

Inverting the pyramid of needs: Positive psychology's new order for labor success

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Abstract

Antecedents: Positive psychologists claim to have demonstrated a causal relationship between happiness and life success, with the former accounting for why people usually end up better off in life than others, especially at workplace. **Method:** In this paper we will analyse the role that happiness-based repertoires and techniques provided by positive psychologists are playing in the current labor sphere. **Results:** Positive psychologists' repertoires and techniques do not only meet the emerging demands derived from the changes in the notions of "work" and "worker" in the last decades, but also introduce a whole new logic in the construction of professional workers' subjectivity, according to which happiness becomes a necessary psychological state that workers must first achieve and develop in order to attain job success at work. **Discussion:** This emerging logic does not only circumscribe to the labor sphere, but also reflects a broader cultural and economic phenomenon.

Keywords: Positive psychology, psychology of labor, happiness, pyramid of needs, Maslow.

Resumen

Invertiendo la pirámide de las necesidades: la psicología positiva y la nueva lógica del éxito laboral. **Antecedentes:** los psicólogos positivos defienden haber demostrado una relación causal entre la felicidad y el éxito en la vida, siendo la primera la razón de por qué hay gente a la que le va mejor que a otra, especialmente en el ámbito del trabajo. **Método:** analizamos el papel que juegan los repertorios y las técnicas de la felicidad de los psicólogos positivos en el ámbito laboral actual. **Resultados:** los repertorios y técnicas de los psicólogos positivos no solamente satisfacen las nuevas demandas laborales surgidas en las últimas décadas a raíz de las transformaciones en las nociones de "trabajo" y "trabajador", sino que también introducen una lógica completamente nueva de la construcción de la subjetividad de los trabajadores, de acuerdo con la cual la felicidad deviene en un estado psicológico necesario que todo trabajador debe alcanzar y desarrollar con el fin de tener éxito. **Discusión:** esta lógica emergente, sin embargo, no se circumscribe únicamente al mundo laboral, sino que es síntoma de un fenómeno económico y cultural más amplio.

Palabras clave: psicología positiva, psicología del trabajo, felicidad, pirámide de las necesidades, Maslow.

From the early twentieth century, but especially from the 1950s onwards, few scholars have contributed to institutionalize certain insights on human behavior as much as economists and psychologist did. The economic and psychological spheres have intertwined at least from the time of Elton Mayo's Hawthorne Studies in the 1930s, intertwinement that has been strengthened along the second half of the twentieth century with the progressive appearance of hybrid disciplines such as Economic Psychology, Human Resources Management, Consumer Research, Marketing or Coaching, to name just a few. On the one hand, crucial concepts defining economic behavior have been increasingly impregnated of psychological language. On the other hand, transformations within market economy have had a great influence over mainstream psychological understandings of human behavior. Eva Illouz (2007, 2008) has coined the term "emotional capitalism" to refer

to this wide cultural process in which psychological management and economic behavior have progressively shaped each other. Psychological features —especially emotional ones— became an essential aspect of economic and corporate conduct, and the logic of economic exchange became crucial to shape and understand the psyche and the emotional life of individuals.

The concepts of "needs" and "happiness" (and related concepts to the latter, such as "satisfaction", "well-being" or "self-realization") are amongst the most representative examples with which both economists and psychologists have dealt in common along the past half century. The psychological theorization of these concepts was the hallmark of Humanist Psychology, which played a decisive role connecting the spheres of economy and psychology within the industrial milieu. As Roger Smith (1997), Kurt Danziger (1997) and others have claimed, Humanist Psychology did not only share a great deal of responsibility in the fact that western post-war societies became "psychological societies" —as Abraham Maslow himself stated, "we must psychologize human nature (Maslow, 1970: 7)—, but also in the fact that psychological repertoires and techniques on human "needs" and "happiness" have been modelling the organizational life ever since. Abraham Maslow's theory of motivation and his

world-wide famous “Pyramid of Needs” played an outstanding role in both aspects.

