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## Gracious Mindset: Practicing Respectful Interpretations

Donna Baumann

*University of Pennsylvania*, [donnaba@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:donnaba@sas.upenn.edu)

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### Abstract

Competition in organizations is embraced as a fundamental element of success. As businesses champion the need to win, employees often compete with their own teammates, sometimes creating a culture of distrust and zero-sum solutions. But increasingly scholars are recognizing the need to focus on the relational aspects of organizations, which have been shown to deliver many benefits including those associated with increased positive affect and better working relationships.

This paper explores a singular relational behavior, that of giving others the benefit of the doubt. To this end, I introduce the construct of Gracious Mindset (GM) as a mindset to consciously practice, when endeavoring to give others the benefit of the doubt, assuming a respectful interpretation of the other's intent or motivation in situations where the benefits outweigh the risks. I explore this concept in the context of an organization and the relevant enabling aspects including psychological safety, civility, humility, perspective taking, trust, optimistic explanatory style, compassion, and forgiveness.

### Keywords

gracious mindset, benefit of the doubt, positive organizations, psychological safety, civility, humility, perspective taking, trust, optimistic explanatory style, compassion, forgiveness, positive psychology, positive organizational psychology, benevolence bias

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Gracious Mindset: Practicing Respectful Interpretations

Donna Hemmert (Baumann)

University of Pennsylvania

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Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Dan Tomasulo

August 1, 2015

Gracious Mindset: Practicing Respectful Interpretations

Donna Hemmert (Baumann)

dhemmert@gmail.com

Capstone Project

Master of Applied Positive Psychology

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August 1, 2015

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## Introduction

*"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye." – Matthew 7:3*

Capitalism is built around the notion of human competitiveness (Friedman, 2015), as many believe that competition is at the root of our very nature (Darwin, 1859). Yet both common sense and research have shown that cooperation is a powerful part of our nature as well (Axelrod, 2006) and a fundamental aspirational behavior in organizations (Leonard, Cosans, Pakdil, & Collaborator, 2012). In fact, no human baby would survive without the constant cooperation of others, and some indigenous cultures consciously recognize cooperation as their highest social value (Bowlby, 1969). In the animal kingdom, cooperation in the form of democracy is actually played out daily by animals where schools of fish, flocks of birds, herds of deer and many other animals move collectively upon the wishes of the majority. When slow motion photography is employed, one can see that these animals are actually “voting” with the positioning of their bodies<sup>1</sup> (Dyer, Johansson, Helbing, Couzin, & Krause, 2009).

Companies that give greater focus to cooperation tend to generate greater innovation, creativity, and stronger relationships while experiencing more enjoyment (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). Transformative cooperation, defined as the kind of change where knowledge, skills and passion are pooled to design and build a new future (not changing or fixing the “what

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<sup>1</sup> There are many examples across species including bees, chimpanzees, red deer and birds (Dyer, Johansson, Helbing, Couzin, & Krause, 2009). For example, researchers attached GPS trackers to pigeons and found that “most birds have a say in decision-making, [but] a flexible system of ‘rank’ ensures that some birds are more likely to lead and others to follow” exposing a complex social hierarchy (Bellaachia & Bari, 2012).

is” but initiating a new effort toward a new form of organizing), has been shown to lead to outcomes that prompt upward growth spirals that reverberate out to build a stronger team (Sekerka, Vacharkulksemsuk, & Fredrickson, 2012).

### **Focus on the Relational**

Cooperation in an organization is dependent upon its relationships since teamwork cannot exist without a relational component, even if the relationship is minimal. Relational aspects are critical to organizations—because organizations *are* relationships (Weick, 1979). The quality of relationships within an organization affects its performance, highlighting the importance of working well with others (Ragins & Dutton, 2007).

Adam Grant (2013) describes how those with a savvy giving behavior<sup>2</sup> (coined “otherish”) tend to be more successful in goal pursuit. Jane Dutton (2003) further explains that the energy and vitality of an organization is dependent on the quality of connections among its people. So, if behavior (as in giving) and interaction impact organizational performance and wellbeing, how does a giving mindset impact an organization? More specifically, if we extend the idea of graciousness, from that of a giving behavior to a mindset of giving others the benefit of the doubt, can this drive generative benefit for the organization and wellbeing for the individual?

This paper explores a singular behavior that can positively impact a company’s creativity, sense of belongingness and interpersonal cooperation—that of giving others the benefit of the doubt. To this end, I introduce the construct of *Gracious Mindset* (GM) as a mindset we

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<sup>2</sup> Being willing to give more than receive, while keeping one’s own goals in the line of sight (Grant, 2013).

consciously practice, endeavoring to give others the benefit of the doubt, assuming a respectful interpretation of the other's intent or motivation in situations where the benefits outweigh the risks. Gracious Mindset, unlike giving the benefit of the doubt as a reaction in a particular situation, is an intentional conscious practice we can employ on a day-to-day basis – one in which we consciously “arm” ourselves before such a trespass has transpired. Also explored here are the effects of GM in situations from the trivial to the profound – for example, from not being addressed by a colleague at a networking event to being overlooked as a candidate for an executive promotion. I will consider this specific phenomenon and what has been learned from positive psychology and other social sciences in this regard and contrast GM with familiar constructs such as humility and compassion. GM has not been studied empirically; my hope is to set a conceptual foundation for GM. Starting with an *Introduction to Positive Psychology*, I will lay the groundwork with research related to the concept of GM by investigating *The Individual and Attribution Theory*, which will explain how individuals attribute the cause of an offense. Next, I will explore what an enabling organizational environment might look like in *The Enabling Environment*. This section also explores enabling constructs such as *Psychological Safety, Civility, Humility, Perspective Taking, Trust, Optimistic Explanatory Style, Compassion, and Forgiveness*. I will then expand on GM and explore examples in *Gracious Mindset*, followed by an exploration of its benefits in *Benefits of Gracious Mindset*. Finally, I will explore some ideas about how we can practice GM in *Employing Gracious Mindset: An Organizational Plan*.

### **Introduction to Positive Psychology**

Happiness and wellbeing have been a matter of human concern throughout human history. Philosophers and social scientists, both historical and contemporary, have asserted related themes as they tie to human happiness. Aristotle asserted that the highest aim in all

matters is happiness (Melchert, 2002). William James concurred when he said, “How to gain, how to keep, how to recover happiness, is in fact for most men at all times the secret motive of all they do, and of all they are willing to endure” (2003, p.68).

In 1998, Martin Seligman launched the positive psychology movement in his presidential address to the American Psychological Association. He clearly challenged his colleagues and others to study, proactively and empirically, what makes life worth living for individuals, institutions and societies (Seligman, 2011). At that time, Seligman called for an empirical descriptive study of wellbeing (J. Pawelski, personal communication, February 1, 2015).

In Seligman’s (Seligman Speech at Lincoln Summit, n.d.) now-famous speech at Lincoln Summit in 1999, he lamented that psychology had lost track of some of its original three missions: 1) curing mental illness, 2) making the lives of all people stronger, happier, more productive, and more fulfilling, and 3) nurturing and identifying genius and high talent. After World War II, with the formation of the Veterans Administration and the founding of the National Institutes of Mental Health, there was a surge in market demand for practitioners who could treat mental illness. Thus, curing pathologies and mental distress became psychology’s focus. This shift resulted in some important successes and in the development of a solid science of mental illness.<sup>3</sup> However, this shift also created asymmetry in which the profession neglected its non-pathological missions: *i.e.*, improving lives of the nonclinical population and identifying the most talented amongst us and the conditions under which they flourish (Seligman Speech at

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<sup>3</sup> Psychology consistently began to systematically defined, operationalized, assessed and looked at causation through experimental methods – laying the foundation for further empirical study beyond pathology (Seligman Speech at Lincoln Summit, n.d.).

Lincoln Summit, n.d.).

Positive psychology helps close this gap created by “psychology as usual” by returning focus to human flourishing and wellbeing. Positive psychology thus brings balance to psychology, and supplements, not supplants, traditional study. Positive psychology, defined as the study of wellbeing for individuals and communities, is shifting the view of psychological wellbeing from the mere absence of mental disorder to that of developing greater psychological resources (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) such as positive emotion, life satisfaction, self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy and purpose.

Although positive psychology is often recognized as having been launched in 1998 with Martin Seligman’s plea, positive psychology scholars and practitioners acknowledge the many theories and findings that came before this event (M. Seligman, personal communication, September 26, 2014). Tenets, findings and research that predate 1998 include scholars such as Aristotle, William James, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis, to name a few. Aristotle’s views on eudaimonia, a notion much like that of positive psychology, holds that human happiness is not possible without excellence or virtue and notes that happy people are virtuous and take pleasure (and action) in right things (Melchert, 2002). Likewise, in 1907, William James proposed a program in psychology that addressed defining the types of human ability, including ideas on happiness, and how these are unleashed (James, 1907).

Additionally, many findings and theories associated with the study of wellbeing originated with humanistic psychologists (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This included its best-known champions, Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi,

2000). In fact, Maslow, the father of the theory known as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs,<sup>4</sup> had originally called for a new agenda, using the term positive psychology in his book, *Motivation and Personality* (1954). This calling has been credited with launching the self-help movement and criticized for lacking empirical backing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Regardless, the movement has helped influence generations to keep an eye on wellbeing, popularizing such topics as peak experiences and self-actualization (Warmoth, Resnick, & Serlin, 2002).

Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis' work, as well, have been foundational in wellbeing research and application. For example, much of their work has been utilized in two well-respected and empirically validated resiliency trainings that are in wide use: Penn Resiliency Program (PRP)<sup>5</sup> and Master Resiliency Training (MRT),<sup>6</sup> both significant contributions of positive psychology. Aaron Beck is popularly regarded as the "father of cognitive therapy," which has been widely used to treat depression (Aaron T. Beck, n.d.). He reignited the study of emotions and thoughts in the 1960s (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Beck, recognizing how cognition drives emotions, developed cognitive therapy, where one can learn to change thinking to overcome depression and

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<sup>4</sup> A well-known theory proposed by Abraham Maslow, which is often displayed as a pyramid with the most basic needs at the bottom. As each level is "satisfied" one moves up to the next level of psychological needs until one reaches the top, where one becomes self-actualized (Maslow's hierarchy of needs, n.d.).

<sup>5</sup> PRP is a group intervention that teaches resilience skills to late elementary and middle school students (Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> MRT is a 10-day program of study that teaches resilience skills to noncommissioned officers in the army (Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

anxiety. Cognitive therapy is now used as one basis for increasing wellbeing (Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011). Albert Ellis, the founder of cognitive-behavioral therapies also played a role foundational to positive psychology. Cognitive-behavioral therapies show that by unearthing one's cognitions, or beliefs, values, and attitudes, one can impact emotions and subsequent behaviors (Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

After Martin Seligman's speech to the APA, an early positive psychology initiative was launched, shifting from problem-solving techniques – turning focus from problems to that of recognizing strengths. This shift was in recognition of the fact that focusing on the positive – *e.g.*, strengths – might prove more effective than focusing primarily on the negative – the problem itself. Positive psychology thus embraced an initiative to cross-culturally find and define the virtues and strengths from which humans tend to pull (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This led to a core finding that when one can discover one's top character strengths<sup>7</sup> and apply them, life satisfaction and wellbeing increase (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Some 13 years after his seminal Lincoln Summit address, Martin Seligman (2011) developed PERMA. PERMA is one of the most widely recognized wellbeing models, whereby one can cultivate increased wellbeing through a combination of (p)ositive emotions, (e)ngagement, positive (r)elationships, (m)eaning and (a)ccomplishment. Another popular wellbeing model is Subjective Wellbeing (SWB) by Ed Diener (2000). SWB is a self-reported measure of the degree of wellbeing one is experiencing through measurement of positive affect, negative affect and degree of life satisfaction. Such measurement is critical because attention and

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<sup>7</sup> Signature strengths are those character strengths one expresses most naturally and intuitively (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

resources follow what is measured (Diener, 2014). The SWB model is significant for having influenced the measurement of wellbeing across entire societies. According to Diener (2014), forty-four nations are already using SWB to measure their wellbeing, much like countries measure Gross Domestic Product.

Another important and popularly leveraged theory in positive psychology is Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT holds that humans have primary needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. When one satisfies these needs, one can increase motivation and wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Although it can be argued that upon its founding, positive psychology was more focused on being descriptive, it has clearly become increasingly normative. This was demonstrated when Martin Seligman threw down the gauntlet calling for positive psychology professionals and others to play a role in the “51 by 51” goal of having 51% of the world’s population flourish by the year 2051 (Seligman, 2011). Self-evidently, positive psychology has clearly moved beyond the descriptive to include the normative.

