

"The book is brimming with wisdom and inspiration. It is a highly valuable resource for leaders and change agents in any kind of organization who care about making positive culture a reality."

—Jane E. Dutton

Developing  
a Positive  
Culture  
where  
People and  
Performance  
Thrive

Marcella Bremer

foreword by

Kim Cameron



BOOK ENDORSEMENTS  
FOR DEVELOPING A POSITIVE CULTURE WHERE  
PEOPLE AND PERFORMANCE THRIVE,  
BY **MARCELLA BREMER**

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There is lots of talk about the importance of creating a positive organizational culture, but relatively little talk about how to achieve it in reality. Marcella Bremer's new book, "Developing a Positive Culture Where People and Performance Thrive" is a thorough and useful compilation of resources, ideas and tools for building and sustaining a positive culture. The book is brimming with wisdom and inspiration. It is a highly valuable resource for leaders and change agents in any kind of organization who care about making positive culture a reality.

*Jane E. Dutton, Robert L. Kahn Distinguished University Professor Emerita of Business Administration and Psychology, Ross School of Business, University of Michigan*

What I appreciate about this book is the collection of models and tools organized into a user friendly framework. In a time of daunting change, this book offers pathways to move beyond suffering, to reject surviving, and to transform our lives and the organizations and communities we care about... places where we can thrive. Bottom line, this is practical, inspirational, and useful today.

*Steven H. Cady, Ph.D., Graduate Faculty and author of The Change Handbook 3rd Edition, Bowling Green State University*

How to become a positive change agent? That's the central question that is answered in this book, a worthy investment of your time. As the dean of the author's Alma Mater, Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, I wholeheartedly recommend this book that combines both theory as well as extensive information on how to apply it and become a positive change agent.

*Professor Steef Van de Velde, Dean of Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University*

Often writing about cultural change is long on conceptual frameworks but falls short when it comes to tactical guidance. This one covers the whole spectrum in ways few others do. The review of various approaches and frameworks that support “positive cultures” is thorough yet selective and the list of practical How To direction is as comprehensive as you’ll ever see. If you’re looking for a simple set of answers to “plug & play”, this isn’t it. If you are looking for help to tailor a journey toward positive cultural outcomes, this is a resource you’ll refer to over and over.

*Daryl Conner, consultant, author and mentor to the change profession*

The stories that we tell ourselves shape the way we see the world. And that shapes our behavior. In an era where disengagement is rampant in the workplace, Bremer shines a light on an emerging story of hope and possibility. If you’re looking for a researched, holistic approach to creating a thriving organization, check out this book.

*Peggy Holman, author of Engaging Emergence: Turning Upheaval into Opportunity, and co-author of The Change Handbook*

Marcella Bremer knows culture. Her work over the years with OCAI has been prodigious and now coupling that with positive leadership takes the study and practice of culture to a new level. This book will be a great asset to anyone, any team or any organization interested in growth and goodwill in the workplace.

*Steve Gladis, PhD, author of Positive Leadership, The Game Changer at Work*

If you plan on reading just one book on positive organizational change this year, make **Developing a Positive Culture where People and Performance Thrive** your number one pick. This book comes from an experienced practitioner who understands the issues and challenges of change, and it covers all the bases including a solid review of the theory, research and relevant models; real-life illustrative examples; the best guiding and reflective questions we’ve ever seen; and, practical applications that individuals and organizations of any size can undertake right away. And the best thing about the book? Marcella Bremer is a masterful writer whose work is a pleasure to read.

*Carole and David Schwinn, co-authors, The Transformative Workplace: Growing People, Purpose, Prosperity and Peace.*

I was recently working with a client on how to change their culture and along came Marcella Bremer’s new book. It is wonderful, timely and I am all ready to use it—this is a really great book. Reading it leads to answer a lot of questions that my clients ask. I can see how they would read it and better understand why culture is so important to their business success. And, as a resource

it would truly make our culture change management jobs easier to do. Every C-suite should be encouraged to pause, read this book and then consciously decide how they want their company's culture to "be" so they can achieve the results that their customers need and their boards expect. Culture is not an afterthought. It is the thought. This is a period when the "way we have always done it" culture will strangle the company that cannot change that very culture. The second part of the book is a very valuable "how to" discussion that adds tremendous power to the "what is" opening salvo. Bravo.

*Andi Simon, Ph.D., corporate anthropologist, award-winning author,  
president Simon Associates Management Consultants*

Culture is currently the critically most important conversation taking place in the business world, and Marcella Bremer's makes an important and timely contribution to the conversation. She dips into how we might best understand culture and surfaces insights from the most credible of sources, including Edgar Schein.

Because we're hardwired to be critical, perhaps even negative, Marcella's setting of a positive direction for individuals and organisations is welcome. Her laudable vision is for the positive, for possibilities and potential.

Having established foundation and set direction, she offers ample examples and ideas about what and how to go about completing the journey – both individually and collectively. This is done in a simple, practical way that belies profound wisdom, and draws on much research.

Thank you Marcella. Your work contributes to enabling organizations to flourish, soar and transcend.

*Graham Bruce Williams, executive coach and originator of Conversations that Count*

Marcella is truly a global influence in the transformation of workplaces into spaces of positive impact. In this book, Marcella shares invaluable insights into the effect that individuals and leadership have in creating positive organizations. The explanation of key concepts is concise. What is particularly useful is the "how to" that this book brings. Marcella is mindful that achievement in Culture transformation is not a linear process but one that is rooted in complexity. She explores "how to" navigate such complexity in a manner that is easy to read and presented in a logical fashion. I know that this Work will inspire thousands and equip them with the requisite tools to take positive action.

*Stan Horwitz, Master OD Practitioner, MD of HR Network, Co-Founder Neosxo and  
Board member of the International Society for Organization Development and Change ISODC*

Marcella Bremer has given a gift to the world. This book is for anyone who wants to learn about culture or improve the culture of their organization, from the Practitioner to the Scholarly level. Ms. Bremer begins by fully explaining what culture is and why it matters, to why a positive culture is so important, and how to create positive change in your organization. Next, she covers how to be your best possible self and creates a strong case that to be a positive change agent, one must know themselves first, including their purpose, strengths and values. Ms. Bremer also explores the role of interventions in creating change. And, lastly, she discusses the role change circles can play in creating a positive, productive culture. The book also addresses how to create safety and respond appropriately when there are monsters in your midst. Thank you for the toolbox to create a positive culture where people and performance thrives! I highly recommend this book!

*Kimberley Barker, PhD, Director, Institute for Culture and Adaptive Leadership*

This inspiring resource is the powerful mind-shift needed to create environments within which to thrive, not simply survive. Today's workplace, and the workplace of the future, demand an integration of self, others and the work we do. This complexity can be mastered with ease by following Marcella's well-researched and very practical go-to guide for individuals, teams and organizations to lead positive change from anywhere, across multiple domains.

I am proud to be part of her vision of "10 000 by 2020" positive agents in the world.

*Colleen Leclercq, Change Consultant & Relationship Systems Coach, Connect EQ (Pty) Ltd*

Reading **Developing a Positive Culture where People and Performance Thrive** is like having the great thought leaders in the field of leadership and organizational culture in one room together so the reader may benefit from their wisdom. Marcella has given us a gift by organizing and integrating what works when it comes to creating work cultures where people thrive. I love the way she has woven together a variety of theories and practices into a comprehensive encyclopedia of culture. Everything you need to create a workplace where people can realize their potential can be found in this valuable guidebook. It's theoretically sound and, best of all, practical.

*Andrew Bennett, President of Bennett Performance Group*

Marcella follows two important imperatives in reconstructing (or intentionally changing) cultures: "increase the number of choices" and "if you desire to see, act". In a positive culture, participation and interpretation are entwined, as are leadership and follower-ship.

The distinction remains nonetheless and they evoke each other. In her practical way, Marcella shows how to engage this maze. Intentionally changing a culture requires courage, creativity, and not being afraid to depend on others. Marcella embodies this and offers her experience and insights.

*Jan Lelie MSc MBA CPF, proces facilitator at mind@work*

Marcella Bremer has provided a worthwhile contribution on culture. This book will be of interest to persons who wish to expand their knowledge and perspectives on culture and its applications. The author begins by explaining culture and then discusses why a positive culture is needed. She then discusses how to create positive change in an organization.

Ms. Bremer also explores the role of interventions in creating change. Further, she discusses the role change circles can play in creating a positive, productive culture. I recommend this book for those persons who are involved in leadership, culture, and change initiatives. It is both interesting and thought-provoking.

*Jerry Glover, PhD, author, consultant, and educator*

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DEVELOPING A POSITIVE  
CULTURE WHERE PEOPLE  
AND PERFORMANCE THRIVE

**MARCELLA BREMER**

FOREWORD BY  
**KIM CAMERON**

  
kikker groep

Zwolle MMXXI





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# FOREWORD

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## “DEVELOPING A POSITIVE CULTURE”

MARCELLA BREMER HAS PRODUCED a very useful and intriguing book on organizational culture and positive practices. She integrates two different approaches to the development of a positive organizational culture—*diagnosing and changing organizational culture* based on the Competing Values Framework, and *positive organizational scholarship*. Marcella describes multiple examples and interesting illustrations of positive organizational culture and of successful culture change, and she offers a multiplicity of practical tools and options for influencing individual behavior as well as organizational dynamics. Among the book’s contributions is offering practically applicable suggestions based on others’ empirical work which provide credibility and legitimacy for her prescriptions. Marcella’s book is full of useful frameworks, tables, and rubrics to help leaders and practitioners develop and enhance positive cultures in organizations.

One of the two core frameworks upon which Marcella’s own consulting practice is built—and which is described in some detail in the book—is the Competing Values Framework. This is the most oft-used framework for diagnosing and changing organizational culture used in the world today. The Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI), developed and copyrighted in the 1980s, is one tool that emerged from the framework. The Competing Values Framework serves as a map, an organizing mechanism, a sense-making device, a source of new ideas, and a learning system. Since it was empirically developed by Quinn and Cameron in the early 1980s, it has been applied by researchers and practitioners to many aspects of organizations such as mergers and acquisitions, corporate strategy, core competencies, leadership, communication, decision making, motivation, human resources practices, quality, and employee selection. Diagnosing and changing organizational culture is probably the most frequently application of this framework (see Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Cameron, Quinn, DeGraff, & Thakor, 2014).

From the Competing Values Framework comes a theory about how the various aspects of organizations function in simultaneous harmony and tension with one another. The framework helps identify a set of guidelines that can enable leaders to diagnose and manage the interrelationships, congruencies, and contradictions among the different aspects of organizations. More than three decades of work on the Competing Values Framework has produced a set of intervention processes, measurement devices, and change techniques that help improve organizations, their outcomes, and their leadership. Most importantly, the framework helps leaders work more comprehensively, consistently, and effectively in developing and enhancing a positive organizational culture.

In this book, Marcella does an excellent job of explaining the key elements of organizational culture and how to make it more positive. Whereas she emphasizes the Competing Values Framework as the basis for her own interventions and consulting practice, she also discusses several other approaches to organizational culture diagnosis. She has, in fact, produced among the most comprehensive and useful descriptions of approaches to culture diagnosis and change that have been published. An important strength of this book is its breadth in referencing and clearly explaining a wide variety of alternatives and approaches to influencing culture and implementing positive practices.

