

# The Positive-Activity Model Revisited: A Review From Critical Juncture Perspective of COVID-19

Bojindra Prasad Tulachan

Department of Global Culture Industry Management, Calvin University,  
Yongin, Republic of Korea

Krishna Prasad Paudyal

Department of English, Nepal Sanskrit University,  
Kathmandu, Nepal

The positive-activity model deals with the role of the positive interventions in increasing wellbeing in normal situation. In that positive responses (positive emotions, positive cognitions, positive behaviors and need satisfaction) mediate the relationship between performance of interventions and wellbeing, whereas intervention traits, person traits and individual-intervention fit moderate the very relationship. In absence of the external environment of traumatic events or situations in the very model, COVID-19 is critical factor to further explaining the mechanism. Therefore, the objective of this frontline paper is to unveil the uncharted individual-in-situation and the individual-in-situation-intervention fit as moderators in explaining the relationship between the performance of the intervention and wellbeing in the backdrop of traumatic events or situations. In doing so, the positive-activity model is revisited and the COVID-19 phenomenon as reference is put into consideration. To that end, propositions are made for larger development of the positive-intervention framework. Further, future research is asked to make empirical investigations on the onset of/post-traumatic events or situations such as COVID-19 pandemic.

*Keywords:* critical juncture perspective, COVID-19, individual-in-situation, individual-in-situation-intervention fit, positive-activity model

## Introduction

With massive concentration on positive psychology in recent literatures, the positive interventions do cope up in increasing happiness and wellbeing in people (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005; Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). In that, the recent positive-activity model predicts wellbeing based on mediating variables, such as positive emotions, positive thoughts, positive behaviors and need satisfaction in normal situation. Further, it projects the moderating role of person features, intervention features and person-intervention fit in the model (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). The puzzle is that the framework does not consider the role of positive interventions and of the moderating variables of individual-in-situation and individual-in-situation-intervention fit in the traumatic events or situations. Thus, this study makes more sense in further development of the

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Bojindra Prasad Tulachan, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Global Culture Industry Management, Calvin University, Yongin, Republic of Korea.

Krishna Prasad Paudyal, Ph.D. Candidate, Associate Professor, Department of English, Nepal Sanskrit University, Kathmandu, Nepal.

positive-intervention framework in the backdrop of recent traumatic event such as COVID-19 outbreak throughout the world.

Normally, human beings are interacting with the external environment and responding accordingly as per the individual cognitions (Bandura, 1991). However, the external environment is not always the same all the time. In traumatic events or situations, there is huge depletion of psychological and physical resources in individuals (Freedy, Resnick, & Kilpatrick, 1992) in that they need social support and coping strategies (Leavell, Aten, & Boan, 2012). Thus, the positive interventions as coping strategies would help to increasing wellbeing in individuals. On the other, responding to traumatic events or situations is not an easy task for every individual in the same manner. Individual-in-situation and individual-in-situation intervention fit interventions would matter in increasing or decreasing wellbeing in individuals during/post-traumatic events or situations such as COVID-19 pandemic.

In the next wave, we review of literatures on positive-activity model in the backdrop of traumatic/post-traumatic events or situations such as COVID-19 pandemic. In the third wave, in lack of profound literatures on the role of positive interventions and of moderating variables during/post-traumatic events or situations, we propose the propositions on direct relationship of the performance of positive interventions with wellbeing and individual-in-situation and individual-in-situation intervention fit as moderating variables. In the fourth wave, we make conclusion and, in the final wave, ask future researchers to carry out further empirical investigations for validity of our propositions.

### **The Positive-Activity Model Revisited**

Positive psychology interventions have markedly drawn the attention to both the readership and the researchers in recent years. Thus, the study of positive psychology and positive interventions is in massive rise in increasing wellbeing in individuals, families and communities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). The study has made a breakthrough in multidisciplinary areas, ranging from clinical science, and public health to organizational domain. When it comes to school children, the positive interventions do assist build wellbeing, such as relationship and academic performance through positive character strengths, positive emotions and positive cognitions (Waters, 2011). With the success stories of the positive interventions to enhance wellbeing and happiness in individuals, the effective intervention making is in the increasing trend through the dynamics of interventions. Sin and Lyubomirsky (2009) argue that there is huge need of interventions for patients to enhance future wellbeing due to thriving research results.