Since then, this applied science has grown, with many programs and people worldwide endeavoring to increase the “tonnage” of happiness in the world (M. Seligman, Personal Communication, September 3, 2014). Positive psychology is not just the investigation of what correlates with and causes happiness (the empirical side), but is also the study of how we can apply empirical lessons to increase wellbeing (the normative side) (J. Pawelski, Personal Communication, February 1, 2015). Since Seligman’s call for a focus on worldwide wellbeing, the number of books, articles, scholars, organizations and communities focused on wellbeing has increased dramatically (Azar, 2011).

A recent related area of scientific inquiry is positive organizational scholarship (POS)

(Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011). Much like positive psychology focuses on optimal psychological states for individuals, institutions and societies, POS focuses on the generative dynamics in organizations. POS looks for positive deviance, rather than factoring deviance out as statistical error, and then utilizes the information as a model for improvement in organizations (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011). POS focuses, just as does positive psychology, on strengths, resilience, and extraordinary performance, while not ignoring dysfunction (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011). POS includes viewing negative events and failures as potential catalysts that can facilitate adaptations, resilience and growth (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003).

Positive psychology, POS, its predecessors, and many wellbeing models recognize what Christopher Peterson so eloquently stated – “Other People Matter” (Peterson, 2006). He believed that positive psychology can be summed up in these three simple words. Focusing on the relational in life, whether individuals, families, communities, organizations or whole societies, with the goal of improving relational aspects, can indeed improve wellbeing. Let’s consider this further in the context of Gracious Mindset, which we will see is both dependent on and generative of the relational.

### **Related Research**

Earlier, I defined GM as a mindset we consciously practice, endeavoring to give others the benefit of the doubt, assuming a respectful interpretation of the other’s intent or motivation in situations where the benefits outweighs the risks. Now I explore the conditions that can facilitate GM.

Whether one employs a GM within an organizational context depends on one’s perception of the cause of trespass (its attribution) and the culture of the organization. Explored in this section are the following: 1) *The Individual and Attribution Theory* and 2) *The Enabling*

*Environment.*

### **The Individual and Attribution Theory**

Whether it seems wise to give another the benefit of the doubt when one has been trespassed upon depends on how one perceives the offense (Weiner, 1985) among other things. Attribution Theory attempts to explain how we understand others' behavior by attributing feelings, beliefs, and intentions to the other person. Our tendency is to explain our own behavior and the behavior of others by assigning attributes to the behaviors in question (Weiner, 1985). We do this to attempt to (re)establish control over and to improve our ability to predict future events (Kelley, 1967). This is especially true in situations perceived as novel, important, unexpected or negative (Wong & Weiner, 1981). Such attributions are important because they impact our subsequent behavior and motivation (Weiner, 1985). Negative events can especially trigger attributional processes because those events threaten our goals and motivation (Wong & Weiner, 1981). We look for the causes so we can avoid similar situations in the future (Weiner, 1985).

One attributes behavior based on three causal dimensions: 1) locus of control, 2) stability, and 3) controllability (Weiner, 1985):

- Locus of control refers to an internal locus or an external locus. For example, a project meeting was held and I didn't know about it. If I perceive this as having an internal locus of control, I might think that the organizer doesn't respect my ideas. If I perceive this as having an external locus of control, I might think I missed the email setting the meeting.
- Stability relates to how likely we believe an event is to reoccur, which may change over time. Our assessment of stability impacts how much we think we can succeed, with an enduring situation potentially leading to feelings of defeat. For example, I might worry

that not being invited to the project meeting is going to happen again and again with subsequent meetings. Whereas, in a non-stable situation, such as not getting a Christmas bonus at a time when the company is going through reorganization, would qualify as a non-stable event, unlikely to reoccur.

- Controllability, or how much we perceive we have control in a situation, impacts our affect and behavior. For example, the CEO doesn't give me credit for a very successful marketing campaign, and yet credits other co-workers in the sales department for its success. I attribute this to my boss not respecting marketing as a discipline. I believe her preference for the sales department is unchangeable and thus feel angry and decide to withdraw.

How one assigns these attributions is influenced by personal perspective and previous experiences, which can lead to error (Weiner, 1985). One such error is “fundamental attribution error,” the tendency to overestimate internal factors and underestimate external factors when explaining others' behavior (Weiner, 1985). For example, if a co-worker is bypassed for a promotion, one might think that they lack the desired skills or intellect for the new position underestimating the person's qualities. Another such error is “self-serving bias,” which occurs when one tends to attribute one's own success to internal factors and one's failure to external factors. For example, had I been the employee up for promotion, I might attribute being bypassed to external factors such as my boss not liking me rather than an internal error such as a lack of some critical experience or skill. Fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias both showcase how one might be inclined to give oneself the benefit of the doubt, but not afford the same benefit to another.

Recent theory has noted additional attributions – relational attributions — which are not

external, not internal, but grounded specifically in the interaction between the two parties (Eberly, Holley, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2011). These attributions are defined as explanations about the cause of the event within the relationship itself. Research suggests that relational attributions are critical to organizational ties and can help us understand and dissect another dimension of attribution (Eberly et al., 2011). Unlike external attributions, partners share responsibility for an event in relational attributions; therefore, the motivation to take steps for improvement is greater than with external attribution (Eberly et al., 2011). Relational attributions also differ from internal attributions in that to achieve success, others' efforts must be recognized and reciprocated (Eberly et al., 2011). For example, members in a group might attribute the launch of a successful event that secured many new leads for the company, was on time, and on budget as a result of strong communication and teamwork.

Within organizations, interpretations of others' actions and comments on the others' behavior have a powerful impact on subsequent actions. In turn, this impacts how the company functions. Relational attribution has many implications for future study and for potential practice in the organization. For example, (Zuckerman, 1979) has shown that self-serving bias is less pronounced in relational contexts. Therefore, an organization might be able to improve an employee's interpretation of a co-worker's trespass by strengthening the organization's relational culture and offering tools for relationship repair. This would reinforce improving relational aspects of the organization, potentially decreasing self-serving bias. A focus on improving relational aspects may lead to those within the organization finding better balance between cutting themselves "more slack" than they do for others.

Eberly et al. (2011) believe we may be able to use relational attributions to identify ways to improve conditions for enhancing relationship-oriented behaviors such as interpersonal

citizenship behaviors (ICBs). ICB tasks involve “going beyond the call of duty” where we help a co-worker, supervisor (or another close other) in ways that are outside the scope of what is strictly required by our jobs. ICBs have a larger impact on performance and morale than other forms of citizenship behavior (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000) and are believed to lead to high-quality relationships in the workplace (Eberly et al., 2011).

In summary, how individuals attribute causes of an offense impacts behavior individually and within the organizational context. This can impact whether or not one would choose to give another the benefit of the doubt.

### **The Enabling Environment**

Just as an individual’s attributions impact employing GM, so too can an organizational environment impact whether GM is employed. Organizational context can provide a strong culture of shared norms and values regarding how to respond to negative situations (Johns, 2006), as well as how we attribute their causes (Eberly et al., 2011). Without the proper enabling environment, we may avoid risk (Porath, 2011), which can reduce the likelihood that we will give another the benefit of the doubt. Many factors can contribute to this reluctance including cognitive biases such as the negativity bias<sup>8</sup> (Kahneman, 2011) and attribution errors such as the fundamental attribution error (Weiner, 1985).

To employ a GM effectively, there must be a supporting organizational climate. I posit

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<sup>8</sup> The negativity bias is the tendency to give more weight to negative information than positive information.

that such a climate includes the following,<sup>9</sup> discussed in detail below: psychological safety, civility, humility, perspective taking, trust, optimistic explanatory style, compassion, and forgiveness.

**Psychological safety.** If we don't feel psychologically safe, we will not be inclined to give another the benefit of the doubt. Psychological safety is defined as one's perceptions relating to the degree of interpersonal threat in an organization, such as general belief of comfort in being oneself (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2011). Psychological safety creates an environment where one is more inclined to take risks (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2011). Risk taking is important in organizations because innovation inherently involves risk (Janssen, Van de Vliert, & West, 2004). To speak one's mind in a company involves risk—the risk of being wrong, or looking or sounding silly or uninformed. To foster a climate of risk taking means creating a climate where people dare to be themselves, a climate where it is safe to learn and take risks. This sense of safety includes what we believe about how others will respond when we take a risk—ask a question, seek feedback, report a mistake or propose a new idea (Edmondson, 1999)—all of which have a direct impact on the perceived risk of giving another the benefit of the doubt.

Because members of the same team experience many of the same elements including contextual influences and shared experiences, the perceptions of psychological safety tend to be

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<sup>9</sup> This list is not intended to be comprehensive and there are many other constructs, not addressed here, which could be explored. Some of these include tolerance, benevolence, and psychological capital.

similar within a team (Edmondson, 1999). Therefore, increases in psychological safety in individual team members can lead to team-wide increases in psychological safety. This, as we will see, can be encouraged by fostering an atmosphere that is learning-oriented rather than performance-oriented.

Psychological safety can foster an environment in which one can take risks (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2011). In organizations where goals are performance-oriented (e.g., offering bonuses for revenue goals) versus learning-oriented (incentivizing the development of skill, knowledge and competence), employees are less inclined to take risks because they fear errors (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2011). Studies have shown that learning-oriented environments lead to greater performance than performance-oriented environments. Studies with children have shown that those given performance goals were more risk-averse, and experimented less than children given learning goals (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). This behavior also holds true in adults. Additionally, being psychologically safe has the important benefit of tending to lead to learning from failure (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009).

Increased safety in an organization leads to increased risk taking, which could include giving another the benefit of the doubt in a moment of trespass, as barriers among and between individuals are lessened. Therefore, an increase in psychological safety could also impact the likelihood of employing a GM.

**Civility.** Another potential enabling aspect to GM is civility, defined as the respectful treatment of others. Civility embodies ideas such as respectful, considerate, compassionate, and caring treatment; pleasant and positive interactions or connections; and feeling valued, recognized, and appreciated (Porath, 2011). Civility increases our sense of psychological safety or feeling that the organizational environment is a safe place to take risks (Porath, 2011).

Therefore, giving another the benefit of the doubt is more likely in a civil environment – where warmer, more respectful, civil attitudes toward others is present.

Incivility, on the other hand, is defined as the exchange of seemingly inconsequential inconsiderate words and deeds that violate conventional norms of conduct (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Incivility is not a mere opposite of civility, because we can remove incivility and still not have civility (Porath, 2011). That is, there is a neutral ground between civility and incivility where neither exists—a non-response, if you will. Whereas civility involves a positive response with a corresponding positive effect, incivility can negatively impact one’s health, and in the organization it can increase employee stress (Porath, 2011), reduce creativity, and reduce helping behaviors (Porath & Erez, 2007). Furthermore, incivility can negatively impact job satisfaction, and reduce meaning in work and productivity (Porath, 2011). Toxic environments, where incivility is high, can have increased depression, hostility and alienation and predictably lead to increased employee turnover and absenteeism). In fact, studies by Porath and Erez (2007) showed that even a one-time, low-intensity incident of incivility led to decreased connection, decreased short-term memory, and low performance.

Incivility has such a strong effect that merely witnessing incivility has negative consequences, many of which are the same as for those who actually experienced the incivility – reduced productivity, creativity and helping behavior (Porath, 2011). Incivility is also linked to a narrowed state of mind, since cognitive resources are used to make sense of the uncivil environment or to determine the reason for the lack of respect. In an uncivil environment, individuals may even shut down.

Incivility, as seems evident, can be devastating to an organization when it spirals, and according to Jane Dutton (2003), it rarely stays contained. She points to three reasons for this

infectiousness: 1) word spreads as bystanders witness uncivil incidents, 2) the offended are likely to communicate the offenses and then can cause such offenses to be a part of the organizational culture, and 3) the offended is more inclined to displace the resulting negative emotion onto another (Dutton, 2003).

Conversely, civility triggers positive emotions that can lead to increased productivity and creativity (Fredrickson, 2001) as well as increased trust, efficacy, risk taking (Porath, 2011), cognitive function and helpfulness (Porath & Erez, 2007). Civility even positively correlates with better health. Respect, which is part of civility, is important for organizations for many reasons including its ability to improve relationships, enable better work performance and clearly energize organizations. (Dutton, 2003).

According to studies conducted by Porath and Erez (2007) those who work in civil environments showed increased energy by 26%, were 30% more likely to feel motivated to learn, were 36% more satisfied with their jobs, and were 44% more committed to their organizations. Even managers rated these employees as performing 10% to 20% better than others (Porath, 2011). Civility is good for teams and can result in better information and idea flow with civil settings breeding increased motivation and trust (Porath, 2011).

