The world of work is changing at a feverish pace. In this increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment (VUCA: Bawany, 2015) leaders, teams, and whole organizations are looking for evidence-based approaches to not only build resilience to survive, but enhance achievement, creativity, innovation and wellbeing to thrive and gain competitive advantage (Green & Palmer, 2014).

What differentiates the organizations that flourish in this constantly evolving environment? Whilst currently small in number, an increasing proportion of organizations are turning their attention to the field of Positive Psychology (PP), as the science of optimal human functioning, to utilize evidence-based positive psychology interventions proven to enhance performance and wellbeing (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009, Bolier et al, 2013).

There is also an increasing interest in the complementary field of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003). POS was developed to profile the extraordinary in organizations; the positive practices, attributes, and outcomes of the organizations themselves, and the Positive Organizational Behaviors (POB) of their members (Cameron et.al., 2011; Luthans et.al., 2006).

Dr Suzy Green, Founder of The Positivity Institute and Adjunct Professor at the School of Business at the University of Western Sydney, together with Olivia Evans, Founder of The Career Guide, and Belinda Williams, Founder of The Whole Being have recently submitted a chapter entitled ‘Positive Psychology at Work: Research and Practice’ for inclusion in the Springer text ‘Positive Psychology Interventions in Practice’ to be published in 2016. The authors’ unique combination of academic research rigour and commercial application in the field of positive psychology at work brings a fresh perspective to the subject and whilst acknowledging the complexity, a pragmatic understanding of its potential application.

In the chapter, they aim to provide an overview of the science and practice of PP and its application in the workplace (PPW). The key message is that now more than ever, it is critical individuals and organizations apply PPW to improve wellbeing and performance. Unique to this PP literature contribution, is recognition of the need for a multi-faceted approach to successfully integrate PPW, including measures of success, reaching across all levels of the organization, and underpinned by cultural change.

As scientist-practitioners, the authors attempt to uncover examples of extraordinary, evidence-based, positive mindsets, capabilities, and behaviors, and profile Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS), that is, identify those organizations who have employed a positive deviance and benefitted from
enhanced engagement, collaboration, innovation, wellbeing, and productivity. More specifically, in their chapter, they draw on four key positive psychological theories that have proven to correlate with positive outcomes for organizations (and individual and team behaviors) and with particularly actionable potential. These theories are Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (1998, 2001), Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), Hope Theory (Snyder, 2000) and Seligman's PERMA model (2011). For each theory, the authors provide scientific rigor and examples of organizational application. The practical application of which has proven to correlate with positive organizational outcomes (and individual behaviors) including improved wellbeing, optimal performance, and growth. Not to mention buffering against the cost of mental illness at an individual and organizational level. Work related stress alone is costing Australian industry $14.81 billion and financial impact to the bottom line has been cited as high as 45% of company operating costs (Medibank, 2008).

In the chapter, they also explore other deliberate and productive PPW interventions focused specifically on positive emotions, strengths and resilience (mental toughness). The PPW practices of thriving high-profile organizations such as Google are also profiled. One idea used by such organizations is 'innovation time', where employees are allowed to spend up to 20% of their time pursuing projects of personal interest, herein addressing the components of one of the four key theories, that being SDT. By being given the opportunity to break free from their workplace routine, tasks and duties, employees can engage with their strengths and interests, which Harzer and Ruch (2012, 2014) found to have a direct, positive impact on pleasure, engagement and job satisfaction. The results of this idea speak for themselves, including the more well-known ‘gmail’ and ‘google maps’ for Google and ‘Post-it Notes’ for 3M.

Unique to the profiled organizations in this chapter is the commonality of multiple bottom lines, that is, a recognition of success beyond profits to include examples of virtuous, positively deviant behaviors at an organizational level, and involving broader stakeholder groups such as the community and the environment. Critically, this intrapressure for positive deviance has the potential to bring about broader positive societal change, as organizational, industry, and business expectations continue to rise. It is an exciting time in the world of work, and PPW offers the opportunity not only for organizations to survive, but to evolve with greater success, and to positively influence the broader society.

In sum, by the end of the chapter readers can expect to glean:

1. key PPW theories and their organizational applications; 
2. successful PPW organizational interventions including case study examples; and 
3. how organizations can effectively integrate these PPW applications into their operations.

This chapter is an important contribution to the continued research and application of positive psychology at work and a must read for scholars, practitioners, and students alike. To register your early interest in this chapter, please contact info@thepositivityinstitute.com.au

About Suzy Greene

Dr. Suzy Green is a Clinical and Coaching Psychologist (MAPS) and the Founder of The Positivity Institute, an organization dedicated to the research and application of Positive Psychology for life, school and work. Suzy is a leader in the complementary fields of Coaching Psychology and Positive Psychology having conducted a world-first study on evidence-based coaching as an Applied Positive Psychology.
About Olivia Evans

Olivia Evans is a qualified Career Coach (CDAA) and Management Consultant and holds a Bachelor of Commerce and a Masters of Science (Coaching Psychology). Olivia is also engaged with The Positivity Institute as a Senior Associate working closely with Dr. Suzy Green in both an executive coaching capacity and as a consultant on applications of Positive Psychology and Positive Organizational Scholarship in the corporate sector.