Positivity in organizations accentuates that which is flourishing and life-giving in order to discover and promote the best of the human condition, exemplified in the recent focus on positive practices, behaviors that are caring, supporting, forgiving, inspiring, meaningful, and respectful (Cameron, Mora, Leutscher, & Calarco, 2011). Such practices have been found to predict organizational performance by enhancing positive affect in employees. The research question for the project concerned how these positive employee practices affect work engagement and task performance, including the moderating effect of social climate. A quantitative study of positivity in a team-based food service organization in southern California (N = 144) elucidated direct relationships between positive practices, social climate, work engagement, and task performance, but no moderating effect of social climate, with all relationships statistically significant. Finer delineation of positive practices demonstrated the importance of team members discovering meaning in their work through mutual interaction that promotes employee trust, respect, and confidence, with employees believing the best in each other and inspiring each other in their performance. The findings suggest that in an intensive service climate, positivity can foster team member engagement and performance through actions that promote greater meaningfulness in work and that demonstrate appreciation and affirmation.

The nature of today’s competitive organizational environments requires the workplace to expand beyond a mentality of survival to envision new pathways toward better-than-average performance (Luthans & Youssef, 2007). In order to pursue optimal performance, organizations are shifting their focus from a fixation on weaknesses to facilitating conditions that promote human flourishing (Cameron, 2010). Traditional approaches to organizational change and development have focused on identifying problems and deficiencies, a form of “deficit thinking” (Whitney, 1998, p. 315) that follows the logic of disease (Cunha, Cunha, & Rego, 2009; Weisbord, 1976). However, a
more positive focus has arisen that looks for what is flourishing and life-giving in order to discover and promote the best of the human condition (Cameron & Caza, 2004). Positivity in organizations is rooted in positive psychology’s shift away from what is wrong with people to what is right, good, and makes life worth living (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2002). It focuses on strengths, capabilities, and possibilities, rather than problems, deficits, and weakness (Cameron, 2008), and attention is given to what is improving and has potential, thus “building on what is working [rather] than obsess[ing] about what is not working” (Schein, 2000, p. xxix). Spreitzer and Cameron (2012) highlighted positivity in organizations:

Positive businesses achieve [high performance and profitability] by bringing out the best in their people to help them grow, and by leveraging their unique strengths and talents … design[ing] work to empower people and make work meaningful (p. 87).

Capturing many of these aspects of positivity is the recent focus on positive practices, behaviors that are caring, supporting, forgiving, inspiring, meaningful, and respectful (Cameron, Mora, Leutscher, & Calarco, 2011). Such practices have been found to predict organizational performance by enhancing positive affect in employees and inspiring positive worker attitudes. Positivity can lead to a positive work environment (PWE), a type of social climate that contributes to employee well-being (Hartel & Ashkanasy, 2011).

Empirical research studies have confirmed that organizations are “doing well” because they are “doing good” (Spreitzer & Cameron, 2012); when employees bring out the best in each other, the results include positive outcomes for both employees (who are vitalized to grow, develop, and perform better) and the organization (outcomes that are characterized by profitability, innovation, and sustainability) (Chen, 2014; Meyer, 2015; Ozcelik, Langton, & Aldrich, 2008). A valuable outcome drawn from positive psychology that evidences significant work effort on the part of employees is work engagement, a consistent psychological state that leads to better employee performance (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Travis, 2008).

Cameron et al. (2011) noted that positive practices capture the fullest breadth of positivity, namely “behaviors, techniques, routines” (p. 269) that reflect exceptional and virtuous attitudes and actions, thus designing a positive practices scale with six dimensions:

- Respect: people trust and have confidence in one another, treating each other with integrity, dignity, and gratitude.
- Care: people show interest in and respond to one another, genuinely caring for each other as friends.
• Support: people honor and support one another in their endeavors, building strong relationships through kindness and helping those who are struggling.
• Inspiration: people share enthusiasm and inspire one another by acknowledging the good they see in each other.
• Meaning: people are motivated, renewed, and elevated by their work as they see the larger purpose in work and discover its profound meaning.
• Forgiveness: people do not place blame on one another for errors, but forgive each other’s mistakes.

Indicating a “dearth of research” on positive practices and their effects, Cameron et al. (2011, p. 267) called for additional research on positivity, including potential moderating and mediating mechanisms in positivity’s effect on employee and organizational outcomes. In response, the current study concerns how positive practices are related to a positive work environment (PWE), a type of social and emotional climate that contributes to employee well-being and flourishing, and to desirable employee outcomes, namely work engagement and task performance. The research question for this study is: Which positive practices have the greatest effect on employee engagement and performance, and does a PWE moderate these relationships?

Literature Review

The potential of positivity has been recognized since the time of ancient Greek mythology (the Pygmalion effect) (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011). Positivity is rooted in Aristotle’s concept of eudaimonia—that inclination exists in all human systems toward flourishing and the achievement of the highest aspirations, extolling the value of excellence and goodness for its own sake (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Cameron, 2011). Positivity does not neglect or exclude negative conditions or events in organizations such as problems, difficulties, or hardships; indeed, organizations can experience vitality and flourish amidst setbacks and challenging demands (Cameron & Caza, 2004). Positivity and negativity are not simply opposite ends of the same spectrum with one cancelling the other (Youssef & Luthans, 2012). Rather, positivity is paradoxical in that it focuses on strengths, capabilities, and possibilities, while also incorporating negative events and looking for the value present in problems, obstacles, and challenges (Cameron, 2008). Positive organizational scholarship (POS) has emerged as “the study of especially positive outcomes, processes, and attributes of organizations and their members” (Cameron et al., 2003, p. 4), and there is now an accumulating body of POS research (Caza & Caza, 2008) with research and theory development in positivity rapidly expanding (Avey, Avolio, & Luthans, 2011).

