



# Positive Organizational Psychology in Archaeological Fieldwork

Madaline Harris-Schober, Gemma M Lee, Lily V Nash and Thomas J Keep

[madalineh@student.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:madalineh@student.unimelb.edu.au); [glee1@student.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:glee1@student.unimelb.edu.au); [lnash1@student.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:lnash1@student.unimelb.edu.au); [thomas.j.keep@gmail.com](mailto:thomas.j.keep@gmail.com)

Recent studies conducted on students and early career archaeologists have detected a perception of negative culture surrounding fieldwork with many participants expressing the attitude that field schools are laborious rites of passage rather than opportunities for growth (Muckle 2014). In these fieldwork experiences, physical and mental struggle is often considered normal due to the often harsh conditions that archaeologists work in (Scott 2017). Reports of negative fieldwork cultures have been compounded by recent studies investigating the incidence of sexual harassment and assault in the field. One such study, the 'Survey of Academic Field Experiences (SAFE): Trainees Report Harassment and Assault' (Clancy et al. 2014) found that of the 666 respondents (nearly a quarter of which were archaeologists), 64 percent reported personally experiencing sexual harassment and over 20 percent reported personal instances of sexual assault. Overwhelmingly, harassment experienced during fieldwork was aimed at students and post-doctoral researchers.

*"Anecdotal evidence of negative behavior on site has included extremes such as sexual assault, however it is more common for negative management styles to impact site dynamics. This can lead to the perpetuation of potentially harmful attitudes on 'being tough' and a negative focus on inability."*

Muckle 2014



Photo courtesy of the Jezreel Valley Regional Project

Considering these reports, it is clear that creating a positive workplace for archaeological fieldwork is paramount to ensuring not only a safer work environment, but one that is conducive to academic development and the overall wellbeing of students and early-career researchers in the field.

We believe that the tools for creating a positive fieldwork experience can be found in studies concerning the implementation of positive organizational psychology (POP) in wider workplace environments.

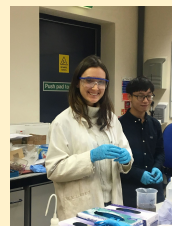


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POP has been defined as "the scientific study of positive subjective experiences and traits in the workplace and positive organizations, and its application to improve the effectiveness and quality of life in organizations" (Donaldson & Ko 2010). This approach focuses on emphasizing strengths rather than weaknesses with a focus on individual and community thriving (Bakker and Schaufeli 2008). Previous scholarship on POP has provided compelling evidence that adopting a positive psychology model in the workplace can benefit employee psychological health, empowerment and work engagement (Mendes & Stander 2011) and promotes a state of human flourishing (Donaldson & Ko 2010). Improvement often occurs through promoting the development of several core positive organizational behaviors in employees: self-efficacy, hope, optimism, subjective well-being and resiliency (Donaldson & Ko 2010; Luthans 2002).

The potential benefits of implementing POP tools and practises in the archaeological field workplace:

In light of POP's previous success in improving the workplace, we believe that this approach may also provide a foundation to build a more positive fieldwork environment in archaeology. Implementing the core principles of POP into archaeological field schools and/or fieldwork programs offers the potential to increase staff and student satisfaction, fulfilment and overall health while also minimising the negativity which can be caused by high-stress fieldwork environments. To investigate the utility of POP in archaeology, the authors plan to conduct a study which will survey the field experiences of students. Our proposed study will investigate to what extent, if any, the tenets of positive organizational psychology are adhered to and whether this is associated with a more positive student experience. There are currently no studies which have applied positive psychology or positive organizational psychology tools and techniques to archaeological field schools and we believe that by doing so, this research project will provide a unique framework in which to build a more positive working environment in archaeological fieldwork.



Students of Durham University working in Archaeology Lab



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The blog [www.positivearchaeology.wordpress.com](http://www.positivearchaeology.wordpress.com) was created to discuss the preliminary implementation of these ideas and solutions in archaeological fieldwork in a public forum.

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