



Perspectives

How can we facilitate positive organizing? The case for developing virtues in organizations.

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HOW CAN WE FACILITATE POSITIVE ORGANIZING? THE CASE FOR DEVELOPING VIRTUES IN ORGANIZATIONS.

The idea:

Not so long ago, life and work were different. Most of us lived much more connected lives; in our churches, town squares, and interdependent communities we found meaning and purpose. We were known. We belonged. Back then, work was more often a means, rather than an end. But things have changed. Where our communities, community groups, extended families, *tribes* used to provide moral direction and meaning to our lives, today that is becoming more and more the domain of the workplace. Today, we work longer hours and have more complex e- and i-interfaces with our jobs; the boundaries of healthy work-life balance are far passed blurred. Many of us have moved away from our village centres and into sprawling suburbia; our identities are derived not by who we are and what tribe we come from, but by 'what we do' and which organization we work for.

In many ways, our workplaces have replaced our communities. Our workplaces have become our contexts for identity construction (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010), our frameworks for moral and ethical conduct (Fehr, Kai Chi, & Dang, 2015), and where we look for meaning, belonging, and opportunities to flourish (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Michaelson, Pratt, Grant, & Dunn, 2014). But while we *look* for meaning, purpose and the conditions for flourishing in our organizations, all too often we do not find them. Many organizations fall short in the duty they have inherited to provide the communities we desire.

Our article proposes that positive organizational inquiry provides the best avenue by which to address the problem of the disconnect between the communities we desire and the workplaces we have. The field of positive inquiry aspires towards a loosely conceptualized endpoint of positive organizing, which is characterized by processes, structures, and states that provide meaning, belonging, and flourishing (Frederickson & Dutton, 2008). Positive organizing, it seems, represents an antithesis to our problem. How then, do we facilitate positive organizing?

In an attempt to answer this question, we conduct an integrative review of the positive organizational paradigms, and conclude that *virtue* is the common foundation of positive inquiry, and that developing *virtues* is the key to enabling positive organizing. Our article culminates in a proposition that developing virtues in organizations provides the most promising avenue by which to facilitate positive organizing.

To whom the article is speaking:

This article speaks to management and organizational scholars and practitioners, and particularly those interested in positive inquiry. A more specific audience would be scholars and practitioners in the areas of organizational wellbeing interventions, positive organizational scholarship, positive organizational behaviour, and virtue ethics, as well as those interested in strengths-based development, positive change, thriving and flourishing. Leadership scholars may also take interest in this article as the virtue ethics tradition (e.g. Aristotle, 350BCE/1962), the organizational wellbeing intervention literature (e.g. Nielsen, 2013), as well as the field of positive inquiry recognize the influential role leaders play in creating and sustaining organizational change.

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3 How we will communicate our idea:
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5 We communicate our idea by first making clear the problem we seek to address, that is the
6 disconnect between the communities we crave and the organizations we have. We then
7 explain how positive organizing represents an antithesis to this problem, and state our intent
8 to understand how positive organizing might be enabled.
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10 A cursory survey of positive inquiry turns up several distinct paradigms, each of which
11 frequently references the importance of virtue (Alzola, 2012), virtues (Peterson & Seligman,
12 2004), virtuous (Cameron, 2013), and organizational virtuousness (Bright, Cameron, & Caza,
13 2006; Cameron, 2003). And, after clarifying these distinct yet interrelated terms by
14 borrowing on the deep ontology of critical realism (Bhaskar, 2014), we trace the notion of
15 virtue throughout the positive organizational paradigms and establish that *virtue* is
16 foundational to each paradigm, and *virtues* are key to facilitating positive organizing. Our
17 paper concludes with a proposed virtues-based framework for positive organizing which
18 provokes a number of avenues for further investigation.
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22 The importance of our idea:
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24 Our article makes a number of important scholarly contributions, primary of which is our
25 clarification of the notion of virtue. While the notion of virtue seems to be gaining some
26 momentum within the field positive inquiry, the term remains a conceptual quagmire. Our
27 initial scholarly contribution is using the deep ontology of critical realism (Bhaskar, 2014) to
28 provide clarity to the concept of virtue, and the distinct yet interrelated virtues, *virtuous*, and
29 *virtuousness*. The importance of this contribution is highlighted by the fact that that a lack of
30 concept clarity is the number one reason manuscripts are rejected from the *Academy of*
31 *Management Review* (Suddaby, 2010). In addition, the clarity we provide to the concept of
32 virtue allows us to discuss some key features of virtue, including how virtues are different
33 from similar terms such as values, corporate social responsibility, or citizenship behaviours;
34 the learnability of virtues; the universality of virtues; and the role virtues play in linking the
35 good of the individual to the good of the community.
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39 The clarity we provide to the notion of virtue allows us to make a number of cascading
40 contributions. For instance, we use our refined conceptualization of virtue to articulate
41 inclusion criteria which provide the reader (scholar or practitioner), with a simple framework
42 against which to judge *what* is virtuous in *which* contexts. This is an important contribution
43 when we consider the vast amount of scholarly work which has generated seemingly
44 conflicting lists of virtues, and the intriguing distinction between the unity of virtue and the
45 universality of *some* virtues. The clarity we provide to the concept of virtue, also allows us to
46 rebut some of the critiques of positive inquiry (e.g. Fineman, 2006; Hackman, 2009).
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48 The virtues-based framework for positive organizing with which this paper culminates,
49 represents another important scholarly contribution. This framework highlights virtue as the
50 uniting foundation of positive inquiry and points to developing virtues as the most promising
51 way of enabling positive organizing; and thus the most promising way of addressing the
52 problems organizations have providing the meaning, belonging, and conditions for
53 flourishing that members desire.
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