commitment.
- ✓ Improving job satisfaction throughout life to help people to find authentic rewards at work, experience states of flow, and make genuine contributions in their work.
- ✓ Improving organizations and societies, discovering that conditions that increase trust, communication, and altruism in people.

The rise in the scientific productivity of Positive Psychology has also been indirectly influenced by how interventions are being carried out in various social and economic contexts. What approach is taken with interventions in the applied field by professionals? Is it a problem-centred approach, focused on what is wrong? Or is it the promotion of health and well-being? This is, without a doubt, an interesting debate and would in itself fill another special edition on the effectiveness of positive interventions and their results today. However, in this special edition we present some of the studies with results on positive interventions in the organizational, clinical and educational fields.

By positive interventions, we mean those strategies that are implemented to improve the development and satisfaction of people with the ultimate goal of promoting their health, quality of life and excellence (Snyder, Feldman, Taylor, Schroeder & Adams, 2000). Advances in this area have enabled us to categorize the interventions (primary and secondary interventions), highlight basic interventions and even propose a series of recommendations from the scientific research (Llorens, Salanova, Torrente & Acosta, 2013; Snyder et al, 2000).

It is since the work of Seligman, Steen, Park and Peterson (2005) that positive interventions have become popular and their use proposed (Rashid, 2015). Reviewing the main strategies of intervention at the individual level, most prominent are those involving the values, interests and preferences of people that ultimately allow them to know themselves. The reason for the relevance of these interventions is that they favour the development of positive reactions in others (e.g. through emotional contagion) and they also increase the well-being of people. These positive interventions involve changes in behaviour (e.g., practising virtues, being kind to others or expressing gratitude), beliefs (e.g., reflecting on the positive or cultivating optimism) or the motives and goals of individuals (e.g., setting and pursuing personal goals or increasing resilience) (Llorens et al, 2013; Martínez, Salanova & Llorens, 2016).

Despite the relevance of the impact of positive interventions in different contexts (clinical and health, education, work and organizations) more applied scientific research is still needed. A review of the publications focusing on positive interventions

reveal that despite the interest in these interventions they differ in several aspects: (1) in the analysis conducted (individual or collective), (2) in the design (usually divided into people/groups that are treated and people/groups that are untreated) either by random selection or non-random selection with an intervention group and no control group or by "natural" selection with an intervention group (participants who voluntarily participate in the intervention) and groups that are not treated or groups that are on the waiting list and (3) in the procedure; generally they are case studies with quasi-experimental designs where different strategies are used (e.g., feedback surveys, workshops, micro interventions with exercises, videos, or talks in small groups, interventions on psychological capital via the internet, theatre-based interventions, problem-solving processes, gratitude exercises). In addition, these interventions also vary with regards to the time and duration of the sessions (see Llorens et al. 2013; Martínez, Salanova & Llorens, 2016; Salanova, Llorens, Torrente, & Acosta, 2013).

Despite this broad range of possibilities of positive interventions, efforts have been made to highlight the best practices in this area: (1) preparing the environments where the intervention will be carried out (e.g., ensuring the commitment the people involved, promoting the information mechanisms and active participation), (2) designing the intervention (e.g., planning the intervention realistically, with realistic, positive and measurable objectives), (3) implementing and testing the effectiveness of the intervention through experimental studies (with an intervention group and a control or waiting list group) with assessments over time, and (4) assessing the real impact of the intervention focused on its transfer into our personal and/or professional lives (see Llorens et al. 2013; Salanova et al., 2013).

In this special issue, which we have divided into two issues of the journal, a number of research results in this field are presented, symbolizing the contribution of researchers from different areas of psychology with a focus on the positive (in the broad sense of the word) and its applications, with 13 review papers related to Positive Psychology in its three areas of application: Organizations and work, Clinical and health, and Education. The studies have been developed by leading experts at national and international level in Positive Psychology.

In this first issue, four studies are presented in the area of application of ORGANIZATIONS AND WORK. In the next issue articles, there will be articles from the other areas of Clinical and health, and Education. With regards to the four studies in the area of Organizations and Work, the first one entitled "Can we be passionate about our work? A review on passion at work" (Lisbona, A., Palací, F.J., & Bernabé, M., from UNED [the National University of Distance Education in Madrid], focuses on passion as an activity characterized by harmony or obsession in relation to carrying out an activity. Unlike engagement, passion involves variables related to the self and the volitional processes in the performance of the action. In this work, the authors reviewed 90 empirical studies that address the construct of passion at work, attending to articles with an



empirical and quantitative design. It is noted that passion was studied as a personal resource, with responses associated with satisfaction, well-being and performance.

In the second article, "Positive leadership models: Theoretical framework and research" (Blanch, J., Gil, F., Antino, M. & Rodríguez-Muñoz, A. from the Complutense University of Madrid) positive leadership is explored. This type of leadership is defined as one that facilitates the superior performance of individuals and groups, focusing on their strengths and abilities, and pivoting around the most positive aspects of the human condition. The aim of this article is twofold: on one hand the conceptual margins of positive leadership are defined, as well as the reasons for their appearance. On the other hand, practical aspects are reviewed related to the empirical research which demonstrates the impact of this type of leadership in organizations. In particular, the positive relationship between authentic leadership and positive organizational variables is emphasized. Finally, future research directions are outlined for the development of this concept.

The third article "Contributions from the Positive Organizational Psychology to develop Healthy and Resilient Organizations" (Salanova, M., Llorens, S. & Martínez, I. Universitat Jaume I of Castellon) presents the main results obtained by the WANT team for Psychosocial Prevention and Healthy Organizations on the HERO model (Healthy & Resilient Organizations). Specifically, the theoretical model and tools that enable the collective assessment (via management interviews and questionnaires administered to groups of workers, supervisors and clients) of healthy and resilient organizations. Secondly, the main results of the application of this methodology in the different socioeconomic contexts are presented. The last part of the work is dedicated to presenting different experiences of positive interventions that have been carried out by the research team under the paradigm of Positive Organizational Psychology.

Finally, in the article "Amplification in the workplace: Building a sustainable workforce through single positive psychological intervention" (Le Blanc, P., & Oerlemans, W.G.M. from the University of Eindhoven) it is shown how amplification interventions are considered a key tool to increase the sustainability of enterprises. The aim of this paper is to provide evidence through a review on how to increase the well-being of employees via interventions focused on "amplification" rather than "healing". First, some important preconditions for the interventions are highlighted and the intervention process itself briefly discussed. Additionally, a review is provided of the empirical studies on interventions of amplification, especially based on engagement.

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