

## Does Negativity Counterpoint Positivity, or the Other Way Round? On Positive Organizational Scholarship

Submitted: 07.08.19 | Accepted: 21.09.19

**Aldona Glińska-Noweś\***, **Beata Glinka\*\***

Management science and organization theory is thriving, as evidenced by thousands of popular and academic publications exploring the subject, as well as a great number of conferences held in recent years. Every year new (and fashionable) concepts and theories are created and POS (Positive Organizational Scholarship) is among the most popular ones. Despite the advancement of the discipline, its current condition is criticised and considered disappointing. This dissatisfaction stems from frustration caused by conflicting expectations of the community, i.e. business and other stakeholders, and of researchers themselves, and the impossibility of satisfying these demands. Failure to fulfil contradictory expectations generates legitimacy problems, which is problematic considering that any activity is easier and more satisfying when it enjoys the recognition of its community (Hensel, 2017). We address these problems in our analysis by discussing POS as one of the most significant movements in the twenty-first-century management research. We present the basic assumptions of POS along with some major threats connected with POS development, such as 1) baroque and grandiloquent language and style that may direct attention to minor problems of organizations and degenerate into a great narrative of novelty and total innovativeness of the concept, or 2) the tendency to neglect the complexity of organizational processes. In order to avoid these pitfalls and overcome current limitations, we suggest here possible directions for the further development of POS, such as more comparative studies, including more countries in research projects, or constant effort toward a better operationalization of key constructs.

**Keywords:** Positive Organizational Scholarship, negative organizational phenomena, management research.

### Negatywność kontrapunktuje pozytywność, czy też na odwrót? Dyskusja na temat *Positive Organizational Scholarship*

Nadesłany: 07.08.19 | Zaakceptowany do druku: 21.09.19

Nauki o zarządzaniu i teoria organizacji przeżywają rozkwit, o czym świadczą tysiące popularnych i naukowych publikacji, a także konferencje poświęcone tej tematyce. Każdego roku powstają nowe (i modne)

\* **Aldona Glińska-Noweś** – prof. dr hab., The Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5415-1563>.

\*\* **Beata Glinka** – prof. dr hab., Faculty of Management University of Warsaw. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7883-8725>.

Correspondence address: The Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, 13A Gagarina Street, 87-100 Toruń; Faculty of Management University of Warsaw, 1/3 Szturmowa Street, 02-678 Warsaw; e-mails: [aldona.glińska@umk.pl](mailto:aldona.glińska@umk.pl); [b.glinka@uw.edu.pl](mailto:b.glinka@uw.edu.pl).



konceptje oraz teorie, a *Positive Organizational Scholarship* (POS) jest w gronie tych najpopularniejszych. Jednocześnie, pomimo zaawansowania tej dyscypliny nauki, jej obecny stan jest krytykowany i uważany za rozczarowujący. Niezadowolenie wynika z frustracji spowodowanej sprzecznymi oczekiwaniami społeczności, tj. biznesu i innych interesariuszy, w tym samych badaczy oraz niemożliwości spełnienia tych oczekiwań. Niespełnienie sprecznych oczekiwań powoduje z kolei trudności z legitymizacją, co generuje dodatkowe problemy, każda bowiem działalność jest łatwiejsza i bardziej satysfakcjonująca, gdy cieszy się uznaniem (por. Hensel, 2017). W niniejszym artykule podejmujemy próbę rozwiązania tych problemów, analizując POS jako jeden z najbardziej znaczących nurtów w badaniach prowadzonych w zarządzaniu w XXI wieku. Prezentujemy podstawowe założenia POS wraz z głównymi zagrożeniami związanymi z jego rozwojem. Wśród tych drugich znajduje się wyszukany i górnolotny język oraz styl, które mogą skierować uwagę w niewłaściwą stronę, utrudniając przetrwanie się tego nurtu w wielką narrację o wymiarze nowości i innowacyjności, a także potencjalna tendencja do zaniedbywania złożoności procesów organizacyjnych. Aby uniknąć tych pułapek i przezwyciężyć obecne ograniczenia, sugerujemy możliwe kierunki dalszego rozwoju POS, takie jak większy nacisk na badania porównawcze, prowadzone w większej liczbie krajów, a także dążenie do właściwej operacjonalizacji kluczowych konstruktów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *Positive Organizational Scholarship*, negatywne zjawiska organizacyjne, badania w naukach o zarządzaniu.