Certainly, the humanistic third force psychology promoted by Carl Rogers, Rollo May, Gardner Murphy, James Bugental, René Dubos, Charlotte Buhler, etc., was not as successful in the academia as it was in the cultural world in general and in the industrial sphere in particular. Within the latter, the theoretical contributions of the discipline proved to be essential in the transition from a “job-minded” managerial period, mainly focused on the optimum adjustment of workers to job’s specifications and requirements—characteristic of the taylorism age—to a “people-minded” managerial period vastly concerned with the idea that it was the job what should fit and satisfy certain motivational, emotional, affective and social needs of individuals as the most effective way to raise productivity and task performance (Wren, 1994). From the works of Elton Mayo, Henry Fayol, Gordon Allport, Henry Murray, Douglass McGregor and David McClelland up to the present, passing through what William Scott (1967) named “industrial humanism”—a widespread movement consolidated in the 1960s and in which a vast number of business schools, behavioral scientists, intellectuals and self-help writers took part—the study of human needs and happiness, as well as their relation to job performance and organizational productivity, has been a chief concern of managerial theories. On this matter, Maslow’s theory of human motivation offered a suggestive and apologetic background. By elevating human needs and happiness to the status of first-order psychological constructs, Maslow did not only help to consolidate the post-Taylorist idea that the management of the motivational, emotional and social assets of workers was of great economic utility for organizations, but also supported the managerial claim that the organization was one of the most privileged scenarios to which individuals must be committed in order to subsequently achieve self-realization.

The success of Maslow’s theory was tightly related to the fact that it provided a model of human behavior that qualified a great deal of organizational demands that were characteristic of post-war capitalism. As Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello (2007) pointed out, security formed an essential part of the implicit and distinctive definition of the work contract within this period, and Maslow’s “Pyramid of Needs” imparted psychological evidence to the spread belief that the need of security was of crucial importance, thus resting at the base of his hierarchy. According to Maslow (1970), certain needs of security and stability (that ranged from the mere physiological to more emotional and interpersonal ones) must be satisfied before the individual could consider developing higher personal tasks such as self-realization. In other words, it was assumed that the individual required a secured economic basis from which to start “growing as a person”. Within the industrial sphere of post-war capitalism, the postulated path that went from economic security to individual self-realization was implicit in the notion of “career”, a long-term working itinerary that involved not only the promise of regular salary and promotion opportunities, but also the guarantee that the most valid and efficient workers would be eventually hired under permanent contracts.

Nevertheless, market economy has remarkably changed in the last fifty years, and both the corporate setting and the notions of “job” and “security” have been transformed accordingly. Neoliberalism has brought a highly fluid, risky, deregulated, individualized, and consumption-centered economic setting (Bauman, 2001; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) within which a “new spirit of capitalism”

has arisen (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2006). This emergent new spirit has been followed by a relentless expansion of the field and scope of economics to every cultural sphere (Harvey, 2007); by a renewed emphasis on the utilitarian and technocratic principles of choice, efficiency, accountability and profit maximization (Lamont, 2012); and by the consolidation of a therapeutic ethos (Nolan, 1998) that places both emotional health (Illouz, 2007, 2008) and the claim for individual self-realization at the core of social progress (Honneth, 2004). Along with it, the “new spirit of capitalism” has also been followed by the appearance of a new working ethics as consequence of the continuous change in the nature of organizational life and of the progressive dissolution along the past decades of the ideas of job security and stability. Thus, the previous work contract between employers and employees has vanished, and foregoing dominant expectations of the workforce have become no longer tenable within the current economic and organizational life. As Bob Aubrey observed,

“Organizations nowadays have to assimilate a new reality and treat each employee as if s/he were a firm. This change means that some of the suppositions that had dominated industrial society have to be abandoned, first and foremost, the idea that people are looking for job security. This is a 1950s concept born out of Abraham Maslow’s famous “pyramid of needs,” with its postulate that fundamental needs must be satisfied before we can even begin to consider other types of fulfillment (...) [and that] the firm’s first responsibility was to create a secure environment, with fulfillment only coming at a later stage” (Aubrey, 1994, as cited in Boltanski & Chiapello, 2006: 185).

