The New Hollywood: A Producer’s Approach to Positive Production Through Enhanced Relationships

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Abstract
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Keywords
film production, relationships, high-quality connections, PERMA, positive psychology

Disciplines
Arts and Humanities | Film and Media Studies | Social and Behavioral Sciences

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The New Hollywood: A Producer’s Approach to Positive Production Through Enhanced Relationships

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MAPP 800: Capstone Project

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Since its inception, Hollywood has enjoyed the benefits of privilege and prestige based in part because of scarcity of resources (i.e., financing, information, labor, equipment). Today’s technology has leveled the filmmaking landscape, and the incoming generation of filmmakers are less tolerant of the traditional devaluing behaviors in Hollywood. If the resources are no longer coveted and the typical behaviors not accepted, can Hollywood remain the filmmaking leader? This paper suggests that it can by evolving its behaviors to nurture people and relationships instead of exploit and deplete them. By utilizing tools such as positive psychology’s well-being model PERMA and positive organizational scholarship’s high-quality connections, the industry can inspire artists by shifting away from traditional devaluing behaviors and create a culture of support. Hollywood can leverage its position as the world’s foremost creative collective to influence new standards of relationships in production that prioritize genuine kindness, trust, and respectful engagement, or as this filmmaker calls it *positive production*.

*Keywords:* production, relationships, high-quality connections, PERMA, positive psychology
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**PRE PRODUCTION**

**Introduction**

Ask any question and *relationships* will be the answer. Most filmmakers are devoted to relationships. Think of some of the most iconic film scenes. *ET’s* “Phone Home.” The “I am your father” scene in *Star Wars*. *Moonlight’s* ocean scene with Chiron and Juan. Or any scene in *The Breakfast Club*. What do you remember? A relationship. Some of the most compelling films highlight interpersonal connection. When watching a film, the audience tends to look for the person or relationship they most care about. But what about the relationships behind the camera? The team making the film. Are they as impacted, influenced, or induced with feelings of enhanced interpersonal connection?

Just as creatives have the power to influence the audience’s journey, producers have similar power while in production. Producers control the environment, the operations, the activities, and the intensity of the production. Conventionally, producers held significant power to set the stage, one that values the people and processes, or not. Because of emerging technology and new attitudes, the film industry is experiencing a shift in that power.

In the quickly changing times of cell phone technology, production and distribution of video content is quickly advancing. Technology has broadened filmmaking’s circle of inclusion with diversity of people and locations. This current and incoming generation of filmmakers are arriving with years of experience, film credits, and established audiences. This generation will not need permission or resources from Old Hollywood to participate in this exciting industry. They are making their own content and distributing it on a multitude of platform options. It is this writer’s observation that the broadened accessibility to top film technology is shifting the overall attitudes of the newer generations of filmmakers. Because films can be made anywhere
with anyone, artists are less likely to accept the devaluing interactions and exploitive relationships that are the current accepted norm in Hollywood. This renaissance is the prime opportunity to reexamine the industry’s values and begin to prioritize a culture of positive relationships.

This review of the literature will chronicle theories on Seligman’s (2011) well-being model PERMA and Dutton’s (2003) high-quality connections to organize an argument on positive relationships as the new norm of Hollywood. This paper will also offer practical applications for producers to strengthen relationships and encourage positive production. This conceptual toolkit can also be broadened to benefit other industries that tend have a tradition of devaluing relationships and reexamine the much-needed evolution on how people treat each one another.

The term positive can encompass a diverse range of how people and cultures thrive (Buettner, 2010). The literature defines a positive organization as having the widely valued characteristics of purpose, fairness, civility, and dignity (Park & Peterson, 2003). This paper will define a positive production with the same characteristics.

**Producer’s Job**

People often ask, “What does a producer do?” The short answer is, “Everything.” The clever answer is, “If you want to know what a producer does, try making a movie without one.” The more precise answer is, producers oversee initiating, coordinating, managing, and supervising a project. They are the problem solvers, the therapists, the glue that holds everything together, and most importantly the individual ultimately responsible for physical safety, money, and final product. They are the final layer of accountability for everything concerning the production. Producers can be creative and owners of intellectual property, or simply drivers of
other people’s property; however, producing is ultimately all about managing relationships. What is not specifically identified is “how” they manage the relationships. The terms producer and leader are interchangeable depending on the industry. For the purposes of this paper the term producer will be used.