Of the positive interventions, Sin & Lyubomirsky (2009) contend that the self-guided volitional or intentional interventions, like thinking mindfully, thinking gratefully or thinking optimistically contribute individuals to increase happiness literally (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Also, the positive psychology interventions significantly help reduce depression in individuals (Sin, Della Porta, & Lyubomirsky, 2011). Of them, the recent theoretical model has more to say on increased well-being. In that, the relationship between simple interventions and increased wellbeing are mediated by positive emotions, positive cognitions, positive behaviors and need satisfaction, whereas the very relationship is moderated by the intervention features, person features and person-intervention fit (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). With the thriving theoretical and practical implications of positive psychology and the positive interventions, the area of positive psychology has moved from its core domain of study to multidisciplinary studies. To the growing readership, the organizational researchers have used self-guided volitional or intentional positive interventions in

organizational contexts. Meyers, Van Woerkom, and Bakker (2013) have meta-analyzed total 15 studies representing computer-based training, coaching-based interventions and a few self-guided interventions, such as loving-kindness meditation, counting one's blessings etc. from workplace sampling in organizations on the effect of positive interventions. The objective of such intervention studies is to develop positivity in employees, such as positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, positive civic traits and positive institutions. That was to enhance employees' wellbeing and performance and reduce anxiety, frustration, and burn out, stress, depression or such trauma (Meyers, Van Woerkom, & Bakker, 2013). The number of such positive interventions is very few. However, the studies are in the rise. The references of the latest studies are gratitude and social-connectedness interventions in increasing wellbeing in employees in organizational setting (Kaplan et al., 2014) and mindful intervention for work recovery (Hülshager, Feinholdt, & Nübold, 2015).

With the empirical validations of the intervention studies, we consider "*How do simple positive activities increase wellbeing?*" in the backdrop of major theoretical model. The focus of the theoretical model is on the intentional or volitional effect of the simple positive activities in increasing wellbeing. Further, the framework mediates the relationship of the performance of positive activities and wellbeing through positive emotions, positive thoughts, and positive behaviors and need satisfaction, whereas it is moderated by activity features, person features, and person-activity fit in normal situations. However, it has failed to address the external environment of traumatic events or situations, individuals gone through it and the effect of the overall interaction in such different environment. The framework also does not project the role of positive interventions in increasing wellbeing during/post-traumatic events or situations, and the role of individual-in-situation and individual-in-situation intervention fit as moderating variables. With such huge literature gap in the positive-activity framework, the objective of the frontline study is to contribute to the existing intervention theory of wellbeing "*How do simple positive activities increase wellbeing?*" against the backdrop of traumatic events or situations such as COVID-19 in the present context.

### **Individuals During Traumatic Events or Situations: A Critical Juncture Perspective of COVID-19**

A great deal of theories on sense of perception have heralded a long way down in given environment. Most of the theoretical assumptions have been made in the normal environmental contexts and there the interaction of the individuals with the environment is worthy to note down. Of the theories, Aristotelian perspective on sense of perception is twofold: common sensibility and the specific sensibility. The former is closer to err, whereas the latter is more to truth (Block, 1961). In this, the role of the sensory organs is very important in bringing the kind of sensibilities in life. On the other, Gibson (2002) argues that this is not about the processes of senses, such as environmental observation, retinal input to the brain, rather it is the on-the-spot observation and investigation about what things are around. The other way round in the argument on sense of perception is that it is the covert expressions (be it weak or strong) of the overt observations of the individuals in the environment. More precisely, it is the reflection of what one has gone through observations in the environment (Bem, 1972).

The sense of perception is likely to be acknowledged as "whole", not in the fragmentation, because it is overall the interaction between the individuals and the environment. Therefore, it is all about input-output process and storing in the mind as CPU and serves as a tool for individuals in life (Gibson, 2014). Seemingly,

the things happening around us are the default of the individuals' active and careful engagement (Ingold, 2000). Based on the observations of discourses put earlier, the sense of perception is to be understood as "one" because we cannot detach the individuals, their senses and the environment. Understanding in compact makes the discourses more meaningful. The recent studies have held strong hold in multi-disciplinary areas, such as psychology, clinical studies, organizational studies and many other domains of studies.