According to Aubrey’s perspective, one of the most characteristic changes brought by the emergent neoliberal working ethics is the exceptional stress on personal responsibility. Indeed, the progressive transition from external control to self-control may be regarded as one of the most significant features of the evolution of organizations and managerial theories within the last forty years. This transition is well exemplified in the replacement of the idea of “career” by the idea of a succession of working “projects”. While careers were defined as specific paths in which individuals needed to learn a definite set of skills in order to perform efficiently and climb the organizational ladder, projects are defined very differently. They are conceived as unstructured arrays of paths, objectives and risk-filled enterprises that demand individuals “learn to learn”, that is, to be flexible, autonomous and creative—demands that apply both to individuals and corporations alike—so they can set by themselves which are the best skills, means and choices that allow them to adapt to a highly uncertain market, perform efficiently, grow as workers and increase the odd of enrolling in more promising and challenging projects. Under this idea, the notion that best describes the kind of workers’ subjectivity in neoliberal capitalism is “human capital”.

Indeed, one of the deepest changes that subjectivity has experimented in the raise of neoliberal capitalism stems from the development of this notion of human capital. As Michel Feher (2009) points out, under post-war capitalism, subjectivity was split into two differentiated spheres: a labor power that was the property of the individual and that could be rented out in the market, and a bigger, incommensurable and inalienable inner part that was not subject to either the laws of economic exchange or the consumption of commodities. It was broadly assumed

that the individual could not grow personally in the same way as he grew materially, and that the spheres of production and consumption could be an impediment to developing the inner world. In consumer capitalism, on the contrary, subjectivity is not separated into these two different spheres; rather, the sphere of the self —authenticity, identity, personality— and the spheres of production and consumption mutually define each other, each sphere a condition of possibility to develop the others (see also Du Gay, 1996). In consequence, human capital is defined as everything that the individual presumably obtains through his own acts and choices —identity, social status, salary, etc.— and which is hypothetically due to the investment in and the deployment of those features that seemingly authentically define him, and makes him someone unique.

In other words, “human capital” is the expression of an emergent neoliberal condition in which workers increasingly think of themselves not as owners (of careers, qualifications, labor force), but as consumers (of goods, competences, knowledge) who instead of conceiving their occupation as a social duty, they must understand their job as a fulfilling enterprise that requires the autonomous application of all of their individual’s skills and abilities. The emergence of “projects” promised to replace the “false autonomy” of the 1960’s careers by a “genuine autonomy” based on self-knowledge, individual free-choice and personal development —a promise that has proved useful to delegate on workers many of the contingencies and contradictions derived from work context, thus displacing a great deal of the burden of the market uncertainty and competition onto individuals themselves.

As a consequence of these transformations, the expected “career itinerary” that went from job security to personal self-realization has vanished, and Maslow’s model of the “Pyramid of Needs” —on which not only managerial theory has relied in the last decades, but also multitude of clinical psychologists, counselors, educators, etc.— has become more and more unable to provide satisfying answers to the raising demands and necessities of the emerging economic and corporate setting. The increasing number of academic studies challenging the scientific validity of Maslow’s motivational theory (e.g., Daniels, 1988; Neher, 1991) have also undermined its usefulness for managerial theory as an explanatory model for worker’s subjectivity. Thus, new managerial approaches have been forced to look for new psychological models through which rethink the notions of human needs and happiness and their relationship to task performance, organizational behavior and job commitment, so alternative professional movements and academic disciplines addressing the nature of human needs and happiness have made their appearance in the last decades with the promise of filling this gap.