The second core framework upon which Marcella builds her approach to positive culture development is Positive Organizational Scholarship (see Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). This field of study emerged from empirical research in the early 2000s on topics such as forgiveness, kindness, and compassion in organizations, extraordinarily positive performance in organizations, and leadership that produced virtuous outcomes in organizations. Organizations ranging from Wall Street firms to military units, from manufacturing enterprises to secondary schools, and from National Intelligence Agencies to hospitals have been studied over the last two decades, and marked culture change and positively deviant improvements have been documented. As a field of study, positive organizational scholarship emphasizes what elevates individuals and organizations (in addition to what challenges them), what goes right in organizations (in addition to what goes wrong), what is life-giving (in addition to what is problematic or life-depleting), what is experienced as good (in addition to what is objectionable), what is extraordinary (in addition to what is merely effective), and what is inspiring (in addition to what is difficult or arduous). It promotes outcomes such as thriving at work, interpersonal flourishing, virtuous behaviors, positive emotions, and energizing networks.

More specifically, positive organizational scholarship emphasizes three primary areas of focus: (1) the facilitation of *positively deviant performance*, or an emphasis on outcomes that dramatically exceed common or expected performance; (2) an *affirmative bias*, or a focus on strengths

and capabilities and on affirming human potential, especially enabling thriving and flourishing in organizations and their members; and (3) producing the *best of the human condition*, or a reinforcement of the inclination in all human systems toward positive, life-giving energy and toward Aristotle's eudaemonic assumption (i.e., the pursuit of goodness for its own sake).

Marcella has done a masterful job in this book of merging this foundation of positive findings with the work on cultural diagnosis and development to produce an extensive array of practical tools. She adroitly builds on an example of culture change in the Dutch Army throughout the book, so her prescriptions and suggestions are grounded in her own experience. She is careful to highlight the contrasts and trade-offs invariably faced in such change efforts. In fact, one of the most notable contributions in the book is an abundance of tables in each chapter that contrast normal assumptions and approaches with her recommended approach to developing a positive culture.

Marcella is especially good at capturing a wide variety of literature covering a broad range of topics—from neuroscience to social movements, from interpersonal response types to meeting agendas, from liberating structures to types of positive questions. This diversity of topics serves to provide practitioners, consultants, and change agents with multiple alternatives for influencing a positive organizational culture. Each chapter contains an excellent summary of its key points at the end, thus making it possible to skim some chapters and still capture the most useful and practical ideas. Skimming, however, will result in missing Marcella's excellent discussions of a broad coverage of topics and the nuances and tradeoffs associated with each.

It needs to be emphasized that an important contribution of Marcella's book is the multiplicity of practical hints for influencing a positive culture. Hers is not intended to be a scholarly book, but it builds on the scholarship of others and explains clearly and cogently the ways in which a great deal of scholarly work can be applied. Summarizing this wide variety of practical tools and interventions aimed at enhancing a positive culture—including interpersonal interaction patterns, rules for effective communication, giving and receiving feedback, asking questions, diagnosing and utilizing energy, mindfulness practices, clarifying higher purpose, ambidextrous thinking, fostering trust, capitalizing on the best-self, enabling optimism, and appreciative inquiry—is, indeed, an important and relatively rare contribution. Marcella's last chapter introduces a unique approach to initiating culture change—change circles—which serves as a mechanism to merge together many of the previously explained disparate array of tools and practices.

This book, in sum, is a highly readable, clearly articulated description of a wide variety of practical, research-based approaches to influencing and developing a positive organizational culture. It will be an excellent source of relevant intervention techniques based on decades of research on the



Competing Values Framework and Positive Organizational Scholarship, among a variety of other frameworks.

*Kim Cameron*  
*William Russell Professor of Management & Organizations,*  
*Ross School of Business*  
*and Professor of Higher Education, School of Education*  
*University of Michigan*  
*Ann Arbor, August 2017*

# WELCOME!

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**W**OULD YOU LIKE TO CHANGE the organization where you work? Do you long for a more positive culture? How are you contributing to your workplace? Do you make a difference? Does it matter what you do?

I suspect many people have learned that they don't matter much outside families and friends and there's not much they can change.

"The world is too big to change. There's power, there's scarcity, and you just have to survive."

This "conventional mechanistic" mindset sees the world as a machine, with scarce positions of power and many pylons, where things unfold in a linear and top-down way, with winners and losers. It makes us cautious and skeptical, many would call it "realistic."

What strikes me is that even managers often think they cannot change their organizations. I remember an executive team that felt defeated by an acquisition and now obeyed a foreign headquarters. No matter what I said, or what exercises I offered, they persisted in their victimhood; an external locus of control. Things happened to them and they couldn't change anything. I tried to help them see they still had a choice, there are always small things you can do differently. There are questions you can ask, explanations to help them understand your needs, and options to discover that create a win-win solution.

If they could only see the situation with a positive-organic mindset they might retrieve their agency (an inner locus of control) and change their response...

Another group of really bright middle managers kept repeating that higher management would torpedo their initiatives, so their hands were completely tied. Even working with them was a waste of my time, they told me. They were just puppets on a string, so they wanted me to either change their bosses or let their employees work harder.

But change always starts within ourselves, by seeing it differently and then *doing* something different. This last group of middle managers urged me to look for Interaction Interventions that you can do anyway, regardless of your position, without needing permission or resources (in addition to the Change Circles I had developed earlier to engage all employees to change).

We long for a world and a workplace where we matter. Most of us would love to work hard for a shared, meaningful purpose and contribute to the greater good. We yearn for possibilities, what if the positive potential we hope for could come true? We long for connection and are wired to collaborate. We thrive if we keep on learning and experience sufficient autonomy. That's why we need to transform our organizations.

Does your organization need to be more innovative, competitive, agile, and productive? Are employees disengaged? As a leader, you can develop a positive culture to help people and build performance.

Do you hate going to work on Monday? As an employee, you can influence your boss, co-workers, and clients by positive interactions (or find a better place to thrive). Remember: one candle can light a room.

Do your clients wear you out? As a consultant or coach, you can help them develop a positive, productive culture.

The fascinating research on positive organizations shows what can happen if you develop a positive culture, based on a positive organic mental map. People and performance start to thrive!

That's what the "positive organic" mindset can help us do. It sees the world as a complex, living system, a network with abundant nodes and opportunities, where things unfold in a non-linear way in many directions, and "positive agents" can realize some of its potential.

Adopting this view makes you optimistic, energized, and courageous. Maybe this is even more "realistic" because our brain is biased to notice what is negative. As reality consists of too many Terabytes, our brains filter and tend to see what we believe.

We need to transform our organizations as only 32% of US employees are engaged at work (Gallup, January 2016). Worldwide, only 13% feel engaged!

Imagine the potential that is left unused! Not just in monetary terms, but also the loss of inspiration, innovation, energy, happiness, connection and health. We can't afford not to use this potential. Our global, societal and organizational challenges are tremendous and we need everyone's ideas and energy to solve them. Moreover, people can take their positive mindset from work back home, where it spreads to their spouses, children, and the community.

But if you're just interested in improving your organization's performance and profits, that's fine, too. It will pay off to develop a positive culture in many ways.

This book is for leaders and employees, for colleagues and clients, for consultants and coaches. We can thrive at work, let's see how.

## HOW DOES IT WORK? A READING GUIDE

Part 1 is the WHAT and the why of developing a positive, productive culture.

Part 2 is about WHO: your personal preparation. This is a “must-do” to be the change you wish to see and to embody the positive-organic mindset that helps to develop a positive organization.

In Part 3, we’ll look at HOW with Interaction Interventions: what you can do to make the culture more positive, regardless of your position, without needing permission or resources. You can change your interactions to be “the candle that lights the room”, maybe together with a few allies.

Part 4 shows HOW to engage the whole organization in Change Circles and deliberately work on developing a positive culture.

## OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPING A POSITIVE, PRODUCTIVE CULTURE

|            | <b>Internal: to observe, reflect and prepare</b>                                 | <b>External to practice and do and persist</b> |
|------------|--|--|
| Individual | What & Why of positive culture and change, Part 1<br>Who to change first, Part 2 | How: Interaction Interventions Part 3          |
| Collective | What & Why, Part 1   | How: Change Circles, Part 4                    |

First, we look at what culture is and why it matters in Chapter 1. Then, we’ll see what makes a culture positive and why that matters in Chapter 2. These chapters include the research evidence, and we’ll find the four ingredients of a positive culture. We’ll also compare the conventional-mechanistic mindset with the positive-organic mindset. Your mental map determines what you can achieve.

In Chapter 3, I show the most well-known culture models that you could use to assess your current culture. If this is too much for you, feel free to fast forward. However, I refer to the Competing Values Framework throughout the book so you might want to check paragraph 3.2.

Then we’ll look at how we can apply the positive-organic map to change and development in Chapter 4 and check the conditions for successful organizational change.

Those four chapters of Part 1 are an extensive introduction to the what and why of developing a positive, productive culture. Feel free to read everything or browse through these chapters as you see fit.

Finally, we get to work in Part 2. Chapter 5 is all about you. Please do not skip this chapter as “touchy-feely” personal coaching stuff. This personal preparation to be the change you wish to see is essential to developing a positive culture. Adopting a positive mental map, challenging limiting beliefs that no longer serve you, following your energy and checking your attitude toward other people, it all determines the quality of the results that you can achieve. Do not take this lightly. There is no organizational change without personal change. Period.

In Part 3, we find the core of the Interaction Interventions that you can do without resources or permission from others, regardless of your role or position. This is what you can do, even those who claim they cannot make a difference to the culture. A culture emerges from our actions and interactions, the way we do things around here because of what we value and believe. People tend to copy, coach, and correct each other in groups. All groups together form a network, and hence, there are countless opportunities to influence the culture if you interact differently.

In Chapter 6 and 7 we’ll look at ways to change meetings, learn together in Triads with other positive agents, ask positive questions, train your listening skills, practice with dialogue and make interactions safe. You might even liberate your meetings.

Chapter 8 focuses on Interaction Interventions for leaders, what else is possible from a leading position? How can you embody positive leadership and develop that positive culture? We’ll review how to enhance the four ingredients of a positive culture: positive awareness, connection and collaboration, positive meaning, and learning and autonomy.

Part 4 shows the Change Circle approach to engage a whole organization in groups of ten people to let them learn and develop their culture. I also show possible ways to make your culture more positive based on the Competing Values Framework.

Throughout the book, I’ve added questions for reflection. I’d like you to engage with what you read and to answer them. I’d love for you to be a creator, become active and do something about your workplace culture.

Reading alone won’t make change happen. Yes, I have a bias for achieving results. So, how can we make your organization a great place to work?

If you buy a notebook or keep a digital document where you answer the questions, you’ll train your culture awareness. Moreover, you’ll create a great resource with observations and insights that you can use as a start to develop a positive culture at work.

If I may, my advice is to answer the questions without over-analyzing. Observe, and don’t judge. Don’t label things as good or bad. Just take notes and start the magic process of creation.

What will emerge? How will you develop your positive agency?

If you influence one person, one interaction at a time, you contribute to positive change. I'd like to see at least 10,000 positive agents by 2020 to spread positive change in their organizations and beyond. Are you a positive agent?

