

A Conceptual Framework on Positive Leadership Style with Competency based Models

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Abstract

Since last many decades, topic of leadership has been getting considerable attention. The multiple disciplines that have contributed to this subject and large number of models that have been put forth, have made this field full of disparate ideas. One can find multiple competing business models. Multiple researchers have worked to identify effective leaders and leadership styles. But still, there is no widely accepted theory of leadership. Having said that, one can still find some common elements such as - leadership is a social process. Leadership works for attainment of goals. Leadership is about being inspirational, transformational, being good and being compassionate. One of the powerful and recent models that are being talked about in current time is "positive leadership". There have been multiple researches on effect of positive leadership behaviours and benefits. It has been widely accepted that positive leaders bring extraordinary results in organisations. Yet, in spite of these testimonials, there has been very less adaptation of this model in organisations. There can be multiple reasons for the same, but one major hindrance is that organisations have developed their own leadership model and adding more models has more resistance. There has been no research done on implementation of positive leadership models as strategic human resource management (SHRM) and there has been no strategic direction for implementation esp. in Indian context. Organisations would have very high resistance to adopt new and emerging concepts and this paper address possible issues. One of the common and contemporary leadership models that can be found in many organisations are based on competency based leadership. Companies have adopted competency-based models to generate and develop leaders. This paper tries to bring an implementation strategy of positive leadership by merging it in existing competency model. Kim Cameron's model of positive leadership

assessment tool has been used as reference point to explore idea of smooth merging of behaviours with competencies so that organisations can reap extraordinary results with positive leadership while keeping their existing SHRM on competency intact. This paper could be used by all individuals and organisations especially by those who believe that positive leadership fosters positive result and who practice competency based leadership style.

Keyword: Positive Leadership, SHRM, Positive Climate, Competencies and Goal Attainment

Introduction

Leadership is a very broad concept. Leadership is defined as a process for giving the direction, ensuring alignment and generating commitment amongst individuals for them to work together productively towards collective expected outcomes. Researchers and theorists have examined leadership through different lenses in wide variety of settings, resulting in numerous models and theories of leadership.

Literature Review

Leadership as Behaviour

As per ASTD handbook of Elaine Biech, leadership is a means of generating the shared direction, alignment and getting commitment from social groups.

Bass and Stogdill (1990, 14) concluded that defining effective leadership as successful influence by the leader results in alignment of goals by the influenced followers is valuable.

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The most fundamental question is “what are the characteristics of effective leaders?”

Leadership is used in various situations by many people. We get feedbacks and advice from many leaders, politicians, consultants, and motivational speakers. Most common prescriptions for successful leadership are teamwork, articulating a vision, encouraging employee participation, fostering trust, treating people with respect, establishing stretch goals, becoming customer-centric etc.

Many models and theories have enhanced knowledge in the field of leadership. While these concepts can be relied upon but the biggest challenge is that all this can lead to either over - simplification or confusion. Also, there is always question before the organisations as to which leadership model to adopt and adapt.

The characteristics that researchers have examined in trying to understand what differentiates effective and ineffective leaders cover a broad range of human capabilities, including personal attributes, actions or behaviours, competencies, expertise and experience. Researchers have also tried to examine the behaviours of leaders.

Leadership is a Process for Goal Attainment

Purpose of leadership is goal attainment. It involves directing people to attainment of goals. Leaders direct the energy, direction and motivation of their people to achievement of something. For example - cricket coaches work with players to win matches. In organisational context, leadership should attain organisational goals and improve them along with their team.

Northouse (2013) defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.” Leadership is a process of social influence to attain shared goals. These definitions do suggest that leadership is a process and leadership involves goal attainment.

Leadership as a process can also suggest that leaders affect and get effected by their followers either positively or negatively.