One of the most important aspects of civility is its ability to impact relationships, the heart and soul of organizations. Civility builds positive relational aspects, creating good feelings about self and others, increasing the belief that one is valued and spurring contributions to others and contributions to the organization (Porath, 2011). These relational aspects, which can be tied to relational attribution, help foster an enabling environment where we might give another the benefit of the doubt. This can lead to an increase in high-quality connections (Porath, 2011).

***High-quality connections.*** High-Quality Connections (HQC) are short-term dyadic

positive interactions (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011) marked by mutual positive regard, trust, and active engagement. HQCs impact the activation and renewal of energy that one brings to work (Dutton, 2003). HQCs can increase wellbeing and work performance (Dutton, 2003) and can even help us absorb and withstand strain in times of conflict (Dutton & Heathy, 2006).

Dutton (2003) identifies three aspects that mark HQCs: 1) a sense of aliveness, enhanced energy and vitality, 2) mutuality – the feeling that one mutually “sees” the other, and 3) holding the other in positive regard (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011). Respect is also an important aspect of HQCs. When we build HQCs, we are pre-disposed to be more open and to connect. We are also open to others’ ideas and willing to be influenced (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011).

HQCs also create respectful engagement, which can cause a virtuous cycle, propelling additional respectful engagement (Dutton, 2003). Dutton (2003) identifies engaging another with an affirmative stance as part of respectful engagement – which she details to include giving another the benefit of the doubt – which can shift another’s perspective and be transformative. For individuals, HQCs can improve cognitive, physiological and behavioral processes (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011). Organizationally, HQCs can improve cooperation, trust, organizational process coordination, error detection, and learning (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011).

Posited here is the notion that one would be more inclined to give another the benefit of the doubt in an environment or in situations in which civility is high and incivility is low.

**Humility.** Humility, another potential enabling aspect of GM, involves the subjugation of the ego’s tendency to protect or to boost one’s image, to be right, and to win. When humble, we are more likely to be open to the opinion of others as well as to see ourselves and others as sharing general human strengths and limitations (Owens, Rowatt, & Wilkins, 2011). I posit that a

person low in humility is less likely to cut another slack – that is, less likely to give another the benefit of the doubt in a moment of trespass.

Humility can be seen as a “multifaceted strength” (Tangney, 2000) that concerns human limits and enables one to handle routine tasks as well as challenges productively and constructively (Hume & Haakonssen, 1994). Humility can help organizations succeed, especially in more unpredictable environments. Many current trends have increased unpredictability in organizations including the ever-changing technological landscape, increasing global competition and the increase of the virtual workforce; all are causing an increase in the unknown. Humility, then, in the age of information has become increasingly important. In this context, we perpetually lack information, so choosing to give another the benefit of the doubt is an increasingly important attitude (Owens, Rowatt, & Wilkins, 2011).

In a literature review of humility, Owens (2009) identifies the most common core facets of humility: 1) the willingness or capacity to evaluate oneself without exaggeration, leading to a more accurate, non-defensive view,<sup>10</sup> 2) viewing others in an appreciative, not threatened way, and 3) being open to new ideas, feedback and advice (Owens, Rowatt, & Wilkins, 2011).

These factors can all impact giving another the benefit of the doubt. The willingness or capacity to evaluate oneself accurately and to adopt a nondefensive view enables benefit-of-the-doubt thinking because nondefensiveness makes us less likely to overreact to perceived offenses. Also if we, for example, hold ourselves in higher esteem than is accurate, we are more inclined to marginalize the opinions of others and not assume a respectful interpretation in regards to others’ actions (Owens, Rowatt, & Wilkins, 2011). Viewing others in an appreciative, non-

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<sup>10</sup> This is the most common dimension cited.

threatening manner can impact our interpretations of an offense, thus perhaps perceiving a small infraction as trivial instead of overreacting or assuming ill will. Openness to new ideas, feedback and advice also are likely to breed an overall openness (Owens, Rowatt, & Wilkins, 2011). Being more open, we are more likely to listen to and accept others. This increases GM because the more we understand another, as we will see in the next section (*perspective taking*), the more likely we are to give the other the benefit of the doubt.

**Perspective taking.** Perspective taking, imagining another's thoughts or feelings from their point of view (Williams, 2011) is related to GM, because when we can take another's perspective, attribution error is reduced. Perspective taking can be the antidote to attribution errors (Williams, 2011).

***Perspective taking and interpersonal connections.*** Perspective taking, which takes both cognitive and emotional effort (Park & Peterson, 2003), can improve relationships because of the interpersonal impact of imagining another's views. Some of these benefits include the following (Williams, 2008):

1) Perspective taking facilitates interpersonal understanding because we understand what meaning a situation holds for another. At that point, we can adjust to the needs of the other (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1967), including tailoring a message to relay our preferences in a way that aligns with the other's language (Blumer, 1969; Collins, 1990; Goffman, 1967).

2) Perspective taking strengthens social bonds. As perspective taking strengthens our social bonds, it can help us cultivate emotionally positive interactions. As the result of increased understanding, we potentially avoid negative interactions and build positive ones (Blumer, 1969; Collins, 1990; Goffman, 1967). Social bonds also increase because while we may initially see ourselves as different, after taking another person's perspective, we can increase the overlap

between the cognitive representation of self, the other, and, potentially the representation of the organization (Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997; Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005).

3) Perspective taking inspires compassionate behavior. Compassionate behavior can be inspired through perspective taking—the cognitive understanding of another’s thoughts, feelings or appraisals (not to be confused with empathy which has an emotional component) (Davis, 1996). Perspective taking can manifest empathy, cooperation and considerate behavior, as well as lead to valuing another’s welfare, engaging in benevolent behavior, and feeling compassion for another (Williams, 2011).

*Perspective taking and prosocial behaviors.* Perspective taking is associated with increased prosocial behaviors such as altruism and cooperation and decreased destructive-aggressive reactions (Aniaga & Rusbult, 1998). This can help us create and sustain HQCs (Dutton, 2003), which, in turn, positively impacts our relationships as it strengthens our social bonds (Williams, 2011).

According to Seiji Takaku (2001), perspective taking can lead us to recognize and understand our own imperfections, as well as to recognize that the potential causes of a transgression may be situational, uncontrollable or unstable. It can also lead the way for kindness, understanding, and compassionate actions as well as leading to befriending co-workers or others (Williams, 2011).

Perspective taking actually can be a habit or a “muscle” that we build (Williams, 2011). This means perspective taking is a good target for intervention and practice. Role-playing or even acting, for example, can be implemented as tools for taking another’s point of view. Perspective taking can put us in another frame of mind perhaps leading us to give another the benefit of the doubt.

**Trust.** I posit that trust is critical to enabling GM in relationships because we can feel

vulnerable when giving another the benefit of the doubt. Although there are several definitions of trust, two models emerged in the 1990's (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995), both of which have become foundational (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007). These definitions have two common elements: 1) a willingness to accept vulnerability and 2) positive expectations (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007). Without trust, which is viewed as both a behavior and a disposition (Nooteboom, 2007), the burden on relationships would be sizable (Bradach & Eccle, 1984) because we would never be able to overcome all the risks related to relationships. Thus trust plays a vital role in reducing relationship overhead.

Trust impacts the quality of relationships in the organization (Dutton, 2003). Specifically, we cannot control for all variables in any or all relationship(s) within the organization – to create policies and controls for every variable would be resource prohibitive and most likely an exercise in futility. However, trust can be built both organizationally (Dutton, 2003; Nooteboom, 2007) and individually, and trust can increase with use. That is, when we trust another person we can create a self-fulfilling cycle (Dutton, 2003). In the absence of institutional trust, however, there is more dependence on relational trust among and between individuals than on the organization itself (Nooteboom, 2007). That is, where institutional trust is lacking, dependence on interpersonal trust rises (Nooteboom, 2007).

***Trust Dimensions.*** Trust literature distinguishes trustworthiness, trust propensity, and trust: Trustworthiness is the ability, benevolence, and integrity of a trustee. Trust propensity is a dispositional willingness to rely on others. Trust is the intention to accept vulnerability to a trustee based on positive expectations of another person's actions (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007).

I posit that the most relevant dimension of trust to GM is trust propensity because if we

are more inclined to trust others, we are more inclined to give another the benefit of the doubt. Assessing trustworthiness would not be possible in all instances when considering whether to give another the benefit of the doubt. For example, when another person cuts us off in traffic, information on their ability, benevolence, and integrity is in short supply, thus our ability to assess trustworthiness is extremely limited. In times such as these, we rely on our own propensity to trust others in general.

In all instances of giving another the benefit of the doubt, whether for a minor infraction or a major transgression, our trust propensity will have an impact on our thoughts, attributions and actions. Additionally, trust propensity can sometimes outweigh our assessment of the trustworthiness of another. Trust propensity, it has been argued, creates a filter whereby, even after we have gathered enough information to start an assessment of the trustworthiness of another person, we might favor our own theories over available information (Govier, 1994). That is, the other person may well be worthy of our trust, but our propensity to doubt the motives of others in general may override our intention to give others the benefit of the doubt in any specific case (or the reverse may be true, where the other is not worthy of our trust but our propensity to trust overrides available information).

***Repairing trust.*** Repairing trust after a trespass is dependent on how trustworthy we perceive the offender to be, and our attribution – how controllable and stable we perceive the behavior to be (Tomlinson & Mryer, 2009). Should we decide the trespass is at least in some part attributed to the trustee, this will decrease their trustworthiness in our eyes. Trustworthiness will increase if we believe the trespass is not related to their ability, benevolence or integrity (internal), but rather is external (Tomlinson & Mryer, 2009). Also, when we receive an apology, we are more likely to make benevolent attributions, perceiving the transgression as less internal,

more controllable, and more stable. This can lead to benevolent affective reactions, where our positive affect increases or negative affect decreases, or both (Weiner, 1995). Repairing trust can impact how likely we are to trust the same offender again (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007) and thus impact our giving the benefit of the doubt in future interactions with this party.

**Optimistic explanatory style.** Explanatory style is how individuals explain both the positive and the negative events in their lives (Seligman, 1990). Since our explanatory style impacts our attributions, it also impacts GM.

Pessimists tend to perceive the causes of negative events as permanent, uncontrollable, and pervasive. In contrast, optimists are more likely to attribute the causes of negative events to temporary, changeable, and due to specific factors (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978). An optimistic explanatory style has been linked to increased wellbeing including better health (Diener & Seligman, 2004); increased resilience, and increased life satisfaction (Seligman, 1998), but has also been linked to greater errors and miscalculation (Schneider, 2001).

How we explain the world and what happens in it is the difference between feeling helpless and feeling that we can exert control over our experience (Seligman, 1990). Feeling helpless is a leading cause of frustration and can lead to depression. Although genetics play a role in explanatory style, an optimistic explanatory style can actually be cultivated and learned, with 40% of our explanatory style believed to be under voluntary control (Seligman, 1990).

Giving another person the benefit of the doubt seems more characteristic of an optimistic explanatory style. Yet, optimism can border on carelessness if, for example, we repeatedly give the benefit of the doubt to those who do not merit it. This was exhibited in a trust study where people continued to trust even when there was information that such trust was not warranted (Mishra & Mishra, 2012).

***Realistic Optimism.*** While optimism is beneficial in many ways, unrealistic optimism can be a problem; in some situations it can be inimical, where one might deny the truth in times when accuracy is important to decision making, and sometimes even to safety (Schneider, 2001). A more appropriate style in employing GM may be realistic optimism. While optimism can be broadly thought of as the tendency to maintain a positive outlook, realistic optimism is a positive tendency within the constraints of the available evidence (Schneider, 2001).

In other words, when we have available information (know the facts), we do ourselves a disservice by ignoring the data and maintaining a potentially unrealistically optimistic explanatory style (Schneider, 2001). Where we have fuzzy knowledge, that is, we do not know the facts, we are best served by collecting more data rather than by being unrealistically optimistic and thus risking harmful error. For example, if I am not feeling well, I can measure my blood pressure and take my temperature, rather than assuming both are in the normal range. By measuring both, I can utilize the information to my benefit.

But there are many situations where there could be numerous interpretations of data, coined “fuzzy meaning” (Schneider, 2001). For example, should a colleague not acknowledge me at a networking event, I could take offense (“She doesn’t like me” or “She is being rude”) or assume that she was busy, distracted or find another interpretation that would be more optimistic. The realistic optimist can maintain a positive outlook when there is fuzzy meaning (where latitude exists in interpretation) while endeavoring to be informed with the relevant knowledge (Schneider, 2001).

This is relevant to GM, because choosing to give another the benefit of the doubt most often requires an assessment of the offending situation. Generally speaking, it is beneficial to learn how to identify inaccurate thoughts elaborated by one’s explanatory styles, analyzing the

accuracy of those thoughts, and re-attributing events to more accurate causal beliefs (Reivich, Seligman, & McBride 2011). More specifically, by employing realistic optimism, one can be more gracious in interpretation while mitigating downside risk by being clear on the related facts.