*Marcella Bremer,  
Zwolle, June 2017*

# CHAPTER 2

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## WHY DEVELOP A POSITIVE CULTURE?

**W**E'VE SEEN HOW CULTURE WORKS and why it is crucial for organizational success. I hope you answered the reflection questions from Chapter 1 as this will help you translate the theory to your specific situation. The first step is learning to “see” culture and its typical examples in your organization. Next, you can discover ways to develop a positive culture. But first, we have to know what a positive culture entails and what it can do for organizations.

Let's briefly look back on the collaborative “Romeo Delta” culture at the Restructuring Project Bureau (see Chapter 1). You might have guessed that was a positive culture experience for me, but it turned out to have been a “culture bubble” within the Army.

The project was dismantled when the task was done. All colleagues were relocated. I got a position in the National Command headquarters that arranged housing, education, nutrition, and healthcare for the operational units.

In spite of the new structure and strategy, the overall Army culture hadn't changed. The National Command was a hierarchical setting, organized by command and control. Everyone had their position, their orders. You couldn't do something new or different without explicit permission. Obedience and loyalty were key. And for good reason, of course. There's no time for discussions during battles. You must be able to blindly trust your mates and be sure that everyone complies with safety procedures.

But in peace time, working as a civilian employee, I preferred professional freedom and autonomy. I was used to being trusted, to working hard and playing hard and contributing to an urgent meaningful purpose.

On one of my first days, I wanted to upload a text to the brandnew Intranet when my new boss stopped me. I had to get approval from the National Command general first. I was stunned.

I walked to the general's office down the corridor but didn't get beyond his secretary. I could either schedule an appointment or give her the document. I handed her the text, and got it back marked with red corrections after a couple of days.

After some time, I quit my comfortable lifetime employment and started my own business. I missed the vibrant, positive culture of the Bureau and I couldn't get used to the Army's "normal" hierarchy culture.

## THRIVING

The National Command was the opposite of the Bureau, where I had thrived. People who thrive have a sense of learning and vitality, as researched by Gretchen Spreitzer and Christine Porath. [1]

Thriving employees report higher levels of job satisfaction, creativity, and courage. They feel more confident in their abilities to achieve anything. They find their work energizing and engaging and are less vulnerable to burnout.

Organizations can help people thrive by creating a positive work culture where people respect and support each other; that is what I liked about the Bureau. We worked hard and played hard, together.

People can also be stimulated to acquire new knowledge and expertise. I was challenged and learned a lot, and that's what kept me interested, and engaged at the Bureau. As we will see in this chapter, the supportive relationships and learning at the Bureau are the core of a positive culture.

The Bureau culture had been characterized by:

- ▶ Dynamic, hands-on, results orientation.
- ▶ "Just make it work", professional freedom and autonomy. No permission needed to move forward with regular tasks, we were trusted as professionals and knew our priorities.
- ▶ Clarity on shared goals and priorities, we knew what we must deliver and when and why. Clear feedback, people were direct and mostly honest, so there was no ambiguity and little politics.
- ▶ Challenges to make it on time, while learning new things.
- ▶ Comradship combined with openness, and diversity, focus on commonalities instead of differences. No gossip because we could speak up if we needed to.
- ▶ Shared values of supporting coworkers, delivering good work in time, and being reliable. Shared belief: Work comes before leisure time.



- ▶ Have you worked in a positive culture? Looking back at your career to date, which culture did you like best and why?
- ▶ Have you experienced thriving at work? Would you have thrived at the Bureau?

## 2.1 WHAT IS POSITIVE?

Not everyone would thrive in the culture of the Bureau as people differ in character and preferences. But in general, research shows characteristics that most people experience as “positive” in organizations.

Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) is the field researching positivity in organizations, and that offers an approach to developing a positive, productive culture. [2]

It is inspired by Positive Psychology, that emerged as a response to the research focus on pathology. Martin Seligman and colleagues developed a science to understand what makes life worth living, instead of defining healthy as the absence of sickness. The old paradigm aims to go from problems back to “normal”, the positive paradigm is looking beyond normal to extraordinary and positive.

Kim Cameron initiated and collected POS research and co-founded the Center for POS at the Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, with colleagues like Robert Quinn, Jane Dutton, and others.

POS evolved from contrasting two extreme, hypothetical worlds: one of greed, manipulation, and distrust; the other of appreciation, collaboration, and meaningfulness. POS recognizes the reality of the first world but intentionally emphasizes the second. It is a conscious choice to look for “the positive.”

Positive refers to the “heliotropic effect”: the tendency of living systems to seek what is life-giving and to avoid what is life-depleting. Positive means an orientation toward exceptional, virtuous, life-giving, and thriving.

In his book “Positive Leadership,” Cameron defines Positive Leadership as focusing on: [3]

- ▶ what elevates both individuals and organizations (in addition to what challenges them),
- ▶ what goes well (in addition to what goes wrong),
- ▶ what is life-giving (in addition to what is life-depleting),
- ▶ what is experienced as good (in addition to what is objectionable),
- ▶ what is extraordinary (in addition to what is merely effective) and
- ▶ what is inspiring (in addition to what is difficult).

- ▶ Can you make a list of what elevates and what challenges you? What goes well and what goes wrong? What is life-giving and what is depleting? What is extraordinary and what is just okay? What is inspiring and what is difficult?

## MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT “POSITIVE”

It is important to note that positive does not mean “dreaming.” You are fully aware of reality, maybe even more realistic than “normal” leaders. As Chris White, managing director of Michigan’s Center for Positive Organizations, explains: Positive leaders might have a more accurate view of the world because our brains are wired to dwell on the negative. [4] Most people might have an unreasonably pessimistic view. By consciously noticing positive things we might see something extra: potential. What could be the positive possibilities that are included in this situation? It is the “organic mindset” that looks for growth and development.

Neither does positive mean that you are nice and happy all the time. You bet I had off-days at the Bureau. We all experience a range of emotions. Authentic people in positive organizations do not deny, suppress, hide or fake anything. But they try to practice gratitude, and appreciate the half full glass. Gratitude is like a muscle that you’re training, and it helps to keep an eye on what is positive and working well. This might be more constructive than narrowing your perception to what is wrong.

Nor does positive mean that you deny or ignore what is negative. You want to hear criticism, doubts or second thoughts. You encourage people to share their problems and questions and mistakes with you (instead of hiding them). That helps everyone to learn and adapt faster. But you try to hear the potential as well: the solution may be hiding in the criticism.

“Positive” is being aware of the whole picture but consciously choosing to reinforce the positive, that which brings inspiration, and energy. Not just because that is pleasant (though it is), but because it has been proven to be effective.

Positive does not mean that you “pamper” people or never give negative feedback. The positive mindset has a respectful, permissive, encouraging, empowering basis, but without being weak or without boundaries.

Positive leaders are quick to correct people who abuse their trust, or whose good intentions lead to negative outcomes. They are gentle and firm. They keep the greater good and the organization in mind. Positive leadership includes stopping individuals who go too far or don’t contribute, in the best interest of everybody else.

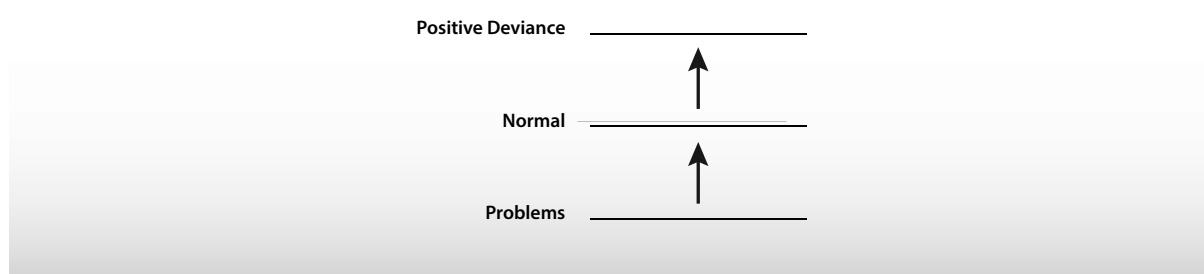
For instance, the Bureau's charismatic general could be charming and trusting but he was very clear about priorities and criteria of good work. Those who didn't deliver to the standards were sure to hear it immediately, but I never experienced a cautious or intimidated atmosphere. What also helped is that military staff are used to direct feedback, and colleagues were direct with each other as well.

Last but not least, "positive" is not reserved for formal leaders. Whether you're leading just yourself or also others, you can apply positive leadership and contribute to a positive culture, without needing permission or resources from others. We'll get back to this in Part 3.

## POSITIVE DEVIANCE

"In a positive organization, people flourish while they work and exceed expectations regarding outcomes. They have a culture in which people engage, collaborate, grow and perform at an extraordinary level." That's Robert Quinn's definition in his book, *The Positive Organization*. [5] So, what does a positive culture entail? We saw that we need learning and vitality to thrive. We need supportive and authentic relationships. We prefer an inspiring purpose and clarity. What sets a positive culture apart is a conscious focus on what is positive and life-giving. A distinct other feature is positive deviance, or extraordinary performance.

How can that be? Positive leaders change what is "normal." Instead of problem-solving and returning to normal, they have an "abundance mindset." The abundance lies in seeing the positive potential that lies beyond the default baseline, in the realm of extraordinary. The situation will be even better than before you detected the problem. Positive deviance enhances a shared feeling of: "We enjoy the challenge to perform beyond expectations. We are the best version of ourselves that we can be."



*Positive Deviance*

Positive deviance is sustainable high performance. It is not the same as short-term peak performance that forces and exhausts people, fueled by punishments and rewards. Positive deviance enables people to thrive, as they learn and engage in extraordinary performance, fueled by a meaningful purpose and supported by coworkers. It is stretching what seemed possible, and surprising yourself.

An impressive case of positive deviance, researched by Kim Cameron and Marc Lavine, is the closing and cleanup of America's biggest nuclear weapons plant, Rocky Flats. [6] The U.S. Department of Energy estimated that this would take seventy years and \$36 billion. But the contractor, Kaiser-Hill, managed to finish this task sixty years ahead of schedule and \$30 billion under budget. The soil was thirteen times cleaner than federal criteria required. In just 10 years, eight hundred facilities were taken down, and the site is becoming a wildlife refuge.

The secret? Kaiser-Hill used an abundance mindset instead of the usual problem-solving. That resulted in "positive deviance." They brought fifty excellent leaders to the project who worked together as a team. Cameron & Lavine also bust the one-strong-leader myth. Many formal and informal leaders "talked and walked" the same message; each person in their own authentic way. Effective leadership turned out to be a strong collective with shared values and goals, aligned with a clear and inspiring vision. Kaiser Hill's positive leadership culture provided excellence, continuity, and consistency.