In this paper, we argue that positive psychology provides the most influential model in this regard. Highly influenced by several insights on human and economic behavior already present in humanist psychology, self-help literature and coaching (Cabanas & Huertas, 2014; Cabanas & Sánchez-González, 2012; García, Cabanas, & Loredó, 2015), positive psychology offers a renewed discourse on human needs and happiness that fully meets the emerging economic and organizational demands characteristic of neoliberal capitalism. We also argue that the most distinctive contribution of positive psychology to this matter has not been the dismissal of Maslow’s “Pyramid of Needs”, but its inversion. Thus, while humanist psychology and managerial theory assumed that certain material and social needs —such as a secure economic

background or healthy and intimate relationships— were prerequisites in the achievement of happiness, Positive psychology and neo-managerial theory understand that those needs are actually subordinated to the fulfillment of personal potentialities and the achievement of happiness. In other words, under the neoliberal subjectivity of “human capital”, happiness has become a prior condition to pursue the fulfillment of those economic and social needs that are no longer guaranteed, as well as to increase the odds of achieving valuable outcomes in the labor sphere. In this regard, we could say that along the last two decades, happiness has been established as one of the most urgent and primary of the needs of individuals in current societies.

Inverting the “Pyramid of Needs”, or how happiness is required to succeed

In advanced capitalist societies the working itinerary that went from personal security to personal self-realization is no longer available. Rather, if there is any working itinerary, it would be the opposite: individuals must first strive for their self-realization in order to achieve some security at any level, as well as to have any chance to climb up the social ladder. Self-realization is no longer conceived as a higher personal stage that individuals pursue once they have reached certain levels of economic and social stability, but an initial condition that individuals must meet in order to achieve employability, job performance, social skills, etc. Positive psychologists, indeed, provide a positivist and individualistic discourse that aims to scientifically justify happiness as a *necessary psychological state* from which to start pursuing the satisfaction of other needs, thus upending the hierarchy proposed in Maslow’s pyramid.

So far, managers, economists and psychologists have generated a vast scientific literature in which they related workplace success with personal satisfaction, assuming the broadly accepted idea that a worker is happy because s/he is successful. Accordingly, successful outcomes produce happiness and satisfaction, and the claimed high correlation between both variables allows taking the latter as a reliable criterion to assess the former. To this regard, both managers and human resources personnel were mainly concerned with the study of those working conditions —that is, cooperative versus competitive work, communicative patterns, leadership and supervision, rewarding/punishment systems, job enlargement, systems of participation and recognition, etc.— and with the identification of those individual traits —that is, extroverted versus introverted personality, high versus low IQ, achievement versus affiliative motivation, etc.— that were related to the enhancement of job performance and, as a consequence, that provided personal satisfaction. Although in the 90’s managers and psychologists started to suggest that the relationship between happiness and performance could be bidirectional, in most of the cases organizational studies still understood happiness as something derivate from optimum working conditions and/or high job performance (Wren, 1994). Along the last decade, however, positive psychologists have contested this assumption, asserting that the relationship between happiness and working success should be better understood in the reverse direction. Thus, while they acknowledge that “past research has demonstrated a relationship between happiness and workplace success”, they also claim that this previous research has failed to grasp the “correct” causality between success and happiness, namely, “that happiness is not only

correlated with workplace success but that happiness often precedes measures of success” (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008: 101).

In general terms, by alleging support on cross-sectional, longitudinal and experimental studies, positive psychologists state that as “happy people are more likely to acquire favorable life circumstances” (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005: 803), happiness brings up success in many valuable personal, social and economic valuable events. Happiness lies underneath the achievement of many desirable outcomes such as a superior mental and physical health; higher longevity and less medication use and substance abuse; high-quality social relationships and greater prosocial behavior; or fulfilling marriages and more stable romantic relationships (e.g., Diener & Chan, 2011; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Fredrickson, 2009; Seligman, 2011), to name just a few.

The world of labor, though, is one of the spheres that draws more attention amongst positive psychologists, stressing that “happiness is an important precursor and determinant of career success” (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008: 101). According to them, happy workers perform higher and are more productive; show greater “organizational citizenship behavior”; they are more committed to their jobs; cope better with organizational changes and multitasking demands; show less burnout, emotional exhaustion and job withdrawal; and are more employable (e.g., Herrbach, 2006; Ilies et al., 2006; Luthans et al., 2007). They also claim that happy workers show more autonomy and flexibility; engage in more risky behaviors by entering novel situations and pursuing newer and more challenging goals; make more creative and efficient decisions; easily recognize promising opportunities; and build richer and more extensive social networks, all of them valuable personal features that increase the odds of achieving more secure and better jobs and attaining higher incomes in the future (e.g., Baron, 2008; Diener et al., 2002; Graham, Eggers, & Sukhtankar, 2004; Judge & Hurst, 2008; Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2007). To this regard, in his latest review on happiness and well-being studies, Ed Diener concludes that all “these findings are compelling because they rule out reverse causality from good performance to job satisfaction” (Diener, 2012, p. 593).

