Managing to Flourish

Activity

90 Minutes

* **Introduction**.

Flourishing is an optimal state of wellbeing where an individual feels positive emotions and functions well psychologically and socially. Both undergraduate and graduate Management students concern themselves with this concept because organizations where employees describe themselves as flourishing experience higher profitability and customer loyalty. This session will review the theoretical foundation of the Short Form Flourishing Assessment and options for using it to help students reflect on their own state of wellbeing, and learn how they as future managers can create organizational conditions where employees have opportunities to flourish. Participants will take the assessment and receive resources for using the assessment in their classrooms.

* **Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**. Briefly specify the relevant background literature that the exercise is based upon and how your session contributes to effective teaching and learning in the field of management.

The term flourishing comes from Greek Virtue Ethics which attempt to answer the question “What is the nature of a good life?” (Devetterre, 2002). Indicators of individual flourishing include:

* Experiencing a sense of wellbeing that involves a combination of *feeling* well and *functioning* well psychologically and socially. (*Keyes, 2002)*
* Ability to reflect on one’s actions and their implications, and to choose those that will lead to a well-functioning life overall, regardless of short-term inconvenience or pain. (*Hinchliffe, 2004)*
* Commitment that seeking one’s own good is compatible with and even predicated on seeking the good of the community. (*Devettere, 2002)*

These indicators suggest individual flourishing cannot be accomplished apart from community. Thus, the concept of flourishing is a useful framework for discussing organizational success and the role of managers in creating it with and for their employees.

Corey Keyes has developed and validated a public use short form assessment of flourishing based on 14 symptoms of wellbeing. He is careful to distinguish flourishing from happiness, and notes the opposite of flourishing is not depression, but rather languishing. In fact, “an individual who is experiencing emotional or physical difficulty can still be described as flourishing based on how he or she faces and overcomes these circumstances.” (Keyes, 2002). In his model, human flourishing is primarily an objective state that in principle could be ascertained from a third-person perspective, and there is room for the paradox of the flourishing person who may be feeling unhappy (Gómez-Lobo, 2008). This makes flourishing a potentially more useful concept for managers and leaders of organizations in challenging circumstances as compared to historical measures of employee satisfaction.

* Devettere, R. (2002). *Introduction to virtue ethics: Insights of the Ancient Greeks*. Washington, DC: Washington University Press.
* Gómez-Lobo, A. (2008). Happiness and “Human Flourishing.” *Health Affairs*, *27*(3),895.
* Hinchliffe, G. (2004). Work and human flourishing. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *36*(5),535–547.
* Keyes, C. (2002). Complete mental health: An agenda for the 21st century. In C. Keyes & J. Haidt (Eds.), *Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
* **Learning Objectives**. Specify the learning objectives for the exercise by articulating the expected changes in knowledge, attitude, or skill that are associated with participation in the activity. What teaching topics are relevant to your session?

Participants who engage this session will leave with the knowledge and skills to:

* Define the term flourishing and explain how it represents the ideal state of human functioning.
* Administer and score the Flourishing Short Form Assessment
* Reflect on how the Flourishing Short Form Assessment can help them identify practical actions to increase their own sense of wellbeing.
* Identify practical strategies an aspiring manager can use to increase the opportunity for employees to flourish.
* **Exercise Overview**. Provide an overview of the activity/exercise, including the logistics of running the exercise (e.g. timing, materials, class size), the flow of the exercise, variations or alternate applications, debriefing guidelines (e.g. questions to ask, how students generally respond). The goal is to give the reviewer enough information so that they understand what the activity is that you plan to present in your session.

At our university undergraduate classes are 1 hour long 3 times/week, and graduate courses are 4 hours long 1 time/week. Because the total activity takes approximately 90 minutes in order to have adequate time for student reflection and discussion, I have structured the 90 minutes into two parts – theory and practice – each roughly 45 minutes long. Part I is essentially the same for undergraduate and graduate students, with both groups identifying relatively nuanced ways in which they personally flourish. In Part II I approach the discussion of managerial applications of the concept of flourishing in the workplace differently for undergraduate and graduate students as follows:

* + Undergraduate:
    - General question - What are ways in which your managers have helped you flourish at work?
    - Using the language of the 14 symptoms - What are practical actions you could take on your own at work to help you score yourself higher on some of the symptoms of flourishing?
    - Using the language of the 14 symptoms - What are practical actions your manager take to help you and your co-workers experience more flourishing at work?
  + Graduate: Move through the 3 questions for undergraduate students more quickly and discuss:
    - sing the language of the 14 symptoms - If you are currently a Supervisor, what are practical steps you could take to help your direct reports flourish more at work?
    - sing the language of the 14 symptoms - What organization-wide systems and practices would you like to see your company implement in order to help all employees flourish
* **Session Description.** Provide an overview of what you will actually do in the MOBTS conference session. Include a timeline for the session and how participants will be involved. Remember, reviewers are looking for participant engagement in these sessions.

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| 0:00 – 0:10 (10 minutes) | Assessment – As participants arrive and get seated, they will be instructed to take the assessment at their seat, and then set aside until later in the session. |
| 0:10 – 0:25 (15 minutes) | Welcome, Opening Discussion and Debrief:   * Speaker welcome/intro * In groups of 2 or 3, what are ways in which you have experienced the sense that you are flourishing? * Group sharing, list on white board |
| 0:25 – 0:30 (5) | Review Agenda and Goals for Session |
| 0:30 – 00:45 (15 minutes) | Brief Lecture   * Define flourishing * Theoretical background * Development of the assessment tool * 14 symptoms – connect back their own descriptions of flourishing which are posted on the white board |
| 0:45 – 1:00 (15 minutes) | Measuring Flourishing   * Learn to score and interpret the assessment * Discuss reactions, surprises, questions |
| 1:00 – 1:25 (25 Minutes) | Relevance to Management Classroom   * Why should managers care? * Brief review of research on benefits of organizational flourishing * Guiding management students to reflect on practical applications in organizational settings |
| 1:25 – 1:30 (5 minutes) | Conclusion and Takeaways |