On the surface, Hollywood shines with glamour, intrigue, and promise, much like the films it produces. But that facade can conceal an environment of mistrust, ego, disrespect, and relationships built on relentless competition and commodity trading. Hollywood has appeared to play a zero-sum game since its inception. Expensive resources and powerful “gatekeepers” perpetuate the authoritarian style of leadership that preserves the excluding behaviors. The power seems to be shifting.

**Devaluing Relationships in Production**

Hollywood’s historical attitude of absolute power held by few has fostered individuals’ willingness to do whatever is necessary to “make it.” Building respectful and trusting relationships that encourage respect and freedom has not been the priority. Instead, exploiting people’s eagerness with long hours, low or no pay, disrespect, mistrust, and unfitting behavior tends to be the standard. Inappropriate adaptive preferences (IAPs) may help us understand how this has sustained for so long (Gallegos, in press). IAPs describe a situation where people tolerate less than optimal conditions, they accept deprivation and seemingly endorse the inadequate behaviors (Gallegos, in press). When filmmaking or filmmakers are used as an instrument, a means to an end, they are more likely to become vulnerable to IPAs, potentially sacrificing well-being.

Humans crave belonging and inclusion (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). Exclusion can create feelings of inferiority, anger, and humiliation, leading to feeling devalued and
dehumanized (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). Individuals experiencing feelings of being devalued tend to engage in self-defeating behaviors such as unhealthy eating, and taking more risks (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). They are less kind to themselves and less likely to help others (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). Devaluing treatment can range in severity of behaviors. On the mild side, it can look like dismissing others or feeling dismissed. When this happens, crew members and creatives tend to withdraw, or “check out,” and forfeit their personal engagement or accountability in the current task or job.

The middle of the devaluing range may reveal itself as public condemnation or humiliation. This tends to be a common occurrence in production. Allowing emotions to go unregulated does not serve the team or goals.

The extreme end of devaluing behavior can turn into a movement. Many Hollywood actors and executives have come into the spotlight because of accusations of inappropriate conduct, prompting the #MeToo movement. Traditional Hollywood behaviors tend to suggest that values, morality, and respect, are not the top priority.

Even the mildest cases of devaluing behaviors can reduce the magic in moviemaking due to people’s natural need to matter as individuals. Films require the efforts of a multitude of artists, actors, musicians, muralists—along with the individual efforts of the director, cinematographer, and composer. Every single person on a film is an artist of their own and they all take their craft very seriously. Globally the U.S. film and television industry generates $17.2 billion in exports with a trade surplus of $10.3 billion, accounting for four percent of the total trade surplus in services (Ortman, 2019). It is imperative we close this gap between the beautiful images in front of the camera and the sometimes-reckless management of people behind it.
*A Bunch of Amateurs* is a film about Britain’s oldest amateur film club. Armed with a love for cinema and a passion for filmmaking, members have been meeting in the same clubhouse every Monday since 1932. Once a thriving, prestigious club with glorious black-tie galas and an eight-year waiting list, it has become as aged and dilapidated as the building in which they gather. But that does not deter these fifteen cinephiles from enthusiastically returning each week to share films and a cup of tea together. What motivates these members to continue to create, despite such difficult life situations and limited filmmaking resources? It appears to be the love of filmmaking and the relationships that encourage the loyal return each week, despite significant struggles, including the death of a spouse one Monday. What does this group of working-class amateur filmmakers know that we don’t, and how can we bottle this devoted filmmaking microcosm and scale it to the creative world?

