

# Exploring the impact of Organizational Virtuousness on Proactive Work Behavior and Workplace Well-Being

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## Abstract

Virtuousness represents the best aspects of humanity and elevates individual behaviors. Within organizations, it appears as a shared commitment to moral excellence. Organizational virtuousness fosters a culture of positive qualities like trust, humanism, forgiveness, optimism, and integrity, extending beyond just employee socialization. Despite the growing importance of organizational virtuousness, research on this topic is limited, with few empirical studies examining its consequences and determinants. Existing studies often focus on negative phenomena, leaving positive organizational traits less explored. This review paper aims to explore the influence of organizational virtuousness on employees' proactive work behavior and workplace well-being by synthesizing recent empirical research. This study contributes to theoretical development by revealing how organizational virtuousness influences proactive work behavior and workplace well-being. Recent studies have demonstrated its positive impact on commitment, engagement, job satisfaction, and performance. Perception of virtuousness at both organizational and individual levels promotes proactive actions, loyalty, empathy, resilience, and overall happiness. This study reveals new insights into how organizational virtuousness promotes proactive work behavior and workplace well-being. The general implication for organizations is that prioritizing organizational virtuousness can create a positive work environment, supporting both employee well-being and organizational success. The paper concludes with recommendations for future research to deepen the understanding of organizational virtuousness.

**Keywords:** Organizational virtuousness, Proactive work behavior, Workplace well-being.

## 1. Introduction

Given the erosion of trust in organizations stemming from corruption, poor business ethics, and other factors (Bright et al., 2006; Cameron et al., 2004), it is vital to re-examine what drives organizational success (Peterson & Park, 2006). Modern workplaces regularly face concerns with ethical dilemmas, prompting the business community to prioritize ethics in organizations (George, 2003) and underlining the importance of virtues within their organizations (Wright & Goodstein, 2007). Consequently, both large corporations and small to medium-sized enterprises are striving to cultivate a virtuous workplace grounded in appreciation, gratitude, and encouragement. Such positive cultural attributes foster psychological safety, well-being, productivity, and improve an organization's reputation (Occupational Safety and Health

Council, 2016). This movement is centered on the idea that organizations can be a force for good, showcasing the best of human character through their collective actions, a concept known as organizational virtuousness. Given the erosion of trust in organizations stemming from corruption, poor business ethics, and other factors (Bright et al., 2006; Cameron et al., 2004), it is vital to re-examine what drives organizational success (Peterson & Park, 2006). Modern workplaces regularly face concerns with ethical dilemmas, prompting the business community to prioritize ethics in organizations (George, 2003) and underlining the importance of virtues within their organizations (Wright & Goodstein, 2007). Consequently, both large corporations and small to medium-sized enterprises are striving to cultivate a virtuous workplace grounded in appreciation, gratitude, and encouragement. Such positive cultural attributes foster psychological safety, well-being, productivity, and improve an organization's reputation (Occupational Safety and Health Council, 2016). This movement is centered on the idea that organizations can be a force for good, showcasing the best of human character through their collective actions, a concept known as organizational virtuousness.

Organizational virtuousness became important after researchers studied what makes organizations positive places to work (Pires & Nunes, 2018). It describes an organizational climate where good habits and actions such as kindness, honesty, and trust are promoted and maintained by individuals and the entire organization (Rego et al., 2011). The positive effects of organizational virtuousness are reflected in evident employee and organizational outcomes (Cameron et al., 2004). Studies highlight that organizational virtuousness enhances employees' citizenship behavior, overall performance, and well-being (Rego et al., 2011). By encouraging organizational virtuousness, employees develop a better sense of loyalty towards the organization and hence respond with dedicated behaviors.

Despite the recognized importance of organizational virtuousness in fostering positive workplace outcomes, a significant gap persists in the organizational literature. Researchers have largely overlooked virtuousness, particularly in the context of organization. Organizational and management research has prioritized solving problems, overcoming obstacles, and achieving efficiency over exploring the positive aspects of organizations. As a result, we know more about organizational problems than about what makes organizations thrive. It is also crucial to note that the link between organizational virtuousness and various outcomes at both individual and organizational levels is still relatively under-explored (Cameron et al., 2004; Cameron and Dutton, 2003). Empirical studies on this topic are scarce, with only a handful of researchers tackling the issue (e.g., Bright et al., 2006; Rego et al., 2010, 2011, 2015).