**JEL:** M10, M12

## 1. Introduction

Management research and organization theory seem to be thriving: every year witnesses more scientific journals, a growing number of scientific and popular publications, a great number of conferences, and the large popularity of managerial education, not to mention the formalization of its standards. This growing popularity has a shadier side with the “mass production” of studies and publications. Paradoxically, despite the development of the discipline, scholars often criticize its current condition as disappointing (Barley, 2015; Birkinshaw et al., 2014; Davis, 2015; Glinka, 2018; Hensel, 2017). One of the main reasons for this dissatisfaction stems from the frustration caused by the conflicting expectations regarding management and organization theory voiced by the community and researchers; thus, different groups of stakeholders. It is nearly impossible for the discipline to satisfy these conflicting expectations, so it generates legitimacy issues, which are problematic, considering that any activity is easier and more satisfying when it enjoys proper recognition (Hensel, 2017). Management and organization theory are usually defined as practical disciplines that – at the empirical level – ought to address challenges currently faced by business and simultaneously offer solutions that can be readily applied in business. This definition adds a new dimension to the discipline’s legitimization process, making it even more complex.

In this context, researchers constantly search for theories and concepts that would be interesting, valuable, accepted, and recognized; preferably

by different groups of stakeholders like other researchers, publishers, and practitioners. Some of these explorations lead to the crafting of ready-made solutions for managers, others lead to theory development. In both cases, researchers may seek inspirations in different disciplines and actually borrow some ideas and theories to incorporate them in management science (Oswick, Fleming, & Hanlon, 2011).

Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) seems to be one of the most viable tendencies in the field that, on the one hand, extensively borrows from psychology and, on the other hand, addresses the needs of various stakeholders. POS is an umbrella concept that covers a variety of theories and research streams, which generally focus on the positive traits, phenomena, and processes that appear in the organizational setting (Cameron et al., 2003; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Quinn, 2015). Although labels used to name this concept constantly evolve – as scholars begin to call it Positive Organizations, Positive Management, and Positive Business – this paper will keep to the abbreviation POS as the most recognized notion in the management science community.

Our paper presents different facets of POS, beginning from an introduction of POS, its genesis, and its nature in management research. The next part assumes a skeptical disposition when presenting some of the drawbacks and threats connected with POS. In conclusion, we outline the actual and possible impact of POS on the development of management research. We build on POS publications and its extensive criticism (Ehrenreich, 2009; Fineman, 2006; Roberts, 2006) to add new critical arguments to the ongoing debate and offer possible directions for development, which could allow scholars to minimize the pitfalls and weaknesses of POS.

## **2. The Nature of Positive Movement in Management Science**

Since 2003, there is a growing movement of management scholars for analyzing positive processes, traits, and phenomena in organizations. The movement was legitimized and institutionalized in the form of a dedicated research center by researchers from the University of Michigan as the Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship; now relabeled Center for Positive Organizations. In February 2004, *Harvard Business Review* announced Positive Organizational Scholarship as the breakthrough idea of 2004 (HBR, 2004).

Positive Organizational Scholarship is an umbrella concept that covers a variety of theories and research streams focused on positive phenomena, processes, and traits of organizations and their members. In particular, POS focuses on organizational dynamics characterized by prosperity, excellence, resourcefulness, resilience, and nobility (Cameron et al., 2003). POS's domain includes research on positive culture, positive ethics and virtues, positive leadership, positive meaning and purpose, positive practices, and

positive relationships in organizational settings (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Glińska-Neweś & Stankiewicz, 2013; Zbierowski, 2012).

Among other sources, POS is inspired by positive psychology, which arose from the need to balance traditional psychology. Notably, POS shifted researchers' interests from human deficiencies and mental weaknesses to sources of happiness and wellbeing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman et al., 2005). Among key assumptions of positive psychology is the belief that the focus on strengths rather than weaknesses is the right way of building happiness and success. Weaknesses are things that we cannot really change while we all can develop their strengths. Moreover, the focus on weaknesses may paradoxically reinforce them and make them true. On the other hand, the focus on strengths may reduce weaknesses and make them less relevant (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012).

While the positive movement in psychology instituted a substantial shift in perspective, the change was not so large in management studies, although significant. In fact, management scholars always focused on how organizations can become more successful, profitable, and prosperous. Therefore, the POS vector toward positivity in organizations means mostly an enhancement of specific fields of interests that already exist in the field of management science. We should mostly seek the reasons for the emergence of POS in the fact of previous underappreciation of specific problems in research. Even if positive phenomena like job satisfaction, team spirit, or trust were focal in management studies, scholars still investigated their relevance from the perspectives of profitability, organizational efficiency, or competitive advantage (Glińska-Neweś, 2017). Thus, the main contribution of POS lays in drawing attention to the importance of various factors of individual wellbeing and happiness as leading to organizational prosperity and flourishing. This research stream seeks to explain why and how positive emotions, feelings, and other states experienced by organizational members lead to the better performance of their organizations. There are various ideas POS contributed to management theory, for instance the positive upward spiral (Fredrickson, 2003; Hakanen, Perhoniemi, & Toppinen-Tanner, 2008), which explains the continuum of mutual and development-supportive influences among individual, group, and organizational phenomena and processes that are positive in nature.

