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Can thinking positive go wrong? A mixed-method study of positive thinking at work

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PhD Thesis submitted October 2021

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DECLARATION

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Shafag Garayeva

Abstract

Positive thinking is widely encouraged and promoted in the popular and practitioner literature as a hallmark of the compliant employee and a requisite of good organisational practice. Yet, apart from remaining elusive what it means and how it can be developed, research reports side effects related to its overpromotion. This thesis therefore seeks to understand how individuals in organisations define and understand positive thinking, what influences its development and manifestations, and what effects its promotion in the workplace can have. Given that positive thinking has been studied in diverse sub-disciplines of psychology and other disciplines, an integrative literature review appraises state of knowledge to identify that there is no commonly accepted definition and individual meanings vary.

Taking a mixed method approach, the research then investigates individual understandings of positive thinking among 19 employees and managers using semi-structured interviews involving vignette discussions, supplemented with data analysis of organisational documents and communications. Through grounded theory method analysis, it identifies key concepts which explain that positive thinking comprises cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements directed at the self, others, and the environment; it is shaped both by individual (self-efficacy and self-regulation) and contextual (psychological safety, work meaningfulness, organisational functioning) factors; and imposing it can end in resisting including faking it. Drawing on the grounded theory study results and existing literature, the research develops an individual-environment interaction model of positive thinking and tests it in an online experiment and two-wave survey. Specifically, the studies examine if psychological safety and self-efficacy can facilitate PT and whether external pressure to demonstrate positive thinking results in faking it. The analysis shows that psychological safety and self-efficacy enable

positive thinking, whereas imposing positive thinking predicts faking it and detrimentally affects psychological safety perceptions.

This thesis extends theory by addressing conceptual confusion pertinent to positive thinking, identifying it as a unique construct incorporating elements of a systematic cognitive inquiry and distinguishable from other constructs it is used interchangeably with, and discerning its antecedents. The study is the first to investigate individual understandings of positive thinking in organisational settings and examine consequences of its promotion in the workplace. The results also add to existing research on positivity by identifying the role of both individual and contextual factors in development of positive thinking, thus shifting the focus away from the sole individual responsibility for it currently dominating in the popular discourse. From a practice perspective, understanding that positive thinking is an indicator of underlying factors is essential for creating fertile conditions for it instead of putting pressure to demonstrate it.

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I would like to thank my parents for instilling the values of learning and growing in our family, whom along with my friends I am grateful to for constantly encouraging me and

believing in me even at times when my own confidence was shattered. Unfortunately, I could not spend as much time with them as I wanted and as they needed during these years, therefore the contentment I get from having conducted my research comes with sadness. In a way, this corroborates one of the arguments of my thesis – human beings are a complex combination of various experiences, cognitions, and emotions all of which are to be accepted.

If merely 'feeling good' could decide, drunkenness would be the supremely valid human experience.

-William James

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Rationale for the Research

1.3 My interest in the topic

1.4 Thesis Structure

1.5 Conclusion

1.1 Introduction

Positive Thinking (PT), which broadly refers to experiencing and expressing positive thoughts and suppressing negative thoughts and fears (Ruthig, Holfeld, & Hanson, 2012), is a trendy but mysterious concept. Commonly assumed to be vital for health and wellbeing and important for performance, it finds a strong presence in popular and practitioner literature, HRM consultancy, and organisational discourses. Yet, critics point to dark sides of its promotion (Collinson, 2012; Ehrenreich, 2009; Fineman, 2006; Held, 2004; 2018; Lee, 2017; Meyer, 1980; Miller, 1955), whereas its theoretical understanding has not kept pace. Extant definitions of PT refer to a variety of other constructs, such as optimism, positive attitudes, outlooks, and emotions and do not clarify if ‘positive’ implies a content or effects of thoughts (McNulty & Fincham, 2012).

Despite the popularity, contextual and individual level antecedents of PT are somewhat overlooked by organisational research (Donaldson & Ko, 2010; Rodríguez-Carvajal, Moreno-Jiménez, Rivas-Hermosilla, Álvarez-Bejarano, & Sanz Vergel, 2010). To date, there has been limited study of PT in organisations, hence its uncritical acceptance and increasing utilisation appear unjustified and premature until a better understanding of the construct is built and

theoretical groundwork for it is laid, which the current thesis aims to achieve. This chapter expands on the rationale for the thesis, presents its key aims, and outlines its research questions. It also discusses the role of my cultural and professional backgrounds in the choice of the topic. Finally, a short overview of the thesis structure is provided.

1.2 Rationale for the Research

Rooted in the New Thought, the mind-cure, and the Christian Science movements (Cederstrom & Spicer, 2015; Storr, 2017), the PT movement (Peale, 2012) emerging in the 1950s posed PT as vital for directing our minds towards health, wealth, and personal power (Meyer, 1980) (see Chapter 2 for the research context). Referring to experiencing and expressing positive thoughts and suppressing negative thoughts (Ruthig, Holfeld, & Hanson, 2012) and commonly considered essential for well-being and happiness (Miller, 1955), it has inundated the contemporary popular and practitioner-oriented literature, HRM consultancy, and organisational discourses (Collinson, 2012; Brinkmann, 2017; Ehrenreich, 2009; Fineman, 2006; Held, 2004; 2018; Lee, 2017; McDonald & O’Callaghan, 2008). In the organisational context, it has been viewed as a characteristic of the compliant employee and a requisite of effective practice boosting employee performance (Ehrenreich, 2009; Fineman, 2006). As such, it is purportedly expected from employees in modern organisations with delegated responsibilities, diffuse or non-existent boundaries between work and private life, and plenty of teamwork (Brinkmann, 2017). Yet, despite the increasing acceptance and utilisation in the practitioner community, PT remains an under-researched phenomenon:

[PT] “*seems to be beneath the notice of academics. I cannot find a learned treatise in social sciences that ever cites these [PT] thinkers, much less takes them seriously. Serious they are*” (Seligman, 2006, p.263).

Similar to other positivity constructs that are somewhat uncritically accepted (Friedman & Robbins, 2012), PT is considered a universal asset in isolation from contexts although not explicitly mentioned in the Virtues and Character Strengths framework (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It is not clear from extant definitions if “positive” implies a content or effects of thoughts and how PT is different from other potentially interchangeable positivity constructs such as optimism, positive affect, emotions, attitudes and outlook. Yet, given the relevance of PT to how employees may engage with others or how managers may feel they should approach the relational context of their management role, it is important to scrutinise the concept critically.

Currently, there is lack of consistent evidence for effects of PT (detailed in Chapter 4) and the available findings on what has been conceptualised and operationalised as PT do not allow to make conclusive judgements either. The literature points to both benevolent (e.g., Layous, Chancellor, & Lyubomirsky, 2014; Taylor, Lyubomirsky, & Stein, 2017; Taylor, Pearlstein, Kakaria, Lyubomirsky, & Stein, 2020) and adverse effects of positivity on well-being and performance (e.g., Greenaway, Frye, & Cruwys, 2015; Oettingen, Mayer, & Portnow, 2016; O’Connor, Smyth, & Williams, 2015; Shepperd, Waters, Weinstein, & Klein, 2015).

Interestingly, findings on benefits of positivity come mainly from Positive Psychology, whereas other psychological subdisciplines provide less encouraging evidence and stress the importance of context consideration when evaluating and urging positivity. Despite recognising that people are embedded in their context and external factors can both enable and hinder positive growth (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), positive psychological research appears to undertake a decontextualised focus on the individual level of wellbeing (Brown, Lomas, & Eiroá-Orosa, 2017; Donaldson et al., 2015). Yet, critics highlight the importance of studying positive phenomena in their context and going “beyond the individual person as the primary focus and

locus of enquiry, and exploring the manifold socio-cultural factors, systems, and processes that impact upon people's wellbeing" (Lomas, Waters, Williams, Oades, & Kern 2021, p.664).

As for expectations to demonstrate PT exerted on individuals, a small number of studies in health psychology indicate that PT can be imposed and thus generate feelings of an oppressing burden put on patients, who are to demonstrate upbeatness while physically suffering (McCreaddie, Payne, & Froggatt, 2010; McGrath, 2004; McGrath, Jordens, Montgomery, & Kerridge, 2006; McGrath, Montgomery, White, & Kerridge, 2006). As there has been limited study of PT in organisations and little is known about its manifestations in the workplace, including what it implies and how it develops, it remains unclear to what extent these concerns are relevant in the workplace. Yet, the overemphasis on PT as a desired characteristic may facilitate a bias held in favour of positive against so-called negative people in selection, recruitment, appraisal, and reward processes (Ehrenreich, 2009; Fineman, 2006). Leaving little space for alternative voices and questioning perspectives, such enforcement can produce tensions in organisations by fuelling employee dissent and result in teaming up of like-minded individuals, silencing employees, and affecting the capacity to think critically and make informed decisions (Collinson, 2012; Kahneman, 2011; Lovallo & Kahneman, 2003).

Given limited knowledge about PT and responding to calls for a balanced scientific investigation of positive phenomena and examination of contextual factors and conditions shaping them to embrace the complexity of the world (Aspinwall & Tedeschi, 2010; Bennett, 2015; Fineman, 2006; Kern et al., 2020; McNulty & Fincham 2012), this thesis sets out three objectives. First, it aims to build a conceptual understanding of PT at work including the organisational context, social interactions, work processes, and physical surroundings of the

workplace (Bose & Agarwal, 2003; Dul & Ceylan, 2011) to create a clear definition incorporating its salient attributes, such as “thinking” and “positive” and distinguishing it from other constructs. Second, it seeks to outline the conditions that influence development and manifestations of PT. Finally, this research seeks to examine the promotion of PT in organisations and its consequences. In doing so, it purposes to obtain conceptual understanding for PT, lay the foundation for the theoretical knowledge, given its popularity, add to its evidence base, and provide an agenda for future research. The thesis employs a theoretical lens incorporating symbolic interactionism, social cognitive theory, and cognitive-affective processing system model (Bandura, 1986; Blumer, 1969; Kuhn, 1964; Mischel & Shoda, 1995) and suggests that individuals’ cognitions, feelings, and behaviours are shaped by the individual’s interaction with the environment (discussed in Chapter 3).

I adopted mixed methods to firstly frame the research through a narrative-integrative examination of relevant literature from psychological subdisciplines and non-psychological disciplines, as well as evaluation of similar phenomena in light of scarcity of research on PT in organisational settings (e.g., fun at work) (Chapter 4). Along with identifying areas of conceptual ambiguity around PT, pointing to controversies regarding evidence on its effects and manifestations at work, and informing research questions of this thesis, the review produced a classification of existing definitions of PT. Further, through grounded theory method, I identified individual understandings of PT in a work context as well as environmental and individual influences shaping its development and manifestations. The qualitative approach of the first study was to counter the dominance of quantitative evidence restricted by dimensions of measures and shortage of thorough qualitative investigations on positivity constructs (Marecek & Christopher 2017; McNulty & Fincham, 2012; Wong & Roy, 2018). Taking a grounded theory

approach for developing a conceptual understanding of PT enabled contribution to research on the construct with little theoretical underpinnings and inadequate contextualisation.

The grounded theory study sample included interviews and vignette discussions with 19 individuals in managerial and employee positions working in formal organisations, which is detailed in Chapter 5. Along with interview data, I examined organisational document and communication data. Having formulated a definition for PT, described its elements, and identified conditions shaping it, I developed a theoretical model providing a more holistic understanding of PT by posing it as a product of the individual-environment interaction. I tested the model in a quasi-experiment and two-wave survey to examine factors facilitating and impeding PT. Overall, this thesis systematised existing knowledge about PT and added to its theoretical development in three previously neglected dimensions: (a) conceptual clarity, (b) influences on PT, and (c) effects of its imposing. The mixed method approach enabled addressing the following research questions:

- How do individuals in organisations define and understand PT?
- What influences development and manifestations of PT at work?
- Is PT imposed in contemporary organisations and what are effects of imposed PT?

1.3 My interest in the topic

Interest in the topic of this thesis stems from my cultural and professional background. I had lived and been exposed to state propaganda cultivating the need to demonstrate positivity and enthusiasm in the USSR. We were to show a firm belief and optimism about the bright era of communism that, as Krushchev promised, would grace us around 1980. Any perspectives

questioning this promise were viewed as overshadowing the collective joy and rejected with indignation, whereas the sceptic would be condemned, which did not leave much space for exercising critical thinking. This tendency is still echoed in rhetoric of political leaders of the post-soviet space expecting expressions of enthusiasm and support regarding state initiatives and government decisions (e.g., the pension age going up) and annoyed with the deficiency of the positive in the social discourse and public moods.

Furthermore, I have got an extensive working experience in international and local organisations in different sectors, where I had encountered organisational emotional display norms. It was both surprising and disappointing to observe positivity expectation patterns in international organisations, which, in making me draw parallels with the USSR, was rather unpleasant as I consider its collapse as one of the best events of my life. In the workplace, I have witnessed and experienced expectations to demonstrate positivity and enthusiasm, whereas raising concerns has not always been welcomed. This was somewhat at odds with the encouragement to be brave and speak up posed as organisational values. I did not know much at the time about the West being colonised by the tyranny of its own PT movement with a two-shaded view of positivity as unequivocally good and negativity as categorically bad (Held, 2004), making those failing to think positive to health and wealth feel guilty and holding them responsible for their misfortunes. I detail the research context in Chapter 2.

As a pragmatist who is up for anything that works, I have long been curious about what it implies to think positive and how it can be developed. The problem was that while there is abundant research on similar constructs, such as hope, optimism, self-efficacy, or resilience, much of knowledge about PT comes from the popular and consultancy discourses. These lack clarity and do not guide as to how PT can be developed, rather appearing to promote their

services. My search for evidence revealed two issues with PT. Firstly, most of the evidence used to support claims about its superpowers comes from research on other constructs, such as positive affect or optimism. Second, the scarce and scattered across disciplines evidence that could be interpreted as research on PT (Kappes & Oettingen, 2011; Kappes, Oettingen, & Mayer, 2012; Oettingen, Mayer, & Portnow, 2016; Sevincer, Wagner, Kalvelage, & Oettingen, 2014) does not show that it works as assumed. In fact, the evidence points to negative consequences of relying on PT for well-being and performance. When doing my MSc in Psychology, I neared the topic by integrating and examining detrimental effects of optimism from different disciplines. However, optimism is a distinct, much more clearly defined, and rather well-documented construct, while PT remains vague and overlooked. Hence, I undertook this research to both add to theory and produce practical knowledge base about PT that would enable an evidence-based approach to its development.

Finally, this research is influenced by the person-situation interactionism principle viewing human responses as reactions activated by situational stimuli and changes in them happening along with alterations of situations exerting pressure on people (Allport, 1966; Mischel, 1968; Murray, 1938). Hence, to get a better understanding of human behaviour, it is essential to empirically investigate the individual-environment interaction, rather than each element in isolation (Bowers, 1973). In line with this approach, the current research sought to identify factors influencing PT in the social context in which it occurs.

1.4 Thesis Structure

This section outlines the thesis structure and provides a short summary of each chapter:

Chapter 2 Research Context

This chapter details the research context by drawing on the history of the PT movement and its contemporary permutations in the popular and practitioner discourse and materials.

Chapter 3 An individual-environment interaction perspective on Positive Thinking

This chapter expands on an individual-environment interaction perspective on PT integrating symbolic interactionism, social cognitive, and cognitive-affective processing system approaches to the study of PT as an individual response to environmental stimuli.

Chapter 4 Literature review

This chapter identifies the variety of ways in which PT is conceptualised and operationalised in the academic literature by classifying those definitions into four main categories. It also evaluates how the literature captures individual understandings of PT and influences on its development and manifestations at work. Finally, it examines evidence on effects of PT to assess the credibility of claims on its benevolent effects. It concludes by making a case for the need of a balanced investigation of the concept starting with individuals' understandings of it.

Chapter 5 Research Methods

This chapter outlines the rationale for the mixed method research design. The data collection and analysis processes are explained for the grounded theory study. This includes sampling in general and theoretical sampling for the grounded theory study, vignette development, interview techniques, procedures, and ethical considerations. The chapter expands on the interview and document data analysis.

Chapters 6-8 Grounded theory study's results and discussion

Chapters 6-8 presents findings from the grounded theory study. Apart from defining and describing elements of PT, a set of organisational and individual level concepts was identified:

organisational functioning, psychological safety, work meaningfulness, self-efficacy, self-regulation, imposing PT, and faking it. The chapters also discuss the concepts in relation to the research questions and existing theory and research.

Chapter 9 Quantitative studies

The chapter introduces an individual-environment interaction model of PT at work, which considers both contextual and individual factors influencing its development and manifestations, discusses research methods used to test the model with variables identified in the grounded theory study, and presents results. Key findings show that for development of PT it is more effective to facilitate it via psychological safety and self-efficacy, than to impose it as the latter results in surface acting it and detrimentally affects psychological safety perceptions. The findings are discussed in the context of extant theory and research.

Chapter 10 Conclusion and Recommendations

This final chapter discusses the thesis' key contributions to theory, research, and practice. It outlines avenues for further research as well as highlights limitations of the research and addresses their mitigation.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the research rationale and questions and outlined how the thesis aims to achieve its objective of contributing to the topic of PT at work that is overlooked within organisational studies. It has presented the research approach to investigating how individuals in formal organisations define and understand PT. The thesis seeks to provide new theoretical

insights and produce practical knowledge to ensure an evidence-based approach to PT. Finally, the chapter has outlined the thesis structure and provided a summary of its chapters.

Chapter 2 Research Context

2.1 Introduction

2.2 History of Positive Thinking

2.3 Contemporary permutations of Positive Thinking

2.4 Conclusion

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter identified the discrepancy between the growing appearance of PT in the popular and organisational discourses as “axiomatic to a healthy workplace” (Fineman, 2006, p. 276) and paucity of its theoretical and evidence bases currently reduced to equivocal findings about its effects. Up to date there has been limited study of PT at work and currently little is known about what it implies and how it develops. This chapter outlines the popularity of PT by examining its roots and contemporary permutations in the practitioner and popular discourses. The chapter concludes that there is a need for robust academic enquiry into PT and suggests questions to guide the further literature review.

2.2 History of Positive Thinking

PT originates in the eponymous movement (Meyer, 1980), which, in turn, has been inspired by the New Thought movement that promoted the idea of the powerful mind overcoming any difficulties, including physical illness, as one’s life is shaped by their attitude (Cederstrom & Spicer, 2015); the mind-cure movement defined as the belief in the all-saving power of healthy-minded attitudes (Storr, 2017); and the Christian Science Movement that endowed the mind with

the control over sickness and misery (ibid). The PT movement associated with Norman Vincent Peale, the author of *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), is based on the belief that a habit of thinking positive would direct our minds towards “success, happiness, money, health, friends, relaxation, peace of mind, power, self-confidence, vacations on Waikiki Beach, and... constant energy” (Miller, 1955, p. 19). Peale was a minister of Manhattan’s Marble Collegiate Church, whom Donald Trump refers to as his pastor and one of the greatest speakers he had ever seen (Blair, 2015). Peale’s message of the happiness habit developed through exercising PT was enormously influential in the USA (Horowitz, 2017), whereas his book is still listed among best-sellers and ranks in the top of bookstore chain searches after nearly 70 years since its publication in 1952.

The PT movement can also be regarded a part of the multi-billion self-help industry (Ziogas, 2020) much criticised for holding the individual accountable for their well-being, success, or misfortunes (Lee, 2017). A prominent figure in this business was Dale Carnegie whose ideology involved managing impressions to attract people and opportunities into one’s life through arousing positive affect in others (e.g., enthusiasm in followers) and nailing prosperity down to one’s outlook (Carnegie, 1994). First come to light in 1937, similar to Peale’s, this doctrine remains influential in our age and benefits from its technological advances, such as social networks, emails, and the internet although their invention has taken more than thinking positive (Carnegie & Cole, 2011; Collinson, 2012; Tracy, 2007). I discuss contemporary permutations of these movements in the next section.

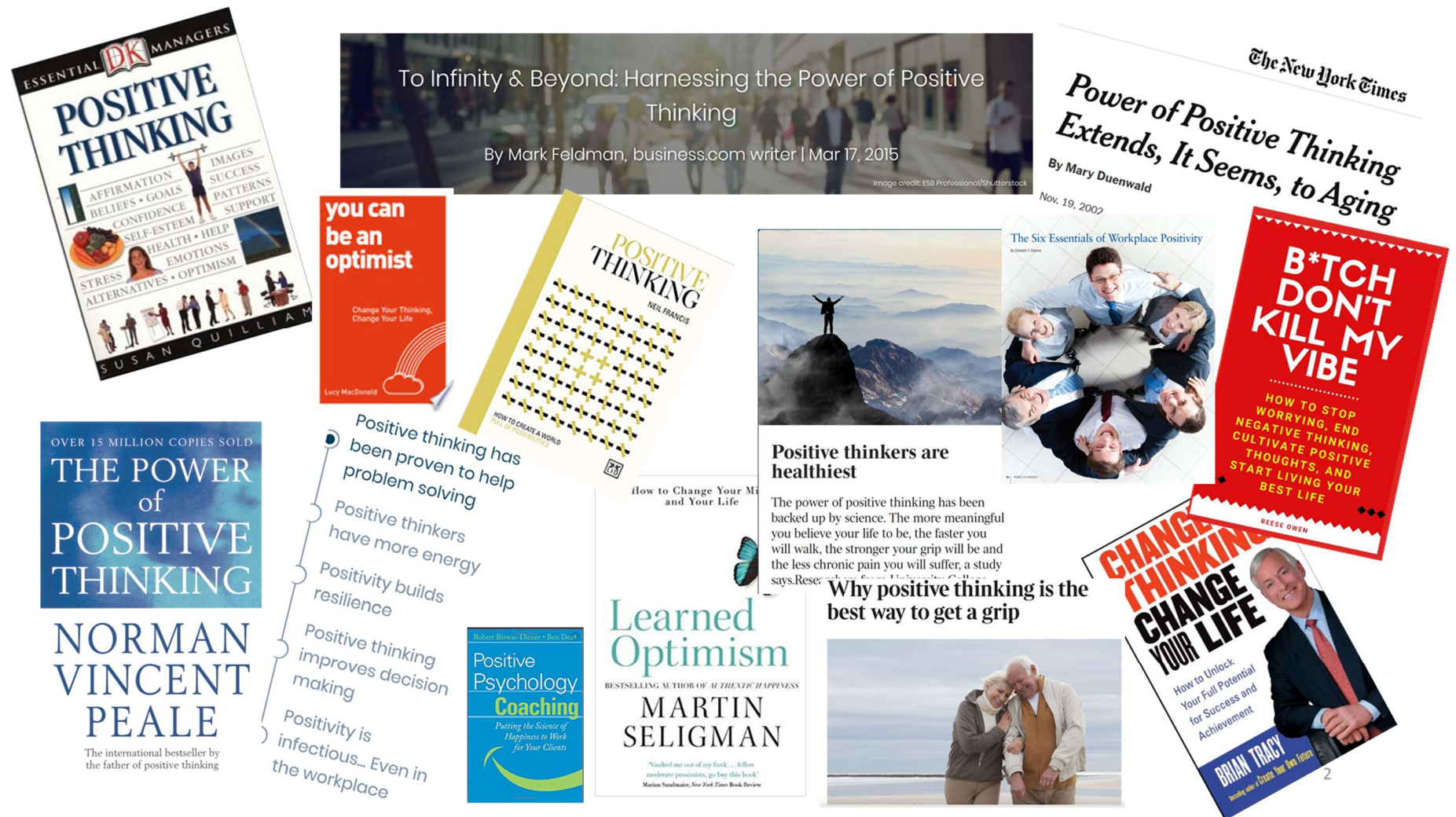
2.3 Contemporary permutations of Positive Thinking

The PT movement got a second wind and spread to the rest of the world at the beginning of the current century. In 2009, a Google search for ‘positive thinking’ turned up 1.92 million entries (Ehrenreich, 2009). In 2021, the number of the entries was 998 million. An epitomic manifestation of it in our age is *The Secret*, a book appealing to the so-called law of attraction to underpin the idea of creating the reality one wishes to have by the power of thinking (Byrne, 2008) although this can be confused with magical thinking for replacing external reality with invented one. Another example is the New German Medicine organisation founded by Ryke Geerd Hamer, a physician, conspiracy theorist, and anti-Semite (Andrade, 2017). Hamer proclaimed that as all diseases are psychosomatic, they can go away with right thoughts and if they do not, one must have not thought right or sufficient. Although his medical license was revoked first by German and then other European authorities, his ideas still dominate the minds and find routes to wider audiences (e.g., through a Udemy course). Search results on business-oriented internet sources and bookstore chains’ websites demonstrate the dissemination of the construct in the business world and popular culture (Figure 2.1 and Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Search results for “positive thinking” in internet sources

Sources/Companies	Number of results
Amazon search	50,000 (including 5,000 for “PT business”, 3,000 for “PT management”, 4,000 for “positive thinking work”, 560 for “positive thinking performance”)
Foyles	441
Goodreads	3766
Harvard Business Review	5,972
LinkedIn	432,175
Virgin corporate website	Over 1500
Google corporate website	57
Amazon corporate website	256
Walmart corporate website	171
Toyota corporate website	150

Figure 2.1. Positive Thinking in the media and popular literature



Organisations and the business world are not immune to the influence of PT either. PT reflects in the discourse of job titles, training and coaching courses, business consultants, popular and practitioner-oriented literature, and press articles (Table 2.2). Claiming to be based on research which “confirms this school of thought” and “Human Capital Management Principles” (Positive Workplace Consultancy), PT promoters promise that thinking positive will improve employee decision-making, increase creativity, productivity, and resilience, and enhance interpersonal skills without grounding the statements on relevant evidence (Cabrera, 2012). Organisations spend significant portions of Learning and Development budgets on purchasing products and paying for seminars, and programmes designed to embed PT into the organisational culture (e.g., Salerno, 2009).

Ehrenreich (2009) lists Sprint, Albertsons, Allstate, Caterpillar, Exxon Mobil, and American Airlines as corporate clients of motivational gurus and refers to an instance when even the academy got exposed to this type of training organised by the administration of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale “to convince the glum professors that “a positive attitude is vital for improving customer satisfaction”.” (p.48). The central argument of the PT movement that PT will make employees more productive and eager (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007) appeals to business leaders (e.g., Gordhamer, 2010; McDonald & O’Callaghan, 2008), who argue that companies should focus their attention on cultivating a positive corporate culture based on the “science of happiness”. Yet, the popular discourse does not provide clarity as to what PT is and how it can be built and shows little consideration of the environment’s influence or facilitation of PT by organisations, rather solely focusing on the individual onus to cherish so-called positive thoughts including “telling yourself to pull up your socks” (De Raeve 1997, p. 250) and appearing to promote consultancy services and products under the name of PT.

Table 2.2. Contemporary permutations of Positive Thinking

Area (source/s)	PT promotion examples	Discourse examples
Job titles (LinkedIn)	<p>“Enabler of positive fresh thinking & action”;</p> <p>“Positive thinking believer”;</p> <p>“Positive thinking facilitator/motivator/influencer”; “Positive Thinking Trainer”</p>	<p>“uplifting individuals, teams and organisations”, “helping clients get off the hamster wheel and into lives full of meaning”, “working silently with positive thinking”, or “positive risk thinking”.</p>
<p>Training/coaching courses (Udemy, LinkedIn, Corporate Coach Group, come-alive.co.uk, trainingzone.co.uk, Positive Workplace Consultancy, Positive Consultancy Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.https://www.successconsciousness.com/index_00003a.htm)</p>	<p>Individual and corporate offers on positive solutions, positive days mind management, positive mental attitude, positive thinking.</p> <p>Events, programmes, surveys, exercises, activities, questionnaires, assessments, scales, and interventions.</p>	<p>“Energy transfers between people”;</p> <p>Promise to change “how you think about your job”;</p> <p>Recommend to “start meetings by asking people what they are thankful for”, use “only positive words while thinking and while talking”, “allow only feelings of happiness, strength and success into one’s awareness, and disregard and ignore negative thoughts”</p> <p>Provide “tips for spreading and promoting positivity”</p>
<p>Popular and practitioner-oriented literature (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007; Blanchard, Lacinak, Tompkins, & Ballard, 2003; Francis, 2019; Owen, 2018; Quilliam, 2008;</p>	<p>“Positive thinking”;</p> <p>“Whale done!: The power of positive relationships”;</p> <p>“Positive psychology coaching: Putting the science of happiness to work for your clients”;</p> <p>“B*tch Don’t Kill My Vibe: How To Stop Worrying, End Negative Thinking, Cultivate Positive Thoughts, And Start Living Your Best Life”;</p> <p>”Positive Thinking. How to create a world full of possibilities”.</p>	<p>Promote practicing positive praise ratios (Fairley & Zipp, 2010) in optimistic workplaces (MacDonald, 2017), flexing one’s thinking with famous people, positive-affirmatively self-talking (ibid), and changing one’s thinking to change their life (Tracy, 2007).</p> <p>Refer to creating a positive world (Quilliam, 2008), developing a mental habit of thinking happy (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007), and fostering of positive</p>

		<p>emotions (Fairley & Zipp, 2010) and positive relationships (Blanchard, Lacinak, Tompkins, & Ballard, 2003) by “focusing on the positives in any situation, thinking well of yourself, thinking well of others and dealing with them in a positive way, expecting the best from the world” (Quilliam, 2008).</p> <p>PT benefits include having successful careers, being half as likely to quit jobs, 30 times more likely happier, and adding on average 7.5 years to their life span, are cited as based on “some facts” from unnamed studies (ibid).</p>
Press	<p>“Why positive thinking is the best way to get a grip” (Lay, 2019),</p> <p>“Happier Means Healthier: Optimists Live Longer, and Optimism Can Be Cultivated” (in Held, 2004),</p> <p>“Want to live longer? Be an optimist, study says” (LaMotte, 2019),</p> <p>“An optimistic outlook ‘means you live longer’(BBC news, 2019),</p> <p>“Power of PT extends, it seems, to aging” (Duenwald, 2002).</p>	<p>PT “has been proven to help problem-solving” (Feldman, 2015).</p>

Closer inspection shows that the promotion of PT in the popular discourse is not backed up by substantial and relevant evidence. Partly, this has to do with misinterpretation of research findings by writers/journalists and their preference for catchy headlines. For example, a press article reporting that PT “has been proven to help problem solving” (Feldman, 2015) referred to another non-academic article on effects of positive emotions, not PT. Similarly, a health journalist writing about benefits of PT (Lay, 2019), referred to a study that did not have the sample, measures, and results the journalist described and then a positive thinking writer (Francis, 2019) used that newspaper article as evidence to argue for benevolent effects of PT. Likewise, popular writers refer to mainstream books of the Positive Psychology movement (e.g. Seligman, 2002; 2006; 2009; 2011) to back claims on PT although these books do not address PT but reference other constructs including happiness, optimism, and flourishing.

Concerningly, the way researchers present their findings to the public is a subject of harsh criticism too as, arguably, reports going out to the media tend to exaggerate positive effects and omit negative or mixed results and nuances because null results do not get media attention (Ehrenreich, 2009). For example, Ehrenreich refers to a case where researchers represented their findings differently depending on the audience: using words such as “reservations” and concerns about “inconsistent” literature and “potentially harmful” effects in academic papers and “the paper provided preliminary evidence’ that persons experiencing positive emotions “are less likely to develop...diseases, live longer, and experience... less pain” (ibid, p.165 on Pressman & Cohen’s (2005) article). The “positive self-spinning” effect (ibid, p.165) is aggravated by researchers presenting results in a categorical manner: “Positivity is good and good for you; negativity is bad and bad for you” (Held, 2004, p. 12). Similarly, Seligman (2002) lists “less

depression, better physical health, and higher achievement” (p.129) as consequences of being optimistic, however, he supports the argument with research on happiness (Cederström, 2017).

Despite the embeddedness in the modern organisational world (Brinkmann, 2017) as a rarely questioned hallmark of the compliant employee and a requisite of good organisational practice (Collinson, 2012; Ehrenreich, 2009; Fineman, 2006), PT comes with controversy in academic circles about unjustified overpromotion. Critics view the dissemination of PT-focused activities in organisational settings, HRM practices, and consultancy services as a non-evidence-based manifestation of “Carnegie’s and Peale’s legacies” (Fineman, 2006, p.276). Moreover, the un-reflected promotion of PT in social and organisational contexts and literatures turns PT into a compulsory practice (Held, 2004), outcomes of which can range from silencing alternative perspectives to flawed decision-making (Collinson, 2012; Kahneman, 2011). In extreme cases, over-promoting PT may result in the corporate bias in favour of positive and against so-called negative people (Ehrenreich, 2009), including hiring people “with exaggerated motions, exaggerated smiles, exaggerated enthusiasm’ (ibid, 2009, p.103), encouraging those who demonstrate more enthusiasm by rewards, and dismissing those with a so-called negative attitude (ibid). Yet, disturbingly, PT remains overlooked by researchers not giving it as much attention as its contamination of the popular and practitioner discourses should have warranted (Seligman, 2006).

2.4 Conclusion

Originating from the religious ideas and movements of the earlier centuries in the US, PT has found a strong presence in the popular and practitioner discourses at the beginning of the 21st century. Yet, while promoting PT as salient for well-being and performance, these discourses do

not provide guidelines as to what PT implies and how one can develop it. Furthermore, they do not appear to consider any environmental factors that could influence PT and put the onus for it solely on the individual. Academics point to the lack of scientific understanding for PT and find its increasing uncritical acceptance and utilisation in social and organisational contexts worrisome and premature. In this context, I started an inquiry into the phenomenon with the first step being the examination of the existing evidence on it. The literature review I undertook for this purpose sought to answer the following focal questions:

- 1) How does the literature define PT?
- 2) How does PT manifest?
- 3) How can PT be developed?

The next two chapters outline my theoretical stance on PT as a product of the individual's interaction with the environment (Chapter 3) and present results of the integrative-narrative literature review examining and summarising the existing evidence on PT from psychological subfields and other social disciplines.

Chapter 3 An individual-environment interaction perspective on Positive Thinking

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Symbolic interactionism

3.3 Social cognitive theory

3.4 Cognitive affective processing system theory

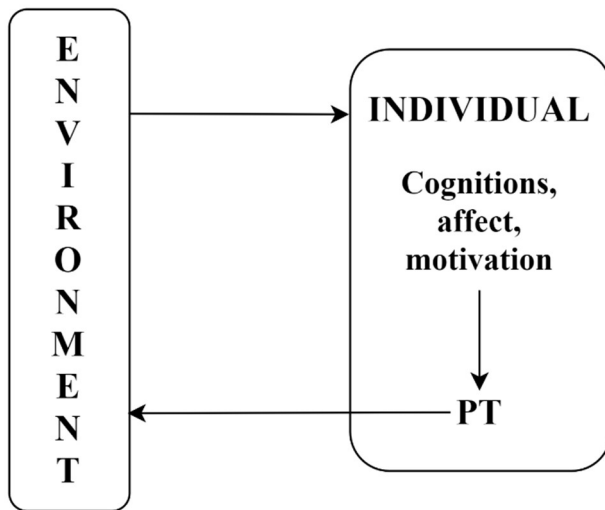
3.5 Conclusion

3.1 Introduction

Following from the research context chapter that identified the promotion of PT in the popular discourse and its widespread dissemination in organisational settings, this chapter introduces a broad interactionist perspective to substantiate the conceptualisation of PT as a product of individual-environment interaction. As referenced in Chapters 1 and 2, this thesis is influenced by interactionist principles (Bower, 1973; Endler & Magnusson, 1977; Mischel, 1968) arguing for the need to study the behaviours as a function of the conditions in which they occur. PT is unlikely to occur as an independent and isolated phenomenon in a situational vacuum. This is because thinking positive about something in oneself or the external environment will in all likelihood occur in a context. Thus, this research is informed by perspectives that could explicate PT and its expression in the organisational context: symbolic interactionism, social cognitive theory, and cognitive-affective processing system theory (Bandura, 1986; Blumer, 1969; Kuhn, 1964; Mischel & Shoda, 1995) (Figure 3.1).

These approaches converge in taking a contextualised view of human behaviour involving the influence of situations and the person's reactions to them enabling their adaptation to the environment (Hamaker, Nesselroede, & Molenaar, 2007).

Figure 3.1. Positive Thinking as a reaction underpinned by the individual-environment interaction



Further, situationist perspectives (Bandura, 1986; Mischel & Shoda, 1995) view the person as a complex system underpinned by cognitive, affective, and motivational processes rather than an organism reduced to enduring traits. The approaches are also complementary in adding to each other. Thus, symbolic interactionism outlines the individual-environment interplay principle, which postulates that agents and contexts reciprocally or mutually act upon one another but it stresses the role of a cognitive element in the interaction to the extent that it overlooks how affect can play a role in interactions too (Weigert & Gecas, 2003). Social cognitive theory provides mechanisms of the interaction, detailing its social aspect, and while it acknowledges affect as one of individual characteristics underlying the individual-environment reciprocal interaction, it mainly focuses on cognitions, in particular, on efficacy beliefs. Cognitive-affective processing system theory, in turn, highlights the role of individual cognitive-affective processes

in the individual-environment interplay and expands the cognition repertoire to include, for example, appraisal patterns, self-regulation, and goals.

This combined theoretical approach provides a comprehensive and useful framing to guide the investigation of PT. Essentially, it explicitly acknowledges social context which has so far been overlooked in positive psychological theory and research (McNulty & Fincham, 2012). I expand on the approaches as applied to PT in the following sections.

3.2 Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective that “rests on three premises: (1) that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; (2) that the meaning of such things is derived from the social interaction; (3) that these meanings are handled in an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters” (Blumer, 1986, p.2). Interaction refers to acting of agents upon one another in a reciprocal or mutual way (McCall & Simmons, 1978). Meanings, language, and thinking are three pillars of interactions. Interactions occur within social and cultural contexts, in which individuals generate meanings to define and categorise situations and objects and act upon these meanings (Nelson, 1998).

Through the process of thinking, which represents the person’s internal communication with themselves as prompted by environmental stimuli (Reynolds & Herman, 1994), individuals create and interpret linguistic symbols and use them to convey meanings in interactions. Thus, thinking, as achieved through interactions with the environment, is social in nature and acquired rather than innate (ibid). It is both a product of the environment and produces it (Meltzer, 2003). As a function enabling adaptation to the environment (ibid), it is not an entity but rather a process that occurs in certain circumstances (Strauss, 1978), when the person perceives the

situation in light of prior experiences, interprets the perceptions, and decides on actions (Meltzer, 2003).

As symbolic interactionism recognises the mutual influence of the environment and the person, it can be applied to studying both meanings that the person holds about the environment and environmental influences that shape those meanings. Implications of this reasoning for the current thesis are twofold. First, PT can be viewed as a symbol carrying meanings that people attach to it based on their interactions with the environment and interpreting the environment. People can share the meaning they have for PT, but they can also have different meanings for it, as meanings are shaped by each person's unique experience (Blumer, 1969). Therefore, to understand PT, it is imperative first to capture definitions and meanings that individuals create for it, which may require adopting an interpretive perspective (*ibid*). Second, as human behaviour is best understood in relation to its environment (Dewey, 2009), the study of PT involves preceding contextual events, which can entail both interpreting and generalising individual perspectives (Kuhn, 1964). Therefore, understanding meanings that individuals create for PT and identifying environmental influences on its development, which the current research sets out, can be achieved by relying on more than one research method (see Chapter 5 for Research methods).

Symbolic interactionism reflects in various research, including cultural studies, as well as research on gender, status, and power, self and identity, collective behaviour and social movement, and the social context and physical environment (see Carter & Fuller, 2015 for a review). Sharing similarities with cognitive psychology in explaining the formation of meaning in social context (Herman-Kinney & Verschaeve, 2003; Weigert & Gecas, 2003), it informs family studies (LaRossa & Reitzes, 2009), the study of emotions (Franks, 2003), and research on

occupations and professions (Shafirr & Pawluch, 2003). As a broad perspective, symbolic interactionism has been employed in organisational research to examine a variety of issues in different contexts with a diverse methodological arsenal, including cross-sectional and longitudinal quantitative studies, as well as qualitative research and reviews. This, for example, involved investigating external/context/power influences on routines, the development of female leadership in higher education and its representation in sports, workplace group culture, the impact of corporate culture on employee organisational commitment, mechanisms underlying the relationship between diversity climate and employee performance, the effects of leader–member exchange and diversity climate on job satisfaction and intention to leave, the relationship between psychological capital, job satisfaction, and safety perceptions, the effect of perceived organisational politics and job-related negative emotions on workplace incivility, spill-over effects of organisational cynicism on supervisor–subordinate relationships and performance, teacher careers, as well as for social organisational analysis (Bergheim, Nielsen, Mearns, & Eid, 2015; Brimhall, Lizano, & Barak, 2014; Burton, 2015; Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013; Everitt, 2012; Fine & Hallett, 2014; Gallant, 2014; McGinty, 2014; Neves, 2012; Nongo & Ikyanyon, 2012; Ogunbamila, 2013; Singh, Winkel, & Selvarajan, 2013). Drawing on the symbolic interactionism paradigm, I am introducing two theoretical perspectives that can explain mechanisms of the individual-environment interaction as applied to PT. These are social cognitive and cognitive-affective personality system theories discussed next.

3.3 Social cognitive theory (SCT)

SCT (Bandura, 1986) explains human behaviour both in terms of the environment and individual characteristics and views psychological functioning as a continuous reciprocal interaction

between the individual, their environment, and their behaviours. Under individual characteristics, SCT in particular refers to individual cognitions, examples of which include expectations, beliefs, self-perceptions, goals, intentions, cognitive competencies, thoughts about future courses of actions, assessments of situations, action strategies, or reflections on one's own thinking and behaviour. According to SCT, the environment can play a role both in development and activation of cognitions through the person's direct experience, observing others' experience, and social persuasion. The environment can both enable and impede development and activation of cognitions by providing opportunities and resources or imposing constraints. The person, in turn, uses cognitions developed or activated by the environment to perceive and evaluate external events on the one side and regulate behaviour on the other one.

In addition, through their actions, individual cognitions can also shape other people's cognitions and actions as well as alter environmental conditions. In this triadic reciprocal system involving individual characteristics, the environment, and the person's behaviours, people are not just reacting to the environment but can shape it too, which resonates with the notion of dynamic interactionism (Endler & Magnusson, 1977). SCT views the individual both as a product and a proactive, self-organising, self-reflective, and self-regulative producer of their environment. From the SCT angle, PT, as a phenomenon that implies thinking in a positive way about something in the environment or oneself, can be seen as behaviour resulting from individual characteristics activated or developed through the person's interaction with their environment. In the context of PT, some examples of such characteristics could be one's appraisal patterns, propensity to experience positive affect, or optimism levels.

The role of self-efficacy. SCT places importance on self-efficacy as a key cognitive characteristic determining whether individual characteristics will translate into behaviours or not.

Self-efficacy denotes people's beliefs in their capabilities to perform a specific action to attain a desired outcome and extends to tasks, domains, or any general life situations (Bandura, 1977).

SCT frames the performance environment as a source of self-efficacy, where social factors influence self-processes (Bandura, 1997). Thus, people can gain and increase self-efficacy through their individual and social sources including mastery and vicarious experiences, as well as verbal persuasion and physiological arousal. Mastery experiences refer to performance accomplishments. The greater the number of successful master experiences, the higher one's beliefs about their capability to handle similar tasks in future. Physiological arousal refers to physiological and affective states from which people may judge their efficacy, strength, and vulnerability to dysfunction. The social sources of self-efficacy include vicarious experiences and verbal persuasion. Vicarious experiences are developed through imagined participation in observed experiences of others performing successfully. They are based on individuals' assumption that if others can succeed, they can do it too. Social persuasion implies that individuals are convinced by an external party that they hold the capabilities needed to act successfully. In light of the current thesis' theoretical framing findings on the relationship between higher levels of social sources of self-efficacy and increased efficacy beliefs in various settings both cross-sectionally and over time are noteworthy (Baron & Morin, 2010; Henderson, Rowe, Watson, & Hitchen-Holmes, 2016; Latham, Greenbaum, & Bardes, 2008; Morris, Usher, & Chen, 2017; Peura et al., 2021; Warner, Schüz, Knittle, Ziegelmann, & Wurm, 2011).

Effects of self-efficacy. In the context of the current thesis, of particular interest are effects of self-efficacy as they can explain how individual characteristics can translate into thinking positive about oneself and the environment through cognitive, motivational, and affective channels (Bandura, 1986). Cognitively, an efficacious outlook stimulates a sense of control over

oneself and the environment, affects one's outcome expectancies, and relates to visualisation of successful future scenarios (Bandura, 1994; 1997). People with high self-efficacy appraise difficult tasks as challenges surmountable through effort rather than threats to be avoided, which enables focusing on opportunities versus dwelling on losses (Bandura, 1999). Efficacious beliefs also shape causal attributions, when the person ascribes failures to insufficient effort, inadequate strategies, or unfavourable circumstances rather than to their low ability. Affect-wise, higher efficacy beliefs create positive states, while lower ones underlie one's vulnerability to stress and depression (ibid). The sense of control accompanying self-efficacy, including perceived thought control efficacy, helps the person cope with stress, whereas low self-efficacy produces distress and activates anxiety (Bandura, 1977; 1989).

Finally, through motivational processes, self-efficacy shapes one's actions both directly and through goal setting and outcome expectations (Bandura, 1999). Motivation reflects in how much effort one puts forth, sustains, or even heightens to attain their goals, while visualising future guides one's actions towards the goals. Self-efficacy beliefs influence resilience and perseverance of people in the face of setbacks when accomplishing their goals (Bandura, 1977; 1994). Self-efficacy beliefs also underlie one's interactions with the environment by affecting their choice and management of it (Bandura, 1999).

While there is not much research on the link between self-efficacy and PT, research on effects of self-efficacy on optimism, which is often used interchangeably with PT (discussed in Section 4.5.1 of Chapter 4), shows that general and domain-specific self-efficacy (e.g., in decision-making, nutrition education) predicts optimism both in cross-sectional and longitudinal studies from 10 weeks to 1 year (Caprara & Steca, 2005; Garcia, Restubog, Bordia, Bordia, & Roxas, 2015; Larsen, McArdle, Robertson, & Dunton, 2015; Pu, Hou, & Ma, 2017; Urbig &

Monsen, 2012). These findings support the view (Bandura, 1997) that without self-efficacy and the sense of control pertinent to it, optimism represents unsustainable wishful thinking. This line of reasoning suggests that self-efficacy may play a pivotal role in development or activation of PT following the person's interaction with the environment. Having outlined the view of PT from the SCT angle, the chapter now moves to the discussion of how PT can be explained from the prism of cognitive-affective processing system theory (CAPST), which similar to SCT, also draws on the person-environment interaction but focuses more on individual aspects.

3.4 Cognitive-affective processing system theory (CAPST)

Before detailing CAPST, it is worth noting that this model conceptualises personality as intertwining *cognitive social constructs* which underlie behaviour and can be used to analyse it, including, for example, one's goals and values, appraisal of situations, or outcome expectancies (Shoda & Mischel, 1993). These constructs are discussed in detail shortly in the section.

Arguably, such narrower cognitive social constructs provide a better understanding of behaviour as a process than broader trait descriptions (Mischel, 1968). Importantly, in characterising how the individual perceives and reacts to situations, behavioural expressions of the cognitive social constructs are contextual and situation-dependent and are not stable manifestations of enduring traits (Schoda & Mischel, 1993).

CAPST (Mischel & Shoda, 1995, 1998) explains social information processing, when situations prompt cognitive and affective reactions, which may vary depending on the state of people's cognitive social constructs and their prior experiences regarding similar situations (Mischel, 1973). This is applicable both to interpersonal and intrapersonal situations (Mischel & Shoda, 1995) and may partly represent the person's meanings of them (Kelly, 1970). The theory

accounts for processes through which cognitions and affects transform into action patterns in response to situations and views the person both as reacting to the environment and shaping it. Importantly, given that CAPST explains not only individual differences but also within-person variability in behaviours, taking this theoretical perspective, one can assume that, depending on a situation, the same person may demonstrate varying levels of PT. Although there is not much evidence on PT in this regard, research on another positivity construct, optimism, indicates that its levels can fluctuate depending on life stages and events (see Mens, Scheier, & Carver (2016) for a review).

While SCT identifies self-efficacy as a key cognitive determinant of future behaviours, CAPST takes a step forward in considering a variety of cognitions and affects that can facilitate the situation-individual interplay and categorises five types of cognitive social constructs, also known as cognitive-affective units (CAUs), including the person's encodings (of self, other people, situations), expectancies (about outcomes and personal efficacy), values, competencies (for behaviour), self-regulation strategies and plans in the pursuit of goals, and affects (Mischel, 1973). Table 3.1 details CAUs. Individuals differ in (a) the specifics of CAUs; (b) their accessibility; (c) relationships among them as they can activate and inhibit each other; and (d) their interactions with situations.

The initial activation of a particular CAU then affects other CAUs in their associative network, either stimulating or inhibiting them. The cognitive-affective system is activated both by situations through the activation of CAUs and by the interaction among CAUs as the individual interprets external and internal stimuli. The activation and interaction of CAUs produce responses to situations, hence the person is an active agent in their social world and not just a perceiver of environmental stimuli.