However, with the passage of time, most organizations have realized the importance of studying positive aspects as well. Furthermore, until recently, very few studies have examined the impact of organizational virtuousness on organizational outcomes. Therefore, this review paper aims to systematically evaluate theoretical and empirical advances in the study of organizational virtuousness, with a focus on its impact on proactive work behavior and workplace well-being. This study contributes to theoretical advancement by revealing the influence of organizational virtuousness on proactive work behavior and workplace well-being.

### **1.1 Organizational Virtuousness: A Neglected Yet Vital Construct**

Organizational virtuousness has been a neglected topic in the academic literature, but changing times have brought it to the forefront. As many believe that it can drive organizational success if nurtured (Cameron, 2010; Rego et al., 2011; Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2020), researchers should explore its potential and include it in their agendas.

Organizational virtuousness (OV) originated from positive organizational scholarship (POS). Organizational virtuousness refers to the actions and practices that promote goodness and positivity within an organization (Cameron et al., 2004). Researchers have identified five key elements that make up organizational virtuousness, comprising optimism, forgiveness, trust, compassion, and integrity (Cameron et al., 2004).

### **Dimensions of Organizational Virtuousness**

#### **Optimism**

Optimism reflects a positive and hopeful outlook, even in challenging situations (Cameron et al., 2004).

#### **Trust**

Trust is the foundation of strong relationships within an organization, where employees feel safe and secure (Cameron et al., 2004).

#### **Forgiveness**

Forgiveness allows individuals to learn from their mistakes and involves letting go of past transgressions and viewing mistakes as opportunities for growth (Cameron et al., 2004).

#### **Compassion**

Compassion involves showing genuine care and empathy towards colleagues and understanding their struggles (Cameron et al., 2004).

#### **Integrity**

Integrity refers to honesty, transparency, and ethical behavior during organizational interactions (Ziapour et al., 2015).

### **1.2 Proactive Work Behavior**

Proactive work behavior (PWB) is all about thinking independently, taking initiative, and being active at work. It is a self-regulatory process that involves thinking ahead, planning, and acting independently to make positive changes (Grant and Ashford, 2008). Parker and Collins (2010) define proactive work behavior as a voluntary behavior directed toward improving the internal work environment. They identified four dimensions of proactive work behavior: taking charge, individual innovation, problem prevention, and voice.

#### **Dimensions of Proactive Work Behavior**

##### **Taking charge**

Taking charge is about employees taking voluntary efforts to improve work structures, practices, and routines (Morrison & Phelps, 1999).

##### **Problem prevention**

Problem prevention involves anticipating and taking actions to prevent work-related problems from recurring (Frese & Fay, 2001).

##### **Individual innovation**

Individual innovation focuses on recognizing opportunities and developing as well as implementing new ideas (Parker & Collins, 2010).

##### **Voice**

Voice refers to speaking up and sharing suggestions to improve the work standards and procedures (Parker & Collins, 2010).

### 1.3 Workplace Well-being

Defining well-being presents something of a challenge, as multiple theorists have emphasized that well-being operates across several domains, reaffirming its complex and multidimensional nature (Forgeard et al., 2011; Michaelson et al., 2009). Workplace well-being refers to workers' overall well-being. It encompasses various aspects of working life, including quality and safety of the physical environment, workers' feelings about their work, organizational climate, and work organization itself (International Labour Organization, 2009). Workplace well-being refers to workers' overall well-being. It encompasses various aspects of working life, including quality and safety of the physical environment, workers' feelings about their work, organizational climate, and work organization itself (International Labour Organization, 2009).

