

Life Skills Education in Corporate World

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Abstract

The field of positive organizational behavior is increasingly discovering organizations' latent aspects that helps in enhancing its' functioning directly or indirectly through capacitating various life skills in employees. The need to practice and inculcate various life skills is becoming crucial in order to live a fulfilling life. There are different life skills that are developed by the World Health Organization that can be proven as beneficial to various organizational settings. The contemporary research scenario focuses on specific life skills and their applicability in diverse settings but there is a paucity of evidence related to the application of positive life skill activities in organizational settings. The ever-expanding and demanding climate of organizations also necessitates various life skill practices by the employees in order to extricate maximum rewards from their immediate environment. Thus, the proposed module for the present paper (PPLS- CW) is based on the theories and models of positive psychology which are combined with various relevant life skills suggested by WHO, which aims to contribute to their personal and professional lives.

Keywords: Positive Organizational Behavior, Life Skills, Training.

INTRODUCTION

Though the topic of the study pinpoints towards the corporate world which mainly focus on motivation, attitudes, leadership but the researcher would begin by addressing an imperative question; how to promote employability in organizations? What practices can be taken up by employees? How to inculcate positivity at workplace? Whenever the phrase 'corporate world' is spelled, what comes to mind is – laptop, meetings and a routine. The researcher attempts to put forward the reply in terms of a contemporary area of organizational behavior, known as Positive Organizational Behavior (POB), which has received attention across different facets like children, teachers but there is paucity of research in the corporate sector. ***Just like we learn and gain knowledge from education; on similar lines researcher would attend to the above stated question by educating and instilling life skills among employees in corporate sector.***

Firstly, at the onset, the researcher attempts to elucidate theoretical conceptualizations in terms of ***positive psychology***. Peterson, (2006) Positive psychology, "what is good about life is as genuine as what is bad and therefore deserves equal attention". Thus, the fundamental aim of POB is to increase employees' well-being and effectiveness at workplace through different strengths and virtues common to positive psychology. Luthans (2002) 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".

As proposed by Fredrickson's (2001, 2003) ***Broaden- and- Build Theory*** that supports the contribution of resilience, optimism and hope in an individuals' performance. The positive emotions broadens' an individual's capacity to indulge in efficient problem solving , better adaptation skills, contentment in performing various actions as well as the growth of an individuals' intellectual repertoire. Also, broadening leads to the buffering of psychological capacities such as optimism, hope, and resilience which leads to enhanced performance outcomes even in the face of stressors (Fredrickson & Joiner,

2002). Other prominent researchers, such as Snyder has contributed to the field through his well-known *theory of Hope*. According to Snyder (2000), most of the human behavior is goal directed and in order to achieve that goal, the individual must indulge in uncovering various pathways or alternatives ways that can help in achieving those goals (pathways thinking). The intention, energy and motivation to reach the desired goal is called as *agency thinking* (Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991). Seligman's *PERMA model* of well being is one of the most prominent models of well being; it consists of five elements namely positive emotions (it corresponds to Fredrickson's broaden and build theory), engagement (deep engagement results in flow), relationship (need to associate with other human beings), meaning (deeper exploration of meaning in life is related to greater well being) and accomplishment (high need to achieve life goals accompanies well being).

To better understand the term "*Life Skills*" it is helpful to investigate its origin. An early mention to this was in the 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, which stated under the rubric of "personal skills" that health promotion "supports personal and social development and by so doing, it increases the options available to people to exercise more control over their own health and to make choices conducive to health." (John, Diallo, Katahoire, Petkova, & Sall, 2002). This linked life skills with responsible personal decision making and the capacity to make appropriate behavioral choices for a healthier life. This concept was then broadened by World Health Organization (WHO), which stated that life skills "may be defined as abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life." (World Health Organization, 1986). WHO forwarded ten life skills that could be inculcated to daily functioning; the skills incorporates ability to think creatively and critically, to communicate effectively, deal with stress and emotion appropriately, empathizing and maintaining good interpersonal relationships with others, to develop functional decision making and problem solving skills and being aware of one self and surroundings (Smith, 2004).

Further, looking at the Life Skills Programs, there are three such types:

- **Firstly**, being *Skills focus* which emphasizing psychological capabilities for using knowledge (critical thinking, problem-solving), for being decisive and resilient (decision-making, motivation, resilience), and for living together (communication, empathy).
- **Secondly**, *Thematic focus* emphasizing the relevance of themes chosen in curricula (such as health promotion and disease prevention, gender equality, environmental protection and disaster risk reduction, violence prevention, social and emotional learning and psychological support, human rights, citizenship and social cohesion, livelihood and financial literacy) within specific contexts.
- **Thirdly**, *Implementation focus* that efficiently implement methods and enable learning environments that help individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (James, Magee, Scerri, Steger, 2014).