In Poland, research based on Positive Organizational Scholarship concentrates in the works of scholars from the Nicolaus Copernicus University (Glińska-Neweś & Karwacki, 2018; Glińska-Neweś & Stankiewicz, 2013) and the Katowice University of Economics (Zbierowski, 2012).

### **3. Is There a Negative Side of the Positive Approach?**

One of the authors of this paper was initially extremely skeptical toward Positive Organizational Scholarship. This negative disposition mainly

stemmed from the exposure to mostly mediocre papers and poor studies in POS. In the case of this scholar, the lack of deeper understanding resulted in rejection and criticism. But at some point, the same author was asked to serve as a co-speaker during a scientific seminar “Counterpoints,” with POS as its central topic. The main speaker was the other co-author, who specializes in this field. At this point, it became clear that the knowledge gap must be filled, enforced by the strong belief of the POS specialist that her competencies will legitimize the field in the eyes of the skeptical co-speaker. This process resulted in a much more balanced perception, although some concerns remain. Undoubtedly, the concept of POS provoked a deeper reflection of both co-authors, which was the initial inspiration for this paper.

As a fashionable umbrella concept that embraces many different ideas and research streams, POS may seem very attractive to many researchers who seek potentially interesting topics that also sell well. The consequences of this attractiveness vary greatly: beginning from the growing body of valuable research and ending with a considerable amount of superficial papers that aim at catching the novelty of the phenomenon. But this phenomenon – the concentration of fashion-followers – is neither unique for POS nor its only weakness. It may be considered one of the forms of a phenomenon typical for organization and management theory that Rhodes and Pullen call “neophilia” (Rhodes & Pullen, 2010). Below, we present the main areas of criticism along with the major limitations and weaknesses of Positive Organizational Scholarship.

Undoubtedly, one of the reasons of POS’ popularity is its concentration on people and their (positive) emotions in organizations. That constitutes a real strength of this approach, as many other approaches and theories, even claiming to be human-centred, in fact offered depersonalized visions of organizations and their functioning. Thus, even though POS is far from perfect, we should still consider it as a potentially fruitful vision of managerial and organizational processes.

Traditionally, the criticism of POS was built around two major arguments (Glińska-Noweś, 2017): its naivety (Ehrenreich, 2009) and one-sidedness (Fineman, 2006). The first argument stresses negative consequences for POS’s users like organizations or individuals (employees, managers, etc.). The second argument emphasizes consequences for researchers who may be biased and attracted by only partial understanding of organizational phenomena.

The question rises whether naivety and one-sidedness are the only major weaknesses of the POS approach. On the one hand, these are not necessarily weaknesses that are substantial and impossible to overcome, as we will demonstrate below. On the other hand, naivety and one-sidedness may be considered a starting point to a deeper analysis of other potential weaknesses and threats of POS’s application in management research. We believe that there are some major sources and areas of potential problems

connected with POS's application in management research, among them some that attract our special attention:

- borrowing from different disciplines its accuracy, scope, and adjustment to specific needs of organization and management theory;
- neglecting "NOS" (i.e. negative organizational scholarship) and the negativity of organizational life;
- the problem of value added;
- the Americanization of content and form of research and communication;
- difficulties in balancing between scientific value and the practicality of research.

The abovementioned list gathers sources and areas connected with research, not with the potential practical application of results, even though the last element points in this direction. We will develop this last element further later below.

Most of the factors are strongly linked, for instance, putting negativity aside, we cannot analyze the borrowing and value added of POS separately. Moreover, some of the factors indeed are not specific to POS but rather characteristic of many other fashionable approaches in organization and management theory. However, there appear peculiarities that foreground POS both as an interesting and – partly – specific case. Let us analyze these factors a little more.

