Course: Positive institutions

- Block: 2
- 6 ECTS

In the course Positive Institutions, different levels (individual, team and organization) will be addressed in investigating the conditions that are necessary to develop institutions and organizations which can safeguard the well-being of individuals.

This course will broaden the scope to institutional and organizational factors that may impact the well-being and flourishing of individuals and communities, in line with the third pillar of positive psychology that focuses on positive institutions or communities.

We will discuss the implications of positive psychology and well-being principles for institutions such as education, (mental) health care and work organizations. Regarding mental health care, the effectiveness of the so-called strength-based approach (see Rapp & Goscha, 1997) will be discussed. This approach is based on the belief that clients are most successful at achieving their goals when they identify and utilize their strengths, abilities, and assets. Clients are therefore assisted in recognizing and utilizing the strengths they may not recognize within themselves, thereby regaining power over their lives (Greene, Lee, & Hoffpauir, 2005).

Regarding education, we will discuss the effects of initiatives to teach children and adolescents both traditional skills and ‘happiness skills’ (Seligman et al., 2009). Bringing about changes in institutions such as health care and educations should be based on systemic changes in the organizations that are involved. In other words, to deliver positive education it is not sufficient to implement a course on happiness skills in the curriculum. In order to secure the well-being of both teachers and students, the management of the school, and the relations between teachers need to change as well. Therefore, we will address phenomena such as positive leadership, positive relationships, and inclusive talent management. For instance, studies have indicated that when leaders enact the features of psychological capital (i.e., hope, optimism, resilience, and self-esteem), follower positivity, performance and trust in the leader is enhanced.

Positive institutions also need to be based on inclusive talent management. In contrast to exclusive talent-management approaches that are directed at a small, elitist percentage of the workforce only, inclusive talent-management approaches are directed at the whole workforce and assume that employee and organizational flourishing can best be achieved by focusing on the positive qualities residing in every individual. Talent is seen as universal, meaning that everyone possesses certain positive traits, and defined in broad terms, considering various forms of talent even if they might seem atypical for the working context.

We will discuss evidence-based practices in the area of work and organization that may contribute to the development of positive institutions.