

Critical Review of “The Role of Positive Psychology in Improving Employees’ Performance and Organizational Productivity: An Experimental Study”

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Abstract

This critical review delves into an in-depth analysis of "The Role of Positive Psychology in Improving Employees’ Performance and Organizational Productivity: An Experimental Study" (Kour et al., 2019). This paper acknowledges and understands the original study's clear objective, relevance, and well-structured experimental approach. However, this review attempts to identify significant methodical and structural limitations; As well as the questionable use of purposive sampling and a single online survey for an experimental design, which raises concerns about bias and replicability. This exploration of the study concludes by offering constructive suggestions and possible additions for improving the original study's rigor and presentation, particularly by addressing sampling methods and procedure of data collection.

Keywords: Positive Psychology, Employee Performance, Critical Review.

Introduction

The scope of psychological inquiry has significantly evolved over time, moving beyond a limited focus on pathology and dysfunction in social sciences to embracing the study of human flourishing and well-being. Unlike traditional psychological schools of thought, positive psychology pays attention to the character qualities, practices, and experiences that contribute to a meaningful and purposeful life, that allows individuals to move beyond mere survival to genuine thriving (Joseph & Worsley, 2005).

Pioneering psychologists in this domain, notably Martin Seligman, who is regarded as the "father of positive psychology," have worked to identify the essential components of a fulfilling life. Their research endeavours have not only proposed but also rigorously tested and validated practices aimed at enhancing overall life satisfaction and well-being among individuals (Seligman, 2000).

The relevance of positive psychology extends significantly into the professional aspect of an individual, particularly concerning an employee’s performance and organizational productivity. A substantial number of literary evidences consistently demonstrate a strong link between well-being and performance. It has experientially stated that fostering a positive and assuring atmosphere in the workplace can boost profitability of an organisation. However, the benefits of such an environment extend far beyond, not only impacting employee retention, improved employee health but also overall organizational resilience (ClearPoint Strategy, 2020; Positive Psychology at Work, 2019). The modern workplace, characterized by rapid technological advancements and increasing pressures, necessitates innovative approaches to sustain both individual and collective output. Organizations are recognizing that their success depends not only on technological infrastructure but equally on the creativity, expertise, and well-being of their human capital (Kour et al., 2019).

In this context, the research paper titled "The Role of Positive Psychology in Improving Employees’ Performance and Organizational Productivity: An Experimental Study" by Jasleen Kour, Jamal El-Den, and Narumon Sriratanaviriyakul (2019) presents a relevant and pertinent investigation. The study aims to understand the influence of a persons’ positive traits on their performance as an employee

and organizational productivity; Also, how these can be improved by identification of such traits and their integration into organizational policies. The authors substantiate the study through an experimental approach assessing three specific positive traits: optimism, well-being, and personal strength; And examining their correlation with workplace efficiency. The final goal of the study is to highlight the relationship between elements of positive psychology and organizational productivity. To achieve these objectives, the study uses a grounded theory method, collecting data through a survey administered online via email to 97 participants.

This critical review attempts to provide an in-depth analysis of Kour, El-Den, and Sriratanaviriyakul's (2019) research study, evaluating its methodical rigor, structural integrity, and the validity of its conclusions. While the original study addresses a highly relevant and impactful topic, a thorough examination reveals several areas for improvement to extend the scope of the study. This review will critically assess the original paper, while highlighting both its strengths and its limitations. By offering a constructive critique, this review intends to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the application of positive psychology principles in organizational settings.

Analysis of the Original Study's Structure and Content

The study by Kour, El-Den, and Sriratanaviriyakul (2019) tries to bridge the theoretical framework of principles of positive psychology with practical applications in organizational settings. The following section provides a detailed analysis of each component of the research paper, while highlighting both commendable aspects and areas requiring advances.

Evaluation of the Introduction

The introduction of the original paper is well-crafted and has the ability to engage the reader and establish the relevance of positive psychology. It smoothly transitions from a discussion of traditional psychology's focus on mental processes to the emergence and distinct emphasis of positive psychology on an individual's strengths and growth, while flowing with a consistent progression of thought and coherency of composition; Also, making the conceptual framework clear to a broad audience.