Organization and management theory extensively draws on concepts, theories, methods, and language of other disciplines (McKinley, Mone, & Moon, 1999; Oswick et al., 2011; Tsang & Kwan, 1999). This borrowing is natural but may create rarely considered problems. Such problems occur especially with overreliance on borrowing (Oswick et al., 2011). As Oswick, Fleming, and Hanlon indicate (2011, p. 318), borrowing may limit the generation of original theories due to how and what we borrow: the predominance of particular patterns and types of borrowing. In the case of POS, the source of borrowing is not unique, as many powerful concepts in organization and management theory stem from psychology. POS also is an approach rooted in psychology and – more precisely – in positive psychology, which some interpret as a "traveling theory" (Oswick et al., 2011, p. 323). Such theories require recontextualization that "involves a process of repacking, refining, and repositioning a discourse" for consumption within another scientific community (Oswick et al., 2011, p. 323). In the case of POS, the introduction of organizational context seems the most important part of this process. The question is whether this switch in the level of analysis from individual-oriented psychological constructs to organizational phenomena is justifiable and creates new opportunities for interpretation. Indeed, the switch is only partial, as individuals remain the main focus of POS. Oswick et al. (2011, pp. 332–333) contrast the one-way borrowing with blending, defined as a two-way exchange between two domains; in their opinion, blending is likely to bring more originality to the discipline.

At its current stage, POS seems a typical case of borrowing, which is not bad in itself. The key issue is whether POS can bring novel results and interpretations. We may doubt it, as organization and management theory are almost always dominated by the concentration on “the positive side.” Therefore, transferring concepts from positive psychology currently offers no effective blending and brings few novel elements.

This situation probes POS’s novelty and value added. This question is not new for POS (Roberts, 2006). Since organization and management theory is a positive science – with few exceptions – the simple explanation that positivity brings value added is unavailable. On the contrary, many scholars claim that management research lacks the deeper analysis of negative events like failures, pathologies, or faults (e.g. Glinka & Hensel, 2017; Meyer & Zucker, 1989; Pasieczny & Glinka, 2016; Samuel, 2010). Moreover, scholars often analyze mistakes as starting points for (positive) learning processes (Argyris, 1999; Edmondson, 2011).

Therefore, we demonstrate below that there is ample space to combine the positive and negative aspects of organizations. Such mixed perception seems particularly important in the case of studies and ideas that address organizations. Positive psychology’s assumptions mainly refer to the individual level, while in management research organizational level is equally important, as it creates an environment for individual decisions, actions, emotions, and interpretations. Abusing negative practices may not only provoke one-sided analysis and bias of researchers but also limit their ability to propose ideas that counteract negativity. The lack of negative components in organization and management research may counterbalance the benefits of wider introduction of positive analyses.

This situation does not mean, as mentioned above, that POS cannot bring any real new value to management research. It only means that POS’s position and reputation cannot effectively develop with claims about the need to bring new positive elements to research. These elements are already available, while the challenge remains to use them effectively and move beyond formulaic research (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013). Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) claim that management research is dominated by gap-spotting approach, which usually leads to unimaginative research of little innovativeness. Imaginative research is particularly important wherever gaps are not obvious yet significant for theory-building, which often happens in the POS approach. Like in many other new fields, the challenge is to find true novelty – in concepts, interpretations, or reinterpretations of organizational life – and create meaningful, inspirational research (Alvesson, Gabriel, & Paulsen, 2017).

As many ideas in organization and management research, POS is a USA-centered approach. It means that its fastest development in terms of studies and publications occurs in the USA and among American companies. American business culture naturally forms a foundation for studies



and interpretations. This Americanization results in the limited scope and potential adaptation problems but also in a specific language, used especially whenever scholars wish to demonstrate the practical utility of the concept (Spicer, 2018). Like numerous fashionable approaches in management research, POS emphasizes the applicability of its concepts. One of the possible results is exaggeration: a temptation to show every new approach (like POS) as a real breakthrough and leap forward in management theory and practice (Alvesson, 2013; Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013). This tendency finds reinforcement in the scientific community and among editors who seek to publish novelties and require from authors such justifications of their papers (Hensel, 2017). Alvesson (2013) calls such phenomena “grandiosity” and “window dressing” and claims they are typical for many fields. Grandiosity is a product of the narcissism of our times (Lasch, 1980), which affects critical reflection and undermines organizational performance and learning abilities (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2016). In turn, behind the façade of a nicely dressed window there may be an empty room, or just a room with standard furniture instead of innovative arrangements. This “inflation of labels” (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2016, p. 466) results in “a hyped-up language [that] is becoming endemic to ordinary discussion of ordinary organisations doing ordinary things” (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2016, p. 464). Such actions not only provoke criticism but also raise questions about the essence and role of science (Alvesson, 2013; Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013; Oswick et al., 2011). Science that includes critical thinking and – sometimes – a dose of cynicism and irony seeks to provide new values (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2016; Oswick et al., 2011).