**Compassion.** I posit that another enabling construct for GM is compassion. Compassion is central to organizational functioning (Frost, 1999) and can be generative – propelling and motivating action (Dutton & Workman, 2011). Varied and significant suffering exists in organizations (Driver, 2007), internal and external to the organization, whether it be the death of an employee’s parent, an employee’s divorce, a demotion, or the confusion resulting from a corporate restructuring. When we exercise compassion, we are turning toward the suffering, not away from it (Dutton & Workman, 2011). Turning away from suffering is the approach that has been historically favored in corporate America (Frost, 1999). Compassion focuses us in the direction of the suffering, thus opening a lens to unearth emotional and relational capabilities of individuals and collectively within the organization, such as caring and empathy (Dutton & Workman, 2011).

Collectively, compassion at work can increase our shared positive emotion (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006), and increases our collective commitment (Grant, Dutton, & Rosso, 2008). Compassion has been seen to be powerful, causing us to alter our focus, increase our imaginations, rethink what we know (Dutton & Workman, 2011), view our organizations in a new positive light as sites of human comfort (Cooperrider, 2000), and cause a ripple across people and time (Dutton & Workman, 2011). By responding compassionately in the workplace, we also tend to increase our compassion satisfaction (satisfaction from helping another) (Stamm, 2002), which, in turn, can cause us to see ourselves as a caring person (Grant, Dutton, & Rosso,

2008). Responding compassionately can increase healing, adaptability (Dutton & Workman, 2011), resilience (Powley, 2009), and inspire us to come together, post-crisis, to organize and pool resources on behalf of others (Dutton & Workman, 2011). In terms of organizational goals, compassion can increase our individual effectiveness (Cameron, 2003) and direct our attention to our conduct and ability to leave our mark on another and our workplaces (Dutton & Workman, 2011). Acting compassionately can cause others to see us as leaders and knowledgeable (Melwani, Mueller, & Overbeck, 2012). Finally, merely witnessing compassion has been shown to activate positive spirals (Dutton & Workman, 2011), much as merely witnessing incivility can do the opposite (Porath, 2011).

***Midwest Billing case study.*** Researchers studied Midwest Billing, a high-performing business unit within Midwest Health System, to discover practices that: 1) built collective capacity for compassion as a reliable collective capability, and 2) limited and enabled compassion (for sustaining as an ongoing resource), acknowledging that compassion can be effortful, draining and distracting (Lilius, Worline, Dutton, Kanov, & Maitlis, 2011). After determining that compassion capability was present within the organization, researchers identified seven practices employed by Midwest Billing that increased organizational compassion: 1) acknowledging (recognizing an individual's contributions), 2) addressing problems directly (dealing with issues directly and immediately), 3) bounded playing (engaging in fun activities while keeping the focus on work), 4) celebrating (recognizing milestones in others' lives through food sharing and gifts), 5) collective decision-making (team-wide input and decision-making involvement on workplace issues), 6) help-offering (noticing needs of others and offering help), and 7) orienting (socializing newcomers to expose them to tasks, people and resources as they onboard).

According to Dutton, Workman, & Harding (2014), Midwest Billing's practices (that built compassion capability) led to favorable relational conditions: HQCs and a dynamic boundary-permeability norm (a collective understanding that it is appropriate to share and constrict sharing of personal information). These conditions make it more likely that employees would notice and respond to another's suffering (Dutton, Workman, & Hardin, 2014). Dutton et al., (2014) theorize that as employees took part in these practices, the conditions that were fostered not only enabled a better way of relating, but also constrained them. Though perhaps counterintuitive, constraining compassion is key, because exercising compassion has been linked to compassion fatigue<sup>11</sup> (Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006) and burnout<sup>12</sup> (Figley, 1995).

When we consistently practice compassion, we can increase compassion capacity in our hearts and minds, fortifying us for later strife (Armstrong, 2011). The resulting resilience can be utilized for many different forms of disunity, whether over a personal disappointment or the transgression of another. This may presuppose a culture of compassion as an enabling construct of GM.

**Forgiveness.** Forgiveness, which has been researched as an emotion-focused coping strategy (Worthington & Scherer, 2004) and via cognitive processes as well (Bright & Exline, 2011), is also a related construct to GM. Forgiveness is related because it can be thought of as a process wherein one can view the offender with compassion and benevolence (Bright & Exline,

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<sup>11</sup> Compassion fatigue is characterized by a gradual lessening of compassion over time and has been linked to the same symptoms as PTSD (Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Burnout is the tendency to become "inoperative" with increased resignation and irritability (Figley, 1995).

2011) in relation to trespass – much like GM.

Many have researched forgiveness. As a result, there are various opinions on its definition. From a POS perspective, forgiveness, a family of actions intended to break or prevent destructive cycles of human interaction: 1) has been defined as an intentional response to an offense to break or prevent the cycle of action and reaction, 2) is distinct and different from reconciliation and thus the forgiven may still be held accountable, and 3) can happen on different levels including intrapersonal, relational, organizational, and group (Bright & Exline, 2011).

Forgiveness is widely understood to be beneficial for the forgiving party and organizations. For the forgiving individuals, it is linked to greater life satisfaction (Worthington, 2004) and better health – even having a positive effect on blood pressure (Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001). Not surprisingly, forgiveness is also associated with better relationship health. For example, wives' forgiveness was associated with improvement in husbands' self-reported communication one year later (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2007).

People who are high in agreeableness and low in neuroticism<sup>13</sup> are more likely to forgive (Worthington & Scherer, 2004) as are those who experience empathy for their transgressor or are able to practice perspective taking with their transgressor (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Hight, 1998; McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003). Less likely to forgive are those who ruminate, which has been closely identified with neuroticism (McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson, 2001). Also, our attributions and assessments of the act and the transgressor will impact forgiveness, with reduced

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<sup>13</sup> Neuroticism is a general tendency to worry and experience negative affect, such as anxiety, depression, and hostility (John, 1990).

forgiveness for acts perceived as intentional or as having severe consequences (Boon & Sulsky, 1997; Takaku, Weiner, & Ohbuchi, 2001).

We are more likely to forgive people to whom we feel close and with whom we feel empathy (McCullough et al., 1998; McCullough et al., 1997; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Empathy is important because it can promote a desire to reduce another's suffering (Batson, Ahmad, Lishner, & Tsang, 2002); empathy also reduces the motivation to retaliate (Batson & Ahmad, 2001). We are also more likely to forgive when the relationship is characterized by high satisfaction, commitment and closeness (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Given this association, Peterson and Seligman (2004) theorized that forgiving a stranger would be different from forgiving someone close to us. This is important because in organizations, interactions can happen in many contexts, from one-time interactions to those we count as friends.

Antecedents that can motivate forgiveness include care-worthiness (if one perceives the offender as worthy of moral concern), 2) expected value (if one perceives the trespasser will bring utility in the future, and 3) safety (if one perceives the trespasser will not harm us again) (McCullough, 2008).

I posit that these traits, dispositions and behaviors that encourage forgiveness (empathy, taking the cognitive perspective of another, attributing the transgression as unintentional, less inclined to ruminate, care-worthiness, expected value, and safety) are likely to encourage GM.

***Forgiveness process.*** According to Takaku (2001), many researchers have defined forgiveness as a process, rather than the product, of overcoming resentment toward the offender. The process is that of prosocial attitudes such as benevolence and compassion and then acting constructively toward the offender (Takaku 2001). When one forgives, the offended becomes more positive (in motivation and action) toward the offender and less negative in general:

benevolence and generosity increase while vengeful and avoidant behavior declines (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Further, forgiveness is distinct from reconciliation, but the players do often reconcile after forgiveness (Enright 2001). Reconciliation can occur concurrently with the forgiveness or independently (Freedman, 1998). We can readily see this in couples who are “happily divorced.” Something or someone caused their marriage to end, but the friendship continues. One can perhaps accurately surmise that in a good number of these cases, a great deal of forgiveness has taken place for such a great rupture to take place only to be followed by a warm friendship.

***Forgivingness.*** While much forgiveness research has focused on forgiveness as a state, it has also been studied from the dispositional standpoint and coined “forgivingness” (Roberts, 1995), and defined as a tendency to forgive transgressions that is stable over time and across situations (Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O’Connor, & Wade, 2001). This is in contrast to forgiveness, which focuses on a single offense and subsequent constructive behavior toward the offender.

Forgivingness, a general attitude much like forgiveness, has been linked in the individual to better physical and mental health and social adjustment (Kaplan, 1992; Thoresen, Harris, & Luskin, 2000). Forgivingness is negatively correlated to anger, hostility and neuroticism and positively associated with emotional stability (Berry et al., 2005).

***Forgiveness in the organization.*** Most work to date has focused on forgiveness on the individual level, yet trespass is inevitable in the organization (Bright & Exline, 2011). Relevant to forgiveness in the organizational context are 1) individual-to-individual forgiveness (at the relational level), 2) individual-to-group forgiveness (where one forgives a group for a perceived trespass), and 3) individual-to-organization forgiveness (where one forgives an organization for a

perceived trespass) (Bright & Exline, 2011).

In the organization, forgiveness can break a potentially costly cycle of action and reaction. Unless broken, cycles of offensive and offense-taking reactions can foster and continue consuming resources and energy (Bright & Exline, 2011). Researchers have found that when there is forgiveness, not only are the victims able to move on (Bright & Exline, 2011), but the offenders are less likely to cause additional hurt (Wallace, Exline, and Baumeister, 2008).

Strategies in organizations that shrink perceptions of offense or increase one's warm attitudes toward an offender can help reduce anger (Bright & Exline, 2011). For example, researchers demonstrated an increase in forgiveness when one focuses on one's common humanity with the offender (Wohl & Branscombe, 2005). When unable or unwilling to undertake this point of view, we might be motivated by the idea of decreasing our own negative affect for emotional relief and, perhaps, even the associated health benefits (Bright & Exline, 2011). That is, we might be persuaded to forgive because it is good for us. These and other findings have laid the foundation for interventions and related models (Bright & Exline, 2011).

Organizational forgiveness occurs when an organization decides to forgive employee(s) or other stakeholder(s) for violating rules or for placing the organization or others at risk (Bright & Exline, 2011). Offenses can include, for example, the breaking of a safety rule—such as not wearing safety goggles—or an employee error on a time card or report. Organizational forgiveness refers to the capacity to foster collective relinquishment of justified resentment, bitterness, and blame, and, instead, adopt a positive, forward-looking approach (Cameron & Caza, 2002).

As we enable a culture of GM, I posit that GM could also increase the level of organizational forgiveness. I posit that this same forgiveness, by its very nature, increases the

likelihood of giving another the benefit of the doubt. This happens because when we forgive, we become more positive toward the offender and less negative in general (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Recent research encourages organizations to develop a culture of forgiveness along with a systems approach for examination of the transgression by the parties (Bright & Exline, 2011). Forgiving behavior of employees is a function of the dispositions of individuals and of environmental factors (Bright & Exline, 2011). These factors include organizational decisions, policies, system-wide events, and interventions (Bright & Exline, 2011).

***Forgiveness climate.*** Forgiveness is higher in organizations that have a stronger forgiveness climate, defined by Fehr and Gelfand (2012) as shared perception that empathic, benevolent responses to conflict are rewarded, supported, and expected in the organization. When employees feel they receive forgiveness, they are likely to give the same to leaders. Employees will also give more latitude to leaders in the face of fallout from tough decisions within a culture of forgiveness (Bright & Exline, 2011). Imagine an employee who is a week late turning in a quarterly report only to have the supervisor listen carefully to her reasons for tardiness and readily forgive the lateness. Later the same supervisor forgets to leave directions to an important meeting the employee is expected to attend. How different might her reaction have been if she had been berated or not allowed to offer an explanation about the earlier report? Now after being treated with understanding by the supervisor, is not the employee more likely to respond with the same patience?

Forgiveness is important to an organization because it allows employees to recover after a mistake, which relates closely to developing the trust necessary to facilitate risk-taking. Nussbaum (2007) extended this idea to that of shaping organizational culture through counseling

struggling employees. To that end, he identified questions that prompt an analysis of behaviors and actions, consequences, and extenuating circumstances, while emphasizing how and when behavior improvement will be accomplished (Nussbaum, 2007). This provides the opportunity to learn from one's mistakes and creates a clear message of expectations on how to handle forgiveness organizationally (Nussbaum, 2007).