Besides drawing upon some cross-sectional, longitudinal and experimental studies, positive psychologists also base their defense of the causal relation between happiness and work success on what they call the “upward spiral” of happiness (Fredrickson, 2009). According to this idea, since happy people are more motivated, perform better, build relationships that are more positive, cope better with uncertainty and changing conditions, and enjoy better health, happy people would presumably achieve a wider number of early successes in life, this resulting in a cumulative advantage that would increase the probability of achieving subsequent successes. To this regard, positive psychologists claim that, by triggering a sort of a “Matthew Effect”, higher happiness levels lead to a series of short-term achievements that would set the tone for long-run ones, this explaining why some people end up better off than others, both in their lives in general and in their working projects in particular (Judge & Hurst, 2008).

Amongst positive psychologists, one of the most popular models that would explain this “upward spiral” effect of happiness is Barbara Fredrickson’s “Broaden-and-build theory” (Fredrickson, 2001, 2013). As stated by this theory, positive thoughts, affects and emotions —unlike negative ones— increase awareness and cognitive processes in a way that widens individuals’ outlook about the world and allow them to take in more information of

their surroundings —broaden effect. Positive states also enable individuals to “produce” durable and effective “personal resources such as competence (e.g., environmental mastery), meaning (e.g., purpose in life), optimism (e.g., pathways thinking), resilience, self-acceptance, positive relationships, as well as physical health”, resources “upon which people draw to navigate life’s journey with greater success” (Fredrickson, 2013: 3) —build effect. People who exploit these “broaden-and-build effects” of positive states are considered people who “flourish” (Catalino & Fredrickson, 2011), that is, individuals who “live within an optimal range of human functioning, one that connotes goodness, generativity, growth, and resilience” (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005: 678). In other words, happy individuals are those who do grow and “do good by feeling good” (Fredrickson, 2013), thus happiness —and related aspects such as positive affects, positive emotions, optimism, hope, resilience, etc.— becomes the key to succeed in whatever the goal any person may pursue.

Once established a causal relationship between happiness and life success, positive psychologists claim that this relationship holds mainly when happiness is not a temporary, fleeting or passing state. Presumably, happiness is much more a matter of frequency than of intensity, so low-grade but frequent positive emotions and feelings best define happiness than intense but low-frequent ones (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008). In this regard, positive psychologists state that “chronically happy people” are in general more successful than temporary happy people, and that “their success is in large part a consequence of their happiness” (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005: 804). Although along the past decade positive psychologists have discussed about whether happiness is a trait-like (genetic) or a state-like (developmental) construct (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), the most commonly accepted assumption amongst them is that happiness is something that can be trained to a great extent. To this effect, positive psychologists provide a wide variety of positive psychological techniques under the promise to enhance people’s happiness. From this point of view, thus, becoming a “chronically happy person” means to frequently and constantly exercise the muscle of happiness.

In *Motivation and Personality*, Maslow stated that happiness (or self-realization) was about being true to one’s own nature, that is, about doing what the individual is fitted for: “A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself” (1970: 46). Maslow claimed that once the lower-needs had been satisfied, individuals could start “growing well” by doing what they do best, so practicing their inner abilities and interests would lead individuals to a psychologically healthy and fulfilling life. *Mutatis mutandis*, this stance highly resembles the famous idea of “strengths and virtues” proposed by positive psychologists, namely, that individuals are naturally equipped with a certain set of inner psychological potentialities that entail “a particular way of behaving, thinking, or feeling that is authentic and energizing to the user” (Linley & Burns, 2010: 4). According to Positive psychology’s father, Martin Seligman (2011), a “good life” cannot be attained as a permanent state, but through a continuous self-cultivation and development of the individual’s strengths. It is by consistently and regularly exercising their inner strengths and virtues how individuals achieve their “optimal” level of “functioning, development and performance”, and positive psychologists provide several scientific methods to assess their authentic capabilities and techniques to guide them throughout their daily practice.