#### **4. So, How Nicely Dressed Room Is Out There?**

All above doubts are natural and, in fact, most welcome on the way to improve the ideas covered by the POS umbrella term. Let us address the main concerns.

Do positive management theories ignore the negative side of organizations with naivety and one-sidedness? In fact, it is the other way around. Researchers gathered around this vein of research emphasize that negative phenomena do exist. Moreover, negative phenomena have an even stronger impact on people, regardless whether it is in organizational settings or not, because people pay far more attention to negative events that touch them emotionally more strongly than positive events (Cameron, 2008). One negative event may overcome and destroy the effects of several positive events (Baumeister et al., 2001). It is apparent in the media, which present news dominated by catastrophes, scandals, or murders while ignoring most of positive events that happen every day. Even the authors themselves are great admirers of noir crime stories such as series about Eberhard Mock by Marek Krajewski.



Thus, positive organizational scholars know of both the existence and impact of negative events. Although one needs many positive events to neutralize the effect of a single negative event, this is the essence of the positive stream of research, namely to prove that the stimulation of *organizational positivity* helps people overcome effects of potentially negative phenomena. The following story illustrates the above process and shows the genesis of POS by demonstrating that the need for focusing on positive elements arises from the awareness of the existence of negative elements in organizations.

The precursors of the POS movement in management studies – Jane Dutton, Kim Cameron, and Robert Quinn – in 2001 came up with the idea to organize a conference regarding issues absent from the mainstream of management science. At that time, Jane Dutton was especially focused on compassion in organizations, Kim Cameron researched forgiveness, while Robert Quinn – positive personal change. Preparations for the conference were disrupted by the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. Conference organizers wished to provide support for those who suffered because of that tragedy. They created a website entitled *Leading in Trying Times*, devoted to the presentation of how scientific theories of positive phenomena can strengthen and help people in such dramatic circumstances. A tremendous interest in the website both among scientists and practitioners manifested in online posts, reflections, and scientific studies, which proved the importance and legitimacy of establishing new streams of organizational research.

Until now, there appeared many efforts from POS scholars to capture the relationships between positive and negative phenomena, traits, and processes. It is not an easy endeavor, partly because measuring negative elements is even harder than measuring the positive ones. Nevertheless, there are trials to identify, for instance, links between positive and negative organizational behaviors represented by positive interpersonal relationships, organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), and counterproductive work behaviors (CWB; Glińska-Noweś, 2017; Glińska-Noweś & Lis, 2016; Szostek, 2019).

But is there any novelty in all such efforts? Does borrowing from positive psychology bring any potential for significant contributions to theory development beyond management research? The answer to both questions is definitely positive. As we have already mentioned, POS promotes a different angle in organizational analyses. While it is true that management sciences have been always positive, POS reinforces this positivity by drawing researchers' attention to the "positive deviance" (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). In other words, research in this stream seeks to answer: why and how things go better than one has expected? Rather than asking: what can lead to results that are actually expected? Hence, POS discourse abounds in words that express states of excellence, such as flourishing, righteousness, prosperity, or virtue.

Concepts, theories and methods borrowed by POS from other disciplines – particularly psychology – lead to innovative findings. There are various examples but one is especially close to one of the authors of the current paper, that is, positive relationships at work. In general, interpersonal relationships are of great value in every sphere of life and they have many common traits, regardless the sphere (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). However, relationships created at work have some peculiarities too (Glińska-Noweś, 2017). For example, friendships made with work colleagues are different than friendships made outside organizational settings (Lincoln & Miller, 1979). In an organization, employees have limited freedom of choice regarding potential friends. If they make them, their common activities concern work. Therefore, networks of friends at work are actually networks of decision-making, information-sharing, and resources mobilization. Among non-work activities, work-friends mostly go together for lunch. Moreover, friendships made at work are less important than those in personal life, which are based on similarities; they can be easily built among people of different age, education background, or social class, which is rather rare in personal life (Berman, West, & Richter, 2002).

Moreover, research conducted following POS contributes to the development of theories primarily embedded in management science. This is the case, for example, of work meaningfulness theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Kahn, 1990) enriched by POS scholars with the concept of job crafting (Wrzesniewski, 2003; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Job crafting refers to employee initiatives to customize their work according to their needs, values, and abilities (Oldham & Fried, 2016). Going one step further, “positive” scholars propose the concept of flourishing, which means a state of optimal human functioning, characterized by simultaneous growth, goodness, resilience, and generativity (Fredrickson, 2004). Flourishing conveys the unlocking of the full potential of individuals, determined, among others, by a sense of meaningfulness derived from work design.

