The Organization as a Romantic Partner™: An Initial Exploration of the Parallels of Employee-Organization Relationships to Romantic Interpersonal Relationships

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Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics, College of Liberal and Professional Studies, in the School of Arts and Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania.
Advisor: Janet Greco

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Abstract
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This paper conducts an exploratory examination of the organizational dynamics that create the conditions for employees to develop and demonstrate cognitive and emotional behavior toward their employing organization that parallel similar behaviors in romantic interpersonal relationships.

The framework of this examination is a literature review in the form of an academic explication of a corporate TEDx talk given to employees of a global, Fortune 500 corporation. During this explication, the relevance and validity of the metaphor to employee work life is tested.

This paper contributes to ongoing research regarding employee-organization relationships by providing an additional lens for study and research of the positive and negative consequences of these relationships while presenting potential solutions.

Keywords
employee, organization, organizational behavior

Comments
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THE ORGANIZATION AS A ROMANTIC PARTNER:
AN INITIAL EXPLORATION OF THE PARALLELS OF
EMPLOYEE-ORGANIZATION RELATIONSHIPS TO
ROMANTIC INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

Employee-organization relationships have been extensively studied in the organizational behavior and development literature, and their characteristics have been described by various metaphors. In spite of this, there appears to be the potential to explore an additional metaphor to describe a specific expression of that relationship: The Organization as a Romantic Partner.

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Dear Love,

I’m exhausted. It’s after one o’clock in the morning, and I can’t sleep; yet on some level I feel like I’m just waking up. As I lie here in my bed, on my back, staring at the ceiling, thinking about what I want to put in this letter, I can’t seem to find the words. They were in my mind all day, but now when I need them the most, I can’t find them. I should not feel this way, not like this and not for you, but I do. I am so scared you won’t really hear what I have to say, but I have a greater fear that you are not capable of hearing it, and if that is true, then this thing I call “us” was never real. Whether you care or not, I want and need you to know: you broke my heart.

It took a while for me to figure out what this feeling was—disappointment, rejection, anger, sadness, confusion, betrayal, bitterness—and it wasn’t any one of these; it was all of them. Although I hurt, I realized it really was not your fault; my words may not show it, but on some level, I realize and accept it...almost.

Was I crazy to think you could love me like I loved you? I fell in love with you, and now I see you did not, and could not, fall in love with me. I’m writing this because it is the only way to share with you what I am experiencing, remind you of what we had, what you had in me, and to get back a part of me I feel I lost, and need back, to move on. You might be wondering how I could have fallen in love with you. If you think about our journey, my question is, why didn’t you fall in love with me? Maybe I misinterpreted the signals and we were not as close as I thought, but I still like to think we were. I felt we were one and didn’t want anyone to see us as separate because being with you made me
feel whole, fulfilled, and worthy. I understand now our relationship has changed; yet I
still like to think about when I thought we were devoted to each other.

How We Met

I’m not sure who made the first move; I think someone told me you were
interested or were looking for someone new. I was open, and though I was in a
relationship at the time, the prospect of being with someone new was exciting.
Remember, we started with a couple of phone calls, and then as time went on I was
excited to hear from you. When your number came across my phone I would leap to grab
it.

Whether I was sitting at the kitchen table about to eat, on the sofa watching TV,
or standing in line getting coffee, I always had time for you. What about the time you
called me, and I was with my soon-to-be ex? I had to sneak off to a private area so we
could talk; I felt a little guilty, but I knew it was right. When we talked, it was as if we
both knew what each other was thinking. I could almost finish your sentences, and I
sensed the smile on your face and head nodding when I said the right things. Time would
fly by during our phone calls, and I’d hold the phone so hard it would make an
impression in the palm of my hand. We shared our likes, dislikes, and details of past
relationships; what we learned from them, and how the future—our future—would be
different. We clicked.

When we decided to meet face-to-face for the first time, I was a little nervous but
excited more than anything. I put on my best suit, the blue one, with a crisp white shirt
and my best shoes. I wanted to impress you, especially since it was the first time you
were inviting me into your home. My first visit was short; we talked some, you showed
me around, introduced me to a few friends, and said you’d call me later. I have to admit I wasn’t sure if you would; I knew there were others who wanted your attention, though I had this special feeling about us. Then, you made the move.

You invited me over again and said you wanted to make me an offer, an offer for us to be together. You introduced me to your family and said you wanted me to be a part of it. If you remember, I did not hesitate to say yes. I have to say that moment was just as I dreamed: You made me feel like the most important person in your life. I was yours and you were mine.

Us

I remember we could not get enough of each other. You were on my mind all the time; in the morning, when I was under the covers, cozy, warm, and the alarm would go off; I would roll over, hit the snooze and you were the first person I’d think about. I would take my time to pick out clothes I knew you liked. You never said, but I felt there was a dress code I needed to follow, a certain look I needed to have that showed that I was yours, and I was happy to oblige. Remember the grey sweater? You always said I looked great in it, and I always felt a little more confident when I wore it with you. When I stepped in the shower, I’d think about our day, how we would spend our time together, and the decisions we’d make about our world. When I dried off and looked in the mirror, it was important that the person who looked back was the one you would never want to leave. I made sure that every hair was in place, that my teeth were sparkling and skin radiant, and that I stayed as attractive as the day we met.

I could not wait to check my messages to see if you called. When you did, it let me know you were thinking about me. I’d get your letters throughout the day; the little notes
you would send reminding me that you knew I was there. I knew the more notes I received, the more important I was to you. When you wrote, I was excited because I knew I was on your mind and that you wanted what I wanted: for us to always be connected. You knew I would write back regardless of the time of night, no matter where I was and what I was doing.

Even when we were apart I thought of you. I wondered what you were doing. Were you thinking about me? Was I missing something important happening in your life? If I was traveling, as soon as I would get off the train or plane, I would check in and see if you needed me. Remember, I always stayed close, even when I was with my friends or family, and you had my full attention.

Sure, sometimes our relationship seemed like work and I felt overwhelmed, but I felt an odd sense of security in it. You seemed to need me as much as I needed you. I showed my devotion and commitment so you would have little need for anyone else.

How could I forget the promises we made to each other about the future? We would talk all the time about our relationship, how strong it was becoming and the future you saw for us. I could not see a future that did not include you, and the more time we spent together, I knew there was no other place I would rather be. For instance, I’d get calls from others telling me they were better for me than you and that I should think about leaving you, but you kept telling me, “The grass isn’t always greener on the other side.”

You told me we would grow together: I had what it took to make a difference in your life, and what I had to offer was rare. I had become your confidant; it was like you were whispering to me, “You’re the only one I can talk to like this.” It made me smile
inside, and I somehow felt stronger around others. Sure, I may have rubbed a few people
the wrong way, but you said that was okay; everyone wasn’t cut out to be in a part of
your life. Remember when I had to tell John he couldn’t be a part of our circle anymore?
He was upset, very upset; as if he had just lost his job, but he didn’t see the big picture,
and you told me that letting John go was one of the ways for me to prove how much I
cared about you. Others around me could not understand it, but this was about you and
me, I didn’t expect them to understand what we meant to each other.

Some of my friends said I did not have balance, but I did. I balanced you and me,
and as far as I was concerned, that was all that mattered. I felt my friends didn’t
understand, so I started acting differently toward some of the people who were close to
me. I rationalized that the more time I spent with you, the better it would be for them, but
they just complained that I wasn’t around as much or that I was preoccupied when I was
with them. They had the nerve to say that when we had a disagreement or fight they felt
the brunt of it. They even told me I was crazy to care so much about you, but I also saw
that they acted the same way in their relationships; they were hypocrites who simply did
not know you like I did.

As I said, relationships are work, and you and I were no different. You would
give me special things to do that I know were tests to see how much I cared, and I know I
proved my dedication to you. When we left each other for the day, I’d come home, fall on
the couch, exhausted, and take a few minutes for myself. But even then I could not get
you off my mind. I would eat something, get a second wind, and answer the love notes
and messages you left me. Before I went to bed I would plan how we would spend the
next day together, and when I laid my head on the pillow, with phone by my side (in case
you wanted a late night chat), I would fall asleep dreaming about us. Then one day I woke up, and our relationship had changed.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The prologue is an allegorical representation of an employee communicating with the organization for which he works in the form of a letter. The prose may not be uncommon when viewed through the lens of a human relationship: the author has found himself at a crossroads in a relationship. He is in love and feels he has been emotionally injured by the actions of his amour and expresses how this injury has affected him. Reflections of the promises given, sacrifices made, and their impact on the writer’s life come through, as does a history of the “good times” in the relationship and moving toward the beginning of an “end” that is signaled or propelled by a change. I will demonstrate in this paper that when viewed through the lens of employee-organization relationships, reasonable similarities to human relationships emerge: talent acquisition; employee onboarding and orientation; career planning; feedback, coaching, mentorship and sponsorship; change; and transition. These parallels are also found in, but are not limited to, the organizational development domains of performance and talent management practices, psychological contracts, perceived organizational support (POS), perception of supervisor support (PSS), organizational change and transition, and organizational commitment.

My work-life journey, education, and personal experiences, which include exposure to diverse environments, cultures, and people, as well as working in various business contexts, have combined to give me an interesting perspective on employees. A not-uncommon occurrence I have found is that in which employees “fall in love” with the companies for which they work. These individuals develop a type of relationship and
emotional connection to a corporate entity that resembles that of human relationships while being blinded to the unfortunate truth that the feelings they have may not or cannot be returned. This relationship, while emotionally charged, has organizational references rooted in the concepts of psychological contracts between employees and organizations, the norm of reciprocity, and the perceptions of employees regarding implied agreements with organizations, all of which influence the perception of the relationship (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007).

I argue that the relationship can manifest itself as “romantic-like” in cases in which the organization is personified (Eisenberger et al., 2010), and involves “a judgment or evaluation, and an action tendency” (Sternberg, 1988, p. 221) based on personal assessment or an assessment of perceived organizational support (POS). The outcome of the personification is a journey that includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements that employees may internalize and display during their employment relationship with the organization. Many of these elements are similar to those measured by the Passionate Love Scale (Appendix A) (Sternberg, 1988).

In this capstone, I propose a new lens for organizations, employees, and practitioners through which to view employee-organizational relationships using this metaphor: the organization as a romantic partner. Contained within this metaphor are the joy of courtship, intoxication of a new relationship, assumed shared expectations of a future together, hunger for reassurance in the face of unreasonable demands, and feeling of being taken for granted. It is not a comprehensive study but rather an exploratory invitation to examine the validity, implications, and consequences of employees’ viewing their organizations as romantic partners.
Methodology

This paper consists of the exploration of the metaphor presented in the prologue, which contains an allegorical device—a love letter—as a platform to explore the parallels between romantic human relationships and employee-organization relationships. Allegory and metaphor are used to assist the reader in identifying and empathizing with the story’s primary actor and his struggle (Haven, 2007). These literary devices are also employed to help the reader extrapolate the actor’s emotional disposition to an organizational context. In this paper, the words “organization” and “company” may be used interchangeably.

Chapter 2 consists of a summary of my experience that led to the development of the metaphor.

Chapter 3 consists of an academic explication of a corporate TEDx talk, given by me, in February 2014. The mission of my organization’s TEDx is to “engage associates to share ideas across sectors, functions, regions, and levels and allow these ideas to grow, cultivate, and spread” (About TEDx [organization], 2014). The venue is a 900-seat auditorium, with the talk being webcast to 40 internal corporate locations worldwide. The academic explication of the speech will be along several major lines: a study of psychological contracts in order to explore the impact of unwritten contracts and promises within the employee-organization relationship in the context of a romantic relationship; a look at organizational change and its value in understanding the state of the employee’s relationship with the organization; organizational commitment, particularly affective commitment, or the emotional affinity an employee has for his
company; and finally, the impact of perceived organizational and supervisor support on
the employee’s interpretation of his relationship with the organization. Appendix B
contains the transcript of the TEDx talk in place of the video recording.

Chapter 4 consists of an analysis of the TEDx talk process, a synthesis of the post-
talk feedback, and development of key themes in that feedback.

Chapter 5 consists of a summary and next steps for further exploration into the
implications of this metaphor for employees, supervisors, practitioners, and
organizations. An Epilogue will contain the completion of the letter started in the
prologue and provide closure to the narrative.

