

ESTUDIOS

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS TO DEVELOP HEALTHY AND RESILIENT ORGANISATIONS

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DIRECTORS

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Chapter 4

Development of Healthy Work Teams

ARI GÓMEZ-BORGES
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MARISA SALANOVA
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1. INTRODUCTION

In an organisational landscape that is increasingly attentive to the importance of well-being in the workplace, a specific and proactive approach to mental health in work environments is essential. This approach must be taken from a multilevel perspective, as demonstrated throughout the chapters of this book, which address various Positive

Psychological Interventions (PPI) at different levels following the IGLO Model (Individual, Group, Leader and Organisation) (Nielsen *et al.*, 2018).

This chapter focuses on the development of an intervention at the Group level (G) with the aim of developing more productive and healthy work teams, as well as improving group well-being. Specifically, it presents the design and implementation of a novel PPI, known as the Development of Healthy Work Teams, developed by the WANT team at Universitat Jaume I. This intervention's relevance lies in its positive approach and its ability to adapt to different work contexts, recognising the uniqueness of each organisation. By addressing contemporary concerns regarding mental health at work, the present intervention seeks to mitigate stressors by strengthening compassion, non-violent and assertive communication, and fostering a work environment that nurtures individual well-being.

Current research supports the effectiveness of personalised interventions to improve emotional regulation and cultivate a work environment where compassion and self-compassion promote individual and collective resilience (Orellana-Rios *et al.*, 2017; San Román *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, the development of character strengths and the application of non-violent and assertive communication are explored as contributing factors to the construction of cohesive and healthy teams. This chapter provides a comprehensive view of this PPI, highlighting its transformative potential in promoting adaptive, emotionally balanced and highly productive work teams.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present intervention is based on 4 conceptual capsules that interweave and complement each other to optimise healthier and more effective work teams. This intervention's 4 conceptual pillars are: Emotional Regulation, Compassion/Self-Compassion, Character Strengths, and Non-Violent and Assertive Communication.

2.1. EMOTIONAL REGULATION

In cognitive-behavioural psychology, emotional regulation refers to the modulation of the physiological response related to emotion, as well as the implementation of strategies to produce an appropriate response that adapts to the social context (Vargas *et al.*, 2013). From this perspective, emotional self-regulation is considered effective when individuals manage to maintain, modulate or change the intensity or duration of certain affective or physiological states derived from an emotional response (Luna, 2010). Promoting a healthy work environment implies that a more collaborative and harmonious atmosphere can be fostered within the workplace by enabling people to effectively manage their emotions. The ability to regulate emotions not only reduces stress and tension in the workplace but also plays an important role in creating a healthier and more productive atmosphere (Peñalver *et al.*, 2023). A study conducted with 20 private organisations in Spain revealed that individuals who practice emotional regulation techniques such as mindfulness have a better perception of their personal resources and, in turn, higher levels of well-being compared to those who do not engage in mindful awareness practices (Gómez-Borges *et al.*, 2022).

2.2. COMPASSION/SELF-COMPASSION

Compassionate behaviour, focused on alleviating distress and promoting personal development, involves the deployment of skills that generate warmth and provide support in various social contexts, such as the workplace (Gilbert and Choden, 2013). One of the fundamental reasons for including this theme is that compassion fosters collaboration among co-workers and even between strangers (Goetz *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, scientific evidence supports that work environments with a higher number of compassionate behaviours show employees with lower stress levels and greater well-being (San Román-Niaves *et al.*, 2022).

Self-compassion, on the other hand, refers to how individuals relate to themselves in the face of suffering or potential failures. Self-compassion involves a notion of shared humanity, mindfulness and showing kindness to oneself. According to Neff (2003), self-compassion has a component that precedes compassion, which is why compassion and self-compassion are addressed separately in this intervention. They, however, remain intertwined and always connected. Various studies have demonstrated that high levels of self-compassion are positively associated with higher levels of life satisfaction, hope, gratitude and vitality (Gunnell *et al.*, 2017; Zessin *et al.*, 2015).

The key difference between compassion and self-compassion lies in their direction. While compassion is oriented outward, placing emphasis on humanity's shared experience, self-compassion is inward-focused, instead promoting self-acceptance and self-soothing. Self-compassion, as indicated by Dev *et al.* (2018) and Llorens (2022), helps overcome barriers to compassion by facilitating empathetic connection. Recognising one's own suffering as part of the universal human condition lays the groundwork for genuine concern for the well-being of others. This process helps to overcome the fear of rejection and emotional exhaustion - common obstacles that can inhibit the expression of compassion.

