



## Positive Organizational Psychology Interventions



# Positive Organizational Psychology Interventions

Design and Evaluation

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## Positive Organizational Psychology Interventions: Design & Evaluation

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## About the Editors

**STEWART I. DONALDSON, Ph.D.**, is a Distinguished University Professor, Executive Director of the Claremont Evaluation Center, and Director of The Evaluators' Institute at Claremont Graduate University (CGU). He is deeply committed to improving lives through research, evaluation, and education. Professor Donaldson works with students on a wide range of topics across several fields and programs at CGU, including the science of well-being and positive psychology; positive organizational and sports psychology; positive organizational and human resource development; positive youth development and education; and community/global health program design, monitoring, and evaluation. As an immigrant born overseas and now a naturalized US citizen, Professor Donaldson has traveled extensively and especially enjoys working on cross-cultural and international topics with students who have diverse backgrounds and perspectives from all across the globe. He was recently honored with the International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA) Inspiring Mentor Career Achievement Award (2019) and appointed Faculty Advisor of the IPPA Student Division with approximately 600 student members from 50 different countries. From 2011 to 2017, he was director and faculty mentor for approximately 50 underrepresented minority graduate students from across more than 30 different universities participating in the American Evaluation Association's esteemed and internationally recognized Graduate Education Diversity Internship (GEDI) Program. Professor Donaldson has served as chair or member on more than 100 doctoral dissertation committees at Claremont Graduate University since 1995, and more than 200 master's theses and online certificate students' culminating research and evaluation projects.

In 2007, Professor Donaldson (in collaboration with professors Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Jeanne Nakamura) developed the first research-focused Ph.D. and M.A. programs in positive psychology. He currently provides paid employment and supervises numerous students specializing in positive organizational psychology, positive health and sports psychology, and evaluation science. Professor Donaldson works collaboratively with his students and colleagues to publish findings from his extensive portfolio of extramurally funded research and evaluation projects. This work has been cited widely, including more than 200 peer-reviewed scientific articles, chapters, and evaluation reports, and he has published or has forthcoming 18 books, including *Applied Positive Psychology* (2011), *Scientific Advances in Positive Psychology* (2017), *Toward a Positive*

*Psychology of Relationships* (2018), *Positive Psychological Science* (2020), and this volume *Positive Organizational Psychology Interventions: Design & Evaluation*.

Professor Donaldson has been honored with a plethora of prestigious international, national, and regional career achievement awards. Most recently at the IPPA World Congress of Positive Psychology in Melbourne, Australia (July 2019), Professor Donaldson was honored with two career achievement awards. The 2019 IPPA Work and Organizations Division “Exemplary Research to Practice Award” was presented to Professor Donaldson for many years of exemplary research and teaching, as well as a robust cumulative contribution to evidence-based practice related to fostering positive work and organizations. He was also awarded the IPPA 2019 “Inspiring Mentor Award.” The student division of the IPPA recognizes one outstanding mentor in the field of positive psychology who provides continued commitment and support to students who foster professional and academic development. Professor Donaldson was given this honor to acknowledge his many years of outstanding teaching and mentoring, and for inspiring the next generation of diverse psychological scientists to make meaningful contributions to societies across the globe.

**CHRISTOPHER CHEN, M.S.**, is a Ph.D. student in the Organizational Behavior and Psychology program at Claremont Graduate University where he received a General Bronson Fellowship and Oskamp Student Fellowship Award. He received his M.S. in Applied Psychology with a concentration in Organizational Psychology from the University of Southern California, where he was elected as a member of The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi. Christopher received his B.A. in Psychology from the University of California, Riverside, and was elected for membership in the Omicron Delta Kappa Society for his academic and campus community achievements. Before becoming a student at Claremont Graduate University, Christopher worked at various organizations, such as the Los Angeles Unified School District and Boston Consulting Group. Christopher has presented his research at conferences hosted by the Academy of Management, Western Psychological Association, and Western Positive Psychological Association. His general research interests revolve around the changing nature of the workplace due to technology, career and job crafting, the protean career, as well as organizational commitment. Christopher is a Global Talent and Innovation Consultant at Accenture and Associate Director of the Claremont Accenture Talent Innovation Lab.

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**VICTORIA (VICKI) CABRERA, M.P.A.** is an organizational and positive psychology consultant, researcher, and evaluator. Her research and practice interests revolve around helping people and organizations thrive and reach their full potential, with a focus on social impact. She also serves on the Executive Committee of the International Positive Psychology Association's (IPPA) Work & Organizations Division. She received her B.A. in Psychology with a concentration in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from The College of New Jersey and her M.P.A. in Public and Nonprofit Management and Policy from New York University. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Psychology with a concentration in Positive Organizational Psychology at Claremont Graduate University.