In case of natural disaster (or traumatic events or situations), the individuals are at loss of psychological resources (Kaniasty & Norris, 1993) and they are more towards coping strategy (Lazarus, 1981) and towards solving the problem against adverse situations (Spurrell & McFarlane, 1993). The individuals are in the pursuit of having the lost resources (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2007). Further, the individuals in the adverse of natural disaster situation are at their best in reviving the lost resources (Hobfoll, 2001) in that individuals with internal locus of control are more in that trajectory against the individuals with external locus of control (Peacock & Wong, 1996). For all to revive and get back normal as soon as possible, coping with social support is highly applicable for individuals going through traumatic situation of natural disaster of any kind (Hobfoll, 1988).

Thus, psychological impairment during the traumatic events or situations can be another area of studies in positive psychology and positive psychology intervention studies. Scanty literatures in empirical studies have been reported in need of further research. Of them, most importantly the gratitude practice has held significant impact in the individuals during or post-traumatic event of Gorkha Earthquake-2015, Nepal (Tulachan, 2019). The more the students having traumatic stories were grateful, the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) level significantly decreased in them (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). Gratitude interventions during painful events helped increase wellbeing and happiness (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010). Further, individuals with bulimia nervosa were reported with increased body image in the presence of positive intervention of gratitude (Geraghty, Wood, & Hyland, 2010), whereas the physical symptoms significantly decreased in them (Emmons, McCullough, & Tsang, 2003).

With mounting transmission, and of ever increasing death tolls due to COVID-19 pandemic across the world, the medical science is at learning stage by large, hence appears at quite dilemma. Accordingly, very scanty is acknowledged whether the positive interventions and of moderating variables we are proposing do have anything to do with wellbeing in traumatic events or situations such as COVID-19. Thus, the objective of this frontline paper is to propose propositions for the extension of the positive-activity framework. Based on the circumstances of traumatic events or situations, the following propositions are held for further empirical studies, including COVID-19 pandemic for further validation of interventions, and of moderating variables in positive psychology domain:

Proposition 1: On the onset of traumatic events or situations in the external environment (such as COVID-19 pandemic), the performance of positive interventions would enhance wellbeing in individuals.

Proposition 2: On the onset of traumatic events or situations in the external environment (such as COVID-19 pandemic), individual-in-situation would moderate the relationship between the performance of positive interventions and wellbeing in individuals.

Proposition 3: On the onset of traumatic events or situations in the external environment (such as COVID-19 pandemic), individual-in-situation intervention fit would moderate the relationship between the performance of positive interventions and wellbeing in individuals.

## Conclusions

The external environment is always at flux. The traumatic events or situations are remarkably different from normal situation in that individuals observe or experience the traumatic events or situations very closely. In such critical juncture of traumatic events or situations, they are at loss of psychological resources and are in need of coping strategies in increasing their wellbeing. Further, the individuals are at different situations during pandemic such as COVID-19 and need special interventions in increasing wellbeing. In such backdrop, the positive-activity model has failed to address such phenomenon in the framework, earlier. To that ground, our proposition is that individual-in-situation and individual-in-situation intervention fit would moderate the relationship between the performance of the interventions and wellbeing, substantially.

## Future Research

As positive psychology intervention studies are largely growing, the future research is to be directed to the study of positive interventions in the background of traumatic events or situations. In that, the future researchers are asked to make empirical investigation on the mediation effect between positive interventions and wellbeing on the onset of traumatic or post-traumatic events or situations. Further, they can examine the moderation effect of individual-in-situation and individual-in-situation intervention fit in the similar events or situations. Thus, the significant amount of scientific results would contribute to the enhancement of the positive-activity framework, substantially. The practitioners would have practical implications of coping strategies in times of traumatic events or situations as part of immediate come-back from lost psychological resources. This way they can save any individuals from traumatic events or situations at all levels across the globe and make them positive, energetic to lead their lives further. Thirdly, the future researchers can preferably go for longitudinal research with double control groups (active and passive). This will bring more rigorous results as well as it will help reduce controversies in the earlier two-group intervention method. The active control group in the middle will check and balance both the experimental and the passive control groups in its overall result and contribute to earlier version of placebo-controlled (Hawthorne-controlled) research design.

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