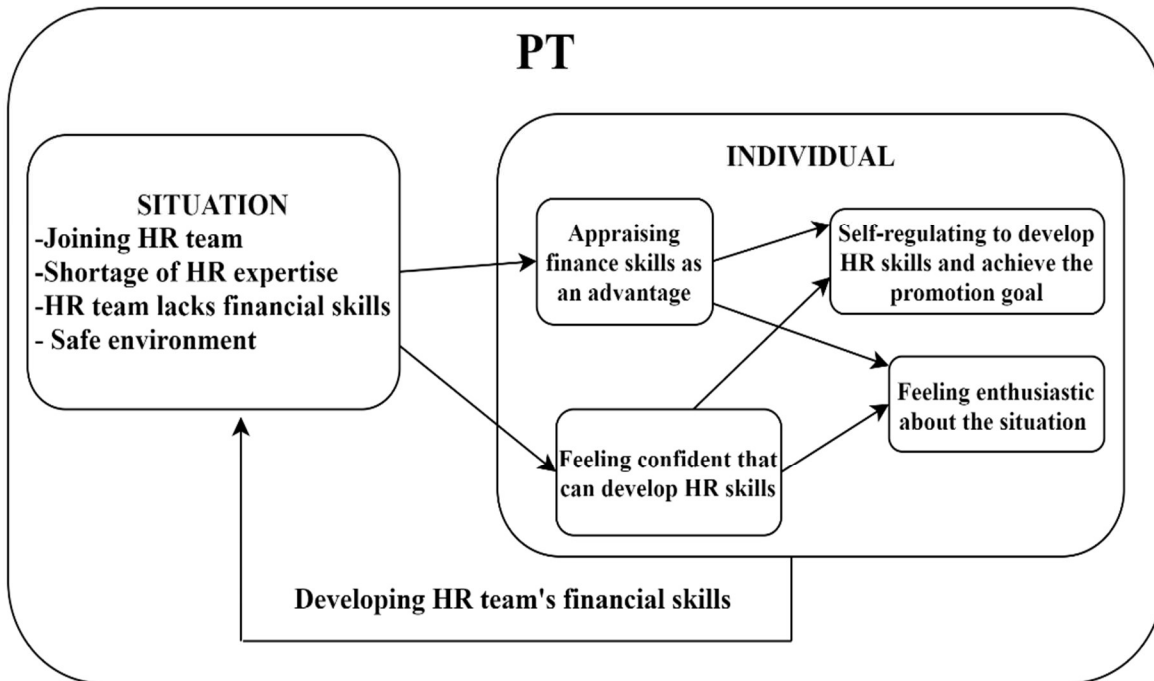
Table 3.1. Description of cognitive-affective units

CAU	Description
1. Encodings	Evaluating, categorising, and attaching meaning to internal and external situations regarding the self and others. The interpretation of situations often dictates the activation of other CAUs and subsequent behaviour (Kell, 2018).
2. Expectancies & beliefs	The person's prediction about outcomes resulting from actions and self-efficacy and influence the likelihood of taking actions.
3. Goals & values	Desired outcomes and the extent to which outcomes are significant to the person respectively and account for behavioural consistency. They can be influenced by self-perceptions and, in turn, can influence pursuing relevant courses of action, similar to expectancies.
4. Competencies & self-regulatory plans	Cognitive and behavioural capabilities and the strategies individuals can use to monitor and direct their behaviour towards attaining goals respectively.
5. Affects	Feelings and emotions, including physiological reactions occurring in response to situations. While they can happen automatically, they can also be altered by cognitions in a reappraisal process changing the initial perception of the stimulus (Kell, 2018).

I argue that the level of the activation may be down to the individual differences in CAUs outlined above. For example, when the person consistently perceives environmental stimuli as threats, sees themselves as inefficacious, and does not exercise self-regulation, their influence on the social world will be less than that of someone who interprets situations as favourable to them, believe they are capable of achieving desired outcomes, and continuously direct themselves to attaining goals.

Drawing on CAPST, I conceptualise PT as a cognitive-affective process of reacting and adapting to the environment activated by the individual's interactions with the environment and their appraisal of it. Figure 3.2 demonstrates PT resulting from the activation of CAUs by a situation and their interactions on an example* of an employee who moved to the HR department from Finance and lacks HR expertise, which they see as a disadvantage, hence self-regulation for developing the new skills is activated.

Figure 3.2. Example of Positive Thinking as a reaction to the situation



Yet, their financial skills put them in a more advantageous position in comparison to peers. They are confident that they can develop the required skills as they have had experiences of developing new skills in the past. They find the environment of the HR department as facilitative of learning and suggesting improvement initiatives, which rests them assured that they can both

**The example is from the grounded theory study data of the current research.*

develop HR skills and get promoted if they build the HR team's financial capacity. Their appraisal of the situation and efficacy beliefs prompt pleasant emotions as one's cognitions can shape affect (Roseman & Smith, 2001). Along with developing HR expertise, they draw on financial skills to get promoted to the next job level. Ultimately, they both react to the situation and change it.

As CAUs underlying one's disposition for PT interplay with the environment, differences in CAUs and their own interactions can account for differences in PT activation and expression as a response to different situations. Furthermore, through the CAPST prism, ultimately, PT is a

reaction to environmental stimuli, which is a function of thinking (Carruthers, 2009; Heyes, 2012; Meltzer, 2003; Tomasello, 2014). The theory can explain why PT may not always be relevant as it is down to the assessment of situations against one's beliefs, values, expectancies, or goals. Importantly, this theoretical perspective reflects the social cognitive rather than simply cognitive approach to PT, which is aligned with interactionist traditions of studying mindsets in their contexts.

Last, CAPST incorporates both rational and irrational ("cold" and "hot" subsystems) information-processing (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). In the context of PT, I focus on deliberative and rational processing enabling, for instance, goal attainment or coping (Mischel & Ayduk, 2002). Such controlled processing, for example, can manifest in deliberately looking for the positive in situations. Yet, self-relevant cognitions are not purely rational (Mischel, 1973). This may be even more relevant to PT as along with cognitions, PT may involve affect too given that cognitions influence affective reactions (Roseman & Smith, 2001), which then, in turn, can affect information processing. Except for few studies that have examined job withdrawal behaviours (Zimmerman, Swider, Woo, & Allen, 2016), job performance variability (Minbashian & Luppino, 2014), or career success (Heslin, Keating, & Minbashian, 2019) through the CAPST lens, its application to the workplace has up to date been limited. Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, CAPST has not been utilised for studying positivity constructs in organisational settings.

3.5 Conclusion

The integrated theoretical perspective discussed in this chapter involved symbolic interactionism, social cognitive, and cognitive-affective processing system theories applied to understand PT in

organisations as a contextual phenomenon subject to environmental influences. This perspective suggests that PT can act as an interaction symbol carrying meanings, which can both converge and diverge for different people depending on their unique understandings and experience of PT. It further proposes that while, as situated within individual agency, PT is impacted by one's cognition and affect, it may develop and express to the degree the environment offers opportunities for it by activating the cognitive-affective characteristics, as well as to the extent the characteristics are sufficiently developed to allow forming PT. For example, it may be hard to develop PT if one's appraisal patterns are negative so that the person consistently dwells on negative elements of situations and does not recognise positive ones. However, it may be equally hard to exercise PT if the environment does not offer such positive cues, when, for instance, the person's initiatives are ignored rather than recognised and encouraged. Since situations can have both objective and subjective cues (Murray, 1938), subjective meanings of situations can play as an important role in PT development and expression as objective factors.

As, according to symbolic interactionism, to understand things, it is imperative first to define them, this research aims to examine definitions and understandings of PT in the literature to identify how they characterise PT, whether the definitions take into account individuals' meanings of it, and whether they pose PT as a response to environment stimuli, as suggested by the interactionist perspective. To get a more complete understanding of PT as a contextual phenomenon in line with the theoretical approach of this thesis, the examination of the literature will also aim identifying individual and environmental influences on development and expression of PT, which may induce or inhibit it. Any potential gaps in the literature can be addressed with research methods (see Chapter 5 for Research methods) compatible with symbolic interactionism, including both interpreting individual perspectives and drawing more

abstract and general conclusions about PT. The former, for example, can involve individual interviews investigating personal understandings and experiences of PT. The latter can include testing relationships among variables related to development and expression of PT at work.

Thus, taking the integrated theoretical perspective built on interactionist traditions, this thesis can contribute to positivity research and practice by systematising existing knowledge about PT in organisations, outlining individual and environmental influences shaping its development and manifestation, and showing the utility of adopting a contextualised approach to behaviours.

In the next chapter, I discuss my approach to examining the literature on PT from various social disciplines and psychological subdisciplines and present results of the integrative-narrative literature review evaluating the existing evidence on PT and similar phenomena.

Chapter 4 Literature Review

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Thinking and definitions of Positive Thinking

4.3 Manifestations of Positive Thinking and similar phenomena: Individual understandings and experiences

4.3.1 PT in health and work settings

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4.4 Effects of Positive Thinking: Evidence versus assumptions

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4.5.1 Optimism as a positive schema

4.5.2 Positive affect

4.6 Conclusion

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the interactionist theoretical perspective of this thesis incorporating symbolic interactionism, social cognitive, and cognitive-affective processing system theories (Bandura, 1986; Blumer, 1969; Kuhn, 1964; Mischel & Shoda, 1995) and viewing PT as a product of a person-environment interaction. Informed by this framing, the current chapter examines existing research on PT to identify limitations in the knowledge base. The review first examines extant definitions of PT in research to assess their clarity and identify if they characterise PT as a response to environment stimuli and whether the definitions are

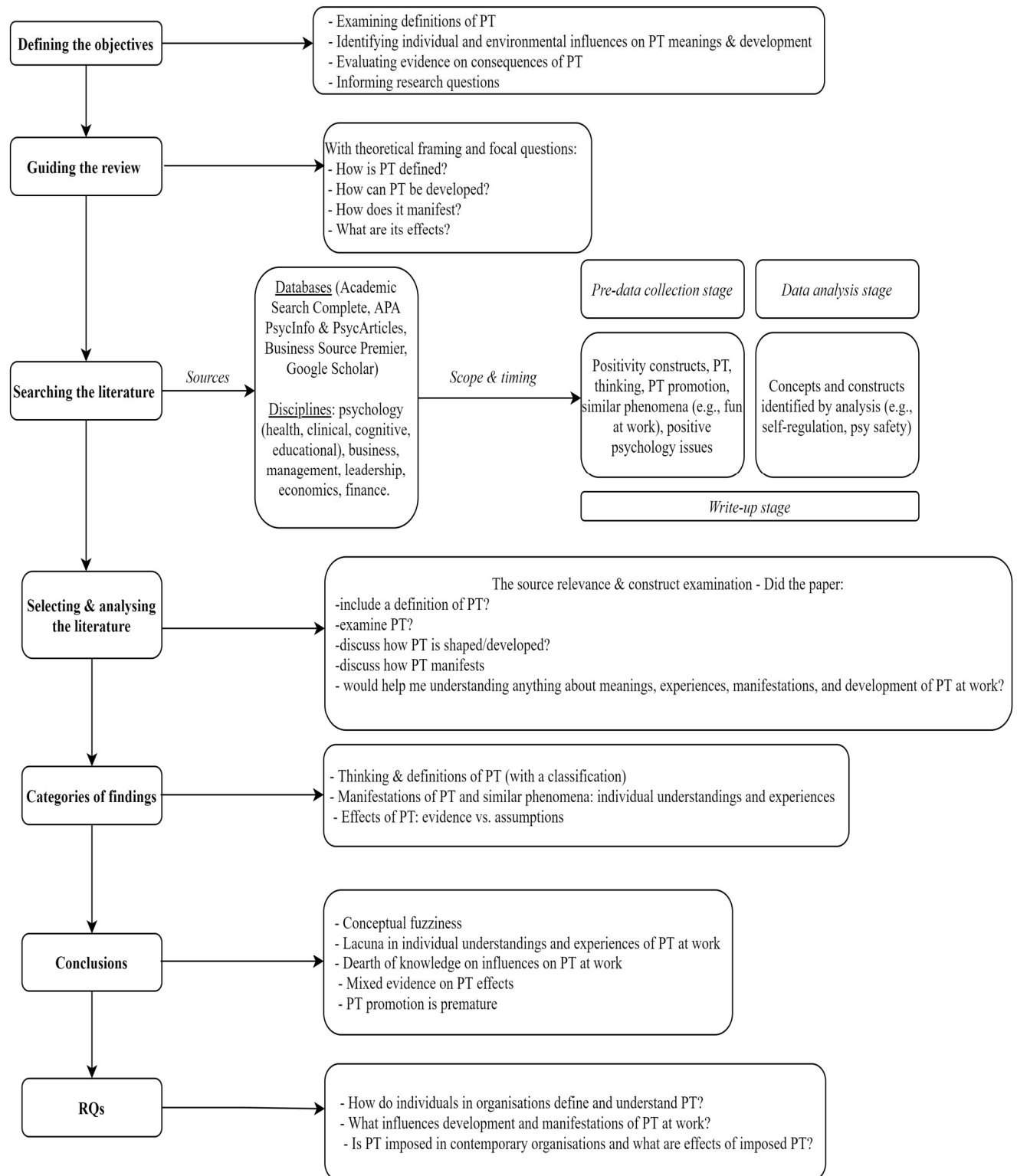
inclusive of meanings that individuals create for it in interactions, as suggested by the interactionist perspective. It also examines the literature to identify how it captures individual understandings of PT and influences on its development and manifestations in various settings. Finally, it examines evidence on consequences of PT to assess the credibility of claims on its benevolent effects. The review proposes an overall rationale and research questions for the thesis. The literature search, selection, a narrative-integrative analysis approach to the review, and issues encountered when examining the literature are detailed in the Appendix F (see Figure 4.1 for an overview of the process).

4.2 Thinking and definitions of Positive Thinking

This section discusses a variety of PT's conceptualisation and operationalisation to provide a classification of the extant definitions.

Thinking is a chain of mental events, where reflection leads to inquiry, inquiry involves critical assessment, which, in turn, generates a conclusion (Dewey, 2009). It covers a range of mental activities that start as a response to environmental stimuli and shape one's subsequent behaviour (Carruthers, 2009). Reacting to the stimuli enables adaptation to the world and is thus used for planning, problem-solving, decision-making, and executive control (Heyes, 2012; Tomasello, 2014). The academic literature does not offer a single definition of PT (Ruthig, Holfeld, & Hanson, 2012) and operational definitions vary (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2000). The existing definitions can be grouped into four categories examined next: (1) definitions using other constructs to describe PT; (2) definitions describing PT as a regulation of thoughts; (3) definitions referring to PT as skills; (4) definitions referring to PT as cognition.

Figure 4.1 The literature review process



Definitions using other constructs to describe PT. These definitions vary from approach to attitude, optimism, life satisfaction, self-esteem, control, hope, expectancies, meaning-seeking, or outlook (Table 4.1). They do not incorporate reacting to stimuli and adjusting further behaviour, which are functions of thinking (Carruthers, 2009; Heyes, 2012; Meltzer, 2003; Tomasello, 2014). Further, these definitions do not refer to the sequence and elements of the thinking process and do not address its adaptive function. They rather define PT as a psychological state or trait. In this regard, the difference between PT and optimism merits particular attention (see Section 4.5.1 of this chapter for a detailed discussion of optimism). PT acts as an acquirable quality resulting from the interaction of the individual's cognitive-affective characteristics with the environment (Chapter 3) and utilised to interpret past, present, and future events (Meltzer, 2003; Reynolds & Herman, 1994). Optimism, however, is defined either as an explanatory style for past events (Peterson & Seligman, 1984) or expectancies for future ones (Mens, Scheier, & Carver, 2016). Whether a trait (Carver & Scheier, 2014) or a cognitive bias (Kahneman, 2011; Sharot, 2011), optimism has a biologic component as it is associated with increased activation of the amygdala and rostral anterior cingulate and linked with serotonin and dopamine levels (Haselton & Nettle, 2006; Sharot, 2011; Yang, Wei, Wang, & Qiu, 2013). Although its levels may vary, it is intrinsic to most human beings unless they suffer from depression (Cummins & Nistico, 2002). Therefore, posing PT as optimism is not accurate as these appear to be two different constructs representing a cognitive-affective process of reaction and adaptation to the environment (PT) and a biologically grounded cognition (optimism).

Table 4.1. Existing conceptualisations and operationalisations of Positive Thinking (n/a in review/conceptual papers) (N=11)

Conceptualisation	Operationalisation	Definition (source)
Attitude	n/a	“a way of talking and acting that reflects an optimistic or positive attitude or feeling state” (McGrath, 2004, p.26) “any derivative encompassing hope, optimism, positive mental attitude, including ‘being positive’” (McCreaddie, Payne, & Froggatt, 2010, p.284)
Outlook / mode of viewing	Optimism, Life satisfaction, Self-esteem PT skills	“a positive outlook or a mode of viewing reality and facing life events that capitalizes on positive past experiences retrieving and making them salient in the various occurrences of life” (Caprara & Steca, 2006, p. 604) a cognitive component of subjective well-being including life satisfaction, self-esteem, and optimism (Caprara & Steca, 2005; Caprara & Steca, 2006; Caprara et al., 2006) “A cognitive process that creates hopeful images, develops optimistic ideas, finds favorable solutions to problems, makes affirmative decisions, and produces an overall bright outlook on life.” (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013, p.3)
Control	Perceived control over having cancer, Perceived control over cancer outcomes, Responsibility judgements for cancer	“Intentional cognitive strategies to be positive that include experiencing and expressing positive thoughts (which may include positive expectations, positive healing imagery, and a positive attitude) and suppressing negative thoughts and fears” (Ruthig, Holfeld, & Hanson, 2012, p.1245)
Expectancies	n/a Future thinking Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count measure	positive outcome expectancies; positive future thinking (Macleod & Moore, 2000) Positive cognitions concerning the future (MacLeod & Salaminiou, 2001) “freely generating thoughts and images that depict possible futures in an idealized way (Sevincer, Wagner, Kalvelage, & Oettingen, 2014, p. 1010)
Meaning-seeking	n/a	“finding meaning and positivity even in challenging circumstances” (Morganson, Litano, & O’neill, 2014, p.228)

Definitions describing PT as regulation of thoughts (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. PT as regulation of thoughts (N=10)

CATEGORY	ACTIVITY	SOURCE
Construction	Generating positive thoughts	Sevincer et al, 2014
	Generating positive feelings	Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013
	Initiating optimistic beliefs	Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013
	Producing a bright outlook on life	Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013
Concentration	Increasing positive thoughts	Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013
	Thinking about positive outcomes in visual or verbal forms	
	Expressing positive thoughts	Ruthig, Holfeld, & Hanson, 2012
	Thinking about positive life experiences	Lyubomirsky, Sousa, & Dickerhoof, 2006
Elimination	Controlling negative thoughts	Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013
	Interrupting pessimistic thoughts	Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013
	Nurturing ways to challenge pessimistic thoughts	Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013
	Suppressing negative thoughts	Ruthig, Holfeld, & Hanson, 2012
	Eliminating negative/destructive attitudes, emotions, thoughts	Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013
Transformation	Transforming negative thoughts into positive ones	Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013
	Overcoming unpleasant, unwanted, and destructive attitudes and states	De Raeve, 1997
	Looking at things positively	De Raeve, 1997
	Replacing worry	Eagleson et al., 2016
	Highlighting positive aspects of a situation	Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013
	Breaking a problem into smaller parts	Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013
Visualisation	Visualising desired outcomes	Morganson, Litano, & O'neill, 2014
	Thinking with positive representations	MacLeod & Salaminiou, 2001
	Generating positive images	Sevincer et al, 2014
	Creating hopeful images	Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013
	Thinking in verbal forms	Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013
	Hopeful goal-directed thinking	Feldman & Dreher, 2012
	Positive future thinking	Peters et al, 2010

In this cluster of definitions, regulation of thoughts is summarised as adjusting one's thinking, when the individual (1) initiates and nurtures thoughts with favourable, complimentary content and (2) suppresses or eliminates thoughts containing non-pleasurable information. These definitions imply that thinking can and should be directed and framed in a "positive" way. This

stance overlooks the adaptive function of thinking and neglects the fact that thoughts with unpleasant content may contain important information that the individual should react to (Lovallo & Kahneman, 2003). Framing thinking in a certain way may impede the ability to critically assess one's environment, which is an element of thinking (Dewey, 2009). In sum, suppressing negative thoughts without trying to understand why they occur and initiating thoughts with favourable content without questioning if there are grounds for them may limit one's vision of situations, affect the accurate perception of reality, and thus misalign with the adaptive function of thinking.

Definitions presenting PT as various skills refer to finding favourable solutions to problems, breaking a problem into smaller, manageable parts, challenging own thoughts (Bekhet & Zauszniewski 2013) or taking something meaningful away from difficult situations (Heraty, Morley, Cleveland, Rotondo, & Kincaid, 2008). These are characteristics of constructive or critical thinking defined as practical intelligence to solve problems (Epstein & Meier, 1989) or self-correcting reflective thinking with sensitivity to context (Lipman, 1988) respectively. Using characteristics of other constructs to conceptualise and operationalise PT fits the definition of a jangle fallacy (Kelley, 1927) and raises several concerns. First, this approach does not treat PT as an independent construct by clearly differentiating it from constructive or critical thinking. Apart from creating conceptual confusion, it also puts into question the effectiveness of measuring PT conceptualised as other constructs and relevance of such studies' results to PT. Last, it does not address the "positive" element of PT.

Definitions referring to PT as cognition. Finally, some definitions present PT as a cognitive process (Bekhet & Zauszniewski 2013), a cognitive strategy (Ruthig, Holfeld, & Hanson, 2012), thoughts that portray the idealised future (Sevincer, Wagner, Kalvelage, &

Oettingen, 2014), or positive cognition (Macleod & Moore, 2000). These definitions pose PT as a cognitive state, however, they do not specify if they refer to the content or effects of the state as well as do not clarify the “positive” component of PT. Neither do they entail elements of the thinking process or explain how adaptive functions of thinking, such as planning, problem solving, or decision-making can be achieved through PT.

Overall, most of the definitions reviewed explain PT as a psychological state and do not incorporate elements and functions of thinking and its affective component potentially implied by “positive”. Those referring to PT as a cognitive state overlook the elements of the thinking process, namely, responses to environmental stimuli, reflection, inquiry, and critical assessment (Dewey, 2009) and its role in the adaptation to the environment. Instead, they suggest regulating one’s perception of reality, where an individual initiates and nurtures thoughts with pleasant content and suppresses or eliminates thoughts containing non-pleasurable information, which may be detrimental to critical thinking and accurate perception of reality (Kahneman, 2011).

There are two key issues with the stream of research reviewed in this section. The first one has to do with conceptual confusion characterising existing definitions of PT and lack of clarity as to whether PT should be viewed as an acquired quality involving reaction and adaptation to the environment, as suggested by the theoretical framing of this research, a cognition, affect, behaviour, state, or trait. The lack of conceptual clarity may explain the mixed evidence on effects of PT discussed later in the chapter. Second, the conceptualisations of PT categorised into a taxonomy in this section mainly come from quantitative studies that examine effects of PT and appear, for convenience purposes, to use PT as a synonym for other constructs and measure it with existing instruments designed for these constructs. As such, the existing definitions may not represent PT accurately or not represent it at all, let alone include individual

understandings of it, which would fit with the interactionist perspective. This points to neglect of meanings that people create and convey through symbols as the foundation of interactions between the individual and the environment (Chapter 3). Hence, the chapter now moves to examination of the literature that focuses on manifestations of PT involving individual accounts of it and meanings that people generate for it in interactions to identify what may shape people's understandings and experiences of PT as a contextual phenomenon, as viewed through the theoretical framing of this thesis.

4.3 Manifestations of Positive Thinking and similar phenomena: Individual understandings and experiences

This section discusses research on manifestations of PT including findings on individual understandings of PT and pressure to demonstrate it in health and work settings. It includes a section on surface acting as a potential outcome of enforced positivity. Given the scarcity of studies in this area, the review brings in evidence from research on a similar and well-studied phenomenon of fun at work to get a better understanding of meanings, experiences, manifestations, and development of PT at work, identify what can shape positive perceptions and experiences of PT, and inform this thesis' research questions.

4.3.1 PT in health and work settings. Having discussed existing definitions of PT in the positivist research stream, the chapter now turns to assessment of individual accounts of PT in qualitative studies that challenge the conceptual ambivalence of PT pertinent to mainstream research and deconstruct the concept to identify how people understand it. This involves reviewing studies in *health psychology*, in particular, in onco-psychology, which is the only subdiscipline where perceptions and meanings of PT have been explored so far (McGrath,

Montgomery, White, & Kerridge, 2006; O’Baugh, Wilkes, Luke, & George, 2003; Wilkes’ O’Baugh, Luke, & George, 2003; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2000).

These studies revealed that in health settings not only patients and carers had different understandings of PT but there was not homogeneity among patients’ understandings either. For patients, PT was more about acquiring normalcy disrupted by the disease (O’Baugh et al., 2003), whereas peer support was perceived as improper cheerleading or “ra ra” positivity (McGrath, 2004). They also used PT as an idiomatic expression reflecting a socially normative requirement (De Raeve, 1997) with the same purposes of recapping conversations, conveying their general meaning without specifying details, moving away from personal and painful topics, and seeking agreement as idioms are used (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2000). Carers saw PT as an approach to living and coping with illness by adopting a fighting spirit, taking control of one’s life, demonstrating strength and courage (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2000; O’Baugh et al., 2003; Petticrew et al., 2002; Tod, Warnock, & Allmark, 2011).

The difference in understandings of PT was aggravated by patients’ perceptions that society and caregivers expected them to demonstrate positivity and suppress negative emotions and thoughts, which felt like an artificial and oppressive burden generating feelings of guilt or self-blame if one fails to think positive, especially, when this was coupled with deterioration in the medical condition (McCreaddie, Payne, & Froggatt, 2010; McGrath et al., 2006; Ehrenreich, 2009; Ruthig, Holfeld, Hanson, 2012; Tod, Warnock, & Allmark, 2011). Such feelings are often reinforced by the popular belief that positivity can impact disease progression, which is partly rooted in ill-justified (Brown, Sokal, & Friedman, 2014) claims (e.g., see Fredrickson et al. (2013) on identification of “molecular signaling pathways that transduce positive psychological states into somatic physiology” (p. 13684)). The pressure of such beliefs is vividly illustrated by

a quote from an Olympic gold medal winner Maarten Van der Weijden, who refuted the non-evidence-based assumption that not thinking positive enough can make one susceptible to cancer and shared his own experience of dealing with a cancer diagnosis:

*I laid down in the hospital and simply surrendered to the doctors. You always hear those stories that you have to think positively, that you have to fight to survive. **This can be a great burden for patients.** It has never been proven that you can cure from cancer by thinking positively or by fighting (in Coyne, Tennen, & Ranchor, 2010, p. 40).*

Unsurprisingly, this sort of pressure is related to developing unreasonable expectations about the future and underreporting of symptoms (McCreaddie, Payne, & Froggatt, 2010; McGrath, 2004; McGrath, Jordens, Montgomery, & Kerridge, 2006; McGrath, Montgomery, White, & Kerridge, 2006). The evidence on different meanings put into the concept by different individuals (McCreaddie, Payne, & Froggatt, 2010) and perceptions of the necessity to demonstrate PT once again highlight issues related to the lack of clear understanding on what thinking positive is.

Even less is known about individual understandings of PT *at work* as no study has so far investigated them despite the concept's rising acceptance and utilisation by organisations and the practitioner community (Brinkmann, 2017; Collinson, 2012; Fineman, 2006; Hackman, 2009; Held, 2018; Lee, 2017). Currently, no conclusions can be made as to whether understandings of individuals about of PT in organisational settings are different or similar to those of patients and if PT in the workplace can be defined as a cognitive-affective process of reaction and adaption prompted by interactions with the environment, skill, psychological state, or something else. Thin part of leadership literature reports experiences of positivity enforced via organisational communications, when employees are encouraged to be upbeat and positive and express optimism and cheeriness, which, arguably, aims to control and discipline them and makes them look more committed to the organisation (Collinson, 2010; 2012).

Yet, such enforcement fuels employee dissent, especially, if managers' positive messages are at odds with employees' experiences, and discourages followers from raising problems or admitting mistakes (Collinson, 2012). For example, Collinson (1992, p.13) reports a case of a private organisation in Northern England, where employees renamed a company magazine filled with photographs of smiling faces and progress reports as the "Goebbels Gazette" and treated its positive language as "Yankee hypnosis on paper" intended to "fool" them "into working", which they dismissed. Importantly, the enforcement may hinder one's psychological security by suppressing legitimate concerns that misalign with the positive discourse, whereas challenging the pressure of compulsory positivity can be risky for one's career and reputation (Collinson, 2006; 2012). While this literature echoes the critique confronting mass media and popular psyche's positivity hype infiltrating organisational practices, it does not sufficiently explore meanings and experiences of PT at work. Neither does it pay adequate attention to the problem of expectations to express positivity in organisational settings and employee reactions to such expectations as the health psychology studies discussed above do. Finally, it primarily focuses on negative influences on meanings and experiences of PT but says little about what can shape positive experiences of it or can add to its development.

4.3.2 Surface acting. A potential outcome of enforcing PT may be faking it through employing strategies of emotional labour, which denotes the regulation of one's emotions, behaviours, thoughts, or actions to appear complying with organisational expectations (Taylor, 1998). In light of PT understood as expressing positive thoughts and suppressing negative thoughts and fears (Ruthig, Holfeld, & Hanson, 2012), *surface acting*, an emotional labour strategy implying hiding negative and amplifying positive emotional expressions to display organisationally

expected emotions without changing beliefs (Grandey, 2015), is of particular interest as a possible consequence of imposing PT at work. Negative outcomes of surface acting on such domains of life as well-being, performance, self-perception, and interactions with others are well documented and include distress, burnout, emotive dissonance, subjective health complaints, turnover intentions, low job satisfaction, work withdrawal, reduced follower participation, distrust in the leader, absenteeism, impaired performance, negative self-perception, self-alienation, perceived inauthenticity, low and peer communication satisfaction, or interaction avoidance (for meta-analyses, see Bono & Vey, 2005; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011; Kammeyer-Mueller et al, 2013; also Chen, Sun, Lam, Hu, Huo, & Zhong, 2012; Côté, 2005; Côté & Morgan, 2002; Deng et al., 2020; Dunbar & Baker, 2014; Fisk & Friesen, 2012; Gardner, Fischer, & Hunt, 2009; Grandey, Rupp, & Brice, 2015; Gross & John, 2003; Groth, Hennig-Thurau, & Walsh, 2009; Hu & Shi, 2015; Hu, Zhan, Jimenez, Garden, & Li, 2021; Grandey, 2000; Grandey, Fisk, & Steiner, 2005; Hülshager, Lang, & Maier, 2010; Indregard, Knardahl, & Nielsen, 2018; Judge, Woolf, & Hurst, 2009; Lartey, Kwesi, & Joseph, 2019; Lee, 2019; Lee & Van Vlack, 2018; Lyddy, Good, Bolino, Thompson, & Stephens, 2021; Herrmann & Rockoff, 2012; Mudau, 2016; Mo & Shi, 2017; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000; Ogunsola, Fontaine, & Jan, 2020; Ozcelik, 2013; Richard & Converse, 2016; Scott & Barnes 2011; Yang, Huang, & Zhou, 2021; Yilmaz, Altinkurt, & Güner, 2015; Yin, Huang, & Lee, 2017). In the context of PT, it could be suggested that having to imitate PT may decrease genuine PT levels as one's resources will be consumed by impression management (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003).

While previous research has largely focused on surface acting in the customer care context and effects of it (e.g., Grandey et al., 2013; Harper, 2020), much less is known about surface acting in the intraorganisational context and its antecedents (e.g., Grandey & Melloy,

2017; Hu & Shi, 2015) although it was found to occur in two thirds of workplace interactions (Mann, 1999). There are indications that there may be individual and organisational level triggers for surface acting including a negative evaluation of one's role, role-related (e.g., leader/follower) perceptions of inappropriateness of displaying certain emotions, unempathetic and disempowering leadership, and lack of a climate of authenticity and psychological safety (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Beal, Trougakos, Weiss, & Green, 2006; Cuadros, 2019; Diefendorff, Erickson, Grandey, & Dahling, 2011; Diefendorff, Richard, & Croyle, 2006; Humphrey, Pollack, & Hawver, 2008; Pescosolido, 2002; Wilk & Moynihan, 2005). Yet, empirical evidence is scarce. An example of this sporadic research is Ozcelik's (2013) empirical analysis of surface acting in intra-organisational relationships, in which drawing on social psychological theories of the self, including sociometer theory of self-esteem (Leary & Baumesiter, 2000; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995) and self-presentation theory (Baumeister, 1989; Goffman, 1968a), the author developed a model of surface acting in intraorganisational relationships postulating that employees will employ surface acting for securing acceptance and resources. Based on this reasoning, he identified five potential antecedents of surface acting in organisations including affective congruence, goal congruence, perceived organisational politics, perceived self-value within organisation, and self-monitoring.

Affective congruence refers to the degree of similarity between the employee's and their colleagues' dispositional positive affect (enthusiasm, cheerfulness, attentiveness, and high energy). Goal congruence implies the individual's perceptions of their goals' congruence with organisational goals. Perceived organisational politics denotes one's beliefs that organisational members "engage in social influence tactics and self-serving behaviors" (p.295) for instrumental purposes. Perceived self-value within organisation refers to the employee's perceptions of their

value to their organisation. Finally, self-monitoring denotes the person's tendency to control and adjust their behaviour in response to social cues. A test of the model in a cross-sectional study corroborated the propositions related to the role of affective and goal congruence, perceived organisational politics, and self-monitoring, in employees' engagement in surface acting and suggested that employees may resort to surface acting to fit better in their organisation. In the context of PT imposed in organisations, it would be interesting to expand the model with more organisational-level factors including the enforcement of desired behaviours/characteristics through the organisational discourse.

4.3.3 Fun at work literature. While literature on enforced PT is rare, findings and conclusions of a massive body of literature looking at subjective experiences of a similar phenomenon – *fun at work* denoting “playful social, interpersonal, recreational, or task activities intended to provide amusement, enjoyment, or pleasure” (Lamm & Meeks, 2009, p. 614), prompt drawing parallels with PT. This research can be seen as a response to promotion of workplace fun in the practitioner, consultant, and management literature making two fundamental assumptions: that fun at work is similar for everyone, hence it is not examining fun's definitions, and that fun is unequivocally beneficial and beneficial for everyone concerned from the individual to society (Ford, McLaughlin, & Newstrom, 2003; Owler, Morrison, & Plester, 2010), which bears a striking similarity with PT's promotion (see Chapter 2). Yet, studies of individual meanings and experiences of fun at work, discussed next, show that fun can mean different things to different people (Owler, Morrison, & Plester, 2010; Plester, Cooper-Thomas, & Winkvist, 2015), which echoes findings from onco-psychology, where carers and patients' understandings of PT differ too.

Further, this research distinguishes between organisation and employee-initiated fun and argues that, depending on the person's interpretation of fun at work, it can motivate or, if perceived as prescribed, generate negative reactions. In extreme cases, managed fun at work may feel humiliating, condescending, or unbearable to the extent that the employee may want to escape it (Bolton & Houlihan, 2009; Fleming, 2005; Plester, Cooper-Thomas, & Winqvist, 2015; Warren & Fineman, 2007). Arguably, managerial fun initiatives can be used to cover up underlying organisational issues, which resonates with concerns about utilising positivity at work, a vivid example of which was brought by Hackman (2009), when an organisation tried to tackle employee distress with positive interventions instead of addressing job design issues that led to the distress.

In seminal ethnography studies (Fleming, 2005; Warren & Fineman, 2007) in an Australian call centre and a global IT firm's UK office, organisation-initiated fun, which participants contrasted with "real fun", felt superficial and forced down, made employees feel anxious and think they had to act it out not to be stigmatised, was seen by participants as an organisational resource to motivate and control employees, and, as such, prompted cynicism and employee rebellion. This resonates with findings from later qualitative research in New Zealand organisations involving ethnography, interviews, participant observations, and document collection (Plester, Cooper-Thomas, & Winqvist, 2015; Plester & Hutchinson, 2016), in which managed fun activities were perceived as coercive and implemented to meet organisational objectives rather than to benefit employees, and resulted in employees distancing themselves from the activities and the organisation. In Warren & Fineman's (2007) study, institutionalised fun ended in employees making fun of the fun programme and using the initiatives in unintended ways, such as punching in the face one of over-size "Russian dolls" ordered by the organisation

to liven up the physical work environment. While participants acknowledged managerial intentions to improve the working environment, they did not appreciate how management did it, as it was the case with the dolls, which, as rumoured, cost the company £10,000, while employees' request for a kitchenette was dismissed as too expensive. In a UK DIY store, where researchers conducted a three-year investigation of structured fun at work, recruitment criteria included such characteristics as "attitude", "passion", "enthusiasm", "spirit", and "heart", while partaking in fun initiatives were linked to performance appraisal and promotions, which placed additional pressure on staff to adjust their behaviour (Redman & Mathews, 2002, p.59).

Importantly, these studies point to facilitators of organic, employee-initiated fun, which was relevant as although the current review identified environmental influences that can add to negative perceptions and experiences of PT, the literature on enablers of positive understandings and experiences of PT is scarce. For example, a study of fun at work as perceived and experienced by UK public sector senior managers (Baptiste, 2009) revealed a range of *organisational factors*, including working time arrangements, stress management, communication and reward strategies, management development, team working, relationships with stakeholders, improved change management, that enabled non-imposed work fun and made people feel happy. The author concluded that organisations could focus efforts on creating and developing these conditions, which would add to staff's well-being, instead of prescribing fun. Another study highlighted *individual factors* that facilitated natural fun at work, including one's sense of mastery in works tasks and enhanced control over the workplace (Owler & Morrison, 2020), which aligns with an earlier argument that employee autonomy and self-management enact natural fun at work (Fleming, 2005).

Building on the individual-environment interaction perspective and adopting a case study approach with semi-structured interviews in two organisations in Ireland, Clancy & Linehan (2019) added to the findings on *organisational and individual influences* on meanings and experiences of fun at work. They identified that individuals' beliefs and feelings about the organisation, the level of management control over fun practices, and perceived drivers of fun at work shaped individual experiences of fun at work. Where fun was perceived to be implemented to employees' benefit, it was experienced higher versus where it was believed to benefit the organisation. Drawing parallels with PT, one can suggest that meanings and experiences of PT may also vary depending on its perceived drives and forms, the individual's views of the organisation, and their interactions with the organisation and therefore, meanings of PT at work should also be examined within the organisational context and not in isolation from it.

Having discussed existing definitions of PT, examined scarce research on individual understandings and experiences of it, and compared it with findings from research on subjective experiences of fun at work as a similar phenomenon, the chapter now moves to the final corpus of knowledge about PT identified by the current review. Namely, it critically examines evidence on effects of PT in light of commonly shared beliefs (Chapter 2) about its superpowers.

4.4 Effects of Positive Thinking: Evidence versus assumptions

This section examines the evidence on effects of PT. Contrary to conditions enabling PT, effects of what has been conceptualised and operationalised as PT have been better studied by different subdisciplines of psychology. The existing evidence is not consistent though and does not allow to make conclusive judgements. PT popularisers often back up their claims on benevolent effects of thinking positive with evidence from positive psychology (Chapter 2). While positive

psychology studies have not examined PT, they have assessed a number of positive constructs, such as positive affect, positive emotions, happiness, optimism and accumulated evidence that the constructs are associated with improved subjective and psychological well-being (Caza & Cameron, 2008; Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Layous, Chancellor, & Lyubomirsky, 2014; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Taylor, Knapp, Bomyea, Ramsawh, Paulus, & Stein, 2017; Taylor, Lyubomirsky, & Stein, 2017; Taylor, Pearlstein, Kakaria, Lyubomirsky, & Stein, 2020; Tugade, Fredrickson, & Feldman Barrett, 2004; Veenhoven, 2008).

However, critics challenge this conclusion arguing that this stream of research does not really demonstrate that positivity explains well-being or achievement but instead associates these outcomes “with a particular personality type: a cheerful, outgoing, goal-driven, status-seeking extravert” (Miller, 2008, p.591) and ridicules “pessimists as losers” (Coyne, Tennen & Ranchor, 2010, p.70). Indeed, it has been argued that people can be programmed to be more active, social, and optimistic, which are outlined as characteristics related to higher levels of happiness (Fordyce, 1977; for more recent research on CBT, see meta-analyses and reviews (e.g., Kolubinski, Frings, Nikčević, Lawrence, & Spada, 2018; Scott et al., 2016). The uniformity of evidence on benefits of positivity is attributed to the dominance of the positivist paradigm in positive psychology paired with the preference for cross-sectional methods over longitudinal ones and under-utilisation of non-positivist lenses to explore perceptions, perspectives, experiences, and modes of living (Fineman, 2006; Marecek & Christopher 2017; McNulty & Fincham, 2012; Wong & Roy, 2018).

On the other side, longitudinal studies on similar constructs in health and clinical settings have reported negative consequences of positive attitudes and optimism, such as a greater risk of disability, mortality, illness, repeat suicide attempts, and unhealthy behaviours (Dillard, Midboe,

& Klein, 2009; Ferrer et al, 2012; Gruber, Mauss, & Tamir, 2011; Lang et al, 2013; O'Connor, Smyth, & Williams, 2015). For example, excessive positivity in thinking about one's future was associated with a greater risk of disability and mortality in the next ten years (Lang et al, 2013). In healthy adults (Ferrer et al, 2012), optimism regarding health risks was associated with subclinical atherosclerosis across a six-year time period. High levels of optimism were found to be related to disappointment, regret, negative affect, misplaced hope, decline in self-esteem and well-being (Sweeny & Shepperd, 2010; Shepperd et al., 2015) and increased reported depression over time (McNulty & Fincham, 2012). An examination of claims about the role of positivity in fighting serious health conditions, such as cancer, also showed that the claims did not fit with available evidence (Coyne & Tennen, 2010).

In educational settings, foreseeing a positive outcome of an exam was related to less happiness and disappointment upon receiving results, PT and positive fantasies predicted low effort and depression in students and resulted in low energy measured by physiological and behavioural indicators (Greenaway, Frye, & Cruwys, 2015; Kappes & Oettingen, 2011; Kappes, Oettingen, & Mayer, 2012; Oettingen, Mayer, & Portnow, 2016; Sweeny & Shepperd, 2010). A systematic review (Gruber, Mauss, & Tamir, 2011) identified links between high levels of positive attitudes and risky behaviours leading to greater mortality rates, such as binge eating, binge drinking, or drug use and neglecting threats. A primer covering 35 years of research highlights regret, negative affect, misplaced hope, and decline in self-esteem and well-being as consequences of excessive positive attitudes (Shepperd et al., 2015). A recent narrative review (Sinclair, Hart, & Lomas, 2020) found that positive attitudes were unhelpful or detrimental in the context of domestic abuse as optimism overshadowed the risk of danger and hope kept one in a toxic relationship. Crucially, the findings demonstrated the importance of considering the context

when promoting positivity and warned against overgeneralisation and simplification in viewing positivity as unequivocally beneficial.

In summary, the existing evidence on effects of PT is divergent and prompts three inferences. First, contrary to popular beliefs, PT may not always good for health, well-being, or performance, hence, as supported with an imbalanced evidence basis largely focused on effects, not antecedents of PT, its promotion in organisational settings is unwarranted. Second, given that, as discussed in the previous section, PT can be imposed on people and such enforcement can generate negative perceptions and affective reactions, one can propose that the enforcement could be related to negative effects of PT, which needs to be examined. Importantly, the divergence of effects in the studies reviewed could also be explained with a variety of PT's operationalisations. Overall, it appears that definite answers on PT effects may prove elusive until the research focus is shifted from studying effects of PT to investigating what can influence both positive and negative perceptions and experiences of PT, as well as what can enable its development. Therefore, rather than to add to the body of inconclusive findings on effects of PT, the current thesis deems imperative to focus on what can shape its meanings and experiences.

4.5 Literature on related concepts: optimism as a positive schema and positive affect

This section discusses the literature on related concepts including positive schemas with the focus on optimism as most relevant in the context of the current thesis and positive affect.

4.5.1. Positive schemas defined as self-beliefs with positive content (Tomlinson, Keyfitz, Rawana, & Lumley, 2017) deserve special mention due to their potential to act as cognitive-affective units facilitating PT in the situation-individual interplay. This, for example, may include the person's encodings of self or their expectancies about outcomes (see Chapter 3).

Positive schemas include constructs like worthiness, optimism, self-efficacy, trust, success, and social connectedness (Bandura 1977; Lee & Robins, 1995; Mruk 2006; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998; Scheier and Carver 1985; Wigfield and Eccles 2002). In the context of the current thesis focusing on the distinctiveness, development, and manifestations of PT at work, I review two of these constructs including self-efficacy (discussed in Chapter 3) and optimism, which, along with its relationship with self-efficacy, I discuss next.

Optimism. Optimism, often used to conceptualise/operationalise PT (e.g., Ju, Shin, Kim, Hyun, Park, 2013; Kim, Hagan, Grodstein, DeMeo, De Vivo, Kubzansky, 2017; Millstein et al., 2016), has been extensively researched, in particular, with regard to its effects on various domains of life (e.g., meta-analyses and reviews by Fasano, Shao, Huang, Kessler, Kolodka, & Shapiro, 2020; Ortin-Montero, Martinez-Rodriguez, Reche-Garcia, de los Fayos, & Gonzalez-Hernandez, 2018; Lupşa, Vîrga, Maricuţoiu, & Rusu, 2020). In this section, I review similarities and differences between optimism and PT including their conceptualisation, origins, and key assumptions about their effects on the example of research on impact of optimism on wellbeing. I conclude that posing PT as optimism is not accurate and propose two areas for future research as informed by mixed findings on effects of optimism and PT.

Optimism is defined as a stable trait expressed in generalised expectancy of positive future outcomes (Carver & Scheier, 2014) or a self-serving cognitive bias indicating the difference between one's expectations and following outcomes (Kahneman, 2011; Sharot, 2011; Taylor & Brown, 1988). This contrasts with PT utilised to interpret past, present, and future events (Meltzer, 2003; Reynolds & Herman, 1994). Neurochemical accounts link optimism to dopamine and serotonin levels (Haselton & Nettle, 2006; Sharot, Guitart-Masip, Korn, Chowdhury, & Dolan, 2012). Neurobiologically, optimism is associated with increased

activation of the amygdala (involved in emotional processing) and rostral anterior cingulate (rACC, involved in emotion regulation) (Sharot, 2011; Yang, Wei, Wang, & Qiu, 2013). Both structures are a part of the brain's limbic system responsible for motivation and emotion (Swanson & Petrovich, 1998). Increased activation of the amygdala may impede higher-order thinking though (planning, decision-making, or problem-solving) (Pessoa, 2009), unless the pre-frontal cortex exerts inhibitory control over the amygdala (Koenigs & Grafman, 2009; for mechanisms, see Davidson, 2002). The biological origin of optimism, especially, its linkage to the emotional brain, distinguishes it from PT as an acquired higher-order thinking feature involving reaction and adaptation to the environment (Gullestad, 2007; Heyes, 2012; Tomasello, 2014).

Unlike PT, which is a gained quality resulting from the individual-environment interaction (Chapter 3), optimism is observed in healthy and ill populations and even in people with psychiatric disorders (Cummins & Nistico, 2002). For example, in 36% of cases levels of optimism of the patients with schizophrenia were comparable with healthy comparison levels (Edmonds, Martin, Palmer, Eyler, Rana, & Jeste, 2018). From the evolutionary standpoint, in motivating individuals to continue life journeys despite the awareness of life hardship, challenges, possible diseases, and eventual mortality optimism acts as a competitive advantage (Haselton & Nettle, 2006; McKay & Dennett, 2009; Varki, 2009). The only group with extremely low levels of optimism is people suffering from depression (Cummins & Nistico, 2002; Hurt et al, 2014). It appears that in individuals with depression, the amygdala and rostral anterior cingulate demonstrate abnormal function and impaired connectivity (Sharot, Riccardi, Raio, & Phelps, 2007). These findings corroborate the argument that optimism is a marker of a

healthy mind and wellbeing (Schwarzer, 1994), while its absence may indicate “the onset and progression of at least some forms of depression” (Taylor, 1989, p. 219).

Yet, it would be inaccurate to reduce origins of optimism to biology as levels of optimism may fluctuate over the lifespan growing along with increasing social (relationships and networks) and status (seniority, income, possessions) resources (e.g., Segerstrom, 2007) and decreasing during periods of transition, stress, and adversities (e.g., Mens, Scheier, & Carver, 2016; Jefferson, Bortolotti, & Kuzmanovic, 2017). Aligned with the social cognitive theory’s (Bandura, 1986) tenet that the belief in one’s capabilities to perform and attain desired results shapes expectations about the future, extensive research including longitudinal studies, reviews, and meta-analyses demonstrates that self-efficacy in various domains may influence and predict optimism. This, for example, includes social self-efficacy (perceptions about one’s ability to manage social relationships), affective self-efficacy (perceptions about one’s ability to express and regulate affect), career decision-making self-efficacy (confidence in making career-related decisions), nutrition self-efficacy (confidence in one’s capability to eat healthy), or study self-efficacy (the belief in handling the demands of one’s studies) (Ahmad & Nasir, 2021; Aymans, Kortsch, & Kauffeld, 2020; Caprara & Steca, 2005; Garcia, Restubog, Bordia, Bordia, & Roxas, 2015; Karademas, 2006; Larsen, McArdle, Robertson, & Dunton, 2015; Sheu & Bordon, 2017; Urbig & Monsen, 2012). Self-efficacy was predictive of outcome expectations also in social-cognitive career theory studies (for meta-analyses, see Lent, Sheu, Miller, Cusick, Penn, & Truong, 2018 and Sheu & Bordon, 2017). Interestingly, in people with low levels of self-efficacy, optimism can be related to defensive coping (Bedi & Brown, 2005; Schwarzer, 1994), which, in turn, may predict high depressive affect over time (e.g., Holahan, Moos, Holahan, Brennan, & Schutte, 2005). Along with highlighting the importance of self-efficacy for

optimism, these findings point to the potential role of self-efficacy as a cognitive unit predisposing the individual to PT too.

As for outcomes, similar to PT, optimism is commonly believed to have benevolent *effects* on various areas of life, yet, careful examination of respective research challenges these assumptions, which I illustrate with evidence on its impact on wellbeing. Optimism has consistently been associated with higher subjective well-being and better physical health across reviews and meta-analyses (e.g., Alarcon, Bowling, & Khazon, 2013; Carver & Scheier, 2014; Rasmussen, Scheier, & Greenhouse, 2009). In addition, optimism can improve immediate subjective well-being (Scheier & Carver, 2018) through yielding pleasant emotions (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 2001). However, the effect size of the relationship between optimism and wellbeing can reduce in longitudinal studies (e.g., down to 0 in Wimberly, Carver, & Antoni, 2008) and lose significance over time (for a systematic review, see Peter, Müller, Cieza, & Geyh, 2012; also, Sulkers et al, 2013). This suggests that optimism may improve momentary wellbeing rather than enable sustainable one. Further, the relationship between optimism and wellbeing is not always positive. For example, in a sample of cancer patients going through chemotherapy for 9 months, optimism declined over the course of therapy while psychological wellbeing improved over the same period (Pinquart & Fröhlich, 2009). The levels of optimism might have been affected by the disease, while long-term wellbeing could have been related to psychosocial resources like social support and self-esteem. In a sample of patients with recurrent depression (Macaskill, 2012), optimism was a negative predictor of life satisfaction, which could be explained by adverse effects of extreme levels of optimism on wellbeing (e.g., Sweeny & Shepperd, 2010; Shepperd, Waters, Weinstein, & Klein, 2015). These findings align with the argument that optimism may be indicative of wellbeing as discussed earlier in the section. In this

regard, optimism can be compared to blood pressure, which offers prognostic information about hypertension such that its deviances from the healthy norm is a symptom of cardiovascular health problems, not their cause. Indeed, research prompts the question of *the direction of causality* in the relationship between optimism and wellbeing by showing that factors constituting and shaping wellbeing may influence optimism too, particularly, in a long term. For example, sleep problems affected mood states and optimism in children and adults (Lau, Hui, Lam, & Cheung, 2017; Lemola et al, 2011; Uchino et al, 2017), increases in social resources predicted a fluctuation in levels of optimism during a ten-year period (Segerstrom, 2007), subjective health predicted optimism (Karademas, 2012), genetic factors explained the variation in optimism in 50 years (Mosing, Zietsch, Shekar, Wright, & Martin, 2009), and physical activity promoted optimism over time (Pavey, Burton, & Brown, 2015).