Good Leader vs. Feel - Good

One of highly successful book “From Good to Great” by Collins, focused on effectiveness dimensions of

leadership and it indicated that “good” leaders can be effective leaders. There would always be debate as to what constitutes good leaders in organisational context. The great leader, as described by Jim Collins, is one who through his leadership embraces fierce determination and humility that leads to involvement and commitment by his or her followers. They want to be led by such leaders not because they are sheep but they understand that they can achieve their own goals through their leaders. The ability of leaders to understand their potential followers’ needs has been associated with great religious, military, political and even business leaders.

Transformational and Inspirational Leadership

Early idea on transformational leadership (Downton, 1973) described leaders as people who could understand the motives of followers and therefore be able to achieve the goals of leaders. Burns (1978) described transformational leadership as that process through which leaders engage with followers and develop a connection that increases the morals and motivation of the follower and leader. Transformational leadership inspires subordinates to achieve more than expected because it increases individuals’ awareness regarding significance of task outcomes and encourages followers to go beyond their own self-interest to the interest of others.

Heliotropic Effect and Appreciative Leadership

Way back in Srivastva, Suresh, and Associates (1988), in one of symposiums in West, it was highlighted that organisations as heliotropic in nature - they are inspired to realise their potential and reach excellence if guided by images of greatest future promise, while exhibiting interactions characterised by a willingness to share, care, cooperate, collaborate, dream, and produce together. Kim Cameron, in his book “Positive leadership”, has also shared that the power of this approach has been achieved in healing, crisis management, etc. It is also widely understood and accepted that appreciative management makes for good organisations

Some of these behaviours of understanding, being good, being compassionate, being appreciative also lead to one strong word being “positive”. Positive leadership is a strong behavioural concept and process for improving leadership capabilities and outcomes.

“Positive” and “Positivity” - Defined

Cambridge dictionary defines positive as “full of hope and confidence or giving hope and confidence”. Another meaning has been given as “certain and beyond doubt”

An attitude, as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary’s website, is a mental position with regard to a fact or state; a feeling or emotion toward a fact or state. The dictionary goes on to state that the word “positive” can be used as “having a good effect; favourable; marked by optimism.”

Hence a positive attitude can be defined as mental effect or position marked by optimism and good effect.

Positive Leadership – Kim Cameron’s View

In order to understand positive leadership style, literature review was done to understand positive leaders. Kim Cameron is one the strong advocates of positive leadership and importance of positive leadership culture in organisation to enable peak performance in all times – good or bad. A deep analysis of his logic for defining positive leaders was studied.

There has been a lot of articles which also talked about similar concepts such as inspirational leadership, transformational leadership, appreciative leadership, negative flow and effects etc. Positivity, positive attitude, appreciative management and heliotropic effect do summarise the framework that positive leaders would be inspiring and transformational. As mentioned earlier, a transformational leadership would drive organisations to peak performance.

Kim Cameron in his article “Positive leadership” states that positive leaders enable extraordinarily positive performance by working on what elevates individuals and systems (not only what de-motivates them), what goes

right (not only what goes wrong), what is felt as good (not only what is bad), what is inspiring.

In his book “Positive leadership”, he has defined that positive leadership aims not just to create positive emotions in people - to help people feel happy - but to help organisational performance for the better.

It states that positive leaders are more than inspirational and charismatic. They propel performance to extraordinary levels. He also mentioned that positive leaders do follow the four action strategies as depicted in Fig. 1.

- **Positive Climate:** It creates a culture of acts of compassion. Such acts do create a climate in which people are cared for, supported and encouraged to flourish. As confirmed by various empirical studies, these activities are associated with positive psychological, mental, and emotional effects. As mentioned by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), organisational performance tends to flourish in the presence of positive climate
- **Positive Relationship:** It has been demonstrated that positive energy of a leader develops cohesion, innovation, and team orientation leading to high performance. Relationships that contribute to helping the benefit of others are most valuable in the company.
- **Positive or Supportive Communication:** Supporting people to continuously be aware of providing feedback on strengths, unique achievements or contributions help leaders to get better acceptance from their people. Supportive communication is useful when delivering corrective, critical, or negative feedback.
- **Positive Meaning:** It is well proven that leaders who enable meaningfulness help employees to deliver outcomes beyond the personal benefit of employees and deliver peak performance.