**LAWRENCE CHAN, M.A.**, is a Lecturer in the Department of Psychological Sciences at Woodbury University, Los Angeles, and in the Management and Human Resources Department at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. As an organizational consultant, he has worked with many diverse organizations, including Accenture, the LA Dodger's Foundation, and The Aspen Institute. His research interests are in positive organizational behavior, namely positive behavioral indicators of performance, and cross-cultural performance management. He received his B.A. in Psychology from the University of California, Riverside, and his M.A. in Organizational Leadership from the University of San Diego. He is currently working on his Ph.D. in Organizational Behavior at Claremont Graduate University.

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**MATT DUBIN, Ph.D.**, is the Founder and Principal of Dubin Consulting Group, an organizational culture and leadership development consultancy that enables organizations to create a culture of flow and peak performance. His philosophy is that each person's job should mean more than work, and organizational success depends on the mutual investment between a company and its people. From start-ups to Fortune 500 companies, Matt has worked with organizations across a variety of industries, including professional sports, tech, entertainment, fashion, law, finance, and academia. Matt completed his Ph.D. in Positive Organizational Psychology at Claremont Graduate University, where he was awarded the inaugural "Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi Dissertation Award for Excellence in Positive Psychology" for his research on cultivating flow in the workplace.

**HANNAH FOSTER GRAMMER, M.A.**, is a Research Lab Member at the Health Psychology and Prevention Science Institute, as well as at the Social Identity Center at Claremont Graduate University. Currently, she is conducting research on strengths-based versus traditional-based goal setting during performance review meetings on performance outcomes, mediated through basic needs satisfaction as part of self-determination theory. She is working toward a Ph.D. in Social Psychology at Claremont Graduate University, with a focus on application in an organizational development context. She is interested in conservation psychology through a social and organizational development lens, specifically in terms of exploring vested interest and attitude-behavior consistency with attitudinal change approaches to achieve effective communication initiatives.

**SHARON HONG, M.A.**, is a Management Consultant at one of the largest professional services firms, with experience in change, diversity, equity, and inclusion, future of work, culture, talent strategy, and leadership development. She earned a B.A. in Psychology at Pepperdine University and her M.A. in Psychology with a concentration in Positive Organizational Psychology from Claremont Graduate University. Her research interests focus on bringing vulnerability, authenticity, and the human touch to the workplace.

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## Preface

The 2020 global pandemic has reminded us how important it is to “follow the science” in our efforts to prevent and ameliorate our most urgent and important health, well-being, community, organizational, and societal challenges. For example, “follow the science” is the cry being heard around the world as leaders and public health professionals attempt to slow the spread and alleviate the suffering being caused by Covid-19. High-quality empirical research and evaluations are being funded at a rapid rate worldwide to determine the efficacy of treatments to reduce the severity and length of illness caused by the coronavirus, as well as to discover an effective vaccine.

The second wave of devastating consequences of the 2020 global pandemic will likely be linked to dramatic declines in well-being, performance, and organizational effectiveness. What does science tell us about enhancing and preventing declines in well-being, performance, and organizational effectiveness? This volume explores those questions by following the positive organizational psychology intervention science during the past two decades and illustrates how to use that science, as well as positive psychological science more broadly, to design and evaluate the next generation of positive organizational psychology interventions (POPIs). After summarizing what we now know from two decades of positive psychological science, including POPI science, each chapter uses aspects of that science in the design of a next-generation POPI. The final chapter emphasizes the importance of the measurement and strategic evaluation of POPIs and provides frameworks for understanding worker and organizational needs, efficacy evaluations of new POPIs, as well as measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of POPIs being implemented in the global workplace.

The editors wish to thank the chapter authors for their creativity and innovative evidence-based approaches to designing POPIs that promise to enhance and prevent declines in well-being, performance, and organizational effectiveness in these challenging times. Special thanks to the Wiley team: Jake Opie, Monica Rogers, Christina Weyrauch, Arthi Kangeyan, and Alan Everett for their amazing editorial and production work, and for efficiently and effectively managing this project. It is our hope that all this exemplary teamwork will provide you with an engaging, meaningful, and productive experience as you make your way through the chapters in this volume.