Does it sometimes sound like an exaggeration? Yes, it does, especially in the ears of Central Europeans, such as Poles, culturally programmed for complaining rather than exalting, which additionally testifies to the USA-centeredness of POS. We may treat this as a weakness but may quite as easily be perceived as an advantage, an impulse for further development. Notably, there is need for bringing POS into the European research community. Actually, POS is less than twenty-years-old, which for both people and theories means immaturity. POS was born in the USA, so now is the time for it to visit the rest of the world.

## **5. Legitimate or Not? Theory and Practice**

The growing popularity of POS and its incremental legitimization in management research stems from many factors, which come in two groups:

rational and opportunistic. The first group is more promising for the development of theory. POS addresses important problems of individuals and organizations, as it brings promises of important theories, on the one hand, and better life with more effective organizations on the other. As we outlined above, there are many scholars who responsibly utilize this approach in advance management research.

The second group also influences legitimization, and it seems to be as important as the first one. New fashion lures many scholars willing to catch an attractive wave or fascinated by the selling potential of the message of positivity. Even if just a façade, mass attention enhances recognition, but it also increases the danger of grandiosity and neophilia. In time, such grandiosity may provoke criticism of the academic community.

These two facets of legitimization interact with each other and mirror typical dilemmas of balancing theoretical and practical sides of research. In the case of POS, we should particularly remember that one of its promises is the improvement of the well-being of individuals in organizations. Although research findings can be practically applied in various ways (Beyer & Trice, 1982; Weick, 2016), important organization research stakeholders give top priority in instrumental usefulness, which can undermine the legitimacy of a discipline. Organization theory researchers cannot always ensure the expected instrumental usefulness of an idea, while the practical nature of organizational theory exposes it to criticism from other disciplines, not to mention from within the discipline. This vicious circle exacerbates disappointment with the discipline's current condition among both researchers and external stakeholders (Hensel, 2017). POS neatly exemplifies this phenomenon.

Both researchers and potential addressees of research like practitioners know the gap between the realm of research and the realm of popularization. Bullinger et al. (2015) demonstrate that scientists who formulate recommendations for practitioners in popular science magazines usually abstain from referring to their own research in a given field. Questions explored in scientific research often has little in common with "real life" problems faced by managers. Moreover, empirical results do not provide a basis for formulating unambiguous practical recommendations. Another study shows that – even in the case of research areas in which scientific achievements could be used in practice – authors of popular literature ignore them, instead suggesting their own recommendations (Miller, Greenwood, & Hinings, 1997). To summarize, finding a balance between theoretical value and the possibilities of application is one of the challenges POS faces at this stage of its development.

## **6. The Future of POS: Opportunities and Limitations**

POS is undoubtedly one of the most vivid tendencies in organization and management research at the beginning of the twenty-first century. However,

as every relatively young tendency or fashion, POS remains exposed to some threats and dangers that may limit its development.

We named some major threats above and want to summarize them here. First, POS uses a language and narrative that may be potentially attractive to readers but includes a very baroque, grandiloquent style. In fact, POS sometimes dangerously approaches something Spicer calls “business bullshit” (Spicer, 2018). Second, such a language is part of a great narrative of novelty and total innovativeness. Even though POS’s pioneers were quite far from such narratives, some of its followers decided to use them to enhance their recognition and perceived innovativeness of theories. Third, a tendency to neglect complexity is also an important threat, even though POS is not designed to be one-sided, as we described above.

All these pitfalls may provoke an extreme reaction of acceptance or rejection, especially among the scientific communities. We claim that both extremes of POS are exaggerated, as there are both good and bad elements in the current POS debate. Instead of an ideologization of the debate, we suggest looking for real, not over-promised value and potential so as to create interesting explanations and theories. In order to avoid POS’s pitfalls and overcome current limitations, we propose solutions along with a reinforcement of certain tendencies:

- the continuation of research that operationalizes and allows scholars to measure the main theoretical constructs;
- the design and introduction of more comparative studies and projects designed in a complex way (e.g. including negativity); these studies may show and use POS as a way to overcome the negative aspects of organizational life that should not be neglected;
- the constant development of internationalization of POS to cover cases in Europe, Asia, and South America; it is a necessary step forward that will allow scholars to perfect the language/narrative and, most of all, culturally adjust POS findings and remove them from its Northern American center;
- the enrichment of POS vocabulary with less pathetic and pompous terms, which are more convincing for audiences beyond the USA and involve more criticism in analyses; if POS is perceived as a façade concept, its actual power wanes.