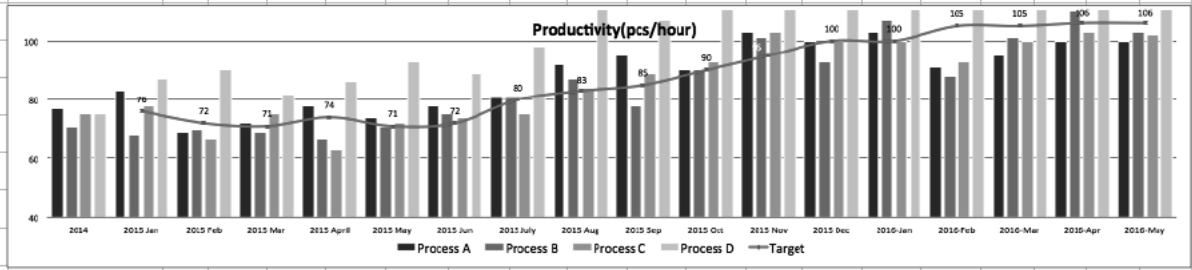
While almost 7,000 people worked at Rocky Flats in 1995, there were just a few people left in 2005. This happened without any strikes. Employees worked hard to make themselves redundant and left feeling proud to pursue new careers.

### **CASE: A POSITIVE PRODUCTION PLANT**

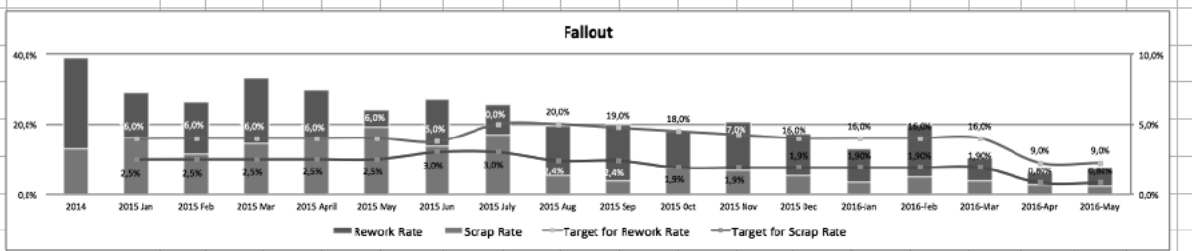
Let me share another positive business case. An Asian manufacturing factory, about to collapse, was turned around within two years by a new plant manager who used positive leadership.

The productivity in pieces per hour for each product line rose from 71-77 in 2014 to 100-127 in May 2016. While productivity went up, fallout costs plummeted. The scrap rate went from 3.2% to 0.56% in 2016. The rework rate improved from 38.8% down to 7.46% in May 2016. Downtime for tooling in one of the product lines went from 16% to 2.41% and for machines from 8.9% back to 1.61%

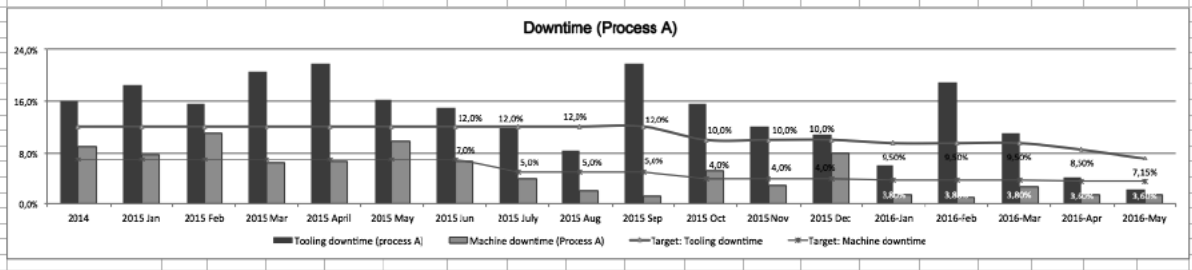
| Productivity | 2014 | 2015 Jan | 2015 Feb | 2015 Mar | 2015 April | 2015 May | 2015 Jun | 2015 July | 2015 Aug | 2015 Sep | 2015 Oct | 2015 Nov | 2015 Dec | 2016-Jan | 2016-Feb | 2016-Mar | 2016-Apr | 2016-May |
|--------------|------|----------|----------|----------|------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Piece/ hour  |      |          |          |          |            |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |
| Process A    | 77   | 83       | 89       | 72       | 78         | 74       | 78       | 81        | 92       | 95       | 90       | 103      | 100      | 103      | 91       | 95       | 100      | 100      |
| Process B    | 71   | 68       | 70       | 69       | 67         | 71       | 75       | 81        | 87       | 78       | 90       | 101      | 93       | 107      | 88       | 101      | 110      | 103      |
| Process C    | 75   | 78       | 67       | 75       | 63         | 72       | 74       | 75        | 84       | 89       | 93       | 103      | 100      | 100      | 93       | 100      | 103      | 102      |
| Process D    | 76   | 87       | 90       | 82       | 86         | 93       | 80       | 98        | 119      | 107      | 117      | 118      | 116      | 117      | 112      | 121      | 132      | 127      |
| Target       | 75   | 72       | 71       | 74       | 71         | 72       | 80       | 83        | 85       | 90       | 95       | 100      | 100      | 100      | 105      | 105      | 106      | 106      |



| Fallout                | 2014  | 2015 Jan | 2015 Feb | 2015 Mar | 2015 April | 2015 May | 2015 Jun | 2015 July | 2015 Aug | 2015 Sep | 2015 Oct | 2015 Nov | 2015 Dec | 2016-Jan | 2016-Feb | 2016-Mar | 2016-Apr | 2016-May |
|------------------------|-------|----------|----------|----------|------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Scrap Rate             | 3,2%  | 4,0%     | 2,9%     | 3,6%     | 4,1%       | 4,8%     | 3,4%     | 4,3%      | 1,3%     | 1,0%     | 1,8%     | 1,7%     | 1,3%     | 0,86%    | 1,21%    | 0,95%    | 0,89%    | 0,56%    |
| Target for Scrap Rate  | 3,5%  | 3,5%     | 3,5%     | 3,5%     | 3,5%       | 3,5%     | 3,0%     | 3,0%      | 2,4%     | 2,4%     | 1,8%     | 1,8%     | 1,8%     | 1,90%    | 1,00%    | 1,00%    | 0,80%    | 0,80%    |
| Rework Rate            | 38,8% | 29,0%    | 26,5%    | 33,1%    | 29,6%      | 24,1%    | 27,3%    | 25,6%     | 16,6%    | 19,9%    | 17,3%    | 20,7%    | 17,2%    | 12,96%   | 19,98%   | 10,28%   | 5,93%    | 7,46%    |
| Target for Rework Rate | 16,0% | 16,0%    | 16,0%    | 18,0%    | 18,0%      | 16,0%    | 20,0%    | 20,0%     | 10,0%    | 18,5%    | 17,6%    | 16,6%    | 16,6%    | 16,6%    | 16,0%    | 16,0%    | 6,0%     | 9,0%     |



| Downtime                     | 2014  | 2015 Jan | 2015 Feb | 2015 Mar | 2015 April | 2015 May | 2015 Jun | 2015 July | 2015 Aug | 2015 Sep | 2015 Oct | 2015 Nov | 2015 Dec | 2016-Jan | 2016-Feb | 2016-Mar | 2016-Apr | 2016-May |
|------------------------------|-------|----------|----------|----------|------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Tooling downtime (process A) | 16,3% | 18,5%    | 15,8%    | 20,7%    | 21,9%      | 16,2%    | 15,1%    | 11,7%     | 8,3%     | 21,8%    | 15,6%    | 12,1%    | 10,8%    | 6,05%    | 16,11%   | 10,90%   | 4,21%    | 2,41%    |
| Machine downtime (Process A) | 8,3%  | 7,8%     | 10,9%    | 6,3%     | 8,6%       | 9,7%     | 8,5%     | 3,9%      | 2,1%     | 1,3%     | 5,1%     | 3,0%     | 8,0%     | 1,46%    | 1,11%    | 2,74%    | 1,81%    | 1,81%    |
| Target: Tooling downtime     | 12,0% | 12,0%    | 12,0%    | 12,0%    | 12,0%      | 12,0%    | 12,0%    | 12,0%     | 12,0%    | 12,0%    | 10,0%    | 10,0%    | 10,0%    | 10,0%    | 9,50%    | 6,60%    | 6,60%    | 8,50%    |
| Target: Machine downtime     | 7,0%  | 7,0%     | 7,0%     | 7,0%     | 7,0%       | 7,0%     | 7,0%     | 5,0%      | 5,0%     | 5,0%     | 4,0%     | 4,0%     | 4,0%     | 3,80%    | 3,80%    | 3,80%    | 3,60%    | 3,60%    |



### ATTENTION FOR PEOPLE

How did Alex Zhang do it? Alex told me: “I focus on people. I try to understand what is going on by asking questions and listening. Why didn’t they meet the target? Is it a lack of thinking power, tools, motivation? Are they afraid? What do they need to do their work well? Next, I coach them to think positive.”

The corporate VP of Operations for Asia, Yanbo Singh, added: “Alex has an individual approach. He has one-on-one conversations, and hardly any meetings. He communicates continuously with twenty managers and occasionally with supervisors and the shop floor.”

This factory used to have around 300 employees but downsized to its current 190 people around late 2015. Yanbo: “The exports to Europe and the USA suddenly stopped after we got a new owner. We went from 50,000 pieces per month to 20,000, and the local sales prices were much lower. We had to reduce the number of people.”

Alex liked the challenge, but it was a risk for his career. He was in the same boat as every other employee, and that also contributed to his moral leadership.

His goal was to lay off around 99 people: “I wondered if we could fire the negative complainers. We had to get morale back up and keep people based on attitude and values rather than skills, tenure, or position. I asked all the managers: If we want this to be a great company who should we let go? And who do we need to be great? I saw this as an opportunity for positive change.”

### POSITIVE POTENTIAL

Alex applied positive leadership: reframing something that is potentially negative to its positive possibility. He believes: “There is often a positive angle to things that happen. Truth is what you choose to see.”

“I assume everyone has a good intention. I’d rather trust people. If we stop doing the right thing because someone once treated you badly, we can’t be positive.”

Alex wanted to verify who the negative and positive energizers were. So he arranged workshops with all the teams to discuss the problems and ask employees for solutions. “I know that Asian workers can’t always tell the truth in a group,” he explains. “But we kept those workers whose ideas were supported by their coworkers.”

Alex started the plant’s “university” to train the remaining workforce both on skills and a positive attitude. They followed a program and Yanbo taught them to be positive, for instance by expressing gratitude, doing small acts of kindness and maintaining relationships. The classes lifted morale and made people proud, especially because there was an official graduation.

### CHALLENGE AND LEARN

Next, Alex introduced friendly competition. “The job definitions of the supervisors were vague, between a blue and white-collar position. People needed clarity on their role but also on the Key Performance Indicators. What were they supposed to achieve? So far, supervisors had been soft because they knew everyone’s families, it-s community. But once we introduced clarity and competition they had to be braver.

The plant is divided into four zones with different process lines. We selected a positive supervisor for each line and made them fully responsible. We gave each of them clear KPI's and started a competition: which production line made their targets that week?

Those four process lines are interdependent. If one line produces bad quality, the next line has a problem too. Feedback used to be slow because there were no clear KPI's before. But suddenly feedback became instant. If one line produced badly, the next would run to them: Hey, better fix your quality! Or: speed up your production, we're waiting!"

The winner received the flag for one week plus a symbolic monetary incentive. This "friendly competition" worked very well.