Importantly, *contextual factors*, such as cultural, gender, and employment status differences can play a role in the relationship between optimism and wellbeing. For example, in a comparison study of Turkish and Californian adolescents (Telef & Furlong, 2017) the correlation between optimism and subjective wellbeing in the Turkish sample (N=1123) was weaker ($r=.20$) than in the Californian sample (N=1119) ($r=.65$) and optimism was a significant predictor of wellbeing only in the Californian sample but not in the Turkish one. This may be explained from the perspective of cultural differences, where, for example, in the Western culture optimism is favoured as a desirable quality associated with success, attractiveness, luck, and confidence (McNulty and Fincham, 2012), and promoted at the societal level (Bennett, 2015). In another study looking at optimism and psychological wellbeing among parents of children with cancer (Fotiadou et al, 2008), gender and work situation affected levels of optimism so that men and employed individuals were more optimistic than women and

unemployed people. Similar to findings on PT, this evidence demonstrates the importance of context recognition and evaluation in research on effects of optimism and respective practical interventions.

Conclusion. The evidence reviewed above shows the conceptual distinction between optimism and PT with the former acting as a trait expressed in expectancies about future and the latter as an acquired characteristic applying to past, present, and future events. It further highlights that origins of optimism and PT diverge due to the biological component of optimism linked with the emotional brain, whereas PT, as a form of higher-order thinking, appears to result from the individual-environment interaction. Yet, they also converge as efficacy beliefs can shape both of them. Importantly, research shows that optimism can be indicative of wellbeing, which may lay the ground for another similarity with PT if the latter is shown to be symptomatic of underlying processes. However, despite the similarities, PT appears to rather encompass optimism as an individual cognitive-affective unit taking part in its development than act as its substitute. Finally, two areas for future research can be identified from the mixed findings on effects of both constructs as they highlight that (1) similar to PT, the variety in effects of optimism may be related to its antecedents and (2) the role of the context in their manifestations should not be overlooked.

4.5.2 Positive Affect. Positive affect (PA), often used interchangeably with positivity constructs (e.g., Fredrickson, 2008; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Tenney, Poole, & Diener, 2016), refers to experiencing positive valence emotions (Miller, 2011). I am bringing in the discussion on PA as a cognitive-affective unit (Chapter 3) that may be involved in the facilitation of PT as, after all, affect is a regular part of cognition (Isen, 2003). This review evaluates evidence on PA including findings on its effects, issues related to its conceptualisation, operationalisation, neurological

underpinnings, and theoretical accounts. It identifies commonalities and differences with research on PT and provides recommendations for future research.

Findings on effects of PA. The assumption that PA enables better health and wellbeing is supported with a large body of research pointing to the association between these variables, particularly, in health settings. For example, a systematic review (N=9 studies) displayed a link between PA and medication adherence in chronic conditions (Bassett, Schuette, O'Dwyer, & Moskowitz, 2019), a narrative review (N=28 studies) suggested a stress-buffering effect of PA (Jones & Graham-Engeland, 2021), a meta-analysis (29 studies with 3521 participants) revealed a negative association of PA with pain severity in people with chronic non-cancer pain (Ong, Thoemmes, Ratner, Ghezzi-Kopel, & Reid, 2020) although effects sizes were larger in studies that did not control for negative affect. PA was also associated with a greater perceived health in near-centenarians (+95) and centenarians (Cheng, Leung, & Brodaty, 2021, N=11 studies) and a longer life in older adults, cardiovascular health, better outcomes in chronic diseases, survival, and self-reported health (for a review, see Pressman, Jenkins, & Moskowitz, 2019).

However, accumulating evidence shows that not all PA have the same effects on cognition, judgement, and decision-making (e.g., compassion and pride) or physiology (e.g., enthusiasm and attachment love) (for a review, see Shiota, Campos, Oveis, Hertenstein, Simon-Thomas, & Keltner, 2017). There is also evidence that PA impairs planning, working memory, and switching from a task to previously activated stimuli (for a review, see Mitchell & Phillips, 2007). Further, PA has been linked to both higher relaxation and higher stress (Pressman, Jenkins, Kraft-Feil, Rasmussen, & Scheier, 2017) and, arguably (e.g., Pressman & Cohen, 2005), arousal levels can contribute to that. For example, high-arousal PA is beneficial in high but not low stress situations (Brooks, 2013) and is damaging in end-state diseases or asthma (Pressman

& Cohen, 2005). Remarkably, little work on PA interventions has found that PA can induce objective changes in health (Pressman et al, 2019). Importantly, confidence in the causal effect of PA has yet to be established as PA could be an indicator of protective psychosocial factors and health it is associated with, such as social connectedness, perceived social support, optimism, adaptive coping, health behaviours, and physical functioning, rather than their predictor (Pressman et al., 2019; Steptoe, Dockray, & Wardle, 2009).

Conceptual confusion. PA has been defined in many ways and, similar to PT, is often used as an umbrella term for various constructs denoting emotions, states, moods, and generally “positivity” (e.g., Gasper & Spencer, 2018; Pressman, Jenkins, & Moskowitz, 2019) although moods are long-term states with no obvious cause, whereas emotions are momentary responses to specific events (Gasper & Spencer, 2018). Examples of positive emotions or states typically include joy, happiness, contentment, amusement, satisfaction, interest, desire, or humour (Clark, Watson, & Leeka, 1989; Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2021). Alternatively, PA is understood as feelings of enthusiasm, activeness, high energy, alertness, full concentration (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), and kindness, compassion, benevolence, or love (Garland et al., 2010).

There is also little consensus in various streams of the literature regarding what “positive” means. Arguably (Fineman, 2006; Kristjansson, 2013; Lazarus, 1991; Wong & Roy, 2017), positive emotions may imply a) appropriate; b) feeling subjectively good; c) positively evaluating; or d) having good implications. However, it is not clear if appropriateness, subjective pleasantness, appraisal, or consequences are applied to the individual or others. For example, is *schadenfreude* (pleasure derived from another person's misfortune (Smith, Powell, Combs, & Schurtz, 2009) positive affect as it feels good and arises from a situation congruent with the

person's desire? Thus, the separation of emotions into positive and negative emotions informed by the criteria above ignores the social context in which they arise, individual differences that shape them, and the interaction between emotions (e.g., so-called mixed feelings) (Fineman, 2006; McNulty & Fincham, 2012; Tamir & Gross, 2011).

Importantly, affect can differ not only in valence but other dimensions including arousal levels, motivational intensity (focusing on obtaining a goal), certainty and control, adaptive function and consequences, or approach and avoidance motivation. For example, excitement (high arousal) and peacefulness (low arousal), amusement (low in motivational intensity) and desire (high in motivational intensity), contentment (associated with certainty) and surprise (associated with uncertainty), enthusiasm (approach) and comfort (avoidance) are all considered positive affect (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones 2021) but as it is discussed in the section later they can hardly have the same effect on cognition, behaviours, performance, or health. Moreover, some “positive” and “negative” affect converge on these dimensions. For example, both joy and anger are high *arousal* emotions, disgust and contentment are *certainty* emotions, surprise and anxiety are associated with uncertainty, desire and fear are high in *motivational intensity*, and amusement and sadness are low in it (Gasper & Spencer, 2018; Gable & Harmon-Jones, 2010).

Further, latest research in emotion theory (Ray & Huntsinger, 2017, discussed later in the section) points to similar effects of positive and negative affect and to various effects of positive affect on cognition, depending on the individual's existing mental content. For example, both happiness and anger can have broadening effects on cognitive processing (ibid). To complicate matters more, various affective states can interact with each other and influence outcomes (e.g., cognition) jointly (e.g., tiredness and happiness (Middlewood, Gallegos, & Gasper, 2016). The

recognition of various dimensions characterising affect re-emphasises the importance of what affect signals over how it feels, as aligned with the evolutionary theory highlighting adaptive functions of affect (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2021).

Operational confusion. The conceptual confusion is aggravated with the operational one as PA is measured in multiple ways. This is vividly illustrated by a substantial body of literature from health settings (discussed above), where a closer inspection reveals that along with measuring long term effects (e.g., mortality) with short-term instruments (e.g., state affect) and neglecting changes in PA over time (Pressman et al., 2019), these studies have operationalised PA in a number of ways (Table 4.3). This, for example, includes simultaneously measuring PA varying in arousal (e.g., excitement and peacefulness (Jones & Graham-Engeland, 2021), measuring other constructs (e.g., life satisfaction, life enjoyment, attention, self-esteem, optimism (Ong et al., 2020; Pressman et al., 2019)), negative affect (e.g., anxiety (Ong et al., 2020)), or even depression (Jones & Graham-Engeland, 2021) to report on outcomes of PA.

Table 4.3 Positive Affect operationalisation in latest research on its relationship with health

Study	PA conceptualisation & operationalisation
Bassett, Schuette, O'Dwyer, & Moskowitz, 2019	<p>Happiness;</p> <p>PANAS;</p> <p>Modified Differential Emotions Scale (amusement, awe, contentment, gladness, gratefulness, hope, inspiration, interest, love, pride);</p> <p>Frequency of positive affect words (e.g., love, nice, sweet) during oral autobiographical narratives;</p> <p>Joy;</p> <p>Enjoying life, feeling as good as other people</p>
Jones & Graham-Engeland, 2021	<p>PANAS;</p> <p>Vigour - Activity with the short form of the profile of mood states (POMS-SF);</p> <p>Happiness, excitement, satisfaction, enthusiasm, cheerfulness, relaxation, contentment, peacefulness, calmness, enjoyment, joy, feeling in good spirits, full of life;</p> <p>PA subscale (feeling as good as other people, hopeful about the future, happy, enjoying life) of the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression (CES-D);</p> <p>Positive Outlook during Stress (feeling hopeful, confident, eager, and excited);</p> <p>Depression subscale (feeling up/lively, like having a lot of fun, really good about oneself, happy, proud of oneself, having a lot to look forward to, having a lot of energy, having accomplished a lot, having a lot of interesting things to do, looking forward to things with enjoyment, moving quickly and easily, optimistic, cheerful, hopeful about the future) of the Mood and Anxiety Symptom Questionnaire;</p> <p>Multidimensional Mood Questionnaire MDBF (short form A) (feeling content, rested, composed, great, energetic, relaxed, highly activated, superb, absolutely calm, good, at ease, alert, fresh, happy, calm, wide awake, wonderful);</p> <p>Mood Adjective Check list (hedonia items including pleased, cheerful, optimistic, contented, satisfied, happy);</p> <p>Mood Scale II (activation and happiness dimensions) of Walter Reed Performance Assessment Battery</p>
Ong, Thoemmes, Ratner, Ghezzi-Kopel, & Reid, 2020	<p>PANAS;</p> <p>A mood subscale of Health Related Quality of Life instrument (Meenan, 1990) (enjoying the things you do, being in low spirits; feeling that nothing turned out the way you wanted it to, feeling that others would be better off if you were dead, feeling so down in the dumps that nothing would cheer you up);</p> <p>Differential Emotions Scale Probe (happiness, sadness, and anger);</p>

	<p>Oxford Happiness Questionnaire Short Form; Life Satisfaction; Mindful Attention Awareness Scale; The profile of mood states (POMS) – Bipolar (6 bipolar states: composed-anxious; agreeable-hostile elated – depressed; confident- unsure; energetic-tired; clearheaded-confused); Anxiety; Folkman & Lazarus PA Scale (feeling hopeful, eager; happy, pleased, relieved, exhilarated, optimistic; PAM (a <i>photographic affect meter: PA measured through a choice of a photo</i>); Moods (sad, afraid, tired, angry, confused, happy, and energetic) and emotions (joy, sadness, anger, surprise, anxiety, relaxation, and vigour/energy); PA items of the short form of the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CESD) (feeling as good as other people, hopeful about the future, happy, enjoying life); Depression with MMPI (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory) and the Zung Scale; Leisure attitude with Crandall Leisure Attitude Scale; Well-being and pain-related questionnaires; Happiness; Self-compassion; Mood states (happy, loving, calm, energetic, fearful, angry, tired, sad) with Brief Mood Introspection Scale (BMIS); Vigour-activity with the Profile of Mood States; Duration of laughter and smiling, determined from videotape recordings of individual participants viewing comedy and neutral stimuli; Pain self-ratings; Rating pictures in terms of valence (from very negative to very positive) and arousal (from not arousing to strongly arousing) via SAM (self-assessment manikin); Sense of humour; Relationship satisfaction</p>
Pressman, Jenkins, & Moskowitz, 2019	<p>Happiness, excitement, calmness; The four-item positive subscale (affect (happiness) and non-affect (life enjoyment, hope, and self-esteem) items of the Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression (CES-D) scale (Radloff 1977); Single-item assessment (“How often do you feel happy?”); Affectively laden language use; Measurement of smiling</p>

In this regard, the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), a scale widely used in the subject studies, merits particular attention. The instrument measures activeness, alertness, attentiveness, determination, enthusiasm, excitement, inspiration, interest, pride, and strength, which are associated with approach motivation and high arousal (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2021; Van Steenbergen, de Bruijn, van Duijvenvoorde, & van Harmelen, 2021). Yet, it does not measure happiness, joy, love, contentment, calmness, or relief. Interestingly, PANAS appears to be associated with anger (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2010; Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones, Abramson, & Peterson, 2009; Pettersson & Turkheimer, 2013). PA data collection methods also vary including spontaneous smiling, self-reported laughter, taking notes of daily positive events, giving and receiving social support, self-reporting levels of attachment to a romantic partner, or recalling autobiographical memories (for a review, see Van Steenbergen et al., 2021). With the plethora of the operational definitions of PA used in these studies and some of them being barely related to PA, it is hard to make definitive conclusions about its effects.

Neurological underpinnings of PA. Accumulating evidence from neuroimaging studies points to the lack of dedicated brain regions responsible for certain affect but shows that multiple cortical and subcortical structures are involved in eliciting and sustaining both pleasant and unpleasant emotions (for a review, see Fonzo, 2018). It is speculated (e.g., Garland et al., 2010) that positive affect can initiate changes in the brain structure and function with consequent changes in behaviour. However, this supposition is based primarily on the evidence on resilience and cognitive techniques (CBT, inter-personal therapy, mindfulness meditation, emotional regulation) rather than positive affect inducing changes in the brain (ibid), which would be good to examine in neuroimaging studies.

Further, there is evidence pointing to the association of pleasant emotions with dopamine release in the brain (Ashby, Isen, & Turken, 1999; Mitchell & Phillips, 2007; Taber, Black, Porrino, & Hurley, 2012). Yet, high levels of dopamine can be detrimental to cognitive performance (Arnsten, 1997). More importantly, through dopamine, the brain reward system increases motivation for a stimulus (“wanting” it) (Kringelbach & Berridge, 2009) (I am skipping the discussion of the brain reward system as not directly relevant to the scope of this thesis, however, there is extensive literature on the subject (e.g., Berridge & Kringelbach, 2015; Schultz 2015). However, over time both sensitivity to the stimulus, and consequently dopamine production in response to it, decrease (Taber, Black, Porrino, & Hurley, 2012). This may result in stopping to receive pleasure from the stimulus (“liking” it) but still “wanting” it because the reward system has attributed it with attractiveness (Kringelbach & Berridge, 2009). The state of decreased dopamine function in turn may heighten anxiety and impair executive functions and memory (Taber, Black, Porrino, & Hurley, 2012). In addition, extreme “wanting” may develop into addiction and increase unhappiness (Kringelbach & Berridge, 2009).

In the context of PA, it would imply that the pursuit of pleasant emotions can eventually decrease one’s sensitivity to them and lead to unhappiness (e.g., Ford & Mauss, 2014; Humphrey, Szoka, & Bastian, 2021; Mauss, Tamir, Anderson, & Savino, 2011). For example, extreme hedonia (a state of pleasure) can impede eudamonia (experiencing life as meaningful) (e.g., Oishi, Diener, & Lucas, 2009). This may not be the case though if PA is not an end goal but a by-product of cognitive techniques aiming to improve coping and wellbeing (discussed above). For example, PA acts as a mediator between cognitions (e.g., mind techniques and practices) and outcomes (e.g., health) (for a review, see Garland et al, 2010), which aligns with the notion that emotions are reactions to stimuli (e.g., cognitive reappraisal that most of these

techniques are based on). Finally, there is a complex involvement of various neurotransmitters in PA and not just dopamine (Shiota, Campos, Oveis, Hertenstein, Simon-Thomas, & Keltner, 2017), where, for example, serotonin plays a major role in pride, whereas oxytocin is mainly involved in awe etc. To improve our understanding of neurological underpinnings of PA, future research needs to delineate neurotransmitter profiles associated with various PA states and traits.

Theoretical basis of PA's outcomes. There are various explanations for how PA may affect wellbeing, health, or performance. For the purposes of this thesis, I am mainly focusing on effects of PA on cognition. PA is assumed to foster more global, top-down, heuristic processing style, whereas negative affect is related to local, bottom-up, systematic thinking (for a review, see Forgas, 2008; Ray & Huntsinger, 2017). The broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) postulates that positive emotions (e.g., joy, interest, contentment, or love (Fredrickson, 2004) broaden one's momentary awareness and scope of attention; form tendencies to play, explore, savour, and integrate; and thus increase innovative and holistic ways of thinking in individuals, whereas negative emotions produce narrower and more survival-oriented thinking. Accumulated experiences of positive emotions, in turn, build durable physical, intellectual, and social resources, therefore, PA should be cultivated. While the breadth and quality of the empirical evidence for the broaden-and-build theory are debatable (e.g., Brown, Sokal, Friedman, 2014; Kristjansson, 2013), more important is that this theory does not consider the role of the context in the affect-cognition relationship. For example, it would not be accurate to say that heightened positive affect characterising mania (Watson & Naragon-Gainey, 2010) can enhance cognition (for a review, see Daglas, Yücel, Cotton, Allott, Hetrick, & Berk, 2015). Importantly, the theory does not explain broadening effects of negative affect and narrowing effects of positive affect (e.g. anger and happiness, see Ray & Huntsinger, 2017 for a review).

An alternative account offered by the affect infusion model (Forgas, 1995) proposes that elaborate cognitive processing, including attention, encoding, retrieval, and association, is most likely to be influenced by affect, where mood-congruent information has far better chances to get attention, be encoded, retrieved, and primed than mood incongruent information. This suggests that both PA and negative affect can facilitate deeper processing, greater attention, and enhanced memory. The affect-as-cognitive feedback theory, according to which affect serves adaptive and feedback functions (Ray & Huntsinger, 2017), takes a step further in contesting a fixed dedicated relationship between affect and cognition. It emphasises the role of (1) affect's congruence with the existing mental content and (2) the role of the certainty and control dimension of affect in its influence on cognition. Specifically, it suggests that this influence may depend on the cognitive context in which the person experiences affect. Specifically, affect conveys information about the value of one's existing thoughts and processing tendencies (e.g., global or local) for a particular task through validating or questioning them. As a result, the individual's cognitive processing style, global or local one (focusing on the forest or trees respectively) will remain unchanged if reinforced by affect associated with confidence (e.g., happiness, anger) that validates the current tendency, and will change when its value is challenged by affect associated with lack of certainty (e.g., surprise, fear). Affect only points to the value of whatever cognitive style is prevalent at the given time and, therefore, positively (e.g., happiness) and negatively-valenced (e.g., anger) affect can both broaden or narrow cognition depending on how the person was thinking when exposed to the affect. To put it even simpler, if you think locally at a time and you experience joy, you will continue thinking locally and, vice versa, if you experience surprise at that time, you will switch to thinking broadly. Or, if you think globally, you will continue to do so if you experience anger at the time and will change to a local thinking strategy if you

experience fear. It is not the valence of affect but the existing mental content and the emotional appraisal along the certainty and control dimension that will influence your cognition. The previous research on the impact of affect on cognition did not consider the role of momentary processing styles and while preliminary research points to validity of the affect-as-cognitive-feedback account, it is rather limited (Huntsinger, Clore, & Bar-Anan, 2010; Huntsinger, 2012; 2013; Huntsinger & Ray, 2016) and more research is needed to accept, refute, or enrich the account. What is becoming increasingly clear though is that the influence of affect on cognition is context-dependent and affect traditionally thought of as “positive” (in terms of its valence) can influence cognition differently depending on the situation and emotional appraisal. Last but not least, affective states can interact with each other (Middlewood et al., 2016; Oh & Tong, 2021; Wong & Roy, 2017), which needs to be considered when examining implications of affect for cognition. The mixed evidence on effects of PA summarised earlier shows that there is no clear pattern in outcomes of PA, which stresses the importance of refining its conceptualisation, operationalisation, and theoretical accounts for understanding how it influences cognition, health, well-being, or performance.

Conclusion. Similar to research on PT, the variation in PA’s conceptualisation and operationalisation complicates the interpretation of inconsistent findings on its effects. In contrast to the deficient theoretical foundation for PT, there are several neurological and theoretical accounts explaining effects of PA. While more research is needed to test newer ones (e.g., the affect-as-cognitive feedback theory), it is becoming apparent that previous accounts (e.g., the broaden-and-build theory) do not provide a comprehensive explanation for effects of PA. The current unidimensional picture of PA painted with broad strokes needs further refinement to gain a better understanding of its effects. This includes differentiating types of PA

when examining its effects, aligning its conceptualisation with operationalisation, considering other dimensions of affect along valence, and acknowledging individual and contextual influences on affect.

4.6 Conclusion

The review showed that PT is not conceptualised as a distinct and unique construct and currently does not qualify for “thinking” as a process involving mental activities generated in response to environmental stimuli (Carruthers, 2009). Instead, existing definitions pose PT as expectancies, attributions, beliefs, attitudes, affects, visualisation, and expectancies united under the PT umbrella (Tod, Warnock, & Allmark, 2011) rather than thinking. The interchangeability of PT with optimism deserves particular attention although these appear to be different constructs, as discussed in the chapter. The definitions reviewed did not explain what “positive” means either, which is important as, to produce positive effects, cognition does not have to be positive in content and can instead be critical or constructive, whereas thoughts that are positive in content may not necessarily have positive effects as discussed in the section 4.5 of this chapter. Thus, the conceptual ambiguity pertinent to positivity terms overall (Ciarrochi, Hayes, Oades, & Hofmann, 2022; Hackman, 2009; Simmons, 2012), discussed in the chapter on the example of positive affect, applies to PT too.

The literature on individuals’ understandings of PT in health settings showed a lack of a common understanding of PT and differences in patient and carer perspectives on it. However, the applicability of these conclusions to the workplace remains unknown. Concerningly, the single studies available pointed to enforcement of PT on individuals in health and organisational settings, which resonates with the promotion of the concept in the popular discourse. Arguably,

the enforcement can result in surface acting positivity, reports on antecedents of which in intra-organisational settings are rare. Yet, a much more substantive literature on employees' perceptions and experiences of fun at work shows that, similar to PT, it is also (a) is understood differently by different parties, (b) can take prescriptive forms when initiated by the organisation, and (c) is not received well when perceived as imposed. Unlike the literature on PT though, research on fun at work indicates what can shape its experiences at the individual and organisational level, which suggests there may be similar influences on PT formation and reinforces the importance of examining the conditions that could contribute to it. Finally, the inconsistency of results on PT effects revealed by this review may be explained by both conceptual ambivalence characterising PT, where studies with diverse results may have measured different constructs, and its enforcement on individuals, which generates negative reactions. In light of the problematic evidence base, the current promotion of PT appears premature and should be held on until research brings more clarity regarding its conceptualisation and development.

Given the ambiguity of the concept, a definition drawing from theory and empirical evidence and ensuring construct adequacy (Suddaby, 2010) by addressing “thinking” and “positive” in it would be an appropriate response from research to the invasion of the popular concept. This could be achieved by diversifying the methodological arsenal currently used to study PT and obtaining “sufficient understanding of how the term is constructed and used in its social context” (Tod, Warnock, & Allmark, 2011, p.45) and investigating individual meanings of PT and perspectives on it as well as contextual factors and conditions shaping its manifestations (Bennett, 2015; Fineman, 2006; McNulty & Fincham 2012). Responding to these calls and aiming to address concerns identified by the review of the research context and academic

literature, this research aims to conduct an inquiry into the concept to investigate how individuals define and understand PT, what factors influence it, and if it is imposed in organisational settings. I formulated the following research questions to address the current under-researched state of the concept:

- How do individuals in organisations define and understand PT?
- What influences development and manifestations of PT at work?
- Is PT imposed in contemporary organisations and what are effects of imposed PT?

In the next chapter, I discuss the approach and design adopted by the current research to address the research questions.

Chapter 5 Research Methods

5.1 Introduction

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5.4 Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted conceptual fuzziness about PT, a lacuna in individual understandings and experiences of PT in organisations, dearth of research on influences on

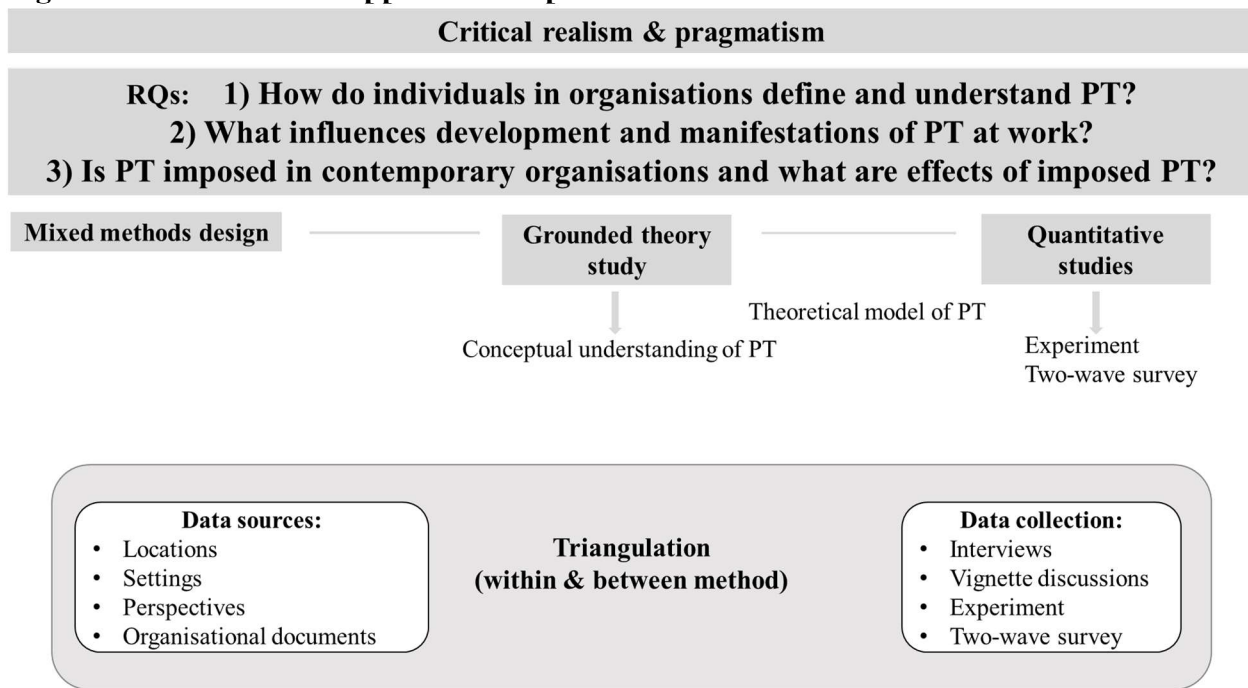
manifestations and development of PT at workplace, and mixed evidence on PT effects. It concluded that given the lack of a robust evidence base, the current promotion of PT appears premature until research brings more clarity regarding its conceptualisation and development.

The following research questions were formulated:

- How do individuals in organisations define PT?
- What influences development and manifestation of PT at work?
- Is PT imposed in contemporary organisations and what are effects of imposed PT?

The current chapter introduces and discusses the research approach and methods used in the first, grounded theory study to address these questions (see Chapter 9 for research methods used in the quantitative studies). The chapter first introduces the paradigm of inquiry of the current research and justifies its choice of the mixed-method research design in the light of its epistemological stance. It outlines the grounded theory method, details data collection, management, and analysis used in the grounded theory study, expands on ethical considerations related to interview and document data collection and analysis, and discusses vignette development. Figure 5.1 provides an overview of the research process. See Appendix E for a glossary of research method terms used in the current research (terms are marked with an asterisk in the chapter).

Figure 5.1. The research approach and process



5.2 Research approach and process

5.2.1 Ontology and epistemology

The current research was underpinned by a critical realist ontological position which assumes that an external reality exists and can be studied through partial fragments, even if not fully comprehended (Annells, 1996; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Levers, 2013; Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010). As a critical realist, I accept there may be alternative accounts of PT and no single perspective can produce complete and perfect knowledge about it (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010). Yet, I assumed that, given the shortage of knowledge about PT revealed by the literature review, laying the theoretical groundwork and generating empirical evidence about it (McEvoy & Richards, 2006), which was the ultimate goal of this research, would add value. I intended to get this understanding from accounts of people working in formal organisations as individuals interact with social structures they are embedded in and react to them (Bower, 1973; Collier,

1994; Endler & Magnusson, 1977). The critical realist ontology was coupled with a pragmatist epistemology.

In pragmatist philosophy building on evolutionary theory and theory of relativity, truth is relativistic, provisional, and constantly revisited with new evidence, while reality is continually in-the-making by actors (Strübing, 2007). This assumption underpinned my aim to lay the groundwork for an under-researched concept, which future studies could draw on and add nuances to. As philosophy calling for theorising practice (Simpson, 2017) and oriented toward solving practical issues rather than based on theoretical assumptions (Hall, 2013), pragmatism informed my research concerned with the problem of an under-examined yet well-accepted concept and generating knowledge about it, which would have practical utility for people working in organisations (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Pragmatism views knowledge as simultaneously based on the reality and the constructed, rejects traditional dualisms (realism vs. antirealism or subjectivism vs. objectivism), and accepts pluralism and eclecticism (Johnson & Onwuebuzie, 2004). It implies that anything that works can be used to answer research questions, accepts that the researcher interacts with external reality, and accommodates a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods as complementary strategies to collect data and answer research questions (ibid). Both pragmatism and critical realism approaches stress the need to examine a phenomenon in different ways to increase the completeness of research results (Phillips, 1987), which guided the mixed method design of this research.

5.2.2 Mixed methods research design

I combined qualitative and quantitative research methods based on their utility (Maxwell & Mittapalli 2010) to investigate PT in organisations and to optimise the strengths and compensate

weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative approaches on their own (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Östlund, Kidd, Wengström, & Rowa-Dewar, 2011). This facilitated richer data and a more complete picture of the research topic with the aims to enhance theory development and practice (Almajali & Dahalin, 2011; Fielding, 2012; Green, Duan, Gibbons, Hoagwood, Palinkas, & Wisdom, 2015; Hussein, 2009; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). I used a sequential model (Creswell & Clark, 2011), where qualitative data were collected and analysed first to inform quantitative data collection (Fig 5.1).

5.2.2.1 Triangulation

The mixed-method design involved triangulation implying the combination of multiple sources of data and multiple methods of data collection (Denzin, 2009). Triangulation added to credibility of the study due to mitigating potential biases caused by relying on one data source/method, increased contextual richness of the study, and created the best opportunity to answer the research question (Bowen, 2009; Bryman, 2008; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Gorissen, van Bruggen, & Jochems, 2013; Halldórsson & Aastrup, 2003; Horne & Horgan, 2012; Lloyd, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Stavros & Westberg, 2009). I used data and methodological triangulation. Data triangulation involved using multiple locations, settings, and perspectives, which was similar to Denzin's (2009) notion of people, time, and spaces as data collection points, and sourcing organisational documents and communications. Combining interviews with document review for triangulation purposes is common in research (e.g., a review by Natow, 2020; also Schoellhammer & Gibb, 2020; Zheng, Lau, Chen, Dickson, De Bosscher, & Peng, 2019). Methodological triangulation reflected in the use of interviews and vignette discussions in the qualitative part and an experiment with the use of vignettes and a two-wave survey in the

quantitative part. Thus, I used both within and between methodological triangulation to answer the research questions (Denzin, 2009).

5.2.2.2 Grounded theory method*

Along with addressing the shortage of knowledge about PT in organisations, the choice of qualitative methods was to counter the dominance of quantitative evidence restricted by dimensions of measures and shortage of thorough qualitative investigations of positivity constructs in general (Fineman, 2006; Marecek & Christopher 2017; McNulty & Fincham, 2012; Wong & Roy, 2018). The qualitative study using the grounded theory method* addressed the research questions on understandings of PT in organisations and conditions for its development through obtaining an in-depth, contextualised, detailed descriptions of individuals' definitions of PT and using it to generate an explanation encompassing what it is, how it manifests, and what conditions shape it. I used the method as the most appropriate for areas with poor theoretical foundation, which showed in the shortage of concepts explaining PT and its insufficient contextualisation (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). In assuming that one can develop an explanation about a phenomenon by breaking data apart to identify concepts/constructs and developing links among them (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), grounded theory method was most suitable for my aim.

The outcome of the grounded theory study was a set of categories (concepts) and their relationships with each other (ibid), which I developed by deconstructing people's understandings of PT and using the identified elements to develop an explanation for the phenomenon of PT at work. Both pragmatism and grounded theory approaches stress the importance of the explanation's clarity and usefulness to laypeople and its potential to inform practices, procedures, and policies (Bryant, 2009). This aligned with my position of a former

practitioner having observed instances of the use of widespread yet not totally clear concepts and terms in various organisations and sectors, resulting in miscommunication. Although grounded theory founders encourage researchers to be ambitious and develop their own concepts (e.g., Strauss et al., 1985), as a pragmatist, I argue for flexibility and putting to use anything that works. To explain such a vague concept as PT, I both developed new concepts (e.g., accepting the negative) and, guided by the literature, used existing ones (e.g., work meaningfulness).

The paradigm model*. The variant of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) that I used aligned with critical realism in a way that the research process addressed experience and subjectivity by drawing on rationales, contexts, and outcomes and investigating relationships between these components and relating them on a meta-level (Smith & Elger, 2014; Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). As the paradigm model is informed by pragmatist epistemology, it facilitated the logic of abduction pertinent to pragmatism, when I sought a general principle that would explain findings and generate an interpretation made from researched perspectives (Strübing, 2007). In grounded theory, abduction in analysis denotes explanatory reasoning involving inference to the best possible explanation of an instance (e.g., a code) validated then through comparisons with other chunks of existing data or new data sought to justify the analytical decision (e.g., to keep the code or discard it) (Strauss, 1984). Abductive reasoning drove simultaneous and iterative data sampling, analysis, and theory development known as theoretical sampling*.

Importantly, Corbin & Strauss (2015) provide a detailed and clear guidance on the analysis steps and an explicit description for the construction of a theoretical framework (Eaves, 2001; Kelle, 2007), which made this approach user-friendly for me as a novice researcher. However, in line with Strauss and Corbin's (1998) recommendations to use procedures and techniques flexibly, I adapted the model to my research aims and questions, rather than allowed

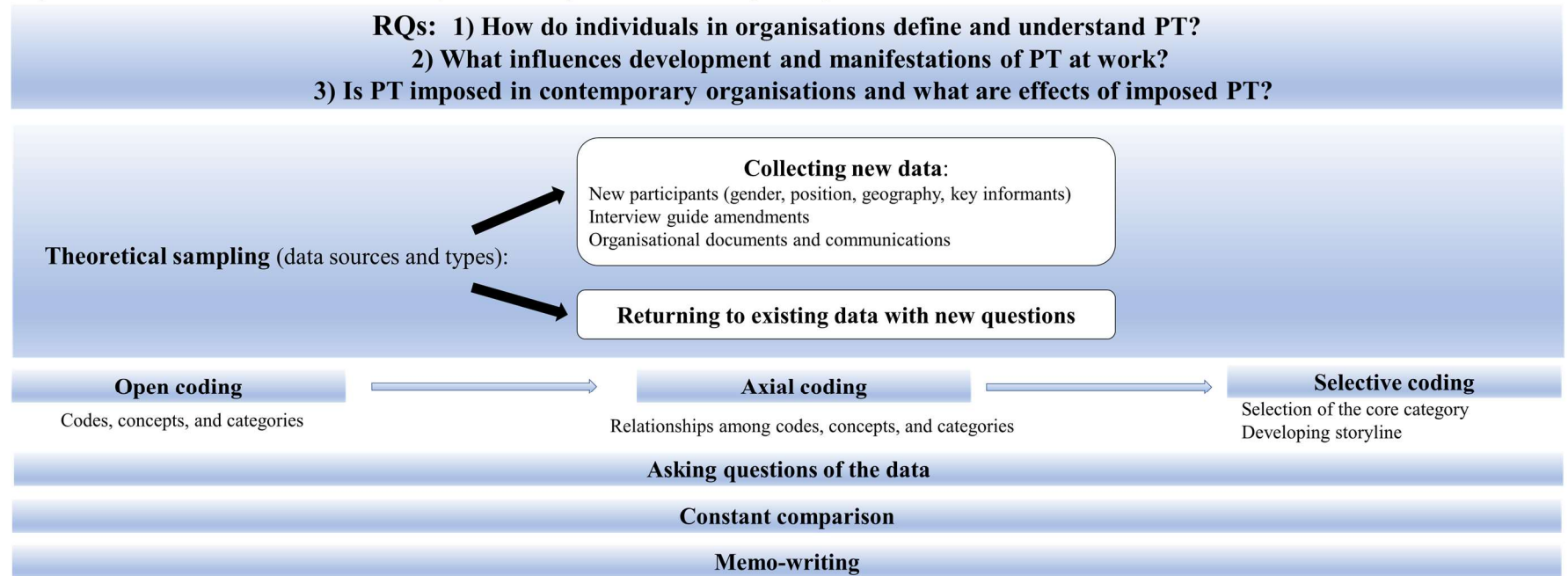
it to force data into preconceived categories, which is the main point of criticism around the model (Glaser, 1992; Kendall, 1999; Melia, 1996). Thus, I used it to *identify concepts* related to PT as well as its development and manifestations in the workplace, rather than sought to label categories according to the model's dimensions.

5.3 Grounded theory study

5.3.1 Data collection

This section discusses the grounded theory study's recruitment strategy and sample, procedure, ethical considerations and details interview, vignette discussion, and organisational document data collection guided by the triangulated approach and theoretical sampling. The Figure 5.2 provides an overview of the data collection and analysis that, in line with the method, took place concurrently.

Figure 5.2. Data collection and analysis in the grounded theory study



5.3.1.1 The recruitment strategy, sample, and procedure

Recruitment strategy and sample. In this section, I discuss initial sampling that aimed to get diverse perspectives from a heterogeneous group of participants to (a) provide a breadth of perspectives around PT, (b) reduce the risk of any strong bias in the sample (Charmaz, 2014; Hawker and Kerr, 2015), and (c) facilitate a better understanding of the phenomenon under study (Glaser, 2002). The sample included two perspectives to get a more accurate understanding of PT in organisations – employees, who are end users of policies and practices and experience their day-to-day impact, and managers, who have a better strategic understanding underlying the policies and practices (Smith & Elger, 2014). I detail theoretical sampling, comprising interdependent data collection and analysis, in the data analysis section later in the chapter.

To be included, participants had to be employed by a formal organisation and thus to be in hierarchical authority-responsibility relationships with limited opportunities to direct themselves (in contrast with self-employed individuals). They had to have defined objectives aligned with organisational objectives and to be exposed to organisational environments and norms as the exposure influences individuals' thinking and behaviour (Stewart, 1991). Finally, they had to be over 18 years of age, in the current role for at least the last 3 months as an employee with a direct manager or a manager with at least 3 subordinates.

Initially, I gathered data through convenience, networking, and snowballing sampling. Some individuals contacted me directly responding to my call for participants in social networks and among my students. Other participants were introduced to me by other participants or friends (e.g., those in Houston). I monitored the sample to include participants who could provide different perspectives and experiences. For example, the first five participants were all female, hence more male participants were recruited for further interviews. First eight interviews were

conducted in the UK. Next interviews took place in the US and, later, additional geographical locations were added to the sample.

The final sample (Table 5.1) underpinned by theoretical saturation* included 19 individuals in employee (53%) and managerial (47%) positions. Participants varied in terms of the type of industries and sectors they represented, the length of the experience, the geographical location, and the employee/manager status.

Table 5.1. Grounded theory study sample details

Name	Position	Gender	Age	Location	Industry	Work area
Yasmin	Employee	Female	33	UK	Consultancy	Project management
Yvonne	Manager	Female	44	UK	Marketing	Client services
Rose	Employee	Female	31	Maldives	Hospitality	Customer care
Helen	Manager	Female	35	UK	Banking	Project management
Ann	Manager	Female	46	UK	Public sector	Organisational development
Leo	Manager	Male	36	UK	Public sector	Project management
Emma	Manager	Female	39	UK	Consultancy	HR
Olivia	Employee	Female	32	UK	Gaming	Customer care
Ralph	Manager	Male	40	US	Oil and gas	Drilling
Norman	Employee	Male	66	US	Oil and gas	Operations
Vail	Employee	Male	32	US	Banking	Risk assessment
Majdi	Employee	Male	50	UK	Recruitment	Recruitment
Derek	Employee	Male	33	UK	Finance	Accounting
Sajiv	Employee	Male	52	Oman	Oil and gas	HR
Yash	Manager	Male	53	OAE	Oil and gas	Engineering
Defne	Employee	Female	45	Azerbaijan	Oil and gas	HR
Neil	Manager	Male	65	UK	Oil and gas	Production
Nail	Manager	Male	40	Azerbaijan	Oil and gas	Communication
Rita	Employee	Female	38	Azerbaijan	Oil and gas	Logistics

Participants' age ranged from 31 to 66 (mean = 41), with 47% being female. They were employed by local (37%) and global organisations (63%) with the organisation size varying from 50 up to 75,000 employees. The industry types included consultancy, advertising, hospitality, banking, gaming, oil and gas, and public sectors. White British constituted 37% of the

participants, the rest included Asian, Hispanic, Mediterranean, and Hispanic and White North American.

Procedure. I shared the information about the study and its goals (Appendix B1) with participants prior to interviews to achieve a good rapport, build trust, more easily access accounts of experiences and underlying processes, and obtain richer narratives (Davies, 2012; Heyl, 2001; Smith & Elger, 2014). With the same purposes, I stressed the importance of their role in the current study and potential contribution not only to this study but to the research field (Organisational Psychology, Positive Psychology) in general (Brandon, Wells, & Seale, 2018). Straight after the introduction, I presented images as prompts to initiate and facilitate discussions about definitions and experiences of PT (Banks, 2001). These were A4-size neutral, colour images downloaded from the internet and participants were to choose any and as many as they like to talk about their understanding of PT. Since I inserted photographs in early parts of interviews, images acted as icebreakers fizzling estrangement and distance (Langmann & Pick, 2018). For the next cluster of questions on PT in workplace, I introduced vignettes*, which consisted of a scenario illustrated by a cartoon image (I discuss vignette development and details in the Data collection section). The scenarios comprised workplace situations involving manifestations of PT from a manager or employee perspective (see Appendices A1-A5 for examples of the vignettes), which participants were invited to complete and discuss. As recommended, I presented vignettes by the time that the rapport had been established and participants, having previously discussed their definitions and understandings of PT, were sufficiently sensitised and engaged (Kandemir & Budd, 2018). After interviews, participants were debriefed and provided with support information.

5.3.1.2 Ethical considerations

This section details ethical considerations in undertaking this study. Ethics approval for the study was granted by the Ethics Committee of the School of Business, Economics, and Informatics, Birkbeck, University of London. Research ethics refers to the moral principles guiding research and conducting it in a responsible and morally defensible way (Gray, 2017). Drawing on the British Psychological Society's ethics framework (BPS, 2009), in designing and conducting this research, I addressed such aspects as informed consent, harm and risk, confidentiality, and ethics of digital analysis issues. These are detailed below.

Informed consent. In line with the principle of informed consent, I provided research participants with sufficient and accessible information about the study enabling them to make an informed decision as to whether to participate in it, or not (Crow, Wiles, Heath, & Charles, 2006). Prior to data collection, I presented the information about the research project (Appendix B1), the interview schedule for participants to familiarise themselves with the questions (Appendix B3), and the formal consent form (Appendix B2) to participants. This provided sufficient time for participants to reflect on the information and make their personal experiences more accessible during the interviews (Roberts, 2016). I once again discussed the information about the research at the outset of data collection and informed that participation in this research was entirely voluntary and they can withdraw at any point without needing to give any explanation for their withdrawal. I also let them know that they could skip any questions they might not feel comfortable to answer and encouraged them to ask questions whenever they needed clarification. Participants were advised that they could get an executive summary of findings upon the project's completion and their request. They signed and returned informed consent forms.

Harm and risk. Although the subject of the study was neutral and involved low levels of risk, to avoid causing any mental distress, I provided participants with support information and my contacts in case they needed advice or had any questions after the interview. Some accounts related to faking PT and perceived workplace injustice triggered criticisms of the organisation and its management. Thus, the support information was relevant. However, participants also viewed the interview as an opportunity to speak out on matters that they were silent about in workplaces, which balanced the associated negative reactions. Further, I scheduled interviews to avoid disruption to participants and participants were able to choose the venue for the interview. At the end of the interview, some participants noticed that the interview was thought-provoking and interesting in making them realise that PT was not as clear to them as they had previously thought. None expressed unhappiness with the way the interview was conducted or asked to skip questions during it.

Confidentiality. To preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, I assigned fictitious names to them and changed or removed any identifying information (e.g., locations and names of any other persons or organisations) from direct quotes. The data were held on my personal computer in password-protected files that only I had access to. Interviews were logged using numbers assigned to interviewees, interview dates, locations, and summary comments on emerged themes/constructs, where applicable. As participants were recruited among Birkbeck students, my former colleagues, and friends of friends, to maintain confidentiality, I did not inform participants that some of their peers participated in the study too. I also did not share any feedback on interviews with individuals who introduced me to participants.

Ethics of digital analysis. I analysed organisational documents and communications that were publicly available on the internet and shared by organisations for internal and external groups.

The subject of my analysis was content of documents and accessing and analysing the documents did not impose any risks to vulnerability of human participants. However, as I analysed documents of organisations that my participants were affiliated with, to ensure the participants' anonymity, in reporting, I resorted to a broad categorisation of sources coupled with cloaking in quoting, which involves paraphrasing the material to prevent identifying the original source of it through search engines (Whiting & Pritchard, 2018).

5.3.1.3 Interviews

To access individuals' understandings of PT in organisations, I conducted semi-structured* interviews, which in the grounded theory method let the researcher to monitor concepts covered in each interview and thus enable theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Overall, my interview approach combined flexibility and control, opened interactional space for ideas and issues to arise, and enabled immediate follow-up on them (Charmaz, 2014). This section provides details of interviews, discusses the study's interview guide and its amendments throughout the research process, and covers participant-led prompts and techniques I used.

Interview types and details. Interviews were conducted in English and Russian (two), recorded and transcribed verbatim. On average, they lasted 46 minutes, were conducted in organisational settings, whenever possible, or at Birkbeck University. I had one telephone and five internet-based interviews. The telephone interview was with a person who volunteered for participation in response to my call in a social media but could not use internet-based messengers in their geographic location. This interview was logistically convenient as allowed me to interview someone in a distant location and thus added to the diversity of the sample, at the same time increasing perceived anonymity and privacy for the respondent (Cachia & Millward,

2011; Lechuga, 2012). Similarly, Internet-based interviewing of individuals located in various geographic locations was beneficial for the sample diversity. The duration of these interviews (from 23 to 53 min) was impacted by theoretical sampling rather than their mode: shorter ones involved collecting data on specific aspects uncovered by earlier sampling. In general, these interviews were informative.

The original interview guide. Initially, the interview guide (Appendix B3) comprised clusters reflecting the research questions: definitions and experiences of PT (images involved); PT in workplace (vignettes involved); and practicing and developing PT. The types of questions used across the interviews are summarised in the Table 5.2 with examples.

Table 5.2 Question types and examples (classification by Patton, 2002)

Question types	Examples
Opinion questions ('head stuff')	How would you describe positive thinking?
Experience questions	In your experience, how does PT manifest in behaviour? Could you give me an example?
Feeling questions	When you are asked to think positive, how does it make you feel?
Vignette discussion questions	
Role-playing and simulation questions	What if you got promoted to a team leader role? How would your reports' PT help you manage the team?
Illustrative example questions	Your peer's report avoids participation in team-building activities, what should your peer do?