Findings have showed that there has been plenty of contemporary research evidence that supports the effectiveness of life skills' training programs. *The present paper emphasizes not only to empower the individual functioning i.e. personal life but also contributes to an efficient working in the professional life. Thus, it is of utmost importance to understand the significance of inculcating life skills with its foundation based on the scientific pursuits of positive psychology.*

Ronen (2009) proposed Applied Positive Psychology Therapy (APPT) which is based on the principles and concepts of positive psychology. APPT is relied on the following assumptions: (a) Long-term goal of Individuals' is a longing for happy and psychologically fulfilling life. (b) Failure to reach the goals results from lack of adequate knowledge and skills and not from past related pathology. (c) The therapy aims at helping individuals' to inculcate diverse self-management skills that aids in achieving

psychological well-being which further facilitates in achieving the long term goals. This therapy does not focus on reviving the individuals with any kind of pathology.

A study was conducted on Tarbiat Moallem students where the effectiveness of life skills training program related to happiness, quality of life and emotion regulation was assessed. The experimental group which attended the life skill training session showed greater satisfaction with life, higher emotional regulation and happiness but there was no significant relationship between training program and physical health subscale (Haji, Mohammadkhani, & Hahtami, 2011).

Also, Keikhayfarzaneh (2011) found positive effects of life skills in enhancing self-dependence, avoiding vicious behaviors, developing cordial relationships, minimizing drug abuse and facing variety of challenges and pressures exerted from the environment. Other researchers analysed the effectiveness of life skills training and found that it results in critical thinking which enhances job planning and also impacts living life in more prominent ways (Albertyn, Kapp & Croenewald, 2004). Similarly Ramesh and Farshad (2004) speculated that life skills training results in reducing problematic behavioral issues and in increasing physical and psychological health. Training in life skills also enhance intellectual knowledge, problem solving skills, self-awareness and also aids in coping with reality (Turner, Macdonald & Somerset, 2008).

Effectiveness of training in life skills on happiness was assessed in college students, the training method consisted of 8 sessions of 120minutes each. The results showed that average happiness scores in the post test experimental group were higher as compared to the control group (Amrei & Frahani, 2016). Youth focused Life Skills Education and Counseling Services (YLSECS) was delivered to college going youth in Karnataka, India by trained professionals. The results indicated significant changes among the post test group; they reported higher confidence and knowledge regarding life skills and how they are essential to inculcate in daily life functioning (Pradeep et al., 2019).

For the present paper, life skills promoted by World Health Organization were incorporated with positive psychology principles and theories to develop a program that can be applied in corporate settings. Purposely, multiple skills are combined to form different activities that could enhance employee and organizations' functioning as a whole. For instance, critical thinking, decision making and the skill dictating problem solving are combined to form analytical thinking which includes programs such as ability to analyze alternatives and intellectual clubs which also lays its basis on Snyder's path goal theory, mindfulness and flow.

Positive Psychology and Life Skills for Corporate World (PPLS- CW)

Life skills programs are designed to teach a broad set of social and behavioral skills—also referred to as “soft” or “non-cognitive” skills—that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands of everyday life. The training program described below is based on the information gathered by the researcher through various positive psychology models and principles which are well tested and applied in the ecological settings. Also, life skills narrated ‘Self-awareness’ and ‘Creative thinking’ works as groundwork for the entire module. The aforementioned life skills play an important role as an illustration, if an employee lacks creativity skills and is minimally aware about his/her surroundings, it becomes extremely difficult for him to survive the setting. Conversely, a creative and self-aware employee not only contributes towards his well-being but also the organization's development.

Session 1

(a)What?

(Three Life Skills)

Critical thinking, Decision making & Ability to solve problems

It is a method of thinking which involves a complete understanding of the phenomenon that includes a broad spectrum these three life skills, therefore clubbed together. Various perspectives and dimensions to a problem are identified and all the alternatives are brought to the cognition before coming to a probable solution. This is also known as scientific thinking, which focuses on testing theories rather than using the common sense approach. In an organizational climate, there are different issues and challenges that an employee has to face regularly, and in order to face such diverse climate, there in an utter need to develop different strategies and skills that can help employees climb up the career ladder.

(b): How?