There are two forms of forgiveness that were uncovered in David Bright's 2005 study of forgiveness (Bright & Exline, 2011): pragmatic forgiveness and transcendent forgiveness. In the pragmatic mode, forgiveness is extended as a matter of supporting ongoing relationships, with clear benefit to the organization. In the transcendent mode, forgiveness is given and viewed as a transformational practice, where one learns from and encourages positive transformation after a hard interpersonal moment (Bright & Exline, 2011). Researchers have found that when an intervention is applied organization-wide, it can actually shift the common narrative amongst its members from pragmatic to the transcendent mode. This is important because this shift indicates that a change can lead to a forgiveness climate (Bright & Exline, 2011).

There are many organizational practices that can create such a climate. In general, policies or practices that increase dialog, an appreciation for another's perspective, or systems-thinking can potentially give employees a perspective that increases forgiveness within an organization (Bright & Exline, 2011). I suggest the same practices and policies, which lead to a forgiveness climate, will also likely create a climate that would nurture GM.

Above I have explored how psychological safety, civility, humility, perspective taking, trust, optimistic explanatory style, compassion and forgiveness can create an enabling environment for GM. The next section will detail GM and its benefits.

## Gracious Mindset

### Boulders and the Snipers

The idea of “cutting some slack” to another person or giving another the “benefit of the doubt” is a personal ideal for me. I have spent more than twenty years of my career in high-tech companies and have experienced many different corporate cultures. One early experience in a high-tech startup company, on balance, was very good. The company in many ways had a very progressive environment, replete with enjoyable outings, Ping-Pong tables for stress relief, free beverages, pizza on Fridays, the freedom to set our own hours (within reason) and to wear what was most comfortable. But, every week when our product cycle meeting (a weekly cross-functional meeting that included representatives from marketing, sales, engineering, software quality assurance, technical support, documentation and operations) was about to commence, I felt angst. I believed these meetings were much more adversarial than productive. I once lamented to a co-worker that the mental image I held for these meetings was of participants hiding behind boulders, emerging to speak with their sniper guns propped, aimed and ready to fire as they spoke, and then quickly disappearing behind shelter to hear the responses – a rain of gunfire. I decided then and there that at least two dysfunctional things were transpiring in those meetings: 1) many were trying to prove their intellect as superior to others, and 2) participants were not giving each other the benefit of the doubt. As a result, they were jumping to conclusions rather than asking questions, or in other cases, not letting some of the more inconsequential opinions go unchallenged. This often-adversarial climate caused many participants to be quiet, when they might otherwise have contributed. At other times participants would just sit idle rather than doing something perceived as risky – which can be fatal for a technology startup, where risk-taking is the lifeblood to competing in the fast-paced tech market.

In this case, the company perks were progressive, but the mindset in such meetings certainly was not.

From that point forward, I wondered, “How do you pull people out from behind their proverbial boulders? As we perform seemingly small actions, such as giving another the benefit of the doubt, what are the ripples that are created? If I give the benefit of the doubt to another, will the same be later extended to me? Can we bring a more gracious mindset to an organization where we create a practice of giving others the benefit of the doubt?”

### **Gracious Mindset Introduced**

*“Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt.”* – Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Introduced here is the construct of Gracious Mindset (GM). GM is a frame of mind we **consciously practice**, endeavoring to give others the benefit of the doubt, assuming a respectful interpretation of the other’s intent in situations where the benefits outweigh the risks. When considering GM in the context of an organization, I differentiate GM from the other constructs below <sup>14</sup>: tolerance, forgiveness, forgivingness, compassion, and humility.

- Tolerance: Tolerance is a fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward those whose opinions, practices, race, religion, nationality, and the like differ from one’s own (Fish, 2014). According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), tolerance is a blend of open-mindedness and fairness. GM goes beyond a simple stance of open-mindedness or fairness, and endeavors to skew toward the benevolent, beyond a more centered stance of fairness.

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<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that although I differentiate GM from these constructs, I assert GM actually is enabled by these constructs, as well.

- **Forgiveness:** Forgiveness is a response to an offense to break a cycle of action and reaction (Bright & Exline, 2011) after a perceived infraction. Gracious mindset, however, is a posture we consciously endeavor to adopt for moments of strife as a matter of practice, where we attempt to interpret events as respectfully as possible, whenever possible. Unlike forgiveness, GM is an intentional mindset we cultivate and practice, drawing upon it in moments of trespass. The tendency to forgive increases in closer relationships, but with GM, there is sometimes a greater need in situations with those with whom we are less close.
- **Forgivingness:** Forgivingness is the tendency to forgive transgressions, a mindset that is stable across time and situations (Roberts, 1995). Where forgivingness is a dispositional standpoint (Roberts, 1995), Gracious Mindset is a conscious choice and a mindset we practice.
- **Compassion:** Compassion is the feeling that arises when one is confronted with another's suffering and feels compelled to relieve it (Lilius et al., 2011). In the case of GM, we are making a cognitive choice to interpret the situation as respectfully and benevolently as possible. Empathy may not be our first response and our physiological states might be quite different from compassion, if we are struggling with our interpretation of the situation or the attributions. We may or may not feel compassion, but with GM we are determined to allow positive doubt in a given situation. Yet, compassion is something from which we can surely pull when endeavoring to employ GM.
- **Humility:** There are many different definitions of humility. According to a group of psychology scholars, humility has two main characteristics: 1) On the intrapersonal

level, humility involves an accurate view of the self, and 2) on the interpersonal level, humility involves a stance that is other-oriented rather than self-focused (Davis & Hook, 2013). Peterson and Seligman (2004) defined humility (along with modesty) as letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not seeking the spot light; not regarding oneself as more special than one is. Gracious Mindset differs in that it does not *require* an accurate view of the self, it does not relate to how one promotes one's accomplishments, nor does it relate to whether one seeks the spotlight or how special one regards oneself.

Psychological safety, civility, humility, trust, optimism, compassion, forgiveness, and forgivingness work together to enable what I have chosen to term a “Gracious Mindset” which, in turn, sets the stage for giving our fellow human beings the benefit of the doubt at home and, especially of interest here, in the workplace.

I assert that bringing GM to the workplace will benefit individuals with increased positive affect, better relationships and increased self-regulation. GM not only positively impacts the work climate but can short-circuit what otherwise might be problematic in organizations.

A simple example is well illustrated here: A seasoned worker finds a new employee has taken his well-earned and convenient parking space. There are many attitudes he might assume about the offender: the other person is just an inconsiderate jerk – this attribution causes stress and anger and might affect his physiology – a racing heart rate, rising blood pressure, and constriction of blood vessels (Levenson, 1992). While sometimes negative affect is appropriate, useful and productive (as it can narrow our focus and keep us grounded), it is often unproductive and inappropriate; gratuitous negativity is neither helpful nor healthy (Fredrickson, 2009).

Imagine this example, but where our driver practices a gracious mindset, bringing this

outlook to the same circumstance, assuming a respectful explanation or as close to that as he might come given his current situation. The driver could choose to believe he was cut out of his usual space because the other driver might:<sup>15</sup> 1) be in a hurry for an emergency, 2) have not been told of the company practice of giving those with the most tenure the best parking spots, or 3) have made an honest mistake quite unconsciously. In this scenario, our offended worker can continue his day with a small hiccup, in a “nearly uninterrupted” state. The cost of a gracious mindset in these micro moments is little to none. Whether one decides the new employee who took the coveted parking spot is a jerk or gives him the benefit of the doubt for erring, the other “offending” employee goes on and we are only left to our own physiological selves with little chance of backlash from the other. Additionally the offended employee is now free to engage the offending driver without rancor to determine why he is in his special parking space, thus avoiding a further alienating event.

The situation in which we could assume a respectful interpretation can range from the trivial to the profound. For example, the incident could be a singular interaction with a stranger — as when a driver cuts us off on a highway to a high-stakes situation with someone with whom we have an ongoing relationship and who exerts some control over our future. To help distinguish between the trivial and the profound, it is beneficial to determine those situations in which we might use benefit of the doubt liberally, perhaps as a default mindset, or on “autopilot” (trivial circumstances) to more profound situations where a default mindset could be risky and subject us to backlash.

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<sup>15</sup> When employing GM, one might consider other specific more benevolent interpretations or just employ a general awareness that other more benevolent interpretations are plausible.

While this paper is focused on GM, in *Appendix V: Employing the Benevolence Bias*, I introduce the benevolence bias – the “default version” of GM – a response we can put on “autopilot” for predetermined situations. Benevolence bias is much like a heuristic<sup>16</sup> that we can endeavor to employ automatically, with the goal of becoming embedded and incorporated without conscious effort.

### **Benefits of Gracious Mindset**

Employing GM, I posit, has emotional, social, and cognitive benefits. The emotional benefits, which are related to our choices, behaviors and reactions in the moment of trespass, are discussed under *Positive Emotion*. Social effects are related to the relationship and discussed under *Relationships*. Cognitive benefits are associated with preserving our psychological resources, and are discussed under *Self-regulation*.

#### **Positive Emotion**

Giving another person the benefit of the doubt can result in increased positive affect or decreased (or foregone negative) affect or both.<sup>17</sup> When a negative event occurs, we have choices. For example, when we stumble upon an infraction and feel trespassed upon, we may experience negative affect, often anger. But, should we choose to employ GM and assume a more respectful interpretation, we potentially spend less time with negative affect, potentially

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<sup>16</sup> While a heuristic is often an unconscious response, benevolence bias, especially in the beginning, will be a much more conscious undertaking.

<sup>17</sup> Positive and negative affect are not mere opposites, so it is possible to have a negative and a positive affective response in the same moment. That said, there is a negative correlation between negative affect and positive affect (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988).

short-circuiting negativity since we disrupt a potential situation. We also might experience positive affect as a result of an uninterrupted good mood, or as we will see in the next section, *Relationships*, as a result of bettered relationships.

Early research regarding negative emotion has been generally agreed upon – negative emotion alerts us to danger, problems and focuses attention on self-preservation and problem solving (Levenson, 1994). However, understanding the utility for positive emotion has been less clear, even dismissed, until recently (Fredrickson, 1998).

**The role of positive emotion.** According to Barbara Fredrickson’s (2009) “Broaden and Build” theory, positive emotion leads to greater creativity, openness, and better problem solving — all of noteworthy importance in the workplace. When we experience positive emotion, our thinking becomes more holistic, and we build new skills (Fredrickson, 2009). This not only makes us more creative, but bonds us to others. As we broaden, we tend to become more inclusive and increase empowerment of others, sometimes actually blurring the distinction between ourselves and others. This can lead to increased trust and stronger relationships as well as building long term social, physical and intellectual resources (Sekerka et al., 2011). Positive emotions can also broaden one’s cognitive repertoire and attention span and build long-term physical, intellectual, and social resources (Fredrickson, 1988).

***Achieving balance: the positivity ratio.*** Fredrickson popularized the positivity ratio—the ratio of positive emotions to negative emotions as measured over time. To flourish, Fredrickson recommends a positivity ratio of about 3 to 1<sup>18</sup>. The positivity ratio plots as a U curve showing

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<sup>18</sup> Most studies have shown the Positivity Ratio for flourishing to be between 3:1 to 4:1 including studies by Marcel Posada, John Gottman, and Robert Schwartz (Fredrickson, 2009). Although

that a higher positivity ratio is healthy and productive up to a certain point and then declines. The key is a high positivity ratio without extremes, with 11:1 being the upper bound for flourishing (Fredrickson, 2009).

**Contagion.** Because emotions are contagious, it's especially important to understand their source in an environment where their impact might be felt more intensely. Emotions (both positive and negative) are contagious (Seligman, 2011). According to Sigal Barsade, professor at the Wharton School of Business, we can “catch moods.” It only takes one of five employees to affect or “infect” the group (Barsade, 2001). We have all witnessed this effect—for better or worse. Imagine this: you are at a gathering, perhaps a family birthday or graduation where the talk is quiet and folksy. Enter now, a cranky relative complaining severely about the food, the drink, the weather, politicians, and the other guests. Just how long does it take for the atmosphere to deteriorate, for family members to disperse or begin to complain themselves? Indeed, the same can happen in reverse. The event is quiet and folksy when funny and affectionate Uncle Harry arrives bringing with him a heart full of affection and hilarious stories. How long before we are laughing and sharing our own hilarious and heartfelt stories?

Positive emotion can also influence the attributions assigned to conflict or to adverse events (Forgas, 1999). For example, Joseph Forgas (1994) cites three studies (Fitness & Strongman, 1991; Fletcher, Fitness, & Blampied, 1990; Forgas, 1991) in which research showed that those with positive affect are more likely to focus on external, unstable, and specific causes

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the nonlinear dynamic model developed by Losada has been questioned (Brown, Sokal, & Friedman, 2013), evidence in recent years fortifies the Positivity Ratio Theory (Fredrickson, 2014).

in their explanations of a conflict and those with negative affect saw the same incidents as internal, stable, and global (Forgas, 1994). In the example above for instance: our cranky relative may attribute the small turnout for the birthday party to “the deterioration of the American family” (internal and global), while our more positive Uncle Harry points to the rainy weather and competing high school graduation (specific and external).