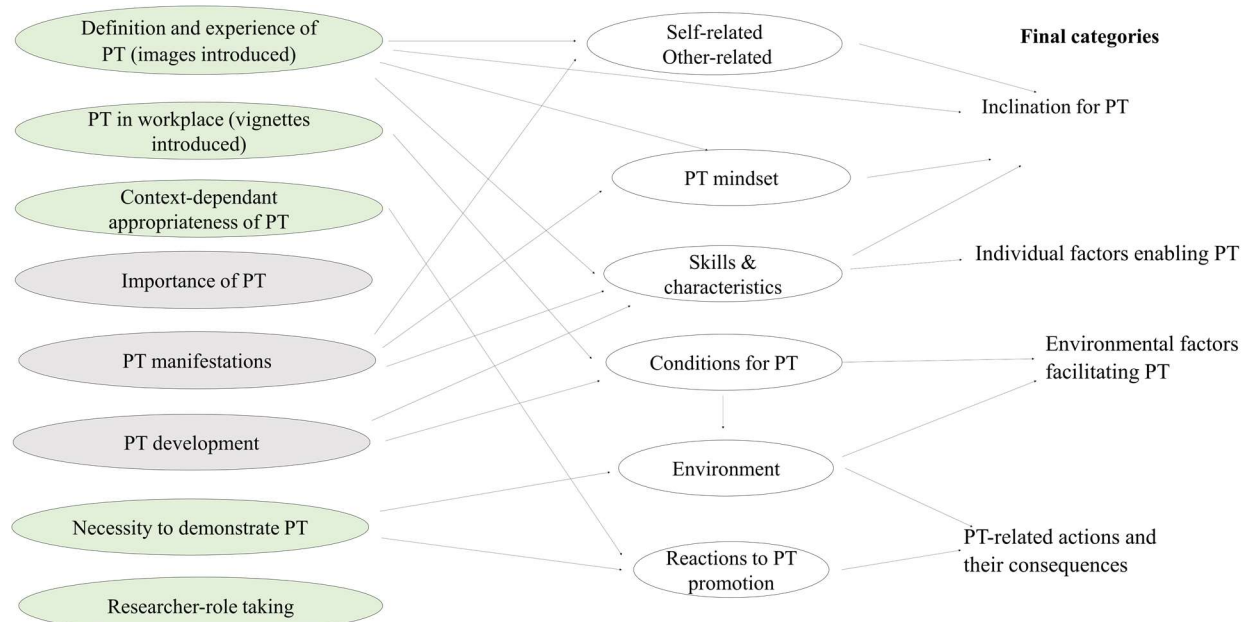
I used questions narrow enough to elicit and explore participants' experiences (for example, "When you are asked to think positive, how does it make you feel?") and probes to follow up on initial questions. For understanding the impact of organisational processes on individuals' thinking, I used direct questions about collective practices first before attending to the individual's participation in and views of these practices (Charmaz, 2002). For example, the "How would you describe PT" theme started with the "How does PT feature in your

organisation?” probe. To encourage participants to speak from a different perspective in vignette discussions, I asked participants to play the role (e.g., of a team leader) and used illustrative example questions (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The interview question with references to “*positive thinkers*” (e.g., “*What are positive thinkers like?*”) aimed to get participants to talk about PT, as an abstract and hard to define concept, both directly and indirectly. Admittedly, this might have elicited more data on manifestations of PT rather than on what PT is.

Examples of open-ended questions or sentences to complete in vignette discussions included “What might David’s team leader mean?”, “How would Jasmine subordinates’ positive thinking help her manage the team?”, “The last remark makes Alex feel...”, “Sonya’s immediate reaction was...”. In addition, I used direct questions, such as “Have you ever been in a situation like this one? What happened? Why?”. Wording of the questions asking participants to share their understandings of PT involved the use of “tell”, “explain”, “describe” (TED technique (Brandon, Wells, & Seale, 2018)) to trigger more active participation by engaging participants’ cognition (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), enable the active construction (Charmaz, 2002), and minimise biasing and contaminating interview data (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). For example, questions asked “Could you please explain what PT is?”, or “How would you describe PT?”. Finally, anticipated* and conditional* probes elaborated participants’ understandings of questions and their thought processes (Priede, Jokinen, Ruuskanen, & Farrall, 2014). For example, “Can you think of any situations where you would or would not recommend thinking positive? Prompt: Why? Could you give me an example?” (anticipated). Or “When you are asked to think positive, how does it make you feel? Prompt: What is your instant reaction to it? What it makes you want to do or say?” (conditional).

Interview guide amendments. Once the data collection began, in line with theoretical sampling, I kept modifying the initial interview questions to gather focused data and to give way to concepts evolving from the data (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The Figure 5.3 depicts an overview of the interview guide clusters' modification and shows the final categories developed from the collected data.

Figure 5.3. Interview guide's amendments during data collection



Colour coding: constant (green), resumed (grey), and evolved (blank) clusters.

Question examples: To what extent do you consider yourself a positive thinker? Why? (self)

What does PT imply? Thinking about what? (mindset)

What skills are needed to develop PT? What are positive thinkers like (skills & characteristics)

To what extent does PT depend on the environment? On self? On one's confidence? (conditions)

Is PT valued in organisations? How is PT encouraged in workplace? How does it make you feel? (reactions).

For example, the theme of psychological safety became distinct after the fifth interview and the analysis prompted questions on psychological safety, which were then used in following interviews. This included questions and probes that I prepared in advance and formulated during

interviews based on what participants said, sometimes using participants' own words. For instance, "To what extent does PT depend on one's environment?", "So do you think it might depend on whether you're working in the right or wrong place? Can you give me an example?", "You've touched on the organisational culture earlier. So, do you think this sort of behaviour from the manager side may be driven by the organisational culture?" (used in a vignette discussion). Both self-efficacy and pressure to demonstrate PT came up in early interviews. The analysis suggested these were linked, thus, I added respective questions in later interviews (e.g., "Can you think of external factors that can affect one's confidence to think positive?"). Yet, I asked the key question "How would you define PT?" in all interviews.

Participant-led prompts. Interview guide amendments also involved modifying interview questions based on participants' feedback, which allowed to elicit more nuanced data. For example, in the first interview a participant asked if I would like to understand reasons why they selected particular images to formulate their definitions of PT and share their understandings of it. This discussion enriched the participant's account with details not revealed before, hence from that point on I asked participants to disclose their motives for selecting images. Alternatively, in response to the question "If you were to conduct this study, what would you ask your participants about?", a participant said, "I would ask 'What you know about PT and how have you learnt it?'". Although the focus of the research was individuals' understandings of PT and not necessarily their theoretic knowledge of it, on reflection, I assumed that this question could potentially elicit indirect answers to the research question. Its use in following interviews enabled taking up an optional research collaborator role by participants (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Heyl, 2001) and contributed to building a closer alliance with them.

Interview techniques. To engage and empower participants, I practiced active listening, used functional remarks to keep the respondent talking, repeated key points and turned interviewees' words into open-ended questions (Charmaz, 2002; Priede, Jokinen, Ruuskanen, & Farrall, 2014). I did not express personal opinions on the subject matter and, when asked about them, answered that I did not come to definitive conclusions yet given the scarcity of previous research and undertook the current study to get a better understanding of the phenomenon. As a critical realist interviewer, I clarified generalities and abstract reasoning by asking for specific examples, probing for details and implications, encouraging participants to compare their experiences with experiences of vignette characters, following up on inconsistencies in accounts, or giving consideration to participants' positions shaping their accounts (e.g., employee or manager). To reduce my influence on the research process, I minimised interruptions of accounts and did not interject silences unless the participant either needed help with formulating or clearly expressed that they were ready to move to the next question (Jones, 2004).

5.3.1.4 Images and vignettes in interviews

This section expands on the use of images and vignettes as an additional data collection tool and source. To collect data on definitions and understandings of PT, I used images as they trigger emotions and activate implicit thinking by eliciting perceptions and encouraging social constructions (Langmann & Pick, 2018). To collect data on PT in workplaces, I used vignettes. By materialising PT (Törrönen, 2018), vignettes enabled interviewees to move from abstract reasoning about it to contextualising it and unpacking aspects that normally are routinised (Jenkins, Bloor, Fischer, Berney, & Neale, 2010; Torres, 2009), which suited this study investigating a vague concept. While participants agreed to interviews thinking they were very

well familiar with PT, along with interview questions, vignette discussions showed that that they did not have clear-cut definitions of it. The internal validity of vignettes refers to the extent to which vignette content captures the research topic under question (Gould, 1996), which I addressed in several ways. First, vignettes contained sufficient information on the context and situation but were also truncated enough to encourage discussions and reflections, fill in gaps, and complete situations (Törrönen, 2018). They depicted organisational contexts and utilised elements of the organisational language (e.g., “*performance discussion*”, “*team leader*”) to match participants’ workplace settings and make vignettes more relevant to participants (Torres, 2009). They implied a variety of cultural backgrounds indicated by ambiguous names such as Jasmine, Sonya, Alex, and David. To strengthen their internal validity*, I informed their development by the literature (e.g., Collinson, 2012), my personal experience of working in organisations, and assessment of their content by subject matter experts for clarity and plausibility of the vignettes (Hughes & Huby, 2012; Podsakoff, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Klinger, 2013). The latter included consulting with my supervisor and organisational psychology researchers and practitioners and adjusting, where recommended.

Participants verified the external validity of the vignettes noting that the scenarios reflected or resembled the reality of their personal workplace experiences and were interesting. For example, Helen noted the following in relation to a scenario about a project engineer raising planning issues to his manager, who responds with “think positive”:

And actually’ I’ve been given that feedback before that I need to be more positive...but just saying you need to think more positively is quite ambiguous. It’s not really clear what that actually means.

Some participants gradually shifted their view of PT during the interview first talking about in complimentary terms and then bringing undesirable aspects of it that they had not considered

before when discussing vignette scenarios. Those aspects were around pressure to demonstrate PT and faking PT, when participants spoke about vignette characters' feelings, thoughts, and actions. Thus, vignettes unearthed more hidden beliefs and highlighted aspects of the topic that would have been hard to approach or would have generated more superficial responses without vignettes (Kandemir & Budd, 2018). In the context of facilitating PT, participants suggested it would be worthwhile using vignettes in organisations for putting people in contact with ideas to make them think and come to conclusions by themselves, rather than telling them to think positive.

I invited participants to discuss all vignettes so that they would speak not only from a perspective matching their own (employee/manager) but also take on an opposite one and thus provide a fuller and more nuanced interpretation of the topic (O'Dell, Crafter, de Abreu, & Cline, 2012). The opportunity to discuss PT from a non-personal perspective triggered shifts to the discussion of participants' own experiences, often without a prompt from my side, as participants projected their feelings and views onto vignette characters (ibid). Overall, vignette discussions provided key insights and rich data and enabled me to combine critical investigation with the respondent-centred approach (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Yet, in subjecting interview data to critical scrutiny and in line with data triangulation, I compared information received from responses to interview questions and vignette discussions with documental sources, which I discuss in the next section.

5.3.1.5 Organisational documents

This section expands on the use of organisational documents as an additional data collection tool and source. As participants referred to instances of pressure to demonstrate PT in organisational documents and communications, to verify and clarify interview data and thus to draw on more than one source of evidence (Bowen, 2009), I collected and analysed communications* and documents* of organisations in which my participants were employed. The use of document data along with interview data is common in grounded theory research (e.g., Coffey, 2014; Holloway & Schwartz, 2018) as Glaser and Strauss (1967) point to the usefulness of documents for theory building. Importantly, this was aligned with theoretical sampling, as concepts relevant to the evolving theory drove further search for new data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The data collection involved searching, selecting, and appraising documents' relevance to the topic of interest. I guided the sampling process by the central question, which asked about manifestations of external pressure to demonstrate PT in the organisational discourse, and reviewed 23 different documents dating back to 2013 as these had been referred to by participants. These included internal and external communications, such as sustainability reports, websites, internal magazines, press interviews, social media accounts, corporate emails, as well as leadership frameworks and selection tools. I primarily focused on written texts and, to a lesser extent, on multimodal documents encompassing both texts and pictures (e.g., social media accounts). I used documents that already existed in the public space and were not made as part of this research.

When selecting documents, to avoid biased selectivity, I sought to identify their relevance to my central question and determine their authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaningfulness (Bowen, 2009; Scott, 1990). I treated them as authentic because they were made available by organisations themselves in online public or internal domains. Documents were

typical of their kind and comprehensible. I also considered the original purpose of documents and their target audience. To draw on a wide array of evidence, I included at least one example from each organisation and documents targeting both internal and external audience.

5.3.2 Data analysis

This section discusses the preparation, management, and analysis of interview and document data. The interview data analysis, guided by theoretical sampling, involved open*, axial*, and selective* coding combined with asking questions of the data, constant comparison of data units, codes, and categories, and memo-writing. To sort out and arrange data, I looked for conditions* for PT, actions* taken in regard to it, and consequences* of the actions (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The document data analysis involved assessing documents and descriptively coding the data to find patterns in it.

5.3.2.1 Interview data analysis

The analytic process (Figure 5.2) had a spiral pattern as the grounded theory method implies reciprocity in collecting and analysing data, reflecting on it, and developing and testing theory (Payne, 2015).

Preparation of data. The interview data analysis started with transcribing, examining, and reading transcripts. Undertaking the transcription of interviews allowed me to reach an in-depth familiarity with the data (Payne, 2015). I read the data with the research questions in mind and coupled reading transcripts with making notes and writing memos. The unit of analysis was the concept under study (Positive Thinking). Following the protocol suggested by Vandenburg (2001) and recommended by Charmaz (2011), each happening, incident, idea, and event that were addressing the “What is PT?” question directly or indirectly was extracted from a transcript

and accumulated into one file. For example, the extract below was considered to answer the question directly:

looking at the bright side of things, approaching things with positive perspective, sort of trying to focus on the good.

In the extract below, in the context of a potential redundancy, the participant was considered to answer the question indirectly:

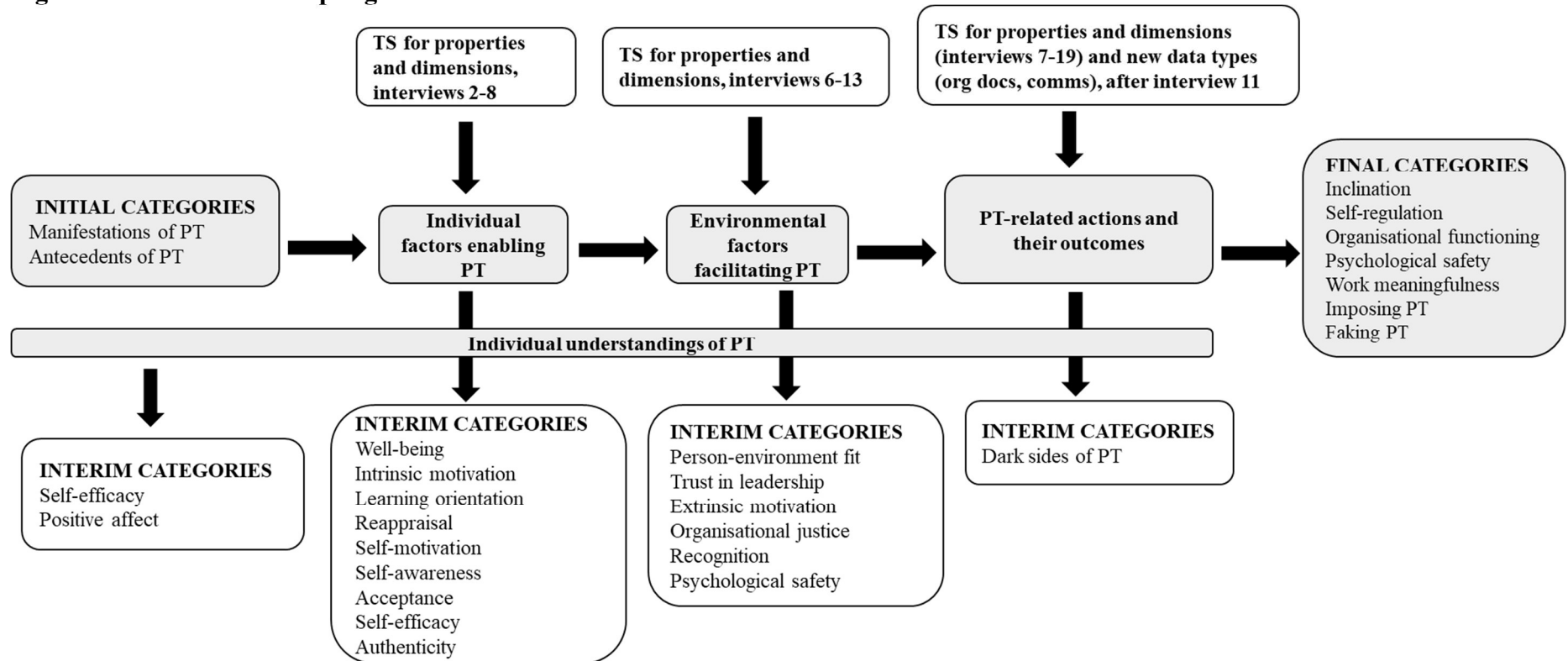
I still have another job to go to if I want this. The future for me in the company is uncertain, but They still need some of what I do and that might be part time.

The data in both categories were coded for identifying concepts and categories.

Analysis. In line with the *theoretical sampling** approach (see Fig 5.4 for an overview of the process), I started the analysis as soon as I collected first data. *Open coding** was the initial stage of analysis and involved breaking data apart, line-by-line coding them, describing data segments with short phrases and in vivo codes reflecting their content, and outlining concepts to summarise the blocks of data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). Along with facilitating a better familiarisation with data, line-by-line coding helped me stay close to data (Charmaz, 2014). Open coding involved moving from the concrete to the abstract: from real world experiences to concepts as abstract representations of events described in the data, and from concepts to categories.

I resolved the dilemma of remaining closer to data, avoiding conceptualisation too soon, and grounding concepts and categories in data as much as possible but also moving beyond description to produce concepts and categories (Charmaz, 1990; Corbin & Strauss, 2015) by first identifying descriptive text codes and then grouping those concrete initial codes into more abstract labels and concepts to form initial categories.

Figure 5.4 Theoretical sampling



It is acceptable for coding to be initially descriptive to become more conceptual later during the analysis (Payne, 2015). In order not to shape the analysis according to my theoretical knowledge, I engaged with the literature to inform the formulation of the major categories only after completing open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Having open-coded data from first interviews, I identified concepts and outlined initial broad categories of constructs, which were antecedents and manifestations of PT, comprising, for example, having a vision, building relationships, openness, driving things forward etc. At this stage, I changed the sampling strategy to collect data about properties* and dimensions* of the categories to refine them further and identify relationships between concepts identified (Payne, 2015). This involved collecting data on categories through amending the interview guide (see *Interview guide amendments* section and Figure 5.3 above). *Theoretical sampling* influenced data sources and types I sought, which reflected in adjusting the interview guide, recruiting participants (e.g., key informants), and sourcing organisational documents (discussed in Data collection) and allowed me to iteratively revise and refine initial categories. In addition to obtaining new data, it also implied re-visiting existing data with new questions.

Developing the core category (Inclination for PT) continued throughout the data collection and analysis. Results of open coding initially largely presented it as demonstrating positive affect and self-efficacy. Later, the analysis showed that it has three components (cognitive, affective, and behavioural) manifesting at three levels (self, environment, and other-oriented) and extends beyond self-efficacy cognitions. The rest of the analytic process moved from identifying individual factors enabling PT to environmental ones facilitating it and then to PT-related actions and their consequences. Figure 5.4, providing an overview of the theoretical sampling process, illustrates the prevailing focus of a particular phase on certain topics rather

than shows clear demarcations between the phases. As data from initial interviews were richer in properties and dimensions of individual factors shaping PT development, adding nuances to their properties guided further data collection. The theme of psychological safety came up in the second interview for the first time, while organisational functioning was first mentioned in the sixth interview. In addition to focusing on these environmental factors facilitating PT in the next phase of data collection, I ensured to get both employee and managerial perspectives on them.

The topic of putting pressure to demonstrate PT and faking it (initially coded under one category of Dark sides of PT) started becoming pronounced by the seventh interview pointing to manifestations of the pressure in the managerial and organisational discourses. Some participants, particularly, not related to me professionally, spoke about pretending to think positive directly. Others did not speak about it at all and mostly focused on bright sides of PT, which contrasted with accounts that covered both bright and dark sides of PT manifestations and, speaking in the language of grounded theory, waved the red flag (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In addition to expanding on the topic in further interviews with employees and managers, I also deemed necessary to interview individuals who could share information on ways PT was encouraged in organisations and channels of communication used for that. Thus, I recruited information-rich individuals (Gilchrist, 1992) with key and extensive insights on manifestations of the pressure in the intra-organisational discourse, which they had due to their roles as HR and internal communication experts. The new participants were helpful both in interpreting employee/managerial perspectives on the topic and directing me towards specific documents for further data collection and analysis (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Marshall, 1996), which I started sourcing after the eleventh interview. These included organisational documents and

communications aimed both at the internal and external audiences (discussed separately in Data collection and Data analysis).

I used *axial coding** to construct relationships among concepts and categories and involved the paradigm model to examine whether major codes represented conditions, actions, or consequences related to PT (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2015) and if they answered my research questions asking about factors shaping development and manifestations of PT in organisations. The paradigm model helped me unite outcomes of open coding, move from microanalysis to the construction of an integrative picture, and outline a conceptual model of PT. I built diagrams and conceptual maps of categories to visualise links among concepts and categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, Heath & Cowley, 2004; Locke, 2001). As a result of axial coding, I identified elements and levels of PT, environmental and individual level conditions enabling it, and PT-related actions and their consequences (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3. Major codes and themes with a number of cases

Category	Theme	Major codes	No
Core	Inclination for PT	Cognitive + Affective + Behavioural manifestations	14+10+12
Individual enablers of PT	Self-regulation	Reappraisal	17
		Self-motivation	14
	Self-efficacy		15
Environmental facilitators of PT	Psychological Safety	Speak-up environment	15
	Organisational functioning	Understanding the strategy	6
		Perceptions of the infrastructure	9
		The quality of interpersonal interactions	5
	Work meaningfulness	Awareness of contribution	3
		Recognition	5
		Clarity of organisational communication	6
PT-related actions	Imposing PT	Interactions and discourse	21
		Reactions and perceptions	14
Consequences of PT-related actions	Faking PT	Role expectations	21
		Consequences of faking	11

Selective coding, guided by “What is the research all about?” and “what seems to be going on here?” (Teppo, 2015) questions, filled in and refined the story line. It involved continuous consultation with existing data and collection of new data needed to validate the evolving model and fill missing elements of it. The analysis identified Inclination for PT as the core category representing a central element linking together conditions, actions related to, and consequences concerning PT in organisations and thus making it possible to develop an explanatory story about this phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). PT, as an inclination drawing on self-efficacy, extended beyond cognitions to affects and behaviours and applied to the individual and their interactions with the environment and others. PT was conditional to the strength and interaction of organisational functioning, psychological safety, work meaningfulness, which were environmental factors facilitating it, and self-regulation, which represented an individual factor enabling it through the transformation of self-efficacy into PT. Imposing PT, which was an action rooted in the popularity of PT, resulted in various emotional reactions, perceptions, and actions with Faking PT being the main one.

I wrote *memos* throughout the analysis process to keep track of ideas and thoughts concerning interpretation of the data, assumptions about concepts and categories, or further data collection (Charmaz, 1990). Writing memos also helped me clarify and refine meanings, concepts and relationships and integrate pieces of the analysis. I collated all memos in one document under different categories and used them in the write-up. In sum, the final version of the conceptual model was a result of an iterative process, where I arrived at the final set of categories through searching for and analysing new data, constantly comparing, renaming, reshuffling (e.g., work meaningfulness was initially coded under psychological safety and later as an independent category) and abandoning weak categories (e.g., authenticity, organisational

justice). The application of the paradigm model refined the categories further and clarified the analytic focus of the study on prerequisites of PT and influences on its manifestations in the workplace, which I broadly categorised as conditions for PT and PT-related actions with consequences respectively.

5.3.2.2 Document data analysis

The document analysis involved synthesising data contained in documents through coding and categorising (Bowen, 2009). Thus, I reviewed documents and identified passages relevant to the central question, which asked about manifestations of external pressure to demonstrate PT in the organisational discourse. Then, I analysed those passages to identify patterns in them and used descriptive coding involving summarising in a word or short phrase the basic topic of a passage of data (Saldaña, 2013). However, I did not view those documents as evidence offering true accounts or facts. Rather, in addition to analysing the documents' content, I explored and interpreted their rhetorical features and I considered them in relation to their production (authorship) and their consumption (readership) (Coffey, 2014). This involved analysing documents' forms, purposes/functions, and their interrelatedness (ibid). For example, this included identifying a link between internal communications and selection tools both encouraging demonstrations of enthusiasm.

Codes identified by the document analysis formed two main categories: Calls to demonstrate enthusiasm and Linking rewards with values (discussed in Findings). In the analysis of data, I tried to both represent the material objectively and be sensitive to subtle cues (Bowen, 2009). To achieve that, I used the central question to guide the process, asked questions of data, compared data, and wrote memos. Since the analysed documents were not produced for research purposes, they were not affected by the research process or myself, which added to credibility of

the research process (ibid). However, it also meant that they were not sufficiently detailed and one example could not address the central question. Therefore, I looked at a wide range of documents, considered their target audience, and compared their content to address the central question.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the overall approach to the research process, including my epistemological stance as a pragmatist, ethical considerations, sampling, and methods I used to collect and analyse data. I detailed the use of the grounded theory method for the qualitative study guided by the theoretical sampling principle with the aim to identify concepts related to PT in organisations. I expanded on the development of vignettes as rooted in the literature and my professional background and validated in this research. Data collection and analysis methods used in the experiment and two-wave surveys of this research, including the vignette development and content are discussed in Chapter 9. In the methodological context provided by this chapter, the next chapters will discuss results of the grounded theory.

Results of the grounded theory study

Chapter 6 Obvious or evasive? The ambiguous case of defining Positive Thinking

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Individual understandings of Positive Thinking in organisations

6.2.1 Defining Positive Thinking

6.2.2 Manifestations of Positive Thinking

6.2.3 Differences in employee and managerial perspectives on Positive Thinking

6.3 Discussion

6.4 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

Building on Chapter 4, which identified a research gap regarding individual understandings and experiences of PT in organisations, the current chapter presents results of the first empirical study based on grounded theory method addressing the research question on how individuals define PT at work. Iterative coding and interpretation of triangulated data from interviews, vignettes and organisational documentation unravel the complex nature of PT involving cognitive, affective, and behavioural manifestations of the concept operating at the self, other, and environment-oriented levels. The chapter demonstrates differences in employee and managerial perspectives on PT and provides a definition of PT inclusive of meanings that individuals create for it in interactions.

6.2 Individual understandings of Positive Thinking in organisations

This section discusses participants' understanding of PT, which are rooted in efficacy beliefs, differences in managerial and employee understandings of it and describes its manifestations.

6.2.1 Defining Positive Thinking

There was no clear-cut and common understanding and meaning of PT as participants elaborated vague ideas and often constructed definitions during the interview noting with some surprise that it was not as easy to explain the concept as they had thought when agreeing to partake in the study. Participants' definitions varied from 'focusing on what you can do' to 'turning things on their head'. Some participants referred to PT as positive affective states, such as enthusiasm, cheerfulness, high energy. When asked "thinking about what?", participants explained it as seeing the bigger picture and thinking about good things, improving, learning, developing, and growing. For example, reflecting on his definition, Neil first referred to it as a feeling, then moved to its behavioural manifestation (problem-solving), and concluded with its other-oriented display (influencing the team):

I've been thinking about it, it actually is quite difficult to define. To me, it's more of a feeling. But I'm not even sure I can define it...if you're a positive thinker, you can generally solve problems actually more easily...Plus, a positive thinker tends to influence the team in the way they actually feel better.

Indeed, there were common patterns in data pointing to it as an acquired characteristic comprising cognitive, affective, or behavioural manifestations. Based on the analysis of participants' understandings, I defined PT as *the inclination to consider both positive and negative aspects of situations or environments when evaluating them, draw on the positive to achieve desired outcomes, and improve the negative*. Interestingly, participants framed PT simultaneously complimentary and sceptically. Strikingly, no one referred to PT as an attempt to

generate optimistic beliefs. Instead, participants referenced efficacy beliefs and revealed multiple layers of PT. I describe such nuanced understanding next.

6.2.2 Manifestations of Positive Thinking

PT was rooted in efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977) with “positive” used synonymously with “confident” implying a can-do mindset and strong conviction that one can achieve goals and only asks themselves *how* they could do that but not *if* they could. Formulating PT in a vignette discussion, Yasmin referred to the performance-related efficacy, interchanged PT with confidence and belief, and viewed confidence as contributing to PT:

Thinking positive might mean like someone's belief in herself or himself, like, confidence and self-confidence for example, so if David believes that, if he's positive about the fact that he could do better, for example, could perform better and then this would help him to improve his performance... maybe he is not self-confident about his potentials, what he would achieve, therefore, he's not thinking positively about his strengths.

As a way of approaching and reacting to situations, PT comprised cognitive, affective, and behavioural manifestations related to the individual and the way they interacted with and affected their environment and other people. The excerpt below, in which Emma described a positive thinker role model, covered most of these elements:

My senior manager, she really is in my opinion, a very positive thinker... she always has a lot of energy... And so just someone who is just very naturally positive, full of energy, can guide you in a positive way, makes you feel like, you get their energy and it's really noticeable 'f you're working for that person and because it drives other traits as well, she's quite keen to develop you and guide you.

Table 6.1 depicts a summary of cognitive, affective, and behavioural manifestations of PT, which are detailed next (they are discussed in light of the respective theoretical perspective (Bandura, 1977) later in the chapter).

Table 6.1. Manifestations of Positive Thinking

Manifestation	Self		Others
Cognitive	<i>Outcome focus</i>		Influencing others' efficacy
	Engagement & interest		Inquisitiveness about others
	Sense of purpose		
	Understanding own contribution		
	<i>Positive future visualisation</i>		
	Motivation		
	Achievement drive		
	Continuous development		
Affective	Action-orientation		
	Positive affect		Inducing positive affect in others Empathy
Behavioural	Self	Environment	Others
	Approach	Selecting	Interaction
	orientation	Challenging	Communication
	Resilience		Leadership

The self-oriented cognitive manifestation of PT inferred outcome focus and visualisation of positive future scenarios. *Outcome focus* involved concentrating on the result and was achieved through engagement and interest in what one did. Positive future *visualisation* involved anticipating good results underpinned by confidence that one can achieve whatever they plan to do. Combined these sub-manifestations helped the person sustain motivation and influenced their drive for achievement. When defining PT, Sajiv, for example, referred both to focusing and anticipating good outcomes:

It's thinking positive about what you do, thinking from the beginning that everything will be okay, trying to improve something that isn't right, you need to focus.

Interestingly, this manifestation did not imply either generating thoughts with positive content or suppressing thoughts with negative one. In fact, it involved a degree of dissatisfaction with the present and continuous efforts to improve it to have a better future. Describing a positive thinker role model, Majid referred to a friend's growth determination as consistently thinking of next projects:

I'd say one of the signs of someone who is always positive is that he's always thinking of the next big idea. So he's not satisfied or happy with where he's at the moment.

The development drive in turn enabled action-orientation, which manifested in the behavioural manifestation of PT discussed later in the section.

The other-oriented cognitive manifestation of PT comprised one's capacity to enhance other people's efficacy beliefs and their inquisitiveness in trying to understand motives of others' behaviour. Participants thought that empowering other people's self-efficacy was particularly valuable in leaders for motivating followers, as demonstrated by Yvonne's account:

There is a belief in positive people that we will get there...and they carry that with them. And the value is that they carry other people with them... it's almost infectious...It gives you confidence actually...people around them have confidence that they will achieve what they set out to do... because this person believes we can do it, we believe we can do it too.

The boosting of other people's self-efficacy was not intended and did not involve encouraging others to think positive or anyhow change their cognitions, yet it was effective. When faced with misconduct at work, PT implied looking beyond the surface for underlying impetus and seeking positive drives of people's behaviour rather than judge by its negative manifestations, as illustrated by Helen's account where she referred to her manager as a positive thinker role model:

one thing he said to me was 'When people react badly, or seem to be not wanting to agree to something, try and think about ... the positive reasons why they might be doing this rather than focusing on the negative traits and characteristics and the impact it was creating... you need to understand the psyche behind why it is that they're reacting or responding in a certain way'.

The self-oriented affective manifestation of PT denoted positive affect and was often referred to first, when participants formulated their understanding of PT, indicating its saliency compared

to the cognitive and behavioural expressions. Manifestations of PT included enthusiasm, cheeriness, high energy, and happiness. Helen, for example, described positive thinkers as content and pleasant people “*who are happy, who are funny, who are smiley, who are welcoming*”. However, participants differentiated between enthusiasm *at* and *about* one’s workplace as managers accentuated the importance of the former and employees of the latter. To employees, feeling enthusiastic about the workplace signalled being in the right work environment, where one can learn, utilise their skills and competence, and grow. Importantly, participants did not reference cherishing positive affect.

The other-oriented affective manifestation of PT implied one’s capability to impact emotional states of other people and empathise with them. Specifically, it involved inducing positive affective states in others by influencing their levels of energy and enthusiasm. For instance, reflecting on how someone’s PT can make her feel, Olivia referred to its inspiring effect:

I think it's contagious... and it actually makes me feel really good usually, it's like a reminder of 'Oh, yeah' that's how we should do it'. And usually, I admire them, especially if they do it in a challenging situation. I'm like, 'Wow, look at them!'.

The key aspect here was the naturalness of this capability, where evoking positive emotions in others did not involve urging people to experience them, which distinguished organic PT from imposed one. Participants contrasted the vitalising element of PT with energy depletion. For example, Derek reflected on reasons why David, a hypothetical character in a vignette scenario (Appendix A1), might have been encouraged to think positive and suggested that the character must have demonstrated behaviours negatively affecting other people:

if I were David's team leader, I'd say 'I guess I would encourage you, David, to spend a little time thinking about how the way you relate to your co-workers, you can get them fired up or drain their energy out of their job performance'.

Further, PT involved taking perspectives and demonstrating compassion and concern for people going through difficult times as opposed to encouraging such individuals to think positive without appreciating the need to process the distress first.

The self-oriented behavioural manifestation of PT implied an approach orientation and resilience. The *approach orientation* manifested in proactiveness, problem-solving mindset, high efforts, and perseverance. As Rose suggested in a vignette discussion on what the encouragement to think positive might imply for an employee, PT enables an attempt to solve the least promising situation as opposed to surrendering without trying:

If David is faced with a problem, he could perhaps approach it with a better mind frame...like a positive mindset, so instead of having a defeatist attitude sort of be like even if it's a problem you can't solve, at least try to think it through'.

Perseverance showed in sustaining efforts, looking for alternative solutions to make things work, and maintaining motivation. Yet, as participants stressed, while PT can empower one with persistency to look for solutions, it also enables flexibility to move on if things are not working for reasons beyond their control.

Resilience manifested in quickly rebounding after adverse experiences. Majid interchanged PT with resilience and saw it as essential for enduring and overcoming difficulties. He referred to an example of small business he worked for, where resilience of employees was simply a matter of existence for the organisation:

P: You need a lot of resilience to keep coming back... If you don't have positive thinking you're done, you can't survive.

R: It's interesting that you you've interchanged positive thinking with resilience. Do you see them as a similar or the same thing?

P: Yeah. I do, because... if you don't have resilience, you're just not going to get up from that, you're just going to think 'oh my god, what happened, this is too hard'..' so that's why I guess I tied these two things together.

Resilience also showed in *self-possession* in stressful situations. For example, Yvonne noted that in her experience positive thinkers had different personalities but all exhibited composure and concentration on problem-solving, thus leading situations rather than being led by them:

Something catastrophic can happen and they'd go 'Okay, what are we going to do about this?' rather than getting dragged into drama...I think it [PT] can actually be about being calm and focused...sometimes, those people I've seen in the in the crisis have been very calm, they exert that positivity through that calmness and focus.

The environment-oriented behavioural manifestation of PT involved *selecting* environments that facilitate one's learning and growth and *challenging* environmental aspects that one does not find acceptable. For example, Vail described PT as recognising conditions that can enable one's development and stretch the person to the best of their capabilities:

So figuring out what sorts of environments challenge you, with a healthy amount of stress, figuring out what sorts of environments you're learning and growing in.

Challenging the environment included changing what one thinks is not right or justified, speaking up, or resisting pressure to exhibit PT. For example, Neil spoke about PT empowering him to change physical working conditions of a new worksite he was not happy with so that it meets his standards of maintenance:

I didn't like it at first, but then slowly, slowly, my thoughts that we could change it got more positive...we can positively change things...And slowly, slowly we tried to change the culture and probably I don't think we ever managed it because it takes years and years but we certainly got about 70% of it [changed]...So we used positive thinking.

Resisting pressure for PT showed in courage to go down the rational route versus forcing one's thoughts into a 'positive' direction and accepting the negative rather than downplaying it.

The other-oriented behavioural manifestation of PT applied to relating to, communicating with, or leading others, and, in general, enhancing interpersonal dynamics. PT enabled the

balance of amiability and agreeableness with directness, and open-mindedness with sensibility.

For instance, Rose referred to her line manager's approachability, people orientation, and attentiveness, when describing an exemplary positive thinker:

She has this thing about her that a lot of people are drawn to her because she's so friendly... She talks to everybody so, as the executive director one of the things that I love about her is that she knows all the gardeners, all the people in maintenance, like people who are usually forgotten by the other HRDs.

Such characteristics as listening and providing clear explanations were deemed particularly important in the context of leader decisions, organisational processes, and employee tasks. In a re-organisation resulting in a number of people losing their jobs, Norman saw leaders' PT in acknowledging adverse outcomes, explaining their long-term effects, simply being with employees in critical times, talking to them, and facing the situation instead of hiding from it or presenting employees with a fait accompli:

our CEO, who is friendly kind of guy, who spends time talking to people at all levels and he was really on the day of the payoffs [when] the majority of people got to know, and he was on our floor but he was really kind of buzzed about, you know, yes, it's a dramatic change, but it will put us in a better place as an organisation'. So that was kind of positive thinking.

Finally, participants saw positive thinking in developing and guiding others, as well as motivating them by behaviour rather than rhetoric.

6.2.3 Differences in employee and managerial perspectives on Positive Thinking

While the study did not aim to specifically examine differences between employee and manager perspectives, differences of note are summarised in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2. Employee and managerial perspectives on Positive Thinking

Employees about employee PT PT ≠ and > enthusiasm and supporting the management line; Confidence, can-do attitude Thinking rationally, expressing concerns, voicing issues; Environmental factors responsible for PT (e.g., psychological safety, organisational functioning) are important. Demonstrations of PT are expected.	Employees about managerial PT Explaining, guiding, supporting, accepting, listening, and motivating; Real PT is contagious and empowering; Fake PT is detectable, detrimental, and damaging trust; Has to show in behaviour.
Managers about employee PT Positive affect, agreeableness, supportiveness; proactiveness; team-playing; Suggesting solutions; Better performance and appraisal results; Should be added to selection criteria; Did not speak about employees faking PT.	Managers about managerial PT Motivates followers; Manifests in confidence and enthusiasm Defeats cynicism and negativity; Managerial faking is hollow and damaging; Sometimes managers have to pretend. Must show in behaviour

For **employees**, their own PT implied confidence, thinking rationally, sharing concerns, or voicing issues rather than exhibiting enthusiasm and supporting the management line, which they thought was expected in organisations. Speaking up involved highlighting things that did not go well and suggesting ways of improving them with employees stressing the importance of the former and managers of the latter. Employees largely thought that PT was an acquired, rather than a natural state and, as such, related it to environmental and individual factors. For example, Emma noted that it was hard to think positive when affected by circumstances beyond one's control:

it can be quite tiring, always trying to think positively about things because sometimes it doesn't come naturally...if you're overwhelmed with work, you've got stuff going on at

home or horrible things keep happening in your life around you, then thinking positively can just not happen, it'd be very difficult to find.

In this regard, participants placed particular importance on environmental influences, such as psychological safety, recognition, or organisational functioning (discussed in Chapter 7).

Employees also thought PT was critical for leaders and perceived it as involving explanation, guidance, support, acceptance, listening, and motivation. They differentiated real and fake PT with the former being contagious, credible, empowering, and giving a warm feeling one gets from a positive human interaction. Fake managerial PT not only did not induce PT in followers but undermined trust in the manager. Participants pointed to the importance of integrity with the leader's positive rhetoric reflecting in their behaviour. This is illustrated by Sajiv's quote from a vignette discussion about a manager lacking in consistency (Appendix A5):

P: it's your [leader] behaviour, your demonstration of how you work, shows them [employees], gives them the positive.

R: So the manager in this scenario, do you think he's a positive thinker?

P: He is but how? He's not demonstrating it, that's the problem.

Managers primarily described employee PT as positive affect (e.g., happiness, enthusiasm, or cheerfulness) and only on reflection (e.g., prompted by vignettes) referenced its cognitive and behavioural elements. However, employees involved in project planning, safety, data security, or financial risk assessment challenged such an understanding of PT, associated the focus on the affective manifestation with complacency and illusions of control, and characterised it as thinking skewed towards the positive end of things. In a vignette discussion about an employee raising project management issues only to be told to think positive, Vail related to the character's concerns and noted that the nature of his work made him prone to detecting risks and sceptical to PT as being at odds with his job:

I do a lot of work with sort of risk analysis and probability... in my work I have to go through all the financial statements of an oil and gas company and figure out how strong I think they are. And then from my work, the bank will decide to loan to these people or not loan to them. So, if I see a lot of positivity on the slides, I have to immediately discount that and try to get to the actual probable outcomes.

Further, managers listed agreeableness, supportiveness, team-playing, and nonconfrontational approach, which inferred accepting assignments happily. Neil's account of a positively thinking employee was informed by motives of his own convenience and concerns over controllability of the situation. He described such employees as cheerful, unconcerned, and thus easier for him to manage:

it's easier to get on with somebody if they are happier and more positively thinking. They're easier people to work with. They also tend to do what you ask them without arguing, with respect. You know, 'Can you go to this place?' 'Yes, no problem' is generally the answer. And therefore, I value that type of behaviour because it's easier for me. Quite simple as a manager. People do what you ask them.

The emphasis on doing things with respect was remarkable in not clearly linking with PT and deviating from the rest of participants' understandings. Moreover, it contrasted sharply with employees' understanding that PT was not about supporting the management line but implied confidence, can-do attitude, or courage of speaking up.

Managers also associated employee PT with better performance, constructive approach, proactiveness, and suggesting solutions along with pointing to issues. Some of them viewed PT as an important value to be embedded in the organisational culture by recruiting so-called positive people and linking it with rewards. For example, Yash suggested adding PT-oriented questions to selection interviews, which paralleled another finding of the present study that positive teams can oust people showing less positivity. Thus, reflecting on why it may be good to think positive, Ralph noted that people not seen as positive can be alienated by others:

if others are viewing them as negative, or having negative energy or just being negative about that they're doing, people tend to, especially if they're working on teams where lot of positive people are very optimistic, people tend to exclude people like that eventually.

Further, managers believed that managerial PT motivates employees and defeats cynicism and negativity. They were not concerned about employees faking PT but thought of managerial faking as hollow and damaging and, like employees, stressed that genuine PT is to show in one's behaviour. Yet, they admitted that sometimes they had to adjust their rhetoric and behaviour to come across more positive to their employees as they assumed it should keep employees motivated. The analysis showed that this assumption was not correct, as discussed in Chapter 8. Interestingly, despite the differences, both sides saw PT as a desired feature and no participant considered themselves a non-positive thinker. In fact, a few explicitly stated that they would challenge such an assumption.

6.3 Discussion

This section discusses the key findings on individual understandings of PT and its manifestations through the prism of existing theory and research on thinking, positivity, social cognition, and personal constructs, and evaluates how the definition of PT proposed by the current research addresses limitations of existing conceptualisations.

Individual understandings. The integrated individual-environment interaction theoretical perspective of this thesis including symbolic interactionism, social cognitive, and cognitive-affective processing system theories (Chapter 3) posed PT as an interaction symbol carrying meanings, which can both converge and diverge for different people depending on their unique understandings and experience of PT. Findings of the qualitative study aligned with this view. The lack of common meaning for PT and various perspectives on it of employees and managers

that the current study revealed resonated with the lack of shared understanding of it in health settings (e.g., Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2000; Youll & Meekosha, 2013) and was akin to positive attitude definitions being constructed based on people's individual experiences (Bruckbauer & Ward, 1993; Leventhal, Meyer, & Nerenz, 1980). Further analogies can be drawn with the concept of fun at work which not only means different things to different people but can also be perceived differently by the same person depending on the context (Owler, Morrison, & Plester, 2010; Plester, Cooper-Thomas, & Winquist, 2015; Warren & Fineman, 2007). Similar to the distinction between organisation-initiated and organic fun (e.g., Owler & Morrison 2020, Plester & Hutchinson 2016), the current study showed that employees differentiated between “real” and “fake” PT and stressed the motivating effect of the former and the off-putting one of the latter.

Further, the study showed differences in managerial and employee views of PT where the managerial perspective primarily focused on the affective element of PT and the employee one placed more importance on challenging the negative (e.g., speaking up). In particular, employees confronted the view of PT reduced to optimism and enthusiasm and referred to situations involving financial risk analysis or project planning, which may not be appropriate to approach with too much positivity (e.g., Vail and Derek). This supported the concern overlooked by Positive Psychology and Positive Organisational Psychology that one needs to exercise a context-sensitive and more reflective approach to positivity constructs as they may not always be relevant in performance-related situations and areas, where rational thinking would be more appropriate (Kahneman, 2011; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; Weinstein, 1989).

The concerning finding on keeping out individuals perceived as not positive by positive majorities (e.g., in Ralph's account) corroborated the concern on grouping up of individuals

thinking alike and silencing alternative voices stemming from the promotion of PT in organisations (Collinson, 2012; Ehrenreich, 2009; Lovallo & Kahneman, 2003). Unsurprisingly, nobody viewed themselves as a non-positive thinker which paralleled the finding on undesirability of reactions that can be considered negative in organisational settings (Chapter 8). These findings align with two streams of research: the literature on organisational emotional display rules (see Discussion in Chapter 8) and interesting but not widely disseminated findings on functional utility of negative reactions (e.g., Forgas, 2013). These streams both point to the “unfavourable” status of negative emotions and a need to normalise negative reactions as part of human functioning in a broader societal discourse, not least because they can prove useful (Forgas, various years).

Finally, participants constructed their understanding of PT in interviews by contrasting it with negativity and negative thinking (e.g., draining others’ energy out) as if it was easier for them to formulate what PT is by referring to what it is not as a point of departure and explaining the world in terms of opposites. This can be explained by the personal construct theory perspective posing personal constructs as reference axes upon which one projects things to make sense out of them (Kelly, 1970). Through the prism of constructive alternativism, PT can be viewed as the contrast between two types of events that participants visualised when constructing a definition for it. PT then served both to differentiate between the event types and to group them (ibid). However, as findings showed, PT was more than the absence of negative thinking.

Manifestations of PT as rooted in self-efficacy. The integrated individual-environment interaction theoretical perspective of this research proposed that, as situated within individual agency, PT is impacted by one’s cognition and affect (Chapter 3, section 3.3). I discussed the triadic reciprocal system involving individual characteristics, the environment, and the person’s

behaviours, in which people both react to the environment and shape it through their individual characteristics including cognitions that the person uses to evaluate the environment and regulate own behaviour to respond to the environment (Bandura, 1986). According to Social Cognitive Theory, among cognitions, self-efficacy plays a crucial role in developing a sense of control over one's life, confidence in one's ability to overcome difficulties, goal setting and commitment to them, and cognitive construction of future scenarios (Bandura, 1994; 1997), based on which I proposed that the person's efficacy beliefs should affect development of PT. The proposition was corroborated with findings of the study showing that as a tendency PT was rooted in self-efficacy that explained manifestations of PT at the self, other, and environment levels.

For instance, outcome focus and visualisation of positive future pertinent to the self-oriented cognitive sub-manifestation of PT are characteristics of the efficacious outlook, when higher levels of self-efficacy provide ground for anticipation of more positive outcomes (Bandura, 1997). The self-oriented affective sub-manifestation of PT (e.g., experiencing enthusiasm, cheeriness, high energy) can be explained by high self-efficacy creating positive affective states through the sense of control over the environment and efficacious individuals experiencing low levels of negative emotions in adverse situations (Bandura, 1989, 1997). Further, the self-oriented behavioural sub-manifestation of PT including efforts that one puts forth and sustains to attain goals can be attributed to efficacy beliefs shaping their motivation (Bandura, 1997), whereas a sense of control associated with self-efficacy (*ibid*) informed their resilience and perseverance.

A strong sense of control pertinent to highly self-efficacious people, which makes them genuinely interested in and approaching situations and people rather than avoiding them (Skinner, 1996) and increases their open-mindedness (Bandura, 1977), can also account for the

attempt to understand situations and people that the study identified as the other-oriented cognitive sub-manifestation of PT. The other-oriented behavioural sub-manifestation of PT included high quality of interactions, communication, and effective leadership, which can be attributed to the willingness to relate to other people, putting more effort into building relationships, and enriched social functioning associated with self-efficacy (Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006; Caprara, Di Giunta, Eisenberg, Gerbino, Pastorelli, & Tramontano, 2008; McCormick, 2001). Challenging the environment or choosing the one that enables one's development can be explained by self-efficacy driving the maximisation of one's control over the environment (Bandura, 1997). In sum, findings of the current study show that a strong sense of self-efficacy and control over oneself and the environment it generates are fundamental to development of PT. Further, PT extends beyond self-oriented cognition and includes affective and behavioural components too, effects of which apply to the self, others, and the environment. This is an important nuance preventing from reducing PT to just one element.

The definition. Results of the present study showed that PT is a unique construct with features making it distinguishable from other constructs it is used interchangeably with. While participants understood PT quite broadly, the study identified some patterns that enabled formulating a definition for the construct. The definition of PT as *“the inclination to consider both positive and negative aspects of situations or environments when evaluating them, draw on the positive to achieve desired outcomes, and improve the negative”* proposed by this study reflects such elements of the thinking process as responses to environmental stimuli and critical assessment of the environment (Dewey, 2009). Specifically, it incorporates elements of a systematic cognitive inquiry: it begins in situations presenting a dilemma, implies solving a perplexity, and involves overcoming the inertia to accept situations at their face value (ibid),

which, for example, would be to focus on the positive only and ignore the negative. It also highlights the adaptive function of PT as a higher-order type of thinking incorporating problem-solving and decision-making (Gullestad, 2007; Heyes, 2012; Tomasello, 2014) achieved through accepting the reality wholly and not distorting its perception. Importantly, this definition is inclusive of meanings that individuals create for it in interactions, which fits with the interactionist perspective of this thesis. Finally, addressing the critique on ambiguity around what “positive” means in positivity constructs (e.g., Hackman, 2009), this definition poses it as the element by drawing on which one can achieve desired outcomes.

Existing conceptualisations of PT. The confusion around PT and multiple meanings for it identified by the current study mirrors the messiness around it in the literature, where its definitions vary from approach to attitude, confidence to resilience, optimism to outlook and involve cognitions, emotions, or behaviours without connecting these elements (Chapter 4, section 4.3). Earlier in the literature review (Chapter 4), I grouped the existing definitions of PT into four categories: (1) definitions using other constructs to describe PT; (2) definitions describing PT as a regulation of thoughts; (3) definitions referring to PT as skills; (4) definitions referring to PT as cognition (see Table 6.3 for their comparison with the current study’s definition of PT).