In the labor sphere, a striking example of that is the emergent notion of “psychological capital” (PsyCap). A wide array of positive “psy” professionals, managers and coaches now suggest to move beyond the notion of “human capital” and focus instead on the development of what they call “psychological capital”, a field of study that it is not only concerned with “what you are”, but also with “what you are becoming” (Luthans et al., 2007; Newman & Ucbasaran, 2014). According to positive psychologists, “psychological capital” is about working on happiness-related aspects such as personal strengths, self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience in order to increase workers’ odds to succeed at challenging tasks, achieve a competitive advantage, make positive attributions about their outcomes, persevere toward goals, and “bounce back and even beyond” when they are beset by problems and adversity (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Individuals have to find by themselves what makes them unique, authentic and indispensable for others, what strengths and virtues they can offer that are profitable for others, what values they inspires in others —self-improvement, ambition, resiliency, social abilities, creativity, etc.—, and what are the best strategies they can undertake in order to grow as an “entity”.

Besides particular strengths and capabilities, positive psychologists emphasize that positive emotions, affects and cognitions ought to be also frequently exercised. As they state, “frequent positive affect is the hallmark of happiness” (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), and this is so because “while negativity dominates positivity in intensity, positivity dominates negativity in frequency” (Fredrickson, 2013: 6). In this line, Lahna Catalino and Barbara Fredrickson (2011) reported that people who experience more frequent positive states thrive because they make more out of routine activities, better capitalize on pleasant events of their lives, and build more personal resources over time than people who do not.

Discussion

It would not be inaccurate to say that, from all this literature, it follows that to continuously work on happiness is *condicio sine qua non* to attain success in almost every domain of life. This is consistent with the fact that, in the last decades, neoliberal societies are witnessing a drastic “happiness turn” (Ahmed, 2010), a “turn” in which happiness has become a sort of moral imperative, as well as an indispensable framework through which to reshape the workers’ identity within the emerging economic and labor setting of consumer capitalism. As aforementioned, if Humanist Psychology shared a great deal of responsibility in the transformation of western post-war societies into psychological societies, we could say that Positive Psychology plays an outstanding role in the fact that neoliberal societies have become psychological societies flooded with the necessity to achieve happiness.

The need to continuously self-cultivate one’s own happiness fits, at least, three central demands characteristic of neoliberal subjectivity, namely, the stress on the notions of personal autonomy, reflexivity and progress. Happiness combines the modern romantic ideal of the emotional and affective inner life both as the drive of human action and as a space that has to be cultivated and expanded, with the rational and utilitarian demand of self-control as the ability to discipline and be responsible for channeling emotions in terms of one’s interests. In this regard, notions such as “emotional intelligence” are no longer an oxymoron, but the definition of a

“fully functioning person” who has no choice but to make self-fulfilling, reflexive and strategic choices amongst a highly plural and heterogeneous corpus of options, as every choice made by individuals at any moment is not only liable for defining them, but it is also liable either for appreciating or to depreciating their worth as persons (Feher, 2009). Autonomy and reflexivity, hence, require the continuous investment in oneself, that is, to enroll in an incessant search for goods and psychological techniques that allow continuous personal growth and progress.