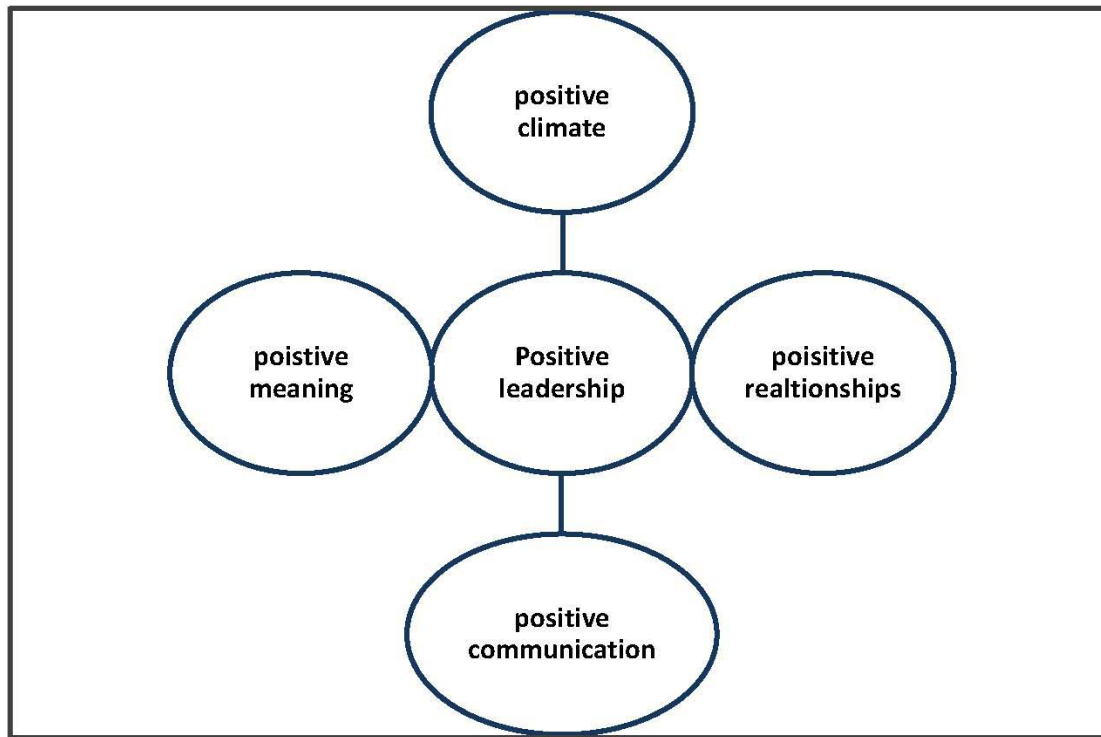


Fig. 1: Action Framework for Positive Leaders

Source: Cameron, K. (2012). *Positive leadership: Strategies for extraordinary performance*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

There has been lot of empirical research done to prove that Positive leaders do enhance performance of company and team. Kim Cameron and others have suggested implementation methods of positive leadership culture and steps to develop positive leaders. They have suggested two step strategies:

Step 1: Diagnosis of current state

It has been suggested that current state of positivity of leadership should be accessed through self-appraisal of 24 set of behaviours called "positive leadership assessment". It has been estimated that a score of 4 and above makes an effective positive leaders. Table 1 depicts the set of 24 questions.

Table 1: Positive Leadership Assessment Questions (Positive leadership tool)

		1 = Never	2 = Seldom	3 = Sometimes	4 = Frequently	5 = Always
As a leader , to what extent you do						
1	Foster information sharing so that people become aware of colleagues difficulties and can express compassion?					
2	Encourage the public expression of compassion by sponsoring formal events to communicate the emotional support?					