According to Cameron and associates (Cameron, 2008, 2011; Cameron et al. 2011; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Spreitzer & Cameron, 2012), positivity in organizational studies has come to reflect four related meanings. First, positivity concerns exceptional performance and extraordinarily positive outcomes. These include spectacular and
surprising results that exceed expectations or business as usual and reflect positive deviance, defined by Spreitzer and Sonenschein (2004, p. 841) as “intentional behaviors that significantly depart from the norms of a referent group in honorable ways.” Second, positivity takes an affirmative bias. It focuses on strengths and abundance, rather than weaknesses and deficit. Positivity endeavors to unlock, broaden, and amplify the positive emotions of employees (Fredrickson, 2001) so that a heliocentric or life-giving effect occurs toward positive energy and climate. This includes affirmative and strength-building approaches, such as appreciative inquiry (AI), that focus on positive organizational aspects, signature strengths, and potential opportunities (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). Third, positivity focuses on virtuousness, well-being, or the best of the human condition. It examines excellence and goodness for its own sake. Well-being concerns “optimal psychological functioning and experience” (Ryan & Deci, 2011, p. 142) and promotes a virtuous lifestyle that makes life worth living and promotes human flourishing (Ryff & Singer, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Culbertson, Fullagar, & Mills, 2010; Lambert, Passmore, & Holder, 2015). Virtuous is what “individuals and organizations aspire to be when they are at their very best” (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003, p. 2). Fourth, positivity concerns adopting an alternative perspective. It reinterprets challenges and obstacles as opportunities for strength-building, rather than problem and tragedy, and focuses on generative processes of learning, adaptation, and the discovery of positive outcomes (James & Wooten, 2012). These outgrowths of positive psychology, as applied in organizations, have been investigated in two interrelated fields: positive organizational behavior (POB) and positive organizational scholarship (POS).

POB concerns “the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities” (Luthans, 2002a, p. 39) and has been subjected to an expansive amount of research focused primarily on its “major” (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011, p. 128) or “core construct” (Avey et al., 2011) termed psychological capital, or PsyCap, which consists of the four positive psychological resources of hope, optimism, efficacy, and resilience. Over the past decade, numerous studies have investigated the relationship between PsyCap and various employee attitudinal, action-based, and achievement-oriented outcomes, with now more than sixty published papers on PsyCap (Newman, Ucbasaran, Zhu, & Hirst, 2014). Hackman (2009) noted the impressive “passion and productivity” accompanying POB research (p. 309). However, the criteria for the components of PsyCap such as being related to POB and being both state-like and developmental (Luthans, 2002a, 2002b, Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007) limits positivity to the framework of PsyCap’s core construct; a “positive appraisal of circumstances and probability for success based on motivated effort and perseverance” (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007, p. 550). The components of PsyCap reflect “motivational propensities,” that are cognitive in nature and reflect psychological resources that have accrued through investment and experiential outcomes (Luthans et al., 2007, p. 542).
In contrast to POB, POS is a broader concept, is more organization level, addresses more stable traits than states (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003), comprises a wider range of positivity (Luthans & Youssef, 2007; Kelloway, 2011), and is more about processes and practices than psychological states (Wright & Quick, 2009a). (However, Wright and Quick [2009b] questioned the state/trait distinction between POB/POS as being methodologically unclear.) POS focuses on positivity within numerous positive attributes (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012) addressing both positive capabilities and activities that contribute to flourishing organizations. Key in POS is establishing a linkage between positive behaviors and how they generate both individual and organizational positive outcomes (Cameron et al., 2011).

Positive Practices

As noted, positive practices concern behaviors and techniques that are affirming and virtuous (Cameron et al., 2011). Key is how their enactment in work relationships produces positive emotions, which can affect others through social contagion processes (Barsade, 2002), such as how positive mood states enhance a reciprocal effect of helping behaviors, while also increasing self-efficacy and task performance (Tsai, Chen, & Liu, 2007). Exposure to positive practices engenders positive emotions, which leads to elevated performance (Cameron et al., 2011). It has been demonstrated in work teams that positivity not only enhances performance, but others’ positivity can neutralize an individual’s low positivity, uplifting his or her positivity and performance (Livi, Alessandri, Caprara, & Pierro, 2015). Baker, Cross, and associates (2003, 2004) identified those who uplift and boost others as “positive energizers” who enact positive energy as a behavioral mechanism, with research indicating that high performance organizations have three times as many positive energizers as average organizations do, concluding that positive energy is a behavioral mechanism (as cited in Caza & Cameron, 2009, p. 108).