(Exercise/ Activity)

- **The ability to analyze alternatives:** In the organizational context, frequent brainstorming sessions can lead to superior thinking and evaluating the available alternatives more effectively. **Group brainstorming sessions** once a week can develop tremendous ideas and can lead to better consideration of inhibited workforces' ideas and suggestions.
- **Intellectual clubs:** Different clubs can be developed in the organization, which employees can join as per their **intellectual stimulation and interest**. Monotonous official schedules lead to reduced creativity among employees which can be instigated through interesting discussions in the clubs.

(c) With?

Positive Psychology Theory/ Model

- Alternatives can be analyzed based on the **Snyder's path goal theory** (2001) where the individual indulges oneself into agency and pathway thinking.
- Intellectual clubs would result in increased level of **flow and mindfulness**; Nakamura & Csikszentmihályi (2001); Kabat Zinn, (2003) level which in turn can lead to greater performance outcomes in the organization and also job satisfaction and enhanced commitment among employees.

Session 2

(a) What?

(Two Life Skills)

Effective Communication, Interpersonal relationships

The ability of an individual to put forward one's viewpoint in a favorable manner reflects assertive communication skills which plays an important role in an organizational climate. Furthermore, an individual's good communication skills are also related to better short and long term outcomes in the organization. Also, maintaining cordial relations with colleagues and staff members can lead to job satisfaction and reduced absenteeism. Human beings strive to socialize which sustains only in healthy and positive environment. Though such skills are developed gradually but there are certain activities that could be practiced in order to improve the pre existing skills.

(b) How?

(Exercise/ Activity)

- **Body language training:** The impact of non-verbal language is highly impactful than verbal language. Appointment of body language trainer in the organization can teach the employees' superior skills that will facilitate their way of handling situations. It has been asserted that working on **positive body language skills** is significantly associated with higher emotional intelligence.
- **Ability to empathize:** Empathy is simply defined as taking the other persons' perspective. The ability to empathize is not an easy task but research has shown that it is a teachable task which can make the world a better place to live in. Regular **task-switching** at workplace can lead to

better understanding among employees. This can lead to less on-the job cribbing and better employees' relationships which will ultimately contribute to company's success.

(c) With?

Positive Psychology Theory/ Model

- Effective communication can be understood with **Self Determination Theory** (Deci & Ryan, 2000) with its three basic psychological needs – autonomy, competence and relatedness – and also theorized that fulfillment of these needs is essential for psychological growth (eg: intrinsic motivation), integrity (eg: internalization and assimilation of cultural practices), and well being (eg: life satisfaction and psychological health), as well as the experience of vitality (Ryan and Frederick, 1997) and self congruence (Sheldon and Elliot, 1999).
- Interpersonal relationships can be enhanced with **PERMA Model** of well being that consists of five elements namely (P) Positive Emotions i.e. goes far beyond bringing a smile to our faces. (E) Engagement i.e. one engages with life and work, we become absorbed. (R) Relationships i.e. it is not enough to surround ourselves with 'friends' - we must also listen and share, make an effort to maintain our connections, and work to make those connections strong. (M) Meaning i.e. people who pursue shared meaningful goals are happier than people who don't., and (A) Achievement/Accomplishment i.e. creating and working toward goals helps us anticipate and build hope for the future.

Session 3

(a) What?

(Two Life Skills)

Empathy, Coping with Emotions

One of the most imperative skills is to develop Emotional Intelligence which is basically defined as identifying, understanding and managing emotions of oneself and others. In the organizational context, intelligent quotient (IQ) plays an important role in recruiting employees but EI comes into play where promotion is concerned it helps employees in the organization to face stressful deadlines, manage aggression and failure. Managers also cope with their emotions as they can use intense emotions as signals to direct their attention to issues in need of immediate attention, and can use emotions to prioritize demands. They can also better anticipate how well their followers will react to different circumstances and changes.

(b) How?

(Exercise/ Activity)

- **Perception vs. reality:** This is a collective exercise which can be performed in a group of people. Sometimes, there exists a difference between an individual perspective and the actual reality which the personal might be unaware of. For example, in the face of crises, such as failure to meet the deadline, personal and work imbalance, a group of 4-5 individuals can collaborate to form a group and help the individual undergoing stress by providing alternative and positive explanations. This activity is somewhat related to correcting cognitive distortions that the individual is going through and helps in enhancing his alternatives evaluation strategies.
- **Form Healthy Boundaries:** Cleantis, (2017) posit that boundaries are an important part of establishing one's identity so is a crucial aspect of mental health and well-being. Boundaries can be physical or emotional, and they can range from being loose to rigid, with healthy boundaries

often falling somewhere in between. Healthy boundaries are a crucial component of self-care. That's because "in work or in our personal relationships, poor boundaries lead to resentment, anger, and burnout" (Nelson, 2016).