**Passion and Motivation**

The amateurs are deeply intrinsically motivated to make films together. Their passion for filmmaking is not unusual; most people that enter this industry do it because they have a passion for it. Passion is defined as a deep inclination to a self-defining activity that people love, find important, and are willing to invest their time and energy (Vallerand & Verner-Filion, 2013). Research has found that passion matters to several important outcomes in well-being such as positive emotions, relationships, and performance (Vallerand & Verner-Filion, 2013). Passion can make people’s lives worth living, and lead people to engage in activities they love (Vallerand & Verner-Filion, 2013). In filmmaking, passion can often be a common dominator that can lead to building connections.
PRODUCTION

Positive Connections

Subjective well-being is a collective phenomenon (Fowler & Christakis, 2009). The happiness of the people we surround ourselves with can influence and enhance our happiness. (Fowler & Christakis, 2008). Research suggests that much like laughter and smiling, happiness may serve an adaptive evolutionary purpose of enhancing social bonds (Fowler & Christakis, 2009). Moreover, close relationships are strongly linked to well-being and health (Gable & Gosnell, 2011). While experiencing stress, the emotional support of others can serve as a pathway to improved health and well-being (Gable & Gosnell, 2011). As humans, we have social, as well as biological needs for relationships (Peterson, 2006).

Although our need to belong transforms over the course of our lives, what remains constant is our reliance on human connection (Smith, 2017). Dutton (2003) discusses small moments of connection that can emotionally and physically energize and revitalize individuals. It can be between two strangers, a long-term monogamous couple, or a production crew. The happiness of the people we surround ourselves with can influence and enhance our happiness. This is good news for any industry, but particularly the film industry. We are surrounded by others; we rely on others; relationships are at the core of what we do. As producers, the leaders of the set, it is important we properly set up an environment that protects and respects all crew members. It is also important we hire likeminded crew and model positive connections.

Expanding upon the generic meaning, Berscheid and Lopes (1997) defines connections as dynamic mutual interactions at work between. Generally speaking, relationships refer to a lasting association between individuals (Reis, 2007). However, in this case it is not presumed that the individuals are affiliated in any prior way or have reason to expect to be in the future. Rather
these connections are segmented, often unintended interaction at work that could possibly transition to a relationship but are influential as they are. Much like many industries that manage temporary or short-term teams, film production requires a group of strangers to gather on both long- and short-term collaborations.

If connections in the workplace—particularly in the ruthless world of Hollywood—are to be perceived as generative, or life-giving, then certain assumptions are to be made. The first is that as humans, we are social by nature and therefore have a need to belong (Maslow, 1968). A film set is a social environment by design, creating countless interactions that either strengthen or weaken connections. Our second assumption is that these connections evolve, and change based on how an individual is feeling, thinking, or behaving during a particular interaction with another person (Gable & La Guardia, 2007). The creative process and monetary pressures can create reactions which can influence the interactions of those involved. Third, the work of organizations is accomplished through social processes, and connections are critical to those processes. A group of people acting independently, regardless of their talent level cannot make a movie. Lastly, we understand that connections will vary in their quality. This variance of quality illustrates the health and level of functionality of the connections at any given time (Stephens et al., 2012).

Organizational learning requires interactions between members of that organization (Elkjaer, 2003). It can be hypothesized that Dutton’s (2003) high-quality connections (HQC)s, may be the foundation of workplace learning; moreover, the quality of those connections will determine the quality and effectiveness of the learning. HQCs are short-term positive interactions between two people during which authentic interest is expressed, including a genuine mutual concern for one another’s well-being. The research on high-quality connections postulates that
these interactions can elevate the lived experience of both parties, as well as those that they later engage with (Stephens et al., 2012). It is through this lens that learning can be viewed as a dynamic behavioral process of interaction and exchange between members of a given work group (Kozlowski & Bell, 2007).

Organizations and groups are made up of individuals. As such, we all experience setbacks (ex. bad mood, unexpected outcomes, or loss) and challenges as we pursue excellence. These setbacks may cause us to weaken previously established connections if we allow them; however, the propensity to be virtuous is facilitated when individuals or collectives have the ability to recover from adversity stronger and more resourceful or be resilient (Walsh, 1998). Resilience has been described as an outcome of virtuousness (Bright et al., n.d.). This is because virtues such as kindness, forgiveness, and hope help members and teams handle adversity and move forward stronger than before (Bright et al., n.d.). These virtues are found when we examine high-quality connections.

Much like an orchestra, filmmaking is one where silos cannot exist. Movie making requires the coordination of countless moving parts, and the contribution of each individual is essential. Bechy (2006) observed, the tradesman, or “below-the-line” workers tend to use relationships that include humor and kindness to express gratitude and criticism. Therefore, it is the quality of member interactions that will determine their ability to develop constructive learning and enabling behaviors. By openly sharing and receiving information the efficiency and effectiveness of the production operation can be enhanced. From experience with many different people and leadership styles, the benefits of positive production and enabling behaviors in a crew setting increases productivity.
In Puerto Rico, crew members like to play music while setting up a scene. Some producers allow this, and some do not. It was observed that when the music was not allowed, the crew moved slower and less enthusiastic than when the music was on. This is an example of how producers understanding individuals and cultures enhances productivity.