Some of the aforementioned recommendations are already becoming true. While POS initially began as a rather consistent and integrated stream of research, it recently became more distracted. Notably, communities of scholars interested in specific fields in the field of POS, like positive relationships at work, now gain independence and focus on elaborating their ideas. The positive approach is also increasingly more present in Europe, as manifested, among others, by appearance the of “positive” topics at the European Academy of Management Annual Conferences.

Positive Organizational Scholarship is at an early stage of its development. Fifteen years is a lot of time to formulate initial assumptions and propose new concept but may not be enough to create powerful theories, verify them, and perform longitudinal, internationally replicable studies. As a “travelling idea” that originated in positive psychology, POS seems perfectly suited to remain as a permanent fixture of organization and management studies. Nevertheless, as the process of legitimization advances, POS still oscillates between just another fashion or façade concept and a new, powerful tendency.

### Acknowledgment

*The study was conducted within a project funded by the National Science Centre, Poland, on the decision number DEC-2016/23/B/HS4/00861.*

### References

- Alvesson, M. (2013). *The triumph of emptiness. Consumption, higher education, and work organization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Alvesson, M., & Gabriel, Y. (2013). Beyond Formulaic Research: In Praise of Greater Diversity in Organizational Research and Publications. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 12(2), 245–263. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2012.0327>.
- Alvesson, M., & Gabriel, Y. (2016). Grandiosity in contemporary management and education. *Management Learning*, 47(4), 464–473.
- Alvesson, M., Gabriel, Y., & Paulsen, R. (2017). *Return to meaning. A social science with something to say*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Alvesson, M., & Sandberg, J. (2013). Has Management Studies Lost Its Way? Ideas for More Imaginative and Innovative Research. *Journal of Management Studies*, 50(1), 128–152.
- Argyris, C. (1999). *On Organizational Learning, 2nd ed.* Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Business.
- Barley, S.R. (2015). 60th Anniversary Essay: Ruminations on How We Became a Mystery House and How We Might Get Out. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 61(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839215624886>.
- Baumeister, R.F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., & Vohs, K.D. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. *Review of General Psychology*, 5(4), 323–370.
- Berman, E.M., West, J.P., & Richter, M.N. (2002). Workplace Relations: Friendship Patterns and Consequences. *Public Administration Review*, 62, 217–230.
- Beyer, J.M., & Trice, H.M. (1982). The Utilization Process: A Conceptual Framework and Synthesis of Empirical Findings. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 27(4), 591–622. Retrieved from: <http://han.buw.uw.edu.pl/han/Ebsco/search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=3980616&lang=pl&site=eds-live&scope=site>.
- Birkinshaw, J., Healey, M.P., Suddaby, R., & Weber, K. (2014). Debating the Future of Management Research. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51(1), 38–55. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12061>.
- Bullinger, B., Kieser, A., & Schiller-Merkens, S. (2015). Coping with institutional complexity: Responses of management scholars to competing logics in the field of management studies. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 31(3), 437–450. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2015.02.001>.
- Cameron, K.S. (2008). Paradox in positive organizational change. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 44, 7–24.