		1 = Never	2 = Seldom	3 = Sometimes	4 = Frequently	5 = Always
3	Demonstrate forgiveness for mistakes and errors rather than punish perpetrators and hold grudges?					
4	Provide support and development as an indicator of forgiveness for individuals who have blundered?					
5	Express gratitude to multiple employees each day?					
6	Make gratitude visits and the distribution of gratitude notes a daily practice?					
7	Ensure that employees have opportunity to provide emotional, intellectual or physical support to others in addition to receiving support from organization?					
8	Model positive energy yourself, and also recognize and encourage other positive energizers in your organization?					
9	Diagnose your organization's energy networks so that you support and utilize individuals in energy hubs as well as help develop peripheral members?					
10	Provide more feedback to individuals about their strength rather than their weaknesses?					
11	Spend more time with your strongest performers than with your weakest performers?					
12	Communicate a ratio of approximately 5 positive messages for every negative message to those with whom you interact?					
13	Provide opportunities for employees to receive best self feedback and develop best self portraits?					

		1 = Never	2 = Seldom	3 = Sometimes	4 = Frequently	5 = Always
14	Consistently distribute notes or cards to your employees complimenting their performance?					
15	Provide negative feedback in supportive ways especially using descriptive rather than evaluative statements so that relationship is strengthened?					
16	Focus on the detrimental behavior and its consequences, not on the person, when correcting people or providing negative feedback?					
17	Establish, recognize, reward and maintain accountability for goals that contribute to human benefit so that effect on other people is obvious?					
18	Emphasize and reinforce the core values of the individuals who work in the organization so that congruency between what the organizations accomplishes and what people value is transparent?					
19	Tie the outcomes of the work to an extended time frame so that long term benefits are cleared?					
20	Ensure that contribution goals take precedence over acquisition goals for individuals in the organization?					
21	Clarify for the direct reports the specific set of expectations and responsibilities associated with their roles, as well the mission, values and the culture of the organization?					
22	Meet at least monthly in one-on-one meetings with your direct reports?					

		1 = Never	2 = Seldom	3 = Sometimes	4 = Frequently	5 = Always
23	Consistently and continuously emphasize continuous improvement and the development of strong interpersonal relationships among your direct reports?					
24	Have a formalized routine in which you can regularly demonstrate positive climates, positive relationships, positive communication and positive meaning associated with the work?					

Step 2: Planning for Implementation

Based on the scores of above, individuals should decide on action plan. This focuses on behaviours and checklist for tracking the same.

One may argue that transformational leadership, Inspirational leadership, appreciative leadership, positive leadership all can be clubbed into few behaviours such as compassion, empathy, engaging, forgiving etc.

Organisational Dilemma in View of Positive Leadership Model

Above study and empirical research of previous years have no doubt suggested that positive leadership brings a culture of outstanding and extraordinary performance.

However, over the years, organisations have decided and evolved to follow a particular leadership model and they have built the same in their strategic Human resource management framework. Some evaluate them on the basis of a particular set of tools and tests and constantly invest lot of money to improve upon the same.

If, with the insights of potential gains of positive leadership framework, an organisation decides to implement positive leadership, they have two choices:

- Abandon existing framework and evaluations and adopt positive leadership.
- Add one more framework for evaluation.

Adding one more framework always comes with resistance as often organisations claim that they have too

many models and frameworks to follow. In the challenging time, organisations always are criticised for burdening too many processes to their people.

While Kim Cameron and other advocates have suggested steps and implementation guide for generating, developing and nurturing positive leadership culture in organisations, it would always be dilemma for organisations whether they should adopt and adapt the same or not. Also the implementation tools have not been made scientific.

Table 1, too, demonstrates that assessment questions needs simplification and any alteration can lead to potential case of wrong interpretations.

This is one of the reasons we see that positive leadership has found very limited coverage and implementation in organisations.

In India, as per knowledge available, there are no organisations which have claimed to have followed the model suggested by Kim Cameron. Yet, a limited review would show that they are a powerful tool to enable peak performance and it is important to find a way out to adopt and adapt the suggested practices in organisations.