The contents of these chapters combine to establish the validity of the metaphor
of the organization as romantic partner and its potential impact on employees and
organizations.
CHAPTER 2
BACKGROUND

My personal knowledge of this subject started approximately six years ago while heading a major project for my company in the form of the leadership of a national sales meeting. The project lasted for nine months and ended with a final sales meeting for approximately 900 employees. The goal of the meeting was to set the strategic direction of the organization for the calendar year. During this project, I managed more than five project teams that had their own accountabilities to the overall project. The leadership of the project was in addition to my core job responsibilities and was approximately a 30% addition to my workload. The project delivered and exceeded expectations, as measured by a training survey, an employee satisfaction survey, and anecdotal comments from participants, during and after the event. However, an incident at the meeting led to the formation of an idea that now has become my study for this capstone.

During the awards banquet, a senior executive told the audience about an individual who made the meeting a success. As he spoke on stage, I felt somewhat embarrassed, yet excited, because I felt that the sleepless nights, stressful days, and time away from my family during this project were finally being acknowledged. As he finished his laudatory comments, the executive revealed to the ballroom of 900 people who this person was. As he called out the name of someone else, I stood completely numb at the back of the room.

As I stood there, my feelings confused me. I felt a mishmash of emotions: betrayal, anger, bitterness, sadness, devaluation, and emptiness. These feelings
intertwined and created an emotion that was somewhat familiar to me but that did not make sense at work and that I struggled to identify. I wrestled with my emotions into the next morning and realized I needed to talk to someone who might be able to provide insight into my confusion. I sought one of my mentors and, taking a risk, told him what I was experiencing. He did not judge but listened, and when I finished my account, he looked me in the eyes and said, “You fell in love. And I’ve been there too.”

His diagnosis immediately resonated with me and provided the impetus for me to make sense of what I was feeling. I had an expectation that I would be treated a certain way. The expectation was that good work begets recognition, which confirms one’s organizational value. I had seen this play out many times before. For me, this was what Rousseau (1995) referred to an unwritten promise. When I perceived that the promise was broken, I felt emotionally injured. From that point, in the background of my mind – from an intellectual and creative standpoint – was the concept of falling in love with an organization. The organization, defined at that time, was my employer.

Following the conversation with my mentor, I started to write the prologue that appears at the beginning of this paper and titled it “The Love Letter,” which would be a vehicle to share my story and those of others who have had similar experiences.

The Next Stage in My Journey

Over the years, each time I shared the idea of “The Love Letter,” I received encouragement and empathy. I learned that other employees from diverse industries, at various levels, had similar experiences and were also searching for some kind of understanding and reconciliation for their emotions. As I trudged along, gradually
constructing “The Love Letter,” I started an academic journey in the Organizational Dynamics Program at the University of Pennsylvania, which influenced the direction I would take my idea. I was exposed to research in organizational dynamics that I knew only through diluted translations contained in popular business books. As I learned about the impact of stories in organizations, the power of metaphor, organizational change, coaching, and the exploration of other cultures, I was able to develop an hypothesis regarding my experiences and those of others who have had similar experiences.

Here is the hypothesis: Employees may at times demonstrate cognitive and emotional behaviors toward their employing organization that parallel the same behaviors demonstrated in romantic human relationships.

The experiential testing of this hypothesis is a 15-minute corporate TEDx talk, mentioned in Chapter 1, I presented to an employee audience of my employer, a global, Fortune 500 corporation.
CHAPTER 3
A LOVE STORY

This chapter consists of the academic explication of the corporate TEDx speech I delivered which is referenced in Chapter 2. The edited transcription of the speech is **bolded** and divided into subsections, which are followed by a un-bolded academic explanation. The goal of this explication is to demonstrate parallels of employee-organization relationships to romantic interpersonal relationships. The speech transcription without explication can be found in Appendix B.

My First Love

*A few years ago I fell in love.*

The relationship between employee and organization is one that displays many of the characteristics and implications of a romantic relationship. John Bowlby (2005), considered a leader in the study of attachment theory, shared in *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds* that “the formation of a bond is described as falling in love” (p. 85). Although his studies are related to the formation of attachments between people, the bonding between employee and organization can feel like love to the employee. We will explore the emotions involved in this type of relationship later in this explication. Meyer and Allen (1991) present a three-component model of organizational commitment through which bonds are developed that have an interesting parallel to interpersonal relationships.

Meyer and Allen (1991) describe the three components as first, *continuance commitment*, whereby the employee makes practical judgments as to whether he will stay
with the organization and about what his level of investment in the organization will be. By weighing his number and types of options, the employee can determine a path that will result in a better situation with the organization, modulating his level of commitment. This is not unlike an individual’s determining that he has too many years invested in a relationship to start over or that his prospects are plentiful outside if he decides to separate.

The second type of commitment is normative, based on the employee’s sense of obligation to the organization. This sense of obligation can come about through perceived external pressures to stay with, and commit to, the organization. It also can be evaluated based on the employee’s perception of the investments the company has made toward his development (Meyer & Allen, 1991). An example of this normative commitment in interpersonal relationships is when one partner sacrifices an aspect of life to create space for the other to pursue an educational or career endeavor. Also seen in interpersonal relationships is a parallel in which a spouse has a family culture and mental model of relationships that commands, for instance, “We do not get divorced in our family.” The cultural obligation becomes psychological pressure, difficult to challenge.

Finally, affective commitment is an emotional connection to the organization that can be based on alignment of values, purpose, and intentions that the employee ascribes to and believes in (Meyer & Allen, 1991). One may argue that this is the most desirable type of commitment for an employee to have; however, the emotional component can become highly intense, as in interpersonal relationships, creating an unrealistic or idealistic view of the relationship. Affective commitment, thus, may provide a basis for an emotional bond that, when coupled with positive perceived organizational support
(Eisenberger et al., 1986), creates a feeling for the employee similar to that of being in love and being loved. All three create a complex composite of why and how an employee can develop and maintain a bond with an organization.

**And my heart was broken.**

Disillusionment and feelings of abandonment and betrayal are factors that create the conditions for a broken heart. All of these describe characteristics of a negative relationship between an employee and an organization. Practitioners, business leaders, and employees may label the behavioral manifestation of this negative relationship as “disengagement.” While the term “employee disengagement” is widely accepted to describe an employee’s negative disposition at work, it should not be confused with organizational heartbreak, which I am defining as an emotional feeling of loss or rejection on the part of an employee, perceived to have been caused by the organization’s actions. Gallup, a leading international organization in employee engagement, describes “actively disengaged” employees as those who “are emotionally disconnected from their workplaces” (Gallup, 2013, p. 12). In contrast, employees who are organizationally heartbroken are very much emotionally connected to their workplace, to the extent that this type of connection may hinder their ability to positively engage in their role within the organization.
And I haven’t been the same since.

The statement “I haven’t been the same since” is used to alert listeners that the story that will be told is the launchpad of this talk. The impact of the relationship created such a change in me that I felt the need to share the experience. The use of story, therefore, is a critical device used I used to create a connection with the audience. McAdams (1993) suggests that “as adults, we may identify just as strongly with the protagonist of a story, experience episodes vicariously and emerging from a narrative encounter happier, better adjusted, more enlightened or improved in some way” (p. 31). I needed my listeners to experience my journey as if it were their own and used story as a catalyst for a shared experience. In arguing that the use of story is important, this section signals the transformational impact that the relationship has on an individual.

In fact, the relationship between an employee and an organization can itself be viewed as a compelling narrative in which, according to McAdams (1993), “we seek to explain events in terms of human actors striving to do things over time” (p. 30). Is that so different from the career journey of an employee? There is a beginning, middle, and end, and along the way there is an emotional investment that brings the story to life and converts a sequence of events into an important series of themes.

Her name was Farma.

The use of the name “Farma” personalizes the story and misdirects the audience to believe that this is an interpersonal relationship, adding a layer of implied meaning by specifically referring to a person by name. In the organizational context, personification, or the act of employees ascribing human-like qualities to the organization (Levinson,
1965; Eisenberger et al., 2010), helps form a basis for the emotional bond that an employee can develop with a company. We later learn that “Farma” is just such a personification.

Levinson (1965) states the following in *Reciprocation: The Relationship Between Man and Organization*:

People project upon organizations human qualities and then relate to them as if the organizations did in fact have human qualities. They generalize from their feelings about people in the organization who are important to them, to the organization as a whole, as well as extrapolating from those attitudes they bring to the organization. (p. 377)

In making sense of this relationship through past experiences, employees develop fertile mental ground for an emotional romantic-like bond to develop. When Levinson referred to “feelings about people in the organization” (p. 377) perhaps he was suggesting that these people could be conduits through which the employee interprets the intentions of the organization. Central in the employee’s work life is the supervisor, whom he may relate to as a surrogate and as a primary facilitator of the relationship between himself and the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2010).

An indication of an emotional connection felt by employees toward their organizations can be heard in the common statement “I love (organization name),” where in this case I have been inserting “Farma.” Whether Farma is a man, woman or an organization, the expression is generally acceptable in describing feelings toward another entity.
And our relationship started simply. Someone told me that I caught her attention and I checked her out, and she caught my attention, and I figured “let’s talk.” So we started with phone conversations where we learned about likes and dislikes. Then we started to date and go out, and we realized we had a connection.

You kind of get that feeling like there’s something different here. And it got to the point where I was thinking, “you know, this isn’t typical.” She was from the Midwest. I’m from the East Coast. But we seemed to connect—likes, dislikes, dreams, goals, and aspirations. We learned about past relationships, and what we wanted in a future mate.

It got to the point where I was thinking, “she might need to see my mother.” That’s when you know it’s serious, right? It went to the point where Farma got impatient and basically said, “Cecil, maybe we should make this exclusive.” And me, being the gentleman that I am, decided to accept her offer.

The part of the relationship described in this section of the speech follows Knapp’s Model of Interaction Stages (Appendix C) for human relationships, which starts with the Initiating, Experimenting, and Intensifying stages (Knapp & Venglisti, 2009). The progression starts at initial interest, exploration, and disclosure; moves to uncovering of similarities in goals and values; and then leads to a bond that can propel the relationship toward exclusivity.

In the employment context, recruiting and selection practices often follow a similar model with initial interest through candidate search and filtering. A move to a
progressive interview process follows, in which a relationship is formed and time is invested in the evaluation of the candidate by the organization and vice-versa. The further filtering of candidates generally results in a selection of one person to whom the organization makes an offer that, when accepted, begins the formal start of the relationship. In full-time employment agreements, as opposed to part-time or independent contractor relationships, the employee is contracted to not work for any other organization, and an exclusive relationship is created.

And from there our relationship took off. I mean we couldn’t get enough of each other. She was the first thing I thought of when I woke up. She was the last thing I thought of when I went to bed. We made promises to each other about what the future would look like, the roles we would play in each other’s lives. We were connected. It was that special thing, that special spark that you get when you’re with someone that you haven’t felt before; [and] you don’t think you’re ever going to feel with anyone else. Farma and I were close.

An emotional investment in the relationship is declared by the employee, which is in part created by the formation of a psychological contract. This introduces psychological contracts in the talk, implied through the term “promises.” However, as we have already seen, expectations that lead to the development of psychological contracts will start to form before formal employment begins (Makin, Cooper, & Cox, 1996). Rousseau (1995), defines psychological contracts as, “beliefs that individuals
hold regarding promises made, accepted, and relied on between themselves and another employee, client, manager, organization” (p. 9).

As with similar interpersonal relationships, it is very easy in the employment environment for signals to be misinterpreted. While an employee career path or career ladder (which traces the organizational and positional moves an employee takes toward a desired job) can be construed as transactional, along the way a connection develops that is very personal. Communications regarding an employee’s potential ascent in the organization may create expectations that lead to a perception of commitment, which the employee may further interpret as a promise (Sturges et al., 2005). This promise then becomes a belief not only in the content of the promise but also in the entity that is making it, even if communicated only by an agent of the organization (i.e., a supervisor).

Promises are not always conveyed by individuals in the organizations but can be a part of a shared belief and espoused values of an organization as a formal entity (Rousseau, 1995). These beliefs and values can be conveyed through a vision or mission statement and imply that the organization is making a promise through what it proclaims to hold itself accountable to, such as Chick-fil-A’s Corporate Purpose or Johnson & Johnson’s Credo. Therefore, it is important for leaders to understand the implications these organizational proclamations have on their relationships with employees.