As a multidimensional construct, workplace well-being is best understood through two key dimensions: hedonic well-being, which focuses on feeling good, experiencing pleasure, and being satisfied with life, and eudemonic well-being, which is about finding meaning and purpose in life, and striving for self-actualization (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Together, these dimensions give us a sense of how employees experience and engage with their work. The positive psychology movement defines well-being as a combination of positive and sustainable characteristics that help individuals and organizations to thrive and flourish (Well-being Institute, University of Cambridge).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Relationship Between Organizational Virtuousness and Proactive Work Behavior

Organizational virtuousness serves as a motivational mechanism that fosters proactive work behavior within organizations (Sison & Ferrero, 2015; Strauss et al., 2017). Proactive work behavior involves self-initiated actions, where individuals are willing to bring change, adapt quickly to new situations, and identify and solve problems (H. Wang et al., 2019; K. Strauss et al., 2017). Organizational virtuousness acts as a catalyst for such proactive tendencies, consequently increasing employees' fidelity towards the organization. Prior studies have shown that proactive behavior is influenced by both individual characteristics and situational circumstances (Bateman and Crant, 1993; Parker et al., 2006; Lebel, 2017; Wu and Parker, 2017; Binyamin and Brender-Ilan, 2018; Cai et al., 2019).

Studies have found that optimism and compassion are both important factors in promoting proactive work behavior (Tolentino et al., 2014; Chang & Chan, 2015; Y. Hu et al., 2018; S. de Stasio et al., 2019). Specifically, optimistic employees tend to be more energetic and proactive (Tolentino et al., 2014; Chang & Chan, 2015), while compassionate behavior towards workers increases the continuity of proactive work behavior (S. de Stasio et al., 2019). Studies have found that optimism and compassion are both important factors in promoting proactive work behavior (Tolentino et al., 2014; Chang & Chan, 2015; Y. Hu et al., 2018; S. de Stasio et al., 2019). Specifically, optimistic employees tend to be more energetic and proactive (Tolentino et al., 2014; Chang & Chan, 2015), while compassionate behavior towards workers increases the continuity of proactive work behavior (S. de Stasio et al., 2019).

Furthermore, Hur et al. (2017) found that when employees perceive their organization as virtuous, they experience positive emotions. These positive feelings strengthen employees' organizational identity and encourage them to shape their tasks in a meaningful way, seek out new opportunities, and prioritize work that aligns with the organization's strengths.

In a recent study, A. Abbas (2022) found a significant impact of organizational virtuousness on proactive work behavior. He confirmed that specific dimensions of organizational virtuousness, such as optimism, trust, compassion, integrity, and forgiveness, contribute positively to promoting employees' proactive actions. These organizational virtues contribute to a creative work environment and improve the quality of communication, allowing employees to share opinions and concerns with management more effectively.

## 2.2 Relationship Between Organizational Virtuousness and Workplace Well-Being

Workplace Well-being has been pointed out as a crucial phenomenon for the adequate and competitive performance of organizations. Employees who share positive behaviors like optimism, compassion, trust, integrity, and forgiveness are more likely to be productive, creative, and deliver high-quality work, thereby enhancing organizational performance and achieving goals (Cameron et al., 2004; Deci and Ryan, 2008).

As people spend a significant portion of their lives at work, feeling positive about their work is essential (Siqueira & Padovam, 2008). Empirical studies consistently indicate that organizational and labor variables are key predictors of well-being at work (Paschoal et al., 2013). At the individual level, virtues contribute to creating love and empathy (Ribeiro & Rego, 2010); moral strength and tolerance during adversity (Baumeister & Exline, 1999); health and resilience (Ryff & Singer, 1998); workplace happiness and engagement (Singh et al., 2018). At the organizational level, virtues offer a clear representation of desirable and honourable qualities that guide both individuals and groups (Cameron et al., 2004).

When leaders and informal systems promote virtue within the organization, it creates a positive feedback loop (Caza, Barker & Cameron, 2004). Employees notice and respond to these virtues, which generate more positive emotions and behaviors (Seligman, 2002), ultimately supporting their psychological well-being (Keyes, Shomotkin & Ryff, 2002). Psychological well-being correlates positively with organizational virtuousness. Employees report feeling good when they behave virtuously or witness virtues in their organization (Huffington, 2014). Specific dimensions such as optimism and hope (Cenkseven Önder & Mukba, 2017), honesty (Cameron, 2003), and forgiveness (Şahin, 2013; Yaşar, 2015) are consistently linked to psychological well-being. Additionally, organizational virtuousness also promotes commitment (Çelik and Esen, 2017) and workplace happiness, particularly through optimism and forgiveness (Sonu Kumari, 2020), leading to healthier work environments (Rego et al., 2010).