The current study identified some of the constructs presented in the literature as PT as its cognitive, affective, and behavioural manifestations, for example, engagement, enthusiasm, or resilience respectively. However, as a multi-layered capability including all the three components extending to the person and their interactions with others and the environment and rooted in self-efficacy, PT goes beyond the constructs typically denoting traits/states and it is not accurate to reduce PT to just one element. Definitions describing PT as a regulation of thoughts

including generating thoughts with positive content, concentrating on them, eliminating thoughts with negative content, transforming them into thoughts with positive content, or visualising the positive to some extent mirrored self-regulation for PT but not PT as such. Further, self-regulation for PT (see Chapter 7) did not imply eliminating or suppressing the negative but critically assessing situations, acknowledging the negative, and choosing to draw on the positive in this particular order, which the existing definitions do not reflect either.

Table 6.3. Comparison of the current study’s definition of Positive Thinking with its existing conceptualisations

Conceptualisation	Similarity with PT	Difference from PT
Other constructs (e.g., engagement, enthusiasm, resilience)	Addressing a manifestation of PT (e.g., behavioural, affective, cognitive)	Overlooking other manifestations of PT
Regulation of thoughts (e.g., concentrating on the positive, visualising the positive; eliminating thoughts with negative content)	To some extent, mirror self-regulation for PT rather than PT	Self-regulation for PT implies critically assessing situations, not eliminating or suppressing the negative
Skills (problem-solving, constructive thinking, challenging own thoughts; taking something meaningful away from difficult situations)	PT implies critical and constructive thinking	Not addressing the “positive”
Cognition (e.g., a cognitive process, a self-regulatory cognitive strategy, portraying the idealised future)	Partly reflect the cognitive manifestation of PT and self-regulation facilitating it.	Not entailing taking a bigger view of situations incorporating both the positive and the negative Not clarifying the “positive” element Not explaining how thinking’s adaptive functions can be realised

While PT implied skills such as problem-solving, constructive thinking, challenging own thoughts (Bekhet & Zauszniewski 2013; Epstein & Meier, 1989), or taking something meaningful away from difficult situations (Heraty et al, 2008; Lipman, 1988), it entailed more

manifestations and elements and addressed the “positive” omitted in the definitions drawing on skills. Definitions referring to PT as a cognitive process (Bekhet & Zauszniewski 2013; Macleod & Moore, 2000), a self-regulatory cognitive strategy (Ruthig, Holfeld, & Hanson, 2012), thoughts that portray the idealised future (Sevincer, Wagner, Kalvelage, & Oettingen, 2014) partly reflect the cognitive element of PT and self-regulation facilitating it.

However, unlike the definition offered by this study, they do not entail taking a bigger view of situations incorporating both the positive and the negative, do not clarify the “positive” element, and do not explain how thinking’s adaptive functions can be realised. For example, while Bekhet & Zauszniewski (2013) highlight that PT “*acknowledges both the negative and positive aspects of issues, events, and situations, and then favors movement toward a positive focus and interpretation*” (p.3), the unidimensional way they operationalise it does not reflect the acknowledgement of the negative as the items of their scale measuring PT as a skill include transforming negative thoughts, highlighting positive aspects, interrupting pessimistic thoughts, practicing positive thinking, breaking a problem, initiating optimistic beliefs, challenging pessimistic thoughts, and generating positive feelings.

In sum, unlike the existing definitions, the definition proposed by the current study is many-sided and more accurate in addressing both the “thinking” and “positive” components and identifying and demarcating cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements applicable to the individual and their interactions with and effects on their environment and other people. Importantly, it poses PT as an independent construct and as an acquired characteristic involving the individual’s interaction with the environment, which I discuss in Chapter 7.

6.4 Conclusion

In response to the first research question of the thesis, this chapter addressed the fundamental question on what PT is and showed how individuals working in organisations understand and define it. The current study contributes to the literature as the first study that scrutinises PT by deconstructing meanings that individuals working in organisations put into it and constructing a definition inclusive of perspectives generated by a diverse sample of the study. These data frame PT as an independent construct and therefore questions its use as a synonym for a myriad of other positive-related phenomena. The data unravel PT as a more manifold phenomenon than the reductionist accounts typically presented in the popular and academic literatures. The same individuals being simultaneously complimentary and sceptical of PT was another divergence from the common view that PT is unequivocally welcomed and beneficial. A more fundamental difference was related to the status when the employee view of PT was closer to confidence, whereas the managerial one resonated with notions of agreeableness and cheerfulness. The variation in perspectives on PT revealed by the study testified the utility of not settling for the widespread use of PT as a replacement for positivity constructs and examining how individuals in work settings understand it, to answer the first research question of the study.

Scrutiny of the construct showed that it was grounded in efficacy cognitions, hence it can be argued that self-efficacy is vital to development and maintenance of PT. Yet, PT extended beyond self-efficacy and comprised also affective and behavioural components manifesting at the self, other, and environment-oriented levels. This definition provides a more holistic and deeper understanding of PT as an approach to life and in that it differs from a common view of PT as merely “fixing” one’s thoughts. Its uniqueness is further leveraged by incorporating the acknowledgement of both the positive and negative, which also distinguishes it

from a popular understanding of PT as initiating optimistic beliefs or generating positive feelings. Based on the findings of the current study, I argue that sustainable PT is a mindset that requires approaching situations with courage to embrace all their aspects but draw on ones that will help the person solve or improve the situation. Such an approach may be better suited to tackling root causes of issues than the superficial turning away from the negative.

The study added further nuances to the understanding of the construct by differentiating employee and managerial perspectives on it, showing that PT is expected in organisations, and supporting a long-standing argument on the context-specific appropriateness of positivity constructs and on the need to exercise caution when promoting PT. Recognising the differences and context-sensitivity of PT are crucial for handling PT-related miscommunication and tension in organisations, specifically, in relation to pressure for exhibiting PT from the managerial side and employee reactions to it, as discussed in Chapter 8. Importantly, there were data pointing to the tendency to exclude people not appearing positive, for example, in the context of the selection process or team dynamics, which is rather alarming and would need further investigation. Finally, data showed that PT was not a natural but acquired state that requires facilitation, which the thesis expands on in the next chapter by discussing environmental and individual influences on it to address the second research question.

Chapter 7 What it takes to think positive at work: Influences on development and manifestations of Positive Thinking

7.1 Introduction

7.2 The Environment: The Functioning, the Safe, and the Meaningful

7.2.1. Organisational functioning

7.2.2 Psychological safety

7.2.3 Work meaningfulness

7.3 The Individual: When Mental Somersault meets Drive

7.3.1 Reappraisal

7.3.2 Self-motivation

7.4 Discussion

7.5 Conclusion

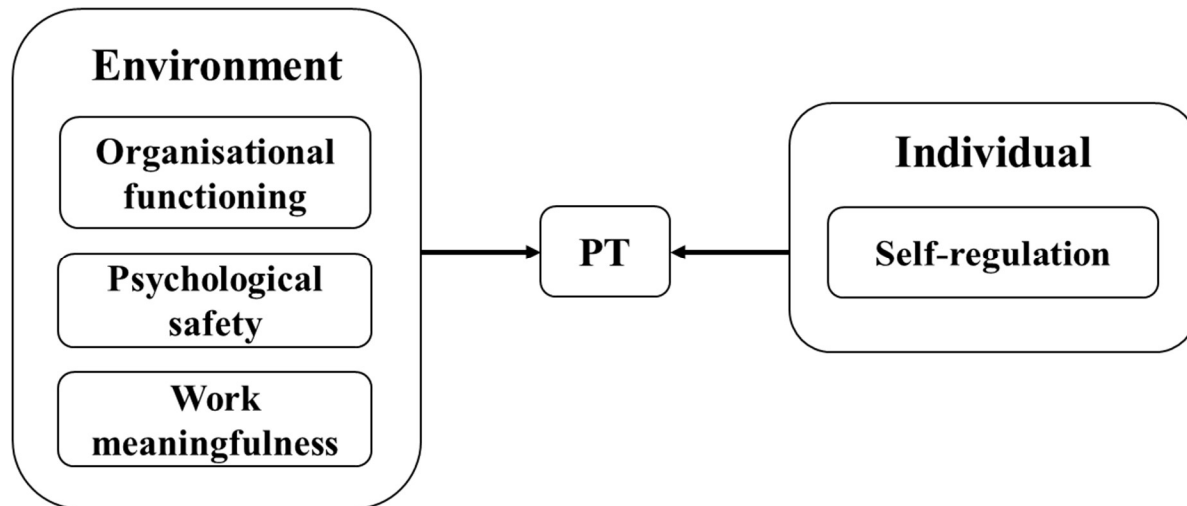
7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed individual meanings of PT at work including a commonly shared understanding of an acquired rather than a natural state and, as such, requiring facilitation.

Addressing the second research question of the study, the current chapter presents further findings of the qualitative study on when and how the individual can develop and manifest PT at work including environmental and individual shapers of the process. It starts with presenting findings on categories of organisational functioning, psychological safety, and work meaningfulness as contextual elements affecting PT and follows with discussing self-regulation

for PT. The chapter makes propositions regarding development of PT at work to be addressed by further research. Figure 7.1 depicts a summary of the influences discussed in the chapter.

Figure 7.1. Environmental and individual influences on Positive Thinking at work



7.2 The environment: The Functioning, the Safe, and the Meaningful

This section presents and discusses results indicating that the environment facilitates PT through creating a perception that the person works in a well-functioning and safe environment and their work is valuable. The respective categories of organisational functioning, psychological safety, and work meaningfulness are discussed next. The category development (e.g., initial, interim categories) are discussed in Chapter 5 (Section 5.3.2.1, pp.121-124).

7.2.1 Organisational functioning

Organisational functioning referred to a perception that the organisation runs smoothly, thrives, and, thus, conveys a sense of strength, which enabled PT through enhancing certainty regarding the workplace's potential to offer growth and promotion opportunities to its employees. As Derek explained, working for a well-functioning organisation shaped PT through setting up positive future expectations:

maybe I'm going to get promotion in the pay rise and this organisation's going to do really well and its share price is going to go up and this is a great place to work...these kinds of things make you feel good. And probably you feel a bit more confident.

Participants judged how well or badly the organisation functioned based on understanding of the organisation's strategy, perceptions of its infrastructure, and the quality of interpersonal interactions in it. *Understanding the strategy* inferred the clarity of the organisation's mission and employees' contribution to achievement of organisational objectives. Understanding what the organisation does and how it functions as a whole, seeing the direction it is taking, and recognising one's own contribution to the common cause were essential for having confidence about the organisation's future, relating to it, and thus thinking positive about it. For example, Yasmin contrasted the environment of a poorly functioning previous workplace with a well-functioning current one, where awareness of organisational objectives and plans enabled PT through positive future visualisation regarding the organisation and herself:

In my new role, I'm more positive because I kind of see the bigger picture what the company's trying to do, what they want to achieve and I'm positive about it, I think they will get bigger, they will do more useful projects in other countries and they expand and I have a positive feeling about that.

Infrastructure implied the context or environment in which the job had to be done, namely, physical working conditions, company policies and administrative practices, or benefits (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). Depending on the organisation size, the working conditions that affected PT ranged from comfortable furniture, heating and conditioning systems, lunch provisions to fitness programmes or regular health check-ups, and general orderliness. Apart from pointing to proper functioning of the organisation, the provisions showed organisational support and care for its employees, which added to PT too. Participants contrasted functioning workplaces with dysfunctional ones including unsuccessful projects, absent or ill-defined procedures, lack of basic workplace facilities, or poor maintenance, which hindered PT

through negative perceptions of the workplace as illustrated in Neil's account of working in two very different oil platforms:

And then I moved to the southern North Sea and there were ex-X [the new workplace] platforms that Y [the previous workplace] bought. So because the philosophy was to only do maintenance when it was necessary, not preventative maintenance, which was always Y sort of maintenance...they didn't look after the platform, it was falling into pieces, it was rusty, the equipment hadn't been maintained. Some of the structures were, in fact, dangerous...The platform was not a nice place, whereas the platforms I'd worked on previous to that were fairly nice even though some of them were not new anymore. And, automatically, trying to think positively is quite difficult, so the environment does affect you. So, nice places to work, it makes a big difference the environment that you're surrounded with.

Interpersonal interactions in the organisation involved the power of relations that could create both a positive and negative atmosphere. Participants noted that while well-functioning and thriving work environments enable PT, it is people who create them and therefore interactions based on support, respect, cooperation, trust, and one-team spirit added to thinking positive about the workplace. On the contrary, negative interactions impeded PT by making one feel unwelcome and uncomfortable. For instance, Majid said that disrespectful attitude can negatively influence PT through disabling sharing:

Now let's say you're brainstorming and sometimes what happens you get the guy in the room who kind of every time somebody comes up with ideas [shouts] 'that's rubbish, that's not gonna work' and then in the end people stop speaking and stop contributing because...that means every idea that comes up is a bad idea.

Cutting off, silencing people, or discouraging ideas and suggestions inhibited speaking up, which was a manifestation of the environment-oriented behavioural manifestation of PT. In this regard, participants emphasised the role of leaders in creating positive interactions by leading by example and setting the tone.

7.2.2 Psychological safety

Psychological safety referred to employees' perceptions of how safe they think it is to self-express at work without fear of negative consequences to their image, status, or career (Kahn, 1990). Self-expression in this study manifested in speaking up, which reflected the environment-oriented behavioural manifestation of PT. The workplace felt psychologically safe when it enabled speaking-up and thinking rationally as opposed to downplaying the negative and demonstrating PT without internalising it. On the example of Alex, the vignette character who is told to be positive in response to raising project planning-related issues, Helen noted that being discouraged from speaking up by the manager might confuse the character rather than help him think positive:

Alex may think 'I was just trying to do the right thing, I was acting with integrity. And I wanted to express my concerns in an environment where I should feel like I'm in a position of psychological safety and I can express myself openly, especially, as this could essentially represent a risk to the business'.

Some participants referred to the formal route of speaking up used by their organisations, where the leadership implemented the initiative to allow employee voices to be heard. For example, Norman spoke about his organisation, where this channel enabled PT through sharing concerns and ideas without fear and transforming the negative to positive:

They probably started this 'Step up and speak up' process maybe about 6-7 years ago, wherein they're encouraging people to see what they thought about the organisation without fear of retribution. And that helped people be more positive about work because they felt that they had a good idea and they can bring that up or, if they didn't like something, they could also say that there were things that were negative... That encouraged people to talk about things that weren't right and that was turning things from negative to positive. I think it encouraged people to think more positively about their situation.

Participants stressed the leadership's role in creating a safe speak-up environment, which implied inviting employees to share their ideas, welcoming their improvement suggestions, listening, and following up on their concerns. In some cases, though, while speaking up was formally encouraged, in reality, it was reprimanded. A few months after the interview a participant informed me that they were made redundant by their organisation and related it to speaking up. In situations when fear of negative consequences stopped people from voicing concerns, psychological safety was hindered and PT was irrelevant as it implied one would be reprovved for exercising it.

7.2.3 Work meaningfulness

Finding meaning in one's work, experiencing it as worthwhile (Hackman & Oldham, 1975), and having zest for one's occupation influenced PT too although to a lesser extent than organisational functioning and psychological safety (see Chapter 5 for theme saturation indications). As Norman put it, it was the enjoyment of work that enabled PT for him:

I don't go to work because I work to live, the other way around, I have to enjoy what I do as otherwise I don't get any satisfaction out of it. I can't become, I can't be positive, I have to like what I do.

While awareness of one's contribution was essential for finding work meaningful, participants stressed the role of the environment in helping one identify meaningfulness through recognition of their contribution by the organisation and clear organisational communication. *Awareness of contribution* included getting a sense of ownership from one's work and realising that they make an impact at workplace by adding to something bigger. For instance, Yasmin drew on the analogy of putting together pieces of a puzzle and referred to mapping one's contribution on a bigger picture of organisational objectives:

Everybody has a role in the organisation and everybody is like a part of a jigsaw. So everybody should feel that they contribute towards the organisation. It could be different for different people. But I think the belief that your role is key is very important to start feeling positive, thinking positively.

Recognition added to work meaningfulness and PT, whereas its lack and feeling that one's efforts determined little impaired PT through depriving one's work of its meaning. Along with financial rewards, recognition extended to being acknowledged for one's work and the overall sense of one's value to their organisation as illustrated by Leo's account:

Positive thinking is also about understanding that what I'm worth of is being recognised and if that's recognised, then I feel more motivated...if you are recognising that I am a good worker, then it makes me feel, yeah, valued and then if I feel valued I can think positive.

Recognition came up both in employees' and managers' accounts as most of interviewed managers represented the middle management cohort rather than senior management who is typically powerful enough to have access to it anyway (Lasch, 1984).

Clarity of organisational communication including explanation of tasks, processes, situations, and decisions made it easier to identify meaning in work and think positive about it. Participants stressed that leaders play a key role in organisational communication by enabling a shared vision and better understanding in teams. For Ralph, for instance, thinking positive directly linked to understanding rationales behind workplace decisions. In a vignette discussion about the manager responding to the employee's concerns on project planning issues with "think positive" (Appendix A3), he noted that while the manager might have had legitimate reasons to not worry, he did not convey them to the employee:

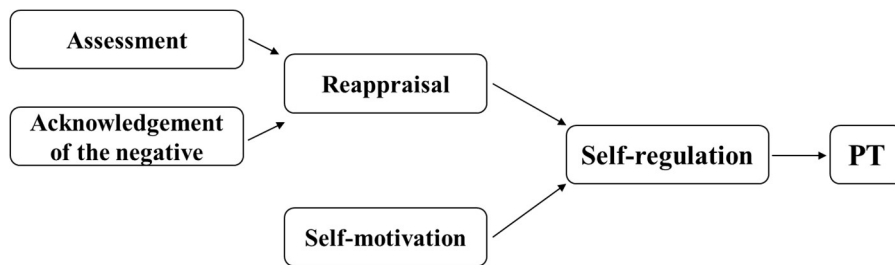
manager might have explained everything. So I think most people are positive once they can understand... I mean, the manager could be right, but it doesn't seem like they're really explaining.

Participants' expectations about manager communication extended to clearly conveying both strategy and tactics. For example, they pointed that in motivating employees to achieve goals, leaders should also detail how this could happen. Having discussed findings on environmental shapers of PT, the chapter now moves to discussing individual influences.

7.3 The individual: When Mental Somersault meets Drive

The previous section discussed environmental influences on PT at work whereas this section focuses on self-regulation as the process facilitating PT through reappraisal and self-motivation (Fig 7.2).

Figure 7.2. Self-regulation for Positive Thinking



Self-regulation implied controlling and guiding one's cognitive, affective, and behavioural reactions to events, to align them with ideal ones or to reach desired goals (Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall, & Oaten, 2006; Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Garnefski, Kraaij, & Spinhoven, 2002). As an act of internal calibration, it did not carry valence but was rather a neutral process enabling PT. There was an agreement among participants that PT is not a natural state and although it may be easier for some people to develop it, it still requires self-regulation. Participants stressed that developing and maintaining PT was an effortful and non-linear process, hence someone not used to PT has to resist slipping back into the default negative mode of reacting to things and

situations. This is illustrated by Emma's quote, where she spoke about the easiness of getting back to habitual ways of thinking if PT is not continuously practiced:

R: You earlier called PT a strength, do you think that as a strength PT can be developed or trained?

P: Oh yeah, definitely...I think your brain is like a habit, isn't it? An instant reaction is to go down a gloomy path instead of recognising all those things that encourage you to think more positively... if you sort of take your eye off the ball, if you forget that way of thinking, you might find yourself there [at the gloomy path] before you realise that.

Participants agreed that the best way to develop PT was through behaviour, where one reflects on past experiences when PT delivered desired results and applies the same approach in the present.

Thus, Helen spoke about a cyclical process in which reflecting PT in actions strengthens it further:

So there's definitely something in there around positive action... to correct or improve or rectify the situation... So it's not just the language, it's actually taking the points of action, and then that positive action leading to positive outcome which reinforces that mental state of actually positive thinking which leads to action, which is the outcome.

Mostly, participants viewed self-regulation for PT as a process, in other words, an activity extended in time. There was an exception though, when one person referred to it as a swift and nearly compulsory shift in one's mind. Thus, Neil spoke about putting himself in the right mind frame when he starts offshore work:

So I think you have to have [PT], it's almost a switch. You know, when you go to work...well, you've got a switch saying: 'So right. I'm away from home. That's my job. And you've got to enjoy every day that you are in here...And you can make that switch and say 'right, I'm going to enjoy it, even though I'm at work.'

Neil's understanding of PT should be viewed from the contextual perspective as he was a senior, experienced, and highly efficacious manager with a wide scope of responsibility for an offshore platform and its crew. It was remarkable though that as a manager he stressed the necessity to

demonstrate PT and did not touch on its facilitation, which contracted with employees' views. The expectation of an instant move to PT in this account overlaps with the theme of imposing that I discuss in Chapter 8. Self-regulation for PT involved two elements: reappraisal and self-motivation discussed next.

7.3.1 Reappraisal

Reappraisal refers to the interpretation of stimuli to generate alternate interpretations of them, modify their meaning, and change one's assessments of them (Koole, 2009; Milyavsky et al, 2019). Reappraisal manifested in actively seeking, choosing, drawing out, focusing, and building on the positive, recognising but not dwelling on the negative, approaching difficult tasks as challenges rather than threats, and wilfully changing the initial reaction to a situation or problem. For instance, Sajiv initially perceived a work situation as overwhelming but thinking positive helped him reinterpret it to see the positive and draw on it to get the best possible results out of it:

R: So, what do you think it takes to be a positive thinker, if you can think about any example?

P: I'll give you my own example. So I was having some issues about 15 years ago: I was working in the finance department and then I moved to HR department. And then initially, of course, it was a shock to me, I'd never worked in HR, I changed my work location, I was away from the family and all these, many things which put me into a negative framework, and I was thinking of leaving the company. But then... I showed my finance skills...in the whole HR department nobody had the finance skills which I had. That was positive thinking and that worked.

Realising that he had an advantage helped Sajiv cope and benefit from the situation initially perceived as unfavourable. Generally, reappraisal enabled building a more balanced view of reality by attempting to put the situation into a broader context. Reappraisal was down to assessment of the situation and acknowledgement of the negative. *Assessment* implied reviewing

issues and situations to understand them and find solutions for them. It included contextualising and comparing one's situation to other situations or other people's situations to appraise the degree of its gravity. For instance, Yvonne explained that assessing the relative severity of issues through benchmarking helped her think more positive:

I think there is this thing on focusing on what you still have...I've got a problem with my joints, I'll never ski or snowboard but I can walk around. And a lot of people can't walk. So it depends on what you benchmark yourself against...I think it's probably in the context of your own life.

Acknowledgment of the negative inferred accepting issues and recognising the negative, which participants viewed as essential for preventing and solving issues. This is illustrated by Ann's reflection on the need to identify potential issues and be prepared to mitigate them with proper planning:

We do lots of stuff in the public centre, it can be reputationally risky. And you always want to make sure that your minister isn't going to end up on the front page of the newspaper for doing something ridiculous, or for wasting money or impropriety of some kind... you've got to be aware of the things that could go wrong [as it] doesn't mean that you're not thinking positively, it just means that you're making sure that you've got a plan in place to mitigate whatever happens.

Acknowledging the negative implied effective problem-solving, which participants contrasted with avoiding or denying the negative. Acknowledgement involved active *emotional processing* by recognising and understanding one's negative reactions too (Marroquín, Tennen, & Stanton, 2017). For instance, Olivia spoke about the importance of recognising negative responses when building PT and stressed that leaders need to be mindful of emotional processing when encouraging PT in employees:

R: Can you think of any situations when you wouldn't recommend positive thinking?
P: If, whenever you're dealing with something, your instant approach is to try and make it positive, then you're not allowing yourself to experience that sadness, that discomfort and that's essential, you can't just erase things by ignoring them...First of all, maybe let

yourself feel sorry for a little while... You need to acknowledge the issue and empathise if needed. So that person needs to be allowed to be sad, to be stressed about it... if you start with an attempt to reframe it before you do all that, then you're just not acknowledging really.

This finding underlined the *normality of experiencing negative reactions* and its appropriateness when self-regulating for PT. Finally, acknowledgement of the negative preceded reappraisal and self-regulation. For example, when assessing the redundancy situation going on in his organisation, Norman first recognised negative elements of it, accepted his negative reaction, and then followed with reappraising the situation by pointing to positive elements in it for his future career:

It was a shock initially to discover that they only need me part-time... since August I've had some periods of thinking negatively... I do have negative thoughts about that but by applying positive thinking, that I will be okay, I still have another job to go to if I want this. The future for me in the company is still uncertain, but there's still quite a lot of positive elements, they still need some of what I do and that might be part time... there're some positive aspects.

7.3.2 Self-motivation

Self-motivation inferred finding a source to nurture PT and included creating self-rewards and arranging a supportive environment (Bandura, 1991; Zimmerman, 2008). It manifested in giving oneself credit for the positive and not being too self-critical about the negative, finding things that keep PT up, and reminding oneself that setbacks can be followed by breakthroughs. For some participants, self-motivation involved using sensory stimulation to cheer oneself up, for example, by listening to favourite music or enjoying art. Others preferred to rely on social support and surround themselves with other positive thinkers or people who could guide them towards PT. When defining PT, Vail, for example, stressed that it implies understanding who could help him live happily:

figuring out who your tribe is, who the people that you need to be in close connection with, to have a happy, thriving life.

Self-motivation involved a high degree of *self-awareness* including knowing one's strengths and weaknesses and continuously checking in with oneself to recognise when one slides back into the nonconstructive mode of thinking. As Helen stressed, self-observation helps sustain PT through resisting negative thinking:

The best way to maintain PT [is] to... [have] self-awareness, sort of 'Oh, I'm slipping back into the negative mode, I need to work on how I get out of this...that's got to come with the self-awareness, the knowledge of the default position, I suppose. And then what help, support, and resources can you pull on if you find yourself reversing backwards.

In terms of consequences, self-motivation enabled the manifestation of self-directed behavioural elements of PT, namely, putting in more efforts towards reaching one's goal and demonstrating resilience and perseverance when set back.

7.4 Discussion

Higher-order thinking is an effortful process (Willingham, 2009), while human functioning is regulated by an interplay of external and self-generated sources of influence (Bandura, 1991), which can explain why PT, as an achieved rather than innate quality, needed facilitation, guidance, and self-management. The study showed that PT was rooted in efficacy beliefs and shaped by individual and environmental influences, including self-regulation and organisational functioning, psychological safety, and work meaningfulness respectively. The respective findings are discussed next.

7.4.1 Environmental influences on PT

The integrated individual-environment interaction theoretical perspective of this research (Chapter 3) proposed that, as a contextual phenomenon subject to environmental influences, PT may develop and express to the degree the environment offers opportunities for it by activating the person's cognitive-affective characteristics. Findings of the present study supported this view by identifying environmental factors influencing PT, which included three major categories of organisational functioning, psychological safety, and work meaningfulness.

Organisational functioning aspects did not constitute exceptional and hard-to-achieve conditions but were related to presumably essential elements of the workplace, which, however, were not always available. These included basic infrastructure of the workplace, clarity about the organisational strategy, or supportive and trustful interpersonal relationships, which affected PT through creating a perception of working in a strong and well-functioning organisation. While hygiene aspects including fair pay, respectful peer relationships, or pleasant and secure working conditions are not viewed as contributors to personal growth, they clearly prevent dissatisfaction and provide contentment in making one free from worry about basics so that the person can focus on the pursuit of growth instead (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959; Sachau, 2007). Conversely, poor environmental working conditions, maintenance, and interpersonal relationships at work negatively affected PT. Although seemingly obvious, the role of working conditions in shaping work behaviours and attitudes has not received due attention as “few organizational researchers are seriously studying...the physical spaces of organizations. These include struggles regarding size, location, and quality of physical premises, equipment, and furniture” (Gabriel, 1999, p.197). Yet, environmental psychology research has long established that physical settings affect work attitudes, emotions and cognitive performance (Finnegan &

Solomon, 1981; Jamrozik et al., 2019; Ko et al., 2020; Proshansky, Ittelson, & Rivlin, 1976). The effect of organisational functioning on PT can be explained by positive affect associated with certainty that working in well-operating environment creates, whereas uncertainty can trigger anxiety (Carleton, 2016; Grupe & Nitschke, 2013).

The effect of *psychological safety*, referring to individuals' perceptions of taking interpersonal risks in their workplace (Edmondson, 1999), on positivity is also somewhat neglected in existing research, whereas this study showed that it influenced the behavioural manifestation of PT. Yet, theoretically, it is intuitive that development of PT should be enhanced by a secure environment that one feels fit with (Edwards & Shipp, 2007) through, for instance, good interpersonal relations so that people feel safe to self-express (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Some sporadic research corroborates this idea by showing that a safe social climate induces vitality (Kark & Carmeli, 2008) or that in a climate of trust, respect, or information sharing, individuals are more likely to thrive through learning and an enhanced sense of agency (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). It is therefore possible that psychological safety can facilitate PT through enabling learning and growth (Edmondson & Lei, 2014) needed for developing self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). While participants highlighted psychological safety as essential for thinking positive, it was not always available. Consistent with previous research (Burke, Sims, Lazzara, & Salas, 2007; Detert & Treviño, 2010), participants stressed leadership's role in creating a safe speak-up environment, which implied inviting employees to share their ideas, welcoming their improvement suggestions, listening, and following up.

Work meaningfulness, involving awareness of one's contribution, recognition of the contribution by the organisation, and clear organisational communication, which enhance

significance of one's role and input (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Warr, 1987), motivated more constructive ways of approaching situations as findings of this study indicated. Work meaningfulness is known to predict work engagement and job satisfaction, or organisational citizenship behaviours (Allan, Batz-Barbarich, Sterling, & Tay, 2019) through changing attitudes and generating positive affective states (Bailey, Lips - Wiersma, Madden, Yeoman, Thompson, & Chalofsky, 2019), whereas the lack of meaning in work prevents one from living a flourishing life (Yeoman, 2014). Arguably, work meaningfulness incorporates both subjective and objective features and is not solely situated within the individual but is also shaped by the context including to what extent it provides one with autonomy, development, recognition, freedom, and dignity (Bailey et al., 2019; Yeoman, 2014).

While the category of work meaningfulness was less saturated than other two categories of environmental influences, the current study's data indicated that the sense of making a significant contribution (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017) and recognition and feeling valued by the organisation added to work meaningfulness (and through it to PT), whereas feeling that one's contribution was not needed and their efforts determined little made one lose meaning of their work. Recognition and perceptions that the organisation values one's contribution could have added to PT via enhancing their social identity (Tyler, 1999) and making them feel fit with the workplace (Caplan, 1987). The alternative route could be through enhanced motivation resulting from the individual's expected utility of their role (Vroom, 1964). Finally, the three environmental factors identified by the current study can also be considered as resources (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001) equipping employees with the capacity to reappraise situations, resist negative perceptions of them, and build positive ones.

7.4.2 Individual influences on PT

Findings showed that, as PT was an achieved rather than innate tendency, self-regulation, involving reappraisal and self-motivation, was essential for developing it. While the role of self-regulation in forming one's action and affect is recognised (Forgas, Baumeister, & Tice, 2009), the present study revealed a non-conventional view on self-regulation for PT by showing that it incorporated acknowledging and processing the negative before reappraising it, and supporting PT with action. In self-motivation for PT, findings pointed to the importance of self-awareness, which also differed from a typical understanding of PT as encouraging positive thoughts, for example. These findings are discussed next through the prism of theories of stress, coping, learning, and relevant research.

Self-regulation, referring to the capacity of individuals to override and alter their responses (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007), acted as an individual level factor shaping PT and comprised *assessment, acknowledgement of the negative, and reappraisal drawing on the positive*. Assessing situations and taking notice about one's negative reactions, which then shape one's reactions to them, fit with transactional models of stress including the primary and secondary appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Assessment and benchmarking one's situation against others or other situations (e.g., Yvonne's account) were akin to the processes of self-diagnosis and social referential comparison intrinsic to self-regulation (Bandura, 1991). Reappraisal, inferring the interpretation of stimuli to generate alternate interpretations of them, modify their meaning, and change one's assessments of them (Koole, 2009; Milyavsky et al, 2019), included several adaptive strategies.

First, it involved acceptance and emotional processing (Marroquín, Tennen, & Stanton, 2017), in other words, recognition of problems, acknowledging and understanding one's

emotional experience, and allowing oneself to experience negative reactions (e.g., Olivia's account). Further, findings also pointed to positive appraisal implying construal of situations as having positive qualities (e.g., seeing issues as challenges) and cognitive reappraisal inferring mentally changing the initial response to influence its consequences (e.g., Sajiv's account) (Gross & John, 2003; Marroquín, Tennen, & Stanton, 2017). These self-regulatory strategies are driven by approach-oriented coping and predict an increase in positive affect (Billings, Folkman, Acree, & Moskowitz, 2000), which can explain the affective expression of PT as stemming from self-regulation.

The literature does not say much about how acknowledgement of the negative can facilitate reappraisal and self-regulation and overlooks the interdependence of these processes that the current study revealed (Marroquín, Tennen, & Stanton, 2017; Troy, Shallcross, Brunner, Friedman, & Jones, 2018). Yet, without acknowledging the negative self-regulation can be reduced to self-monitoring, which is hugely responsible for surface acting (Ozcelik, 2013). This finding also aligns with the critique stressing the coexistence and inseparability of the positive and negative (Lomas, 2016; Lomas & Ivztan, 2016, Wong & Roy, 2018) and supports the view of taking a holistic approach for understanding human behaviour. In this regard, the notion of PT developed by the current study is closer to that of practical wisdom that enables responding to events in a balanced manner (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010) rather than to pursuit of thoughts generating immediate positive affect.

Unsurprisingly, self-regulation for PT heavily relied on self-motivation (Silvia, 2002; Zimmerman & Moylan, 2009), which is a characteristic of individuals who are agents of their own thinking (Kluwe, 1982). It inferred nurturing PT through self-rewards and a benevolent environment (Bandura, 1991; Zimmerman, 2008). Yet, self-motivation for PT adopted a

reflective approach as it was reliant on self-awareness, implying understanding of one's emotions and cognition patterns (Overholser, 1996; Silvia, 2002). The expression of the cognitive manifestation of PT in the behavioural one can be explained by self-regulatory mechanisms translating cognitions into purposive action (Bandura, 1991).

Overall, developing PT as a non-linear process contingent on reflecting on past experiences when PT delivered desired results to apply the similar approach in the present resonated with the notion of double-loop learning, the intent of which is a self-guided transformation through discarding dysfunctional ways of thinking, feeling, and acting and developing more adaptive and effective ones (Argyris, 2002). Remarkably, self-regulation for PT excluded suppression, avoidance, or denial of negative reactions or situations. Similarly, it did not infer “fixing thoughts”, generating positive feelings, controlling negative thoughts, or initiating optimistic beliefs as suggested by the literature (e.g., Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013).

7.5 Conclusion

Addressing the second research question of the thesis regarding development and manifestation of PT, this chapter elucidates that interaction of context with individual functions plays a strong role in forming PT. In particular, this study identifies a hierarchy of ways in which the environment can facilitate PT, starting from basic physical conditions of the workplace and its functioning up to feelings of safety it generates and the extent to which it contributes to finding a meaning in what the person does. By showing that basic workplace facilities and infrastructure or lack of them can influence how the person thinks and feels about and at work, the study draws attention to the seemingly obvious but often neglected in relation to positivity environmental aspects. Further, the study demonstrates that as PT is a form of self-expression involving the

bravery to point to deficiencies so that they could be improved, a psychologically safe environment is a must for its development and manifestations. Finally, the study highlights the role of the environment in helping the person identify a meaning in their work, which then contributes to development of PT. While the study adds to the literature by highlighting the role of these specific influences overlooked before, its major contribution is rather in showing the role of the environment in shaping the individual's thinking, feelings, and behaviour at work and stressing that as such it should receive much more attention as, arguably, the list of environmental antecedents of PT identified by the current study is by no means exhaustive.

At the individual level, the study's findings put under the spotlight the simplicity of reducing PT to "fixing your thoughts" and point to a more sophisticated process of self-regulation required for development of PT. Although the role of self-regulation in development of PT may seem apparent, the unique contribution of the current study is multiplex in highlighting the importance of acknowledging the negative, accepting and processing one's negative reactions, and understanding their normality before reappraising the situation and thinking positive about it. Acknowledging the negative and recognising a dissatisfactory state of things are essential for improving them, which, as the previous chapter showed, is a component of PT, whereas appreciating the normality of negative reactions is vital for understanding such a complex organism as a human being comprising multiple cognitions, affect, and behaviours. Another remarkable finding was the importance of self-awareness and ongoing self-reflection in self-motivation for PT. Once again, this finding emphasises that forming and maintaining PT is a continuous process involving much more refined efforts than simply directing one's thinking or generating positive emotions.

Overall, addressing the second research question on influences on PT, the study shed light on potential environmental and individual level antecedents of PT thus advancing the literature largely focused on its effects, as well as identified areas that need to be addressed by further research by formulating propositions regarding development of PT at work (Table 7.1). In the next chapter, I discuss findings addressing the third research question on imposing PT at work and showing organisational attempts to replace the diligence of facilitating PT with its enforcement.

Table 7.1. Propositions about potential antecedents of Positive Thinking at work

<i>Environmental level</i>
Organisational functioning positively relates to PT
Psychological safety positively relates to PT
Work meaningfulness positively relates to PT
Recognition positively relates to PT
Work meaningfulness mediates the positive relationship between recognition and PT
Positive interpersonal interactions positively relate to PT
Leader communication clarity positively relates to employee PT
<i>Individual level</i>
Self-regulation positively relates to PT
Reappraisal positively relates to PT
Self-regulation mediates a positive relationship between reappraisal and PT
Acknowledgement of the negative positively relates to PT through reappraisal and self-regulation
Self-motivation positively relates to PT through self-regulation.
Self-awareness positively relates to PT through self-motivation and self-regulation

Chapter 8 When organisations try to shortcut it: Imposing Positive Thinking and its not so positive consequences

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Imposing Positive Thinking

8.3 Consequences of imposing Positive Thinking

8.3.1 Emotional reactions, perceptions, and actions as response to imposing Positive Thinking

8.3.2 Faking Positive Thinking

8.3.3 Consequences of faking Positive Thinking

8.4 Discussion

8.4.1 Imposing Positive Thinking

8.4.2 Faking Positive Thinking

8.5 Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

To address the third research question asking about imposing PT in organisations and consequences of doing so, this chapter continues reporting findings from the grounded theory study examining perceived enforcement of PT in the organisational discourse and workplace interactions. Along with interview and vignette discussion data, the study analysed organisational document and communication data. The chapter also reports findings on consequences of imposed PT manifesting in people's emotional reactions, perceptions, and

actions. Finally, the chapter expands on faking PT as a major response to enforcing it. The chapter concludes with propositions for future research regarding imposing PT at work.

8.2 Imposing Positive Thinking

Data showed that PT was imposed in organisations, which implied enforcing or expecting primarily its affective manifestations including enthusiasm, cheerfulness, or high energy, particularly, in relation to support for organisational/managerial initiatives. Both employees and managers experienced pressure for PT although managers did not think that they put pressure to think positive on subordinates. Employees saw imposing as subliminal messages aimed to influence their thinking and attitudes. For example, speaking about how PT featured in his workplace, Vail referred to the organisational website and compared its pervasive content seeming to inject positivity with cultlike messages. In making fun of the initiative, which called in question its effectiveness, Vail was rather ironical:

Our company's homepage... always has a smiling face of someone in senior leadership. Are you familiar with the term 'devotional'? So it's a religious term, that means in the States, it's like a short written meditation, talking about religion... But we joke that we have bank devotionals, where the chief financial officer will be talking about 'My great grandmother is, you know, 92 years old, and she's from Sicily. And every time I go visit her, I'm reminded of these positive family traditions and things like that'. So they put things on there, it's hard to avoid seeing and there's always some sort of positive message behind them.

Drawing on similar examples and references that demonstrations of PT were equalled to the demonstration of organisational values linked with the reward and selection and assessment systems, I analysed documents of organisations my participants were affiliated with to identify evidence of imposing PT (see Chapter 5). Notably, these two sources of data (interviews and documents) are complementary as interview data included references to the imposing in

interactions, whereas document data provided evidence of the imposing in the organisational discourse.

In the *organisational discourse*, imposing mostly took overt and deliberate forms, with the former implying that expectations of PT were explicit and the latter inferring intentionally enforcing manifestations of PT. Documents referred to the need to demonstrate enthusiasm, energy, passion, confidence, and positive approach and contained calls for creating a positive work environment, acting positively, energising people, generating an attitude of enthusiasm, communicating with enthusiasm, or driving positivity. The emphasis on demonstrating enthusiasm and confidence as must-have qualities was particularly strong. For example, a group Human Resources Director named enthusiastic employees as the stewards of the company that prioritise company performance. This mirrored in other organisations' discourse, where they referred to communicating with confidence and enthusiasm when describing role model employees. In an internal magazine interview, an employee recommended those looking to pursue a career with the company to put enthusiasm into their role, noting:

There is one thing I bring to everything I do in life, and that is enthusiasm... I also bring my enthusiasm to my career...I am known for my enthusiasm...

Enthusiasm and passion were listed as preferred features and requirements in job and career development programmes' descriptions (e.g., women's careers, undergraduate work placements) and came up in leadership frameworks and recruitment tools too, where the higher up the ladder, the more explicit references to having to energise, demonstrate relentless drive and determination, and generate an attitude of enthusiasm were. Required competencies included showing pride, passion, confidence, and enthusiasm for one's work, driving positivity within the team, interacting with enthusiasm, and encouraging others to do the same. Similarly, corporate social media accounts contained images of smiling and happy employees with hashtags including

#spreadpositivity, excessively positive expressions, such as “Wowzers!” and “awesome”, and people in photos encouraging viewers to demonstrate positive emotions. Interviews with senior leadership in internal magazines had showy titles, such as “Mr. Resilient Takes the lead”, “A winning way”, “Operations thrive as efficiency improves”, or “Excitement and pride surround X [field name] development”. Overall, the organisational discourse was abundant with calls to exhibit positive affect, which the current study identified as only one component of PT.

Not only did organisations stress the importance of demonstrating positive affect and organisational behaviours and values, but they also linked the values with the reward and selection and assessment systems. For example, a Group Human Resources Director emphasised the need to scrutinise people’s values, behaviours, and attitudes to ensure that the recruitment process delivers the right type of employee and embed the company’s core values through linking them with reward. This echoed interview data on linking PT, which managers primarily understood as positive affect, with the performance management and selection and assessment systems (Chapter 6). Thus, the discourse bunched positive affect up with organisational behaviours and values, which, in turn, were explicitly linked with rewards. Eventually, employees associated positive affect with reward, chaining, for example, enthusiasm with promotion.

The pressure for PT in the organisational discourse may explain why then expectations of PT manifested in *workplace interactions*. First, interview data pointed to managerial beliefs that their workplace conduct must be adherent to organisational norms. Olivia’s quote, where she reflects on how PT features in her organisation, illustrates this:

So in my organisation, there is this way that management should conduct themselves. So there are certain, certain values and certain behaviours that we are supposed to be demonstrating. And sometimes you can see that their actions and behaviours are done just for the sake of saying that we’re positive about things.

Having received pressure to display PT, rolled top down on them via the organisational discourse, and acquiesced to it, managers then expected PT from subordinates, which took overt, covert, unintentional, and deliberate forms in manager-employee in interactions. For example, Neil acknowledged that he requested employees to blend in and leave “negativity” behind the workplace, which was an instance of overt, deliberate, and quite categorical imposing in an offshore setting:

You can tell when somebody's not feeling good. I'd call them into my office and say, 'What's the problem? You know, you need to sort things out somewhere else'... They'd say 'So you can't be happy every day.' I'd say 'Well, no, you can't. But we're here for four weeks. We're a close family and we affect each other. So if you cannot be happy, I prefer you not to be there'.

Requesting the employee to be happy in this example linked with an earlier finding that managers primarily understood PT as positive affect and agreeableness (Chapter 6). A particular example of deliberate covert pressure in the manager-employee interaction was an attempt to get employees to complete a task invoking PT, which participants viewed as manipulation. Emma noted that in such scenarios, tasks were presented as a good opportunity under the cover of PT, which she perceived as enforcing:

A good example, that happens a lot in organisations is when somebody wants to give you a piece of work that they probably know you're not going to really want to do that much, but they spin it as a good opportunity for you and I think they almost force positive thinking on you...so I personally feel like positive thinking can be a bit forced in an organisation.

Participants stressed that they could detect manipulation even if they agreed to do a task wrapped in PT.

Managers did not recognise imposing where employees did. For example, Yash, a senior manager, did not see imposing in the vignette scenario about project engineer's (Alex) concerns

over project planning (Appendix A3) and suggested that the manager might have had reasons to encourage the employee to discard the concerns and think positive. Yet, he related to Alex's situation recollecting that at the beginning of working for his organisation he had a similar experience and stressed that the manager could have explained his rationale more clearly and Alex would have been right to ask for clarification:

This team leader is basically a mature man and he understands how things work. He's aware of the reason and process...And then he might have explained.. But if I were Alex, I'd have asked for justification...And if the team leader says 'don't worry, everything will be fine', we need to understand why it'll be fine.

Covert deliberate imposing also manifested in the management distinguishing so-called positive employees and encouraging them in various ways including public praising and awarding with certificates and prizes in staff meetings, publishing articles about such employees in internal newsletters, or ostentatiously showing favour to them by, for instance, by greeting them in an over-animated, excessively hearty manner or patting them on the shoulder. Participants interpreted such behaviour as projecting an example to be followed by the rest. This coupled with the perception that reactions that could be interpreted as “negative”, such as not expressing positive affect or expressing negative affect, questioning organisational or managerial initiatives, or raising concerns, were undesirable and would make one seen as a critical, pessimistic, and nit-picking naysayer, who is looked down upon and excluded by others. Covert deliberate imposing underlay employee self-censoring to behaviours that would secure gaining rewards and avoiding mistreatment (detailed under Consequences of imposing later in the chapter).

Finally, *unintentional* imposing referred to encouraging one to demonstrate PT without the intent to enforce it but also without much sensitivity to employee reactions and clarity of communication as to what it implies. Examples included casual encouragement to think/be positive thrown away without appreciation of their potential adverse effect. Managers suggested

that such sentences and expressions must have entered the vernacular and are used without much consideration given to their meaning and impact. Employee participants though viewed any form of imposing as an expectation of immediate and radical shift in one's perspective. They opposed imposing to steering the person towards PT by helping them view a bigger picture and find positive nuances of a situation. For example, in a vignette discussion about Alex, Majid said that the encouragement to think positive needs to come with clarity about what it implies and guidance as to how it can be achieved:

[PT] needs to be guided... the manager should have said 'Be positive, but here's some guidance on how you might want to' ... you need to be quite specific in which areas to be positive and how to be positive as well...because he doesn't really tell how, Alex might think 'Okay, being positive might be just smiling more or agreeing more' ... it is not really that helpful. I'd definitely give an example of that from his work.

This demonstrated a difference in the managerial and employee perspectives not only on PT but also on imposing it, to be mindful of in workplace interactions and communications. For example, while most participants spoke about having experienced imposing, as stressed above, managers did not think they imposed PT themselves. Along with showing the lack of reflection on the managerial part so that managers did not realise that their rhetoric and actions can be perceived negatively by employees, this suggested the normalisation of imposing as the managerial and corporate discourse perfectly aligned. The failure to see the imposing explained the tension around PT at work including cognitive, affective, and behavioural consequences of the imposing, which the chapter discusses next.

8.3 Consequences of imposing Positive Thinking

Whether overt, covert, deliberate, or unintentional, imposing PT was not received well by employees. They found that imposing missed out on listening, understanding, explaining, acknowledging issues, and demonstrating support and empathy, which they viewed as important for a leader and essential for employee well-being. Participants pointed that doubts and worries cannot be brushed away simply by thinking positive and, particularly, by someone's telling you to think positive. Consequences of imposing involved emotional reactions, perceptions, and actions.

8.3.1 Emotional reactions, perceptions, and actions as response to imposing Positive Thinking

The range of *emotional reactions* participants spoke about in regard to imposing included disappointment, frustration, unhappiness, confusion, defensiveness, guilt, or anger. For example, in a vignette discussion about Alex, Rose spoke about his potential frustration and, relating to the character, suggested she would have reacted fiercely to such a remark:

It would make feel Alex annoyed... I'd probably break a desk... if you think in your mind and people around you tell you that you're generally a very positive person, all of a sudden, I guess it would be a bit difficult to hear.

Participants *perceived* imposing in the organisational discourse as an intrusion into their personal mind space and in interactions as simplism, attempting to fix complex situations with surface-level measures without looking into and addressing root causes, and thus harming the employee-manager or employee-organisation dynamics. For example, reflecting on the scenario about David encouraged by his manager to think positive during a performance appraisal, Vail alluded to trendy management tools taken at face value and referred to the estranging effect of such an unquestioning decontextualised approach on employee attitude:

I can imagine David's manager being someone who doesn't understand or analyse the things that he talks about particularly well... people like this, they get an email every week that talks about cool new management techniques, and they accept the things they read. They're pretty uncritical and don't understand why they're trying to roll out these things...but doing it in a way that's impersonal and maybe even slightly relationship destructive. If someone feels like you're just reading off a script almost rather than relating to them as a human being, that can be kind of alienating.

Participants also viewed imposing as judging one's personality and labelling them as a negative person, thus perceiving it as unwarranted criticism and personal attack. In a vignette discussion about Alex raising concerns regarding project management only to be told to think positive, Yvonne noted that it implies being negative and saw it as an unwarranted tag attached to people:

it's suggesting that he's being negative, not positive... sometimes, when people say 'try to be positive' the inference is 'you've been negative'... So the danger there is that he goes away feeling, not only is he still worried about the project, but he now feels he's potentially been criticised by his manager indirectly... if someone hears something in passing, that someone is negative, it's like a label...it's not fair.