Also illustrated in this section of the talk is how an employee may romanticize the employment journey. The commitment the employee feels for the organization and the perception of reciprocity can create a connection and affection that fosters a “we were meant to be together” narrative. Knapp’s Model of Interaction Stages remerges in this section of the talk, and the relationship moves from the Intensifying phase, to the
Integrating and Bonding phases, where the connection is strong enough to declare a commitment to a single future for the parties involved (Knapp and Vangelisti, 2009). The employee may not be naïve to the presence of other actors; however, he may perceive his relationship with the organization as special. A challenge is that while the employee may view a single future with organization, with him as the leading suitor, the organization is courting multiple suitors. This disparity creates a scenario where the employee unknowingly has an unrealistic expectation of the future of the relationship and is more than likely destined for a disappointing outcome.

As noted earlier, another factor in the development of a perceived relationship with the organization is the role played by the employee’s supervisor. In my work experience, the supervisor is often referred to as “the face of the organization,” especially in the eyes of the employee. The employee may construe perceived supervisor support (PSS) and positive organization support (POS) as barometers for his relationship with the company (Eisenberger et al., 2002). For example, Donald (employee) may come to believe that Mary (supervisor) values his contributions and cares about him while simultaneously holding the belief that Mary is acting on the behalf of the organization. Donald may not be fully aware that he is gauging his relationship with the organization by his interactions with Mary, as well as by her feedback and evaluation. When Mary provides rewards, recognition, and positive feedback to Donald, he reasonably believes the organization likes, understands, and views him favorably. Conversely, if Mary’s assessment of Donald’s performance, feedback, and coaching are perceived as negative, he may develop a belief that his relationship with the organization is poor. This is one illustration of a potential connection between the performance
Feedback and coaching have been long-standing supervisory levers for performance management and employee development in organizations. Behavioral or performance feedback given by a supervisor to an employee may generally be categorized as positive or negative depending on the employee’s and supervisor’s perceptions. When receiving positive feedback, the employee may accept or reject it; however, it still may subconsciously indicate, in my opinion, a favorable status in the relationship, i.e., “I am doing the things that please my partner. He loves me.” When negative feedback is given the inverse can occur, signaling a problem in the relationship. This can result in a feeling of “he loves me not.” This potential emotional relationship roller coaster may lead the employee to focus all of his attention on how to make the organization “happy,” as opposed to how to help it thrive, by repeatedly trying to demonstrate that he is “good enough.” The feedback process is also influenced by the skill and willingness of the supervisor to provide effective feedback, which, in my experience, is often a contributing factor to the uncertainty of an employee regarding his standing within the organization.

The culmination of this feedback/relationship evaluation is a grade or assessment given through the organizational process called the annual performance review. The employee may unwittingly use this review to assess the current state of the relationship, which, through my experience and observations as a supervisor and employee, tends to be emotionally charged.
Change in the Relationship

And then she decided to change. No warning, no conversation. She became a little different. I noticed the conversations that we used to have; I noticed she was having with other people. Our time together was shorter. It just wasn’t as rich. It just wasn’t as meaningful—to the point where she came to me and said, “Cecil, I care about you, but I think you need to play a different role in my life.” Really? Just like that. So we’re doing this now, right?

The employee was surprised by the change. He saw indicators but did not associate them with an impending change. Employees in love with their organizations may idealize the organization and the relationship. The organization is perceived by the employee to be almost a utopia. The relationship is where the employee focuses his or her energy in an attempt to keep the relationship alive.

In contrast to this, I would argue that employees who idealize the organization hurt the organization. Through unrealistic expectations of the relationship, they may not explore opportunities to improve or to provide constructive critiques of practices that the organization could improve. They do not innovate beyond boundaries set by the organization, thus opportunities for innovation are not acted upon. These employees allow the organization to take on the role of strategist in the relationship to the detriment of their own personal growth and the growth of the organization.

This type of idealization can create a blind spot for the employee, who may miss the impact external forces can have on internal change. For example, an employee may notice industry and economic changes, yet fail to understand their meaning as it relates to change in the organization. Although one may argue that the employee is playing the
role of child in the relationship, relying on trust that the parent (organization) will take
care of him, I argue that there is another lens. The employee is taking a passive role in
the relationship and allows the organization to take the lead, with the hope of being a
partner in the internal change, assuming the lover will be a protector.

Another consequence may be that the employee does not believe the organization
will change. Idealization has created such a perfect object of affection that the employee
ignores or does not acknowledge the internal change the organization has to go through in
order to stay ahead of the changing external environment. By ignoring these internal
changes, the employee misses his own opportunities to grow, stay relevant, and maintain
a meaningful relationship. He therefore may allow his partner, the company, to outgrow
him.

And here I am left, bruised, hurt, confused, and really heartbroken.

Duck (2001) states, “Changing an organization is inherently and inescapably an
emotional human process” (p. 9). If you ask employees at various levels and in different
roles in the organization the question “Is change emotional?” there will probably be a
resounding and unanimous, “Yes!” However, I have noticed that the emotional impact
can be an accepted form of collateral damage: everyone knows that culture change, for
example, will create some emotional pain, but it is just a matter of getting through it.
Organizations and employees may underestimate or fail to categorize various types of
emotional pain experienced during culture change due to accepting it as inevitable. In
doing so, they fail to observe and create sub-categories of behaviors that contain the
actions which impact the relationship and feelings of love. The specific feelings of love
or heartbreak seen and experienced during change are not uncommon; however, when combined with other emotions and indicators of an employee’s response to change, the opportunity to differentiate among those emotions is lost and other strategies to resolve the situation are not employed. If we modify the lens with which we view these same emotions, perhaps there is a better opportunity to accurately diagnose and treat the organizational condition through the individual.

For example, there is general acceptance that dealing with change is signaled by the need to move through a number of stages. Bridges (2003) uses the emotions of anger, depression, bargaining, anxiety, sadness, and disorientation to describe emotions seen during the Ending, Losing, Letting Go phase of transition. He also equates the emotions to a state of grieving.

Table 1 (below) illustrates how the emotions during transition described by Bridges (2003) can be reexamined through love, relationship and intimacy. Shifting the perspective away from grieving and loss can create opportunities for organizations, leaders and practitioners to explore more diverse interventions for change and transition that relate to interpersonal relationships.
Table 1. Parallels Between Organizational Loss and Love, Intimacy, and Relationship Emotions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotions (Bridges, 2003, p. 29–30)</th>
<th>Love, Relationship, and Intimacy Parallels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger, Depression</td>
<td>Sternberg (1988) shares, “…intense anger or depression, are accordingly potential emotional sequelae of intimacy” (p. 336); anger can also be a signal of the relationship deteriorating or coming apart (Knapp, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bargaining</td>
<td>Noted as a power strategy in intimate relationships; can be seen as a surrogate for seeking equitable reciprocity in an interpersonal or intimate relationship (Rijt, 2006, pp. 1455–1470; Falbo, 1982, pp. 399–405). This can be translated to seeking a level of control and a desire to win in the relationship, or having some concession that feels acceptable as an emotional consolation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety, Disorientation (Confusion)</td>
<td>Sternberg (1988) states, “Unrequited love (separation) is associated with emptiness, anxiety, or despair” (p. 202). In the case of the relationship between the employee and organization, the employee may experience a distancing, which creates confusion and a feeling of uncertainty about the relationship. An employee may consciously and cognitively assign anxiety and confusion to his changing state of employment, and subconsciously have concern regarding the relationship with the organization, which intensifies the emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Bridges (2003) describes this as “the heart of the grieving process” (p. 29). The employee’s heart has been broken, as well as his perception of, belief in and hope in the relationship. While employees may be in a state of sadness or grieving due the loss of “how the organization used to be,” this emotion increases in complexity when viewed as a relationship. While the</td>
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</table>
employee has lost something, the employee may remain in the presence of the entity that held that which he lost.

This is akin to severing a relationship with someone, yet one has to work intimately with the individual every day. The emotional footprint of this loss may be larger in the context of a relationship vs. perceiving the loss as an operational change initiative. Therefore, when an employee appears to “have a tough time with change,” which is a label placed on some employees who appear to resist organizational change, perhaps the root of the behavior is the person’s challenge with reframing the relationship. If organizational leaders used the romantic relationship lens as part of their toolkit to diagnose employee behavior during change and transition, perhaps there would be more meaningful interventions to help employees through those challenging emotional stages.

A potential problem for organizations, leaders, and practitioners to solve during change is how to positively redirect employees who have “fallen in love” with their company. They may avoid addressing the source of emotional distress at the individual level and instead gravitate toward solving at the organizational level. This form of avoidance can mean that leaders or practitioners have failed to expand their reach to include interpersonal relationship solutions that may be equal keys to success, as are broad organizational interventions.

When organizations are implementing organizational change initiatives, they may not consider assessing the relationships they have with their employees. Each employee has a perceived relationship, contract, or promise with the organization, and change impacts him or her emotionally (Bridges, 2003; Duck 2001). The emotional impact can
influence employee behavior, which will have bearing on the success of the change initiative.

But there’s something I’m not telling you. Farma wasn’t my girlfriend. Farma was a company that I fell in love with years ago. And every day employees fall in love with their companies, and every other day someone, somewhere, somehow gets their heart broken.

Positive employee-organization relationships are critical components for sustained organizational success and a fulfilled employee work life. However, when violation or breach of the psychological contract occurs, trust can be damaged, employee job satisfaction lowered, and the level of continuance commitment an employee has with his or her organization reduced (Robinson, 1994). Therefore, as argued earlier, the consequence of an employee’s emotional connection with an organization being injured by unfulfilled promises can result in emotional distress to the employee and a deterioration of organizational commitment.

Employees’ development of an affective or emotional commitment to their organization is not a new course of study (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). However, viewing the development of affective or emotional commitment by an employee with an organization through stages of love offers an additional and valuable perspective. For example, when examining an employee’s potential journey in an organization, there is a reasonable connection to Stendhal’s Seven Stages of Love, referenced in Stendhal’s On Love (2013), which is a recent edition and translation of the 1822 work by M. Stendhal. To illustrate, Table 2 (below) is a
representation of the seven stages through the lens of an employee-organization relationship and the influence the perceived relationship has on the employee’s assessment of his situation and his decision-making process.

Table 2. Stendhal’s Seven Stages of Love and the Employee-Organization Relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stendhal’s Seven Stages of Love</th>
<th>Employee-Organization Interpretation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admiration</td>
<td>I believe this is a company I like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Delightful</td>
<td>It would be interesting to work there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>I wonder if and hope that there is an opportunity for me there. Now here, I see the potential of being here for quite some time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The birth of love</td>
<td>I like this place, and the organization demonstrates that it sees my value and worth, and rewards me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First crystallization. (Surety in reciprocal love)</td>
<td>This is a perfect situation for me; the grass can never be greener anywhere else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubt creeps in…</td>
<td>Am I really on the path on which they said I would be? I see others moving faster than me; things are not going as I had planned and how the organization promised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second crystallization (Vacillation – ‘she loves me, she loves me not’)</td>
<td>I am getting mixed messages and am confused, but there is no other place I would rather be.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Stendhal’s *On Love* (Chapter 4, section 1, para 2), by M. Stendhal. 2013. Retrieved from Amazon.com

Earlier, the annual performance review process was presented as an example of how an employee may assess unconsciously the current state of the relationship. Another organizational process that may serve as an evaluative instrument of the relationship for the employee is succession planning. Succession planning is an organizational process that aims to create a pipeline of future leaders to fill key roles. When an employee has a
succession planning meeting with his supervisor or designated leader, the message communicated is often in terms of how the organization “sees” the employee in roles of progressive responsibility. When this message is favorable or aligned with the employee’s own career expectation it may be construed by the employee as an indicator of a healthy future for the relationship. The converse may be true when there is a misalignment of career mobility expectations between the employee and organization. The employee may unconsciously use these two standing organizational processes—annual performance review and succession planning—to evaluate his relationship, and he may allow them to influence his emotional attachment to the organization. As asserted by Sternberg (1988), “love is more than an emotion; it is a judgment or evaluation, and an action tendency.”

Performance management processes and their influence on employees’ views of the stability of their relationship with organizations require more exploration than presented here, but organizational leaders should be aware of their impact.

And you may have had your Farma and left it and started a relationship with [this company], and now you’re here… and someway, somehow your heart’s been broken here. Maybe you feel ignored. Maybe you feel invisible.