(c) With?

Positive Psychology Theory/ Model

- **The broaden-and-build theory** proposed by Fredrickson, (2001), carries an important prescriptive message that people should create positive emotions in their own lives and in the lives of those around them. Positive emotions broaden our thought action repertoires enabling to draw flexibly on higher-level connections and wider-than-usual ranges of percepts, ideas, and action urges; broadened cognition in turn creates behavioral flexibility, undo negative emotions and fuel psychological resiliency, further it builds personal resources and fuel psychological and physical well-being. Fredrickson & Joiner (2002) founded that when people feel positive emotion, they are jolted into a different way of thinking and acting. Their thinking becomes creative and broad-minded, and their actions become adventurous and exploratory.
- **The Sustainable Happiness Model** by Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade (2005b) accommodates that 50% of happiness is determined by a genetic set point and only 10% is determined by life circumstances, while 40% is the result of actions under voluntary control i.e. intentional activities. It offers an optimistic perspective regarding the possibility of creating positive emotions. It incorporates certain types of intentional activities indeed offer ways to achieve sustainable changes in well-being, despite the counteracting effects of adaptation.

Session 4

(a) What?

(One Life Skill)

Coping with Stress

The ability to deal with stress and cope up the psychological pressure aids in discerning the impact of psychological stressors and the competence in dealing with those stressors. There are multiple short- term and long-term stressors that an individual faces at workplace such as meeting with deadlines, commuting, and relationship with colleagues, family and work imbalance, working overtime etcetera.

(b) How?

(Exercise/ Activity)

As the level of subjective well-being is determined by the personality traits, the level of psychological pressure that an individual can face is also partially determined by personality factors and past life experiences. This **set point activity** aims at making the employees' realize through their previous records about their level of competence in the organization. Likewise, this set point can help employees to set expectations for himself and in turn will reduce his pressure and increase positive emotions.

(c) With?

Positive Psychology Theory/ Model

- Stress can be coped in terms of cognitive training i.e. **positive self-affirmations** (e.g., I feel strong, I can stay focused under pressure), visualization (e.g., accomplishing a target), as well as thoughts reflecting optimism and an unshakable self-belief (De Witt, 1980).

- Further, **guided imagery (GI)** is a relaxation technique based on visualizing pleasant images and body awareness to help create sensory-rich images in their minds to promote relaxation and concentration (Abdoli, Rahzani, Safaie, & Sattarie, 2011). This relaxed state can aid healing, learning, creativity, and performance, which may help one feel more in control of their emotions and thought processes.

The researcher attempts to put forward the Module explained above in form of pictorial presentation. LS denote Life Skills; LS 1 to 8 refers to the number of life skills proposed by WHO and PP denotes to Positive Psychology; PP 1 to 8 refers to supporting positive psychology theories and models. Also, life skills narrated ‘Self-awareness’ and ‘Creative thinking’ which works as a groundwork for the entire module that have been described in the module.

Fig: Positive Psychology and Life Skills for Corporate World Module (PPLS- CW)

Positive Psychology and Life Skills for Corporate World Module (PPLS- CW)		
No. of Sessions of Life Skills (LS)	Suggested Activities	Positive Psychology Theories & Principles (PP)
<p><i>(Session- 1)</i></p> <p>LS 1- Critical Thinking LS 2- Problem Solving LS 3- Decision Making</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to analyze alternatives • Intellectual clubs 	<p>PP1- Path Goal Theory</p> <p>PP2- Mindfulness and Flow</p>
<p><i>(Session- 2)</i></p> <p>LS 4- Effective Communication LS 5-Interpersonal Relationship</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body language training • Ability to empathize 	<p>PP3- Self Determination Theory</p> <p>PP4- PERMA Model</p>
<p><i>(Session- 3)</i></p> <p>LS 6- Empathy LS 7- Coping with Emotions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception vs. reality • Form Healthy Boundaries 	<p>PP5- The broaden-and-build theory</p> <p>PP6- The Sustainable Happiness Model</p>
<p><i>(Session- 4)</i></p> <p>LS 8- Coping with Stress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set point activity 	<p>PP7-Positive Self Affirmations</p> <p>PP8-Guided Imagery</p>

Conclusion

Combining life skills with positive psychology helps employee to intrinsically strengthen such as by developing different strengths (love for learning, open mindedness, social intelligence) and extrinsically in the form of valuable contribution to the organization. The present paper also calls for application of the aforementioned module in various corporate settings which will augment the reliability and validity of this module.

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