The literature shows that cultivating self-compassion in the workplace has several proven benefits. Studies such as Hashem and Zeinoun (2020) have indicated that it can contribute to reducing stress and burnout. Furthermore, research by Sasaki *et al.* (2020) suggests that it strengthens psychological well-being and work performance, as well as resilience (Delaney, 2018) and job satisfaction (Abaci & Arda, 2013). The systematic review conducted by Kotera and Gordon (2021) highlights the potential of self-compassion interventions at work to improve such aspects as stress management, burnout and resilience.

2.3. CHARACTER STRENGTHS

Martin Seligman (1999) concisely defines Positive Psychology as the study of the optimal functioning of individuals and organisations. One

of its main foundations is the extensive research on character strengths, led by Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman. To establish a common language, it is essential to understand that the virtues and strengths addressed in the PPI result from the arduous efforts supported by the VIA (Values In Action) Institute, in collaboration with a team of 55 renowned scientists over several years. This team conducted an exhaustive historical review and analysis of the most prominent schools of thought over the past 2,500 years, covering such areas as character philosophy, virtue ethics, moral education, psychology and theology (Seligman and Peterson, 2009). The research resulted in a classification of 6 virtues that are universally possessed by humans, regardless of religion, culture, nation or belief system: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence. Subsequently, 24 Character Strengths emerged, representing the developmental pathways to each of the 6 virtues. Finally, Peterson and Seligman (2004) define character strengths as the basic capacities or strengths of character to think, feel and behave, which are perceived as authentic and energising and lead us to optimal functioning and performance.

Linley *et al.* (2010) suggest that people with greater knowledge of their own strengths tend to present higher levels of self-confidence, self-esteem, energy and vitality, experience less stress and, in turn, greater work engagement. Furthermore, once a process of self-exploration of individual strengths and their application in specific situations is initiated, these can become valuable tools to enhance efficacy beliefs, resilience and the quality of the work team environment. Collective knowledge of strengths among team members fosters a fluid dynamic and greater satisfaction when facing daily work challenges.

The systematic review conducted by Yan *et al.* (2020) has shown positive evidence in the use of character strengths in Positive Psychological Interventions for people with chronic illnesses. These results are not only promising for patients' mental health but also pave the way for applying similar strategies in the organisational world. The evidence supports the idea that the Development of Healthy

Work Teams based on the Character Strengths approach can promote well-being and cohesion in work environments, providing benefits at both Individual and Group levels. The strengths-based approach is also gaining relevance in the organisational field. In a previous study with a heterogeneous sample of employees, Bakker and van Woerkom (2021) found that the weekly use of strengths led to greater work engagement. This increase can lead employees to feel greater emotional and mental involvement in their work tasks, resulting in increased motivation, dedication and enthusiasm for their roles. This state of high energy and commitment not only improves productivity and efficiency but also fosters a more positive and dynamic work environment, which highlights the importance of developing character strengths in organisational interventions.

2.4. NON-VIOLENT AND ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION

In teamwork, communication is considered a key competence and provides a fundamental competitive advantage in the business context (Rosseau *et al.*, 2006). Effective teamwork requires the collaboration and co-operation of various actors within the organisation, encouraging participation and communication to create greater fluidity in the distribution and attainment of objectives. To achieve this, communication plays a fundamental role (Park *et al.*, 2005) and, for this reason, occupies one of this intervention's foundational pillars.

This intervention's chosen approach is based on the Non-Violent Communication (NVC) model proposed by Rosenberg (2019). This model helps us connect with others and with ourselves, allowing natural compassion to emerge. NVC is oriented towards restructuring the way in which we express ourselves and listen to others, becoming aware of what we observe, feel, need and request from them.

Expanding training in tools to improve communication within work teams, the Assertive Communication model is also considered. This model focuses on developing the expression of thoughts, needs,

feelings and opinions in a respectful, yet clear and direct manner (Pipas & Jaradat, 2010).

Both models (NVC and Assertive Communication) are interrelated and complement each other in the pursuit of a healthier, more effective, dynamic and compassionate work environment. Furthermore, the tools developed through these models have self-awareness, perception and regulation of emotions, empathy and compassion at their core, thus creating a coherent and effective connecting thread.