As noted elsewhere (Cabanas & Illouz, 2015; Cabanas & Sánchez-González, 2012), to the neoliberal notion of happiness underlies the idea that individuals are “Self-Made Men”, though “Self-Made Men” whose “Self” is never completely or fully “Made”, because it is presupposed that it always can be fuller and better. This assumption has important psychological and economic implications. On the one hand, as Eva Illouz (2008) points out, the imperative of striving for higher and higher levels of self-improvement brings new narratives of suffering. Individuals are worried about never being able to “catch up”, giving them a sense of meaninglessness, emptiness and depression when they feel overburdened by “the project of becoming the best part of themselves”. On the other hand, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) point out, this “fundamental incompleteness of the ‘self’” lies at the core of the second modernity in which neoliberal capitalism ascended, being undoubtedly useful for a market that links the ideal of limitless self-improvement to the principles of insatiable consumption and productivity.

Indeed, “insatiability” might be regarded as one of the principal tenets of neoliberal consumer societies, as well as main characteristic of the new working ethics of “human capital”, according to which the sphere of the self (authenticity, identity, personality) and the spheres of production and consumption mutually feed each other, as aforementioned, so the more one sphere is enlarged, the more the other increases. Happiness fits this feature of insatiability: always incomplete by definition, the “happy self” demands the continuous and frequent exercise of positive emotions, affects and cognitions in order to attain success in any objective the individual may pursue, with an expanding “happiness industry” claiming to offer multitude of products and psychological techniques to enhance happiness (Davies, 2015). This “happy individual” —autonomous, reflexive and fundamentally incomplete— lies at the core of the type of subjectivity that is simultaneously presupposed and targeted by “neoliberal governmentality”, as well as at the center of the institutionalized expectations inherent in the reproduction of society (Binkley, 2011, 2014). As Carl Cederström and André Spicer point out in “The Wellness Syndrome”, happiness has become a pervasive ideology that stresses the insource of responsibility, delineates a new moral regime that defines what is right and wrong, promises rewards for those who engage in psychic self-development, and punishes those who fail to conform to it (2015).

Therefore happiness does not only mirror and emphasize the principal tenets of neoliberal subjectivity. It also introduces a whole new condition for the construction of identity in neoliberal societies, namely, a condition in which happiness itself stands as a first-order necessity to virtually achieve any valuable outcome in current societies, with Positive Psychology playing an outstanding role in this since its appearance in the academia at the turn of the century.

Conclusion

The influence of Positive Psychology has been outstanding within the cultural and academic sphere since it made its appearance at the turn of the century. Its influence within the working sphere has also been exceptional, to the extent that the happiness-based repertoires and techniques developed by positive psychologists are changing the organizational way of thinking. By stating that the causal relation between happiness and works success is one of the most striking “findings” of the last decades, positive psychologists argue that previous managerial views have to change the focus and intervene in people’s happiness as the most efficient and successful way to increase work performance and to improve working organizational conditions, not the reverse. Accordingly, workers also have to change their perspective if they are to succeed within the new emerging condition of “working projects”. Positive psychologists claim that happiness explains why some people end up better off in life than others, as well as why people do better at work and succeed in the world of labor—presumably, happy workers would perform better, show more flexibility, engage in more risky behaviors, pursue challenging objectives, are more employable, achieve early successes, demonstrate more commitment to their jobs, suffer from less

job exhaustion, and recognize promising opportunities and build great and profitable social networks.

Drawing upon the literature above displayed, we have developed the argument that happiness studies are channeling an economic and cultural process in which the language of needs and the constructive process of worker’s identity are changing, with happiness being progressively understood as a sort of *necessary psychological state* to thrive in life in general, and in the current working sphere in particular. We call this a process of “inversion of the ‘Pyramid of Needs’”, process that, consistent with the economic reality posited by neoliberalism, advances an entire new logic in the construction of workers’ selfhood in the new century. Positive Psychology plays an outstanding role in this process by raising happiness to the status of a first-need category whose achievement has become a precondition to increase people’s chances of fulfilling other needs that are highly socially valuable but that are no longer guaranteed, such as getting a job, thriving in work projects, securing income, building profitable social networks, having satisfying marriages, or living a mentally and physically healthy life, to name a few. In other words, by stressing the main demand of the neoliberal self-care-therapeutic culture, to wit, that individuals must govern and take care of themselves, Positive Psychology establishes happiness as one of the most urgent needs for individuals in neoliberal societies.

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