Organizations who declare to employees, “We want to hear from you,” may miss the opportunity to create the proper feedback loop for an employee’s voice to be heard. They may also, knowingly or unknowingly, fail to acknowledge a type of employee, due to job level, based on an assessment of contribution to the organization or role, and thereby decrease safety. For example, administrative assistants may feel ignored when
providing input on how to improve a nonadministrative process. The organization may fail to recognize their perspective and place a lower value on their input, which may translate into feeling ignored by these employees. A similar example is the case of an organization that is not accepting of a diverse workplace, consciously or unconsciously, when it comes to women and race. Women and underrepresented ethnic groups may find themselves without voices or organizational equity due to their marginalization, as influenced by organizational culture. This can lead them to feel unsafe.

**Maybe someone said something or did something to you and you don’t understand why the organization let it happen.** Maybe a promise was made to you and somehow it’s taken too long for it to happen, or somehow someone else got it or you just feel that it’s been broken; or maybe a change took you away from the thing that you thought you were meant to do and the people you care about. Well, I’m here to tell you that you’re not crazy.

**You’re not alone. This happened to me, too.**

Viewing change not only as a shift in the company’s strategic direction, but as a meaningful change in the relationship between the employee and organization, provides additional perspective to enable successful employee outcomes during organizational change. It is reasonable to argue that the organization has a right to create change when it deems it appropriate, and the employee should understand that there are generally no promises beyond the two-week pay period. My assertion, however, is that there should be consideration by the leaders of the organization of the psychological contract that has been made with their employees. If the organization would like to increase the likelihood
of a successful change through their employees, perhaps in the boardrooms or organizational design meetings, the question should be posed: Have we implied any promises to our employees that we may be breaking or created the perception that we are breaking those promises? In addition to the actions of individual leaders, these implied promises can be made by the organization through the execution of corporate policies, statements of purpose, and espoused values. When these promises are broken, the impact can be more challenging for an employee to reconcile because he does not have an object to direct his emotion toward or no way to do so safely.

According to Robinson and Rousseau (1994), “The psychological contract, unlike expectations, entails a belief in what the employer is obliged to provide, based on perceived promises of reciprocal exchange” (p. 246). The implications of the psychological contract do not pertain to what is on paper, but to what is perceived.

Unfulfilled Expectations and Emotional Awareness

Two years ago I was involved in a project. I was given the lead for a big project. It’s the project where your boss walks into your office and says, “I’ve got an opportunity for you.” It’s that rites-of-passage project, the one that you go to 20 or 30…thousand meetings for. It’s that type of project.

And I had a great team and I worked hard, sleepless nights, stressful. [I] made some people happy, some people mad, some people sad, and my goal was to make sure that I delivered on what the company wanted, and it went off without a hitch…except I was left empty. Something inside me wasn’t filled.
Here is what it was: I was just looking for my senior leader to just acknowledge [me], “Cecil, good job,” just show me somehow that I’m valued. I would have even taken it in the hallway, a drive-by-Isaac-Love-Boat-finger-point. I got none of that and I don't know what the feeling was, but it was just – you know, was – was it bitterness? Was it betrayal? Was it being unappreciated? It wasn’t any one of those things. It was kind of all those things wrapped together.

There are two major themes in this section. First, I had an expectation that recognition or reward is a reasonable exchange for the work he completed. This also illustrates the exchange ideology I held (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Rewards and recognition in the workplace and their progressive nature may elicit feelings similar to those of an interpersonal relationship. For example, a basic reward such as an email of appreciation from a supervisor may feel gratifying and evoke an emotional response similar to receiving a thoughtful card and flowers in the personal realm. If the next level of recognition is monetary, then the feelings may be emotionally comparable to a special dinner and jewelry. In the case of a highly regarded annual award given to a select number of employees, the response from the employee may be similar to that of hearing the words “I love you” whispered in his ear. This ladder of rewards and recognition may create the unintended consequence of an employee’s attributing receipt of them to the quality and stability of the relationship (Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002), leading to an intense focus on obtaining the rewards and ignoring internal and external problems and opportunities. While the ladder of rewards may be an accurate depiction of the relationship health between employee and
organization, the narrow focus of the employee may lead to an outcome opposite of the one he seeks. For example, the organization can miss reaching key business metrics due to lack of feedback from employees regarding the impact of the external environment on the company. If this becomes a common practice, the organization may be forced to make reactive changes that negatively affect the employee’s relationship. It is fruitful for organizations to set expectations that reinforce the importance of internal and external environmental scanning by employees and to create the environment for hearing employee opinions, whether good or bad.

The second theme that emerges is that the employee, as with my situation recounted in the speech, develops the perception and belief that his senior leader’s acknowledgement and approval would represent organizational validation of his value. In the example from the speech, I wanted to know that I mattered, that my personal sacrifices were not wasted, and that my contributions made a difference. One flaw in my thought process was that I implied I did not receive validation for a job well done from my leader, however, I did have confirmation of the project’s success, indicated by the statement, “it went off without a hitch.” I viewed my leader as the embodiment of the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2010) which may have amplified the emotional impact of the disparity between my expectations and what the recognition I actually received.

And after wrestling with it I took a risk. I went to one of my mentors and I told him my story, and I told him how I felt. And he listened patiently and then he stopped, looked at me and said, “Cecil, you fell in love and I’ve been there, too.” That was it. That was the feeling I had.
It didn’t make sense at work to fall in love and to get your heart broken, but that was the feeling. I had it in middle school. I had it in high school, a little bit in college. It was that feeling, and I figured that I had to find a way to reconcile it.

Now it [the feeling] kind of made sense, but I knew a couple things. One, I did not want to break up with the company, but I did not want to be hurt that way again. And I had to figure out what do I do? What do I do next?

Naming and understanding feelings are two distinct and related challenges that arise for organizational actors when experiencing interpersonal relationship-like emotions in the workplace, especially when those emotions are not the norm.

For example, an emotion such as anger may be considered inappropriate in some work environments, yet clearly identifiable. Positive emotions of love may also be accepted and understood when expressed by employees through enthusiasm, self-sacrifice, and devotion to the company; in my observation, they are often admirably labeled as “all in,” meaning committed or engaged. However, organizational heartbreak and commensurate feelings may be perceived as atypical behavior and not easily named or understood by either the employee or organization.

When an employee exhibits organizational heartbreak, leaders may search to name the behavior in order to understand the employee, using terms and phrases such as disengaged, resisting change, “having a challenge with change,” and having not bought in to the change initiative. However, the crucial point is that these labels do not capture what the employee is experiencing emotionally, and therefore interventions, such as
performance coaching, and counseling, will not address the root cause and at best will be a temporary salve. The employee is left misunderstood and frustrated; having not named his own emotions, he can potentially become an outcast – even to himself – based on his behavior without knowing why.

The statement “You fell in love” spoken to me by my mentor, stimulated recognition and acknowledgement that his statement was accurate. At that time, my recognition and acknowledgement could be seen as a form of emotional awareness in that I had a cognitive label for my emotions for which I was able to make sense of and take actions to influence their impact (Lane, 1987). This emotional awareness is not separate from emotional intelligence (EI), but is a skill contained within its domain that enables an individual to discern complex emotions and assign meaning in order to achieve behavioral goals (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008). The Mayer and Salovey model, developed in 1997, is not that of Daniel Goleman (1995) in, Emotional Intelligence. Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2008) share that the representation of EI in Goleman’s book “began with the early version of our EI model but mixed in many other personality traits including persistence, zeal, self-control, character as a whole, and other positive attributes” (p. 504). While not the focus of this paper, the opportunity may exist to further explore the role of emotional awareness as a subset of EI in the development of organizational actors.

So I started to write. I started to write and write and I decided that I was going to write a book and the name of this book would be called, The Love Letter, and in that book it would be an employee writing to their company,
basically in the same concept of sharing with the company the hurts, their pain, just like one person in a relationship would share with another.

And every time I mentioned this book to someone they would say, “You need to write that book.” Whether they were outside the company, inside the company, president, frontline employee, they would say, “You need to write that book.” But what they were really saying to me was that, “Cecil, you need to write that book for me, because in that book is my story. In that book are the stories of others that need to be heard, that need to know that they’re not alone and that somehow the pain they have, the pain they feel, they can get rid of it on the other side.”

In my personal and professional experience as a supervisor, mentor, and department leader responsible for training over 400 leaders annually, when an employee has successfully identified and named his emotions, it is important for him to then engage in a process of catharsis if his desire is to achieve some level of emotional healing that will help him return to his personal level of fulfillment within the organization. The reference to catharsis is not in the strict literary or medical sense but is meant to convey an emotional release that has come about due to increased clarity regarding the feelings the organizational actor is experiencing.

I have shared my potential book with others, on and off the stage, and have started writing it; spoken and written narrative I was able to employ as my own cathartic vehicle. Both mediums allowed me to acknowledge and express the personal impact the incident had on my organizational relationship. In addition, I have an awareness of others with
similar experiences, which signals the early formation of a community of employees who “fell in love” with their organizations and had their hearts broken.

The proclamation by others, saying, “You need to write that book,” imploring me to complete my written narrative, may indicate the recognition, even if unconscious, of the healing power of story. A creative example of how this power has been employed in the corporate setting is by David Whyte (1994), an English poet, in his book *The Heart Aroused*. One of Whyte’s goals, through the use and examination of poetry, is to unearth and heal the soul where there exists a struggle to reconcile the perceived incompatibility of work and home life (Whyte, 1994).

Those imploring me to write my book are essentially declaring their own desire and need to be heard, heeded, and healed via a public promulgation of my experiences. According to Kearney (2007), “From the ancient Greeks to the present day, the healing powers of storytelling have been recognized and even revered” (p. 51).

**Exploring the Arts and Sciences**

And that let me know that I’m not alone, but there [was] more for me to learn, and that led me here, the campus of the University of Pennsylvania where I enrolled in the Masters of Organizational Dynamics program, and this is a leading national and international program. And what we do is that we take the arts and the sciences and we leverage them to transform organizations, leaders, and change.

The merging of my observations with the art and science of organizational dynamics revealed that I was witnessing and experiencing components of well-studied
organizational and interpersonal relationship theories. I contend that the metaphoric framing of this thesis would not be developed as it stands now without my academic immersion at Penn and exposure to the study of culture, coaching, stories in organizations, organizational politics, and resilience.

And I learned about things such as psychological contracts. Those are things that are unwritten promises and agreements that are made between employee and organization and organization and employee. And those are just as binding in the minds of the employee as if they were written contracts. So when one is broken and when a promise isn’t fulfilled it can destroy the relationship, but when one is fulfilled it can strengthen it.

I have argued for the impact of psychological contracts in previous sections; however, it is important to acknowledge the contribution of George Homans, founder of Social Exchange Theory, to the shaping of the theory of psychological contracts. Homans (1958), early in his work, discussed the case of two individuals in that exchange: “Each is emitting behavior reinforced to some degree by the behavior of the other” (p. 598). I will present a specific example that illustrates a similar exchange relationship between the employee and organization where the organization’s behavior, as perceived by the employee, reinforces his actions. His behavior reinforces the organization’s behavior and advances the perceived commitments. I had the opportunity to discuss a career experience that left an employee emotionally injured; some details have been altered to maintain anonymity; I will call the employee “David.”
David entered the organization with promise and committed to the career development activities his leadership advised would help him reach his goal of becoming vice president. David took various roles in the organization including Supply Chain, Information Technology, and Sales; he also relocated his family for three years to China. The organization told David that cross-functional experience and an international tour, while demonstrating excellent performance, was a requirement to achieve a vice presidency. David completed all of his career moves with superior performance and returned to the United States ready for his next assignment, assuming that, when a vice presidency opened, he would be selected.

David had his initial concern when he was told he needed to take an additional role prior to being considered. The additional role and the word “considered” gave him pause, but he was confident he would achieve his goal as he had done exactly what the organization prescribed. After a year, a vice presidency opened and David was put on the interview slate. Ideally, he told me, he wanted to be appointed but understood that there needed to be a process in place for fairness, though he genuinely felt he was the preferred candidate. David’s assessment was that he accomplished and sacrificed more than the others; in fact, he had even coached some of his fellow candidates in their career journey.