But why wasn't Alex discouraged by all the negativity when he started out? Alex: "I believe that if I do the right thing every day, I will eventually reap abundance. If I focus on the people, they will give their best. And that's what happened."

"Every time I visit the plant, people are smiling and tell me that work is great," adds Yanbo.

Alex concludes: "At the start, you won't see results. But if you keep believing and do small, positive things every day you will achieve a positive, productive culture."

(Alex Zhang and Yanbo Singh aren't real names as this Corporation values its privacy. I interviewed them in June 2016.)

- ▶ When was a time that your team or organization stretched what seemed possible? What were the constituents of this situation?

## WHAT IS WORKING WELL

Positive cultures seek to amplify and build on what is already working well. This is what companies such as Ford, Kelly Services, Burt's Bees, Griffin Hospital, and Zingerman's have been doing. They use a strengths perspective that values people and their unique contributions. Focusing on strengths empowers people as it increases their confidence, energy, and ideas. Feeling safe, trusted, and positive, it's easier to perform at your best.

## APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

You might notice the similarity with Appreciative Inquiry, an approach developed by Cooperrider and Srivastava (Cooperrider, 2000). Appreciative Inquiry focuses on what works well and how to amplify that to improve performance. Its assumption is that each person has a positive core and positive potential awaiting discovery. By engaging in inquiry and collaboration, you can unleash this potential. [7]

Appreciative Inquiry uses four stages to develop people and organizations:

Discover: when and where are things okay and working well?

Dream: what if we extended what is working well to other parts of the organization?

Design: what will we do now?

Deliver: how will we do this?

This approach aligns with the organic mindset. It is looking for the potential that can be developed into reality. Diana Whitney identifies five conditions before people can achieve high performance. They must know they belong, feel valued for what they can contribute, and know that they are contributing to the greater good. Besides, they need to know where the organization is headed and that excellence is expected. These needs will be met if you develop a positive culture.

## TRUST

Trust and safety are the soil to grow strengths and positive deviance. In a positive culture, the default answer often seems “yes” followed by “unless.” It assumes that professionals can be trusted and that they will learn and be responsible, and that there is positive potential to explore. Example: You can try new things unless you deviate from our shared purpose.

By comparison, conventional leadership prefers the mechanistic control mindset. It assumes that professionals are self-interested, may be not good enough, and that learning is risky as it might cause problems, scarcity, and loss. The default answer is “no” unless you ask permission in advance and you can prove that your idea will be useful. The latter may be difficult if it hasn’t been tried before. In the mechanistic mindset, the visible present often wins from the potential future that is not visible yet.

- ▶ What are your examples of yes-unless?
- ▶ When and where are things working well? What if other parts of the organization would copy this? What else is possible?

## 2.2 THE POSITIVE-ORGANIC MINDSET

But before we start to develop a positive culture, it’s crucial to upgrade our mindset. Let’s explore the organic mindset we encountered in Chapter 1.

You have to learn to see possibility instead of only what is present. But how can you learn this? Robert Quinn emphasizes the importance of both/and thinking as a condition for development. [5] The mechanistic mindset prefers linearity, planning, control, and tangibles. Change starts at the top



and is rolled out. There is one correct answer, just like we learned in school. This reinforces our use of either/or categories. “An organization is positive or negative.”

But the reality is much more complex and dynamic. It is rather both/and, as we know intuitively. It's the wisdom of yin and yang. Every situation potentially holds its opposite: it is both/and.

When you have too much of something, the initial positive effects can turn into something more negative. Too much wine will evolve from nice relaxation to the necessity to relax the next day to recover. Efficiency might initially increase your bottom line but gone too far, it stifles the innovation that enhances long-term success. Kindness to people adds to mutual trust, but unconditionally applied to bad results, kindness leads to abuse of trust.

Positive leaders can hold opposing ideas at the same time, and see both reality plus its positive potential.

- ▶ Thinking about a current situation or person, what is present? In a column, make a list of the features you notice (without judgment, just notice facts). Next, write down the theoretical opposite of each feature. What is the hidden potential?

In the organic view, your organization is a network of flowing energy and information with emerging opportunities from countless actions and interactions. It is non-linear and absolute predictions and control are not possible. Change can start in any of the nodes and go viral in the network. You can't determine the correct answer in advance. Multiple options and outcomes are possible. There's a range of probability that you can sense when you know your organizational system or “field” well enough.

- ▶ What does your organization look like as a network? How much energy is flowing? To whom? Who are important nodes in the network? Don't forget to include secretaries and janitors...

## SENSING THE ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEM

Otto Scharmer's Theory U is an approach to deeply understand the organizational system and develop its potential. [8] It requires seeing with fresh eyes instead of with judgment and expectations. Next, you “sense” from the field or situation, and also process data in the back of your mind or from intuition, instead of surrendering to cynicism. Then you let go of what you fear and arrive at a clear state where you see what is present and what is potential.

You broaden your data input, so to speak. Judgments, expectations, and models are limiting your view. You temporarily suspend this thinking. It is mindfulness: observe sensations, intuitions,

sub-conscious impressions. Let go of emotions that block your view. Then you can discover the potential of a situation.

Scharmer calls this process “learning from the future as it emerges” as opposed to learning from the past where you repeat what worked well.

When I interviewed him, he explained: “In situations of disruptive change the key capacity that is needed is to stop, really pay attention, let go of old definitions, let come of new future possibilities and make a connection to one’s Higher Self.” [9]

Don’t worry if this sounds magic. The point is that Scharmer’s research shows that people who use this heightened awareness create better outcomes. His research concluded: “The quality of results achieved by any system depends on the quality of awareness from which people in the system operate.” [10]

That awareness boils down to an open mind, using data from all the senses, holding opposites without judgment, and sensing what needs to be done. This goes beyond the processing capacity of the rational, verbal mind and relies on the enormous capacity of the whole brain, that includes subconscious information processing.

- ▶ On a scale of 1-10, how open are you to both/and thinking and non-judgmental observation of different data? How could you enhance non-judgmental, mindful observation?

Here is proof that you first need to upgrade your thinking before you can create a positive culture with extraordinary performance.

## ADDING POSITIVITY TO OUR MINDSET

Quinn agrees with Scharmer: “To turn an organization positive, we have to increase consciousness.” Leaders need to become “bilingual” to navigate organizational complexity. [5] You need to speak both “conventional” and “positive” languages. You need to be realistic and aware of constraints and fact-based. Please use that “one correct answer” when appropriate.

But you also need to be positive to see and develop potential and bypass current limitations. Be open to multiple answers when the situation is complex.

Both qualities combined will lead to developing extraordinary performance in a positive organization.

In the mechanistic mindset, the organization is a stable pyramid and management must solve problems and return things to equilibrium: you need this to fix problems. In the organic mindset, the organization is a social network that is constantly learning and changing: you need this to achieve high performance.

Let's revisit both mindsets and add positive awareness to help develop a positive, productive culture.

- ▶ Both/and thinking, multiple options possible (instead of: either/or thinking and one correct answer).
- ▶ Real is what is present plus its potential that might be sensed (instead of: Real is what is present and can be measured).

| <b>Mechanistic Mindset “conventional”</b>                                       | <b>Organic Mindset “positive”</b>   |
|---|---|
| Organization as machine   | Organization as a living system   |
| Pyramid   | Network   |
| Leaders as engineers programming for output, leaders as heroes in the spotlight | Leaders as gardeners facilitating the output, leaders as hosts in the background                              |
| Planning & Control  | Coordination of emerging opportunities & Shared purpose   |
| Leaders are the most important and know best, employees are told what to do     | Leaders and followers are equally important roles and contribute both   |
| Information flows top-down  | Information flows in all directions   |
| Information is scarce and slow  | Information is abundant and real-time   |
| Power is based on position thus scarce  | Power is based on influence and shared thus abundant  |
| Management based on tangibles and numbers                                       | Leadership based on shared purpose and goals  |
| Focus on correcting errors to go back to normal                                 | Focus on strengths, values, what works well, to exceed normal if possible                                     |
| Culture is invisible and soft so let's focus on what we can measure             | Culture is largely invisible but we can see and feel it affecting the business so let's influence it together |
| Change is linear, can be predicted and planned for                              | Change is non-linear, can't be completely planned so prepare for what emerges                                 |
| Preference for efficiency and competitiveness                                   | Preference for development, growth and learning   |
| Real is what is present and can be measured                                     | Real is what is present and its potential that might be sensed  |
| Either/or thinking and one correct answer                                       | Both/and thinking, multiple options possible  |

- ▶ If you divide 100% between these two mindsets, what would your score be? In what situations do you use the conventional-mechanistic or the positive-organic mindset? What about the others in your culture? Is there someone who deviates?

In Chapter 5, we will discuss how you can broaden your mindset to include positivity.

## 2.3 PROOF FOR THE POSITIVE

Now let's see why a positive culture is vital to thriving organizations. The research evidence is compelling and exciting. Maybe some of these findings evoke a "duh" because they resonate with what you intuitively know. Nevertheless, for the skeptics out there, Kim Cameron collected proof that positivity pays off. [3]

Why is positivity important for organizations? The short explanation is that when people feel good and positive, they will perform better. Feeling good boosts confidence and creativity, and an optimistic outlook if something goes wrong nevertheless. Positive feelings enhance relationships and communication as well. You probably recognize this. When you feel good, you think you can take on the world. But have you ever delivered your best when you felt irritated, insecure, pressed, or scared, angry or worn out?

Barbara Frederickson described the effects of positive emotions (1998). [3] It "broadens people's thought-action repertoires and builds their enduring personal resources" (Frederickson, 2003). Negative emotions narrow your repertory and diminish your coping abilities. A positive climate at work will "broaden and build" your organization because it makes people more creative, resilient, and innovative.

- ▶ How and when have you experienced the broaden-and-build phenomenon of positivity?

### HOW DOES "NEGATIVE" HARM PERFORMANCE?

By contrast, when we feel bad, negative, stressed out and exhausted we won't perform well. The amygdala in our brains continuously scans the environment for potential dangers, like a smoke detector. "It is always on and stimulates the injection of hormones for fight and flight. Its basic question is: Will this threat eat me, or can I eat it? (Goleman, 2007)." [11]

If we assess something as a threat, we will focus on it which narrows our scope, creativity, and ability to think of creative solutions. Our normal peripheral vision becomes reduced. Stress creates tunnel vision literally and makes us vulnerable to judgment errors, jumping to conclusions, getting defensive, closing ourselves off, and worse.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, behaviors are easily copied. Moreover, moods are contagious because people mimic each other's facial expressions without even being aware. This is a way for our mirror neurons to experience what the other is feeling, so we can better detect what is happening around us. But mimicking a negative expression will make you feel the same, that's how moods subliminally spread in a team.

Some theorists even say that we affect people at least three levels out beyond ourselves. Imagine what happens in a toxic workplace and how that affects everyone at work and at home. I've experienced this as a consultant when I felt depleted after a session with a discouraged executive team of a division suffering under their headquarters abroad. I empathized too much and picked up on their mood, which left me discouraged and exhausted.