Cameron et al. (2011) suggested that mechanisms for the effect of positive practices on organizational effectiveness involve amplification (enhancing positive emotions and enabling effective social connections), buffering (shielding and reducing negative effects of stress, trauma, and illness), and heliotropism (fostering positive energy and life-giving effects that elevate performance). According to Bright, Cameron, and Caza (2006), virtues represent that which is good, human, and produces social betterment, meaning that virtuousness transcends instrumental reciprocity in relationships and focuses on the right thing to do in respect to the other without intent of return (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Observing and experiencing virtuousness creates “upward spirals” (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002, p. 172) of positivity as, for example, how enjoyment, cooperation, and commitment in work teams engenders “charged behavior” (Sethi & Nicholson, 2001, p. 155).
Positive Practices in the Workplace

Key in self-determination processes (Ryan & Deci, 2000) is how positive work relationships energize intention, action, and direction, shaping how people think, feel, and act (Kahn, 2007; Colbert, Bono, & Purvanova, 2016). Thus, Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, and Grant (2005) posited that thriving at work is socially embedded, meaning that experiences of vitality, energy, feeling valued, and being productive, involves dynamic connections with others. Miller and Stiver’s (1997) relational view of self-development suggests that zest comes from relational connection to others. Energy is an important organizational resource that increases employees’ capacity for action, enabling them to do their work more effectively (Spreitzer, Quinn, & Lam, 2012). Zest at work contributes to experiences of engagement in work, and is contagious, being related to group morale (Peterson, Park, Hall, & Seligman, 2009). The clear suggestion is that positive practices can create a charged atmosphere of positive affect that produces energy, zest, and a vitality in social work relationships and interaction, leading to better performance.

Positive Work Environment (PWE)

Wilderom (2011) suggested that if all persons who comprise the culture and climate of an organization are treated as positively as possible a contagion effect of better contribution is likely to happen. Hartel and Ashkanasy (2011) identified a climate for well-being—one where procedures and practices promote employees “feeling good and worthwhile in the workplace” (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2011, p. 30)—as a positive work environment (PWE). These PWEs are characterized by elevating interactions, social inclusion, and uplifting emotions.

Elevating interactions. A PWE is characterized by the enacted values of openness, friendship, collaboration, encouragement, personal freedom, and trust that enhances positive affect and well-being. A climate characterized by such positive social values has been found to engender work involvement (Glisson et al., 2008), positive worker attitudes (Aarons & Sawitzky, 2006), and positive affect (Schulte, Ostroff, Shmulyian, & Kinicki, 2009). Key in studies of positive climate is how performance can be mediated or moderated by employee positive affect and well-being (Patterson, Warr, & West, 2004; Dawson, Gonzalez-Roma, Davis, & West, 2008), where the affective tone of a group can establish a global team climate through members’ social interactions (West & Richter, 2011). Carr, Schmidt, Ford, and DeShon (2003) found that the effect of positive climate on workers’ sense of well-being and performance in the workplace was more affective (sense of warmth and fellowship) than cognitive (perception of autonomy and growth) or instrumental (structure of tasks and work processes). Thus, relational support is key in positive organizational climates (Shadur, Kienzle, & Rodwell, 1999).

Social inclusion. A PWE emphasizes beliefs and behaviors that promote respect, trust, dignity, and social inclusion. Ferris et al. (2009) identified work relationships as patterns of exchanges geared toward accomplishing objectives or goals, which involve mutuality
between employees that is both attitudinal and behavioral; reflecting qualities such as respect, trust, attention, and liking. High quality employee-employee relations are marked by vitality and positivity and based on mutual respect for the dignity of the other and the centrality of trust (Dutton & Ragins, 2007). A clear way to energize the workplace and increase involvement is through these high-quality interpersonal relationships (Dutton, 2003; Atwater & Carmeli, 2009).

**Uplifting emotions.** A PWE is a positive emotional climate that broadens and builds employees’ potential to perceive, think, and act. Fredrickson and associates’ (2001, 2002, 2005) broaden-and-build theory suggests that experiences of positive emotions such as interest, excitement, enthusiasm, and attentiveness (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) broaden people’s thought-action repertoires (e.g., fight or flight responses) and thus build their mental, emotional, social, and physical resources. Broadening effects include social inclusion (Isen & Daubman, 1984), enhanced attention to others and sense of oneness (Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006), and increased trust (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). Positive emotions have also been linked to enhanced sociability and improved social interactions (Burger & Caldwell, 2000; Cunningham, 1988) and friendships (Berry, Willingham, & Thayer, 2000).

Thus, the cultivation of a PWE or positive social climate seems consistent with the social and emotional contagion processes that accompany Cameron et al.’s (2011) relationally-rich positive practices, with positive emotions underlying the interactions between members that promote flourishing at work. Thus, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

**H1:** There will be a positive relationship between positive practices and social climate.

**Work Engagement**

Work engagement has been related to positive psychology’s emphasis on workplace well-being, recognized as a positive and fulfilling work-related state of mind that involves an energetic and effective connection with work activities (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). It reflects the degree to which employees apply themselves to their work roles, suggesting their psychological presence in a role, or being “fully there” (Kahn, 1992, p. 321). Engaged employees exert significant effort toward their work but not out of compulsion, a workaholic condition, or Type-A behavior (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008). Schaufeli, Bakker et al. (2008) indicated that antecedents to employee engagement include positive self-esteem, optimism, or a positive belief that good outcomes will be experienced, as well as being self-efficacious and believing that participation at work will satisfy need. In addition, engaged workers perform better because they experience positive emotions, including happiness, joy, and enthusiasm, have better psychological health, and transfer their engagement to others (Bakker et al.,
Engagement is “shared by employees in the workplace,” involving “positive psychological contagion processes” (morale, cohesion, rapport) (Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005, p. 1218). Work engagement has three interrelated dimensions (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2006; Salanova et al., 2005):

- **Vigor**, which is characterized by high energy, mental resilience, and a willingness to invest extra effort and persistence in one’s work.
- **Dedication**, which refers to being strongly involved in one’s work, with a sense of purpose, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge.
- **Adsorption**, which indicates concentration, happiness with work, and being deeply and fully engrossed in work, where time passes quickly and detachment from work is difficult.