During the interview process David was notified he would not move past the first round of interviews. He was devastated. He felt betrayed, let down, and hurt; he reflected on the sacrifice of moving his family overseas and felt physically ill. He shared that there were no good answers when he queried about his failed candidacy; he was told, “Things are different now.” His pain and anger increased as he realized that he had not
been informed that his career strategy, given to him by the organization, was no longer relevant. In fact, his understanding was that he had done all the right things.

After David’s disappointment, he told his leadership he wanted a different role, which would lead him down a different career path. He also set a condition that he wanted the role in a part of the country that he and his family preferred. David shared with me that if the message was that he would not be a vice president, then the least the organization could do was relocate him to an area that he and his family would enjoy. David’s reaction and emotions gesture toward frustration-aggression theory, in that his denial of an expected goal instigated specific emotions (Berkowitz, 1989). I would be hesitant to say that he displayed hostile or even instrumental aggression, though the latter could be mildly connected to his assertive request of a new position and relocation of his family, however they do not demonstrate harm to the organization.

David’s experience illustrates an initial perceived fulfillment of the psychological contract as his career decisions were advised and supported by the organization (Sturges et al., 2005). The breach occurred when his career management strategy was invalidated by the organization’s subsequent decision not to place him in his desired position.

During this journey David displayed behavior resembling Sternberg’s Triangular Theory of Love (1997): Intimacy—David felt personally close to the organization due to the perceived commitments made to him and the implied promises based on his faithful actions, evidenced by his career decisions; Passion—David made tough sacrifices and relocated his family based on an implied covenant that he believed would be honored; Decision/Commitment—David took actions that demonstrated his desire to stay with the organization and that he would do what was necessary to maintain the relationship.
Although David’s experience is in the context of employment, he nonetheless displays the attributes of an individual involved in a romantic entanglement. I suggest that David is not alone and that other employees have similar experiences. The challenge arises when David and other employees perceive that a commitment, agreement, or covenant has been made while the employer, as a collective entity, is unaware of such promises (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002), and despite the employee’s need for emotional reciprocity to obtain clarity and closure, the organization cannot return those feelings (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007). However, I do not suggest that the issue with David, from the organization’s perspective, is simple. External environments shift, which triggers internal organizational change, thereby requiring adjustments to the skills and experience required in various roles. The organization has an obligation to customers, employees, and shareholders to change in order to remain viable.

I also learned about different types of love and the Greeks have different words, for different types of love, but one struck me and that was the word, philia, brotherly love, just like Philadelphia. And what that really means is that there’s mutuality in the relationship, that there is connection and equity in the relationship.

The concept, emotion, biology, and physiology of love have been written about extensively by Greek philosophers, including Plato and Aristotle, as well as by more modern authors such as Stendhal, who wrote on the subject in his 1822 book, On Love, and C. S. Lewis (1960), Sternberg and Barnes (1988) and Fisher (2004), who discuss love from their own unique perspectives and from different academic and social
disciplines. From these works, there emerges a concept of four “loves,” as expressed in the Greek texts and as outlined by C. S. Lewis (1960) in *The Four Loves*. The first three I would like to discuss are agape, storge, and eros.

Agape is an unconditional love that is given without expectation of reciprocity. However, in the employee-organization relationship, there is clear such expectation that exists in order for both parties to feel satisfied (Levinson, 1965). Storge is referred to at times as a familial love between parent and child; it is a connection that transcends choice, as opposed to romantic relationships (Lewis, 1960). In organizations, this can present itself as the organization being seen as protector of the employee. It may also present itself when employees fulfill roles as protectors of the organization as happens in employee- or family-owned companies. Eros is a romantic love. There is an attraction that can focus on an idealized beauty of the organization and the employee romanticizing the employment journey, leading to a narrow focus on acceptance on the part of the employee.

Each of these forms of love has its unique representation and connection in employee-organization relationships. Philia, however, provides application for assisting employees in reconciling their relationships with organizations in the face of perceived heartbreak.

And when you dig underneath, when you look at what Aristotle writes about it, Aristotle gets underneath it. What he really talks about is that it starts with self-love. It starts with understanding the power that you bring, the power that you have, your strengths, your talents, and your virtue. It starts
there, and only at that point can you truly have a full relationship with someone else.

The Greek term *philia* has a meaning of friendship, which has been interpreted broadly as brotherly love. There is mutuality in the relationship; however, this type of love starts with self-love.

Aristotle, in his *Nichomachean Ethics* states that “the good person ought to be a self-lover—he will both profit himself and benefit others by doing noble things” (Bartlett, 2011). Aristotle emphasizes that the self-love he speaks of is not a narcissistic manifestation but a virtuous one where the individual chooses a nobler action in the service of others (Bartlett, 2011). This “self-lover” has clarity and security concerning his talents and purposes, which creates freedom to make unselfish choices. I have witnessed narcissistic behavior in organizations, where employees fail to make noble choices in order to create an exaggerated sense of their own value due to their insecurities. For example, an individual may believe that to be successful he must suppress information, cast others in an inferior light, and ignore others’ success. All of these may be examples of a lack of self-love, which can be motivated by a belief that what is given to another will be at the expense of oneself.

While this employee may be naturally inclined to this way of thinking, he may justify his actions due to the presence of an organizational system that creates an environment of scarcity, such as when organizations employ a forced ranking, or bell-curve, of employee performance distributions. By mandating that only a select number of employees be to the far right of the curve (higher performance), a few unfortunate souls to the far left (poor performance), and the rest in the middle, they create negative
internal competition; high ratings translate into disproportionate incentives and compensation, high perception of individual value, and a sense that the relationship with the company is positive and preferential. Although employees may believe in the practice of positive self-love, this scenario creates a challenge for application, as it may appear to be in complete opposition to the achievement of their goals. New research suggests that this long-held organizational practice of the bell-curve is being challenged (Bersin, 2014). A question is, do organizations love their employees enough to abandon them, and can employees love themselves enough to rise above it? The exercise of philia for the employee can be a valuable practice.

There also exists in this part of the speech a theme of power. There is both a perceived and a real power imbalance in employment arrangements between individuals and organizations. Organizations determine who is hired and why, set the monetary value of the employment contract, and define the success criteria for the employees. This type of power dynamic can also exist in interpersonal relationships when one partner has a large pool of potential suitors to choose from, can therefore define the emotional currency that will make him happy, and then use this to legislate how his partner must act in order to please him. We can reasonably see a connection to resource theory. Resource theory, studied in marital relationships, posits that one who has access to and supplies more resources to the partner or family unit has more power (Blood & Heer, 1963). In the above example, the organization generally holds more resources (i.e., economic stature, ability to assign internal status to value external to the organization, and jobs), which will enable it to hold a superior power position. Employees can be in a power position when the resource needed is a specific skill or experience that is in short supply.
and to which the organization lacks to readily access. Both types—organizational and interpersonal power—contain emotional consequences that can negatively impact the future health of the relationship by hindering it from reaching full potential.

A Relationship with the Organization

So with this study I came to believe that we are in a relationship with the company. Yes, there are relationships in the company, but we are in a relationship with the company, and it’s that relationship that excites us, that expands us, that engages us, and it’s that same relationship that confuses us, that hurts us and that breaks our heart.

My assertion is that employees and organizations are in a relationship. Employees can and do develop emotional connections that are manifested in a romantic way. As demonstrated earlier, this romantic-like relationship develops in various ways that parallel interpersonal romantic relationships.

Employees personify, or ascribe human-like qualities to, the organization (Levinson, 1965), which assists in developing a bond that can be a reference to previous psychological analogues of interpersonal relationships.

Psychological contracts between employees and organizations are promises and commitments that, while unwritten, can strengthen their relationship, which can increase an employee’s belief that the commitments will be fulfilled (Rousseau, 1995). This contract is similar to the commitments made in an interpersonal relationship that establish expectations of the relationship and the role each partner will play in fulfilling those expectations (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009).
Several organizational commitment types—continuance, normative, and affective—offer a way to define why, how, and to what degree an employee maintains a bond with his or her organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment describes the emotional bond an employee has with the organization demonstrated by a desire to stay in the relationship, alignment to the organization’s values, seeking of need fulfillment, and willingness to join the pursuit of organizational goals (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment can be seen as a parallel to Sternberg’s (1997) Triangular Theory of Love, consisting of intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment.

A supervisor’s role in the execution of performance and career management processes can create a dynamic where the employee may perceive him as the embodiment of the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2010). This dynamic may create the perception that the supervisor’s actions, disapprovals, approvals, and commitments are those of the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2010). When the employee evaluates the relationship with the organization as strong, this belief, “serves to meet needs for approval, esteem, affiliation, and socioemotional support” (Eisenberger et al., 2010, p. 3). Approval, self-esteem, affiliation (identity, belonging) and socioemotional support can be viewed as commonly accepted benefits and outcomes of a romantic relationship.

This paper has also illustrated the associations of love, intimacy, and relationship with employee emotion during organizational transitions (Table 1); Stendhal’s Seven Stages of Love with employee-organizational relationships (Table 2); and Sternberg’s Triangular Theory of Love’s interplay with an employee’s career experience.
The opportunity now exists for further exploration by organizational leaders, employees and practitioners to determine the impact this relationship has on employees and the organizations for which they work.

So if we are in a relationship maybe, maybe there’s a way that we can perhaps think differently about it, or maybe approach it or reframe it in a different way. So I’d like to offer you some paths to think about when it comes to your relationship with the company.

Reframing How You Love the Organization

The first one: change is often a catalyst, but also a litmus test for your relationship. Based on how you feel, based on what you internalize, based on your reactions, based on your behavior, you’ll know what type of relationship you’re in and where you are in the relationship.

You see, Farma had to change. Farma had to be different. Farma had to evolve. The problem was I wasn’t ready. I knew that if Farma changed, our relationship would change, and if our relationship would change, then everything that I had worked for and built up to that point might go away.

So I resisted, and in that resisting I tested myself in the change and realized that I might have needed to make a different decision about my behavior or change my actions. And often when we’re in that test it’s
important for us to understand, maybe we need to do something just a little bit different.

Perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977/2000) is critical during organizational change. The degree to which an organizational actor perceives his ability to demonstrate adaptive behaviors, exhibit resilience and overcome obstacles, may have a significant impact on the degree to which the change has a real effect on his capacity to effectively cope and thrive in the midst of perceived uncertainty (Jimmieson, Terry, & Callan, 2004).

An employee amid organizational change may find it important to reflect and assess the impact change has on his ability to reconcile emotions. In interpersonal relationships, self-reflection has been studied to help individuals understand themselves with a goal to improve self-insight (Hixon & Swann, 1993). Using reflection and assessment as a personal intervention strategy enables the employee to become a self-practitioner during and after the change and take steps to mitigate undesirable behaviors and reinforce positive actions (Liu & Perrewe, 2005).

The next thing I learned that I want to share with you is that if you haven’t gotten over it, why haven’t you gotten out of it? What are you scared of? Sometimes you just need to break up. I know. I know. It’s not easy. It’s a little fearful, but sometimes you might need to take a sabbatical. Sometimes you just need a break. Maybe you need to break up with how you approach the relationship. Maybe you need to break up with the situation. Maybe you need to break up with the team or just break up with the company.
You see, the relationship is unhealthy, and you’re miserable. And here’s a secret. Everyone knows you’re miserable. Right? They see it in your eyes. They can see it in your walk. They see it in your face. They hear it in your voice. They read it in your e-mails. And you cannot be whole being miserable.

So maybe you need to grow someplace else. That doesn’t mean you can’t come back. Others have done it, but you can’t count on that. Maybe in order for you to have a healthy relationship you need to grow in a different way and maybe you’ll grow faster that way.

Breaking up is hard to do; romantic partners and employees seem to experience similar difficulties in breaking an unhealthy union. Factors that constitute an employee’s organizational commitment level, discussed earlier as continuance, normative, and affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991), may have an impact on his bond with the organization and his willingness to separate. In interpersonal relationships, an individual’s need and desire for a bonding relationship creates a strong emotional connection that may hinder his ability to dissolve the union (Baumeister, 1995).