No participant thought of themselves as a negative person. Only one participant thought that not thinking too positive may stem from one's personality and hence does not need to be justified, whereas others felt they would challenge such a view of themselves and avoid the “negative” tag. Labelling went hand in hand with simplism of imposing, when PT acted as a seemingly easy, although not necessarily effective, solution to complex problems, whereas people were conveniently categorised as “positive” and “negative” without putting efforts into learning about situations and contexts, in which people self-express in a particular way. Importantly, it contradicted the other-oriented behavioural manifestation of PT implying looking beyond the surface and seeking drives of people's behaviour to get a better understanding of them (discussed in Chapter 6).

Further, participants noted that imposing might affect perceptions of psychological safety and thus prevent employees from speaking up in future not to be seen negative. In a vignette discussion about Alex, Derek reflected on the discouraging effect of imposing PT:

I'd feel quite disappointed if that was my manager... it's quite dismissive. And you think well, what about next time? What if this comes up and I have concerns in the future? Would I want to bring that up if I'm just going to be brushed aside... maybe no one cares?... So yeah, I'd feel really frustrated.

Participants also challenged the ambiguity of 'think positive' and patronisation it aired, contrasting it with clarity of specific feedback with concrete examples as Rose said when reflecting on a vignette about Alex:

He's coming to his manager with a problem and it sounds a bit condescending to say try to be positive at the end of it. So the manager doesn't really give him a reason as to why there is no need to worry and why things are under control... if you had a reason for telling me, if it was related to, for example, a new venture that he wanted me to do or something specific, then I would accept it.

Finally, participants stressed that there is a danger of backfiring when the person imposing PT does not recognise that not everyone and not always can demonstrate PT, which may have to do with their circumstances, well-being, or mental health. **Actions** in response to imposing PT included challenging it and faking PT. Participants who were aware of their expertise and value to the organisation felt most confident to withstand imposing. For example, Vail viewed one's job-related efficacy impacting dynamics in the employee-organisation relationship, where the more confident the employee, the more immune to such pressure they become. Participants' accounts focused more on succumbing to pressure for PT by faking it though, which, along with its consequences, is discussed in the next section.

8.3.2 Faking Positive Thinking

Faking PT in response to imposing it meant taking a deliberate effort to demonstrate exaggerated positive affect, enthusiasm, and confidence in rhetoric without feeling and not reflecting them in actions, and hiding negative reactions. The theme appeared in accounts of both employees and managers from different geographic locations, with ways they spoke about it varying from ironical to explicitly critical and their reactions to it ranging from pragmatic acceptance to mental struggle. Both employees and managers resorted to faking with **managers** having to do it in interactions with both employees and more senior management. Participants believed that senior leaders expect positive responses, hence one had better disclose only positive content with them and conceal the real state of things. When I followed up on Yvonne's understanding of PT, she corrected me and explained that in interactions with senior management, demonstrating PT can imply communicating positive messages up the hierarchy:

R: So is thinking positive about being honest and open?

P: Not always, it depends on what situation you're managing.. Sometimes... you recognise it's in your interest to be seen positive... you might not want to dump all your concerns on someone senior because in reality, they're up there. If you are a more junior person, what they want from you is 'Yes', a lot of the time.

Further, managers faked PT to motivate their followers as they viewed PT as a sign of inspirational leadership implying delivering messages with confidence, demonstrating enthusiasm, or hiding concerns as part of work-persona role playing. Thus, Rose spoke about having been in controversial situations when she had to sound positive to her employees about work they were doing, while, having not received support from her management, she lacked motivation herself:

When I'm working with my team and I know that either we're not getting support from the management, I feel very disheartened and I don't really want to continue whatever it is. For example, we campaign once in a while, for awards. That's done by us because it's internal marketing, but where we don't get support from the management and I have to be

positive for my team. Otherwise, I feel like it won't be done or it won't be done to the best of its ability... And that happens a lot of times.

Ralph said that as a leader he faked to motivate employees in commercial roles as, looking for deals for the company, they needed to remain optimistic and even risk-taking so that they would continue to seek opportunities and secure revenues for the organisation even though he did not always believe they were going in the right direction:

With my current role, I have some folks that need to be very optimistic and even though I might not agree with where we think we're going to go, I need them to be positive and I need to support them because they can't get demoralised, because then we start losing opportunities. So that's the part where it feels like, it's not that I am necessarily lying to them but I'm just not expressing my true feelings just because I think it could be bad, I need those people in the organisation to do their job and to be motivated.

It is worth noting that while he tried to keep levels of their optimism high for the type of work the employees did, Ralph did not actually facilitate their PT, which could manifest in creating and maintaining fertile conditions for it (discussed in Chapter 7). This once again questions the effectiveness of imposing PT (through faking in this case) as a strategy for its development.

Faking **by employees** manifested in expressing positive affect and enthusiasm when accepting tasks and workload and hiding negative reactions to make an impression of a positive employee. For example, Norman acknowledged that he tried to demonstrate enthusiasm, when asked to do work, not to be seen negative even though, in light of forthcoming downsizing, he could not see environmental stimuli for PT:

I try not to be negative in the team... you don't want to be seen to be a negative person. So you might pretend that you are enthusiastic and that you've been positive about it all just to make other people believe that... you are still keen to do whatever is asked to do even though perhaps you're not... I feel pretty negative about being asked to do work now when I'm not in that positive thinking frame of mind but I try to be enthusiastic.

This resonates with the point about perceived undesirability of the negative in the organisational context which participants responded to by choosing not to demonstrate behaviour that could be

seen as negative thinking. For example, Yasmin spoke about being a pessimist and worrying about things but trying not to show it to other people as it would mean projecting her negativity at work. However, silencing was counterproductive to PT, a behavioural environment-oriented manifestation of which implied challenging it through speaking up.

Employees also faked PT to demonstrate their team-playing, while not pretending would mean going against the team and having lessened acceptance by it in future. For example, reflecting on why people may display PT without having internalised it, Olivia shared her concerns on having to keep up appearances not to be outed:

If everyone goes with it because that's the way we're supposed to behave, then you might be compelled to play along and not express your concerns...It might be hard to oppose them because it might be seen as negative thinking and might be seen as you're not collaborative... you don't want to be seen as the one who's not a team player because everyone else agrees....So when that's the climate, then you don't want to be the outboud.

The intertwining motives of not wanting to be seen as negative and wanting to come across as a positive team-player echoes the earlier discussed findings about labelling attached to those not fitting the image of a positive employee (in the current chapter) and exclusion of such individuals by their teams (Chapter 6). Finally, participants associated the positive image with receiving rewards and benefits, which stemmed from pressure for PT in in the organisational discourse and interactions. Managerial accounts supported this perception by suggesting that as an element of good behaviour PT is to be reflected in the appraisal and selection and assessment process. Having reported findings on faking PT, the chapter now moves to discussing consequences of faking.

8.3.3 Consequences of faking Positive Thinking

A less saturated category of outcomes of faking (not least due to being out of the thesis' scope) still encompassed interesting insights. Effects of faking PT extended to others' *perceptions* about the faking person and *well-being* of the faking person. Mainly, faking was counterproductive for the actor's reputation. For example, Emma portrayed people faking PT as not genuine and uneasy to be in the company of, while Yasmin interpreted faking as shallowness, which prompted disregard for the actor:

I think some people if they're too positive, you may think 'Ooh, these people are just, not doing anything, just being positive' ...you kind of lose respect towards that person because it's just a speaker not a doer, or just saying things just to be nice but you know inside she or he is empty. They are taken lightly maybe because they're too positive... not taking things seriously.

This was especially relevant if the faking person was a leader. Faking and not reflecting PT in actions by managers missed out on behavioural integrity and thus made the positive narrative fall into pieces and lose credibility. Employees spoke about the difficulty of being persuaded to think positive if the management did not come across as sincere and believing their own rhetoric. They also stressed the appreciation of leader genuineness in the context of PT, as opposed to faking and deceiving oneself that one can gain follower trust by overly positive discourse. They viewed such leaders as acting to impress senior management and losing follower respect. Ralph's reflection on why leaders may want to fake PT illustrates this point:

We have a lot of leaders who pretend to be positive and it's very hollow...it's more like they're just saying things because they want their management to think that they are on board with that... leaders kind of fool themselves thinking that just because they're saying that, people will follow them and it's really more related to genuine... People respect honesty and genuineness versus just whatever the company line is.

Faking also cast doubt on the actor's capability and interpersonal skills. For example, in a vignette discussion about a manager encouraging his subordinate to think positive when the latter

raised work-related concerns, Derek saw it as the manager not delving deep into employee concerns and dismissing them:

when you've got real problems or issues that you're trying to bring forward and they say 'No, ignore that... you think 'You haven't really considered this from a rational point of view?' ...the person's not interested. Then you start to think, well, are they really that positive and competent? They're not really listening to us.

Thus, similar to imposing PT, faking created the impression of shallow oversimplification.

Finally, participants acknowledged that faking felt like a psychological challenge. Norman, who, at the time of the interview, was waiting for results of his company's downsizing, admitted that faking was not easy and described his enthusiasm as superficial rather than genuine:

sometimes I'm kind of outwardly positive when inwardly I'm kind of not so much... I'm generally seen as a kind of happy-go-lucky kind of person even though perhaps I'm not, trying to pretend that I am... it seems to be working so far but it's tough... but I try and be enthusiastic. So you're actually just, on the surface you look like you're positive but inwardly you're not.

Despite believing that pretending would help him get through the hardship of impending redundancy, Norman felt a mental struggle trying to remain upbeat while not feeling like.

8.4 Discussion

This section discusses findings relevant to imposing of PT in modern organisations and employee reactions to it through the lens of existing psychological theory and research on control, resistance, labelling, and surface acting.

8.4.1 Imposing Positive Thinking

The present study provided evidence that PT was imposed on employees *via the organisational communication* and in *interactions by managers*, which aligned with the literature pointing to discursive elements associated with imposing in the organisational communication including websites, internal communication, or social media accounts (e.g., Brown & Humphreys, 2006)

and personal interactions (e.g., Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Imposing PT incited a variety of reactions in employees with faking PT being the most common response to its enforcement. I discuss these findings through the prism of organisational control and resistance to it, where imposing PT acts as an attempt to control employee behaviour through creating a positive thinking employee identity in the discourse (ibid), whereas faking PT, as superficial compliance (Gill, 2019), symbolises employee resistance (Gabriel, 1999).

Organisational control, implying regulating behaviour, emotions, or thoughts (Gill, 2019), can be achieved by identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) with discourses creating, maintaining, and promoting internalisation of identity (Foucault, 1979; Nair, 2010). Findings of the current study pointed to normative control promoting a positive thinker identity through the discourse with the expectation that employees self-censor to match the promoted identity (Child, 1973; Gabriel, 1999; Gill, 2019; Simons, 1994). The organisational discourse established a respective code of conduct, which inferred a set of meanings related to PT (not necessarily shared by employees) and guidance on what is necessary to make positive impressions. A typical employee identity produced by normative control infers someone “hardworking, flexible, and docile; someone who breaks easily into a smile when meeting the organisation ’s customers, experiences guilt and shame with alacrity” (Gabriel, 1999, p.180). Similarly, the positive thinker identity imposed in the current study among other qualities (e.g., agreeableness, enthusiasm) included doing “*what you ask them*”, as Neil put it.

The particular emphasis on the affective component of PT in the discourse resonated with the concerns on the encouragement of employees and managers to demonstrate enthusiasm, a zealous commitment to organisations, and infectious optimism flagged in scarce research on promotions of PT in organisations (Collinson, 2010; 2012). The emphasis might be grounded in

organisational emotional display rules, which are shared and often implicit norms regarding appropriate emotions and their expressions (Ekman, 1973; Hochschild, 1983; Morris & Feldman, 1996) manifesting in the organisational culture, formal policies, procedures, and systems (Arvey, Renz, & Watson, 1998; Martin, Knopff, & Beckman, 1998; Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989). The rules pose positive affect as desirable and negative affect as inappropriate to experience and express (Edwards, Micek, Mottarella, & Wupperman, 2017; Wharton & Erickson, 1993), which found reflection in the data pointing to the undesirability of negative reactions, when people did not disclose them and challenged the very idea of being negative.

Further parallels with control can be seen in imposing PT via the organisational discourse compared by participants to the intrusion into one's mind space, which resembled earlier findings on the promotional character of organisational rhetoric perceived by workers as "propaganda" that seemingly aimed to dominate their minds (Collinson, 1992; 2010; Llewellyn & Harrison, 2006). Also, corporative practices can share similarities with religious ones in seeking to enhance follower/employee commitment via shaping their interpretations through discourse and their behaviour through reward systems (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1996). Being particularly relevant in light of the PT movement's religious roots (Chapter 2), this reflected in the comparison of the organisational discourse promoting positivity with religious devotionals (e.g., Vail's account), the PT-reward link in organisational documents, and the suggestion to link PT with selection criteria (e.g., Yash's account).

Intriguingly, while both employees and managers reported experiencing pressure to demonstrate PT, managers did not think that they put pressure on employees even when they suggested PT should be linked with reward systems (e.g., Neil's account). A primary explanation for this phenomenon could lie in the uncritical acceptance of PT as unequivocally beneficial and

the normalisation of imposing in the discourse. The context review (Chapter 2) has earlier showed that the promotion of PT took place at a broader, societal level, where the “think positive” discourse is rarely challenged and has by now naturalised. The current study supported this perspective by finding that pressure sometimes took unintentional forms, for example, as a throwaway comment meaning no harm but also used without much reflexivity on its potential adverse effects. On a deeper level, the imposing could indicate the unconscious desire for control (Freud, 1917).

Reactions to imposing varied as predicted by the literature (Gill, 2019) but, remarkably, in any case imposing was detectable and induced scepticism prompting analogies with the literature on negative responses to prescribed fun at work (Chapter 4, section 4.4). The literature extensively discusses how perceived external pressure, particularly, obedience pressure, results in conformity or compliance, both of which imply changing or adapting one’s beliefs and opinions (Asch, 1952; Cialdini & Goldstein 2004; Hewlin, 2003; Milgram, 1974). Yet, employees are not passive consumers of discourses but agents reacting to them and, thus, discourses of control will not necessarily shape employee behaviour if employees do not identify with them (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). In the current study, actions in response to external pressure for PT included either challenging it or, if challenging was perceived as risky for one’s career and reputation, self-censoring to comply with display norms and adjust to organisational standards of behaviours without changing private views. In fact, participants’ accounts largely focused on yielding to pressure for PT by faking it, which is not surprising given that control can induce the production of “false selves” (Garrety, 2008). I discuss faking PT next.

8.4.2 Faking Positive Thinking

Findings showed that environmental stimuli could both conduce to development of PT (see Chapter 7) or activate its faking. Faking in response to enforcing PT via organisational and managerial discourses was akin to imitating work meaningfulness induced by organisational attempts to manipulate it (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, Shantz, & Soane, 2017). I argue that faking was driven by motives of resistance, when employees did not internalise PT promoted by organisational ideology and responded to the environmental pressure by imitating PT.

Resistance can manifest in a variety of ways not necessarily excluding compliance (Gabriel, 1999; Mumby, 2005; Ybema & Horvers, 2017). Therefore, faking can be seen as superficial compliance (Gill, 2019) or resistance through compliance (Ybema & Horvers, 2017) resulting from the clash between the organisational attempt to control employee behaviour through imposing PT and employees opposing the pressure. By faking, employees created a non-intrudable safe bubble that was “less accessible to the controlling gaze” (Gabriel, 1999, p. 197) of the organisation. In addition, creating the “right” impression protected the employee as formally they were compliant with expected norms and therefore could not be faulted for not demonstrating PT.

Faking camouflaged the resistance to being labelled as negative as the latter risked social acceptance (e.g., the team-playing motive in Norman’s account) and access to benefits. In stigma and labelling theories (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1968), being deviant is fraught with isolation and mistreatment (Becker, 1963; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Goffman, 1968; Link & Phelan, 2001; Schlenker & Pontari, 2000; Tedeschi & Norman, 1985). Conversely, social approval and belonging enable access to benefits (Leary & Kowalski, 1990), which explains social role playing and strategic self-presentation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hornsey & Jetten, 2004;

Jellison, 1981). As imposing focused on the affective component of PT, faking in the current study partly fit the description of surface acting, which implies modifying one's emotional expressions to display organisationally expected positive emotions and hide negative ones without changing beliefs (Grandey, 2015).

Pressure for PT triggered self-presentational concerns both for employees and managers (Hochschild, 1983; Ozcelik, 2013). Specifically, display rules entwined with role expectations, when, for example, managers thought that they had to display positive affect or confidence to motivate followers and influence their moods, emotions, and performance (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Collinson, 2012; Humphrey, Pollack, & Hawver, 2008) and believed employees were to show positive affect (Pescosolido, 2002; Wilk & Moynihan, 2005). Employees' belief that they should communicate only positive messages up the hierarchy as managers prefer not to hear about any difficulties (e.g., Yvonne's account) echoes findings from Collinson's (1999) research on two North Sea oil installations, where offshore workers did not disclose accidents and near misses as those who reported them were penalised with poor assessments threatening their pay and employment security. There was also a similarity with underreporting of symptoms by patients in health settings under the pressure to exhibit PT (e.g., McCreaddie, Payne, & Froggatt, 2010).

While it was out of the research's scope and thus less explored by me, there were interesting findings on consequences of faking PT under pressure. Although managers imitated PT to motivate and inspire employees, their faking rather delivered a message on in/appropriateness of particular emotional reactions (Pescosolido, 2002). Inconsistencies that employees noticed between leaders' excessively positive rhetoric and their practices (as in Collinson, 1999) were detrimental for the leader's reputation and resulted in learning to

disconnect the leader's words from actions (Brunsson, 1989; Gardner, Fischer, & Hunt, 2009). Faking also felt as a psychological struggle, which was akin to negative effects of surface acting on well-being including stress and strain (Hülshager & Schewe, 2011; Judge, Woolf, & Hurst, 2009; Kammeyer-Mueller et al, 2013). Yet, aligned with theory and research (Goffman, 1968; Major & O'brien, 2005; Ozcelik, 2013), higher levels of confidence and awareness of one's strengths and expertise decreased the perceived need to fake (e.g., Vail's account) and intensified defending the self-image of a positive person (e.g., Rose's account).

8.5 Conclusion

The chapter contributes novel insights as predominantly the affective component of PT is imposed and expected in the organisational discourse and workplace interactions in overt, covert, deliberate, and unintentional forms, where it is linked with reward and selection and assessment. Organisational communication and document data revealed the abundance of appeals to demonstrate positive affect and confidence without explaining how these states can be achieved. Such an emphasis on exhibiting the affective component of PT points to neglecting its facilitation and viewing PT as an end goal rather than a by-product of underlying environmental and individual level influences. By showing that while managers experienced the pressure for PT stemming from the organisational discourse, they did not recognise they forced it upon employees, whereas employees saw it coming both from the discourse and interactions with managers, the chapter highlights the disturbing normality of imposing at a higher organisational level. Another finding of concern was the perceived undesirability of the negative so that people preferred not to disclose reactions that could be interpreted as negative and felt necessary to

challenge the very idea of being negative as it carried reputational risks and compromised one's access to benefits.

Imposing was, at the least, ineffective, and, at the worst, harmful resulting in emotional, cognitive, and behavioural reactions. Participants found the encouragement to show PT ambiguous and contrasted it with guiding towards PT involving clear communication and explanation. It did not facilitate PT, was associated with shallowness, and was either challenged or adapted to by faking, when both employees and managers pretended to display affective elements of PT. Middle-level managers were in the most vulnerable position due to having to demonstrate PT both to motivate followers and express support to senior management. Faking was detrimental for the actor's reputation, particularly, for leaders, and their well-being, as acting something that the actor did not internalise felt like a psychological struggle. The Table 8.1 depicts a summary of propositions about imposing and faking PT at work. Having discussed findings from the grounded theory study on imposing of PT in organisations and its consequences, the thesis now moves to presenting the individual-environment interaction model of PT developed by the current research and results of its testing in an experiment and two-wave survey.

Table 8.1. Propositions about imposing Positive Thinking and its effects

Imposing PT negatively relates to PT
Imposing PT positively relates to faking PT
Imposing PT negatively relates to perceived psychological safety
Self-efficacy negatively relates to faking PT
Faking PT negatively relates to the actor's subjective well-being

Quantitative studies

Chapter 9 If you enforce it, I will fake it: The individual-environment interaction model of Positive Thinking at work

9.1 Introduction

9.2 The individual-environment interaction model of Positive Thinking at work

9.3 Study 1: Experiment

9.3.1 Hypotheses

9.3.2 Methods

9.3.3 Results

9.4 Study 2: Two-wave survey

9.4.1 Hypotheses

9.4.2 Methods

9.4.3 Results

9.5 Discussion

9.6 Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

The Literature Review chapter of this thesis uncovered inconclusive findings on effects of PT as both benevolent and detrimental for individual well-being and performance, negative consequences of putting pressure on individuals to demonstrate PT, and scarcity of knowledge about antecedents of PT. Importantly, despite the critique of the concept's reckless and decontextualised promotion in organisations, there is a dearth of research on consequences of

enforcing PT in the workplace. To consolidate the conflicting literature, understand what can facilitate PT at work and what imposing it can result in, and, importantly, address the second and third research questions, drawing on the theoretical perspectives of the current thesis (Chapter 3), results of the previous grounded theory study (Chapters 6-8), and the literature, I developed and tested an individual-environment interaction model of PT in an experiment and two-wave survey. The model suggested that, as an outcome of the individual-environment interaction, PT is shaped both by individual characteristics and the social context, where certain environmental features will be more conducive to its development, whereas others will activate its imitation rather than genuine manifestations. Specifically, the tested model incorporated self-efficacy as an individual facilitator of PT, psychological safety as its contextual enabler, and imposing PT as an environmental factor inhibiting PT and activating its faking operationalised as surface acting.

I used the *multi-method* quantitative approach to compare evidence obtained using different methods as convergent results strengthen internal and external validity of research by providing greater support for the robustness of conclusions (Eden, 2017; Lykken, 1968). The experiment tested if imposing PT could predict surface acting it and if higher levels of psychological safety and self-efficacy can weaken this relationship. It also examined direct effects of psychological safety and self-efficacy on surface acting PT. Along with re-testing these hypotheses, the two-wave survey examined the extent to which psychological safety and self-efficacy can predict PT. The research was conducted in compliance with Birkbeck and BPS research *ethics* standards. Participation was voluntary and granted with anonymity and confidentiality. Participant consent was sought before starting data collection and debriefing was provided upon data completion. The research subject was presented as organisational and individual factors influencing individual decision-making processes and positive environment in

organisational settings. The current chapter presents the model, the studies along with their hypotheses, methods, and results and discusses findings in light of theory and research.

9.2 The individual-environment interaction model of Positive Thinking at work

The current research views PT as a reaction of adjusting to the environment resulting from the individual-environment interaction and activated by the environment and the person's appraisal of it. I argue that a more complete theory of PT enabling the understanding of its diverse effects should account for its individual and contextual level antecedents. As involving thinking positive about something in oneself or the external environment, PT is unlikely to occur as an independent and isolated phenomenon in a situational vacuum (Chapter 3). Therefore, PT is to be studied as a contextual phenomenon that generates in individual-environment interactions and development and manifestations of which are down to individual and contextual factors and the interplay between them. The mechanisms through which the antecedents could influence PT, are described next.

Contextual factors affecting PT. As individuals are embedded in the environment in which they function (Barker 1968; Nelson and Prilleltensky 2005), it is imperative to consider organisational level factors when studying workplace phenomena. Arguably, the environment can impact PT in two ways. First, as PT implies evaluating the environment or situations with the aim to find and build on the positive, situations must have positive elements in them. For example, the availability and accessibility of growth opportunities, recognition of one's efforts, a job description congruent with one's strengths, peer and supervisory support, or transparent promotion processes enabling perceptions of fairness might encourage one to think more positive about their work. This type of factors can act as environmental aspects that one can draw on

when evaluating their environment as they may outweigh negative aspects. Second, from the perspective of contexts activating development and manifestation of behaviour to the degree that they provide opportunities for that (Bandura, 1986; Tett & Burnett, 2003), certain environments and situations can be more conducive to PT than others. That could imply facilitating PT through eliciting and fostering relevant cognitions or affect. For example, a leadership style involving clear communication and appreciation, could enable PT by helping one recognise the importance of their contribution to the organisational strategy. In contrast, PT may be suppressed in the environment where the person's initiatives are ignored rather than appreciated and encouraged. Thus, whether a disposition for PT can transform into PT depends on the context's relevance to and favourability for PT.

Finally, in situations where PT is perceived as an essential for performance quality (e.g., Brinkmann, 2017; Collinson, 1992; 2012; Fineman, 2006), people may be motivated to show it for instrumental reasons. Therefore, under high environmental demands for PT, if people's predisposition for PT is low or if the situation does not offer PT-relevant opportunities, they may pursue the demonstration of PT rather than its development. If PT is undeveloped but thought to be expected to display, the perceived pressure of expectations to exhibit it may generate perceptions of the necessity to amend one's conduct to make it look like PT without necessarily having internalised PT. Thus, situations may have features responding to which with PT would be adequate, features that can facilitate PT, or features that can inhibit development of PT and activate faking it, and the same person can demonstrate different levels of PT depending on the environment. As situations can have both objective and subjective cues and partly represent the person's meanings of them (Kelly, 1970; Murray, 1938), subjective meanings of situations can play as an important role in PT development and expression as objective factors. Contextual

factors can include but are not limited to organisational functioning, organisational justice, organisational culture, physical working conditions, the availability/accessibility of growth opportunities, recognition by the organisation, change processes, or leadership style.

Drawing on results of the grounded theory study (see Chapters 6-8), I focused on psychological safety and imposing PT as contextual factors that influence development and manifestations of PT in a positive and negative way respectively. Psychological safety denotes “feeling able to show and employ one’s self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career” (Kahn, 1990, p. 708). The effect of psychological safety on positive cognitive or affective states is somewhat neglected in existing research although findings on safe environments inducing vitality (Kark & Carmeli, 2008), or boosting growth and thriving (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005) suggest that a climate of trust enabling self-expression could activate PT too. In a psychologically safe environment, the person can exercise PT by, for example, suggesting an improvement idea being confident that they will not be punished for speaking up about the area that needs improvement.

Imposing PT refers to enforcing or expecting manifestations of PT, as consistent with perceived organisational emotional display rules. I posited that under pressure to demonstrate PT for approval or extrinsic rewards, individuals would be preoccupied with displaying it rather than focus on developing it. This might involve faking the affective component of PT, such as enthusiasm or cheeriness, in other words, surface acting it, which implies modification of one’s self-expression without changing inner feelings to make it more desirable in work interactions (Hochschild, 1983). In this case, it is appropriate to speak of fake versus genuine PT. Eventually, having to imitate PT may decrease genuine PT levels as one’s resources will be consumed by impression management (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003). Despite the consistent

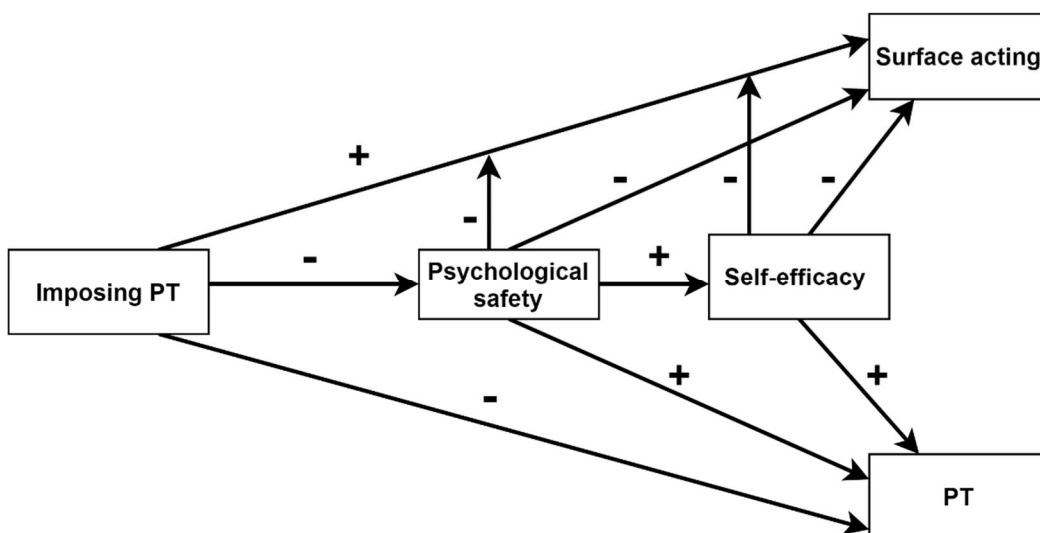
critique (e.g., Fineman, 2006; Hackman, 2009), the phenomenon of promoting positivity at work has not received sufficient empirical investigation and there is little quantitative evidence on effects of the promotion in organisational settings. Yet, findings in similar streams of research on prescribed fun at work triggering negative responses and manipulations of work meaningfulness for performative intents inducing its imitation by employees (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, Shantz, & Soane, 2017), suggest that imposing PT can be detrimental too.

Individual factors affecting PT. Individual factors can influence PT through the regulation of the person's cognitive and affective states (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Marroquín, Tennen, & Stanton, 2017; Roseman, 1996; Zimmerman & Moylan, 2009). The list of potential individual level shapers of PT is by no means exhaustive and can include the person's appraisal patterns, efficacy beliefs, values, expectancies, goals, or self-regulation (Mischel, 1973). Differences in the individual factors can account for differences in PT activation and expression, so that some people will be more inclined towards thinking positive than others. Importantly, as situations can trigger individual cognitions and affect (Mischel & Shoda, 1995, 1998), in influencing PT, individual factors will interact with the environment, which, for example, can manifest in the assessment of situations against one's beliefs, expectancies, or goals. Thus, individual factors can mediate the effect of situations on PT development and manifestations. For example, working for a well-functioning organisation can enable PT through positive visualisation regarding one's future prospects with it. Alternatively, workplace infrastructure, including physical working conditions, policies and administrative practices, or employee benefits can be interpreted as organisational support and care for its employees and thus enable thinking positive about the employer. Workplace interactions based on support, respect, cooperation, trust, and one-team spirit can also add to PT through perceptions of perceived peer support.

I focused on self-efficacy, which implies ‘people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives’ (Bandura, 1994, p.1), as a precursor of PT in impacting people’s cognitive patterns and affective states through perceptions of control (ibid). I suggested that differences in self-efficacy levels and its interplay with psychological safety can account for differences in PT levels. A core construct in the Positive Organisational Scholarship literature and a desired characteristic of Positive Organisational Behaviour (e.g., Luthans, 2002; Luthans, Avey, Avolio, & Peterson, 2010; Luthans, Luthans, & Avey, 2014), self-efficacy is predominantly viewed as an end goal rather than a means and its relationship with PT is under-researched.

By testing the individual-environment interaction model of PT (Figure 9.1), the present research aimed to outline individual and environmental factors that shape PT, examine consequences of its promotion in organisations to identify if psychological safety and self-efficacy facilitate PT and whether external pressure to demonstrate PT results in surface acting it.

Figure 9.1. The individual-environment interaction model of Positive Thinking at work



Specifically, I predicted that imposing PT would negatively relate to PT directly, through psychological safety, and through psychological safety and self-efficacy. I also expected that

imposing PT would positively relate to surface acting directly, through psychological safety, and through psychological safety and self-efficacy. I assumed that psychological safety would positively relate to PT directly and through self-efficacy and negatively relate to surface acting directly and through self-efficacy. I also anticipated a relationship between the contextual factors, where imposing PT decreases perceived psychological safety. Finally, psychological safety and self-efficacy would moderate the relationship between imposing PT and surface acting. The model was tested in two complimentary studies using different research designs to examine facilitating and imposing PT at work, which are presented next.

9.3 Study 1: Experiment

The first, experimental study aimed to identify if imposing PT results in surface acting and if psychological safety and self-efficacy could decrease surface acting directly and by buffering the effect of imposing.

9.3.1 Hypotheses

Direct effects of imposing PT, psychological safety, and self-efficacy on surface acting.

There is plenty of literature discussing how perceived external pressure of organisational display rules, norms, or expectations can result in suppressing one's views and beliefs and adjusting one's behaviour to outwardly support views that one does not hold and demonstrate emotions that one does not feel, to gain approval or access to benefits (e.g., Baumeister, 1982; Hewlin, Kim, & Song, 2016; Sherif, 1936). When extrinsic rewards for certain behaviours are strong, everyone will be motivated to show them (Tett et al., 2013). If PT is promoted in the organisation as a characteristic of an exemplary employee and, therefore, has an extrinsic consequential value, such as potential rewards, positive evaluations from others, or career

growth, everyone may want to demonstrate it. Yet, not everyone may have relevant or sufficiently developed individual factors enabling PT (e.g., cognitions (Mischel & Shoda, 1995)). Hence, if the individual's PT is undeveloped, they will pretend they think positive. I thus inferred that under environmental demands one may pursue pretending and there is a positive relationship between external pressure to demonstrate PT and faking it.

Further, as psychological safety is an indicator of inclusive, conducive, and engaging work environments (Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Idris, Dollard, & Tuckey, 2015; O'Donovan & Mcauliffe, 2020), higher levels of it can enable employees to self-express (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Kahn, 1990) and thus decrease the need to fake PT to create 'right' impressions and fit with the environment. Conversely, when not feeling safe to self-express, employees may resort to faking PT as otherwise they may become deviant, which would threaten their status and access to benefits. Previous research on surface acting has shown that it decreases in a safe environment (Grandey, Foo, Groth, & Goodwin, 2012; Duke, Goodman, Treadway, & Breland, 2009). I therefore expected a negative relationship between psychological safety and surface acting.

Finally, I argue that self-efficacy can impact employee-organisation relationship dynamics, where the more efficacious the employee, the more confident they will be that the organisation needs their expertise. In combination with a sense of control over the environment one is empowered with through self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994), the awareness of one's competence pertinent to efficacious individuals can make them more independent and confident that their merits can attain them rewards without taking such extra measures as modifying self-expression to adapt to the environment. Possibly, this could make the person require less of approval and thus not have to pretend to be liked. Contrariwise, via decreasing the sense of control over the environment, low levels of self-efficacy beliefs may increase the need to

accommodate to the environment by faking its norms to secure access to benefits. While higher self-efficacy can make one comfortable to stand out, lower levels of it may drive the perceived need to blend in and not look deviant, which can be achieved by faking norms. Evidence on the negative relation between self-efficacy and surface acting (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011) supports this proposition. Hence, the following hypotheses on direct effects of pressure, psychological safety, and self-efficacy on surface acting:

H1a: Imposing PT positively relates to surface acting

H1b: Psychological safety negatively relates to surface acting

H1c: Self-efficacy negatively relates to surface acting

Psychological safety and self-efficacy buffering the effect of imposing PT. The theoretical model of the study depicts a couple of moderation effects related to imposing PT – those reflect the role of psychological safety and self-efficacy in the relationship between external pressure for PT and faking it. I argue that by acting as external and internal sources of confidence, higher psychological safety and self-efficacy can make people more resistant to external pressure for PT by perceiving the pressure as less threatening to their status and hence not worth of acceding to. For psychological safety, these assumptions are based on the reasoning that, as grounded on trustful and supportive relationships with co-workers and the leader (Kahn, 1990; Frazier, Fainshmidt, Klinger, Pezeshkan, & Vacheva, 2017), psychological safety implies lack of fear of negative consequences (Kahn, 1990) for expressing unconventional views or challenging imposed ones. Consequently, it reduces anxiety (Schein, 1985), provides one with feelings of security and confidence high enough to take the risk (Edmondson, 1999) of withstanding pressure, and enables voice behaviour (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Altogether, this may reduce the likelihood of cloaking under pressure as individuals will be less concerned about impressions

they make on others (Edmondson, 1999). Not many studies have examined the role of psychological safety in opposing external pressure, but some findings indicate that safety climate can enable authenticity and resistance to the necessity to disguise one's true feelings in employees (e.g., Cuadros, 2019), or that psychological safety strengthens the relation between trait and state authenticity (Kwan, Au, & Cheung, 2016).

Self-efficacy, empowering people through the beliefs about their capabilities to control their environment (Bandura, 1989), can also reduce one's susceptibility to external pressure, as discussed earlier. There is evidence showing that self-efficacy strengthens one's independence from social influence (Lucas, Alexander, Firestone, & Baltes, 2006) or that higher levels of self-efficacy in newcomers weaken the relationship between collective onboarding processes and passive job role orientations (e.g., inactively accepting the role's status quo versus innovating it) (Jones, 1986). Based on this reasoning and evidence, I expected that psychological safety and self-efficacy would mitigate the effect of external pressure for PT as in a safe environment and with high levels of confidence the need to pretend may reduce. Hence, the following hypotheses on the buffering effect of psychological safety and self-efficacy:

H2a: Psychological safety moderates the relationship between imposing PT and surface acting such that the relationship is weaker at higher levels of psychological safety

H2b: Self-efficacy moderates the relationship between imposing PT and surface acting such that the relationship is weaker at higher levels of self-efficacy.

9.3.2 Methods

I used a between-subject random assignment experimental design manipulating imposing PT, psychological safety, and self-efficacy and measured surface acting as an outcome of the manipulation.

Sample. The sample comprised 241 volunteers (43% female, 76% in employee (non-managerial) and 83% in full-time positions). The study reached the sample size of 30 participants per study condition. That was sufficient to have the power of approximately about .95 (statistical significance expected 95% of the time) to detect an effect size of 1 (one standard deviation difference between the groups exposed to low versus high levels of the manipulated variables) with the analysis of variance (Lipsey, 1990). The majority of participants (54%) were in the 25-39 age group, 23% in the 18-24, 22% in the 40-60, and 1% in the 60 plus age groups. I used random sampling of individuals employed by formal organisations. Participants were recruited through the online Prolific platform and were compensated £1.25 per survey completed. Participation was voluntary, with confidentiality and anonymity assured. Prolific found 31,377 potential participants meeting the study's criteria: being over 18 years of age, employed by a formal organisation in the current role for at least the last 3 months as an employee with a direct manager or a manager with at least 3 subordinates, having defined objectives aligned with organisational objectives and being exposed to organisational environments and norms, and having a record of at least 10 previously approved submissions. Participants' self-reported geographic regions included Europe (62%), UK (31%), North America, South America, Asia Pacific, and Africa (7%) and they worked in the private (62%), public (34%), and non-profit (4%) sectors.

Procedure. Participants received a link to an online Qualtrics-based survey experiment and were randomly allocated to one of the study’s eight conditions, with a 2 (low vs. high psychological safety) x 2 (low self-efficacy vs. high self-efficacy) x 2 (imposing PT vs. no imposing PT) (Table 9.1) combination.

Table 9.1. Experiment conditions

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8
Imposing PT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Psychological Safety	High	High	Low	Low	High	High	Low	Low
Self-Efficacy	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low

Participants were asked to imagine themselves in a hypothetical situation described in a vignette assigned to them and report how they would act if they were in this situation. Each vignette contained a scenario with a description of the individual’s level of self-efficacy, perceived psychological safety, and imposing PT, referred to in the vignette text as ‘enthusiasm’.

Materials. The predictors were manipulated through the description in the vignette text (Table 9.2). The operationalisation of imposed PT as the pressure to display enthusiasm in the experiment vignette was informed by interview and organisational document data from the qualitative study (Chapter 8), where enthusiasm was identified as an affective manifestation of PT, displays of which were expected to be demonstrated by employees. The outcome variable was measured with the five-item surface acting scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$) (Ozcelik, 2013) using 7-point Likert scales (1 = Extremely unlikely to 7 = Extremely likely). Example items included: ‘*In this scenario, how likely is that you would resist expressing your true feelings to your manager?*’ and ‘*In this scenario, how likely is that you would pretend to have emotions that you do not really have when interacting with your manager?*’.

To establish the internal validity of vignettes, which refers to the extent to which vignette content captures the research topics under question (Hughes & Huby, 2004, p.37), as suggested by the literature, I developed the vignettes based on consultations with the literature and experts with “sufficient knowledge and experience to judge their suitability for the study” (ibid) including my supervisors. Specifically, I used conceptual definitions and measures of constructs under study and, in addition, rooted vignettes in data collected from individuals representing organisational settings, suggestions from subject matter experts, or organisational documents (Podsakoff, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Klinger, 2013).

Table 9.2 Vignette text clauses

Introduction (adapted from Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988)	<i>Please imagine you are part of the situation described below. Try to imagine the feelings and reactions you'd have in this particular situation as vividly as you can. You are welcome to read the text as many times as you need to make yourself completely familiar with the details. Once you have done this complete the set of questions indicating how you would react in the situation.</i>	
Vignette text (followed by the clauses below)	<i>You've recently joined a large project as a lead planning engineer. The project is a part of a well-known manufacturing company. It will last for at least the next five years and you aim to stay on it for its entire duration. This is because working on this project offers career advancement opportunities in this industry.</i>	
Condition (underlined)		
	High/+	Low/-
Psychological safety (based on De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Edmondson, 1999)	<i>Members of the project team are <u>always</u> able to bring up problems and tough issues. This is because project management <u>always</u> mean what they say and <u>can always</u> be believed and relied upon to keep their word.</i>	<i>Members of the project team are <u>not always</u> able to bring up problems and tough issues. This is because project management do <u>not always</u> mean what they say and <u>can't always</u> be believed and relied upon to keep their word.</i>
Self-efficacy (based on Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 2010).	<i>You <u>feel confident</u> about your expertise and ability to solve difficult problems <u>if you try hard enough</u>. Therefore, you <u>can usually</u> handle whatever comes your way.</i>	<i>You <u>don't yet feel confident</u> about your expertise and ability to solve difficult problems <u>even if you try hard enough</u>. Therefore, you <u>can't always</u> handle whatever comes your way.</i>
Imposing PT	<i>There's an overall air of <u>enthusiasm</u> in the project. Management <u>always</u> encourage people to display</i>	<i>There's an overall air of <u>agreeableness</u> in the project. <u>Occasionally</u>, management encourage people to display</i>

(based on data
from the
grounded
theory study)

*passion, energy, and confidence in their work and
behaviours.*

*Project newsletters regularly tell inspirational stories of
organisational role models held up as enthusiasm
champions.*

*People's performances are scrutinised and rewarded for
these behaviours.*

*Demonstrating enthusiasm is not your natural ability
and therefore your direct manager continuously
encourages you to develop it.*

*passion, energy, and confidence in their work and
behaviours.*

*Sometimes, project newsletters tell inspirational stories
of organisational role models held up as enthusiasm
champions.*

*People's performances may be scrutinised and
rewarded for these behaviours.*

*Demonstrating enthusiasm is not your natural ability
and therefore your direct manager doesn't encourage
you to develop it.*

Guided by these principles, the current study used items from the Team Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior (Edmondson, 1999) measures in writing the psychological safety clause of the vignette scenario. For the self-efficacy clause, it used items from the Generalized self-efficacy measure (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 2010). For the Imposing clause, it used findings from the grounded theory study of this research.

Data preparation and analysis. A total of 276 individuals volunteered to participate in the study, out of which 241 provided complete responses. A factorial analysis of variance was conducted to identify significant differences between groups exposed to different levels of manipulated variables (psychological safety, self-efficacy, and imposing PT). The analysis was performed with the IBM SPSS 26 software.

Manipulation checks. Manipulation checks were carried out to ensure that vignette scenarios were interpreted correctly. Checks involved requesting to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale the extent to which participants agreed that:

- There was external pressure to demonstrate enthusiasm in the scenario;
- The project described was a psychologically safe workplace;
- The person in the scenario was confident in their expertise and ability to solve issues.

The manipulation checks were subjected to an independent samples t-test and indicated that the manipulation was effective. Participants rated the psychological safety check item significantly lower in the low ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.42$) than in the high condition ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.44$; $t(239) = -5.06$, $p < .001$). They rated the self-efficacy check item significantly lower in the low ($M = 3$, $SD = 1.34$) than in the high condition ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 1.33$; $t(239) = -14$, $p < .001$). They rated the imposing PT check item significantly lower in the low ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.49$) than in the high condition ($M = 5.71$, $SD = 1.13$; $t(239) = -3.92$, $p < .001$).

9.3.3 Results

Descriptive statistics. Table 9.3 shows mean surface acting scores and SDs for each of the eight conditions. The highest mean for the surface mean score (4.89) was in C4, the condition with imposing and low levels of psychological safety and self-efficacy.

Table 9.3 Mean surface acting (SA) scores and standard deviations (SD) for each condition (N=241)

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8
Imposing PT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Psychological Safety	High	High	Low	Low	High	High	Low	Low
Self-efficacy	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
Mean SA	4.47	4.41	4.18	4.89	3.69	4.31	3.82	4.43
SD	1.59	1.28	1.22	1.15	1.20	0.96	1.39	1.29

ANOVA results. A 2 (low vs. high psychological safety) x 2 (low self-efficacy vs. high self-efficacy) x 2 (imposing PT vs. no imposing) three-way between-subjects ANOVA was performed on the data in SPSS with surface acting as a dependent variable to test hypotheses H1a, H1b, and H1c. There was an effect of imposing ($F(1, 233) = 6.6, p = 0.011$) and self-efficacy ($F(1, 233) = 8.2, p = 0.005$) on surface acting scores but there was no significant effect of psychological safety ($F(1, 233) = 0.5, p = 0.498$). There was no statistically significant interaction between the effects of imposing and psychological safety ($F(1, 233) = 0.01; p = 0.92$) and the effects of imposing and self-efficacy ($F(1, 233) = 0.82, p = 0.37$). Therefore the study results were consistent with the hypotheses on direct effects of imposing and self-efficacy on surface acting (H1a and H1c) but did not support the hypotheses on a direct effect of psychological safety on surface acting (H1b) and on the moderating role of psychological safety and self-efficacy on surface acting (H2a and b).

9.4 Study 2: Two-wave survey

Study 1 provided evidence that imposing PT can result in surface acting and showed no interaction effects of psychological safety and self-efficacy. In addition to retesting Study 1's hypotheses on direct (H1a, b, c) effects of imposing, psychological safety, and self-efficacy on surface acting and interaction effects of psychological safety and self-efficacy (H2a, b), Study 2 examined mechanisms through which imposing can predict surface acting, and tested direct and indirect effects of imposing and psychological safety on PT to shed more light on enforcing and facilitating it. These additional hypotheses are discussed next.

9.4.1 Hypotheses

Mechanisms of the effect of imposing PT on surface acting. I argue that external pressure to think positive exerted on the individual can restrict the range of perceivably acceptable self-expressions and reduce them down to essentially one type, which may not necessarily be congruent with how the individual thinks or feels. As being able to self-express without negative consequences is fundamental for psychological safety (Kahn, 1990), such enforcement of a certain type of behaviour on the individual can shake their perceptions of how protected and accepted they are in their environment. Research shows that workplace pressure to demonstrate expected behaviours has adverse effects on employees' perceived security, trust, and work-related attitudes (Hewlin, Kim, & Song, 2016). On the other side, psychological safety is subject to perceptions of organisational norms, organisational support, and trust in the organisation (Carmeli & Zisu, 2009; Kahn, 1990, Tucker, Nembhard, & Edmondson, 2007). Thus, if one perceives PT as an imposed norm in the workplace, the demonstration of which is expected from employees, they should feel less safe in there than in the workplace where individuals are free to

react to situations as they like. Further, as a safe and supportive environment enables self-efficacy through learning and growing (Bandura, 1994; Edmondson & Lei, 2014, p. 23), external pressure for PT can undermine self-efficacy through decreasing perceived psychological safety. Thus, I inferred that perceived pressure for PT can result in surface acting PT via reduced psychological safety and, given the relationship between psychological safety and self-efficacy, there would also be a sequential mediating effect of these constructs on surface acting. Hence, the following indirect effect hypotheses:

H3a: Psychological safety mediates the relationship between imposing PT and surface acting, such that imposing is linked to increased surface acting through lower psychological safety.

H3b: There will be a two-step sequential mediation from imposing PT to surface acting through psychological safety and self-efficacy.

Direct effects of imposing PT, psychological safety, and self-efficacy on PT. External pressure, in general, influences individuals' thinking and feeling (Asch, 1955). For instance, it can impair cognitive regulation (Chein, Albert, O'Brien, Uckert, & Steinberg, 2011; Schmid, Kleiman, & Amodio, 2015). More specifically, pressure of organisational display rules, role perceptions, and perceived managerial expectations to demonstrate behaviours aligned with group norms can result in emotional exhaustion, which in turn is related to deficient cognitive functioning (Alkan & Turgut, 2015; Bolino, Turnley, Gilstrap, & Suazo, 2010; Horvat & Tement, 2020; Tepper, 2007; Tepper, Moss, Lockhart, & Carr, 2007). In addition, if demands for PT exceed one's individual resources for it (e.g., cognitions), PT will be reduced (Tett & Burnett,

2003). Hence, I envisaged that external pressure for PT would suppress cognitive and non-cognitive elements of PT.

Extensive research on psychological safety shows that it results in learning behaviours, improved communication, knowledge sharing, citizenship and voice behaviours, innovation, creativity and experimentation, work engagement, job commitment and job satisfaction, or task performance (Edmondson; 1999; Frazier, Fainshmidt, Klinger, Pezeshkan, & Vracheva, 2017; Kahn, 1990; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Newman, Donohue, Eva, 2017; Tucker, Nembhard, & Edmondson, 2007). Importantly, it is effective in helping one overcome the anxiety and fear of failure (Schein, 1985) and focus on improvement (Frazier et al, 2017). Given the evidence, I inferred that psychological safety creates the environment facilitating development of PT through affective and cognitive channels. Finally, as self-efficacy entails regulating “one's own motivation, thought processes, affective states and actions, or changing environmental conditions” (Bandura, 1994, p.25), I expected self-efficacy to contribute to variances in PT levels too. In sum, based on the discussed evidence and theoretical considerations I assumed that imposing PT, psychological safety, and self-efficacy would predict PT. Hence, the following hypotheses on their direct effects on PT:

H4a: Imposing PT negatively relates to PT.

H4b: Psychological safety positively relates to PT.

H4c: Self-efficacy positively relates to PT.

Indirect effects of psychological safety and imposing on PT. As discussed earlier, evidence indicates that pressure of organisational norms can suppress perceptions of psychological safety, which is essential for growing, learning, and accumulating experiences needed for self-efficacy. I

therefore anticipated psychological safety and self-efficacy to mediate the effect of imposing on PT. Further, self-efficacy can explain the link between psychological safety and PT. Hence, the following indirect effect hypotheses:

H5a: Psychological safety mediates the relationship between imposing PT and PT such that imposing is linked to decreased PT through lower psychological safety.