Work engagement is an important attitudinal employee outcome, for it indicates the quality of participation in work role activities (Rothbard, 2001). It suggests both the degree of investment of personal energies into role behaviors (self-employment), as well as the display of the self at work (self-expression), and therefore reflects a holistic investment of the self in one’s work role. The value of work engagement in relation to positivity is suggested by its causal effect on other exceptional performance outcomes, such as increased task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010), overall performance (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008), and business-unit performance (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Notably, work engagement also predicts and enhances service climate in restaurant teams, for engagement produces “common perceptions about the quality of the service” (i.e., service climate), leading to “favorable employee performance” (Salanova et al., 2005, p. 1218).

H2: There will be a positive relationship between positive practices and work engagement.

**Task Performance**

Kahn (1990) demonstrated that work engagement, emotional connection to other organizational members, and task performance are all interrelated, where functionality in relationships is dependent upon members feeling emotionally bound to each other, “experiences of feeling themselves joined, seen and felt, known, and not alone” in the context of work (Kahn, 1998, p. 41, as cited in Ozcelik et al., 2008, p. 188). According to Spreitzer et al. (2005) individuals are more likely to thrive when they focus on their tasks at hand, due to adsorption with work and accompanying energy; engagement and performance go hand in hand. Positive functioning and performance have been related to Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) concept of flow, which concerns employee’s feelings of complete involvement in a task, such that all is forgotten but the task itself (Culbertson et al., 2010). Task performance in teams, as indicated by the quantity of team member
output and whether team goals are reached, is also dependent upon the quality of the team members’ group experience (Aube & Rousseau, 2005), the latter denoting group well-being or “the extent to which the social climate within the work team is positive,” reflecting a “we are in it together” attitude within a team, where pursuit of goals and desired performance encourage the maintenance of positive relationships within the team (Aube & Rousseau, 2005, p. 191). Positive affective tone in groups is amplified through rich and supportive team member interactions, which enhance team effectiveness (West & Richter, 2011).

H3: There will be a positive relationship between positive practices and task performance.

Further, it proposed that a positive social climate, being integral to how positive, uplifting interactions elevate employee emotions and mutually charge work behavior, will moderate the relationship between positive practices and employee outcomes:

H4: Social climate will moderate the relationship between positive practices and work engagement.

H5: Social climate will moderate the relationship between positive practices and task performance.

These relationships are depicted in Figure 1.

![Diagram](image-url)

*Fig. 1.* Diagram depicting the relationship between positive practices (respect, care, support, meaning, inspiration, forgiveness) and the positive outcomes of work engagement and task performance, as mediated by a positive work environment (PWE, or social climate).
Method

The project focused on a rapidly expanding gourmet sandwich and salad restaurant chain in southern California named Urbane Café, currently with twelve locations (Ventura, Oxnard, Camarillo, Thousand Oaks, Agoura Hills, Simi Valley, San Luis Obispo, Northridge, Valencia, Mira Mesa, San Diego, and Temecula). Investigating positivity at Urbane Café is strategic, for it promotes a service climate characterized by “fast, friendly service and a warm, inviting environment” that “cares for [its] employees” (“About Urbane”). Having dined at Urbane Café since its flagship store opened in Ventura in 2003, I have perceived the café’s positive, energetic, friendly, and efficient atmosphere. Researched focused on the nature of positivity in relation to social and service climates in restaurants and the interaction of their team members is valuable for understanding how climate energizes work teams and promotes customer service and satisfaction (Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998; Salanova et al., 2005). The results could be generalizable to other types of service climate organizations.

Sampling and Procedures

The research involved a nonexperimental, cross-sectional study using a voluntary survey questionnaire. A cover letter discussing employee privacy and confidentiality was included. Human subject review board (HSRB) approval was obtained from Regent University prior to commencing the study. Surveys were made available to all employees at the twelve Urbane Café locations in southern California (N ≈ 230), including team members, shift leads, and assistant managers. The managers at the cafes facilitated team members completing the surveys during their work breaks in a private location at each cafe. The survey included demographic questions concerning gender, age, job tenure, and café location.

Measures

Positive practices. Cameron et al.’s (2011) 29-item positive practices scale was used to measure positive practices. The authors found that the scale, in two separate studies, had six distinct dimensions: a) caring (4 items) (α = .928, .946), b) forgiveness (3 items) (α = .850, .887), c) inspiration (3 items) (α = .904, .925), d) meaning (5 items) (α = .903, .919), e) dignity, or respect (7 items) (α = .941, .954), and f) support (7 items) (α = .948, .958). The dimensions and items use a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree.” Cameron et al. did not test specific hypotheses, stating, “Not enough information [regarding the relation of positive practices to performance outcomes] is available to formulate precise hypotheses” (p. 269). To my knowledge this scale has not been used apart from Cameron et al.’s initial studies, so the current study is the first to test hypotheses, based on the current literature. Permission was received from Dr. Kim Cameron to use the scale. Respondents were asked to respond to the positive practice items/statements and rate how they perceive
their work team on a scale of 1 to 5, such as “We treat each other with respect,” and “We show kindness to one another.”