In both organizational and romantic breakups, self-identity and attachment anxiety also play important roles. Blending with organizational identity, and being a part of a larger collective, have been substantial parts of employee-organization life (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). “The dissolution of a relationship is one of the most emotionally distressing events that adults experience” (Slotter & Gardner, 2011, p. 3). A major cause of this distress is the impact the dissolution has on the identities of the individuals formed during the relationship (Weigert & Hastings, 1977), which can
contribute to an intra-psychic assault on the conception of who they are (Slotter, Gardner, and Finkel, 2010). Previous experience with a romantic breakup may create avoidance or delay in ending an unhealthy relationship with the organization due to the employee associating whom they are with for whom they work. Slotter and Gardner (2011) note that “individuals who experience high levels of attachment anxiety are prone to desire and strive for even greater inclusion of the romantic partner into their self, which, in turn, leaves them more vulnerable to the negative self-relevant consequences should their relationship end” (p. 17). An employee’s view may be that when the relationship with the employer ends, his identity ends, and living with that reality instills fear.

For the employee, a breach of a psychological contract can create the circumstances for potential dissolution of the relationship, yet the type and degree of organizational commitment (continuance, normative, affective), may be a factor in whether the breakup occurs. For the romantic partner, it may be “dissatisfaction with one’s partner—not receiving the expected rewards from the partner” (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009, p. 339). Both signal unmet expectations previously perceived or implied as promises.

Despite the disappointment and potential damage to the relationship, “the most significant losses present the greatest opportunities for disruption while simultaneously presenting the greatest opportunities for growth, with the outcome depending on how effectively emotions are processed” (Conroy & O’Leary-Kelly, 2014, p. 83). When there is organizational change that impacts the employee-organization relationship, opportunities may exist for the employee to re-frame its potential impact. Employee emotions during change are inevitable and cannot be avoided (Duck, 2001; Bridges,
2003; Kotter, 2012); however, thinking differently about change, such as seeing an opportunity to win during the transition as opposed to losing (Duck, 2001), may assist in alleviating the potential strain on the relationship.

There is a possibility that the employee cannot move past the perceived injury to the relationship, and growth may be best accomplished outside the organization. Various organizational artifacts, such as mission statements and credos, may point to ideals, values, and beliefs that the employee feels are no longer valued or valid within the relationship, possibly serving as constant reminders of relationship failure, yet accurately representing underlying assumptions of the organization (Schein, 2010). Similarly, resistance to change for employees may be precipitated by their assumptions of how change will affect their relationship with the organization. This resistance may prohibit them from questioning or reflecting on their motives as Kegan and Lahey (2002) assert in their *Harvard Business Review* article, “The Real Reason People Won’t Change”:

“People rarely realize they hold big assumptions because, quite simply, they accept them as reality (p. 47). In interpersonal relationships, individuals can hold negative assumptions regarding the impact that leaving the relationship will have on their personal identity (Park, Sanchez, & Brynildsen, 2011). However, there is data to support that individuals experience growth post relationship dissolution (Tashiro & Frasier, 2003). The assumptions of employees and individuals in romantic relationships regarding the negative impact of breaking up can be hindering and only part of the story. Reflection that leads to self-awareness may be an opportunity for employees to explore the benefits of leaving their organizations and free them to experience growth once gone.
And if you do that, then my last one is that it’s important that you put yourself first. When you walk into your boss’ office and you have a meeting, why is your name and your development at the bottom of the list? Because it should be at the top because anything good that can happen has to come through you, and if you are a better you then all the better for yourself and the company.

But you may be like me. At times I defer, delay myself, and delay development. The company has tremendous amounts of resources and we just put them on the back burner sometimes. We defer that and I understand, “Cecil, I have projects due. I have deliverables.” Well, why don’t we make ourselves a deliverable? Because by doing that we can truly tap into our power. We can have equal authority in a relationship.

We can truly tap into what matters so that we can truly make a difference, because it’s at that point that the relationship can truly be whole, that you can truly connect and be a partner with the company, and truly drive and truly create a company in your work, in your purpose, in your values, in your strengths.

My role for 14 years has been to develop hundreds of managers, who are responsible for developing thousands of front line employees. I have observed a trend: both groups (people leaders and front line employees) generally fail to prioritize their own development as a catalyst to help them reach professional and business goals. While this observation is centrally based on my organization, a global Fortune 500 company, it may serve as a reasonable basis to encourage further study in other organizations. A
contributing factor to employees’ not prioritizing their own development may be the lack of skills supervisors have in developing employees (“Career Development,” 2009; “Engaging Managers,” 2003). Therefore it is important for organizations to equip their supervisors to effectively develop employees and for supervisors to have the desire to do so (Senge, 1990).

The requirement for employees to assume ownership of their development based on a changing employment environment has been an increasing trend over the last two decades (Hall & Mirvis, 1995; Sturges et al., 2005). To complement this changing landscape, millennial employees recognize the importance of training and development to job success and advancement and are increasingly proactive in prioritizing and expecting development (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010).

These two occurrences—the requirement for employees to assume ownership of their development and for new employees to prioritize development—suggest that joint responsibility for development may have a greater impact on employee satisfaction and commitment to the organization (Sturges et al., 2005). In organizations that subscribe to this view, it is important for there to be a provision for resources and access and a framework for development. Supervisors in these organizations may need the skills and systems to authorize, motivate, remove barriers, and make sure that they themselves are not impediments. However, employees hold the lever, which, when pulled, should put the process in motion.

Despite the expectation that the employee should take ownership of development, the employee who has developed a romantic-like relationship with his organization may focus all of his efforts on completing tasks and day-to-day assignments with the
perception that doing so is strengthening the relationship. This approach may have the potential to create the conditions that cause the employee to ignore changes in his external environment, which may be signaling the very development that is needed.

In observation of the organization for which I am employed, and with my exposure to all levels of employees as a learning and development practitioner, I see that those who prioritize the development of their skills and abilities place themselves in the unique and enviable position of forecasting organizational changes and changing before the organization does; this is not to imply that this is the only way to do so, but it is a viable option to explore and study further.
CHAPTER 4
ENVIRONMENAL FEEDBACK

The previous chapter demonstrated how employees might develop a relationship with their organizations similar to that of a romantic bond. Missing, however, from the academic essay was feedback from employees that sheds additional light on the issue. This chapter will therefore provide personal, rather than experimental, evidence based on employees’ exposure to the romantic metaphor, following a verbal presentation I made at my employer, a global, Fortune 500 organization, TEDx conference. While I do not pretend that the analysis provided is based on rigorous data or testing of the target audience, I suggest that the strength of employee reaction to my presentation demonstrates that this romantic construct merits additional empirical consideration.

Anecdotal Indications of Validity

As mentioned in Chapter 2, this journey started approximately six years ago with a significant on-the-job experience, which led to a feeling that I could not explain, yet resonated with me emotionally. A mentor helped identify this feeling as, “falling in love,” which felt valid and assisted me in developing emotional awareness about the experience. Since that time I have explored the concept of falling in love with an organization with diverse types of employees, most of whom have expressed empathy for the concept and stated they have either personally experienced, or witnessed, falling in love with their organization.

Graduate-level study has contributed to my appreciation of the wide range of academic literature that attempts to explain, or better describe, the proposition of falling
in love with an organization romantically. Additionally, members of the Organizational Dynamics community at the University of Pennsylvania demonstrated that there might be face validity to this hypothesis.

The selection process for speaking at the TEDx event itself supported the face validity of falling in romantic love with one’s organization. I was one of 150 nominees and participated in three one-hour interviews before selection. The interview panel consisted of the TEDx Curator (lead for the event), lead speaker coordinator (responsible for all speakers), and a member of the speaker selection committee. During my final interview, the lead speaker coordinator said, “This is a message people need to hear.” Being selected as one of 21 employees to speak at this event indicated that my message was organizationally relevant and was a reinforcement of its potential value.

The talk development process expanded my personal perspective on the relationship between employees and organizations, and I was able to reflect more deeply on my experience of “falling in love” as an employee. I saw that I consciously attempted to manage my expectations, emotions, and behavior as a result of organizational heartbreak. However, as a supervisor, I noticed that I compartmentalized my experience as an employee and did not consciously think of my role in facilitating the relationship that my employees have with the organization.

The process also forced me to distill six years of emotion, experience, and study down to 15 coherent minutes that would connect with a diverse audience. Parenthetically, I suggest that perhaps there is utility for a similar process to be employed for those formulating the presentation of their academic theses.
Feedback

Figure 1 represents feedback that was obtained by way of e-mail from attendees of the live talk and a smaller audience who viewed the video via a private link, some of whom provided comments spontaneously, others by answering the question, “What resonated with you most from the talk?” In total, feedback was gathered from 37 individuals, who contributed 98 comments that were aggregated into themes. The graph shows the percentage of times a theme was mentioned as relevant by these employees. Not shown are data from individuals who provided feedback verbally, e-mails that contained cursory laudatory comments, or third party comments relayed by others. Additionally, the video of the talk has not been distributed to the broader organization via the company’s internal TEDx site, which will occur later this year. At that point, all employees will be able to view the talk and provide comments via an electronic message board so that additional data can be collected at that time.
The above chart indicates that the leading theme resonating with the individuals in this analysis was “falling in love with the organization” and that it explained a personal experience for them (33%). Additionally, while not displayed in the chart, the same theme was mentioned by 33 of the 37 individuals, representing 89% of this group. Perhaps this indicates that “falling in love” with one’s company, at least for this organization, while not common, is an experience shared by a representative number of employees.

Encouraging is the group’s connection to the theme of “focus on development” (14%), which may indicate fertile ground to plant resources that create opportunities for these employees to take ownership of their growth and development.

The themes, “falling in love” (33%) and “I plan to show to my team and others” (10%), in combination, may indicate that the metaphor provides some additional level of
emotional literacy (Steiner & Perry, 1997) to individuals. It may, for example, increase understanding of their own emotions, raise their desire to have empathy for others with similar experiences, and empower them to take ownership of the impact emotions have on their behavior (Steiner & Perry, 1997).

The themes “write the book” (10%) and “inspired by the speaker’s courage” (8%) perhaps imply the desire for this group to have their shared story told to a broader audience. The individuals who indicated that they were inspired by the my courage may be acknowledging that the message of “falling in love” with one’s organization is not easy to share, personally and within the organizational culture, and therefore I may have given voice to feelings they did not know how to express or did not feel safe in doing so.

While not explicitly illustrated in this analysis, I suggest an interesting duality exists for supervisors who also have their “hearts broken” by the organization. If one subscribes to the theory that employees can perceive their supervisors as the embodiment of the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2010), then supervisors may be either causal actors or victims in organizational heartbreak – or both. An opportunity exists for follow-up examination with supervisors to determine if a similar experience has shaped their leadership approaches with employees.

These themes suggest informally that further exploration and either primary or secondary research would prove a worthwhile pathway extending from my romantic relationship hypothesis.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

The academic literature of the applied social sciences discusses various types of employee-organization relationships. At the other end the spectrum conversations in the hallways of organizations contain anecdotal warnings against falling in love with jobs or companies, with the assumption that doing so is both prevalent and risky. Themes from these very different sources may appear similar to this paper’s topic, but they do not specifically explore how relationships between organizations and employees mirror the kind of romantic love associated more commonly with interpersonal relationships. Most important, they fail to capture the potential consequences of that romance, the emotional impact it can have on individuals, and how managing the process successfully can enhance employee and organizational effectiveness.

As I outlined in the preceding chapters, there are various fields of study that reasonably connect in order to provide validity to employee-organization relationships presenting as romantic liaisons. Below (Figure 2) illustrates the central themes presented in this exploratory paper and opportunities for further study. The elements of Figure 2 can be considered as fertile ground for more rigorous academic pursuit in developing the romantic relationship metaphor in employee-organization relationships.
I could not have predicted that a perceived slight by a leader six years ago would lead me to ask a question that may be relevant in the organizational science community: can employees demonstrate cognitive and emotional behavior toward their employing organization that parallel the same behaviors demonstrated in romantic human relationships? The central proposition in this paper is that the question has merit, can be answered affirmatively, and should be studied further to determine the potential impact it has on various groups.

**Employees**

The unveiling of this metaphor may present an opportunity for employees to develop an emotional awareness (Lane & Schwartz, 1987) and literacy (Steiner & Perry, 1997) of their experience by examining the possibility of falling in love as a way to define their relationship with their organizations.
A beneficial outcome for employees may be that, whereas they previously identified as victims, they can now better define and shape their relationships with their organizations. By resisting the urge to assign perfection to the organization or romanticize their career journey, they may come to have more realistic expectations of the relationship and become aware of internal and external dynamics that affect their environment. Doing so might enable employees to attain an empowered position that places them ahead of organizational change and that is mutually beneficial.