H5b: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between psychological safety and PT such that psychological safety is linked to increased PT through higher self-efficacy.

H5c: There will be a sequential mediation from imposing PT to PT through psychological safety and self-efficacy.

9.4.2 Methods

I used an online Qualtrics-based survey to collect data in two waves with a one-week time lag to minimize common source and common method concerns (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). Participants' PT and surface acting self-ratings were measured in the first week, psychological safety, self-efficacy, and imposing PT in the second one.

Sample. The sample comprised 199 individuals (49% female, 85% in employee and 65% in full-time positions). Fifty percent of participants were in the 25-39 age group, 35% in the 18-24, and 15% in the 40-60 age groups. The sample size was aligned with guidelines for studies using SEM for data analysis requiring 10 participants for every free parameter (13 in this study) (Schreiber, Nora, Stage, Barlow, & King, 2006; Weston & Gore Jr, 2006). Using the same selection criteria as in the experiment study, I randomly sampled individuals through the online Prolific platform. Participants were compensated £1.50 per survey completed. Participation was voluntary, with confidentiality and anonymity assured. Participants' self-reported geographic

regions included Europe (75.8%), UK (14.6%), North America, Asia Pacific, Western Asia, and Africa (9.6%) and they worked in the private (64.6%), public (32.3%), and non-profit (3%) sectors.

Measures. The questionnaire consisted of 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) measuring the following variables. In this section I introduce the study's instruments as well as the rationale behind using the ones to measure PT and imposing PT.

Positive Thinking was assessed by the 'Refocus on planning' subscale (four items) of the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2006). Although the coefficient alpha was less than the recommended .7 ($\alpha = .63$), the mean inter-item correlation was satisfactory at .32 (an optimal range is .2 to .4 (Pallant, 2007)). Example items with adjusted wording were: '*When encountering an issue at work, I think of what I can do best*' and '*When dealing with an adverse situation at work, I think about how I can best cope with the situation.*' While the measure used by the current research to examine PT in the survey study (Garnefski & Kraaij 2006) focuses only on its cognitive element, it shows face validity in measuring PT as a process of reacting to environmental stimuli and content validity as its items match the definition of PT at work rooted in interview data from a previous qualitative study (demonstrated in Table 9.4).

Table 9.4. Positive Thinking measure's representativeness of the definition of PT

Item from the PT measure	Matching element of the definition for PT
<i>When encountering an adverse situation at work, I think about how to change the situation</i>	<i>to consider the negative; to improve the negative</i>
<i>When working on a task, I think about a plan of what I can do best</i>	<i>to draw on the positive; to achieve desired outcomes</i>
<i>When encountering an issue at work, I think of what I can do best</i>	<i>to draw on the positive; to achieve desired outcomes</i>
<i>When dealing with an adverse situation at work, I think about how I can best cope with the situation</i>	<i>to draw on the positive; to achieve desired outcomes; to improve the negative</i>

In contrary, other existing scales of PT show not only problematic face and content validity but also irrelevance to the organisational context (Table 9.5). For example, the Habitual Index of Positive Thinking (Harris et al., 2019) was created as a self-affirmation measure of regular positive self-related thinking, whereas the qualitative study identified that PT at work does not involve positive self-affirmation, extends beyond the self, and manifests as a response to a situation. The Positive Thinking Skills Scale (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2013) assesses skills for PT rather than PT and its items do not represent the definition of PT developed by the current research. Alternatively, Diener et al.'s (2009) Positive Thinking Scale mixing up positive and negative thinking items measures a propensity to PT by assessing thinking about important aspects of life, that, however, are irrelevant to organisational settings. Also, while the focus of the measure (oneself, one's past and future, other people, and the world in general) to some extent parallels findings of the previous qualitative study, the face validity of some of the items (especially, those measuring negative thinking) and their relevance to organisational settings are questionable.

Table 9.5. Relevance of existing PT scales to the current research.

Measure & items	Face/Content validity	Coherence with findings of the qualitative study
<p>The Habitual Index of Positive Thinking (Harris et al., 2019)</p> <p>Thinking positively about myself is something...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ...I do automatically 2. ...that feels sort of natural to me 3. ...I do without further thinking 4. ...I would find hard not to do 5. ...that's typically "me" 	<p>A self-affirmation measure of habitual self-related thinking with the focus on spontaneity of having thoughts with positive content about oneself.</p>	<p>PT did not involve self-affirmation but rather a process of reacting to environmental stimuli. The measure does not reflect “evaluating situations/environments”, “drawing on the positive”, “improving the negative”, “achieving desired results”.</p>
<p>Positive Thinking Skills Scale (Bekhet & Zauszniewski 2013)</p> <p><i>Transforming negative thoughts</i> <i>Highlighting positive aspects</i> <i>Interrupting pessimistic thoughts</i> <i>Practicing positive thinking</i> <i>Breaking a problem</i> <i>Initiating optimistic beliefs</i> <i>Challenging pessimistic thoughts</i> <i>Generating positive feelings</i></p>	<p>Measures skills needed to develop PT rather than PT. Some items are related to problem-solving, constructive, or critical thinking (e.g., <i>breaking a problem, challenging own thoughts</i>); The use of “<i>practicing positive thinking</i>” for measuring PT skills is questionable.</p>	<p>Unlike PT accepting and improving the negative, the measure includes “<i>interrupting</i>”, “<i>transforming</i>”, or “<i>challenging</i>” it. The “<i>highlighting positive aspects</i>” item is most relevant, however more related to self-regulation for PT rather than PT.</p>
<p>The Positive Thinking Scale (Diener et al., 2009)</p> <p><i>I see my community as a place full of problems. (N)</i> <i>I see much beauty around me. (P)</i> <i>I see the good in most people. (P)</i> <i>When I think of myself, I think of many shortcomings. (N)</i></p>	<p>Assesses positive versus negative thinking in general settings with self-directed positive focusing on thoughts with positive content.</p>	<p>Partly coherent as some items focus on oneself, one’s past and future, other people, and the world in general but (1) does not reflect the interactive nature of PT; (2) irrelevant to PT at work; (3) removing irrelevant items would have affected the internal consistency of the measure.</p>

I think of myself as a person with many strengths. (P)
I am optimistic about my future. (P)
When somebody does something for me, I usually wonder if they have an ulterior motive. (N)
When something bad happens, I often see a “silver lining,” something good in the bad event. (P)
I sometimes think about how fortunate I have been in life. (P)
When good things happen, I wonder if they might have been even better. (N)
I frequently compare myself to others. (N)
I think frequently about opportunities that I missed. (N)
When I think of the past, the happy times are most salient to me. (P)
I savor memories of pleasant past times. (P)
I regret many things from my past. (N)
When I see others prosper, even strangers, I am happy for them. (P)
When I think of the past, for some reason the bad things stand out. (N)
I know the world has problems, but it seems like a wonderful place anyway. (P)
When something bad happens, I ruminate on it for a long time. (N)
When good things happen, I wonder if they will soon turn sour. (N)
When I see others prosper, it makes me feel bad about myself. (N)
I believe in the good qualities of other people. (P)

Surface acting was measured with a respective five-item scale (Ozcelik, 2013) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$).

Psychological Safety was measured with a respective three-item scale (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004). After removing one item, the corrected inter-item correlation was .33 (an optimal range is .2 to .4 (Pallant, 2007)) and Cronbach's α was .50. Example items are: '*I'm not afraid to be myself at work*', '*I am afraid to express my opinions at work*' (r), and '*There is a threatening environment at work.*' (r).

Self-efficacy was measured with a five-item Work Self-Efficacy Scale (Mazzetti, Schaufeli, & Guglielmi, 2014) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$). Example items are: '*At work, I reach my goal, even when unexpected situations arise*', '*If I encounter obstacles at work, I always find a way to overcome them.*', and '*If something new comes to me at work, I always know how to deal with it*'.

Imposing PT was assessed by a six-item *Accepting external influence* subscale of the Authenticity at work measure (Van den Bosch & Taris, 2014) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .68$) placed in the PT context in the instructions. Example items were: '*In the workplace, I am strongly influenced by the opinions of others in deciding how much positivity I need to demonstrate*' and '*At work, I feel pressured to behave in certain ways*'. The choice of the subscale was based on its focus on the exposure to external pressure in organisational settings and potential to examine the extent of being subjected to the environmental influence in the context of PT. A literature search for this type of measures identified that the pressure to display certain behaviours placed on individuals is largely operationalised as a manipulated variable in experimental research (e.g., social influence in the retail, crisis communications, decision-making contexts (for reviews, see Amin, Dunn, & Laranjo, 2020; Argo & Dahl, 2020; Kim, Rasouli, & Timmermans, 2018; Sadri, Ukkusuri, & Ahmed, 2021), social pressure (Bastian, Kuppens, Hornsey, Park, Koval, & Uchida,

2012), or social influence and conformity pressures (Kao et al. 2018; Lord & DeZoort, 2001), which did not fit with the survey design of the study.

Alternatively, external influence is operationalised as perceived societal expectancies regarding experiencing certain emotions (e.g., anxiety, sadness, happiness) (e.g., “*Society generally expects people not/to feel ____*”) (Bastian, Kuppens, Hornsey, Park, Koval, & Uchida, 2012; Dejonckheere & Bastian, 2020). Such measures assess people’s perceptions about feeling particular emotions and societal acceptance of them and hence did not suit this research’s question on imposing PT in organisational settings. Finally, a large body of the literature on emotional labour uses measures of display rules (for a meta-analysis, see Mesmer-Magnus, DeChurch, & Wax, 2012; for integrative reviews, see Cha et al., 2019 and Haver, Akerjordet, & Furunes, 2013) as a contextual antecedent of self-expressing in/authentically. For example, a widely used Positive and Negative Display Rule Perceptions Scale (Diefendorff, Croyle, & Gosserand, 2005) measures the subject perceptions in the customer care context (e.g., “*Part of my job is to make the customer feel good*” or “*I am expected to suppress my bad moods or negative reactions to customers*”), which was not relevant to the present research examining the enforcement of PT in intra-organisational relationships rather than role expectations around emotional expressions in the customer service context. While the current research used the Accepting external influence subscale (Van den Bosch & Taris, 2014) as most suiting its purpose of examining enforced PT at work in comparison to other measures, it is advisable to design an instrument to assess the specific pressure for exhibiting various manifestations of PT including its cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements.

Data preparation and analysis. The first part of the survey designed to measure PT and surface acting got 310 responses. The second one measuring imposing PT, psychological safety, and

self-efficacy received 218 responses with all of them being present at both rounds of data collection. After removing incomplete responses from the data set, 199 matching responses were identified, indicating a final response rate of 91%. There were no missing data in the final set. Hypothesised relationships between imposing PT, psychological safety, self-efficacy, PT, and surface acting were tested by examining statistically significant path coefficients in structural equation model (SEM).

SEM models relations among variables by including all variables that are known to have some involvement in the process of interest (Field, 2013). It involves a collection of statistical techniques that allows researchers to examine simultaneously a set of dependence relationships and to specify directional paths indicating the sequence of events (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Ullman & Bentler, 2009). Eventually, it enables finding a model that is both theoretically substantiated and statistically well fitting (Byrne, 2010). The use of SEM in this study was dictated by its research questions on facilitating/imposing PT in organisations. That included testing and identifying direct and indirect paths among variables to provide a valid account of processes underpinning variance in PT and surface acting.

The analysis was performed with the AMOS 26 software. The maximum likelihood estimation method was used. The model fit was assessed using the Chi-square, comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Values above 0.90 on the CFI and TLI and values less than 0.08 for RMSEA and SRMR indicate good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The interaction and mediating effects were tested for significance using 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals.

9.4.3 Results

Descriptive statistics. Table 9.6 summarises means and SDs of the variables and correlations among them. In general, the sample demonstrated high levels of PT (M=5.86).

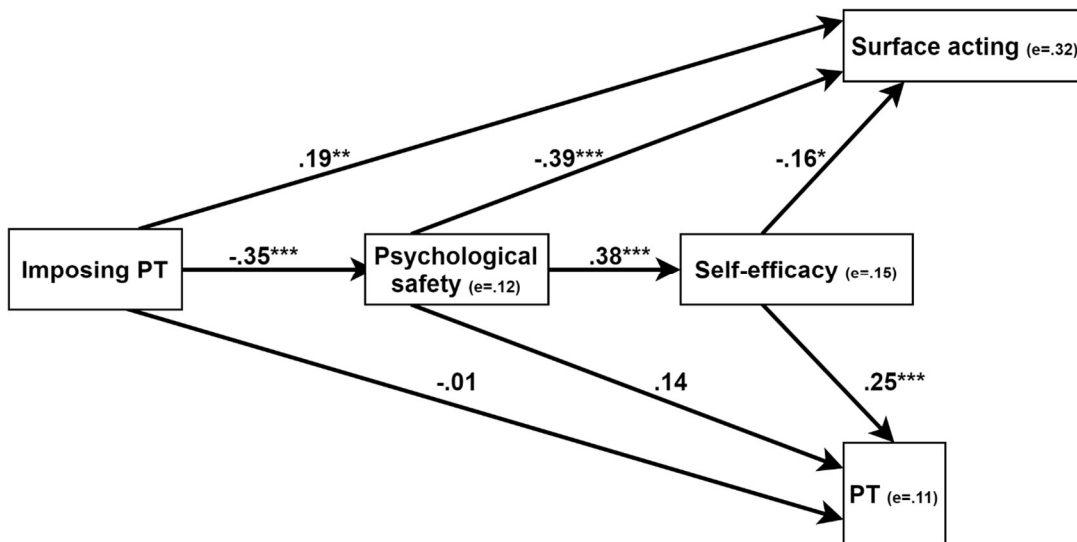
Table 9.6 Means, standard deviations, and correlations (N=199)

Variable	Mean	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Psychological Safety	5.03	1.05				
2. Self-efficacy	5.11	0.9	.38**			
3. Imposing PT	4.51	0.1	-.35**	-.12		
4. PT	5.86	0.65	.23*	.30**	-.07	
5. Surface Acting	4.14	1.34	-.51**	-.33**	.34**	-.23*

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

Path analysis. I examined to what extent imposing PT, psychological safety, and self-efficacy predicted PT and surface acting in individuals working in formal organisations (see Figure 9.2 and Table 9.7 for the summary of direct, indirect, and total effects).

Figure 9.2. SEM results (with standardised estimates)



The fitness indices ($\chi^2 = 1.974$, degrees of freedom = 2 ($p = .373$), TLI = 1.00, CFI = 1.00

RMSEA = 0; SRMR = 0.02) indicated that the hypothesised model was a good fit to the observed data.

PT as an outcome. Path analysis results supported my expectations that self-efficacy positively affects PT (hypothesis H4c; $\beta = .25$; $SE = .06$, $p < .001$) and psychological safety facilitates PT via self-efficacy (hypothesis H5b; indirect effect coefficient = .06, 95% CI [.02: .10]). I did not find significant direct effects of imposing PT and psychological safety on PT levels (hypotheses H4a, H4b). The total R^2 for PT was .11 including the effect of imposing PT, psychological safety, and self-efficacy.

Table 9.7 Unstandardised direct, indirect, and total effects (with 95% confidence intervals)

Direct effects				
Path	Estimate	SE	Lower Bounds	Upper bounds
Imposing PT→Psychological Safety	-.40***	.08	-.54	-.24
Psychological Safety→Self-efficacy	.29***	.05	.20	.39
Imposing PT→Surface Acting	.28**	.09	.10	.45
Imposing PT→PT	.01	.05	-.10	.11
Psychological Safety→Surface Acting	-.50***	.09	-.66	-.34
Self-efficacy→Surface Acting	-.27*	.11	-.47	-.03
Self-efficacy→PT	.21***	.06	.08	.34
Psychological Safety→PT	.10	.05	-.02	.21
*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$				
Indirect effects				
Path	Estimate		Lower bounds	Upper bounds
Imposing PT→Psychological Safety→Surface Acting	.23		.13	.35
Imposing PT→Psychological Safety→Self-efficacy→Surface Acting	.03		.00	.07
Imposing PT→Psychological Safety→PT	.06		-.12	-.01
Imposing PT→Psychological Safety→Self-efficacy→PT	.02		-.05	-.01
Psychological Safety→Self-efficacy→PT	.06		.02	.10
Total effects				
Path	Estimate		Lower bounds	Upper bounds
Imposing PT→Surface Acting	.50		.32	.67
Psychological Safety→Surface Acting	.57		-.73	-.42
Imposing PT→PT	.05		-.15	.04
Psychological Safety→PT	.15		.04	.26

Indirect effects of imposing on PT via psychological safety (hypothesis H5a; coefficient = $-.06$, 95% CI $[-.12: -.01]$) and both psychological safety and self-efficacy (hypothesis H5c; coefficient = $-.02$, 95% CI $[-.05: -.01]$) were significant.

Surface acting as an outcome. The results also aligned with my inferences that imposing PT can end in surface acting (hypothesis H1a from Study 1; $\beta = .19$, $SE = .09$, $p = .003$), whereas higher levels of psychological safety (hypothesis H1b from Study 1; $\beta = -.39$, $SE = .09$, $p < .001$) and self-efficacy (hypothesis H1c from Study 1; $\beta = -.16$, $SE = .11$, $p = .013$) would relate to lower levels of surface acting. The total R^2 for surface acting was .32 including the effects of imposing, psychological safety, and self-efficacy. Further, as predicted, psychological safety mediated the relationship between imposing PT and surface acting on its own (hypothesis H3a; indirect effect coefficient = $.23$, 95% CI $[.13: .35]$) and in a sequential mediation with self-efficacy (hypothesis H3b) although with a small effect in the latter case (indirect effect coefficient = $.03$, 95% CI $[.00: .07]$). Yet, the total effect of imposing PT on surface acting was rather large (total effect coefficient = $.50$, 95% CI $[.32: .67]$). Finally, the results did not support my prediction that psychological safety and self-efficacy can moderate the relationship between imposing PT and surface acting (hypotheses H2a and b from Study 1).

9.5 Discussion

Drawing on the interactionist perspective, the present research proposed and tested an individual-environment interaction model of PT at work comprising factors facilitating PT and triggering its surface acting at work in two complementary studies. Results of the studies provided evidence for the validity of the model. Specifically, I examined the role of psychological safety and imposing PT as environmental factors and self-efficacy as an individual

factor that can influence development of PT or activate faking it (operationalised as surface acting). As predicted, self-efficacy (directly) and psychological safety (via self-efficacy) facilitated PT, whereas putting pressure to exhibit PT induced surface acting. Imposing did not reduce PT directly but did so via reducing psychological safety and self-efficacy. Interestingly, measuring the cognitive component of PT and identifying a weak and non-significant relationship between imposing and PT contrasted with finding a strong and significant relationship between imposing an affective manifestation of PT and an emotional reaction to it (surface acting in both studies). This corroborated the findings of the qualitative study of this research that PT is initially understood and expected as demonstrations of positive affect.

Self-efficacy had the strongest direct effect on PT corroborating the proposition deriving from the social cognitive theory that efficacy beliefs can translate into thinking positive about oneself and the environment through cognitive, motivational, and affective channels (Bandura, 1986) (Chapter 3) and findings of the grounded theory study that self-efficacy is fundamental to PT development (Chapter 6).

The harm of imposing PT was not just in triggering surface acting but also in decreasing psychological safety, which mediated the effect of imposing on surface acting by nearly doubling it. The results did not support the hypotheses on a buffering effect of psychological safety and self-efficacy on the relationship between imposing PT and surface acting, suggesting that regardless of psychological safety and self-efficacy levels, under pressure to demonstrate PT individuals will resort to surface acting. Overall, the findings suggested that putting pressure to display PT does not help one develop it but activates faking it, whereas psychological safety and self-efficacy can facilitate PT.

The current research advances organisational research in several ways. First, its key theoretical contribution is in developing a parsimonious model of PT as a contextual phenomenon, development and manifestations of which are shaped by the individual-environment interaction. The model draws on the notion that human behaviour is to be studied in relation to contexts in which it is situated (Bower, 1973; Dewey, 2009) and recognises the influence of the environment on development and manifestations of positivity. Along with individual characteristics that can shape PT, the model includes two categories of environmental conditions that can facilitate development of PT at work or activate faking it. Further, the model offers an explication of conflicting evidence on effects of PT as the interaction of individual and environmental features can enable PT or trigger its imitation with different consequences for each.

Further, the present research contributes to knowledge on PT by providing one of the first evidence on conditions fostering it. Specifically, the findings highlight the role of psychological safety and self-efficacy in facilitating PT and show the mechanism of developing PT in a safe climate via self-efficacy. Previous research not only has not examined the influence of these constructs on PT and overlooked its antecedents in general but has rarely considered PT as an independent construct (Seligman, 2006). Another important aspect covered by this research is the impact of external pressure for PT exerted on individuals, which too has received little attention in organisational psychology research. The finding that imposing PT can result in surface acting, which negatively impacts well-being (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Hewlin, 2003; Ozcelik, 2013), is first empirical evidence supporting the long-standing argument on adverse effects of the unreflective promotion of PT in organisations (Collinson, 2012; Ehrenreich, 2009; Fineman, 2006; Lovallo & Kahneman, 2003). While qualitative studies in health psychology have

previously flagged negative consequences of the pressure to think positive put on patients (O'Baugh et al, 2003; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2000), this research provides first quantitative evidence to formulate generalisations about the phenomenon.

The study also extends previous research on surface acting in intra-organisational relationships. While consequences of surface acting are well documented (Grandey, 2003; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011), with few exceptions (e.g., Ozcelik (2013)) as discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.3.2), its antecedents are less studied. The finding that imposing PT can result in imitating it corroborates the argument that the pressure of organisational norms can trigger surface acting (e.g., Hewlin, 2009). Yet, both psychological safety and self-efficacy decreased surface acting suggesting that at higher levels of perceived safety and efficacy the need to imitate organisational display norms may decrease. Methodologically, the studies initiated quantitative research on antecedents of PT and consequences of its imposing, which is currently next to non-existent, and examined the relationship between imposing PT and surface acting with two complimentary research designs, which added to the robustness of its analytical approach. Importantly, one of the studies employed an experimental design with the use of vignettes to investigate the causal relationship between imposing PT and surface acting, which has not been done previously.

9.6 Conclusion

The present research developed and tested in experiment and survey studies a theoretical model of positive thinking as an outcome of the individual-environment interaction. Unlike previous individual-centred research, this research highlights the influence of the environment on positive phenomena. By shedding light on antecedents of PT, the model advances research that has so far

focused on its effects. Its further contributions to research include identifying specific environmental (psychological safety) and individual (self-efficacy) factors that can foster PT and providing evidence that imposing PT in organisational settings can provoke its simulation, which addresses the criticism of promoting PT. The findings point to the need to facilitate PT via increasing psychological safety and self-efficacy and minimise pressure to exhibit it. Along with integrating the literatures on PT and surface acting, findings contribute to research on antecedents of surface acting in intra-organisational relationships. The studies are the first to explain development of PT and suggest a causal relationship between imposing PT and surface acting.

This chapter draws a line under results of the empirical studies that examined PT with mixed research methods. In the following Conclusion chapter, I summarise key theoretical contributions of the thesis, discuss its methodological strengths, outline future research avenues, acknowledge limitations of the research, provide practical recommendations about PT at work, and highlight final conclusions.

Chapter 10 Conclusion and Recommendations

10.1 Introduction

10.2 Theoretical contributions

10.3 Methodological contributions

10.4 Contributions to practice

10.5 Limitations and future research suggestions

10.6 Think positive or Stop and think?

10.1 Introduction

The introductory chapter of this thesis identified a critical need to address the shortage of theoretical knowledge about PT and the ill-founded hype surrounding it in the popular and practitioner literature and discourse. For the first time, this research examined individual meanings of and perspectives on PT in organisational settings to understand how the concept is used in this social context and investigated imposing of PT in the workplace. The findings question simplistic, reductionist, and conventional views of positive thinking as an individual responsibility to generate optimistic beliefs that will prove a success regardless of context, and points to negative consequences of its unreflective promotion. Instead, the thesis frames PT as a manifold phenomenon involving cognitive, affective, and behavioural components operating at the self, other, and environmental levels from an interactive process perspective. This final chapter discusses the theoretical contributions of the thesis and their implications for research and practice, suggests avenues for future studies, acknowledges limitations of the research, and highlights key conclusions of the thesis.

10.2 Theoretical contributions

The contribution of the current thesis to advancing organisational theory is multifold (Table 10.1). First, the narrative-integrative literature review of the thesis catalogued existing definitions of PT and exposed its ambiguous status in the literature, where it is primarily used to denote other constructs indicating a jingle-jangle fallacy when different concepts are conflated with each other. Such erroneous treatment of the concept has created confusion about what PT is in both in the academic and popular literatures, limited our understanding of how it relates to other constructs, and resulted in the variation in evidence on effects of PT ranging from benevolent to detrimental. Instead, this thesis provides conceptual clarity for PT by framing it as an independent construct and offering a definition for PT drawing from theory and empirical evidence and capturing both elements of the concept - “*thinking*” and “*positive*” as:

the inclination to consider both positive and negative aspects of situations or environments when evaluating them, draw on the positive to achieve desired outcomes, and improve the negative.

This conceptually distinct framing poses PT as a process of reacting and adapting to the environment and encompasses its cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements operating at the self, other, and environment levels. It is achieved through examining individual meanings of and perspectives on PT in organisational settings in a grounded theory study to understand how the concept is used in its social context. The data-grounded definition for PT developed by this research removes irrelevant meanings typically attached to PT including initiating optimistic beliefs, making positive affirmations, or generating positive affect because it embraces both the negative and positive, where the former implies acknowledging the area for improvement and the latter refers to situational features to draw on to improve the negative.

Table 10.1 Theoretical contributions of the thesis

Research Question	Method	Finding	Contribution
How do individuals in organisations define and understand PT?	Integrative-narrative literature review	Identified conceptual confusion about PT by systematising existing definitions of PT	Points to the ambiguous status of PT in the literature
How do individuals in organisations define and understand PT?	Grounded theory method	Formulated a data-grounded definition of PT, identifying its cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements operating at the self, other, environment-oriented levels, and removing irrelevant meanings attached to PT; Identified the variation in individual understandings of PT and differences in employee/manager perspectives;	Provides conceptual clarity for PT Frames PT as an independent construct Addresses limitations of existing conceptualisations including clarifying “positive”
How do individuals in organisations define and understand PT?	Grounded theory method	Unravelled PT as a manifold, contextualised, and nuanced phenomenon vs. posing it as a universal virtue involving cultivating the positive and avoiding the negative	Challenges simplistic and reductionist assumptions about PT in research
What influences development and manifestations of PT at work?	Grounded theory method, experiment, survey	Identified environmental influences on development and manifestations of PT including organisational functioning, psychological safety, work meaningfulness, and imposing	Develops a substantive theory of PT at work (conceptual explanation); Builds the individual-environment interaction model of PT Adds to understanding of PT with knowledge about its antecedents vs. the current focus on its effects
How do individuals in organisations define and understand PT? What influences development and manifestations of PT at work?	Grounded theory method, experiment, survey	Pinpointed routes, forms, and negative effects of imposing PT in organisations; Showed faking PT under the pressure of	Refines existing theory with novel elements including: Control/resistance theory

Is PT imposed in organisations and what are effects of imposed PT?		imposing as a new form of resistance to control in organisations;	
		Identified antecedents of surface acting in intraorganisational relationships including the role of imposing, self-efficacy, and psychological safety;	The model of surface acting in organisations
		Revealed the interdependence of acknowledging the negative with reappraisal Identified that self-regulation for PT excludes denial, avoidance, or suppression of the negative	Self-regulation theory
		Showed that PT is expected in organisations Revealed the tendency to exclude people not appearing positive	Organisational emotional display rules literature
How do individuals in organisations define and understand PT?	Grounded theory method		Extends the application of social and psychological theory to development and manifestations of positive phenomena overlooked by Positive Psychology including:
		(1) explained the influence of both the environment and individual on development of PT; (2) demonstrated the effect of situational aspects on manifestations of PT (genuine when facilitated and fake when imposed); (3) put the organisational onus for the individual's workplace attitudes under the spotlight	The interactionist perspective

Highlighted self-efficacy as fundamental for forming PT	Social cognitive theory
Explicated self-regulation for PT as a non-linear process of self-guided transformation, where PT is to be reinforced with behaviour	Theory of learning
Accounted for (1) the perceived undesirability of the negative in organisations and (2) concealment of the non-positive to avoid the “negative” tag detrimental to one’s reputation and access to benefits	Stigma and labelling theories

It displays the variation in individual understandings of PT and differences in employee/manager perspectives on it. Having a clear definition for PT advances theory development and knowledge accumulation and improves accuracy of its measurement (Suddaby, 2010). The thesis also challenges simplistic and reductionist assumptions about PT in research as a universal virtue involving the cultivation of the positive and avoidance of the negative by showing it as a multi-layered and contextualised phenomenon that is not indubitably welcomed and beneficial in any situation.

Further, the current thesis provides a substantive grounded theory of PT at work that has “the ability to speak specifically for the populations from which it was derived and to apply back to them” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.267), which aligns with my position to develop a conceptual explanation that could guide action and practice in the environment in which PT takes place (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The conceptual explanation of PT at work drawing on results of the grounded theory study involves environmental and individual influences on development and manifestations of PT as an acquired quality requiring facilitation, guidance, and self-management. While this study adds to research on positivity by identifying specific environmental influences on development and manifestations of PT including organisational functioning, psychological safety, work meaningfulness, and imposing, its major contribution is in shifting the focus away from the purely individual accountability for one’s workplace attitudes and putting the organisational one under the spotlight. The latter currently dominates the field of positive organisational scholarship (e.g., Luthans et al., various years), whereas the former has received little attention (Hackman, 2009).

Based on the conceptual understanding of PT, the current research proposes a theoretical model of PT positing it as an outcome of the individual-environment interaction that shapes

development and manifestations of PT in organisations and outlines mechanisms through which individual functions (e.g., self-regulation) and contextual aspects (e.g., psychological safety, imposing PT) influence PT including suggesting a causal effect of imposing PT on faking it. Both the substantive theory and the theoretical model enrich our understanding of PT with knowledge about its antecedents juxtaposing the current research focus on its effects (Chapter 4) and provide a useful framework for future studies to build on. Given the theoretical deficiency in Positive Psychology (Wong & Roy, 2018), findings of this thesis are both original and useful in adding new conceptual and empirical insights to research (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

Apart from addressing the conceptual confusion and laying theoretical groundwork for PT at work, the thesis refines existing theory with novel elements. Thus, by identifying routes, forms, and negative effects of reckless and decontextualised promotion of PT in the organisational discourse and workplace interactions, highlighting the disturbing normality of imposing PT at a higher organisational level, and pinpointing faking PT as the major response to its enforcement, it contributes to the literature on control-resistance in organisations through showing “new variants of opposition and dissent” (Gabriel, 1999, p. 194). It enriches scarce research on antecedents of surface acting by highlighting its motives in the intraorganisational and PT-related context, including the role of imposing, self-efficacy, and psychological safety. Another insight is in revealing an unconventional view on self-regulation for PT as involving the acknowledgement of the negative and accepting and processing one’s negative reactions before reappraising the situation rather than denying or suppressing the negative. By showing that PT is expected in organisations and people not appearing positive tend to be excluded by others, it adds to the organisational emotional display literature.

Finally, the thesis extends the application of existing social and psychological theory to development and manifestations of positive phenomena overlooked by Positive Psychology (Hackman, 2009). First, it includes employing the interactionist perspective to explain the influence of the environment-individual interplay on PT, demonstrating how situational aspects affect manifestations of PT (genuine when facilitated and fake when imposed), and putting the organisational onus for individual workplace attitudes under the spotlight. Next, the thesis builds on Social Cognitive theory by highlighting the role of self-efficacy in forming PT, which is currently neglected. The thesis utilises learning theory to explicate self-regulation for PT as a non-linear process of self-guided transformation, where PT is reinforced with behaviour. It also adopts the stigma and labelling theories' lenses to account for the perceived undesirability of the negative in organisations and preferences not to disclose thoughts or affective reactions that could be seen as "negative" as they may risk the reputation and access to benefits.

10.3 Methodological contributions

From the *methodology* perspective, this research is the first that investigates PT in organisations with mixed methods, including within and between method triangulation of data sources and collection (Denzin, 2009), grounded theory method, the use of vignettes in both the qualitative and quantitative studies, photo-elicitation, the analysis of organisational documents and communications along with interview data, and an experiment followed by a survey. Importantly, the experiment study examines the causal relationship between imposing PT and faking it, which has not been done previously. The combination of the experiment with the survey and inclusion of both organisational (psychological safety and imposing PT) and

individual (self-efficacy) level factors enables a robust analytical approach and is highly relevant given the scarcity of quantitative research on antecedents of PT.

Data source triangulation, which is essential for increasing the quality of data and improving the rigour of the study (O'Dell, Crafter, de Abreu, & Cline, 2012), involved the use of multiple locations, settings, and perspectives to enable securing diverse and multi-cultural samples. The samples of the studies included two sides to understand a bigger picture and get a more accurate understanding of PT in organisations – employees, who are end users of policies and practices and experience their day-to-day impact, and managers, who have a better strategic understanding underlying the policies and practices (Smith & Elger, 2014). The use of photos for questions asking about definitions and experiences of PT at the beginning of interviews both activated implicit thinking by eliciting perceptions and encouraging social constructions and acted as icebreakers (Langmann & Pick, 2018).

As a complementary research method enabling triangulation, both qualitative and quantitative studies used vignettes depicting organisational contexts and utilising elements of the organisational language (e.g., “*performance discussion*”, “*team leader*”) to match participants’ workplace settings and make the vignettes more relevant to participants (Torres, 2009). I informed the vignette development by the literature (e.g., Collinson, 2012), my personal experience of working in organisations, interview and document data, and assessment of their content by subject matter experts for clarity and plausibility of the vignettes (Hughes & Huby, 2012; Podsakoff, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Klinger, 2013) (detailed in Chapter 5). Externally valid vignettes can increase participant engagement, as participants found the vignettes so interesting that they asked me about their development and suggested that a similar tool could be used by practitioners to encourage reflection instead of imposing any particular type of thinking

on individuals. The vignettes also showed internal validity (see the respective discussions in Chapter 5, section 5.3.1.4 for the grounded theory study and Chapter 9, section 9.3.2 for the quantitative studies) as they were relevant both to the topic and the participants (i.e., externally valid), drawn upon existing literature, vetted by experts with relevant knowledge as suitable for the study, and elicited data that could address my research questions (Kandemir & Budd, 2018). Finally, the grounded theory study enhanced its rigour by providing the option of taking on a research collaborator role to participants (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Heyl, 2001), which, for example, involved asking them “If you were to conduct this study, what would you ask your participants about?”.

10.4 Contributions to practice

Practical implications of this research are threefold. First, providing an evidence-based definition for PT, explicating its components and levels of operation, and highlighting differences in understanding of it by employees and managers can address the confusion around the concept and facilitate moving to the middle-ground understanding of it in organisations. That can be reached by avoiding general statements when encouraging demonstrations of PT in the organisational and managerial discourse. Instead, the emphasis should be put on providing clear explanations and examples as to where more PT could be directed (e.g., task or behaviour) and what this would involve.

Further, findings reveal that as an acquired rather than natural state, PT requires facilitation, guidance, and self-management. The theoretical model of this research integrating both development and faking of PT demonstrates “what to do” and “what not to do” in organisations to develop PT in the workforce and provides practical understanding that efforts

for developing PT should be aimed at creating conditions for it. At the *organisational* level, this can involve activities aiming to achieve organisational functioning and enabling psychological safety and work meaningfulness. Some examples of these may include but are not limited to clearly communicating the organisation's strategy and ensuring employees understand their own contribution to it; recognising employee inputs; providing employees with formal structures and basic working conditions to enable the achievement of the organisational strategy; developing interpersonal interactions based on support and respect with leaders playing a critical role in their development; or facilitating psychological safety and speaking up without reprimands through organisational and leadership support practices, improved relationship networks, and leader behavioural integrity (Edmondson & Lei 2014; Kahn, 1990; Newman, Donohue, & Eva, 2017).

At the individual level, the thesis' findings put under the spotlight the simplicity of reducing PT to "fixing your thoughts" and point to a critical role of self-efficacy in laying the foundation for PT and more refined and continuous process of self-regulation required for forming and maintaining PT. Self-efficacy could be enhanced by providing employees with opportunities to gain mastery experiences, develop vicarious experiences, and receive social persuasion (Bandura, 1997). For example, this could be achieved by assigning the employee to projects involving collaboration with more experienced colleagues they could learn from and providing constructive feedback to them. Organisations could also facilitate PT by encouraging objective assessment of situations and acceptance and processing of the negative as findings caution against skipping the acceptance stage, reappraising, and developing self-awareness and reflection. Interventions aimed at developing self-regulation for PT could involve employees sharing their stories of developing PT thus making it more concrete for others. Alternatively, as suggested by some participants, they could include vignette scenarios to "get people to think" on

the example of vignette characters about how self-regulation for PT could be achieved.

Importantly, as the findings showed the undesirability of the negative, more work could be done on educating organisations about normality and functional utility of negative reactions (e.g., Forgas, 2013).

Finally, the findings stress the need to minimise imposing PT as concerns raised in the literature regarding the promotional character of organisational communications encouraging demonstrations of positive affect (e.g., enthusiasm) were corroborated by findings of this research. As demonstrated by the current study, such rhetoric generates unintended effects including challenging the imposed discourse by employees and faking the enforced characteristic rather than trying to develop it. Hence, it would be worthwhile to lessen calls for demonstrating “passion, relentless drive, and enthusiasm” in organisational documents and communications and instead guide employees towards achieving PT. Further, linking demonstrations of PT/positivity with rewards in organisational documents is not recommended as it creates perceptions of the need to fake PT to get rewarded, which can shift the focus away from work efforts to meeting the behavioural expectations (Ferris, Fedor, Chachere, & Pondy, 1989). Finally, as faking PT by leaders was detectable, detrimental for follower perceptions of leaders, and, harmful to the actor’s well-being, it is to be discouraged, which can largely be achieved via reducing imposing in the organisational discourse.

Overall, the thesis provides understanding that PT is an indicator of underlying factors, therefore its development can be facilitated by creating fertile conditions rather than unreflected pressure to demonstrate it.

10.5 Limitations and future research suggestions

The research had several *limitations*. While vignette discussions in the grounded theory study provided rich insights, they may not necessarily suggest how participants would react in real life (Hughes & Huby, 2012). However, my primary interest was not in their potential action but in understandings of PT and meanings they put into it, which I obtained from their opinions on vignette scenarios. The interview questions about positive thinkers might have elicited data on manifestations of PT, rather than on what it is. A relatively heterogeneous sample of the grounded theory study could have culturally framed PT, yet, I found convergence across the interviews in people's understandings of it.

I collected data for the quantitative studies during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown that have affected many workplaces and, consequently, individuals' work attitudes and perceptions (e.g., Bajrami, Terzić, Petrović, Radovanović, Tretiakova, & Hadoud, 2020; Song, Wang, Li, Yang, & Li, 2020), which could have impacted the constructs under study. Controlling for the workplace (home/site) as well as adding more controls that might act as potential moderators could have affected relationships predicted in this study, however, this is a nuance that future research could address with a bigger sample and more power, whereas my aim was to lay the theoretical groundwork for PT and test a model based on the interaction principle. While the survey study used existing instruments to measure PT and imposing PT, the former was limited in assessing a cognitive aspect of PT only and the latter in measuring the extent of being exposed to any external influence in the context of authenticity at work. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that future research designs new instruments to measure these constructs including cognitive, affective, and behavioural expressions of PT. The psychological safety and PT measures included a limited number of items, which impacted their internal consistency (.50

and .63 respectively) as it is common with short scales. However, as reported by the study, their mean inter-item correlations were within an optimal range (Pallant, 2007). Future studies could use measures with a higher number of items to measure these constructs. The study analysed PT in a broad organisational context with occupationally and geographically diverse samples and thus set up a knowledge base for future studies to draw on, albeit the interpretation of results about the contextual influence on PT may be limited by reliance on self-report data. Despite the limitations, this research forms a theoretical base for PT and provides knowledge about factors facilitating and hindering it in organisations including links among psychological safety, self-efficacy, imposing PT, and surface acting.

This research provides a theoretical framework upon which *future research* can draw. Thus, while the grounded theory study aimed to build a conceptual explanation for PT, future studies can focus more on its phenomenological and discursal aspects because only the combination of different perspectives can provide a holistic understanding of the construct and capture its essence entirely. Future research might also expand on employee/managerial perspective differences, as well as differences on organic, naturally occurring PT and imposed one. The concerning tendency to exclude people not appearing positive indicated by the data would also need further investigation. In addition, it would be worth exploring further individual differences in understandings PT at work, for example, by occupation, work location (e.g., office versus field), sector, industry, culture, employment pattern, or personality characteristics to identify further nuances of PT in organisations. Overall, it would be good to understand the transferability of the model of PT to non-organisational settings and thus explore options of building a formal theory of PT and designing a new, comprehensive PT measure that would

incorporate its cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions operating at the self, other, and environment-directed levels.

In the context of imposing PT in organisations, it would be interesting to investigate to what extent employee perceptions of corporate communications promoting positive organisational behaviour differ from impressions that creators of communications intend to make. Further, although I checked the theory with some participants and practitioners, it would be good to conduct focus groups both with employees and managers for an open debate and a further and deeper scrutinisation of the model. Future research could also examine particular elements of the conceptual model developed in the grounded theory study in relation to PT (e.g., see propositions in Chapter 7 and 8) or test potential causal links with longitudinal or experimental research. In measuring constructs under study, the present research examined their individual levels, while it would be interesting to examine group-level perceptions of the constructs. Finally, it would be good to examine the influence of other environmental and individual level constructs on PT, for example, organisational culture, politics, justice, or self-regulation. More specifically, it would be interesting to know how individual beliefs and feelings about the workplace can affect one's experience of PT.

10.6 Think positive or Stop and think?

The positive thinking movement has been active for many decades now. The concept is posed as a panacea for any sort of problem an individual can experience despite the scientific groundlessness of such claims. It is seen as an attribute of good organisational practice with perceptions of its encouragement, sometimes taking bizarre forms, varying from confusion to

burden put on employees. This thesis challenges the established view of positive thinking and brings to light its “other” side less spoken about in the public discourse.

If there is one thing I want this thesis to encourage, it is to stop taking trendy phenomena at face value and reflect over the “whys” and “hows” of their presence in our life. I observed this in interviews when participants’ initial confidence in their capability to define and describe PT and view of PT as an undeniable bliss gradually gave way to doubts and the realisation that there may be hidden layers of PT that they had not previously considered. This was particularly striking as all I did was ask questions. My aim with conducting this research was to equip lay people in organisations with practical knowledge that they could draw on to combat illiteracy accompanying the uncritical and decontextualised promotion of a particular outlook or view of the world. It is not about urging them to take sides as taking sides about an instrument, and I consider PT an instrument, makes little sense. It is rather about taking an evidence-based approach to PT in particular and popular tools and phenomena in general. If, after having familiarised with my research, even just one person will stop and reflect when they want to say “Think positive!” to a colleague, friend, or a family member in distress, I will consider my aim accomplished. I also hope that my research might stimulate reflection on the prescription of PT as a simple solution to complex issues, as such an approach discredits PT and provokes a range of reactions that advocates of PT clearly do not intend to incite. I did my best to debunk myths about PT and demystify such a popular but vague and paradoxically under-studied concept. However, the research about PT also influenced me in shifting my initial unacceptance to a more balanced view of it and forming me as a researcher giving priority to evidence over personal preferences. While it may be great to encounter PT, it is only an indicator of underlying

influences and complex processes, which makes the encouragement to exhibit it meaningless if not harmful.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A1: A vignette used in the grounded theory study

David is having a performance discussion with his team leader:

TL: You are doing okay but you could improve your performance significantly if only you thought more positive!

D (looking puzzled): How is thinking positive related to my performance?

TL: Well, ...

**What might David's team leader mean?
How would you complete the sentence if you were David's team leader?**



Appendix A2: A vignette used in the grounded theory study

Your friend Jasmine gets promoted to a team leader role. How would her subordinates' positive thinking help her manage the team?



Appendix A3: A vignette used in the grounded theory study

Your friend Alex is taking part in an important project involving reporting to key external stakeholders. From his previous experiences, Alex knows how important it is to put enough consideration into the planning of costs and resources. He hasn't observed this within the current project, where decisions made with regards to project costs do not always seem to be rational and thought through. Alex shares his concerns with his manager. The manager listens to him carefully and reassures him that there is there is no need to worry and things are under control. "Try to be positive" he adds at the end of the conversation.

The last remark makes Alex feel...



Appendix A4: A vignette used in the grounded theory study

Your friend Sonya has been quite stressed recently. Her house was flooded, negotiations with the insurance company were not straightforward and took away a lot of her energy and time. Sonya made sure this did not affect her performance at work but let her supervisor know that given the hectic schedule at home and work, she won't be able to contribute to a forthcoming team-building event as planned before. The supervisor said it was okay but mentioned that this event would be a good opportunity for Sonya to demonstrate her team spirit if Sonya wanted to think about things positively.

Sonya's immediate reaction was...



Appendix A5: A vignette used in the grounded theory study

Aiden's organisation has recently got a new managing director. He received a warm response from employees after an emotional speech he gave at the first townhall meeting:

'My grandmother is 92 years old. And she's the most positive person I know! She taught me a great deal about thinking positively in any situation. Every time I visit her, I'm reminded of these positive family traditions and personal striving. These are the values I'd like us to build on to be and act as a family!'



At the end, he added that his door was always open and that he'd be available to talk on the shop floor at 7:30 each morning. About few months later, many remarked that the managing director had never been glimpsed on the shop floor at any time, let alone at 7:30 a.m. Somebody told that they'd tried to appoint a meeting with the MD to discuss work process improvement suggestions but, after several attempts, gave up as the manager's calendar was too busy.

Appendix B1: Participant Information Sheet for the grounded theory study

*Organizational Psychology Department, School of Business, Economics, & Informatics
Birkbeck, University of London, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HX*

Participant Information Sheet: Positive Thinking in Organisations

Thank you for agreeing to consider participating in this research project. Before deciding whether to participate, it is important that you understand the reason why the research is being conducted and what this will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss with your colleagues or other people if you wish. Please do not hesitate to contact me if any of the information is unclear or you wish to discuss your participation in this project.

What is the purpose of the study?

I would like to interview you about your views on positive thinking. I hope to talk to managers and employees in equal measures. Curiously, this is a big gap in research and I hope to contribute to knowledge to help researchers and organisations understand better what it means to think positive and what the links to other aspects of business life might be, as well as implications for follow up research.

Who is running and responsible for the study?

The project is being conducted by myself, Shafag Garayeva, a PhD student of the Organizational Psychology Department at the school of Business, Economics, and Informatics at Birkbeck, University of London. I am supervised by Professor Almuth McDowall, also of Birkbeck, University of London.

Why have I been chosen to take part?

You are a regularly employed professional working in an organisation as an employee/manager and therefore your experiences will be invaluable for my research.

Do I have to take part?

No, your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you decide not to take part in the research, you will not be asked to give any explanation for your withdrawal.

What will I be asked to do?

I would like you to take part in an interview lasting approximately 1 hour during working hours at your office premises/through videoconferencing at your convenience; I will ask you a range of questions and you will also be requested to review some scenarios. The interview will give you an opportunity to reflect on how you think about things.

What questions will be asked in the interview?

The interview will involve a discussion around hypothetical scenarios about positive thinking in organisations. You will receive the scenarios before the interview.

What will happen to the information I provide in my interview?

The recording of your interview will be transcribed and analysed by myself. The actual recordings will be destroyed once I have transcribed and analysed the data. The analysed information will then be incorporated into the findings and conclusions of the research. All transcripts will be kept on a private laptop, in encrypted files. The laptop and transcripts will be kept locked to ensure your data's security. At the end of the study, all transcripts will be kept securely for a period of ten years, after which the data will be destroyed in a secure manner.

How will the research team protect my confidentiality and anonymity?

All transcripts will be fully anonymised and will be kept in a secure location at all times. Only myself and my supervisor will have access to these documents and recordings of interviews. The data will be stored on a private computer in encrypted/password protected files in line with the British Psychological Society's code of ethics. You, locations and names of any other persons or organisations mentioned during the interview will not be named or otherwise identified in any dissemination arising from this research.

What will happen to the results of the research?

I will write up the results in my thesis and hope to have them published in academic publications so that they are read by academics, students, practitioners, and others interested in positive thinking.

Has the study been reviewed by anyone?

The research has been subject to ethical approval by the Ethics Committee of the Organizational Psychology Department, Birkbeck, University of London.

Contacts details:

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For information about Birkbeck's data protection policy please visit:

<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/about-us/policies/privacy#7>

If you have concerns about this study, please contact the School's Ethics Officer at: BEI-ethics@bbk.ac.uk

School Ethics Office

School of Business, Economics and Informatics

Birkbeck, University of London
London WC1E 7HX

You also have the right to submit a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office
<https://ico.org.uk/>

Appendix B2: Informed Consent Form for the grounded theory study

*Organizational Psychology Department, School of Business, Economics, & Informatics
Birkbeck, University of London, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HX*

Informed Consent Form: Positive Thinking in Organisations

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to research people's experiences and perceptions of positive thinking. For that, I am conducting interviews with participants from various professions with the common features of being regularly employed and working in an organisation either as an employee or as a manager.

Procedure:

You are being asked to participate in an interview lasting approximately 1 hour. The interview will consist of a number of questions about your workplace experiences related to positive thinking. The interview will be recorded on a digital voice recorder with your consent. Please let me know if you do not wish to answer any of the questions asked.

Voluntary nature of the research/confidentiality:

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any of the questions or terminate the interview at any point. You may also withdraw your research data before **31/08/2019**. Your name and personal information will not be connected to your responses. Information that would make it possible to identify you will not be included in the thesis. The data will be accessible only to the researcher. Your data will be kept in a secure location and stored as encrypted files.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the information above and understand the purpose of the research and my part in it. I have asked any questions I had regarding the interview procedure or research and they have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I have the right to withdraw my data at any point during the interview or after the interview until the **31/08/2019**. I consent to this interview being audio recorded. I consent to participate in this study.

Name of Participant _____ Date: _____
(please print)

Signature of Participant _____

Name of Researcher _____ Date: _____
(please print)

Signature of Researcher _____

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix B3: Initial Interview Schedule for the grounded theory study

1. Could you please tell me about yourself?

Prompt: Your current role & responsibilities?/ What do you like and dislike about the role?