**PWE.** To measure a PWE, Aube and Rousseau’s (2005) 3-item scale for quality of group experience, or group well-being, was used, which was identified as a social climate scale that assesses the degree of positivity in work teams. Aube and Rousseau (p. 196) found their scale to have excellent reliability ($\alpha = .96$). The scale is set to a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1, “not true at all,” to 5, “totally true.” Permission was obtained from Dr. Caroline Aube to use the scale. Respondents will be asked to rate their work team relative to the items, such as “The social climate in our work team is good,” and “In our team, relationships are harmonious.”

**Work engagement.** Work engagement was measured using the Ultretcht Work Engagement Scale-9 (UWES-9) by Schaufeli et al. (2006). The 9-item measure (short form) uses a 7-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 0, “Never” to 6, “Every day.” Sample items include “At work, I feel bursting with energy,” and “I am enthusiastic about my job.” The scale is available at Dr. Wilmar Schaufeli’s personal website (http://www.wilmarschaufeli.nl/), which grants permission for use of the survey, per conditions fulfilled, such as it being used for non-commercial purposes and results sent to Dr. Schaufeli for further validation of the instrument.

**Task performance.** Aube and Rousseau’s (2005) 3-item scale for team performance was used for task performance. Aube and Rousseau (p. 196) found the scale to have good reliability ($\alpha = .82$). The scale is set to a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1, “not true at all” to 5, “totally true.” Permission was obtained from Dr. Caroline Aube to use the scale. Respondents will be asked to rate their work team relative to the items, such as “The members of this team produce good quality work” and “This team is productive.”

The completed questionnaire had a total of 47 items and was designed using SurveyMonkey (https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ZC3YZGT). Due to limited group email capability, hard copies of the survey were prepared, and delivered to the 12 Urbane Café locations, as data collection took place April 10th – 17th, 2017.

**Results**

Data from the surveys ($N = 144$, 63% response rate) were entered into SPSS 23.0 for analysis, showing a gender distribution of 47% male and 53% female, with age range distributions of 16-20 years at 19%, 21-30 years at 39%, 31-40 years at 25%, and over 40 years at 17%, and job tenure range distributions of 0-1 year at 43%, between 1 and 5 years at 40%, and more than 5 years at 17%. Overall ratings by team member participants for the variables (converting means to frequency percentages) showed positive practices rated at 70%, social climate at 73%, task performance at 79%, and
work engagement at 84%. Specific positive practices were rated as follows: respect at 72%, care at 70%, support at 73%, meaning at 69%, inspiration at 67%, and forgiveness at 66%. The correlation and reliability analyses are shown in Table 1 (next page).

The internal consistency reliability values (Cronbach’s α) show acceptability for all scales (DeVellis, 1991; Nunnally, 1978; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). According to Cozby and Bates (2012), correlation between each item and the total score is important (the item-total correlations), for without this correlation, such items could be “measuring a different variable” (p. 99). With the six positive practice dimensions showing acceptable α values, and the α value for the composite positive practices variable (reflecting all six scales) indicating a very high value (.97), this suggests the viability of using positive practices as a higher order variable for hypotheses testing.

Table 1

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<td>9. Task Performance</td>
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<td>.88</td>
<td>.72b</td>
<td>.71b</td>
<td>.66b</td>
<td>.64b</td>
<td>.61b</td>
<td>.67b</td>
<td>.52b</td>
<td>.78b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Work Engagement</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.35b</td>
<td>.25b</td>
<td>.31b</td>
<td>.35b</td>
<td>.42b</td>
<td>.34b</td>
<td>.19b</td>
<td>.31b</td>
<td>.31b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Vigor</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>.28b</td>
<td>.19b</td>
<td>.23b</td>
<td>.28b</td>
<td>.36b</td>
<td>.26b</td>
<td>.17b</td>
<td>.25b</td>
<td>.25b</td>
<td>.93b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Absorption</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>.31b</td>
<td>.30b</td>
<td>.30b</td>
<td>.33b</td>
<td>.34b</td>
<td>.30b</td>
<td>.13b</td>
<td>.29b</td>
<td>.31b</td>
<td>.89b</td>
<td>.74b</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Dedication</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.38b</td>
<td>.29b</td>
<td>.31b</td>
<td>.37b</td>
<td>.45b</td>
<td>.37b</td>
<td>.20b</td>
<td>.32b</td>
<td>.32b</td>
<td>.92b</td>
<td>.82b</td>
<td>.71b</td>
<td>(.83)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 144; diagonals (in parentheses) are reliability coefficients; * p ≤ .05 (2-tailed); † p ≤ .01 (2-tailed)

The correlation between positive practices and work engagement, though weak (.35), was significant, and the correlations between positive practices and social climate (.78) and task performance (.72) were moderately strong and significant. The work engagement dimensions were also highly correlated with each other (r values ranging from .71 to .93).

Effect of Positive Practices

Simple linear regression was run on the relationship between positive practices and social climate, work engagement, and task performance, with results shown in Table 2:
Each of the relationships between positive practices and the dependent variables was also tested while controlling for the two other dependent variables (results not shown), but in each case the $\Delta R^2$ did not suggest a confounding variable problem for either work engagement ($\Delta R^2 = .023$), social climate ($\Delta R^2 = .096$), or task performance ($\Delta R^2 = .026$). Testing the relationship between positive practices and the dependent variables while controlling for gender, age, and job tenure showed slight improvement of variance between positive practices and social climate ($\Delta R^2 = .021$) and task performance ($\Delta R^2 = .014$), and slightly more confounding effect with work engagement ($\Delta R^2 = .149$). Though negative correlations were found between social climate and age ($r = -.202$), job tenure (-.297), and gender (-.049), and between task performance and age ($r = -.241$), job tenure ($r = -.286$), and gender (-.007), there was a slight positive correlation between work engagement and age ($r = .182$). Based on the results in Table 2, H1, H2, and H3 are confirmed, though the effect size for positive practices and social climate and task performance is much greater than work engagement, and the potential confounding effect between age and work engagement should be noted.