**The Importance of Leadership**

Although this paper started by giving an understanding of what a producer does, being competent at coordinating and managing projects does not make one a good producer. A good producer is the curator of positive relationships that leave team members feeling empowered and able. Organizational psychologist, Jane Dutton (2003) defines energy as the readiness and capability to act. Although energy is limited, it is renewable, and a critical resource to enable excellence in individuals and organizations (Dutton, 2003). Navigating personalities and getting the best out of people is the core of a producer’s responsibilities. A producer is accountable for all aspects of production, from the safety of the team, to generating environments that allow creativity to flourish. This can come in many forms, including unwavering support, protection, and enabling of the artists.

A recent casual conversation with a young producer went like this:

“How did your day go?”

“Great, except my coordinator lost it and screamed, “Shut the f@*k up!” four times in a row to our cinematographer in front of the crew and client. Then spent the next hour crying because of her unprofessional behavior.”

Unfortunately, this is not unusual. In production, many producers pounce on other’s weaknesses and mistakes. They are unwilling or unable to regulate their emotions and spend the time necessary to properly listen and evaluate a situation before a confrontation. This is the
opposite of what production leaders should do. Someone struggling should be seen as an opportunity to assist and enable, ideally privately. The coordinator described above learned this behavior from her mentor. Just as she learned negative deviant behavior, she could also be taught positive deviant behaviors. This example illustrates how behavior can be perpetuated beyond generations through mentorship. Much like any other relationship, the quality of the mentorship can range from high-quality to dysfunctional (Ragins, 2011). Relational mentorship is a high-quality state that is interdependent and promotes mutual growth, learning, and development (Ragins, 2005). These opportunities for learning and sharing could be enhanced by positive production’s common language and standardized set of tools and established values.

When the young producer stepped in to defuse the situation and individuals involved, the coordinator was interested in her ability to remain calm, and problem solve. She told the producer, “I want to be more like you.” This is proof that people want to build these relationships that promote kindness, patience, and protection but they either do not know how, or have not been taught that it was a priority. The traditional negative tone can be enhanced or eliminated by the producer. Leaders shape the opportunities for connection in two ways according to Dutton (2003): first, how they interact with others, and second, how they design the environments in which others interact. A producer models behaviors, and the way individuals act towards one another or treat each other determines the strength of their connections. The following sections discuss high-quality connections and its four pathways as a practical tool to strengthen relationships in production.

If we agree that: 1) The entertainment industry must prioritize quality ties and relationships to collect and promote top talent. 2) Accepting and promoting qualities of inclusivity, civility, and collaboration is vital to our people and industry. 3) Relationships are the
new currency. Then we next need to discuss the steps to integrate these values into our industry’s daily interaction. It is this writer’s conviction that these enhanced connections can be constructed with the pathways of PERMA and HQCs, which will be discussed in the proceeding sections.

Positive Psychology

In 1999 the American Psychological Association’s new president, Dr. Martin Seligman suggested another direction for the field of psychology, which he termed “positive psychology” (Seligman, 1999). The discipline focused on answering questions such as: "What makes life worth living? How do we increase individual’s well-being, optimism, and happiness?" These are not new questions; Athenian philosophers to Confucius contemplated the same questions that positive psychologist’s study today.

Positive psychology is the scientific study of what goes right in life, from birth until death, and the everything in between—also metaphorically known as north of neutral (Peterson, 2006). In 1984 there were only a few publications on subjective well-being, and by 2016 there were over 140,000 articles published on the subject (Diener et al., 2017). Positive psychology is an empirical discipline and should not be confused with wishful thinking, faith, self-deception, or fads. It uses scientific methods to understand what makes us flourish and identifies scientific models and interventions to increase well-being.