Evaluation of the Methodology

The methodology section of any research paper is its powerhouse, as it governs the reliability, validity, and replicability of the study. While the authors attempt to provide a detailed account of the steps followed in the study, several aspects of the methodology in the original paper warrant attention.

Theoretical Basis

The study was based on a grounded theory approach, aiming to understand and assess a social process in an organisational setting. Grounded theory is a qualitative approach focused on developing a new theory from data, generally through iterative data collection and its thorough analysis. However, the paper mentions the use of experimental procedures in surveying and data analysis, creating a significant methodical tension.

True experimental studies entail the manipulation of independent variables, random assignment to different conditions, and control groups to establish cause-and-effect relationships between the variables. Grounded theory, conversely, is inductive in its nature and aims to generate theory from rich qualitative data. The blend of these two distinct paradigms with an unclear explanation of how they are integrated creates confusion regarding the study's foundational design and its ability to achieve its objectives. If the study was primarily quantitative with hypotheses testing, as suggested by the later analysis sections, then labelling it as grounded theory creates a fallacy.

Participants and Sampling Size

The use of a purposive sampling technique to select participant employees from the urban corporate sector is a significant limitation. Purposive sampling can be useful for specific qualitative research where particular inclusive characteristics are sought. However, in a study aiming to assess

correlations and imply broader applicability to general public, it inherently introduces a bias. In this case, the selection of a non-randomized group means that the sample might not be representative of the larger employee population, thus limiting the generalizability of the findings of the study. The authors acknowledge that proper ethical measures were taken, which is commendable, but this does not mitigate the inherent sampling bias. For a study that suggests having an experimental nature and seeks to establish correlations, a more representative sampling method, such as simple random sampling, would have been more appropriate to enhance external validity of the study.

Data Collection

The reliance on solely a single basic method of data collection, that is an online survey questionnaire using Likert scale and yes/no options sent via email, slightly compromises the study's credibility.

While online surveys offer convenience in data collection, they are highly susceptible to biases, such as the self-report bias, response bias, and selection bias. Moreover, in an experimental context, the lack of control over the participants' working environment and other confounding variables at the time of data collection means that any observed correlations cannot be definitively attributed to the positive traits that are assessed. The absence of triangulation in data collection, further weakens the validity of the data, as it does not provide any means to cross-verify the self-reported information.

Data Analysis

The data analysis involved calculation of Z-scores for each hypothesis based on agree/disagree responses, while ignoring neutral responses. The Z-test is a valid statistical approach for hypothesis testing, its application in this study must be viewed in light of the aforementioned data collection limitations. The fact that all hypotheses were validated suggests a strong statistical outcome. However, the reliability of these outcomes are contingent upon the quality and unbiased nature of the input data. If the data itself is compromised by methodological flaws, in that case, even statistically significant results may not accurately reflect the true relationships of the variables in the population. The decision to ignore neutral responses also requires further justification, it could potentially skew the results by removing a segment of responses that might indicate ambivalence of response or the lack of strong opinion.

Evaluation of the Findings/Results

An important structural flaw in the original paper is the absence of a distinct section dedicated to presenting the findings or results. The results are integrated within the 'Data Analysis' and 'Discussion and Conclusion' sections.

However, it is up to the discretion of the authors, this deviation from standard scientific reporting practice makes it little difficult for readers to clearly identify and differentiate between the raw findings, the statistical analysis, and the interpretation of those findings.

A separate 'Results' section is crucial for transparent scientific communication, as it allows the readers to review the empirical data independently before engaging with the authors' interpretations.

Despite this structural issue, the paper does explicitly state that all the hypothesis made are accepted, leading to the conclusion that positive traits such as optimism enhance workplace efficiency and performance, thereby contributing to an organization's productivity. While this finding aligns with the broader positive psychology literature, its robustness in this specific study is undermined by the methodological weaknesses previously discussed.

Evaluation of the Discussion and Conclusion

The discussion section coherently connects the various facets highlighted in the study, providing insights into the scope and functional use of the findings. It appropriately interprets the meaning of the results and attempts to portray their significance. The authors also claim to have uncovered new gaps that weren't uncovered already in the prior writings, which, if substantiated, would be a valuable contribution to the field. The conclusion is presented concisely, offering a summarised overview of the entire paper and its implications, and outlines future prospects and utilization of the study's findings. The final

statement that implementing positive psychology principles leads to happier, more focused, and satisfied employees is a clear and positive takeaway from the study.