Hierarchical linear regression was run to test the moderating effect of social climate on the relationship between positive practices and work engagement and task performance, with the results shown in Table 3:

Table 2

*Linear Regression Results – Positive Practices as Independent Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>$r$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Climate</td>
<td>.784</td>
<td>.615</td>
<td>226.7$^b$</td>
<td>1.056</td>
<td>.784</td>
<td>-.085</td>
<td>.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Performance</td>
<td>.719</td>
<td>.517</td>
<td>152.1$^b$</td>
<td>.894</td>
<td>.719</td>
<td>.764</td>
<td>.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Engagement</td>
<td>.353</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>20.2$^b$</td>
<td>.496</td>
<td>.353</td>
<td>3.136</td>
<td>.110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a $p \leq .05$ (2-tailed); $^b$ $p \leq .01$ (2-tailed)
The results show that the moderating effect of social climate on the relationships between positive practices and task performance ($\Delta R^2 = .005$) and work engagement ($\Delta R^2 = .022$), though statistically significant, are negligible. Thus, H4 and H5 are not confirmed.

**Positive Practice Dimensions**

With H1, H2, and H3 confirmed, multiple regression analysis was run to delineate which positive practice dimensions (respect, care, support, meaning, inspiration, and forgiveness) were most strongly associated with social climate, work engagement, and task performance. Multiple regression analysis is the preferred method when “the intent of the analysis is to determine whether certain predictor variables explain or account for an outcome measure,” with all the variables “entered into the equation simultaneously” (Girden & Kabacoff, 2011, p. 130). Multiple regression was run on the relationship between the positive practices and each of the outcome variables of social climate, work engagement, and task performance, both with and without controlling for the other variables, including the demographic variables. Table 4 (on the next page) shows the results of the multiple regression analysis (both with and without control are indicated), with partial regression coefficients shown for the specific positive practice dimensions.
The correlations between the positive practice dimensions and social climate from Table 1 showed moderately strong positive associations, ranging from forgiveness (r = .64) to respect (r = .75), while linear regression results from Table 2 showed that social climate accounted for the highest percentage of variance for the effect of positive practices (61.5%), with a good coefficient (β = .784). The multiple regression results shown in Table 4 are more informative for specific practices, showing in Model 1 (without control) that the positive practices of respect and inspiration, and to a lesser degree forgiveness, were more associated with social climate than other dimensions, though the effect of respect was removed when controlling for all other variables (Model 2), while forgiveness increased.

The correlation between specific positive practice dimensions and task performance from Table 1 were all reasonably good, ranging from forgiveness (r = .52) to respect (r = .71), while the linear regression results in Table 2 showed a good relationship (β = .719). From Table 4, multiple regression indicated that the positive practice dimension of respect had the strongest association with task performance (Model 1), with inspiration also showing contribution, though the effect of inspiration was removed when controlling for other variables (Model 2).

The correlation between specific positive practice dimensions and work engagement from Table 1 showed weak correlation, ranging from forgiveness (r = .19) to meaning (r = .42), while linear regression from Table 2 showed a weak coefficient (β = .353), though both analyses were significant (p ≤ .001). The multiple regression analysis showed that meaning had a predominate association with work engagement compared to other dimensions, with inspiration also showing effect, with little change while controlling for other variables (Model 2).
Table 4

Multiple Regression Results – Positive Practice Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Climate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 1 (w/o control)</td>
<td>.789*</td>
<td>.622*</td>
<td>37.63b</td>
<td>1.06**</td>
<td>.784**</td>
<td>Model 2 (w/ control)</td>
<td>.867</td>
<td>.752</td>
<td>31.47b</td>
<td>.605**</td>
<td>.449**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>.275</td>
<td>.219</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>.183</td>
<td>.144</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiration</td>
<td>.241</td>
<td>.236</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.216</td>
<td>.212</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Task Performance</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 1 (w/o control)</td>
<td>.740*</td>
<td>.548*</td>
<td>27.63b</td>
<td>.894**</td>
<td>.719**</td>
<td>Model 2 (w/ control)</td>
<td>.827</td>
<td>.684</td>
<td>22.39b</td>
<td>.297**</td>
<td>.234**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>.470</td>
<td>.407</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.305</td>
<td>.260</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td>.164</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.158</td>
<td>.131</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>-.090</td>
<td>-.076</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.217</td>
<td>-.178</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.114</td>
<td>.103</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspiration</td>
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<td>.247</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>.020</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>-.035</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.114</td>
<td>-.105</td>
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<td>Work Engagement</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 1 (w/o control)</td>
<td>.470*</td>
<td>.221*</td>
<td>5.207b</td>
<td>.496**</td>
<td>.353**</td>
<td>Model 2 (w/ control)</td>
<td>.552</td>
<td>.305</td>
<td>4.548b</td>
<td>.435**</td>
<td>.313**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>-.477</td>
<td>-.365</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.419</td>
<td>-.326</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>-.088</td>
<td>-.066</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.253</td>
<td>-.191</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>.232</td>
<td>.172</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>.110</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>.561</td>
<td>.461</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>.559</td>
<td>.460</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiration</td>
<td>.282</td>
<td>.263</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.293</td>
<td>.278</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>-.058</td>
<td>-.048</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.056</td>
<td>-.047</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Model summary for multiple regression with positive practices dimensions; ** B, β values from linear regression with positive practices composite variable; *** Control variables: gender, age, and tenure, other two dependents; a p ≤ .05 (2-tailed); b p ≤ .01 (2-tailed)