## 3. Conclusion

The reviewed literature consistently emphasizes the positive effects of organizational virtuousness on proactive work behavior and workplace well-being. Studies highlight practical strategies, such as building trust, fostering compassion, promoting integrity, cultivating optimism, and encouraging forgiveness, which enhance proactive work behavior and workplace well-being in organizations. These studies show that creating an environment grounded in virtues not only boosts employee well-being at work but also promotes employees' proactive actions and builds a workforce willing to face challenges and exceed their formal responsibilities, which strengthens organizational sustainability. In conclusion, organizations should prioritize incorporating virtues into their organizational culture to foster employee initiative, resilience, and positive psychological states. This initiative promotes ethical values and mutual respect, contributing to a positive atmosphere and improving the quality of communication.

Despite the positive findings, the current body of literature remains limited, and the field still faces conceptual and empirical challenges, underscoring the need for further research to understand and strengthen the potential of organizational virtuousness. Potential issues such as virtue signalling (the intent to appear virtuous and morally superior) and moral overload (the pressure to always act ethically) require thoughtful consideration to maintain a balanced and realistic understanding of organizational virtuousness.

#### **4. Theoretical Contribution**

This review adds to the expanding body of literature on organizational virtuousness by establishing both its conceptual and empirical links with proactive work behavior and workplace well-being. This study conceptualizes organizational virtuousness through five key dimensions: optimism, trust, forgiveness, compassion, and integrity, which together form a strong foundation for positive employee outcomes. While these dimensions have often been studied independently in previous research with various employee outcomes, this review brings them together within an integrated framework, connecting them to proactive work behavior and workplace well-being. By focusing on employees' perceptions of virtuous organizational climates, the study advances current understanding in organizational behavior and positive organizational scholarship. It moves beyond traditional managerial, objective, and structural perspectives, emphasizing the importance of employees' perception and lived experiences, which studies increasingly show to be stronger predictors of proactive work behavior and workplace well-being. Ultimately, this review enriches theoretical discussions by presenting virtuousness not only as an ethical goal but also as a practical and strategic resource that fosters adaptability, resilience, responsibility, and sustained organizational success in today's fast-paced, stressful environment.

#### **5. Practical Application**

From a practical perspective, the findings imply that organizations aiming to foster proactive work behavior of employees and improve their workplace well-being should actively integrate virtuous values into their daily organizational practices. When these values are consistently practiced, employees step up, handle challenges with confidence, go beyond their job descriptions, and experience increased satisfaction and psychological well-being.

Leaders play a crucial role in demonstrating virtuous behavior and should take deliberate steps to model such behavior. This can be achieved through initiatives such as ethical leadership development programs, encouraging empathy, recognition systems that reward acts of kindness and integrity across all levels of the organization.

Organizations can also promote workplace well-being interventions, such as mindfulness training for workers, peer-support groups, and opportunities for meaningful teamwork that help align everyday practices with virtuous principles. When organizations intentionally integrate virtues into their regular tasks, they can build a more active, deeply engaged, happy, and high-performing workforce that supports their long-term success.



## 6. Avenues for Future Research

Based on the foregoing review of existing studies on organizational virtuousness, proactive work behavior, and workplace well-being, several avenues for future research can be recommended. First, although the concept of organizational virtuousness has been increasingly recognized, there is still limited empirical understanding of its long-term effects on proactive work behavior and workplace well-being. Therefore, future research should prioritize longitudinal research to examine how organizational virtuousness influences proactive work behavior and workplace well-being over time.

Future researchers should focus on cross-cultural and cross-industry comparative studies to understand how organizational virtuousness operates and manifests across different cultures and sectors. This would offer a broader understanding of how contextual differences influence the expression and outcomes of virtuous practices. For a more comprehensive understanding of organizational virtuousness in the workplace, future research must investigate by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Such an investigation would enrich insights by combining empirical evidence with employees' lived experiences.

Additionally, future studies should explore how contextual factors, such as leadership styles and workforce diversity, moderate the links between organizational virtuousness and outcomes like proactive work behavior, workplace well-being, and other key organizational outcomes.

Finally, future research should also investigate potential negative effects or challenges related to organizational virtuousness, such as moral overload, virtue signalling, or value misalignment between employees and management. This approach will offer a more balanced and realistic view of its impacts.

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