For an organization, positive affect is linked to many organizational concerns including broader information processing strategies, more viability in perspectives (Fredrickson & Losada (2005), increased creativity, greater innovation and increased connectedness (Fredrickson, 1998). We also tend to perform better, have increased intrinsic motivation and more favorable perceptions of our work and organization with increased positive emotion (Amabile & Kramer, 2007). Positive affect can increase a group’s feeling of empowerment and community (Howard, 2006). At the organizational level, when there is a climate of positive emotion, there can be increased social and psychological capital (Bushell, 1998), which can help build resilience in the organization (Luthans, Vgelgesang, & Lester, 2006). Positive affect’s impact goes beyond the troops, so to speak, as positive emotion correlates with transformational leadership, as opposed to transactional leadership (Rowold & Rohmann, 2009), with employees having been found to perceive leaders with increased positive affect as more effective leaders (Bono and Ilies, 2006).

### **Relationships**

Employing GM can improve relationships, which are key to our wellbeing. Wellbeing lies in the individual, but not exclusively. As Chris Peterson noted, “Other people matter,” and biology and evolution have supported the drive to increase wellbeing in the company of other people.

A large part of our lives is spent at work; thus the impact of work relationships (and

related social networks) is enormous. Science has shown that strong social relationships—including those in the workplace—strengthen our immune systems, extend our lives, and reduce the risks of depression and anxiety disorders (Haidt, 2006). Social support, in the larger sense, is linked to greater wellbeing and good health (Haidt, 2006), decreasing stress and anxiety (Gable & Gosnell, 2011). It is not only whether or not we are actually cared for, but includes whether we perceive that we are cared for, and believe that assistance is available when needed (Haidt, 2006).

Interactions impact the quality of our relationships, with research suggesting that negative interactions in the workplace can be more impactful than positive (Duffy, Ganster, Shaw, Johnson, & Pagon, 2006). When we employ a GM, we potentially short-circuit negativity since we disrupt a potential situation where we and others might feel unsafe. For example, rather than being angry that another carelessly spills coffee on our newly dry cleaned shirt, we give them the benefit of the doubt, possibly noting mentally that we are not above dripping coffee, thereby minimizing negative affect. This has a direct positive impact on relationships, with all the attendant benefits. This impacts our lives overall as the ability to develop relationships influences our interactions both in the organizational setting and in our lives outside the organization (Ragins & Dutton, 2007). Earlier, we explored many constructs that can create a more positive and enabling environment for a Gracious Mindset (psychological safety, civility, humility, perspective taking, trust, compassion and forgiveness). I summarize these below as they relate to GM within the context of relationships.

**Psychological safety.** Earlier, I explored how psychological safety could enable GM. I also assert that employing GM increases psychological safety because the reduction in adversity in relationships can also impact our sense of value and sense of safety. This can lead to feeling

more free to be open, authentic and direct (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2011) which, in turn, impacts the quality of our interactions.

**Civility.** Increasing civility in organizations can improve collegiality (Porath, 2011). Earlier, I explored how civil behavior could enable GM. I further suggest that GM can also increase the level of civility in an organization because it reduces hostility and alienation. When we are civil, we are displaying respectful, considerate, compassionate, or caring treatment. Civility can lead to HQCs, which builds positive relational aspects.

**Incivility.** Hostility and alienation are related to uncivil and toxic environments (Porath, 2011). When we decrease incivility, we also decrease isolation, hostility, and alienation. As discussed earlier, even a one-time display of incivility can lead to decreased connection, thus impacting the quality of relationships.

**High-quality connections.** We explored HQCs in *Civility*, which are marked by mutual positive regard, trust, and active engagement (Dutton, 2003). HQCs can cause us to feel more alive, more “seen” by each other, and increase the regard in which we hold each other (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011). This resultant positive energy can lead to “positive spirals” which can increase one’s desire for effective interactions. This directly impacts relationships in the organization potentially leading to increased cooperation, trust, organizational process coordination, error detection, and learning (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011).

**Compassion.** Compassion, too, has a positive impact on relationships in general and in the organization specifically (Dutton & Workman, 2011). While above I explored how a compassionate climate can increase the possibility of GM, I posit that GM can increase climate compassion in the organization. Merely witnessing compassion has been shown to activate positive spirals (Dutton & Workman, 2011). Collectively, compassion at work can increase our

shared positive emotion (Dutton et al., 2006) and increase our collective commitment (Grant, Dutton, & Rosso, 2008). Sharing emotion can improve relationships by bonding workers together around a common experience such as a company sports team, a holiday event, a wedding, birth or even a sickness of a co-worker. Likewise, sharing a collective commitment can improve relationships because of the bonds of cooperation formed around the event or task, such as raising money for a cause together, playing on the company bowling team or celebrating holidays and special events (Dutton et al., 2006).

As we explored earlier, compassion focuses us in the direction of suffering, thus opening a lens to unearth emotional and relational capabilities of individuals, and collectively within the organization (such as caring and empathy) (Dutton et al., 2006). This can increase healing, adaptability (Dutton & Workman, 2011), resilience (Powley, 2009), and inspire us to come together, to organize and pool resources on behalf of others (Dutton et al., 2006). Responding as a team to the sickness and death of co-workers and their families, as well as to natural disasters, for example, can bond a team in powerful ways (Dutton, Workman, & Harding, 2014)

**Humility.** In the presence of humility, we become more humble, more human. Humility can lay the foundation for GM; conversely, when we employ GM we are likely invoking our own humility, which has the power to improve relationships. This, in turn, can allow us not only to be open to new ideas and feedback, but also to view others in an appreciative way while evaluating ourselves without exaggeration (Porath, 2011). Because humility has been associated with positive qualities and behaviors important to relationships (such as forgiveness, cooperation, helping), humility might improve the quality of our relationships (Peters, Rowat, & Johnson, 2011), which in turns increases feelings of relatedness.

**Trust.** Trust impacts the quality of relationships in the organization (Dutton, 2003). As

discussed above, trust propensity, our willingness to rely on others, can lead to greater likelihood of employing a GM. A GM may also increase trust because as hostility and suspicion decrease, trust increases. Additionally, others might view us as more trustworthy when we employ GM, as we forego, for example, a display of anger.

### **Self-Regulation**

I posit that GM can increase self-regulation and decrease ego depletion. When we give another the benefit of the doubt, we can preserve cognitive resources, thereby limiting or avoiding cognitive depletion. Self-regulation relies on a limited resource, much like energy, with a limited supply (Baumeister, DeWall, Gailliot, & Oaten, 2006). When depleted, individuals experience ego depletion, which, for a period of time, reduces the success of subsequent self-regulation tasks (Baumeister et al., 2006). This can also decrease our likelihood of handling ourselves well when our self-regulation is challenged (Baumeister et al., 2006).

Self-regulation is a critical personality process that enables us to control and direct feelings, thoughts and actions (Baumeister et al., 2006). People who have high levels of self-regulation tend to be more successful, moving toward desired results through better decision-making. Self-control helps us conduct ourselves appropriately in society, bringing responses in line with norms and laws by regulating impulses and appetites and directing our actions. Self-regulation helps us avoid otherwise impulsive negative behaviors and make better choices.

Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall, and Oaten (2006) also found that we can improve our “moral muscle” through deliberate practice, controlling our thoughts and actions to overcome personality traits in service of an adaptive behavior, thereby overcoming less desirable parts of our personality. Therefore, I suggest that self-regulation is not only a benefit of GM, since ego depletion can be lessened, but can also be an antecedent. That is, in endeavoring to employ a

gracious mindset, we can utilize our self-regulation “muscle.” Through repetition, self-regulation can be strengthened as can any other muscle (Baumeister et al., 2006). These new habits, in turn, begin to create an upward spiral, where newfound wellbeing sustains itself and even helps build higher levels of wellbeing, and positive changes in other behaviors (Fredrickson, 2014).

I have explored some of the potential benefits of employing GM including a positive impact on affect, better relationships, and increased self-regulation. Now, let’s look at practical application within an organizational setting.

### **Employing Gracious Mindset: An Organizational Plan**

In a toxic work environment, a focus on GM (a focus across the organization to consciously practice benevolent interpretations of offenses when benefits outweigh the risks) can provide a good place to begin positive transformation. In fact, I suggest gracious mindset could be a starting point for increasing civility in an organization. Recent research suggests that civility can beget civility in the form of reciprocity or even third-party civility (C. Porath, Personal Communication, July 16, 2015). It extends that as employees start to give others in an organization the benefit of the doubt, their respectful behavior can initiate reciprocal respectful behavior in others.

GM can be implemented at the individual level, or within a team, but will have the most impact when supported organization-wide. Therefore, for this plan, I will focus on organizational deployment. While I outline a full plan here, an organization, a group, or an individual for that matter, does not necessarily have to undertake the full plan in order to achieve positive results. In fact, most organizations may be best suited to focus in simple areas and build from there, given finite resources. An organization can choose an area defined around increasing strength in an area such as humility or civility. Or it can choose to design its plan around activities, such as

focusing on tools first (such as those in the appendices) or instead, perhaps, redefining the organizational identity, which might include the corporate values and a new mission statement.

The approach for the plan below is as follows: 1) In *Enabling GM Constructs in Action*, I consider the constructs discussed earlier in *The Enabling Environment* in the context of the application of GM; 2) I then look at how to increase GM through organizational planning and strategy in *Organizational Policies, Practices and Decision Making*; and finally 3) I explore interventions and tools that can be utilized in *Tools for GM*.<sup>19</sup>

### **Enabling Gracious Mindset Constructs in Action**

To build a climate where GM can be fostered and thrive, the organization must consider implications as they define or refine organizational values and identity, create policies, create practices (including employee recruitment and orientations), make organizational decisions and plan events. This will be further explored below after clarifying how the constructs covered in *The Enabling Environment* relate to application of GM.

A word about relationships first: each and every enabling aspect we discussed (*psychological safety, civility, humility, trust, optimistic explanatory style, compassion and forgiveness*) has the potential to improve relationships, but it is important to note that a GM can be improved by the quality of relationships. Therefore, organizations that employ strategies and tactics to improve the relational overall will likely impact GM as well.

The list of possible actions is extensive, so I focus on a subset that can be utilized together as an application to increase GM. Of course, with all GM building tactics, modeling is

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<sup>19</sup> This plan is based on the research cited throughout this paper, but none of the suggestions of this plan have been empirically studied within the context of GM.

front and center. Management, as well as all employees, would be encouraged to practice and model these behaviors.

**Psychological safety.** To increase the psychological safety in an organization (and the consequent willingness to take risks), an organization can focus on building an environment that is more learning-oriented. To increase the shift from performance-oriented to learning-oriented, organizational policies and practices must reflect this change. This includes the selection of behavior for which people are rewarded and praised.

**Civility.** Incivility clearly reduces psychological safety, with the risk of spiraling out of control (Dutton, 2003). Additionally, when we perceive that we are unsafe in our environment, we tend to reduce our risk-taking (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2011), thus reducing the likelihood of giving others the benefit of the doubt. To increase respect and civility, attention should be paid to organizational policies and practices that encourage the behaviors we wish to see. Sometimes even a simple “thank you” or pat on the back can convey appreciation and certainly performance reviews can reflect appreciation for civility. Civility as a value and in practice can thus be integrated into everything from the stated corporate values to the hiring practices as well as everyday shows of appreciation.

**Humility.** Humility interventions in the research are limited (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Yet according to recent research, a focus on resilience might increase humility<sup>20</sup> (Dwiwardani,

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<sup>20</sup> In a study of 245 participants, researchers explored attachment and resilience as predictors of humility (and gratitude and forgiveness) (Dwiwardani, Hill, Bollinger, Marks, Steele, Doolin, & Davis, 2014) and found, while controlling for religiosity, that both attachment and resilience are significant predictors of all three.

Hill, Bollinger, Marks, Steele, Doolin, & Davis, 2014). To increase humility, an organization can increase the focus on resilience. I recommend three resilience-building activities that are later described in the appendices: 1) Optimistic Explanatory Styles (explored later in this section), 2) the ABC Model (Appendix II) and 3) Thinking Traps (Appendix III). I have chosen these three specifically since these interventions are particularly relevant to humility and explanatory style, as well as to realistic optimism and perspective taking.