Discussion

Positive practices denote virtuous behaviors that promote the best of the human condition, evidenced in a healthy work climate, employee well-being, and positive and exceptional outcomes. The correlation between positive practices and the work outcomes, all significant, suggest a strong association with task performance (r = .72) and social climate (r = .78), but a weaker association with work engagement (r = .35), but showed good association to each other (r = .78). The interrelationships from the linear regression parallel the correlation analysis. There were moderately strong relationships between positive practices and both social climate (β = .784) and task performance (β = .719), but a weaker relationship with work engagement (β = .353), a
moderately strong relationship between social climate and task performance ($\beta = .783$), but a weaker relationship between work engagement and both social climate ($\beta = .313$) and task performance ($\beta = .309$). These relationships are shown in Figure 2.

![Diagram showing the relationships between positive practices, social climate, work engagement, and task performance]

Fig. 2. Diagram depicting the strength of relationship between positive practices and the outcomes of social climate, task performance, and work engagement, along with the interrelationships between the outcome variables (from simple linear regression analyses).

The linear regression analyses are shown, indicating significant interrelationships between all the variables, while the hierarchical regression analysis revealed a lack of moderating effect of social climate on the relationship between positive practices and both work engagement and task performance. Rather than having a moderating role, a healthy social climate or positive work environment both result from and contribute to task performance. Climate and performance in work teams may have a mutually affective relationship (Schneider et al., 1998; Hartel, Gough, & Hartel, 2008). These relationships suggest that positive practices promote a healthy social climate characterized by positive identity (Chen, 2014), positive social contagion (Cameron et al., 2011), synergistic teamwork (Salanova et al. 2005), and the effect of an upward spiral of good deeds (Fredrickson, 2003), amplifying positive emotions and leading to enhanced performance (Tsai et al., 2007; Cameron et al., 2011).

The weaker relationships between positive practices and work engagement, and similar linkage between both social climate and task performance and work engagement, could suggest that work engagement is not entirely a causal result of employee relationships, but more related to employee self-concepts. Work engagement concerns employee psychological connection to work tasks with antecedents related to personal resources, such as optimism, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, establishing employees’ sense of
presence in relation to the work task (Bakker et al., 2008; Rothbard & Patil, 2012). The multiple regression results identified the positive practices of meaning (β = .461) and inspiration (β = .263) as having the majority impact on work engagement. Further multiple regression analysis of the relationships between the positive practice of meaning and the work engagement dimensions of vigor (β = -.055), adsorption (β = .066), and dedication (β = .444) (overall model, r = .450, R² = .20, F [3,143] = 11.780, p ≤ .001) suggests that a relationship between meaning in work, where employees experience their work being elevating, renewing, motivating, and granting a sense of purpose (meaning items), is related to employees feeling dedicated to the work task through increased enthusiasm, inspiration, and a sense of accomplishment (dedication items) (statistics not shown in table). According to Bakker et al. (2008, p. 188), dedication means being strongly involved in one’s work through a “sense of significance” — a clear connection between meaningfulness at work and engagement in work. It is likely that team members mutually inspire each other in their confidence and identity, for meaningfulness stems from members feeling worthwhile, useful, and valuable (Rich et al., 2010).

The stronger relationship between positive practices and the outcomes of social climate and task performance suggest the possibility of specific virtuous behaviors having a casual effect upon team dynamics. Regressing positive practices on the outcome of social climate suggested mixed results in regards to the dimensions of respect and care, with these effects disappearing when controlling for other variables (possibly due to their strong contribution to task performance), but inspiration (β = .216) and forgiveness (β = .210) showed effect. These positive practices concern proactive influence between employees in regard to enthusiasm, employees communicating the good in others, and employees showing tolerance when mistakes are made, with the suggestion that a positive work environment can form from such behaviors. Regressing the positive practice of inspiration on social climate (overall model, r = .722, R² = .521, F [3,143] = 50.788, p ≤ .001) showed the effect of specific behaviors on climate, namely how employees communicate the good they see in each other (β = .292), and how they display confidence in each other (β = .444), suggesting that confidence between employees based on mutual respect and value for one another, including mutual affirmation and encouragement in work performance, is key in a positive work environment (statistics not shown in table).

The multiple regression analysis of positive practices and task performance showed respect to be a primary predictor of performance among the six behaviors (β = .470). Regressing the respect dimension of positive practices on task performance (overall model, r = .752, R² = .543, F [7,143] = 25.266, p ≤ .001) showed primary contribution through employee trust (β = .280), employee confidence (β = .246), and employee respect (β = .237). This suggests that when employees trust, have confidence in, and respect for one another, there is a direct effect on task performance. In an intensive service
climate atmosphere, emotional support and care may not be as critical as team members respecting and trusting each other in their work tasks, including acts that demonstrate gratitude, appreciation, and confidence.

