Positive Psychology for a Happy Workplace and Happier Employees

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Abstract

There's a new killer on the block: stress, depression and consequently suicide at the workplace. Suicide is responsible for nearly 1 million deaths worldwide each year, and the rate is continuing to rise- particularly in the workplace, according to a new study. Most jobs involve some degree of stress, and this can affect people at all levels within an organisation, including frontline employees, managers and senior leaders. Some stress is reasonable, but it becomes an issue when it is excessive and ongoing. There are some strategies everyone can adopt to manage and reduce their own stress levels, as well as find a positive work-life balance.

Keywords: stress, psychology, positive, workplace, happy, employees

Introduction:

There are few things in life much more riveting than the human mind. In fact, apart from the complexity of the unknown cosmos, it is probably one of the least understood objects in the universe. That doesn't mean, however, that we haven't learnt a lot about it.

Psychology is the study of behavior and mind, embracing all aspects of conscious and unconscious experience as well as thought. Psychologists attempt to understand the role of mental functions in individual and social behavior, while also exploring the physiological and biological processes that underlie cognitive functions and behaviors.

In psychology, happiness is a mental or emotional state of well-being which can be defined by, among others, positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy. We feel happy or are in a state of happiness when things go our way. But there are times when things don't happen the way we expect them to or want them to. This can lead to unhappiness or anxiety or even depression. Depression is not just restricted in somebody's personal life but also their professional life. The lines between personal and work life are shrinking.

Work can make us feel good about ourselves and give us a sense of purpose; it's an important way to help us to protect and improve our mental health and wellbeing. However, sometimes work and life stress can negatively affect our mental health and our ability to do our jobs.

One way to prioritize mental health in the workplace is to focus on the office atmosphere, according to John. F. Greden, M.D., executive director of the University of Michigan Comprehensive Depression Center."The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind". William James (1842-1910)

Psychology is much bigger than just medicine, or fixing unhealthy things. It's about education, work, marriage - it's even about sports. What I want to do is see psychologists working to help people build strengths in all these domains Martin Seligman

Positive psychology is that branch of psychology that uses scientific understanding and effective intervention to aid in the achievement of a satisfactory life, rather than treating mental illness. Positive psychology is concerned with **eudaimonia**, "the good life", reflection about what holds the greatest value in life – the factors that contribute the most to a well-lived and fulfilling life.

Martin Seligman is a pioneer of Positive Psychology. Positive Psychology is grounded in the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within them, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play. (Positive Psychology Center, 2016).In 1998 Martin Seligman suggested that psychology turns toward understanding and building human strengths to complement the traditional emphasis on healing damage.

Three Levels of Positive Psychology

The science of positive psychology operates on three different levels:

The Subjective Level: The subjective level includes the study of positive experiences such as joy, well-being, satisfaction, contentment, happiness, optimism and flow. This level is about feeling good, rather than doing good or being a good person.

The Individual Level: Here, the aim is to identify the constituents of the 'good life' and the personal qualities that are necessary for being a 'good person', through studying human strengths

and virtues, future-mindedness, capacity for love, courage, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, wisdom, interpersonal skills and giftedness.

The Group Level: The emphasis is on civic virtues, social responsibilities, nurturance, altruism, civility, tolerance, work ethics, positive institutions and other factors that contribute to the development of citizenship and communities.

Research Findings in Positive Psychology

Some of the major findings of positive psychology include:

- People are generally happy.

- Money doesn't necessarily buy well-being; but spending money on other people can make individuals happier.

- Some of the best ways to combat disappointments and setbacks include strong social relationships and character strengths.

- Work can be important to well-being, especially when people are able to engage in work that is purposeful and meaningful.

- While happiness is influenced by genetics, people can learn to be happier by developing optimism, gratitude, and selflessness.

Workplace Stress

Workplace stress can occur when there is a mismatch between the requirements of the role, your capabilities and resources and supports available.

Everyone knows what stress feels like and we've probably all experienced it at some stage – at home, school or work, or while getting outside our comfort zone, but while this stress is normal, if it is ongoing, it can become a problem.

Stress is a normal response to the demands of work. It can be beneficial in short bursts, helping you stay alert and perform at your best. However, prolonged or excessive job stress can be damaging to your mental health. Stress can contribute to the development of anxiety and/or depression, and may cause an existing condition to worsen. As well as affecting your relationships and life outside work, stress can increase your risk of injury, fatigue and burnout.

Some Contributing Factors

- time pressure, working too hard or too fast, or unrealistic targets
- having limited control over how you do your work
- not receiving enough support from supervisors, managers and/or co-workers
- job insecurity
- high mental task demands, work that requires high-level decision making
- a lack of role clarity
- poor communication
- conflict with colleagues or managers
- bullying
- low levels of recognition and reward
- work that is emotionally disturbing or requires high emotional involvement
- poorly managed change, lack of organizational justice
- Discrimination – whether based on gender, ethnicity, race or sexuality.

Positive Psychology and Work

Positive emotions spread quickly in organisations and teams. Bringing more positive emotions into your day-to-day work life will help you develop the resources and skills to thrive, be a positive leader and an employee. It also helps create a positive climate that increases performance, engagement, wellbeing and better results.

Our genes are responsible for about 50% of our happiness levels, our actions and attitudes account for 40% for our happiness.

For Workplace Happiness:

• Start a meeting by asking everyone to share one really good memory or something equally positive to get people in a positive zone. People thrive when they are happier. Brain scans show that when subjects are instructed to count their blessings there is increased activity in the part of the brain associated with happiness.

• Our happiness is contagious. Science shows us the greatest way to influence our happiness is to invest in our relationships. Make an effort to talk to your neighbours at work; eat with them and share your time with them and organize a get together. Get to know the people and this gives them a sense of belonging. One has to remember that an unhappy person can lead to an unhappy workplace.

• Assuming that everyone knows their own strengths or that they are the same as a particular employee is not conducive. Recognizing and letting go of the assumption that because one finds something easy doesn't mean that everyone else also will helps people to better understand their colleagues and work together more productively. Playing to your staff's strengths rather than their weaknesses not only impacts their intrinsic motivation, but also the company and organization at large.

• Setting goals at an individual, team and organizational level is critical for productivity and happiness. Trying to connect goals with values and strengths works much better as one is more likely to feel happier and perform better. If a middle ground is found between skills, interest, values and strengths, one is likely to build a team with internal motivation, engagement, and connection, as they thrive on their own motivations and energy.

• Our ability to celebrate our own accomplishments, as well as those of our colleagues, is another important element that enables us to flourish in the workplace. By offering positivity, engagement, connection, meaning and acknowledgement, an inspired and motivated workforce cane be maintained that are not only happy to be at work but are excited to contribute to the workplace at large. Remember to thank and express appreciation to your colleagues and team.

Conclusion

Work can make us feel good about ourselves and give us a sense of purpose; it's an important way to help us to protect and improve our mental health and wellbeing. Stress is part of everyday life, and it is not always a problem. A little bit of stress – like the stress you feel during a job interview – can sometimes help you perform better. It is usually temporary and can help you to focus and do your best under pressure. Healthy workplaces promote mental health and wellbeing. They are positive and productive, and get the best out of everyone in the workplace.

Positive Psychology / Perma Theory (Seligman): https://www.learning-theories.com/positive-psychology-perma-theory-seligman.html

Positive Thinking: https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/positive-thinking.html

Happiness at Work: 10 Tips for How to be Happy at Work: https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/happiness-at-work/