- Cameron, K.S., Dutton, J.E., & Quinn, R.E. (Eds.). (2003). *Positive Organizational Scholarship. Foundation of a New Discipline*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Cameron, K.S., & Spreitzer, G.M. (Eds.). (2012). *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M.S. (2005). Social Exchange Theory: An Interdisciplinary Review. *Journal of Management*, 31, 874–900.
- Davis, G.F. (2015). Editorial Essay: What Is Organizational Research For? *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 60(2), 179–188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839215585725>.
- Edmondson, A. (2011). Strategies for learning from failure. *Harvard Business Review* (4), 48–55.
- Ehrenreich, B. (2009). *Bright-sided: How Positive Thinking Is Undermining America*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Fineman, S. (2006). On being positive: concerns and counterpoints. *Academy of Management Review*, 31(2).
- Fredrickson, B.L. (2003). Positive Emotions and Upward Spirals in Organizations. In: K.S. Cameron, J.E. Dutton, & R.E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive Organizational Scholarship. Foundation of a New Discipline* (pp. 163–173). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Fredrickson, B.L. (2004). The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences*, 359(1449), 1367–1377.
- Glinka, B. (2018). Znaczenie badań przedsiębiorczości imigrantów dla nauk o zarządzaniu [The importance of immigrant entrepreneurship studies to the management sciences]. *Studia i Prace Kolegium Zarządzania i Finansów SGH*, (161), 163–174.
- Glinka, B., & Hensel, P. (2017). Reforms and identities: How relentless pursuit of improvements produces a sense of helplessness among bureaucrats. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 30(2), 142–160. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-05-2016-0090>.
- Glińska-Neweś, A. (2017). *Pozytywne relacje interpersonalne w zarządzaniu (Positive interpersonal relations in management)*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika.
- Glińska-Neweś, A., & Karwacki, A. (2018). Innovativeness of social economy entities in Poland. An empirical study from the perspective of Positive Organizational Scholarship. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 28(3), 367–382. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21292>.
- Glińska-Neweś, A., & Lis, A. (2016). Paradoks współwystępowania organizacyjnych zachowań obywatelskich i kontrproduktywnych. *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu*, 422, 265–274. <https://doi.org/10.15611/pn.2016.422.22>.
- Glińska-Neweś, A., & Stankiewicz, M.J. (2013). Key Areas of Positive Organizational Potential as Accelerators of Pro-developmental Employee Behaviours. In: M.J. Stankiewicz (Ed.), *Positive Management. Managing the Key Areas of Positive Organisational Potential for Company Success* (pp. 17–34). Toruń: Dom Organizatora.
- Hackman, J.R., & Oldham, G.R. (1980). *Work redesign*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Hakanen, J.J., Perhoniemi, R., & Toppinen-Tanner, S. (2008). Positive gain spirals at work: From job resources to work engagement, personal initiative and work-unit innovativeness. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 73(1), 78–91.
- HBR. (2004). Breakthrough Ideas for 2004: The HBR List. *Harvard Business Review*, 1.
- Hensel, P. (2017). *Legitymizacja badań organizacji*. Warszawa: PWN.
- Kahn, W.A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(4), 692–724.
- Lasch, C. (1980). *The Culture of Narcissism*. London: Abacus.
- Lincoln, J.R., & Miller, J. (1979). Work and Friendship Ties in Organizations: A Comparative Analysis of Relational Networks. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24, 181–199.
- McKinley, W., Mone, M.A., & Moon, G. (1999). Determinants and development of schools in organization theory. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(4), 634–648.



- Meyer, M.W., & Zucker, L.G. (1989). *Permanently Failing Organization*. Newbury Park: SAGE Publications.
- Miller, D., Greenwood, R., & Hinings, B. (1997). Creative Chaos versus Munificent Momentum: The Schism between Normative and Academic Views of Organizational Change. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 6(1), 71–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105649269761014>.
- Oldham, G.R., & Fried, Y. (2016). Job design research and theory: past, present and future. *Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes*, 136, 20–35.
- Oswick, C., Fleming, P., & Hanlon, G. (2011). From Borrowing to Blending: Rethinking the processes of organizational theory building. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(2), 318–337.
- Pasieczny, J., & Glinka, B. (2016). Organizational Dysfunctions: sources and areas. *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, 4(4), 213–223.
- Quinn, R.E. (2015). *The Positive Organization: Breaking Free from Conventional Cultures, Constraints, and Beliefs*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Rhodes, C., & Pullen, A. (2010). Editorial: Neophilia and organization. *Culture and Organization*, (16), 1–6.
- Roberts, L.M. (2006). Shifting the lens of organizational life: The added value of positive scholarship. *Academy of Management Review*, 31(2), 292–305.
- Samuel, Y. (2010). *Organizational Pathology. Life and Death of Organizations*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Seligman, M.E.P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive Psychology: An Introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55, 5–14.
- Seligman, M.E.P., Steen, T.A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive Psychology Progress. *American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410–421.
- Spicer, A. (2018). *Business Bullshit*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Szostek, D. (2019). *Kontrproduktywne zachowania organizacyjne w kontekście jakości relacji interpersonalnych w zespołach pracowniczych*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika.
- Tsang, E.W.K., & Kwan, K.M. (1999). Replicatin and theory development in organizational science: A critical realist perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(4), 759–780.
- Weick, K.E. (2016). 60th Anniversary Essay: Constrained Comprehending: The Experience of Organizational Inquiry. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 61(3), 333–346. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839216633453>.
- Wrzesniewski, A. (2003). Finding Positive Meaning in Work. In: K.S. Cameron, J.E. Dutton, & R.E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive Organizational Scholarship: Foundations of a New Discipline* (pp. 296–308). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Wrzesniewski, A., & Dutton, J.E. (2001). Crafting a job: Revisioning employees as active crafters of their work. *Academy of Management Review*, 26(2), 179–201.
- Zbierowski, P. (2012). *Orientacja pozytywna organizacji wysokiej efektywności [Positive orientation of highly effective organisations]*. Warszawa: Oficyna Wolters Kluwer business.