2.5. IGLO GROUP INTERVENTION

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the IGLO model (Day & Nielsen, 2017; Nielsen *et al.*, 2018) was developed to address the need to classify and develop organisational resources through interventions at different levels of the organisation. Specifically, the IGLO model proposes 4 levels of analysis (i.e., Individual, Group, Leader and Organisation) from which to study organisational reality and intervene in it. The intervention adopts this multilevel perspective to achieve the goal of generating healthier and more effective work teams, focusing on the Group level (G). However, initially, this group objective is fostered through the development of tools at the Individual level (e.g., Emotional Regulation), aimed at achieving group objectives. In the long term, it is expected that these new forms of relationship will consolidate into informal social norms within the group itself, encouraging interactions that are characterised by both compassion and assertiveness. Thus, the intervention seeks to improve Individual-level interactions and establish healthy relationship patterns to sustain long-term results within work teams.

3. PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

3.1. OBJECTIVE AND DESIGN

This intervention shares some of the psychological constructs that underpin it with the Positive Social Interaction PPI (see Chapter

3). Although it shares content with Positive Social Interaction, the purpose of the intervention makes it specifically aimed at addressing an organisation's certain previously identified needs through the diagnosis of psychosocial factors using the HERO methodology (Salanova *et al.*, 2012), which are specific at the work group level.

The intervention's general objective is to promote positive social interactions among work teams to improve coordination within and between teams, with the goal of preventing and optimising psychosocial well-being. This protocol is currently in the pilot and effectiveness in the workplace validation stage, and this chapter provides initial data on its effectiveness.

The intervention helps participants recognise and regulate their emotions more effectively and adaptively, as well as become aware of the impact of regulation -or the lack thereof- on work teams. Once new emotional regulation tools are incorporated, the next step is to understand the role and impact of compassion and self-compassion both personally and in developing more effective and healthier work teams. After developing intrapersonal skills in emotional regulation, self-compassion and compassion, we move to a Group level of impact and develop the use of tools with direct impact on the work team, such as character strengths (both individual and group), and the use and application of Non-Violent Communication (NVC) in the work team environment. As can be seen, this intervention is designed to first have an individual impact and development in each participant (emotional regulation and self-compassion) but with a group focus. Although the first 2 workshops are aimed at individual development, this is associated with the importance of and relationship with group functioning. Once the intrapersonal part of self-compassion is learned, we move to compassion for others and, in our case, towards work team members. Finally, the Character Strengths and Non-Violent Communication workshops have a practical application dynamic focused on the group.

This programme is aimed at a natural work team, meaning people who belong to the same organisation and department/area of work

since the objectives proposed and the topics reflected on in the various workshops that comprise the PPI are focused on the functioning of a particular group. The intervention is carried out in 3 120-minute sessions. The sessions are interspersed, one week on and one week off, and the total programme lasts approximately 1 month, allowing time to apply the tools acquired in the group sessions. Participants include an experimental group (EG) of no more than 25 people and an inactive control group (CG) of at least 20 people.

Finally, this programme has 2 application versions, the first being a face-to-face version and the second being an online version (synchronous and asynchronous) - both supported by a platform where we find training videos and practical tasks for each of the 4 workshops.

3.2. PRE- AND POST-INTERVENTION EVALUATION

First, a needs analysis is conducted throughout the organisation using the HEROCheck questionnaire (HERO methodology; Salanova *et al.*, 2012 and 2019). This questionnaire covers the distal measures to be evaluated. Once the organisation's needs are identified, the interventions to be carried out are chosen.

If the workshop is selected for implementation in this organisation's work teams, the following evaluation procedure will be followed: before starting the intervention itself, a questionnaire of proximal measures (pre-intervention) is completed. This evaluation is repeated at the end of the intervention (post-intervention) and, finally, the same questionnaire is administered 3 months after the PPI is completed (follow-up), supplemented with questions to evaluate satisfaction and the transfer of what has been learned, both personally and professionally. The proximal evaluation questionnaire includes work-related measures:

Teamwork: Measured with a 3-item scale validated by Salanova *et al.* (2005, 2012). Using a Likert scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*always*), this scale evaluates the extent to which the team has clear goals,

accepts new ideas and possesses an adequate level of knowledge (e.g., 'My team has clear work goals.')

Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$.

Emotional Regulation: Measured with the Spanish validation of 10 items (Cabello *et al.*, 2013) from the original English version (Gross and John, 2003) and using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Respondents are asked about how they control their emotions (e.g., 'When I want to increase my positive emotions, I change the way I think about the situation.')

Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$.

Compassion: Measured with the short adaptation of the Compassion scale of 5 items (Amutio *et al.*, 2016) from the original version (Pommier *et al.*, 2020) and using a 7-point frequency scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). Respondents are asked about how compassionate they are towards others (e.g., 'If I see someone struggling, I try to help.')

Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$.