**Practical Implications**

Meaningful work has to do with work being purposeful and significant (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). In an intensive and often routinized café food preparation and service context, it can be challenging for team members to discover factors that contribute to meaningfulness of work, such as autonomy and freedom, personal development and self-expression, and growth and goal-fulfillment (Cardador & Rupp, 2011). However, as noted by Kahn (1990), finding psychological meaning in work goes beyond the task itself, but incorporates “rewarding interpersonal relationships with coworkers and clients” that promote “dignity, self-appreciation, and a sense of worthwhileness” (p. 707), as well as members sensing psychological safety through relational interactions that are “supportive and trusting” (p. 708). Employees want to feel they are both valuable and valued, which involves mutual appreciation and respect, and employees want to feel that they can express themselves without fear of negative consequences—a key to employees fully immersing themselves in their work (Rothbard & Patil, 2011). The results of the study confirm that in an intensive task environment, team members can mutually inspire each other and promote meaningfulness in work by respecting, trusting, expressing confidence in, and communicating the good they see in each other, which promotes team member dignity and sense of worth. The extra energy, persistence, and dedication that engaged employees invest in their work can be shared and transferred between team members during task accomplishment (Salarova et al., 2005; Torrente, Salarova, & Llorens, 2013).

In the current context of study, team managers at Urbane Café work closely with team members to coordinate and encourage their efforts, while often participating in food preparation and customer service. The findings of the study suggest the importance of managerial involvement in how team members can influence each other toward greater work engagement through processes of mutual inspiration. Such processes generally involve the sharing of emotions (emotional contagion or positive affect) through mutual empathy between members. The positivity of a leader can have a dramatic effect on employees, significantly influencing their attitudes and performance, since employees can sense the emotions of their manager or supervisor (Barsade, 2002). Managers can foster a positive work environment by modeling for team members how to think and feel more positive, thus being positive energizers who “benefit their organizations by enabling others around them to perform better” (Cameron, 2010, p. 49). The implementation of strategic management practices in teams could enhance positivity at work and inspire meaningful work engagement (Cabrera, 2012):
• Managers can inspire team members to focus on the good by celebrating wins, pointing out team member strengths and accomplishments, telling success stories, and encouraging the search for solutions rather than dwelling on problems.
• Managers can motivate team members toward optimistic thinking and how to reinterpret challenges as opportunities to dispel or dispute pessimistic thoughts and engage in positive forward-thinking.
• Managers can facilitate a culture of gratitude and appreciation in work teams, leading team members in recognizing and valuing each other for their contributions, identifying strengths, expressing thankfulness for accomplishments, and engendering virtuous cycles of honor.
• Managers can encourage and model forgiveness for mistakes by giving latitude for miss-steps, engendering a safe psychological climate, and viewing mistakes as opportunities for learning.
• Managers can demonstrate respect by asking for ideas and opinions by listening to what team members have to say, both valuing their input and trusting their abilities.
• Managers can help team members identify and utilize their strengths and grant them increased autonomy in decisions and responsibilities, thus enhancing energy and flow in work tasks.
• Managers can show genuine concern for the health and well-being of team members by helping them to enjoy their work, for high quality relational exchanges in teams include members having fun, being comfortable, relaxed, and satisfied, experiencing enjoyment and enthusiasm, and liking their work (Tse & Dasborough, 2008).

Conclusion

This research study constitutes a finer-grained analysis of positive virtuous practices in the workplace and their relation to organizational climate and the outcomes of work engagement and task performance. How specific virtuous behaviors relate to the formation of a positive work environment and the resultant effect on workers is strategic, for it is necessary in today’s competitive markets that workplaces pursue exceptional performance at all levels. Organizations that provide customer service face a highly competitive environment, putting much onus on the nature and quality of services provided to customers. A service climate is a “collective and shared phenomenon” that involves both employee and customer perceptions, and thus, positive experiences for both employees and customers are paramount (Salanova et al., 2005, p. 1217). Schneider, Bowen, Ehrhart, and Holcombe (2000) demonstrated that a positive service climate for workers engenders behaviors toward customers that are also positive, resulting in positive customer reports on service quality, which, in turn, leads to greater profits. The current study demonstrates the importance of team members
discovering meaning in their work through interaction with other members, involving mutual trust, respect, and confidence, where team members believe the best in each other and are tolerant of their mistakes, thus inspiring and charging each other in their performance. In this manner, positive employee behaviors can enhance both climate and performance.

Limitations in the study include the focus on a single gourmet sandwich and salad restaurant chain, and the use of an instrument for positive practices that was described as “blunt” (Cameron et al., 2012, p. 292), since it produces aggregated ratings (based on it involving perceptions of the organization, or in this case a café work team). This study constitutes the first use of the positive practice dimensions as a single instrument for hypotheses testing. Possibly the present study has sharpened the instrument and demonstrated more intricate linkage between positive behaviors and worker outcomes.

Future study is needed to show valid and consistent results for the positive practices scale dimensions. A confirmatory factor analysis is needed to demonstrate that the six positive practice dimensions constitute a higher order variable. More research linking positive practices to attitudinal (e.g., organizational citizenship behavior), attachment related (e.g., organizational commitment or intent to leave), and achievement-oriented (e.g., production and profitability) outcomes are needed to show the viability and practicality of the positive practices instrument. Further study could help delineate positivity in regards to its cognitive, emotive, and volitional aspects, and elucidate how positivity enacted through employee attitudes and actions comprises both psychological resources and relational behaviors, including mechanisms for how positivity in employees engenders both a positive work environment and positive organization.

About the Author
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