**Perspective taking.** As discussed earlier, perspective taking can increase interpersonal understanding, strengthen social bonds, and inspire compassionate behavior (William, 2008). This is important because a lack of perspective can lead to error in our attributions of others' motives (and our own) (such as *fundamental attribution error* and *self-serving bias*). Perspective taking is also important in increasing potential forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1997, 1998, 2003) and in increasing the forgiveness climate (Bright & Exline, 2011). The appendices explore tools that aid in building perspective including *MCII* (Appendix I), *ABCs* (Appendix II), *Thinking Traps* (Appendix III) and *Practicing Empathy* (Appendix IV).

**Trust.** As discussed above, trust can be built with use and can create a self-fulfilling cycle (Dutton, 2003). As trust begins to build among employees, it potentially accelerates – amplifying organizational efforts toward building a deeper sense of safety in the organization. To that end, the organization can emphasize the importance of being open, honest, and trustworthy in their policies, practices and modeled behavior. Additionally, focusing on building an individual's optimistic explanatory style (Reivich & Shatte, 2002), will impact how we attribute cause and potentially increase benevolent explanations. Finally, when trust is breached, the organization can encourage trust repair through dialogue and role playing since this can lead to more benevolent attributions, perceiving the transgression as less internal, controllable and

stable.

**Optimistic explanatory style.** Explanatory style impacts how we attribute causes to others' and our own behavior (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Explanatory style is very important because: 1) all optimism strategies involve construing our world with a more charitable perspective (Lyubomirsky, 2007), and 2) we can cultivate an optimistic explanatory style through intervention (Seligman, 1990). Therefore, since explanatory style impacts how we attribute causes of behavior, understanding our explanatory style and then challenging any inaccuracies can impact our overall attitudes and behaviors (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). To encourage insight, the organization can require all employees to take (at no cost) the *Optimism Test* at [www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu](http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu) as a way of measuring and understanding their own optimistic versus pessimistic inclinations. The organization can also train and encourage employees to challenge any catastrophic thinking with FAT Thinking<sup>21</sup> which is explored further in *Appendix II: The ABC Model*.

**Compassion.** Organizations can proactively build a stronger compassion capability by leveraging what was learned from the Midwest Billing case study discussed earlier (Lilius et al., 2011). That is, an organization can incorporate compassion into their culture, values, policies and practice by encouraging the following within the organization: 1) recognizing stakeholders' contributions in the organization (and rewarding these behaviors), 2) dealing with issues directly

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<sup>21</sup> F.A.T. Thinking is (F)lexible, (A)ccurate and (T)horough thinking. In moments of challenge, one can consider other options (flexible), challenge the veracity of their thoughts (accurate), and by considering additional information (thorough) (J. Saltzberg, personal communication, February 27, 2015).

and immediately, 3) engaging in enjoyable activities with others while maintaining focus on work, 4) celebrating milestones in others' lives, 5) using collective decision-making, 6) offering help, and 7) orienting newcomers to tasks, people, expectations, values, and resources as they come onboard.

**Forgiveness.** To increase GM, we can look to the building of a forgiveness climate, since forgiveness' antecedents are likely to apply to GM. Actions the organization can take could be activities and policies that increase perspective-taking – such as role playing – an increase in systems-thinking (Bright & Exline, 2011), and psychological counseling for struggling employees (Nussbaum, 2007).

### **Organizational Policies, Practices and Decision-Making**

To increase the potential for success, the organizational culture should support this plan. This can be done through policies, practices, ongoing communication, rewards, and leadership modeling. An organization needs to look at these recommendations for increasing GM and incorporate and launch such policies and practices in the context of their organization's culture and resources, which may occur in phases. Below is an outline of steps an organization can take (some organizations might not choose to take all steps, or to look at these in a different order):

- Review of policies, practices, incentive programs and other organizational elements for aspects that support or hinder GM. This can include increased focus on relational aspects, intolerance of bad behavior such as incivility, practices and policies for apology and conflict, a focus on trust, respect, compassion, humility, and forgiveness.
- Consider the organizational values and mission for aspects that support or hinder GM. Consider revision and integration.
- Determine tools and interventions that will be deployed along with related schedule.

- Hold an organization-wide meeting to launch new cultural elements and trainings. Set the tone by securing a commitment from all stakeholders to a positive environment.<sup>22</sup>
- Train the management team on concepts and tools.
- Direct the management team to model new behaviors and reinforce it in others. For example, in meetings they can help create an environment for GM by modeling how a trespass is attributed. Instead of “The marketing department is ignoring our request,” we can say, “Marketing may be overloaded right now. I am going to check in and see why our materials have not been delivered.”

### **Tools for Gracious Mindset**

To support GM, the following interventions and exercises have been shown to be efficacious as noted:

- Mental Contrasting with Implementation Intentions (MCII) (See Appendix I). MCII can help us think about potential future situations and reduce related undesired reactions by preplanning responses (Houssais, Oettingen, & Mayer, 2013).
- The ABC Model (See Appendix II). ABCs can help us unearth underlying beliefs, which impact our attributions, our explanatory style, and forgiveness among others (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).
- Thinking Traps (See Appendix III). Thinking Traps leverage what we have learned from ABCs and help us identify patterns of thought (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).
- Practice Empathy (See Appendix IV). In *Practice Empathy*, we consider another’s

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<sup>22</sup> Securing such a commitment has been found to increase civility and decrease incivility (Porath, 2011).

perspective and practice looking at respectful attributions (Lyubormisky, 2007).

- Employing the Benevolence Bias (See Appendix V). This exercise will help frame when and how to employ a default mindset of GM.

### **Conclusion**

*“Sow a thought and you reap an action; Sow an act and reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap character; sow character and you reap a destiny.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Every day, throughout the day, we all are making choices. There are no inert actions, as we are either feeding or filling with each action we take, whether consciously or unconsciously. We have the opportunity to choose intentional thinking and harness benefit from micro interactions, that might have previously gone by with little thought. Gracious Mindset is intentional thinking, and a practice, and a conscious way of interacting.

Where we make a choice to practice grace in moments of trespass, we still are in the position to protect ourselves. While endeavoring to interpret situations respectfully, we still are in the position to say, “No” or “Stop” and react appropriately when we recognize a malicious action. But in other moments, where we might overreact, lack perspective, or make attribution errors, we can consciously practice grace, impacting our interactions from moment to moment, and potentially creating an upward spiral. But one person can make a difference, on their own wellbeing, upon the one given grace, and upon those who bear witness. Any resulting feelings of gratitude, hope or connectedness can be carried forward and even “caught” by another, as we know emotions can be contagious.

Factor in an enabling environment, where an organization chooses to opt for graciousness as an important element in their corporate climate, and the effects can multiply. By fostering and fortifying through the organization’s practices, policies, actions and even identity, a small idea

can become foundational. And this can become destiny.

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### **Appendix I: Mental Contrasting with Implementation Intentions (MCII)**

The Mental Contrasting with Implementation Intentions (MCII) exercise can be trained within an organization to help arm us with a response in situations that might trigger an unfavorable reaction from us in moments of trespass. This reduction in strife can increase psychological safety, increasing the potential for GM.

MCII is a research-validated technique designed to help us modify behavior and reach goals (Sevincer, Busatta, & Oettingen, 2014). MCII can help one employ realistic optimism since it details a plan of action for likely obstacles (Oettingen, 2014). It comprises two very efficacious and complementary processes: Mental Contrasting and Implementation Intentions (Sevincer, Busatta, & Oettingen, 2014). Although MCII was developed and has been mostly utilized for goal attainment, researchers empirically studied the use of MCII in the context of relationships. In this context, it has been shown to reduce undesired behavior in those relationships<sup>23</sup> (Houssais, Oettingen, & Mayer, 2013).

With Mental Contrasting in its original context of modifying behavior and reaching goals, participants first indulge (visualize a successful outcome of a goal) then immediately identify and imagine (dwell on) what obstacles might stand in the way. With goals, when Mental Contrasting, we can often quickly determine if the goal is worth pursuing and find out whether our commitment is enough to carry us through (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2010). For use within relationships, we can think about an undesirable pattern in the relationship, analyzing our

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<sup>23</sup> In a study by Houssais, Oettingen, & Mayer (2013), MCII lead to a reduction of self-perceived insecurity-based behavior in romantic relationships. Although not in organizational context, it does point to MCII's potential efficacy in changing one's responses in relationships.

undesirable responses. For example, if we tend to say things we regret to an employee arriving late to a staff meeting, we can utilize MCII to create a better response. We can then create strategies (Implementation Intentions) for this pattern to increase the likelihood that we will be able to identify it when encountered and be armed with a predetermined action (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2010). The form of Implementation Intentions, is “if-then-plan” statements that spell out how one will act upon a cue (pattern in the relationship) (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2010):

If \_\_\_\_\_ Then \_\_\_\_\_

Below is an example in the “if-then-plan” format:

If an employee is late to the staff meeting Then I will table my reaction and, later, after the meeting, ask them the reason for tardiness

Each organization can choose how best to deploy this intervention and practice including as a live training, webinar, video or role-playing, for example.

## **Appendix II: The ABC Model**

The ABC Model exercise is something that can be trained within an organization to increase skills to unearth underlying beliefs, affecting attributions and interpretations (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Since giving another the benefit of the doubt when trespassed upon is dependent on how we perceive the offense (among other things), the ABC Model exercise can help set the stage for GM.

Albert Ellis (1962), the father of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, identified that much of the stress experienced in life comes not from the activating event itself, but from our interpretation of the event. And this makes sense – if the activating event were causal, then everyone's responses would be similar. Awareness and control of internalized communication can significantly alter how we experience and how we are impacted by stressful events (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). The ABC Model is something that can be taught and utilized in organizations. By training our teams to stop and consider their underlying beliefs, we can increase resilience and GM.

### **The ABC Model**

Below is an example of the ABC Model exercise, which can increase our skill to detect thoughts in the midst of adversity and can help us understand its emotional impact (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). ABC stands for the following:

A: Adversity or activating event

B: Beliefs – the thoughts that run through our minds (consciously or unconsciously) when we face an adversity or an activating event

C: Consequence – the result of the belief, which can be behavioral or emotional, or both –

### **A-to-Connections**

Often when we are faced with adversity, we can jump right from the adversity to the consequence. Here is an example, moving from A to C:

We are having our weekly staff meeting and an employee arrives ten minutes late (adversity). I become angry and make a sarcastic remark to the employee in front of the entire team (consequence).

### **Dissecting the Steps**

A: An employee is ten minutes late to a staff meeting

C: “I am mad” and the whole team knows it because of my sarcastic comment.

In this example, I have decided that anger is a result of the tardiness. That is an A->C connection. But, if we dig deeper, we will see there is also an underlying belief:

B: “This employee is disrespecting me.” We can see what really had transpired was A->B->C.

Consider the above example again, but now with the belief:

We are having our weekly staff meeting and an employee arrives ten minutes late (adversity). I think, “This employee is disrespecting me” (belief). I become angry and make a sarcastic remark to the employee in front of the entire team (consequence).

Once we understand this underlying belief, we can potentially use this information to debunk the belief. This can be done with FAT Thinking.

### **FAT Thinking**

FAT thinking is (F)lexible, (A)ccurate and (T)horough thinking. In moments of challenge, we can consider other options (be more flexible in our thinking), challenge the veracity of our own thoughts (be more accurate in our thinking) and consider additional

information (be more thorough in our thinking) (J. Saltzberg, personal communication, February 27, 2015). In the example above, we could ask ourselves:

Flexible: Is there another way to look at this situation?

Accurate: Am I sure this is true?

Thorough: Is there more information I can consider?

### ABC Worksheet

Below is a worksheet that can be used to practice using the ABC Model and can potentially be employed in organizational trainings.

Learning Your ABCs Worksheet	
Activating Event (Describe a recent adversity or positive event – keep it objective and stick to the facts, not your opinions) Describe Event:	
Beliefs/Thoughts (What did you say to yourself in the heat of the moment?)	Consequences (Emotions/Behaviors): (What did you feel and do?)
Reflections: What did you learn from this? Was this belief helpful or harmful in the moment?	

Each organization can choose how best to deploy this intervention including as a live training, webinar, video or role-playing, for example.

### **Appendix III: Thinking Traps**

The Thinking Trap exercise can be taught within an organization to decrease faulty patterns of thinking that might be undermining communication and relationships, thus reducing the potential for GM.

A Thinking Trap is a common pattern of thinking (“thinking shortcut”) that can cause us to miss critical information. We tend to fall into thinking traps when there is ambiguity and we do not have enough information (Beck, 1979). We also have this tendency when there is adversity, we are tired, or even if we are extremely elated. By detecting thinking traps and then challenging them, we can increase the accuracy of our thoughts and increase impulse control (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). This can enable us to employ GM more easily.

FAT thinking is related to thinking traps because if our thoughts are more flexible, accurate and thorough, we will recognize thinking errors, thus minimizing mistakes (J. Saltzberg, personal communication, February 27, 2015). To be a FAT thinker (covered in *Appendix II, The ABC Model*), we need to sometimes challenge ourselves and ask questions to entertain another perspective.