Self-Compassion: Measured with the 3-item Self-Compassion scale validated by Breines and Chen (2012) and using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Respondents are asked to reflect on their work experiences from the past month and indicate how self-compassionate they were (e.g., 'I now seek to have a balanced attitude towards my work experiences.')

Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$.

Knowledge and Use of Strengths: Measured using the Spanish validation of 14 items (Peláez-Zuberbuhler *et al.*, 2023) from the original English version (Govindji & Linley, 2007). Using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), respondents are asked to provide information about their use of personal strengths, referring to things they can do well or better (e.g., 'I am usually able to regularly do what I do best.')

Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$.

In-Role and Extra-Role Performance: Evaluated using a 6-item scale included in the Healthy and Resilient Organisations

questionnaire (HERO) (Salanova *et al.*, 2012), adapted from the Goodman and Svyantek (1999) scale. In-role performance (3 items) refers to activities related to formal work (e.g., 'I perform all tasks and duties required by the job,') and extra-role performance (3 items) describes actions that go beyond what is expected of the employee, such as helping others or voluntarily working overtime (e.g., 'I help when someone in the group is overloaded with work.'). Participants are asked to individually report on each statement using a Likert scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree/never*) to 6 (*strongly agree/always*). Cronbach's alpha = .83 and .74, respectively.

Assertive Communication: 4 questions were developed based on Pipas and Jaradat (2010). Using a 5-point frequency scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*), respondents are asked about how assertively they communicate (e.g., 'When I find something to be unfair, I express my opinion on the matter.'). Cronbach's alpha = .57 (This index value does not exceed the acceptable threshold. This scale is, therefore, undergoing redevelopment.)

Non-Violent Communication: 4 questions were developed based on Rosenberg (2002). Using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), respondents are asked about how they communicate in problematic situations at work (e.g., 'I verbally express how the situation has made me feel.'). Cronbach's alpha = .84.

Satisfaction: A self-constructed scale by the WANT Team, measured through 6 questions about satisfaction levels with the intervention, including 4 Likert-type questions ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*) and 2 open-ended questions where respondents write what they liked and what they would improve about the intervention (e.g., 'Level of satisfaction with the intervention.'). Cronbach's alpha = .90.

Transfer: A self-constructed scale by the WANT Team, measured through 2 questions about whether respondents believe they

can apply what they learned in the intervention to their work and daily lives. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very little*) to 5 (*a lot*) is used (e.g., 'I can apply what I have learned in this intervention to my work.')

3.3. PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

It is worth noting that this programme has a 100% online version (synchronous and asynchronous: online group meetings plus training and practice on an interactive online platform) and a face-to-face version (face-to-face group meetings plus training and practice on an interactive platform). Both versions contain the same working methodology, workshops and exercises, so the following description applies to both versions.

The course is delivered in a blended format, combining the use of an interactive digital platform, called Virtual Campus, with either face-to-face or online group meetings. Participants progress independently, accessing a variety of educational resources, including videos, exercises and informative graphic representations. The inaugural session serves as an introduction to the programme and is synchronous. Over the following weeks, participants advance independently through the Virtual Campus, complementing their self-directed learning with 2 synchronous meetings led by facilitators. The purpose of these meetings is to address questions and conduct practical exercises to anchor the theoretical content learned on the Virtual Campus to real-life group situations in the workplace. To enrich the learning experience and promote positive personal development, the programme integrates meditation practices, applied activities, audio-visual material and explanatory graphic representations. We recommend that this intervention be conducted in natural work groups, considering the results of the initial distal diagnostic evaluation. This way, the practical exercises conducted during the synchronous meetings can be based on real day-to-day team situations, thus maximising the applicability of the tools learned by the participants.

The development of the below sessions and their activities are based on a pilot test carried out by the WANT Team in its online version.

3.3.1. Synchronous Session I: Welcome Session

This programme includes 3 synchronous meetings with the facilitators, each lasting approximately 2 hours (totalling 6 hours). The first welcome session (2 hours) aims to present the intervention programme and its features, conduct the pre-evaluation (proximal evaluation, PR1) of the variables to be intervened, assess expectations, register participants on the online platform where all the videos and tasks are located and complete the programme's introductory workshop. Once the facilitator introduces themselves, basic norms are established (confidentiality, commitment to learning, participation). The facilitators should explain the importance of conducting the pre-evaluation, post-evaluation and follow-up with scientific rigour. After this explanation, the pre-intervention proximal evaluation is conducted. Next, participants should be provided guidance to ensure that they are familiar with the functioning and pedagogical style of this intervention. This is done by asking participants if they are already registered in the Virtual Classroom and enrolled in the intervention. In the Virtual Classroom, participants will find the introductory workshop to the intervention programme, including a welcome video, an explanation of the programme objective and a brief description of its 4 workshops: Emotional Regulation, Compassion and Self-Compassion, Character Strengths and Non-Violent Communication.