The next question will involve the use of images:

2. Have you come across or experienced positive thinking?

Prompt: How would you define positive thinking? How does 'positivity' feature in your organisation?

The next part of the interview will be built around a vignette discussion and involve the following questions:

3. In workplaces, in what situations people may feel they have to demonstrate positive thinking?

Prompt: Why may they have to do it? Can you think of an example?

4. Could you think of someone who thinks positively and describe how positive thinking manifests in this person's behaviour?

Prompt: What makes you think that this person thinks positively? What do you associate positive thinking with? Why do you think this person thinks positively?

5. Can you think of any situations where you would or would not recommend thinking positively?

Prompt: Why? Could you give me an example?

6. How important is it to think positively?

Prompt: Why? / What can it help achieve? / What can it prevent achieving? / Could you give me an example?

7. When you are asked to think positively, how does it make you feel?

Prompt: What is your instant reaction to it? What it makes you want to do or say? Why do you think someone would say that?

8. What is needed to think positively?

Prompt: What does it take? Can you give me an example of that?

9. To what extent can positive thinking be trained or developed?

Prompt: How could that be achieved? Could you give me an example of that?

10. Is there something you would ask participants if you were conducting this research?

Prompt: What should have I asked you that I did not think to ask?

Appendix B4: Participant Debriefing Sheet for the grounded theory study

*Organizational Psychology Department, School of Business, Economics, & Informatics
Birkbeck, University of London, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HX*

Participant Debriefing Sheet: Positive Thinking in Organisations

Thank you for taking part in my study. The results from this study will provide a description of people's experience and perceptions of positive thinking. The information you provided during the interview will be used anonymously. This means that it will be impossible for other people to know what you told me. I will transcribe this interview and analyse the data. Please note that you have a right to withdraw your data from the study until I have transcribed and anonymised the interview (till 31/08/2019) by contacting me using the details at the bottom of the page.

You will then have an opportunity to see the actual transcript of the interview. I'd be able to debrief you more fully and provide a summary of the study when all the data from interviews have been collected and analysed.

Support information:

Should you require any advice/support as a consequence of participating in the study, here are some sources you could use:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/>

<https://uk.themindgym.com/>

In addition, if you have any concerns about any aspect of the study and would like to raise them, you may contact my supervisor Professor Almuth McDowall using the details below.

CONTACT DETAILS:

Shafag Garayeva
PhD student
Organizational Psychology Department
Email: s.garayeva@bbk.ac.uk

Professor Almuth McDowall
Head of Department
Organizational Psychology Department
Email: a.mcdowall@bbk.ac.uk

Or at the following address:

c/o Shafag Garayeva
PhD student, Organizational Psychology
School of Business, Economics, and Informatics
Birkbeck, University of London
Malet Street
London
WC1E 7HX

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION

Appendix C1: Participant Information Sheet for the quantitative studies

***Organizational Psychology Department, School of Business, Economics, & Informatics
Birkbeck, University of London, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HX***

Participant Information Sheet: Positive environment in organisations

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project as part of my doctoral studies at Birkbeck, University of London. This project has received ethical approval. To make an informed decision on whether you want to take part in this study, please take a few minutes to read this information sheet.

Who is conducting this research?

The research is conducted by myself, Shafag Garayeva, a PhD student of the Organizational Psychology Department at the school of Business, Economics, and Informatics, under the guidance of my supervisor Professor Almuth McDowall.

What is the purpose of the study?

I am looking into the link between how people feel about themselves and their work environment and how they think and make decisions about work.

Why have I been invited to take part?

I am inviting individuals over 18 years of age working in formal organisations as an employee with a direct manager or a manager with at least 3 subordinates, having defined objectives aligned with organisational objectives, exposed to organisational environments and norms, having been fully employed in the current role for at least the last 3 months, in the private or public sector, in any part of the world to take part in this study.

What are the procedures of taking part?

If you decide to take part, you'll be asked to complete an anonymous online questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete and you'll be asked questions about your demographics (age/gender), personality, work environment, and decision-making. Upon completion of your participation you will be provided with a debrief and can access a summary of the findings, once analysed, by contacting the research team (details below).

What are my participation rights?

Participation in this research guarantees the right to withdraw, to ask questions about how your data will be handled and about the study itself, the right to confidentiality and anonymity, the right to refuse to answer questions and to be given access to a summary of the findings.

What if I want to withdraw my information?

If you wish to withdraw responses or any personal data gathered during the study you may do this without any consequences. You will be provided with an option to do this during the survey completion. Each page of the survey will display a clearly visible 'withdraw' button. Clicking it will lead to a debrief page and a statement asking if you require your data to be withdrawn, or whether your partial data can be used.

What will happen to my responses to the study?

Data collected in this study will be analysed and used for the research thesis. Data may also be used for academic publications but these would only report general trends/responses and no identifying information would be released.

Will my responses and information be kept confidential?

All information will be treated with the strictest confidence throughout the study. Information, which may lead to your identification, such as your name, will not be requested. All information will be kept in secure folders on a password protected computer, or a secure filing cabinet. Access to such information will only be allowed to the researcher and researcher supervisor. During the marking process, external examiners of my project may also have access.

What are the possible risks to taking part?

There are no risks involved in taking part in this research.

Support information:

Should you require any advice/support as a consequence of participating in the study, here are some sources you could use:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/>

<https://uk.themindgym.com/>

Any further questions?

If you have any questions or require more information about this study before or during your participation, please contact either of:

Shafag Garayeva, s.garayeva@bbk.ac.uk
Research Student

Professor Almuth McDowall, a.mcdowall@bbk.ac.uk
Research Supervisor,
Department of Organizational Psychology,
Birkbeck, University of London,

Clore Management Building,
Malet Street, Bloomsbury,
London.
WC1E 7HX

For information about Birkbeck's data protection policy please
visit: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/about-us/policies/privacy#7>

If you have concerns about this study, please contact the School's Ethics Officer at:
BEI-ethics@bbk.ac.uk
School Ethics Officer
School of Business, Economics and Informatics
Birkbeck, University of London
London WC1E 7HX

You also have the right to submit a complaint to the Information Commissioner's
Office <https://ico.org.uk/>

Appendix C2: Informed Consent Form for the quantitative studies

*Organizational Psychology Department, School of Business, Economics, & Informatics
Birkbeck, University of London, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HX*

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form: Positive environment in organisations

Please read the following items and tick the appropriate box below to indicate whether you agree to take part in this study.

- 1) I have read the information sheet in full, any questions I had have been answered, and I understand I may ask further questions at any time.
- 2) I understand what is involved in participating, that it is voluntary, and that I may withdraw at any stage during the survey.
- 3) I agree to take part in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

I agree to take part in this research

Yes ☐

No ☐

You'll now be directed to the online questionnaire.

Appendix C3: Participant Debriefing Sheet for the quantitative studies

*Organizational Psychology Department, School of Business, Economics, & Informatics
Birkbeck, University of London, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HX*

Appendix C

Participant Debriefing Sheet: Positive environment in organisations

Thank you very much for taking part in this research project, which is looking into the link between how people feel about themselves and their work environment and how they think and make decisions about work in organisations as part of my PhD thesis in Organizational Psychology at Birkbeck, University of London.

The results of this research will provide understanding of the role of personality and organisations in creating a positive environment and could be useful to organisations willing to facilitate such an environment.

I would like to thank you and affirm that your data will be treated confidentially. If you would like to find out the outcome of this research, please do not hesitate to keep in touch with me and I will send you a summary of findings once analysed. If you have any concerns about the way that this study was conducted, please do not hesitate to contact the research supervisor Professor Almuth McDowall at a.mcdowall@bbk.ac.uk.

Thank you.

Shafag Garayeva
s.garayeva@bbk.ac.uk

For information about Birkbeck's data protection policy please visit: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/about-us/policies/privacy#7>

If you have concerns about this study, please contact the School's Ethics Officer at: BEI-ethics@bbk.ac.uk.

School Ethics Officer

School of Business, Economics and Informatics

Birkbeck, University of London

London WC1E 7HX

You also have the right to submit a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office <https://ico.org.uk/>

Support information:

Should you require any advice/support as a consequence of participating in the study, here are some sources you could use:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/>

<https://uk.themindgym.com/>

Appendix D1 Ethics approval form for the grounded theory study

Organizational Psychology Ethics Form Proposal to Conduct Research Involving Human Participants

Section B: Supporting Documentation

Listed below are the materials you need to include with the ethics submission. Please place an X in each box when you have ensured that this material is included with your submission.

Note that if you are seeking ethical approval for a survey your only need to submit the questionnaire if you are using your own questions. If you are using existing, published questionnaires, you do not have to attach the questionnaire but you do need to explain which questionnaire(s) you are using (and provide references) in Section D.

Under the “Other” option you may specify (and attach) any other documents that you consider relevant to your application. For example you can include an ethics application form that has been submitted to a different committee. If you are debriefing the participants you need to include the relevant documents here. Note that debriefing is not compulsory unless you are actively misleading or deceiving the participants as to the purpose of the study.

For projects that will run over multiple years and may involve multiple data sources it is recommended to include a data management plan. This is also required if you are applying for ethical approval for a funding application or a funded project.

Information Sheet	X
Consent Form	X
Materials used (e.g. questionnaire, interview schedule) (where appropriate)	X
Other (please specify):	Debriefing sheet; Entry request letter; Vignettes.

Before completing this form make sure you have familiarised yourself with BPS Core of Human Research Ethics

If you are conducting internet research please read the AoIR recommendations for ethical decision making before completing this form

Section C: Checklist

Will the participants be required to experience unpleasant stimuli or unpleasant situations? (this also include unpleasant experiences that may result from deprivation or restriction, e.g. Food, water, sleep deprivation)	NO
Will any information about the nature, process or outcome of the experiment or study be withheld from participants? (if information is withheld, the participants will need to be debriefed after the data collection. In addition, a second informed consent to use the data should be obtained after debriefing the participants)	NO
Will participants be actively misled or deceived as to the purpose of the study? (if the participants are actively misled or deceived, they need to be debriefed after the data collection. In addition, a second informed consent to use the data should be obtained after debriefing the participants)	NO
Will participants receive any inducement or payment to take part in the study?	NO
Does the research involve identifiable participants or the possibility that anonymised individuals may become identifiable?	NO
Will any participants be unable to provide informed consent? (e.g. minors, people who may lack capacity to do so, people in an unequal relationship forced to participate, etc)	NO
Might the study carry a risk of being harmful to the physical or mental well-being of the researcher in carrying out the study? (any risk above the normal risk expected in everyday life should be reported here)	NO
Might the study carry a risk of being harmful to the physical or mental well-being of participants? (any risk above the normal risk expected in everyday life should be reported here)	NO
Might the study carry a risk of being harmful to the College in any way? (e.g. reputation damage, security sensitive research such as military research or on extremist or terrorist groups, research requiring illegal/extreme/dangerous materials)	NO
Will the research involve any conflict of interest? (e.g. between your role at work and your role as a researcher? will you want to use data/colleagues that you have access/contact with in your job but as a researcher they would not normally be available to you)	NO
Is there any possibility of a participant disclosing any issues of concern? (e.g. legal, emotional, psychological, health or educational.)	NO
Is there any possibility of the researcher identifying any issues of concern?	NO
Are there any other ethical concerns that you are aware of?	NO

If you answered 'YES' or 'DON'T KNOW' to any of the above; provide further details here; being specific about how you will address ethical concerns in the study protocol:
(you can expand the area below to use as much space as needed)

Section A:

Name(s) of Investigator:	Shafag Garayeva
Date of application:	15 August 2018
Proposed start date:	1 September 2018
Contact details: Email	s.garayeva@bbk.ac.uk
Status (e.g. Lecturer, PhD student, BSc/MSc student)	PhD Student
Supervisor (name and email) (if applicable):	Almuth McDowall, a.mcdowall@bbk.ac.uk
Funding source (if applicable)	n/a
Project Title (15 words max)	Positive thinking in organisations – an interview study
Are any committees other than this one evaluating whether your proposed research is ethical? NO If yes, include the proposal you made to them and (if available) their decision	

Section D: Project description

(you can expand the areas below to use as much space as needed)

Description and rationale for proposed project (in accessible terms – what is the research question, how can people benefit, what are potential risks, and how are they mitigated?)

This study will investigate positive thinking in organisations from the perspectives of employees and managers with the aim of theoretical development and refinement taking a grounded theory approach. The literature in the (positive psychological) domain is somewhat atheoretical, suffers from ‘concept confusion’; therefore a bottom up grounded approach is appropriate. Whilst much is purported about the benefits of ‘positive thinking’, there is hardly any evidence from organisational contexts about how to grasp relevant phenomena.

The study will seek to answer the following research questions:

- How do managers and employees experience and define positive thinking?
- How different/similar are positive thinking perceptions of employees and positive thinking perceptions of managers?
- As the data builds up: what are the potential antecedents, underlying conditions, and consequences of positive thinking in organisations?

No potential risks to participants or the researcher resulting from the study are foreseen.

Description of participants (How will participants be selected? What are the inclusion/exclusion criteria? How many? How will they be identified and recruited?)

Participants for this study will be selected from various professions with the common features of being regularly employed and working in an organisation either as an employee or as a manager. The initial data will be gathered through snowball, convenience or networking sampling. With the advancement of the research, the sampling strategy will be more influenced by phenomenon constructs emerging from the data. The eventual sample size will be determined by theoretical saturation and may reach multiples of ten (e.g. 20, 30 and so on).

Description of Methods (What are the procedures used for data collection? What will the participants be asked to do? Where will the study be conducted? How do you intend to analyse the data?)

Data will be collected through individual, semi-structured, thematic, and theory-driven interviews with open-ended questions. Prior to starting the research, the researcher will present the research objectives and significance to research participants. The participants will also receive the interview schedule prior to the interview and asked to familiarise themselves with the questions. They will have an opportunity to skip any questions they may not feel comfortable to answer. The research data will be collected in business (initially, oil & gas and innovations industries) and public-sector organisations during working hours. The unit of analysis will be the concept under study (positive thinking). The grounded theory method will be used to analyse data.

What arrangements are to be made to protect participants’ anonymity?

All transcripts will be fully anonymised. Participants, locations and names of any other persons or organisations mentioned during the interview will not be named or otherwise identified in any dissemination arising from this research. Participants will have an opportunity to see transcripts of their interviews.

What arrangements are to be made to ensure that the data you collect is held securely and confidentially? (both electronic and hard copies)

Actual recordings of the interviews will be destroyed once the data has been transcribed and analysed. All transcripts will be kept in a secure location at all times. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to these documents and recordings of interviews. The data will be stored on a private computer in encrypted/password-protected files in line with the British Psychological Society's code of ethics. The interviews will be logged using interviewee initials, interview dates, locations, and summary comments on emerged themes/constructs, where applicable. Original transcript files will be retained for a period of 10 years to support potential future publications.

What arrangements are to be made to obtain the free and informed consent of the participants?

Prior to starting the research, the researcher will present the research objectives and significance to research participants to provide them with an understanding of their contribution to the study. The participants will also receive the interview schedule prior to the interview and asked to familiarise themselves with the questions. They will have an opportunity to skip any questions they may not feel comfortable to answer. Participants will receive an information sheet and be asked to sign a consent form after having familiarised themselves with the interview-relevant materials. They will also be encouraged to ask questions whenever they may need clarity.

If you are conducting internet research, please explain how you have addressed the following issues: a. Does your internet research involve human participation?
b. Does your internet research take place in a private or public internet space?
c. Is it appropriate to obtain informed consent from those whose data you are using?
d. Is it appropriate to anonymise or attribute your internet data?
(Please see the AoIR recommendations for a definition of internet research and more details on these issues)

N/A

Section E: Declarations

Please confirm each of the statements below by placing an 'X' in the appropriate space

I certify that to the best of my knowledge the information given above, together with accompanying information, is complete and correct.	X
I accept the responsibility for the conduct of the procedures set out in the attached application.	X
I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research that may arise in conducting the project.	X
I understand that no research work involving human participants or data can commence until ethical approval has been given.	X

Suggested Classification of project by the applicant (please highlight):

*SENSITIVE / EXTREMELY SENSITIVE /
ROUTINE*

Signed by the
applicant:

Date

If you have answered with “Yes” or “Don’t know” to any of the questions in Section C, your project should be classified as either “Sensitive” or “Extremely Sensitive”. However note that your project may be “Sensitive” or “Extremely Sensitive” even if you have responded with “No” to all section C questions.

Section F: Classification

FOR USE BY SUPERVISORS OR THE DEPARTMENTAL RESEARCH OFFICER

Classification of project (please highlight):

*SENSITIVE / EXTREMELY SENSITIVE /
ROUTINE*

Signed by the
Supervisor (if
applicable)
Signed by the
Departmental
Research Ethics
Officer

Date

13th
August
2018

Date

Appendix D2 Ethics approval form for the quantitative studies

Organizational Psychology Ethics Application Form

(please download from dissertation Moodle page)

Proposal to Conduct Research Involving Human Participants

Before completing this form make sure you have familiarised yourself with BPS Core of Human Research Ethics

If you are conducting internet research please read the AoIR recommendations for ethical decision making before completing this form

Section A:

Name(s) of Investigator:	Shafag Garayeva
Date of application:	18 Feb 2020
Proposed start date:	5 Mar 2020
Contact details: Email	s.garayeva@bbk.ac.uk
Status (e.g. Lecturer, PhD student, BSc/MSc student)	PhD student
Supervisor (name and email) (if applicable):	Prof Almuth McDowall, a.mcdowall@bbk.ac.uk
Funding source (if applicable)	n/a
Project Title (15 words max)	Positive environment in organisations

Are any committees other than this one evaluating whether your proposed research is ethical? NO

If yes, include the proposal you made to them and (if available) their decision

Section B: Supporting Documentation

Listed below are the materials you need to include with the ethics submission. Please place an X in each box when you have ensured that this material is included with your submission.

Note that if you are seeking ethical approval for a survey your only need to submit the questionnaire if you are using your own questions. If you are using existing, published questionnaires, you do not have to attach the questionnaire but you do need to explain which questionnaire(s) you are using (and provide references) in Section D.

Under the “Other” option you may specify (and attach) any other documents that you consider relevant to your application. For example you can include an ethics application form that has been submitted to a different committee. If you are debriefing the participants you need to include the relevant documents here. Note that debriefing is not compulsory unless you are actively misleading or deceiving the participants as to the purpose of the study.

For projects that will run over multiple years and may involve multiple data sources it is recommended to include a data management plan. This is also required if you are applying for ethical approval for a funding application or a funded project.

Information Sheet	X (Appendix A)
Consent Form	X (Appendix B)
Materials used For Quantitative studies provide details of the validated scales and any other questions to be asked.	X (see ‘Research design’ document)
Debrief	X (Appendix C)
Other (please specify):	Invitation to BBK students (Appendix D)

Section C: Checklist

Will the participants be required to experience unpleasant stimuli or unpleasant situations? (this also include unpleasant experiences that may result from deprivation or restriction, e.g. Food, water, sleep deprivation)	NO
Will any information about the nature, process or outcome of the experiment or study be withheld from participants? (if information is withheld, the participants will need to be debriefed after the data collection. In addition, a second informed consent to use the data should be obtained after debriefing the participants)	NO
Will participants be actively misled or deceived as to the purpose of the study? (if the participants are actively misled or deceived, they need to be debriefed after the data collection. In addition, a second informed consent to use the data should be obtained after debriefing the participants)	NO
Will participants receive any inducement or payment to take part in the study?	YES
Does the research involve identifiable participants or the possibility that anonymised individuals may become identifiable? (see “Additional Ethics Advice for Qualitative Research” on Moodle for advice)	NO
Will any participants be unable to provide informed consent? (e.g. minors, people who may lack capacity to do so, people in an unequal relationship forced to participate, etc)	NO
Might the study carry a risk of being harmful to the physical or mental well-being of the researcher in carrying out the study? (any risk above the normal risk expected in everyday life should be reported here)	NO
Might the study carry a risk of being harmful to the physical or mental well-being of participants? (any risk above the normal risk expected in everyday life should be reported here)	NO
Might the study carry a risk of being harmful to the College in any way? (e.g. reputation damage, security sensitive research such as military research or on extremist or terrorist groups, research requiring illegal/extreme/dangerous materials)	NO
Will the research involve any conflict of interest? (e.g. between your role at work and your role as a researcher? will you want to use data/colleagues that you have access/contact with in your job but as a researcher they would not normally be available to you) For advice see <u>Guidance note: Researching within your own institution</u>	NO
Is there any possibility of a participant disclosing any issues of concern? (e.g. legal, emotional, psychological, health) (see “Additional Ethics Advice for Qualitative Research” on Moodle for advice)	NO
Is there any possibility of the researcher identifying any issues of concern? (see “Additional Ethics Advice for Qualitative Research” on Moodle for advice)	NO
Are there any other ethical concerns that you are aware of?	NO
Will you recruit Birkbeck staff (inc ex staff)/students as participants? (for restrictions to questions you can ask Birkbeck staff/students please see “A Guide to Research Ethics in Organizational Psychology” on Moodle)	YES

If you answered ‘YES’ or ‘DON’T KNOW’ to any of the above; provide further details here; being specific about how you will address ethical concerns in the study protocol:

(you can expand the area below to use as much space as needed)

The researcher will offer an incentive (e.g., a charitable donation) to stimulate survey completion. This is done with the aim to reach the desired number of participants, which, given the data collection and analysis method (vignette experiment and SEM) should be circa 200 participants per each study.

For the same aim of reaching the desired sample size, the research is going to involve BBK students to the survey completion. It will be made clear to BBK students that the questionnaire relates to their own work environment and not to their Birkbeck experience.

Section D: Project description

(you can expand the areas below to use as much space as needed)

Description and rationale for proposed project (in accessible terms – what is the research question, how can people benefit, what are potential risks, and how are they mitigated?)

This research is a part of a doctoral study looking at positive thinking in organisations. Whilst much is purported about the benefits of ‘positive thinking’, there is little robust empirical evidence from organisational contexts about the phenomenon. Therefore, this research programme aims to build up the relevant evidence base. The previous part of the research, a qualitative study, looking at individuals’ definitions and understandings of PT, has identified individual and organisational level variables contributing to development or faking of PT in organisations. A theoretical model drawn on findings of the qualitative study, encompassed perceived psychological safety and self-efficacy facilitating the development of PT. In the absence of psychological safety and under the external pressure to demonstrate PT, individuals may fake it to meet perceived expectations around PT. Individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy can resist to the pressure to demonstrate PT and not fake. The proposed quantitative part of the research aims to test the model in two studies. Specifically, it aims to:

- examine organisational (psychological safety) and individual (self-efficacy) level factors contributing to development of PT in organisations;
- investigate antecedents of faking in the PT-specific interorganisational context;
- add to the knowledge around development and promotion of PT in organisations.

The study will seek to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent are perceived psychological safety and self-efficacy associated with individuals’ PT in organisations?
- Does the pressure from the external environment to demonstrate PT result in faking it?
- Do psychological safety and self-efficacy buffer the effect of the external pressure to demonstrate PT on individuals in organisations?

In addition to adding to the theoretical and empirical evidence base of PT in organisations, the study’s findings will be inform designing of PT interventions in organisational settings.

No potential risks to participants or the researcher resulting from the study are foreseen. In case they require any advice/support as a consequence of participating in the study, they will be provided with support information during debriefing. This will include directing them to support sources as

Description of participants (How will participants be selected? What are the inclusion/exclusion criteria? How many? How will they be identified and recruited?) Please highlight if you may want to use Birkbeck staff or students in your research and ensure that you adhere to the restrictions outlined in “A Guide to Research Ethics in Organizational Psychology”

Participants for this study will be individuals over 18 years of age working in formal organisations as an employee with a direct manager or a manager with at least 3 subordinates, having defined objectives aligned with organisational objectives, exposed to organisational environments and norms, having been fully employed in the current role for at least the last 3 months, in the private or public sector, in any part of the world.

The survey study will seek to recruit around 250 participants from multiple organisations. The experiment study will seek to recruit around 240 participants among BBK students and the researcher’s extended professional network.

UPDATE [14/07/2020]: The research’s participant recruitment has been negatively affected by the Covid-19 situation. Therefore, the researcher is seeking ethical approval to collect data through Prolific, which is a paid online-based service for research participant recruitment. Completion of the survey takes about 15 min, the cost is £7.50 per hour, approximately 200 participants are needed for each study. The request to use Prolific has been approved by the researcher’s supervisor and relevant fees will be covered by the OP department. The rest of the research design remains unchanged.

Description of Methods (What are the procedures used for data collection? What will the participants be asked to do? Where will the study be conducted? How do you intend to analyse the data?)

The research will involve a multi-method quantitative approach with two studies: a survey and a survey experiment. The first study, a survey, will examine relationships between psychological safety, self-efficacy, positive thinking, faking (operationalised and hereinafter referred to as surface acting), and external pressure. The second, experimental study will test if the external pressure can lead to surface acting of PT and if psychological safety and self-efficacy can buffer this effect.

Data for both studies will be collected through anonymous online Qualtrics-based surveys. For the survey study, respondents will need to complete five measures (Positive Thinking, Psychological Safety, Self-efficacy, Perceived external pressure, and Surface Acting) in two waves with a one-week time lag. In the first wave, they will need to complete Positive Thinking and Surface Acting questionnaires. In the second wave of data collection, they will be asked to complete Psychological Safety, Self-efficacy, and Perceived external pressure questionnaires.

Participants will receive a unique code generated by Qualtrics and asked to provide their email address. Unique codes will enable matching up of data collected in two waves. Email addresses will enable sending a reminder through Qualtrics asking to complete the second part of the survey. These bits of data (codes and email addresses) will be kept separately on the researcher’s devices and deleted after the research is complete.

For the experiment study, participants will be asked to read a randomly allocated vignette that will contain a scenario with a description of a hypothetical character’s self-efficacy, organisational psychological safety, and the external pressure to demonstrate PT. Levels of these variables will be manipulated in vignettes as low/high. After having read the vignette, participants will be asked to

answer demographic and manipulation check questions and complete Surface Acting questionnaire in relation to the extent the vignette character would fake PT as a result of the external pressure described in the scenario.

Data from the survey study will be analysed with SEM, data from the experiment study will be analysed with ANOVA.

What arrangements are to be made to protect participants' anonymity?

All collected data will be stored anonymously. Participants' email addresses will be stored in a separate encrypted document, wherein they will be matched to their unique codes. Upon data collection, this document will be deleted. In the presentation of findings, participants will not be identifiable and data will only be presented at the aggregate level.

What arrangements are to be made to ensure that the data you collect is held securely and confidentially? (both electronic and hard copies)

Data will be kept in a secure location at all times. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to these documents. The data will be stored on a private computer in encrypted/password-protected files in line with the British Psychological Society's code of ethics. Data will be retained to support potential future publications.

What arrangements are to be made to obtain the free and informed consent of the participants?

Information about the research will be provided in the message used to recruit participants. In addition, prior to completing the relevant questionnaires, participants will have a chance to familiarise themselves with information about the research objectives and significance. Then, they'll be asked to read the informed consent terms and tick the respective box, if agreed to the terms. In line with BPS guidelines, each page of surveys will display a clearly visible 'withdraw' button. Clicking it will lead to a debrief page and a statement asking participants if they require their data to be withdrawn, or whether their partial data can be used (Appendix A).

If you are conducting internet research, please explain how you have addressed the following issues: a. Does your internet research involve human participation?
b. Does your internet research take place in a private or public internet space?
c. Is it appropriate to obtain informed consent from those whose data you are using?
d. Is it appropriate to anonymise or attribute your internet data?
(Please see the AoIR recommendations and BPS Ethics Guidance on Internet-mediated Research for a definition of internet research and more details on these issues)

Participants will receive a link, which will take them to the dedicated Qualtrics page with anonymous surveys to complete. They will be able to familiarise with information about the surveys and provide their informed consent before completing questionnaires. Data will be stored anonymously. Those wishing to participate in the prize draw will have an option to indicate it upon survey completion.

Section E: Declarations

Please confirm each of the statements below by placing an 'X' in the appropriate space

I certify that to the best of my knowledge the information given above, together with accompanying information, is complete and correct.

I accept the responsibility for the conduct of the procedures set out in the attached application.

I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research that may arise in conducting the project.

I understand that **no** research work involving human participants or data can commence until ethical approval has been given.

Suggested Classification of project by the applicant (please highlight):

*SENSITIVE / EXTREMELY SENSITIVE /
ROUTINE*

Signed by the
applicant:
Shafag Garayeva

Date
18 Feb
2020

If you have answered with "Yes" or "Don't know" to any of the questions in Section C, your project should be classified as either "Sensitive" or "Extremely Sensitive". However note that your project may be "Sensitive" or "Extremely Sensitive" even if you have responded with "No" to all section C questions.

Section F: Classification

FOR USE BY SUPERVISORS OR THE DEPARTMENTAL RESEARCH OFFICER

Classification of project (please highlight):

*SENSITIVE / EXTREMELY
SENSITIVE / ROUTINE*

Signed by the
Supervisor (if
applicable)
Signed by the
Departmental
Research Ethics
Officer

Almuth McDowall

Date 18th Feb
2020
Date 16 March
2020
Amendment
approved:
17 July
2020

ETHICS APPLICATION APPROVAL NUMBER OPEA-19/20-17

Appendix E Glossary of research terms (marked with an asterisk in Chapter 5)

Data collection terms

Anticipated probes – scripted follow-up questions, based on the anticipation of certain answers and behaviours. They are best used to probe for problems (Priede, Jokinen, Ruuskanen, & Farrall, 2014). I used them in interviews.

Conditional probes - scripted follow-up questions but used only on certain conditions such as exhibition of certain behaviours. They are useful when trying to uncover the reasons for the problems (Priede, Jokinen, Ruuskanen, & Farrall, 2014). I used these in interviews.

Organisational communications - a framework and vocabulary used for establishing and maintaining favourable reputations with stakeholder groups upon which the organisation is dependent. It involves communication techniques and media that are used towards internal and external groups (Cornelissen, 2008). I included organisational communications into organisational data as part of the grounded theory study.

Organisational documents - literary, textual, or visual ways of sharing information, presenting stories, and representing organisations (Coffey, 2014). Same as above, I included organisational documents into grounded theory study data.

Semi-structured interviews – flexible interviews focusing on certain themes (Kvale, 1983) and using pre-determined questions, wording and order of which can be modified by the researcher during an interview thus allowing the researcher to improvise based on issues emerging from participants' responses. They are suitable for studying individuals' perceptions and opinions (Kallio, Pietila, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016) and have the potential to facilitate developing more detailed accounts by participants (Heyl, 2001) not restricted by a precise interview schedule. Interviews provide more control over generating data than most other forms of

qualitative data gathering (Charmaz, 2014). I used semi-structured interviews to collect data in the grounded theory study.

Theoretical sampling - focused, deliberate, and discriminate sampling and data collection driven by the evolving theory and previous analysis (Charmaz, 2014). It provides opportunities to collect data about properties and dimensions of the categories and how the categories are related to each other and thus develop theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). It implies the selection of new cases that are to be included in the analysis: people, events, or information to develop categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). It involves both going back to the existing data with new questions and seeking for new data that could address the questions that arose during analysis (Charmaz, 1990). In the beginning of the theory development process, it aims to discover new concepts and later, it gives way to elaborating and refining properties and dimensions of categories built from data and interrelations among them (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). Theoretical sampling guided data collection in the grounded theory study.

Theoretical saturation - in grounded theory, implies the point where incoming data do not add anything new to the overall data and properties of categories (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I used the theoretical saturation criterion for data collection decision-making in the grounded theory study.

Vignettes - short stories about hypothetical characters in specific situations related to the research topic, to which participants are invited to respond and share views on (Finch, 1987; Törrönen, 2018) asking participants to respond as if they were in the situation. The story places characters in a concrete context and invites participants to formulate opinions and comment on vignette characters' thoughts, feelings, and actions (Lapatin et al, 2012; Törrönen, 2002). I used vignettes to collect data in the grounded theory and experiment studies of this research.

Validity of vignettes - *internal* and *external*, refer to their *representativeness* of the research topic and *relevance* to potential participants respectively (Gould, 1996). It is essential for the quality of data obtained using vignettes. I used the validity criteria for developing vignettes.

Data analysis terms

This section defines terms related to grounded theory method, its analytical strategies, and the paradigm model approach adopted by the grounded theory study.

Grounded theory method – a qualitative research methodology that seeks to develop new theory from given data to explain a phenomenon through development of categories (e.g., themes, concepts) as well as their relationships with each other to form a theoretical framework through inductive, comparative, iterative, and interactive method (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The method implies simultaneous and iterative data collection, data analysis, and theory development and I used it to derive a conceptual understanding of PT in organisations.

Theory – “a set of well-developed categories (e.g., themes, concepts) that are systematically integrated through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some relevant ... phenomenon. The statement of relationship explains who, what, when, where, why, how, and with what consequences an event occurs.” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 22). The aim of this study was to identify interrelated concepts that would explain PT in organisations.

Categories – higher-level concepts grouping lower-level concepts with shared properties.

Categories enable the analyst to reduce and combine data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Properties - characteristics that define and describe concepts/categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). They address what a concept/category is.

Dimensions - variations of properties along a range (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Methodological strategies of grounded theory – strategies facilitating analysis. These include coding, asking questions of the data, constant comparison, theoretical sampling (introduced earlier as a data collection term), and memo-writing used iteratively

a) Coding - the process of defining what the data is about. It involves labelling units of data relevant to the research question, capturing patterns and themes in data, and grouping them under a summative title (Lempert, 2007). Coding is needed to extract concepts from raw data and develop them in terms of their properties and dimensions. In grounded theory, coding enables the conceptual abstraction of data (Holton, 2007) and the assembly of the final theory's skeleton (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Coding also outlines conditions under which categories develop and their consequences (Charmaz, 2014). Aligned with the paradigm model variant, in this study, I used open, axial, and selective phases of coding to analyse and sort out data.

Open coding – is the first stage of the coding process and infers breaking data down (Kelle, 2007) and deriving and developing initial concepts from them. It involves describing data segments with short phrases and in vivo codes (participants' own words and terms) reflecting their content and outlining concepts to summarise the blocks of data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). It is achieved through asking questions about the data and making comparisons between data to identify categories and their properties and dimensions. Open coding is followed by axial coding.

Axial coding – denotes investigating and constructing relationships between concepts, subcategories, and categories identified in the open coding stage to bring the data back together as a coherent whole (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). It comprises examining conditions, inter/actions, and consequences of the phenomenon under study (introduced below in the section), grouping open codes into categories, reducing, clustering, and

identifying relationships between categories and thus includes further development and refinement of categories. It can be combined with drawing diagrams and conceptual maps (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, Heath & Cowley, 2004; Locke, 2001). It is followed by or coincides with selective coding.

Selective coding - integrating categories into one overarching theory, choosing the core category, and constructing a storyline (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Heath & Cowley, 2004; Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006).). It acts as ‘mopping up’ (Locke, 2001, p.79) integrating the analysis. The main difference between axial and selective coding is in the level of abstraction (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019).

b) Asking questions of the data – a strategy facilitating coding. For *open coding*, questions include: What do the data suggest/what is happening in the data? What does the action in the data represent? Of what larger process is this action a part? Who are the people involved? Which aspects of the phenomenon are dealt with? Which are left out? How did this action evolve? Which justifications are given or deducible? Which strategies are used? In what context is the code/action used? Is the code related to another code? Is the code encompassed by a broader code? Which consequences are anticipated? (Charmaz, 2014; Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). For *axial coding*, they include: What feature of the theory does the code denote in terms of the paradigm model? Is it representative of a context of PT, an antecedent condition of PT, an action related to PT, and/or a consequence of the action? (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). The questions guiding *selective coding* are “What is the research all about?” and “what seems to be going on here?” (Teppo, 2015).

c) Constant comparison – the strategy that iteratively identifies and compares units of data, codes, concepts, and categories through data analysis from the beginning of research and allows

a researcher to identify patterns and relationships between these patterns (Glaser 1978). It is carried out on three levels: quotes and codes – concepts – categories, to identify similarities and differences between them and integrate theoretical concepts (Länsisalmi, Peiró, & Kivimäki, 2004). The comparison of quotes and codes is to result in the definition and selection of a set of concepts to be elaborated further. The comparison of concepts adds to development of categories. Finally, the comparison of categories facilitates development of conceptual frameworks and theory built from data. Constant comparison may lead to revising, relabelling, merging, and splitting of initial categories to take account of new insights (Payne, 2015). It enables theoretical sampling.

d) Memo-writing – writing notes throughout the analysis for keeping in contact with the data and recording the ongoing dialogue (Payne, 2015). Memos are used for interpreting data, enabling constant comparison, speculating about developing concepts and categories, examining relationships between concepts and categories, refining meanings, concepts, and relationships, asking methodological questions, and prompting further research inquiries and personal reflection (Charmaz, 1990).

The paradigm model – a model containing three basic components: (a) conditions, (b) inter/actions, and (c) consequences and a set of questions applied to data to identify factors related to the phenomenon under study and relationships between categories and thus to sort out and arrange the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I used it to organise data and identify relationships between codes, concepts, and categories derived from open coding and examine them against my research questions asking about factors shaping development and manifestations of PT in organisations.

a) Conditions - answer to the questions why, when, and how come and refer to reasons and explanations of participants' actions.

b) Actions - actors' responses to conditions of the phenomenon under study. They are taken to handle, overcome, perform or, or to react to it (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). Actions may be preceded with meanings given to events, feelings experienced about them, and thoughts and perceptions had about them.

c) Consequences - outcomes resulting from the combination of conditions and actions. They are neither predictable nor intended and can be anticipated or actual (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019).

Appendix F A narrative-integrative approach to the literature review

Objectives and approach. This literature review (see Figure 4.1 for an overview of the process), informed by the theoretical perspective of the current research (discussed in Chapter 3), had *four objectives*. First, in line with the symbolic interactionism approach of this thesis, it aimed *to examine* to what extent PT is conceptualised clearly in the literature and whether its existing definitions are inclusive of meanings that individuals create for it in interactions. Reviewing existing conceptualisations and operationalisations of PT was an essential first step in this research as a well-defined construct advances theory building (Hackman, 2009; Suddaby, 2010).

Second, building on the social information processing perspective, it sought *to identify* individual and environmental influences on meanings and experiences of PT and its development. This would have practical implications given the popularity of the concept coupled with the lack of guidance as to how one can build and maintain PT (Chapter 2).

Third, it set *to evaluate* evidence on consequences of PT to assess credibility of popular literature claims posing PT as a superpower. Importantly, building on the theoretical perspective of this research and as aligned with my pragmatist stance, it sought *to inform* the study's research questions by identifying areas of potential conceptual ambiguity around PT and possible controversies regarding evidence on development of PT in organisations.

I adopted a narrative approach to the literature review as along with appraising the state of knowledge on a particular topic, narrative literature reviews can enable theory development including novel conceptualisation and problem identification (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). These goals were compatible with my research interests of getting a comprehensive perspective on conceptual clarity for PT, assessing nature and strength of empirical evidence on PT, identifying research needs, and formulating research questions. Apart from reviewing definitions of PT and

organising them into categories, the appraisal involved assessing PT-related evidence to identify if knowledge about PT is as conclusive as it is commonly believed and whether its effects on one's well-being and performance are decisively beneficial (see Chapter 2 for widespread perceptions about PT). However, as evidence was spread out across several disciplines and psychological subdisciplines, I brought various streams of research together to identify core issues related to PT at work rather than merely reporting findings neatly accumulated in one field (Torraco, 2005).

Integration: searching, selecting, and analysing the literature. My initial assumption that the positive psychology literature (e.g., the literature on positive interventions) would be the main source of knowledge about PT did not prove true. As PT has been studied in several research areas but still lacks a robust theoretical foundation, integration of the relevant evidence across subdisciplines of psychology (e.g., health, clinical, cognitive, educational psychology) and other disciplines (e.g., business, management, critical leadership, economics, finance) was essential to bring together their insights and form a more comprehensive and nuanced body of knowledge on PT (Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2016). The integration involved searching, selecting, and analysing the literature, as detailed next.

While the research context examination was heavily informed by the popular literature, including self-help books, and press, the literature review focused on peer-reviewed sources found in online databases including Academic Search Complete, APA PsycInfo, Business Source Premier, APA PsycArticles, and Google Scholar with “positive thinking” and “positive thinking in organisations” as *search terms*. To identify additional sources of relevant knowledge, I reviewed citations used in key papers and for some subtopics (e.g., effects of PT on performance) referred to the grey literature (e.g., CIPD, working papers, theses). In line with my

research objective of producing practical knowledge about PT to enable an evidence-based approach to its development, I searched influences on PT and its antecedents (e.g., Forgeard & Seligman, 2012; Mens, Scheier, & Carver, 2016; Stingl & Geraldi, 2017). As the popular and practitioner literatures relate beneficial effects of PT mainly with well-being and performance and aligned with the objective of examining the accuracy of such claims, I searched effects of PT on these areas of human functioning (e.g., Coelho, 2010, 2012; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Oettingen, Mayer, & Portnow, 2016; Shefrin, 2012; Tenney, Logg, & Moore, 2015). I also examined the literature on cherishing positive states (e.g., Forgas, 2007; Forgas & East, 2008; Parrott, 2014) to examine the effectiveness of this strategy for developing PT as claimed by the popular discourse. Overall, the review moved from sources on a number of positivity constructs to those focused on PT and PT-related issues.

As part of the review, I examined sources both on “thinking” and “positive” to understand what each of these elements in the concept stands for. This involved examining thinking as a cognitive process, including higher order thinking and its functions, to appraise to what extent PT represents them (e.g., Dewey, 2009; Carruthers, 2009; Heyes, 2012; Tomasello, 2014). Examination of ‘positive’ involved familiarisation with critique of issues pertinent to the Positive Psychology movement and research, in which regard I found the Routledge International Handbook of Critical Positive Psychology (Brown, Lomas, & Eiroá-Orosa, 2017) instructive to compile the relevant literature and point to further sources. The issues flagged by critics included conceptual confusion, simplistic positive-negative dichotomy, ignorance of the context, focus on the individual, methodological weaknesses, shortage of theoretical underpinnings, unjustified generalisation, associations with self-help materials, and over-marketing of positivity constructs (e.g., Bennett, 2015; Brown, Sokal, & Friedman, 2013;

Fineman, 2006; Hackman, 2009; Held, 2004; 2018; Kristjánsson, 2010; 2013; Lazarus, 2003; Lomas & Ivztan, 2016; Marecek & Christopher, 2017; Matthews & Zeidner, 2003; McDonald & O’Callaghan, 2008; McNulty & Fincham, 2012; Miller, 2008; Simmons, 2012; Wong & Roy, 2018).

Although not directly related to the area of my interest, this contextual information refined my understanding of conceptual and methodological issues pertinent to the field, including lack of conceptual clarity characterising positivity constructs and terms (e.g., what “positive” implies), poor theoretical development, and the limited methodological repertoire. This influenced my research questions by reaffirming the need to first and foremost clearly define PT through capturing individual understandings of it and add to theory by identifying what influences PT in organisations, as suggested by my theoretical perspective. Familiarising with methodological issues in positive psychology reiterated the utility of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to the investigation of PT, as well as relying on more than one data source and collection methods (see Chapter 5 for research methods). Finally, to ensure to review latest findings on the topic, along with identifying most recent publications, I also sought to determine to what extent the Covid-19 pandemic influenced both the public discourse and research on PT.

Given the number and location of relevant sources, PT has been investigated most frequently in health settings, particularly, in onco-psychology (e.g., Ruthig, Holfeld, & Hanson, 2012; Tod, Warnock, & Allmark, 2011), where its effectiveness appeared to be debatable. Health psychology studies that challenged popular beliefs about superpowers of PT adopted qualitative research methods exploring discourses about and experiences of PT among patients with cancer (e.g., McCreaddie, Payne, & Froggatt, 2010; Wilkinson & Kitzinger 2000). There was also

quantitative research in clinical psychology and general and educational settings (e.g., Kappes & Oettingen, 2011, 2012; Oettingen & Mayer, 2002) and there was less than a handful of organisational study papers, which predominantly focused on the leadership context (Collinson, 2010, 2012). Given a dearth of research on PT in organisations, let alone interpretivist to capture individual meanings, I reviewed a literature on a similar, yet way better researched phenomenon of fun at work to identify to what extent findings from this body of evidence could be used to inform my research questions.

To *select* sources, I checked their relevance and conducted construct examination asking if the paper: (a) included a definition of PT?; (b) examined PT?; (c) discussed how PT is shaped/developed?; (d) discussed how PT manifests; (e) would help me understand anything about meanings, experiences, manifestations, and development of PT at work? Depending on which of its objectives the review aimed to achieve at a particular stage, selection involved reading different subsets of papers (e.g., introduction for identifying definitions, methods for examining approaches, or results for evaluating effects) or reading through the entire piece (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, Collins, 2012). *Analysis* then involved descriptively coding the relevant pieces, comparing new information against existing codes, and either adding to the existing codes or developing new codes. Constant comparison of evidence within and between sources at the level of definitions of PT (e.g., PT as a skill, cognition, or thought regulation; state or trait), approaches to studying it (e.g., positivist vs. interpretivist), or consequences of PT (e.g., in short vs. long term) allowed to group codes into respective categories of findings (ibid).

As a result, the review identified three streams of knowledge about PT as relevant to its objectives, which included evidence on conceptualisation and operationalisation of PT, individual understandings and experiences of PT, and effects of PT on well-being and

performance. I grouped them into three categories of findings: Thinking and definitions of PT, Manifestations of PT and similar phenomena: Individual understandings and experiences, and Effects of PT: Evidence versus assumptions. The Thinking and definitions of PT category in turn contained four sub-categories: (1) definitions using other constructs to describe PT; (2) definitions describing PT as a regulation of thoughts; (3) definitions referring to PT as skills; (4) definitions referring to PT as cognition. The review pointed to conceptual fuzziness about PT, a lacuna in individual understandings and experiences of PT in organisations, dearth of research on influences on development and manifestations of PT at work, and mixed evidence on its effects.

Issues. I faced two issues during the review. *The first* was that while the main search term was “positive thinking”, the literature search generated thousands of results on other positivity constructs with “optimism” including “unrealistic optimism” leading the list followed by “positive attitude”, “positive affect/emotions”, “positive expectancies”, “positive practices”, “positive states”, “positive deviance”, “positive illusions”, “positive fantasies”, “positivity”, “positiveness”, “the positive”, “thinking about future”, “self-serving biases”, “overconfidence”, “attribution styles”, “gratitude”, “resilience”, “self-efficacy”, “happiness”, “mental toughness”, “hope”, or “life satisfaction”. To manage such proliferation of terminology, I guided the review process by constantly checking if sources were relevant to PT and whether PT was discussed in the main body of texts and not only used in the title as detailed above.

The second issue was that even fewer papers that referred to PT directly and consistently, used various definitions of PT, which mirrored the vagueness pertinent to the concept in the popular discourse. Thus, conceptualisation and operationalisation of PT in the literature was multi-dimensional and encompassed traits, states, behaviours, and attributions. As such, PT appeared to be subject to *the jingle-jangle fallacy* (Kelley, 1927; Thorndike, 1904), when, as a

single construct, PT was attributed with different meanings or different constructs (e.g., optimism, hope) were used to define and operationalise PT. Such fallacies have long been established in other areas of research for constructs which are similarly as broad, for example work-life balance or leader-member exchange (Casper, Vaziri, Wayne, DeHauw, & Greenhaus, 2018; Gottfredson, Wright, & Heaphy, 2020). The variety of PT's extant definitions did not demonstrate that it "has been deliberately or consciously invented or adopted for a scientific purpose" (Kerlinger, 1973, p. 29) and that theory was used to define the concept. It rather suggested that the construct has originated from the popular and practitioner literature and instead of responding to this challenge by examining the concept and proposing a definition for it, researchers adopted it for convenience purposes as a synonym for other constructs.

Conclusion. Overall, the literature review process was not linear and involved revisiting the literature with new questions and conducting new searches throughout the research process, including in the data analysis and write-up stages. For example, at the pre-data collection stage I focused on definitions of PT, promotion of PT, other positivity constructs, positive psychology issues, or similar phenomena-related literature (e.g., fun at work); during qualitative data analysis, I turned to the literature on concepts and constructs identified (e.g., psychological safety, self-regulation); during write-up I revisited previously examined sources or looked up new ones to integrate literature review and research results. The literature review resulted in a classification of existing definitions of PT and informed research questions of this thesis (see Chapter 1 and Conclusion of Chapter 4).

Appendix G Questionnaires used in the quantitative studies

Experiment

Surface Acting

1. In this scenario, how likely is that you would pretend to have emotions that you do not really have when interacting with your manager?
2. In this scenario, how likely is that you would resist expressing your true feelings to your manager?
3. In this scenario, how likely is that you would hide your true feelings about work-related issues when interacting with your manager?
4. In this scenario, how likely is that you would put on an act when communicating with your manager?
5. In this scenario, how likely is that you would put on a “mask” in order to express the appropriate emotions (the ones that are encouraged in this organisation) to your manager?

Survey

Part one

PT

1. When encountering an issue at work, I think of what I can do best.
2. When dealing with an adverse situation at work, I think about how I can best cope with the situation.
3. When encountering an adverse situation at work, I think about how to change the situation.
4. When working on a task, I think about a plan of what I can do best.

Surface Acting

1. When interacting with my coworkers, I pretend to have positive emotions I do not really have.
I resist expressing my true feelings to my coworkers.
2. I hide my true feelings about a number of issues when interacting with my coworkers.
3. I put on an act when communicating with my coworkers.
4. I put on a “mask” in order to express the appropriate emotions to my coworkers.

Part 2

Psychological Safety

1. I'm not afraid to be myself at work.
2. I am afraid to express my opinions at work.

3. There is a threatening environment at my work

Self-efficacy

1. If there are difficult problems at work, I know how to solve them.
2. At work, I reach my goals even when unexpected situations arise.
3. If I encounter obstacles at work, I always find a way to overcome them.
4. Even if it takes me a lot of time and energy, I reach my goals at work.
5. If something new comes to me at work, I always know how to deal with it.

Imposing PT

1. At work, I feel the need to demonstrate I'm a positive person as others expect it from me.
2. In the workplace, I am strongly influenced by the opinions of others in deciding how much positivity I need to demonstrate.
3. Other people influence what behaviours I demonstrate at work.
4. At work, I behave in a manner that people expect me to behave.
5. I usually do what other people tell me to do in the workplace.