Another opportunity that presents itself is the development of a community of employees who have similar experiences of organizational heartbreak, in order to constructively discuss individual and organizational solutions. This community might assist in establishing more productive workplaces by creating a change in organizational culture where relationships have unknowingly become emotionally fractured.

**Supervisors**

Personification and anthropomorphism point to ways that a supervisor can be viewed as the embodiment and representative agent of the organization by the employee (Levinson, 1962/1965; Eisenberger et al., 2010).

Posed earlier in this paper was the question of whether supervisors, who have had their hearts broken in organizations, consciously take a different approach to how they manage employees. I did not in my role as a supervisor before writing this capstone.

A common message told to supervisors is that they are the face of the company, but I came to realize over time that an employee might perceive me as the heart also. If I appear to “love” them through favorable supervisory actions, such as rewards, positive
feedback, and predictions of their upward mobility, then they may believe the organization “loves” them also. The opposite can be equally true when my actions are seen to confirm suspicions of rejection, failure, or a lack of caring.

Messages supervisors deliver verbally, silently, or ineffectively may, therefore, have a profound influence on the perception employees have of their relationship with the organization. Awareness of the romantic relationship by supervisors creates an opportunity for them to understand that their actions have emotional impact and consequences.

All of this suggests that an opportunity exists for further study of supervisors who have experienced organizational heartbreak and the impact this has on how they lead others following that negative experience.

Organizations

Organizations are complex. They are made up of systems where one positive action in a part of a business, even if begun with good intentions, can negatively impact another part and appear as a premeditated assault. Therefore, when I discuss organizational heartbreak and employees falling in love, it is not to blame organizations but to bring attention to a human condition that has important implications for the broader system.

Organizational actors do not always know that commitments and promises are being breached (Rousseau, 1995), and, when they do, they can underestimate the collateral damage the violation has on employees emotionally and their subsequent
commitment to the organization. Essentially, they are inattentive to, are ignorant of, or simply forget about the relationship nature of their interactions.

At times, we appreciate the difficult decisions organizations have to make in order to evolve, except in the cases where they have a negative impact on our life as an employee. When Starbucks Coffee makes a process improvement that shortens customers’ wait time, lowers the cost of coffee, and creates a more relaxing environment, we, the consumers, may show appreciation for the company’s ability to change for our benefit. Yet that same change may have had the unexpected consequence of having broken the heart of an employee within the organization if the process improvement dismissed any implied promises of advancement, security, or income.

Again, organizations are complex but no more complex than the individuals in them. Organizations consequently should expect that some employees will experience various levels of heartbreak as a result of change, and therefore should determine how to approach the change differently in order to lessen the impact. A potential solution may be to proactively acknowledge broken promises or commitments and develop alternatives that might help employees reconcile their feelings faster. Organizations should, therefore, remember that each change brings an opportunity to reset, clarify, and balance expectations and commitments with employees in a way that assures the relationship does not have to end, just change, potentially for the better.

Practitioners

There is a risk that in some part of the vast universe of organizational scholarship someone has studied, written, or alluded to the idea that I am proposing here as original
thinking. In the case of the metaphor of the organization as a romantic partner, that
possibility exists and, if true, then my hope is that any such work would complement my
argument and add further validity to my hypothesis. However, in the absence of such
verification, my goal has been to make the argument that the potential implications of the
metaphor are sufficient grounds to justify further study backed by empirical evidence and
offering potential solutions.

Most organizational development practitioners will recognize the statement
“Employees don’t leave companies, they leave their managers” and the philosophy that
lies behind it. The solution to this statement is that they are often commissioned to
supply training or other interventions intended to help organizations “fix” the problem
with their managers. However, an opportunity exists for practitioners to remind
organizations that they cannot separate themselves from their managers that easily.

Yes, there are ineffective managers. In spite of that, the opportunity exists to ask
the following questions: What cultural systems, attributes, and values are influencing
managers’ behaviors that in turn cause employees to have their hearts broken in a way
that leads to an emotional break up with the organization? Does, for example, the lack of
specific and clear career feedback given to employees by managers represent a lack of
individual skill or a broader fear of commitment within the organizational culture?

These are questions we hope the organization would ask itself, but in reality it is
our job as practitioners to explore the additional implications that falling in love with
organizations has for employee development and organizational culture.

We as practitioners also have the opportunity to examine our own compass as we
attempt to help organizations and employees overcome their relationship challenges: Are
we working to help individuals come to terms with the fact that they work in large organizations, or helping large organizations come to terms with the fact that they have individuals in them (M. Jones, personal communication, March 6, 2014)? If we answer yes to just one part of the question we achieve some clarity of purpose. If, however, we answer yes to both parts, then our opportunities to improve life for employees and results for the organization are more abundant.

Overcoming Challenges

The influence of the examiner on how a situation is assessed is always present and one challenge for me personally was not to be seduced by the power of metaphor, especially my own metaphor. Morgan (2006) explains:

We tend to find and realize what we are looking for. This does not mean that there is no real basis to what we find. Rather, it is just that reality has a tendency to reveal itself in accordance with the perspectives through which it is engaged. (p. 339)

The metaphor discussed in this paper strongly resonates with the human experience of falling in love, and my challenge, therefore, was to ensure that I did not assign romantic meaning to every relationship between organization and employee.

Another consideration when reviewing this paper is that it primarily focuses on the relationship from the employee’s view. Not examined was the potential heartbreak that occurs for a body of organizational agents who may “fall in love” with a specific employee, only to have their hearts broken by the employee’s breach of a promise or commitment. For example, an employee projected as successor to a critical leadership
role may have significant resources invested in him by senior management in the form of, for example, executive coaching, relocation expenses, or payment for executive education. The acceptance of those resources may not unreasonably be seen by management to imply a commitment to the organization. In addition, management, who are often referred to as “the organization,” may have denied other skilled employees opportunities because of their commitment to the selected employee. However, despite this investment and commitment from the organization, the employee decides to leave for an external opportunity. While the need to prioritize my approach means that I have not explored the organization’s response to the breakup in any depth, it is important to recognize that the recovery of any emotional investment that mentors, supervisors, and sponsors have made is lost. That too has important implications for future relationships.

As mentioned in the introduction, this is not a comprehensive study but an exploratory one, which invites opportunities for expanded examination.

In Practice

I may not have a body of research to support application of the changes to implement based on this type of relationship in organizations; however, I do have recommendations based on my work in this subject.

When thought is given to the romantic potential of the employee-organization relationship, we change the language of the dialogue. Leaders, managers, and coaches can ask more relationship-focused questions.

The question “What has disengaged you?” changes to “How have I/we or the organization hurt you?” The former, while well meaning, does not speak to the heart of
the employee; it stays above the emotional fray, searching for solutions to improve productivity. The latter acknowledges that hurt may have occurred and that the inquirer wants to know. A caveat is that, depending on the organization’s culture, the true answers may be difficult to obtain at first—not different from a relationship where one partner has asked his mate how he can improve only to act defensively when told to do so. The mate, after dealing with this reaction repeatedly, will only say what the other partner wants to hear with no surprises. But there should be surprises, and the responses from employees may be frightening; yet any relationship that is growing should have new information coming in. That information may be emotional data that employee assistance programs cannot address but that dialogue and relationships can. An additional caution is that the statement should be modified to avoid legal ramifications, yet still have the same intent and impact.

Another opportunity is to break the paradigm that calls for retention strategies to save the relationship. The employees’ bags are packed and by the door. What will be said but has not been that removes the employee’s threat of leaving? Why is it being said now and what prevented it from being expressed earlier? There exists the opportunity for strategies focused on attention and intention, instead of retention, in order to cultivate and build relationship equity proactively.

An attention strategy acknowledges that the employee is seen not as a part of a group but as an individual. It acknowledges the personal and specific relationship the employee has with the organization. An example of an attention strategy is employee training and development. When employed incorrectly it is targeted to affect only the employee within the container of the specific organization. But there is a case for
training and development as an attention strategy when it is targeted to affect the employee beyond the current job, company, and industry, while improving the personal dimensions of his or her life as well.

Intention strategies focus on motives, communicating with the employee clearly about organizational perceptions and in turn about the individual’s career aspirations. Employing an intention strategy in succession planning conversations seeks to remove messages of false hope and provides clarity to the employee regarding realistic career goals. Perhaps the reason organizations and their leaders are reluctant to increase emphasis on attention and intention strategy is a fear of commitment, as mentioned earlier.

While preparing for the TEDx talk, I came to a fork in the road: do I provide recommendations at the end of the speech that may not be popular with my company’s leaders but are what the employees need to hear, or do I play it safe, and protect myself politically? I was apprehensive because of the risk involved, and I was being asked to take that risk by those who would not suffer any consequences. My speaker coach, who was an external consultant and had been working with me for almost two months, felt it was the right thing to do but acknowledged that I was the one on the stage. Then, after hearing me try to dilute the message, attempting to hedge my bets, she asked me the question that made me look in the mirror, “Cecil, may I ask, what is your relationship with the company right now?” I thought about it, replied that it was good, but while reflecting I realized that I was uncomfortable with telling the truth that needed to be said, in the current relationship. Despite living with the metaphor, my practice of using it as a lens to improve relationships and have an impact on organizations was not second nature;
nevertheless, the question reminded me of its potential impact, which I responded to by providing the more provocative recommendations that employees needed to hear.

**Moving the Relationship Forward**

The exploration in this paper started with a love letter from an employee to the organization. This was followed by an examination of the elements that contribute to the employee’s developing a romantic-type relationship with the organization, as well as parallels drawn with interpersonal relationships. On the surface it may make sense given that people fall in love, want to love, and need to love (Sternberg & Barnes, 1998), but we too easily assume that this drive is reserved merely for interpersonal relationships outside of work. Yet we also recognize that organizations can be experienced as “socially constructed realities that are as much in the minds of their members as they are in concrete structure, rules, and regulations” (Morgan, 2006, p 137).

Therefore, if the minds of organizational members are moved to seek attachment and express it as romantic love, then perhaps the possibility exists for that expression to be targeted at the organization itself. Conceivably, then, work and personal life do not exist in parallel universes that separate realms of emotion for employees in organizations, but are, in fact, an integrated experience that includes both. The central argument of this paper is that the existence of those feelings is not a failure for either the employee or the organization. It is an opportunity.
Your Change

The interesting thing is you told me that you were changing, that you needed to evolve, and, for me to be with you, I had to. You said I needed to show how committed I was to our relationship; but hadn’t I done everything you asked? There was nothing more important to me than our relationship, and you’ll remember, I took a risk, and we agreed that I’d play a different role in your life...temporarily. Yet after that, I felt you forgot about me.

The notes did not come as often, your tone was different, and you seemed distracted every time we met. It was as if you were focused on something... or someone else. “Us” was different, and it was not fair. Why did you have to change?

The change you went through—rather, we went through—tested me. I must admit I failed at first, but then I realized while I was trying to answer your questions, I did not ask questions of myself.

I was losing me in our relationship. I adored you so much that I did not know how I could be without you. When people saw me, they saw you, and being with you seemed to make me who I was; I did not want to let that feeling go. But I knew I had to.

My Change

I took some time for myself to reflect and then I saw you and me differently. The promises I thought you made to me, you didn’t; the love I thought you had given me, you
had not; and the future I wanted us to share would not have been my future but yours. I learned that most of my pain was caused by my perspective on us, not on your view of me. I also found that by pushing through the heartache, the emptiness, and the mental fog, I am stronger, I see more clearly, and I know how capable I am. You taught me that this business of you and I was never personal. I was able to connect with what was truly important: my values and my value.

So, I just wanted to share with you how I feel. I’m not angry anymore, the pain is gone. Like all relationships, when expectations are different, there is bound to be a breakdown, often a breakup, and in cases like mine, a breakthrough.
REFERENCES


Coyle-Shapiro, J. A., & Kessler, I. (2002). Exploring reciprocity through the lens of the


APPENDIX A

PASSIONATE LOVE SCALE

Passionate Love Scale (from Sternberg, 1988, p. 195)

TABLE 9.1 Passionate Love Scale

In this section of the questionnaire you will be asked to describe how you feel when you are passionately in love. Some common terms for this feeling are passionate love, infatuation, love sickness, or obsessive love.