The facilitators will present a detailed schedule of the dedication required to complete the programme in the following weeks. Emphasis is placed on the importance of training and learning the proposed content in the 4 workshops, as well as anchoring the new knowledge through the practice of the different techniques proposed on the platform. Additionally, the fact that synchronous meetings 2 and 3

will be focused on practicing what has been learned on the platform at the Group level will be emphasised. Therefore, before meeting 2, participants should complete workshops I and II on the online platform, and before meeting 3, they should complete workshops III and IV. This point is essential to the proper development of the intervention.

3.3.2. Weeks 1-2

During weeks 1 and 2 of the intervention, participants independently complete the training and practical activities available on the online platform. The workshops have a similar structural distribution of training and activities - each workshop including an explanatory video on the topic, a series of proposed activities and techniques to anchor the imparted knowledge and an infographic summarising the workshop and the main techniques learned, all of which can be downloaded. Each workshop is designed for an approximate weekly dedication of 2 hours. To progress in the training, all tasks from the previous workshop must be completed before advancing. For example, to start workshop II, participants must complete the training and activities of workshop I.

Workshop I: Emotional Regulation

This workshop focuses on training and practicing emotional regulation and its impact on both individual and group well-being. The online platform provides a training capsule on emotional regulation, the areas of the brain that affect emotions and various strategies for regulation. Practical exercises are provided to help participants learn to better regulate emotional reactions (e.g., the STOPP technique, meditations on feelings and emotions). Work record sheets are also available for participants to note their progress and feelings after each exercise. It is important to highlight that these sheets are for personal use by each participant.

Workshop II: Compassion and Self-Compassion

Workshop II focuses on the training and practice of compassion and self-compassion, their impact on personal life and how to apply them in the workplace. The online platform includes a training capsule presenting the theoretical definition of compassion and different perspectives on compassion (compassion, self-compassion and compassion in the workplace). Various strategies to develop compassion, meditations to cultivate compassion and self-compassion, and methods to foster compassion in the workplace are then provided, viewing it as a cornerstone in the development of healthy teams. Finally, participants can find a summary of the workshop in an infographic, as well as a voluntary self-directed work record sheet to write down their feelings, reflections and learned knowledge as they practice the different activities and tools provided.

3.3.3. Synchronous Session II: First Follow-Up Session

In the third week of training, the second session with the group is conducted. This is the first follow-up session and will last 2 hours. Its main objectives are to carry out practical activities with and among the group based on what was learned in workshops I and II, to dispel doubts about the training capsules and exercises shared on the online platform and to share experiences and new knowledge with the participants up to that point.

The session will begin with a welcome from the facilitators and a brief exercise with a dual purpose: to break the ice and encourage participation, and to promote self-awareness of one's own emotions and their benefits for emotional regulation. Each participant will take a minute to identify the emotion they are feeling now through different emoticons and colours shown in the presentation.

Next, a mindfulness exercise guided by the facilitators will be conducted (Arch *et al.*, 2006; Coo *et al.*, 2020). The benefits of this type

ESTUDIOS

Reference book for researchers and professionals interested in implementing Positive Psychological Interventions (PPIs) aimed at developing individuals, groups, leaders, and ultimately, Healthy and Resilient Organizations. From a scientific and up-to-date perspective, the book presents protocols for six PPIs based on the HERO Model (HEalthy & Resilient Organization) and the IGLO Model, which proposes multilevel interventions focused on the Individual, Group, Leader, and Organization. Specifically, the book presents PPI protocols in the areas of Healthy Emotionality, Improving Positive Social Interaction, Developing Healthy Work Teams, Strengths-Based Team Coaching, and Positive Leadership or Leader as a Coach. Additionally, it includes a protocol aimed at achieving sustainability of intervention effects, focusing primarily on the power of 'refreshment' actions as a mechanism to maintain the positive impact achieved through PPIs. Each chapter justifies the use and relevance of each PPI, a specific implementation protocol, and a real case study illustrating an example of intervention implementation and its impact. Reading this book will facilitate the application of PPIs from a Positive Psychology perspective in organizations, using a scientifically applied approach that considers different organizational levels to ensure the effectiveness of PPIs, ultimately enhancing workplace well-being and fostering the development of Healthy Organizations.

The price of this book includes the publication in Double format at no additional cost (paper + e-book).

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