Stewart I. Donaldson  
Christopher Chen  
Claremont, CA



## 1

## Designing Positive Organizational Psychology Interventions

*Stewart I. Donaldson, Christopher Chen, & Scott I. Donaldson*

The contemporary version of the science of positive psychology introduced by Professors Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) rests on the shoulders of some of the earlier pioneers and thought leaders in the discipline and profession of psychology. Most notably, William James and Abraham Maslow introduced the concepts of optimal functioning, self-actualization, and positive psychology decades before the current perspective was launched (see James, 1908; Maslow, 1954). Nevertheless, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's vision and call to the next generation of psychological scientists is what led to an explosion of activity worldwide, and the development of a substantial peer-reviewed scientific literature on well-being, excellence, and optimal human functioning over the past two decades (Donaldson et al., 2020a; Donaldson et al., 2020b; Donaldson et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2018).

While there are now more than 50 regional and national positive psychology professional organizations across the world (see Kim et al., 2018), one of the largest professional organizations of positive psychologists in the world today is the International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA) with several thousand members from more than 70 countries. The IPPA describes positive psychology as a field that focuses on the study and practice of positive emotions, strengths, and virtues that make all individuals, institutions, and communities thrive, and has a three-part mission:

1. To promote the science of positive psychology and its research-based applications.
2. To facilitate collaboration among researchers, teachers, students, and practitioners of positive psychology around the world and across academic disciplines.
3. To share the findings of positive psychology with the broadest possible audience.

The IPPA currently has five divisions, with the largest division of over 1,000 members focused on positive organizational psychology (POP). The IPPA Positive Work and Organizations Division's mission is to serve as a bridge

between research and practice and facilitate collaboration to increase the incorporation of positive psychology in academic research related to organizations and the practice of positive psychology in the organizational context, thereby positively transforming the way the world works.

## **Positive Organizational Psychology**

Donaldson and Ko (2010) defined POP “as the scientific study of positive subjective experiences and traits in the workplace and positive organizations, and its application to improve the effectiveness and quality of life in organizations.” They identified two related multidisciplinary streams of scholarship and research, positive organizational behavior (POB; Luthans, 2002) and positive organizational scholarship (POS; Cameron et al., 2003), that greatly contributed to the understanding of POP topics such as positive leadership, positive organizational development and change, positive psychological capital (PsyCap), organizational virtuousness and ethics, well-being at work, work engagement, flow at work, and the like.

Inspired by the new vision for the addition of a positive approach to psychological science, Fred Luthans, Professor of Organizational Behavior at the University of Nebraska, published his seminal work on POB in 2002 (see Donaldson et al., 2020b). He defined POB 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, 2002a, p. 59). He envisioned POB capacities, such as hope, optimism, resiliency, and self-efficacy, as something one can measure, develop, and use to improve performance (see Donaldson et al., 2020b; Warren et al., 2017).

A year later, Cameron et al. (2003) provided an even more expansive vision for POS, which is “concerned primarily with the study of especially positive outcomes, processes, and attributes of organizations and their members” (Cameron et al., 2003, p. 4). POS is focused on understanding the drivers of positive behavior in the workplace that would enable organizations to rise to new levels of achievement (Roberts et al., 2005). POS seeks to study organizations characterized by “appreciation, collaboration, virtuousness, vitality, and meaningfulness where creating abundance and human well-being are key indicators of success” (Bernstein, 2003).

Donaldson and Ko (2010) suggested that POP serves as an umbrella term that covers POB, POS, and other related labels (e.g., positive psychology at work) with regard to their research topics, foci, and the level of analysis. More recently, Warren et al. (2017) proposed the umbrella term positive work and organizations (PWO), which encourages integration among POP, POB, and POS. The unifying framework enriches traditional organizational behavior approaches, such as applied organizational psychology, organizational behavior, and management. It also influences technology, hospitality, management, law, and financial planning as a consequence of the growing popularity of the positive perspective in the workplace (Warren et al., 2017). The goal of this book is to understand specific practices, programs, and interventions that can be designed based on the large and growing body of scientific literature to improve work life and organizational

effectiveness. We will broadly call these efforts positive organizational psychology interventions (POPIs). We will first briefly review the scientific evidence for positive psychology interventions (PPIs) more generally, and then discuss the effectiveness of POPIs, which are the application of PPIs in the workplace.