What is the Way Out? - How to Adopt Positive Leadership Model?

There could always be easier adoption of positive leadership model, if they can be amalgamated into existing leadership model of organisations. We have to find out a possible approach.

It is widely accepted that leadership is a process. Organisations worldwide have developed some methods and framework to create and nurture leadership pipeline. They also have developed assessment and feedback mechanism to monitor leaders and their behaviours. Some of them are assessment centres, 360 degree feedback, appraisal system etc.

One of the most common systems for assessing leadership score of individuals are appraisal system. All appraisal system developed by companies focus on key result areas (KRA) which have direct linkages to organisational goals in defined timeframe. Over the years, appraisal system has evolved and started incorporating elements for softer skills such as behaviours, skills, competencies etc.

Many organisations where strategic HR is practiced have defined certain leadership behaviours in line with their value system and expected leadership levels.

For ensuring proper dissemination of this across all levels in organisations, set of competencies have been developed in line with expected leadership behaviours and all individuals are constantly assessed on the same. Based on their level, all further actions for improvement such as training, on-job projects, role enhancement, job-fitment are done.

As defined by Gialsturgess (2012), Gail Sturgess (2012), competency is defined as “a measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviours, and other characteristics that an individual needs to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully”.

Positive leadership is more of behavioural skills. Research has proven that if they are followed, they enable higher performance.

Competencies chosen by organisations are aligned towards the objective of meeting business goals. In view

of this, it would be prudent to assume that if a fit is found between these two, then organisations can choose set of behaviours which they would ask employees to follow which would help them to enhance existing competencies and lead to higher performance.

This would mean that a set has to be decided by organisations by studying their competencies and chose behaviours which leaders should adopt.

Study of Positive Leadership Assessment Questions and Listing of Possible Competencies

With the help of assessment tool developed by Kim Cameron, an effort has been made to list competencies. A broader outlook has been defined as depicted in Table 2, that it does reflect competencies. The emphasis is to map each of 24 questions to competencies.

Table 2: Positive Leadership Assessment Questions and Possible Competency Fitment

		Competency - option 1	Competency - option 2
	As a leader , to what extent you do		
1	Foster information sharing so that people become aware of colleagues difficulties and can express compassion?	Empathy	
2	Encourage the public expression of compassion by sponsoring formal events to communicate the emotional support?	Communication	
3	Demonstrate forgiveness for mistakes and errors rather than punish perpetrators and hold grudges?	Risk taking	Continuous Improvement
4	Provide support and development as an indicator of forgiveness for individuals who have blundered?	coaching and Mentoring	developing others
5	Express gratitude to multiple employees each day?	Communication	developing others
6	Make gratitude visits and the distribution of gratitude notes a daily practice?	developing others	inter-personal relationships
7	Ensure that employees have opportunity to provide emotional, intellectual or physical support to others in addition to receiving support from organization?	fostering team work	
8	Model positive energy yourself, and also recognize and encourage other positive energizers in your organization?	motivating	inspiring
9	Diagnose your organization's energy networks so that you support and utilize individuals in energy hubs as well as help develop peripheral members?	managing performance	managing change
10	Provide more feedback to individuals about their strength rather than their weaknesses?	developing others	managing performance
11	Spend more time with your strongest performers than with your weakest performers?	developing others	Entrepreneurial thinking
12	Communicate a ratio of approximately 5 positive messages for every negative message to those with whom you interact?	motivating	inter-personal relationships

		Competency - option 1	Competency - option 2
13	Provide opportunities for employees to receive best self feedback and develop best self portraits?	developing others	managing self
14	Consistently distribute notes or cards to your employees complimenting their performance?	motivating	

It was observed that many competencies can be mapped towards each questions. An attempt has been made to write competency and options of competency set against all 24 suggested steps “positive leadership assessment”. This would help organisations to develop set of guiding

behaviours for enhancing existing competency list which they are expected to follow. Through proper discussions and research, a proper fitment can be arrived for each action vs. competency in which they are fitting. Some of the competencies which have been mapped are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Competencies which can be Mapped for the Questions of Positive Leadership Assessment