However, the conclusion's brevity comes at the cost of detail. It lacks specific references to the expected tests and models that have helped in designing the study, which would provide a stronger foundation for the conclusions drawn by it. While a study's conclusion should be succinct, it must still appropriately summarize the core elements that underpin the outcomes.

Furthermore, while the discussion attempts to interpret the findings, the inherent methodological limitations mean that the interpretations must be viewed with caution or situationally. The discussion could have acknowledged these limitations within its own section helping the reader keeping it in mind while quoting the study, rather than leaving them primarily for a separate 'Suggestions to Improve Study' section.

Strengths and Limitations of the Original Study

The original study by Kour, El-Den, and Sriratanaviriyakul (2019) addresses a highly relevant and impactful topic within organizational and positive psychology, contributing to the growing literature on positive psychology's role in the workplace. It's clear, simple, objective and accessible writing style are definite strengths. The attempt to develop a framework linking positive traits to organizational outcomes is also a valuable conceptual contribution made by the study.

However, the study is significantly hampered by several methodical and structural shortcomings. The most prominent issues include the clashing claims of an experimental study based on grounded theory, while employing only a single online survey with quantitative analysis. The reliance on purposive sampling also introduces inherent bias, limiting the generalizability of the findings. The absence of a dedicated results section and the integration of findings within other sections detract from the paper's clarity and flow as well as its adherence to scientific reporting standards.

Suggestions for Improving Future Research

Based on the critical analysis, several key recommendations can be made to enhance the rigor and impact of future advances in this area:

Methodological Clarity

Future studies should clearly define their research paradigm and ensure that all methodological choices are coherent with the particular paradigm. If an experimental design is intended, it must incorporate variance of variables, random assignment, and control conditions, to generate results.

Robust Sampling

To reduce any bias and enhance generalizability of the study, researchers should employ probability or random sampling techniques, when aiming for quantitative assessment of relationships across a broader population of corporate employees.

Triangulation of Data

Relying on a single self-report online survey is insufficient for establishing such robust findings, especially in an experimental context. Future studies should incorporate multiple data collection methods like objective performance metrics, observational data, structured or unstructured interviews, 360-degree feedback, to triangulate findings and enhance validity of the study.

Structured Reporting

Adherence to standard scientific paper format, including distinct and clearly labelled sections is crucial for transparency, readability and the ease of understanding of the reader. A dedicated 'Results' section is important for presenting empirical findings clearly and concisely.

Theoretical Grounding of Traits

The introduction of the paper should provide a more explicit theoretical rationale for the selection of specific positive traits highlighted in the study, linking them to established psychological theories or models.

Acknowledgement of Limitations

While the original paper had a separate 'Suggestions to Improve Study' section, it is essential for the 'Discussion' section itself to explicitly acknowledge and discuss the limitations of the study's design, data collection, and data analysis, and how these might impact the interpretation and generalizability of the statistical results.

Nuance in Conclusions

Given the methodological limitations, conclusions should be framed with appropriate caution regarding causality and generalizability of the findings. While positive correlations are observed, the ability to claim a direct cause-and-effect relationship is constrained by the study design.

Conclusion

This critical review has thoroughly examined "The Role of Positive Psychology in Improving Employees' Performance and Organizational Productivity: An Experimental Study" by Kour, El-Den, and Sriratanaviriyakul (2019). The original study's overall objective and ambition to explore the impact of positive psychological traits on workplace outcomes is commendable and aligns with the growing interest in fostering human growth in professional facets of life. The paper's clear objective and accessible introduction are its notable strengths. However, the review has highlighted a few methodological and structural weaknesses that temper the robustness of the study's results. While the original study concludes that positive traits enhance productivity, the methodological concerns pointed out in the review necessitate a cautious interpretation of its claims.

Future research in this area would benefit highly from clearer methodological alignment, more robust sampling techniques, and a structured presentation of findings in accordance with standard scientific format to advance the understanding of positive psychology's practical applications in organizational settings with greater scientific rigor.

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