## Positive Psychology Interventions

Donaldson et al. (under review) recently systematically reviewed and analyzed the findings from 22 meta-analyses and 231 randomized controlled trials (RCTs) designed to determine the efficacy of PPIs. They found that the science of PPIs has matured to the point where we now have numerous systematic reviews and meta-analyses to determine which PPIs are most effective under specific conditions (see Table 1.1). Most of these reviews and meta-analyses of RCTs show that PPIs, on average, do have at least small to medium-sized positive effects on important outcomes. For example, three recent meta-analyses based on numerous empirical tests and thousands of participants clearly illustrate the conditions under which PPIs can generate well-being and optimal human functioning (Donaldson et al., 2019a; Hendriks et al., 2020; Koydemir et al., 2020).

**Table 1.1** Positive Psychology Intervention Meta-Analyses.

References	Title	Sample	Findings
Heekerens and Eid (2020)	Inducing positive affect and positive future expectations using the best-possible-self intervention: A systematic review and meta-analysis	34 randomized controlled trial (RCT) studies, 4,462 participants	The best-possible-self (BPS) interventions were effective positive psychology interventions (PPIs) with small effects for positive affect and optimism, with no substantial follow-up effects. Moderators included: assessment of momentary affect immediately after the intervention and conceptualizing optimism as positive future expectations instead of a general orientation in life.
Hendriks et al. (2020)	The efficacy of multi-component positive psychology interventions: A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials	50 RCT studies in 51 articles, 6,141 participants	Multicomponent PPIs were effective with small effects for subjective well-being and depression, small to moderate effects for psychological well-being and anxiety, and moderate effects for stress, after taking study quality and outliers into account. Moderators included region and study quality. Non-Western countries and lower quality studies found greater effects.

(Continued)

Table 1.1 (Cont'd)

References	Title	Sample	Findings
Koydemir et al. (2020)	A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of randomized controlled positive psychological interventions on subjective and psychological well-being	68 RCT studies of non-clinical populations, 16,085 participants	PPIs were effective with small effects for psychological well-being and subjective well-being, with small to moderate effects when targeting both types of well-being, with evidence for sustained effects at follow-up. Moderators included: longer interventions (vs shorter), traditional methods (vs technology-assisted methods), and mixed outcomes for age.
Brown et al. (2019)	The effects of positive psychological interventions on medical patients' anxiety: A meta-analysis	12 RCT studies with 1,131 participants; 11 non-randomized trials with 300 participants, patients	PPIs were effective with small to medium effects for patient anxiety, sustained eight weeks post. Moderators included: clinician-led interventions (vs self-administered) and longer interventions (vs shorter).
Carrillo et al. (2019)	Effects of the Best Possible Self intervention: A systematic review and meta-analysis	29 studies in 26 articles, 2,909 participants	BPS interventions were effective PPIs with small effects for well-being, optimism, negative affect, and depressive symptoms, as well as moderate effects for positive affect. Moderators included: older participants and shorter (total minutes of) practice. BPS was more effective than gratitude interventions for positive and negative affect outcomes.
Donaldson et al. (2019a)	Evaluating positive psychology interventions at work: A systematic review and meta-analysis	22 studies, 52 independent samples, 6,027 participants from 10 countries	Five workplace PPIs (psychological capital, job crafting, strengths, gratitude, and employee well-being) can be effective with small effects for desirable work outcomes (performance, job well-being, engagement, etc.) and with small to moderate effects for undesirable work outcomes (negative performance, negative job well-being). Moderators for both desirable and undesirable outcomes did not include the type of theory or intervention delivery method.

(Continued)

Table 1.1 (Cont'd)

References	Title	Sample	Findings
Howell and Passmore (2019)	Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT) as a positive psychological intervention: A systematic review and initial meta-analysis regarding ACT's role in well-being promotion among university students	5 randomized experiments of university students, 585 participants	Acceptance and Commitment Training was an effective PPI with small effects on well-being.
Lomas et al. (2019)	Mindfulness-based interventions in the workplace: An inclusive systematic review and meta-analysis of their impact upon wellbeing	35 RCT studies, 3,090 participants	Mindfulness-based interventions were effective with moderate effects for stress, anxiety, distress, depression, and burnout, as well as small to moderate effects for health, job performance, compassion, empathy, mindfulness, and positive well-being, with no effects for emotional regulation. Moderators for health included: region, mindfulness-based stress-reduction intervention type, and age (younger vs older). Moderators for positive well-being and compassion included: gender.
Slemp et al. (2019)	Contemplative interventions and employee distress: A meta-analysis	119 studies, 6,044 participants	Contemplative interventions (e.g., mindfulness, meditation, and other practices) were effective with small to moderate effects for reducing employee distress sustained at follow-up. Moderators included: type of contemplative intervention and type of control group. Adjustments for publication bias lowered overall effects.
White et al. (2019)	Meta-analyses of positive psychology interventions: The effects are much smaller than previously reported	2 previous meta-analyses (Bolier et al., 2013; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009)	When small sample size bias was taken into account, PPIs were effective with small effects for well-being, with mixed effectiveness for depression. Notes need for increasing sample sizes in future studies.