Fortunately, the effect can also be reversed as research shows that working in the vicinity of a positive leader, makes you positive (Goleman, Biyatzis, McKee, 2004). [11]

While we are in the zone of the negative, let's quickly review more evidence before we return to the positive realm. In a Harvard Business review article, Kim Cameron and Emma Seppala (from Stanford's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research) state that too many companies bet on having a cut-throat, high-pressure culture to drive their financial success. [12] They summarize research that shows how harmful that is to productivity over time, such as 50% more health care expenditures at high-pressure companies. Studies show the lower someone's rank in a hierarchy, the higher their chances of cardiovascular disease and death. Another study found a strong link between leadership behavior and heart disease in employees. High-stress work environments lead to disengagement in the long run, while various research shows that disengaged workers have 37% higher absenteeism, 49% more accidents, and 60% more errors and defects, and thus, lower productivity and profitability, not to speak of the high costs of turnover.

Cameron and Seppala conclude: "Wellbeing comes from one place, and one place only — a positive culture."

Despite the evidence that people and performance thrive in a positive organization, the majority of organizations still operates from the mechanistic mindset that manages people like human resources. Executives prefer to control employees to deliver the highest possible output in the short term. Emotions are judged and dismissed as soft. Wellbeing is nice when you're at home, but at work, you need to be rational and tough. The workplace revolves around efficiency and competition. The focus is on fixing problems and going back to normal, which does not inspire to extraordinary performance. How does your organization think and act?

Kim Cameron [13] told me that his positive research evolved from studying the phenomena of downsizing: "Almost all of the downsizing organizations deteriorate in performance. This happens because conflict goes up, and morale, trust, and innovation go down. But 10-15% of organizations flourish after downsizing because of organizational virtuousness. They implemented practices like forgiveness, compassion, gratitude, and integrity. I found that those organizations were more

optimistic looking at the future. They forgave the pain that was inflicted through the downsizing, instead of holding grudges and dwelling on the pain. The evidence over the last ten years is clear: if you implement virtuousness in organizations, performance goes up, customer satisfaction goes up, everything gets better.”

Let's return to some of that positive research to understand the business case for positive cultures.

### HOW DOES “POSITIVE” BOOST PERFORMANCE?

In his book *Positive Leadership*, Cameron identifies four features that stimulate “positive deviance” or high performance: creating a positive climate, relationships, communication and positive meaning such as a shared, inspiring purpose. [3]

Positive emotions prevail in a positive climate, and you can observe more optimistic employees. Organizational performance is substantially affected by a positive climate, as researched by Mathieu & Zajac (1990). People who focus on strengths (instead of weaknesses) may show positively deviant performance (Clifton & Harter, 2003).

Positive relationships enhance what a person can take emotionally (Heaphy, 2007), and foster resiliency (Dutton & Heaphy 2003). Not surprisingly, positive relationships also lead to more creativity, trust, and openness to new ideas (Pratt & Dirks 2007).

Jane Dutton shows that leaders need to encourage energizing interactions among their staff for a more creative organization and a competitive advantage. [1] Humans are social animals that thrive when they have high-quality connections: interactions where both participants' energy levels are increased, for instance when you discuss a topic that matters to you with someone you trust.

Kahn found that people are more committed to the organization and Baker & Dutton proved that positive relationships lead to higher levels of energy, learning, cooperation, resource utilization, cost reduction, time savings, and human capital development in organizations.

Close relationships tend to enhance and increase productivity and performance (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Dutton 2003, Lawler 2003).

- ▶ What are your experiences with positive relationships? With a positive climate? With positive communication? With positive meaning?

## HIGH PERFORMERS ARE KINDER

There's more fascinating research case to convince the skeptics.

Losada and Heaphy [3] studied sixty top-management teams engaged in annual strategic planning. Fifteen teams were rated as high performers, twenty-six medium and nineteen low. The single most important factor in predicting organizational performance turned out to be the ratio of positive to negative statements! Positive refers to appreciation, support, approval, or compliments. Negative statements express criticism, disapproval, or disparagement.

The top teams had 5.6 positive to 1 negative statement. Medium had 1.85 to 1, but low performers had 0.36 to 1. In other words, low performing organizations use three times more negative than positive statements.

Low performing teams also tell more than they ask. You can hear more advocacy statements (telling or advocating a position) as opposed to inquiry statements (asking, seeking others' viewpoints). Low performers ask five questions for every hundred statements. High performers ask approximately as much as they tell.

The focus on self versus others showed the same tendency. High performers showed a balance, low performers used three statements focused on others, for every hundred focused on self.

This research shows that high-performing organizations have more positive communication patterns than low performers and that it does not pay off to be "tough" as the old image of the strong leader.

- ▶ Who are your examples of positive communicators, and who are other-focused and ask more than they tell?

## GIVERS GET MORE

Wharton professor Adam Grant describes his fascinating research in the book Give and Take – Why helping others drives our success. [14] He demonstrates that leader kindness and generosity are strong predictors of team and organizational effectiveness.

Grant describes two extremes in how we relate to one another. On the one end of the spectrum is the Taker. Takers like to get more than they give; they are self-focused because they expect others to act selfish, too. They believe that the world is a competitive, dog-eat-dog place. "If I win, you lose." If Takers give, they do so strategically. They believe that "the pie" is fixed and they'd rather get the largest piece of it.

Givers are on the other end of the relationship spectrum. Givers like to give more than they get – they want to help others. They are other-focused and trust people up front, assuming the best of them. They believe that people are good and that there is abundance – there will be enough for everyone. “If I win, you win, too! We can all win together.”

Somewhere in between these extremes, are the matchers. They prefer balance. They value fairness, reciprocity, and equality. They have a norm of “quid pro quo.” If they give, they’ll expect some favor in return, sooner or later.

Most people act like givers outside the workplace (research by Yale psychologist Margaret Clark). Worldwide, people value “giver values” such as helpfulness, responsibility, social justice, and compassion.

But in the workplace, most of us become matchers – probably because we get cautious. Giving to a Taker can be risky – it costs energy and time and prevents you from getting your own work done – while you get nothing in return.

People who are givers at work are often afraid to admit it. Sherryan Plesse, an executive at a prestigious financial services firm, says: “I was conditioned to leave my human feelings at the door and win. I want my primary skills to be seen as hard-working and results-oriented, not kindness and compassion.”

The fear of being judged as weak and naive prevents giving at work. Work is seen as a zero-sum game. You anticipate self-interested behavior from others, and that’s why being competitive seems the rational thing to do, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

But what does “taking” do to your workplace culture? Social network researchers Rob Cross and Andrew Parker found that “the takers were black holes. They sucked energy. The givers were radiating suns. They created opportunities for colleagues to contribute rather than imposing ideas on them and claiming the credit for achievements. When someone disagreed with them, givers showed respect instead of condescending them.”

Givers work for the team, but takers for themselves. If everyone around you hides information, you will do so, too. But in the long run, “taking,” hoarding, and mistrust hurts everyone in the organization.

Givers give with no strings attached, expecting nothing in return. But by giving generously in time, advice, efforts – they seem to enlarge “the pie” for everyone. Because people copy their generous behaviors and pay it forward, they trust each other more and come up with innovative ideas that eventually enlarge the pie.



Other research shows that consistent and visible giving is contagious and it motivates others in a system to shift their reciprocity styles. James Fowler and Nicholas Christakis found that giving spreads rapidly in social networks. When one person contributed to the group over multiple rounds, more people were inclined to do the same in future rounds, even if the giver who started was no longer present.

Teams depend on givers to share information, to volunteer for unpopular tasks and to provide help. Adam Grant claims that givers thrive in the service economy where collaboration matters.

The case for giving is: if you give at work, the takers won't compete with you. The matchers want to pay you back with good stuff, and the givers accept you as one of them.

Imagine what could happen if you can make “giving” normal in your culture. The givers will do so naturally, the matchers will reciprocate, and the takers want to look good, so they might try to conform as well.

- ▶ What is your favorite style at work? What is the percentage of givers, matchers, and takers in your organization?

## HIGH TRUST, HIGH RETURNS

Givers trust people up front, as we have learned from Grant's research. The Great Place to Work® report 2016 [15] summarizes the research that a high-trust culture is vital to performance and people. Herbert Nold, Professor of Business Administration at Polk State College examined 28 publicly-traded great workplaces and compared them to industry peers. The great workplaces outperformed the “normal” organizations in operating income per employee, operating margin, growth rate and return on assets.

Organizations that cultivate cultures that are strong in fairness, credibility, respect, pride, and camaraderie significantly do better. Nold suggests that trust enables collaboration and knowledge sharing, just like Stephen Covey in his book *The Speed of Trust*.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's research on the most successful organizations in more than twenty countries confirms this. [16]

These organizations engage employees by trusting them to make choices about where, when, and with whom they work. (That aligns with Daniel Pink's criteria of autonomy that motivates people). They also have a company purpose and use societal and human values in decision making. (Pink's criteria of purpose). They provide resources for improvements and innovations. (Pinks criteria of mastery: learning and development).

Moss Kanter says: “People can be trusted to care about the fate of the whole enterprise—not just about their own jobs or promotions—and to catalyze improvements and innovations without waiting for instructions. When people are trusted to self-organize, they create networks to share information and new initiatives or innovations are often the result.” This is the positive-organic mindset in action.

- ▶ How would you rate the trust level in your organization?

## **2.4 DARING GREATLY AT WORK**

Let’s take a quick look at the work of Brené Brown. She shares her research on shame in the book *Daring Greatly*. [17] Shame is the fear of not being worthy of real connection and belonging. Many people suffer from shame, the fear of not being good enough and not meeting the norms and criteria, especially at work.

Brown declares that she has never been to a shame-free organization. The Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) estimates that 37% of the US workforce has been bullied at work. As in sabotaged by others, or experienced verbal abuse, threats or humiliation.

When you see a manager berating an employee – the problem of shame is acute. But in most cases, we have to look for more subtle signs. Signs that shame has permeated a culture are blaming, gossiping, favoritism, name-calling, harassment. Even worse are management by fear, bullying, criticizing or public reprimands and reward systems that intentionally belittle people.

We blame when we experience pain or discomfort, and we pass it on. From blame comes shame, according to Brown. If employees are constantly navigating shame at work, you can bet that they’re passing it on to their customers, students, and families.

Brown shares an example of using shame: the salesperson with the best quarterly results got to choose his office and send its current inhabitant packing. But one salesperson won the quarterly contest three times in a row and was asked to start packing anyway – because the point was to terrorize the others. “Busting their balls in public builds character and motivation.”

Simply put: winners lists means there are also losers who lose face, and that is using shame as a way to manage people.

Shame can only rise so far because we disengage to protect ourselves. Disengaged, we don’t show up, we don’t contribute, and we stop caring. On the far end, you may even rationalize unethical behaviors. You’re taking the heart out of business, and lying and cheating may become normal in your workplace culture. You checked out, emotionally. Cover-up cultures thrive on shame to keep folks quiet.

People who believe in their worthiness are “shame resilient.” Brown calls them the Wholehearted people. They have a mindset of knowing that they are enough and worthy of belonging to a group, even though they are imperfect and vulnerable and sometimes afraid.

So, how could we cultivate positive cultures? Where shaming-and-blaming behaviors are not tolerated? And, even better, where people work “wholeheartedly”, bringing their authentic selves to work plus developing their best selves?