Historically, psychology has not been a science of flourishing. It has been a science to treat mental illness. Positive psychology works to understand positive traits in individuals such as the capacity to love, persevere, and forgive. At the group level it recognizes principles such as civility, moderation, and work ethic. Based on these principles, this paper uses positive psychology as one of the theories in the organizing framework for positive production specifically the pathways of the well-being model PERMA (Seligman, 2011).
Positive psychology is not about being happy. There are distinct differences between experiencing positive emotions and experiencing pleasure. Pleasure is a subjective positive psychological state that feels good. It can come from adding or subtracting stimulus, and varies in degree of social acceptability, intensity, quantity, and quality (Peterson, 2006). While the benefits of positive emotions increase the more we participate, pleasure decreases in enjoyment the more we indulge (Peterson, 2006). It is also important to understand our natural ability to adapt and return to neutrality very quickly: this is known as hedonic adaptation (Peterson, 2006). Positive psychology encompasses the lasting effects of living a meaningful life, or flourishing, based on the five pathways of PERMA (Seligman, 2011).

PERMA

There are currently many well-being models and theories; this paper will explore positive psychology’s PERMA model (Seligman, 2011). PERMA is an acronym summarizing the seminal theory on well-being that was established by positive psychology founder, Martin Seligman. Seligman (2011) introduced the acronym PERMA for the five pathways to well-being: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaningfulness, and achievement (Seligman, 2011).

Although PERMA has been widely accepted by the industry, it has had its critics. Seligman (2018) offers the following criteria to support his well-being model. First, the five pathways contribute to well-being. This has been supported by a .98 latent correlation with Diener’s subjective well-being (Goodman et al., 2018). This means that as subjective well-being rises, so does PERMA and the converse is also correct. Second, each pathway can be pursued for its own sake and not only to serve another element (Seligman, 2018). Third, each pathway can be
defined and measured independently (Seligman, 2018). Forth, PERMA offers a concise list of only the five pathways (Seligman, 2018).

The following paragraphs will describe each of the five pathways of the well-being model PERMA. To further illustrate, examples from the feature documentary *A Bunch of Amateurs* will be used throughout the next sections.

**Positive Emotions**

The first pathway of PERMA is positive emotions. Positive emotions have traditionally been studied as detectors of well-being (Tugade et al., 2021). But that is just the beginning. Barbara Fredrickson (2004) empirically researched positive emotions and specifically identified ten including joy, love, hope, awe, and gratitude (Frederickson, 2004). Experiencing these emotions can be a strong indicator of well-being and can have such benefits as increased creativity, ideas, opened awareness, and increased resources and social bonds (Fredrickson, 2001). Positive emotions can foster resilience and undo the damaging effects of negative emotions (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

Positive emotions helps us understand why the amateurs have not missed a Monday despite the sometimes-traumatic personal circumstances. The film documents the filmmakers experiencing the entire range of positive emotions. From joy to hope to curiosity, we witness this group sharing positive emotions and the effects of positive emotions, including building enduring personal resources such as social support, resilience, and skills and knowledge (Fredrickson, 2004).

**Engagement**

The second pathway is engagement. Deep engagement could also be considered flow, a highly enjoyable state of engagement (Peterson, 2006). While researching highly creative people,
Csikszentmihalyi (2014) noticed similar themes reappeared: feelings of enjoyment, engagement, intense concentration, loss of self-awareness and time. It might feel look or feel like a total surrender to the moment or task at hand. Optimal flow occurs when the perfect amount of skill meets the perfect amount of challenge (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989). The more flow experiences we engage in, the higher the likelihood of living the good life. Engagement and flow are a regular part of our amateurs’ weekly routine; several of the club members were so committed that they spent months attempting to recreate fifteen seconds of the classic opening of the film *Oklahoma*.

**Relationships**

The third pathway is relationships. These relationships can vary in interaction, but they should leave us feelings supported, loved, and valued. Close relationships are strongly linked to well-being and health (Gable & Gosnell, 2011). While experiencing stress, the emotional support of others can serve as a pathway to improved health and well-being (Gable & Gosnell, 2011). As humans, we have social, as well as biological needs for relationships (Peterson, 2006). This may be the most influential of the five pathways for our amateurs: their relationships with each other. The film shows that their interaction can get turbulent, but they persist and maintain ties with the group.