(Continued)

Table 1.1 (Cont'd)

References	Title	Sample	Findings
Chakhssi et al. (2018)	The effect of positive psychology interventions on well-being in clinical populations: A systematic review and meta-analysis	30 studies, 1,864 participants with clinical disorders	PPIs were effective with small effects for well-being and depression, moderate effects for anxiety, and no significant effects for stress, with similar effects 8–12 weeks post. Moderator for well-being included: guided PPIs (vs unguided, such as self-help). Moderator for stress included: control group type. Moderators did not include: population type, intervention format (individual vs group), intervention duration (shorter vs longer), or type of PPI.
Curry et al. (2018)	Happy to help? A systematic review and meta-analysis of the effects of performing acts of kindness on the well-being of the actor	27 studies in 24 articles, 4,045 participants	Kindness interventions (e.g., random acts of kindness) were effective PPIs with small to medium effects for well-being (for the actor of kindness). Moderators did not include: sex, age, type of participant, intervention, control condition, or outcome measure.
Hendriks et al. (2018)	The efficacy of positive psychology interventions from non-Western countries: A systematic review and meta-analysis	28 RCT studies, 3,009 participants	PPIs from non-Western countries were effective with moderate effects for well-being and large effects for depression and anxiety.
Hendriks et al. (2019) <sup>a</sup>	How WEIRD are positive psychology interventions? A bibliometric analysis of randomized controlled trials on the science of well-being	188 RCT studies in 187 articles from 24 countries, 43,582 participants	Most PPI studies that employ RCTs come from Western Educated Industrialized Rich Democratic (WEIRD) populations. 78.2% of the RCT studies reviewed were conducted in Western countries. However, the number of non-Western publications has increased since 2012.
Dhillon et al. (2017)	Mindfulness-based interventions during pregnancy: A systematic review and meta-analysis	14 articles (some RCT and some non-RCT studies), pregnant (prenatal) participants	Mindfulness-based interventions showed no significant effects for anxiety, depression, or perceived stress in the pooled RCTs, but each showed a significant effect in the pooled non-RCTs. Further, four RCTs and four non-RCT studies showed effectiveness for mindfulness as an outcome.

(Continued)

Table 1.1 (Cont'd)

References	Title	Sample	Findings
Dickens (2017)	Using gratitude to promote positive change: A series of meta-analyses investigating the effectiveness of gratitude interventions	38 studies, 5,223 participants	Gratitude interventions can be effective with small to medium effects for well-being, happiness, life satisfaction, grateful mood, grateful disposition, positive affect, and depressive symptoms, with mixed findings for negative affect and stress, and no significant effects for physical health, sleep, exercise, prosocial behavior, or self-esteem. Moderators included: adults (vs children or college aged). Moderators did not include: gender, type of neutral comparison group, duration of the follow-up period.
Davis et al. (2016)	Thankful for the little things: A meta-analysis of gratitude interventions	32 studies in 26 articles	Gratitude interventions were effective PPIs with small effects for psychological well-being but not gratitude itself in comparison to measurement-only controls. However, gratitude interventions were effective with moderate effects for gratitude and small effects for psychological well-being, with no significant effects for anxiety, in comparison to alternate-activity conditions. Moderators did not include: type of gratitude intervention or dosage (neither days nor minutes of participation).
Weiss et al. (2016)	Can we increase psychological well-being? The effects of interventions on psychological well-being: A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials	27 RCT studies, 3,579 participants	Behavioral interventions were effective with moderate effects for psychological well-being, with small effects at follow-up. Moderators included: clinical groups (vs non-clinical) and individual face-to-face interventions (vs self-help or group face to face). Moderators did not include: age, number of sessions, measurement instrument, and control group. Lower-quality studies found greater effects.
Theeboom et al. (2014)	Does coaching work? A meta-analysis on the effects of coaching on individual-level outcomes in an organizational context	18 studies, 2,090 participants, organizational context	Coaching was effective with moderate to large effects for goal-directed self-regulation and with small to moderate effects for performance/skills, well-being, coping, and work attitudes in an organizational context.

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