Please think of the person whom you love most passionately right now. If you are not in love right now, please think of the last person you loved passionately. If you have never been in love, think of the person whom you came closest to caring for in that way. Keep this person in mind as you complete this section of the questionnaire. (The person you choose should be of the opposite sex if you are heterosexual or of the same sex if you are homosexual.) Try to tell us how you felt at the time when your feelings were the most intense.

All of your answers will be strictly confidential.

1. Since I’ve been involved with ________, my emotions have been on a roller coaster.
2. I would feel deep despair if ________ left me.
3. Sometimes my body trembles with excitement at the sight of ________.
4. I take delight in studying the movements and angles of ________’s body.
5. Sometimes I feel I can’t control my thoughts; they are obsessively on ________.
6. I feel happy when I am doing something to make ________ happy.
7. I would rather be with ________ than anyone else.
8. I’d get jealous if I thought ________ were falling in love with someone else.
9. No one else could love ________ like I do.
10. I yearn to know all about ________.
11. I want ________—physically, emotionally, mentally.
12. I will love ________ forever.
13. I melt when looking deeply into ________’s eyes.
14. I have an endless appetite for affection from ________.
15. For me, ________ is the perfect romantic partner.
16. ________ is the person who can make me feel the happiest.
17. I sense my body responding when ________ touches me.
18. I feel tender toward ________.
19. ________ always seems to be on my mind.
20. If I were separated from ________ for a long time, I would feel intensely lonely.
21. I sometimes find it difficult to concentrate on work because thoughts of ________ occupy my mind.
22. I want ________ to know me—my thoughts, my fears, and my hopes.
23. Knowing that ________ cares about me makes me feel complete.
24. I eagerly look for signs indicating ________’s desire for me.
25. If ________ were going through a difficult time, I would put away my own concerns to help him/her out.
26. ________ can make me feel effervescent and bubbly.
27. In the presence of ________, I yearn to touch and be touched.
28. An existence without ________ would be dark and dismal.
29. I possess a powerful attraction for ________.
30. I get extremely depressed when things don’t go right in my relationship with ________.

Possible responses to each item range from:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Not at all true</th>
<th>Moderately true</th>
<th>Definitely true</th>
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<td>7</td>
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*Indicates items selected for a short version of the PLS.
APPENDIX B

Contained in this appendix is an edited version of the transcript of the corporate TEDx talk I delivered in February 2014. This has been edited to provide the reader with opportunity to read the script as best to capture how the speech was delivered. References to specific organization have been omitted or changed.

A LOVE STORY

My First Love

A few years ago I fell in love. And my heart was broken. And I haven’t been the same since.

Her name was Farma. And our relationship started simply. Someone told me that I caught her attention and I checked her out… and she caught my attention, and I figured “let’s talk”. So we started with phone conversations where we learned about our likes and dislikes. Then we started to date and go out, and we realized we had a connection.

You kind of get that feeling like there’s something different here. And it went to the point where I was thinking, “you know, this isn’t typical”. She was from the Midwest. I’m from the East Coast. But we seemed to connect - likes, dislikes, dreams, goals, and aspirations. We learned about past relationships, and what we wanted in a future mate.

It got to the point where I was thinking, “she might need to see my mother.” That’s when you know it’s serious, right? It went to the point where Farma became impatient and basically said, “Cecil, maybe we should make this exclusive.” And me, being the gentleman that I am, decided to accept her offer.

And from there our relationship took off. We could not get enough of each other. She was the first thing I thought of when I woke up. She was the last thing I thought of when I went to bed. We made a promises to each other about what the future would look like, the roles we would play in each other’s lives. We were connected. It was that special thing, that special spark that you get when you’re with someone that you haven’t felt before; [and] you don’t think you’re ever going to feel with anyone else. Farma and I were close.
Change in the Relationship

And then she decided to change. No warning, no conversation. She became a little different. I noticed the conversations that we used to have; I noticed she was having with other people. Our time together was shorter. It just wasn’t as rich. It just wasn’t as meaningful - to the point where she came to me and said, “Cecil, I care about you, but I think you need to play a different role in my life.” Really? Just like that. So we’re doing this now, right?

And here I am left, bruised, hurt, confused, and really heartbroken.

But there’s something I’m not telling you. Farma wasn’t my girlfriend. Farma was a company that I fell in love with years ago. And every day employees fall in love with their companies, and every other day someone, somewhere, somehow gets their heart broken.

And you may have had your Farma and left it and started a relationship here, and now you’re here and someway, somehow your heart’s been broken [here]. Maybe you feel ignored. Maybe you feel invisible. Maybe someone said something or did something to you and you don’t understand why the organization let it happen. Maybe a promise was made to you and somehow it’s taken too long for it to happen, or somehow someone else got it or you just feel that it’s been broken; or maybe a change took you away from the thing that you thought you were meant to do and the people you care about.

Well I’m here to tell you that you’re not crazy. You’re not alone. This happened to me, too.

Unfulfilled Expectations and Emotional Awareness

Two years ago I was involved in a project. I was given the lead for a big project. It’s the project where your boss walks into your office and says, “I’ve got an opportunity for you.” It’s that rites of passage project, the one that you go to 20 or 30…thousand meetings for – that type of project.

And I had a great team and I worked hard; sleepless nights, stressful. I made some people happy, some people mad, some people sad, and my goal was to make sure that I delivered on what the company wanted, and it went off without a hitch…except I was left empty. Something inside me wasn’t filled.

Here is what it was: I was looking for my senior leader to just acknowledge [me], “Cecil, good job,” just show me somehow that I’m valued. I would have even taken it in the
hallway, drive-by-Isaac-From-Love-Boat-finger-point. I got none of that and I don't know what the feeling was, but it was just... was it bitterness? Was it betrayal? Was it feeling unappreciated? It wasn’t any one of those things. It was kind of all those things wrapped together.

And after wrestling with it I took a risk. I went to one of my mentors and I told him my story, and I told him how I felt. And he listened patiently and then he stopped, looked at me and said, “Cecil, you fell in love and I’ve been there, too.” That was it. That was the feeling I had.

It didn’t make sense at work to fall in love and to get your heart broken, but that was the feeling. I had it in middle school. I had it in high school, a little bit in college. It was that feeling, and I figured that I had to find a way to reconcile it.

Now it [the feeling] kind of made sense, but I knew a couple things. One, I did not want to break up with the company, but I did not want to be hurt that way again. And I had to figure out what do I do? What do I do next?

So I started to write. I started to write and write and I decided that I was going to write a book and the name of this book would be called, The Love Letter, and in that book it would be an employee writing to their company, basically in the same concept of sharing with the company the hurts, their pain, just like one person in a relationship would share with another.

And every time I mentioned this book to someone they would say, “You need to write that book.” Whether they were outside the company, inside the company, president, frontline employee, they would say, “You need to write that book.” But what they were really saying to me was that, “Cecil, you need to write that book for me, because in that book is my story. In that book are the stories of others that need to be heard, that need to know that they’re not alone and that somehow the pain they have, the pain they feel, they can get rid of it on the other side.”

Exploring the Arts and Sciences

And that let me know that I’m not alone, but there [was] more for me to learn, and that led me here, the campus of the University of Pennsylvania where I enrolled in the Masters of Organizational Dynamics program, and this is a leading national and international program. And what we do is that we take the arts and the sciences and we leverage them to transform organizations, leaders, and change.

And I learned about things such as psychological contracts. Those are things that are unwritten promises and agreements that are made between employee and organization and organization and employee. And those are just as binding in the minds of the
employee as if they were written contracts. So when one is broken and when a promise isn’t fulfilled it can destroy the relationship, but when one is fulfilled it can strengthen it.

I also learned about different types of love and the Greeks have different words, for different types of love, but one struck me and that was the word, philia, brotherly love, just like Philadelphia. And what that really means is that there’s mutuality in the relationship, that there is connection and equity in the relationship.

And when you dig underneath [it], when you look at what Aristotle writes about it, Aristotle gets underneath it. What he really talks about is that it starts with self-love. It starts with understanding the power that you bring, the power that you have, your strengths, your talents, and your virtue. It starts there, and only at that point can you truly have a full relationship with someone else.

A Relationship with the Organization

So with this study I came to believe that we are in a relationship with the company. Yes, there are relationships in the company, but we are in a relationship with the company, and it’s that relationship that excites us, that expands us, that engages us, and it’s that same relationship that confuses us, that hurts us and that breaks our heart.

So if we are in a relationship maybe, maybe, there’s a way that we can perhaps think differently about it, or maybe approach it or reframe it in a different way. So I’d like to offer you some paths to think about when it comes to your relationship with the company.

Reframing How You Love the Organization

The first one: change is often a catalyst, but also a litmus test for your relationship. Based on how you feel, based on what you internalize, based on your reactions, based on your behavior, you’ll know what type of relationship you’re in and where you are in the relationship.

You see Farma had to change. Farma had to be different. Farma had to evolve. The problem was I wasn’t ready. I knew that if Farma changed, our relationship would change, and if our relationship would change, then everything that I had worked for and built up to that point might go away. So I resisted, and in that resisting I tested myself in the change and realized that I might have needed to make a different decision about my behavior or change my actions. And often when we’re in that test it’s important for us to understand, maybe we need to do something just a little bit different.

The next thing I learned that I want to share with you is that if you haven’t gotten over it, why haven’t you gotten out of it? What are you scared of? Sometimes you just need to break up. I know. I know. It’s not easy. It’s a little fearful, but sometimes you might need to take a sabbatical. Sometimes you just need a break. Maybe you need to break up
with how you approach the relationship. Maybe you need to break up with the situation. Maybe you need to break up with the team or just break up with the company.

You see, the relationship is unhealthy, and you’re miserable. And here’s a secret. Everyone knows you’re miserable. Right? They see it in your eyes. They can see it in your walk. They see it in your face. They hear it in your voice. They read it in your e-mails. And you cannot be whole being miserable.

So maybe you need to grow someplace else. That doesn’t mean you can’t come back. Others have done it, but you can’t count on that. Maybe in order for you to have a healthy relationship you need to grow in a different way and maybe you’ll grow faster that way.

And if you do that, then it’s important that you put yourself first. When you walk into your boss’ office and you have a meeting, why is your name and your development at the bottom of the list? Because it should be at the top because anything good that can happen has to come through you, and if you are a better you then all the better for yourself and the company.

But you may be like me. At times I defer, delay myself, and delay development. The company has tremendous amounts of resources and we just put them on the back burner sometimes. We defer that and I understand, “Cecil, I have projects due. I have deliverables.” Well, why don’t we make ourselves a deliverable? Because by doing that we can truly tap into our power. We can have equal authority in a relationship.

We can truly tap into what matters so that we can truly make a difference, because it’s at that point that the relationship can truly be whole, that you can truly connect and be a partner with the company, and truly drive and truly create a company in your work, in your purpose, in your values, in your strengths.

What the Future Can Look Like

When I think about all this. Really, what my wish is that somehow my story connects to your story. If my story somehow connects to your story, then together we can create a community and that community truly can have rich connections and rich relationships. Because in that community I imagine that one day someone will walk in your office, someone will walk into your cube or down the hallway and look you in the eyes and they will say, “I’m in pain,” and you’ll be able to say to them, “You know, a few years ago I fell in love, and my heart was broken, but I’ve never been the same since.”
APPENDIX C

Knapp’s Model of Interaction Stages (from Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009, p. 34)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Representative Dialogue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiating</td>
<td>“Hi, how ya doin?”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Fine. You?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experimenting</td>
<td>“Oh, so you like to ski . . . so do I.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“You do? Great. Where do you go?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coming Together</td>
<td>Intensifying</td>
<td>“I . . . I think I love you.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I love you too.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I feel so much a part of you.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Yeah, we are like one person. What happens to you happens to me.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I want to be with you always.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Let’s get married.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differentiating</td>
<td>“I just don’t like big social gatherings.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Sometimes I don’t understand you. This is one area where I’m certainly not like you at all.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Circumscribing</td>
<td>“Did you have a good time on your trip?”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“What time will dinner be ready?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coming Apart</td>
<td>Stagnating</td>
<td>“What’s there to talk about?”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Right. I know what you’re going to say and you know what I’m going to say.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>“I’m so busy, I just don’t know when I’ll be able to see you.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“If I’m not around when you try, you’ll understand.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Terminating</td>
<td>“I’m leaving you . . . and don’t bother trying to contact me.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Don’t worry.”</td>
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