For that to happen, leaders should “dare greatly” and show up authentic and vulnerable. They should facilitate honest conversations and practice how to give and receive feedback in an honest, constructive and positive way. Without feedback, there can be no transformative change. We need to focus on people’s qualities and tie them to the shared purpose.

One condition for a culture without shame is to normalize discomfort. If we expect real learning, critical thinking, ownership, and change, then discomfort is part of the process. “If you’re going to learn and change and innovate, you’re going to make mistakes, get feedback and feel uncomfortable. You are not going to know all the answers. It’s part of the process. It means you are contributing.” You might recognize the beliefs of the positive-organic mindset in this advice...

- ▶ Do you see people who suffer from shame at work, or who dare greatly? What are the symptoms?

## **2.5 DO YOU SUFFER, SURVIVE, OR THRIVE?**

By now, I hope you see why it’s vital to practice positive leadership and develop a positive culture. The business case is that helping people and organizations become positive will drive productivity and profits.

Besides, I believe there’s inherent virtue in helping people thrive. In a way, it will contribute to “saving the world.” As people tend to unconsciously mimic and copy other people they see regularly, the empowering behaviors of kindness, openness, positivity, and trust can spread. One person at a time, the world can become a kinder place. It will also be a smarter place as positivity helps people to feel safe and open up, to become creative, and to explore solutions for the economic, environmental, political and societal challenges we face. The more people thrive, the more we can do to “save the world.” But whatever your motivation to develop a positive culture, just go for it!

We no longer have to suffer or just survive at work, as the generations before us did, sighing under the yoke of heavy workloads or authoritative bosses to make a meager living. On the contrary, in developed economies, we can thrive at work and take our positive mindset home to our families, communities, clubs, and associations.

But the positive-organic mindset is not mainstream thinking yet because we just came out of the industrial age. We're still getting used to the abundance of the information age, standing on the threshold to a whole new era. If you look at the stages of human development, you can better understand where we are headed.

## HUMAN DEVELOPMENT STAGES

In his book *Reinventing Organizations*, Frederic Laloux gives an overview of these developmental stages, based on the work of many researchers and integrated by Ken Wilber and Jenny Wade. [18]

There's consensus that humankind developed in leaps. We changed thinking and technology in each phase, and invented a new organization and management paradigm in each stage.

Humanity moved through four big stages to date: the magic/tribal, agrarian/traditional, scientific/industrial, and post-modern/information eras. They align with organizational characteristics as you can see in the image below. I recommend reading Laloux' book or the overview article on my blog if you want to learn more. [19]

| <b>Laloux Five Stages of Organizations and Culture</b>   | <b>Characteristics and core values and "metaphors":</b>   |
|--|---|
| Teal organizations of the 21st century / Today: a few, rare outliers like Patagonia and Morning Star               | Shared Power.<br>Self-organizing and ownership where possible, wholeness and authenticity at work, evolutionary purpose: what wants to emerge?<br>"Living System" |
| Green organizations of the post-modern information age / Today: Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, Zappos, Ben&Jerry's | People.<br>Value-driven cultures, soft skills and people matter, empowerment, all stakeholders matter not just shareholders.<br>"Family"                          |
| Orange organizations of the scientific age / Today: multinationals, Wall Street, consultancy firms                 | Achievement.<br>Innovation, learning, meritocracy and accountability: think for yourself to succeed.<br>"Machines"  |
| Amber organizations of the agricultural age / Today: churches, armies, public schools                              | Structure.<br>Formal hierarchy, structure, rules. Replicable process, planning, reliability.<br>"Armies"  |
| Red organizations of the tribal age / Today: street gangs  | Power.<br>Fight and dominate. The boss inspires fear to stay on top.<br>"Wolf packs"  |

The 21st century is expected to be the fifth time that we'll leap to a next level. Some call this the authentic age, or the integral age. Because the stages are organized with colors, this new stage is also indicated as "Teal."

Laloux says: "The next stage of organization development corresponds with Maslow's level of self-actualization." The mindset of Teal looks like positive-organic thinking.

Teal accepts complexity and is less attached to outcomes. It can observe facts and gather data but is also open to other sources of knowing. Intuition honors the complex, ambiguous, paradoxical, non-linear nature of reality. Teal transcends the either-or thinking and embraces both-and thinking.

People dis-identify from ego, they resist the need to control, and to fit in. They shift from external yardsticks to internal ones in decision making. Instead of social norms to be successful, you check: does it feel good? Am I in service to the world?

In Teal, obstacles are seen as life's way to teach us about ourselves and the world. We embrace the possibility that we were part of creating the problem.

Teal organizations and cultures embrace self-management, wholeness at work (bringing your authentic self and not just the rational professional), and evolutionary purpose (a shared purpose of the organizational system that evolves or emerges).

Teal organizations have a clear intent and respond to what happens while they travel in that direction. They don't have fixed strategies, budgets and targets, because milestones make you look at your plan instead of what happens in front of you. It's better to navigate on reality and constantly adjust.

Do you notice the similarity with a positive, productive culture based on the positive-organic mindset?

Other authors describe alike developmental stages. Bruce Schneider discerns seven levels in his book *Energy Leadership* and indicates how to lift your organization. [20] What he says aligns with *Positive Organizational Scholarship*: "Problems are creations of a fear-based perspective on life. When we transcend fear, what remains is opportunity."

In *Tribal Leadership*, the authors (Dave Logan, John King, Hallee Fischer-Wright) identify and work with five stages of personal and culture development. [21] There are more developmental theories such as *Spiral Dynamics* as adapted by Richard Barrett, and *Human Synergistics*, that we will discuss in Chapter 3. Though the details differ, the rough lines of development are the same in all theories.

I integrated and simplified Laloux, Schneider, Logan, Barrett and my own consulting experiences into three stages of development of organizational culture to see where we come from and where we are headed. I paint the picture with large contrast for clarity (and thus, I sacrifice some nuance).

## THE SUFFER MODE

Suffer cultures have very low energy. People sit dully in their offices and submit to the daily routines without a spark in their eyes. You can observe this; it's palpable.

The mindset is: Life is harsh, you can't win this, everyone loses. They see everything as a problem. "Life, the workplace, and everyone else are handing me problems. Life is a constant rat race, even for the boss. I can't change anything and must try to endure it." This is a victim attitude.

The main driver is a need: everything they need and what is lacking.

The basic emotion is fear or even grief. People are scared. They are beaten. They may experience threats, insecurity, office politics, bullies, and being publicly shamed.

People are hired for their output: the "what" they produce. They don't want to work until the boss makes them. Work is just a job, often meaningless, but they have to do it to make money; it's basic self-preservation.

Managers are ruling in a top-down way, using punishments, coercion, and micro-management. Workers have no information, no space to vary work in their own way, no choices. This is what they expect, this is normal, they are apathetic.

## THE SURVIVE MODE

Survival cultures show more energy. You'll see people argue and debate in meetings, work long hours to get even more done and rush through the corridors. Again, you can see, hear, and feel this.

The mindset is: "Life is hard, so you'd better play it smart. Not everyone loses. I want to win, and you may lose. But I want and will work on change!"

"There's no free lunch, and you have to work hard and defend yourself. I can't be bothered with kindness: it's every man for himself. Maybe life and the organization will reward me."

The main driver is: What I have and what I have to do.

The basic emotion is anger. People are ambitious, angry, dedicated. They see challenges instead

of problems. They work hard to climb the corporate ladder and strive for temporary safety: when they reach the higher ground, they can be safe for a while overseeing their enemies approaching from below and fending them off. This is the fighter attitude.

People are hired for “how” they do things; for their expertise. They contribute skilled labor, specialization, knowledge. They work on self-mastery: they climb, want to improve themselves and have a career. Work is about earning respect and status as much as about making money.

Managers are managing with a mix of top-down and bottom-up styles, punishments and rewards alike. Colleagues will sometimes collaborate, sometimes compete.

People have more information about what’s going on, especially if they’re part of the prestigious meetings. They have some space to vary their work within their job description in the hierarchy.

### THE THRIVE MODE

Thriving cultures radiate with energy and elevate people. You’ll see people brainstorming, laughing, speaking with enthusiasm, crossing corridors with a spring in their step. It looks and feels dynamic.

The mindset is: “Life is great. Choose from an abundance of possibilities, live to the max! There’s enough for everyone. I am here to contribute and make a difference.”

The main driver is: to be. Be who I am to give my unique gift to the world and make a difference.

The basic emotion is love. People love what they do and are enthusiastic, creative, confident, and open to learning and sharing. They see things as an opportunity to grow, instead of a problem or a challenge. They are safe; they are okay: hence the openness and the lack of fighting tendencies.

There are no winners and losers. “We can all win depending on our criteria; nobody needs to lose. We can create anything together.” This is the creator attitude.

People are hired for “who” they are. What matters is their personality, purpose, motivation. Do they fit the team? Skills can be learned, knowledge acquired, but character and authenticity are crucial.

Work should facilitate personal development and is centered around a higher purpose. Work is a calling.

Workplaces are managed “from all directions.” People co-create, sometimes without a strict organizational chart, official meetings and maybe even without official managers.

They prefer flowing information, flowing energy, the freedom to come up with new ideas and to work the way they are at their best. Sometimes there are no job descriptions, but self-management, and shared leadership. There’s always trust, openness, authenticity.

The purpose is more central than the money. They want to make a difference instead of just making a living.

| Suffer                         | Survive                        | Thrive              |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Low energy                     | Medium energy                  | High energy         |
| “Life is harsh”                | “Life is hard, play it smart”  | “Life is great”     |
| Fear and grief                 | Anger (fight your way up)      | Love (what we do)   |
| Driver: to need                | Driver: to have                | Driver: to be       |
| We are losers                  | Winners and losers             | We can all win      |
| What we do matters, our output | How we work; expertise matters | Who you are matters |
| Work as a job                  | Work as career                 | Work as a calling   |
| Self-preservation              | Status                         | Purpose             |
| Top-down                       | Bottom-up and top-down         | Co-creation         |
| Enduring what is               | Fitting into the hierarchy     | Learning & autonomy |

- ▶ Is the majority in your workplace in suffering, survive or thrive mode? Do you recognize your own thoughts and behaviors? Some of your current or former workplaces and coworkers?

From what I’ve seen (confirmed by Logan’s research) the vast majority of people and organizations are in Survive mode, which corresponds with the conventional-mechanistic mindset. A minority is a “toxic” workplace and is Suffering.

According to Logan, around 2% of organizational cultures have reached the Thrive mode. They operate from a positive-organic mindset and have moved from fear to love, and developed a positive culture.

These three developmental stages can help you better understand your organization.

## 2.6 WHAT DO WE NEED TO DEVELOP?

As we have reviewed a lot of research with different angles, let’s boil it down to a list of what we need for a positive culture. I distilled four vital ingredients that most studies have in common: positive awareness, connection and collaboration, learning and autonomy, and a shared, meaningful purpose.



## POSITIVE AWARENESS

We develop our awareness of the positive-organic mindset:

- ▶ being aware of ourselves and authentic
- ▶ open-minded to facts, people, and ideas
- ▶ seeing organizations as complex networks that are learning, living systems
- ▶ trusting the non-linear processes of complexity and emergence
- ▶ seeing positive possibilities and focusing our attention on what goes well, what elevates, what is virtuous, good, or the right thing to do
- ▶ aiming for positive deviance: we seek extraordinary outcomes beyond “just okay.”

