

Executive Summary: Why the Workplace Needs Positive Psychology

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John manages a team that makes sales over the phone. Telesales can be a very boring job since upwards of half of the day can be spent on hold waiting to speak to the right person. It can also be very demoralizing, especially when money is tight and sales are scarce. Yet all of John's salespeople love their jobs, and they have very strong sales records. John's winning strategy is to give his employees enough leeway to do the job "their way." As long as they earn more for the company than they are paid in salary, they can do as they wish. Thus, all of the employees can use their respective strengths to earn sales, find their own ways to avoid boredom, and choose how to stay organized and on-task. Moreover, John encourages his employees to share tips and to help each other through difficulties, which results in a strong, close-knit team that helps each other to sell-sell-sell. One of John's employees had the company record for number of sales in a month. John has almost no turnover at all – even his seasonal employees keep coming back to help make money for the firm.

Across the many companies with which I have worked, successes like John's are few and far between. Yet the level of achievement, engagement, satisfaction, and effort that John's management style inspires in his employees provides an excellent example of how positive psychology can productively influence the workplace. Having spent several years analyzing companies and conducting research, I decided to write an overview of research about specific areas of focus that can help firms to build a strong foundation of top-notch human capital.

For a company to succeed, employees need to be creative, proactive, and driven to do good work. They need to be effective in their collaborations, efficient in their production, and feel valuable to the company as contributors to its bottom line. Odds are, many who read that description wish it were true for their companies, and there are ways based on research in positive psychology for companies to get there. Here are some focus areas to consider:

Good work: Doing high-quality, socially-responsible, and meaningful work.

Personnel selection: Choosing the right people.

Enabling engagement: Promoting optimal experiences, self-efficacy, and job-person fit.

Mentoring: Growing your own talent.

Team performance: Fostering teamwork, rather than an association of individuals.

Creativity and innovation: Finding ways to produce more creative works.

With increasing demands in the workplace, and a greater need for knowledge work, innovation, and creativity, organizations need to find ways to enable their employees to do and be their best. Because of positive psychology's focus on flourishing, and its transform-good-into-great angle, it is relevant to any conversation about the factors that contribute to solid organizational performance, and will become an essential contributor to success in the business world. Whether in showing management how to develop and use human capital, guiding organizational policy, or enabling workers to make their best contributions, positive psychology has been, and will continue to be, a boon to the workplace.

(Download the full paper [here](#).)

¹ Feel free to send questions or comments to dr.orin.davis@gmail.com; © Orin C. Davis, 2010, all rights reserved. The author thanks [Kathryn Britton](#) and [Natasha Utevsy](#) for their feedback and edits.