Empathy	Communication	Risk taking
Continuous improvement	Coaching & mentoring	Developing others
Inter-personal relationships	Teamwork	Inspiring
Execution	Managing change	Managing performance
Managing self	Goal orientation	Entrepreneurial thinking

Suggest Approach for Implementation of Positive Leadership in Organisations

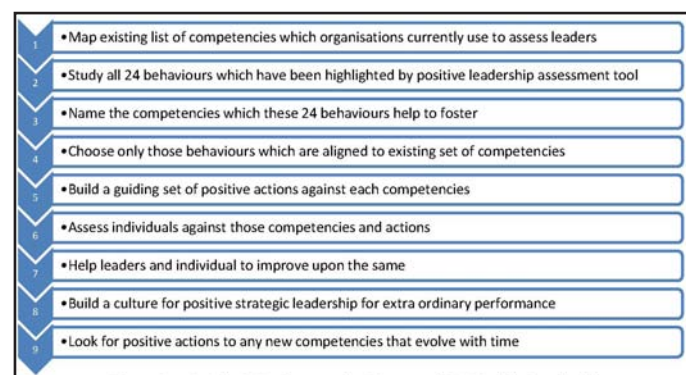
It is evident that if organisations decide to incorporate positive leadership culture in organisations, one of the easier ways would be to arrive at behaviours which would enhance scores in existing competencies. This would help them to choose expected behaviours and they can assess the individuals on those behaviours. Improvements in behaviours are expected to enhance existing competencies listed by organisations and this would automatically lead to improved performance.

We propose following step for implementation as depicted in Fig. 2.

- Map existing list of competencies which organisations currently use to assess leaders.
- Study all 24 behaviours which have been highlighted by positive leadership assessment tool.
- Name the competencies which these 24 behaviours help to foster.
- Choose only those behaviours which are aligned to existing set of competencies.
- Build a guiding set of positive actions against each competencies.

- Assess individuals against those competencies and actions.
- Help leaders and individual to improve upon the same.
- Build a culture for positive strategic leadership for extra ordinary performance.
- Look for positive actions to any new competencies that evolve with time.

This framework and model, if validated and implemented properly, would help large number of organisations easily adopt positive leadership culture in organisations.



Limitations and Future Research

It is easier said than done. Above model is based on past definitions and results. There are many questions for further research.

First, due to cultural, geographical, and organisational factors, it is to be established that the competencies mapped are the competencies which would be affected by the respective behaviours

Second, even the behaviours help to improve the competencies; they are the dominant ones. This is critical as during the process of implementation, organisations or individuals can assume that these behaviours would automatically enhance the competencies

Third, a correlation has to be established that by following those behaviours, organisations have been able to improve performance.

Conclusion

Leadership models have evolved with time. Various companies have adopted a defined set of leadership model to enable organisational performance. Positive leadership has emerged as a powerful tool to accomplish extraordinary results on sustained basis in all times. While studying, the implementation strategy, it has been found that organisations would have resistant to adopt and adapt the same. They have a dilemma as how to adopt such a wonderful concept in their existing framework. Leadership is a social process and accumulations of various behaviours. Positive leadership focuses on behaviours. Behaviours if applied, with ability and experience would lead to development of competencies. Hence, building and expanding set of behaviours against each competency would an opportunity for organisations to adopt positive strategic leadership style. Many organisations have already now evolved towards assessing and developing leaders on competency framework. Example case of 24 questions, have demonstrated that there is a possibility for mapping competency against each behaviour. An action guide has been proposed which would help organisations. A set of actions has been proposed to adopt the positive strategic leadership framework in their strategic human resource management approach. Since there are limitations of this paper, a deeper study and research would throw further insights and would help organisations to develop leaders which would shape our future.

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