## CONNECTION AND COLLABORATION

We develop a collaborative climate with positive relationships and authentic communication, by

- ▶ being interested in and knowing colleagues
- ▶ having energizing interactions that lift people’s energy
- ▶ caring for colleagues as equal human beings and grown-ups
- ▶ including and engaging them in activities and decision making
- ▶ valuing their contributions and enhancing their strengths
- ▶ asking sincere questions instead of assuming or judging
- ▶ seeing the potential of others
- ▶ supporting and coaching them when they struggle or ask for help
- ▶ creating a safe space without social risks by respectful, non-violent communication
- ▶ acting as “givers” instead of takers or matchers
- ▶ collaborating with others and enjoying diversity
- ▶ avoiding blame and gossip
- ▶ bringing our whole, authentic selves to work, daring to be vulnerable, transparent, open
- ▶ taking responsibility for ourselves and being honest
- ▶ applying positive communication and giving negative feedback in a good way

## SHARED PURPOSE AND MEANING

We create clarity on why the organization exists, what our shared purpose is and how we contribute to the world, by

- ▶ knowing our shared purpose and why we are doing our work, which feels like a calling
- ▶ experiencing positive meaning; we contribute to the lives of our customers, our co-workers, and our community
- ▶ knowing our shared values and criteria, and thus our priorities
- ▶ knowing how we each, individually, add value to the organization
- ▶ inspiring each other to make choices for the good of the whole, and embody shared positive values
- ▶ knowing where our organization is headed and that excellence is expected from all of us.

## LEARNING AND AUTONOMY

We develop learning, development, and professional autonomy by

- ▶ trusting others as professionals
- ▶ seeing the potential of others
- ▶ being tolerant of mistakes
- ▶ inspiring each other to learn and try more
- ▶ working on a permissive basis, no mandatory activities, people join if they are motivated and energized by a goal
- ▶ yes-unless policy regarding what to do
- ▶ stimulating each other to take ownership
- ▶ taking responsibility for the whole; I am a contributor, and I'm co-creating this situation (an "inner locus of control")
- ▶ tuning into the emergent, non-linear organizational system, and adapting when needed
- ▶ understanding that each member of the organizational system can instigate change
- ▶ varying degrees of autonomy, for instance, self-organizing units, job-crafting or setting your own goals

Positive cultures stimulate a "creator attitude." We create our performance and culture together, and every person contributes and is responsible for the whole organizational system. We cherish an

“inner locus of control”, focusing on what we can change and decide and do without permission or resources from others.

Positive cultures have a lot of energy, openness to ideas and others, good relationships based on trust and authenticity, participation, support for others, and an eye for positive potential. They cherish learning and development, collaboration, a meaningful shared purpose, and professional autonomy (sometimes even self-management). They deliver extraordinary performance.

Don't be discouraged. This is an ideal image of a positive culture. But it is not impossible...

Assess your current situation in these four areas. Which needs improvement the most? Which is already present?

- ▶ Positive awareness
- ▶ Connection and collaboration
- ▶ Shared purpose and meaning
- ▶ Learning and autonomy

Before we develop a positive culture, we'll review some validated culture tools in Chapter 3 to further assess the culture and understand the requirements of successful change in organizations in Chapter 4.

## **RECAP: CHAPTER 2**

Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) is the field researching positivity in organizations, and that offers an approach to managing organizations.

Positive means an orientation toward exceptional, virtuous, and thriving because it has been proven to be effective.

We focus our attention on:

- ▶ what goes well
- ▶ what elevates, energizes, and inspires
- ▶ what is virtuous, good, or the right thing to do
- ▶ what is extraordinary
- ▶ the positive potential of a person or situation or organization

Positive does not mean that you deny what is negative, nor does it mean never giving negative feedback. The positive mindset is not weak or without boundaries.

“Positive” is not reserved for formal leaders, regardless of role or position, you can apply it without needing permission or resources from others.

Positive deviance is going beyond the default baseline to extraordinary and stretching what seemed possible, and surprising yourself.

Thriving is a sense of learning and vitality that can be enhanced by a positive climate and learning and development.

To develop a positive culture, you must learn to see possibility instead of only what is present. This requires both/and thinking and sensing the organization beyond rational facts and figures. This is the positive-organic mindset, aimed at growth and development.

Helping people and organizations become positive will drive productivity and profits. The research evidence is clear.

A positive climate will “broaden and build” your organization because it makes people more creative, resilient, and innovative. High performing teams use five times more positive language than negative. Givers trust and support others by sharing resources, knowledge, and time.

A negative climate with stress creates tunnel vision and makes people vulnerable to judgment errors, jumping to conclusions, getting defensive, closing themselves off, and worse. Disengaged workers have 37% higher absenteeism, 49% more accidents, and 60% more errors

For a positive culture, we need to develop four areas:

- ▶ Positive awareness
- ▶ Connection and collaboration
- ▶ Shared purpose and meaning
- ▶ Learning and autonomy

Positive cultures have a lot of energy, openness to ideas and others, good relationships based on trust and authenticity, participation, support for others, and an eye for positive potential. They cherish learning and development, collaboration, a meaningful shared purpose, and professional autonomy (sometimes even self-management).

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# WRAPPING IT UP

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**I** KNOW, THIS WAS A LOT. It was my intention to bring you up to date about culture and positive organizational leadership. The research evidence of these last years is fascinating and hope giving. We can thrive at work, achieve extraordinary performance and make a meaningful contribution to the world.

I hope you feel that vibe and you're looking forward to get started with your organization. There is so much you can do right away – and you can do it within any old-fashioned hierarchy and, yes, even with your co-workers. A conversation with one is a conversation with all. Culture is copied via (inter)actions. Beware: what you ignore, you tolerate. What you tolerate becomes normal. What is normal gets copied by everyone else. If you focus on the positive with Interaction Interventions – what would happen? If you influence one person, one interaction at a time, you contribute to positive change. When you adopt the positive-organic mental map, you can see how interactions shape the culture. It can be as pragmatic as that, to start developing a more positive culture from anywhere in the organizational network, on a day-to-day basis. You can be a positive agent if you wish.

## POSITIVE AGENT MANIFESTO

I choose positivity, with a focus on possibilities. I look to find the positive potential in a situation or a person and amplify what is already working well.

I develop and apply kindness and compassion, I aim to bring my best self forward.

I am responsible for my actions and interactions. What I do, matters to the world.

I make a difference without needing permission or resources from others.

I empower myself and engage with others to work on positive change.

I aim to be the change I wish to see.

Everyone and everything is connected. Every act contributes to a world where all people can thrive.

You could even take it further and engage your organization in Change Circles to develop a positive, productive culture. The choice is yours – and this book is your toolbox. What feels good to you? What would be best given your organization’s situation? Get together with a few other Positive Agents to prepare and practice what you’d like to change in your organization.

Here’s an overview to help you find what you need in this book:

### DETAILS OF DEVELOPING A POSITIVE, PRODUCTIVE CULTURE

|            | <b>Internal: to observe, reflect and prepare</b>  | <b>External: to practice and do and persist</b>  |
|------------|---|--|
| Individual | What is our culture – in beliefs and behaviors? (Ch.1-2-3)<br>How can we make it positive? (Ch.2, Ch.4)<br>What to change? (Ch.4)<br>What do I believe – positive-organic mindset? (5.1)<br>What’s my purpose, strengths, values, criteria? (5.2)<br>My emotions and energy? (5.2)<br>My fears, vulnerability and Ego? (5.3)<br>Gratitude and compassion? (5.3)<br>My attitude toward others? (5.4-5.5) | Make it safe and transparent (6.3)<br>Enhance dialogue, beware of silence and violence (6.1, 6.3)<br>Meet in Triads (6.1)<br>Use open language (6.1)<br>Use positive communication (6.2)<br>Ask possibility-oriented questions (6.4)<br>Listen, listen, and understand (6.5)<br>Receive and give feedback (6.6)<br>Find other positive agents (7.1-7.2)<br>Gamify the necessary meetings (7.3)<br>Use Liberating Structures (7.4)<br>Do random acts of kindness (7.5)<br>Be a “giver” and support others (7.5)<br>Socialize! (7.5) |
| Collective | What culture tool to use? (Ch.3)<br>How to organize the development process? (Ch.4, Ch.8, Ch.9)<br>How to enhance positive awareness, connection, purpose, learning & autonomy? (10.3)  | Make it safe and transparent (8.2)<br>Give people attention (8.1)<br>Coaching with positive mindset and strengths (8.1)<br>Discover positive deviance (8.1)<br>Help people connect (8.1)<br>Use dialogue methods, liberating structures and exercises to collaborate (8.2)<br>Discover shared purpose and meaning (8.3)<br>Enhance learning exercises (8.4)<br>Let go so people take autonomy (8.4)<br>Consider self-organization (8.4)<br>Organize a Culture Day (9.2)<br>Work with Change Circles (Ch.9, Ch.10)                  |

May this book serve you – and may your organization be positive and productive! If you’d like more support and training, please enroll in my online Positive Culture Academy.

*Marcella Bremer*



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I am inspired by many researchers and authors, fellow consultants, clients and the positive people in my life. I am blessed to live and work in these times of abundance. The work of Kim Cameron and Robert Quinn has become a foundation for my pursuits to develop the workplace and the world, based on culture and positive leadership. I also stand on the shoulders of Jane Dutton, Frederic Laloux, Otto Scharmer, Geert Hofstede, Brené Brown, Henri Lipmanowicz, Keith McCandless and Diana Whitney.

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With gratitude, Marcella Bremer

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**M**ARCELLA BREMER MSCBA is an author, speaker, and culture & change consultant, graduated from Rotterdam School of Management. She helps leaders, consultants, and professionals make a difference at work by positive leadership, change, and a positive culture.

She co-founded OCAI online (that provides Cameron & Quinn's validated Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) online). She works on organizational culture with global clients and teaches about positive leadership, culture, and change. She blogs about culture at <https://www.ocai-online.com/blog>

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She is a founding member of the Institute for Culturally Adaptive Leadership (ICAL), faculty member of the Academy of Culture Ambassadors, contributor at the International Society for Organization Development and Change (ISODC), contributor at Culture University, at the Berlin Change Days, and guest blogger at Lead Change Group.

She published the book "Organizational Culture Change: Unleash your Organization's Potential in Circles of 10" and several Positive Leadership & Change Collections.

She is married with her business partner Marcel Lamers and they have three sons. She lives in the Netherlands but does consulting and workshops wherever she's needed.

She founded the online Positive Culture Academy at <https://www.positive-culture.com>

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Feel free to connect with her on social media!

# THE POSITIVE CULTURE ACADEMY

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**I**F YOU'D LIKE MORE SUPPORT TO APPLY what you've read, you can enroll in the Positive Culture Academy.

In this online Academy, you'll work on developing a positive and productive culture in your organization. This is your personal "How-To-Do-it" with your colleagues, your boss, in your situation.

The curriculum entails more than 20 video lectures, checklists and materials, individual assignments, a private group for discussion and support, live sessions with me, and individual consulting (optional).

I invite you to go to <https://www.positive-culture.com/>

Be (a) present for a positive culture!