#### **The Seven Common Thinking Traps**

Below are seven common thinking traps (Saltzberg & Reivich, 2015) that participants can use to try to detect in their own behavior.

Thinking Trap	Description	Example
Jumping to Conclusions (Ready, Fire, Aim) (Mother of all thinking traps)	Being certain of the meaning of a situation despite little or no evidence to support it.	You send an email your friend. He responds back with a simple one-word answer. You think, “He must be angry with me” because of the brevity of the response.
Tunnel Vision (not seeing the forest for the trees)	Focusing on the less significant details in a situation.	Despite accolades from two co-workers on your presentation, when another does not respond, you think, “I blew it. I was boring.”
Overgeneralizing (Character assassination)	Settling on global beliefs about one’s general lack or worth or ability on the basis of a single situation.	You drop a glass and break it and think, “I am always such a klutz.”
Magnifying and minimizing (Wrong side of the binoculars)	Errors in evaluating events in which the negative aspects of a situation are favored.	You don’t get a promotion and think, “I am bad at everything I do.”  or You get a promotion and think, “I was lucky. This doesn’t mean I am smart.”
Personalizing (Me, me, me)	Automatically attribute the cause of an adversity to one’s personal characteristics or actions	Your best friend is acting cranky and you think, “I wonder what I did wrong.”
Externalizing (Them, them, them)	Tendency to automatically attribute the cause of an adversity to other people or circumstance.	Your team at work has been underperforming. Upon criticism, you see how others have failed without considering your own contribution.
Mind Reading (Thinking we know another’s thoughts)	Assuming that you know what the other person is thinking or expecting the other person to know what you are thinking.	When someone doesn’t greet you at a local coffee shop, “She doesn’t like me.”

### Thinking Traps and B-C Connections

We can view thinking traps through the lens of B-C connections (covered in *Appendix*

II), dissecting our beliefs and looking for patterns. The table below can be used as a tool.

<b>THINKING TRAPS</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Jumping to Conclusions <input type="checkbox"/> Tunnel Visions <input type="checkbox"/> Overgeneralizing <input type="checkbox"/> Magnifying <input type="checkbox"/> Minimizing <input type="checkbox"/> Personalizing <input type="checkbox"/> Externalizing <input type="checkbox"/> Mind Reading	Activating Event:		
	B: Heat-of-the-Moment Thought	C: Emotions and Reactions	Thinking Traps Spotted

Recall the example in *Appendix II, The ABC Model*:

We are having our weekly staff meeting and an employee arrives ten minutes late (adversity). “This employee is disrespecting me” (belief). I become angry and make a sarcastic remark to the employee in front of the entire team (consequence).

Consider this example and review the list of *Seven Common Thinking Traps* above in table 1. We might fill out the table as follows:

- THINKING TRAPS**
- Jumping to Conclusions
  - Tunnel Visions
  - Overgeneralizing
  - Magnifying
  - Minimizing
  - Personalizing
  - Externalizing
  - Mind Reading

Activating Event:		
B: Heat-of-the-Moment Thought	C: Emotions and Reactions	Thinking Traps Spotted
<b><i>This employee is disrespecting me</i></b>	<b><i>Anger, Sarcasm</i></b>	<b><i>Jumping to conclusions, Magnifying, Personalizing, Mind Reading</i></b>

**How to Deal with Thinking Traps**

Thinking traps may recur in any area of life. One thing to consider is whether there are patterns associated with thinking traps. Questions we might ask include:

- Is there an area of my life where I tend to have more thinking traps? At work? With my children?
- Are there certain situations where I am more vulnerable?
- Are there thinking traps I tend to fall into more often?

To help deal with thinking traps we have identified, there are goals we can undertake and questions we can ask in the moment specific to each (Saltzberg & Reivich, 2015). For example, if we personalize, we can look outward, beyond ourselves, for other elements that might be contributing. We can ask, “How did others or other circumstances contribute?” Goal questions are explored below:

<b>Thinking Trap</b>	<b>How to deal with it Goals/Critical Questions</b>
Jumping to Conclusions (Ready, Fire, Aim) (Mother of all thinking traps)	Need to slow down. What is the evidence?
Tunnel Visions (not seeing the forest for the trees)	Include more. What salient info did I miss?
Overgeneralizing (or Character assassination):	Look at behavior. Is there a specific behavior that explains the situation?
Magnifying and minimizing (wrong side of the binoculars)	Be even handed. What positive events occurred?
Personalizing (Me, me, me)	Look outward. How did others or other circumstances contribute?
Externalizing (Them, them, them)	Look inward. What did I contribute?
Mind Reading	Speak up. Did I express myself? Did I ask for info?

Each organization can choose how best to deploy this information including as a live training, webinar, video or role-playing, for example.

### **Appendix IV: Practicing Empathy**

We can actually practice empathy (Lyubormirsky, 2007), which can help set the stage for GM. In toxic environments, where empathy is more likely to be low, the organization may want to consider organization-wide trainings that could include any of the following (identified as some of the most commonly-utilized techniques) (Schueller, 2014):

- Didactic instructions (lectures). This is most often used with other techniques (Schueller, 2014).
- Discussion groups. For example, one program consisted of weekly two-hour sessions where a topic was introduced and then small groups of five or six discussed the situation (Garaigordobil, 2004).
- Activity-based. For example, with role-playing, participants can practice perspective taking of another (Lyubormirsky, 2007).

If empathy is not a large concern in an organization, this can be a smaller undertaking where we encourage those within an organization to practice empathy in their daily lives (Lyubormirsky, 2007). Should another trespass upon them, we can encourage those within the organization to stop and consider others' thoughts, feelings and intentions. They can ask questions such as why the other might have behaved in this matter and what factors might explain the behavior (Lyubormirsky, 2007).

### Appendix V: Employing the Benevolence Bias

As stated above, to employ GM, we may often appropriately use cognitive resources to stop and consider what benevolent interpretations we might consider and their appropriateness. When we experience a transgression, we attribute many motives including the perceived causal attributions explored in *Attribution Theory* (locus of control, stability, and controllability) (Weiner, 1985). We may utilize tools such as the ABC Model. We may also use realistic optimism in these situations, where we gather and analyze the available facts, but lean toward optimism in our interpretations of these facts. But there might also be situations where risk is low in which we can employ another level of GM – benevolence bias.<sup>24</sup>

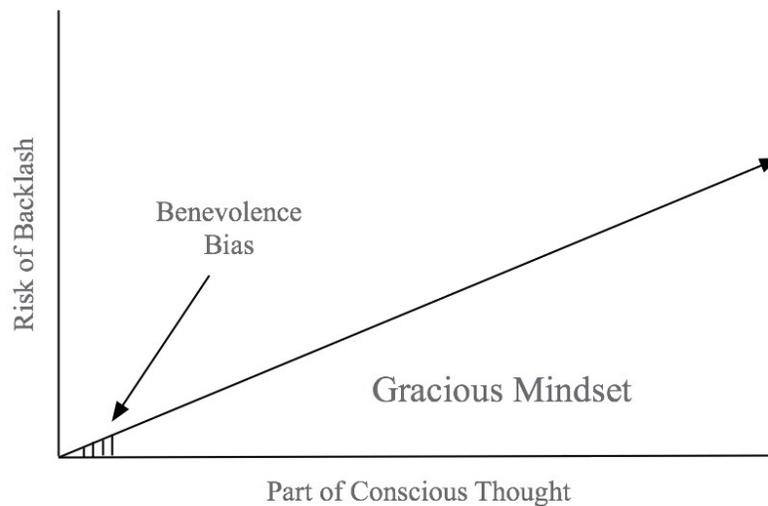
Benevolence bias is the “default version” of GM, a response we can put on “autopilot” where our predetermined responses are deployed in predefined situations, where the risk of backlash is small. We endeavor to employ benevolence bias automatically, with the goal of becoming embedded and incorporated with decreasing conscious effort.

Benevolence bias differs from GM and can actually be thought of as on a spectrum of GM as pictured below, where, when embedded, is less part of our conscious thoughts, reducing cognitive toll. In this way, benevolence bias is much like a heuristic.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Karen Reivich has actually created a “game” – the Benevolence Game, where a group of participants agree to look for only the most respectful interpretation of situations within a certain context and consider it as a possibility (J. Saltzberg, personal communication, March 5, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> While a heuristic is often an unconscious response, benevolence bias, especially in the beginning, will be a more conscious undertaking.



We can think of benevolence bias as a personal or organizational goal, where we are primed and ready to give others the benefit of the doubt, reducing in-the-moment decision-making surrounding an offense.

### **Cognitive Biases and Heuristics**

Cognitive Biases (our tendency to filter information through our own past experiences, likes, and dislikes) make sense because they greatly simplify decision-making. They arise from heuristics, rules of thumb, that we use to conserve cognitive resources, and can be used consciously or unconsciously. However, they sometimes have a bad reputation because their use can lead to faulty judgments – systematic errors of judgment. But heuristics are not by definition negative; they are adaptive (e.g., Bergert & Nosofsky, 2007; Broder & Schiffer, 2003; Rieskamp & Otto, 2006) and often necessary and useful (Kahneman, 2011). They are often right and can help us conserve cognitive resources. They are especially useful in situations where we need to act fast, where probabilities or utilities are unknown, or the problem is ill-defined, preventing us from using logic, finding the optimal solution, or calculating probability (Gigerenzer, 2008).

### **Employing a Benevolence Bias**

A benevolence bias is best used in situations where likelihood of any further interaction on the topic or incident at hand is minimal – therefore, there is an unlikely downside. After all, when cut off in traffic, whether we assume the driver just made a mistake or is being a jerk, doesn't matter. No matter what we decide in that situation, the driver will continue on his or her way, and we will continue on ours, presumably never to interact with that driver again in that way. The question: Are such scenarios common in the workplace? The answer is yes, quite. For example, a co-worker forgets to flush to toilet, to replenish the paper towels, to wipe up the drips of coffee he or she just spilled, to sign your birthday card, to chip in on the boss' anniversary bouquet, and on and on.

### **Spotting the Right Situation**

If we are going to employ automatic benevolence bias, we need to predefine situations in which we will use it. These are situations: 1) that are likely to recur with a pattern we can recognize, and 2) in which the likelihood of later backlash is small.

**Recurring situations and patterns.** A unique situation would be difficult to predict and, because it's not recurring, very unlikely to be worth relegating to benevolence bias. In such a situation, we need to employ cognitive resources. We can employ GM where we still consider our response. By definition, its uniqueness and unpredictability mean that it is necessary to use cognitive resources to decide on the most appropriate response. For benevolence bias, it's most useful to find situations that are likely to recur. We can define recurring situations almost any way we decide to suit our lives. For example, the right recurring situation can be defined by context, who is involved, by time frame, or any other relevant dimension. For example:

- I am going to employ benevolence bias when I am driving (context)

- I am going to employ benevolence bias when I speak with Rachel in the logistics department. I find I tend to get easily aggravated with Rachel, but the outcomes are not consequential for me (who is involved)
- I am going to employ benevolence bias during the staff meetings every Monday (time frame)

**Perceived potential for backlash.** “Backlash” refers to the perceived likelihood that an offender might exploit GM after having been given the benefit of the doubt. It refers to the negative consequences flowing from failing to correct or address a situation that, if left untreated, could cause significant problems in the future. Backlash can take several forms including opening oneself up to being taken advantage of or being perceived as weak. When we look at whether there is a potential for backlash we can ask ourselves certain questions:

- Is this situation isolated? One of the most important questions one can consider is whether the situation is isolated. For example, if it is unlikely that we will see the offending party again, the probability of backlash has been greatly reduced.
- Is the situation zero-sum? This is important because behavior and motivation can be different in zero-sum situations, since the gain for one party results in an equal loss for the other.
- Is there meaningful negative history between the parties? If so, they may have non-benevolent motives such as retribution, vengeance or manipulation.

**Degree of transgression.** The best situation in which to employ benevolence bias is with small, isolated, recurring offenses. When the transgression is larger, we need to move away from “an automatic” response. A larger transgression may still merit a GM, but the larger size of the transgression justifies the cognitive resources necessary to analyze the situation and using our

cognition, intuition and tools such as those discussed in this paper.

### **Some Clues to Employing Benevolence Bias**

Thus, analyzing a transaction under the factors set forth above, finding the right situations in which to employ benevolence bias as a heuristic includes those in which the trespass is likely to:

- Be recurring
- Be unintentional
- Be isolated or nearly so, thus creating minimal potential for backlash
- Be a non-zero-sum transaction
- Involve an offender who is unlikely to have motives of retribution, vengeance or manipulation