Another interesting part of the group is that while several of the non-member spouses have passed away, all members are alive and still participate weekly. This may be supported by research that suggests social connections become increasingly important as we age because they play a critical role in preventing cognitive decline while contributing to better physical health among older adults (Siedlecki et al., 2014).
Meaningfulness

The fourth pathway of PERMA is meaningfulness. It is our natural human instinct to desire meaning. The essence of meaning is connection, and this helps to stabilize us in an unstable world (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). Meaning can also be a part of belonging or being a part of something larger than us (Seligman, 2011). Baumeister & Vohs (2002) identify the four needs for meaning, the need for purpose, values, efficacy, and self-worth. Coming to the film club weekly, being accountable and essential for the daily tasks and filmmaking, as well as the overall survival of the club seems to be a big motivator for our amateurs.

Accomplishment

The last element in the PERMA model of well-being is accomplishment, also referred to as achievement. Being motivated, reaching a goal, or mastering a task contributes to our well-being because we feel a sense of pride (Seligman, 2011). Achievement of intrinsic goals, pursued for personal accomplishment, tend to lead to higher levels of well-being than extrinsic goals, such as popularity or money (Seligman, 2011). The amateurs absolutely enjoy the benefits of accomplishment. It may be as simple as getting up the stairs of the clubhouse for the older members or winning a regional amateur film club competition. Accomplishment is a large part of these filmmakers’ lives in the club.

What wisdoms can we extract from our light-hearted amateurs? Maybe their unwavering admiration for the cinema, and loyalty to the club’s mission. Or maybe their commitment to the purpose of filmmaking and strong relationships. All these motivations are important for work, life, and art, and should be nurtured throughout the entire production process, from the beginning to the end of an artist’s journey. Collecting and connecting artists with similar passion and energy is just one significant benefit of supporting a creative community.
Using High-Quality Connections to Strengthen “R”

This paper will use high-quality connections as a tool to further advance the “R” in PERMA to continue to build a path. Positive production asserts that what is being is as important as how it is being created. At the center of optimal living is having quality ties to others (Ryff & Singer, 2000). Stephens, Heaphy, and Dutton (2012) describe high-quality connections (HQC) as momentary experiences between individuals that occur within a work environment.

High-Quality Connections

High-quality connections are short-term, subjectively positive interactions between connected individuals that nurture individual and mutual well-being, and are definitionally marked by vitality, positive regard, and mutuality (Dutton, 2012). The answer to the question of how to assess the quality of connections is the evaluation of three distinct subjective understandings of HQCs: 1) connection and vitality are the degree to which the participants feel positive arousal and energy, 2) positive regard contributes to the participants’ feelings of being known, loved, respected, and cared for, and 3) mutuality depends on both participants feeling that the other is vulnerable and fully engaged in the shared moment (Stephens et al., 2012). As described, HQCs are of short duration and often occur between strangers. Executives and other industry leaders will naturally ask the question: how impactful can high-quality connections be in the workplace, particularly in Hollywood, which is largely a transient workforce? Additionally, apart from its Golden Age, Hollywood is currently in its most popular and successful time. Again, begging the question, what is the point of focusing on these seemingly insignificant interactions?
Cognitive, Physiological, and Behavioral Processes

Research indicates that HQCs provide value by raising the functionality of cognitive, physiological, and behavioral processes (Stephens et al., 2012). Cognitive improvement of people engaged in HQCs is demonstrated by increased speed of processing and working memory performance (Ybarra et al., 2008). Positive changes in an individual’s physiological condition in the areas of cardiovascular, neuroendocrine, and immune systems have been credited to HQCs. The behavioral benefits show themselves in the form of an employee’s ability to recover from and adapt to loss or illness, navigating career or job transitions, or task related help (Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007).

The Collective

The research reveals that HQCs not only have a positive influence on individuals but can also affect the collective. An example of this is high-quality connections helping to facilitate collaborative educational growth and success through the intensifying of collaboration and the asking of caring questions, which can help advance knowledge formation and innovation (Aarrestad et al, 2015). One of the challenges many organizations face in forming HQCs is that many interactions take place through some form of teleconferencing. However recent education literature by Atkins et al (2020) suggests that, though there are difficulties to forming HQCs over telecommunication, virtual platforms can still be effective for educating students and maintaining HQCs through distance learning. Technology’s effect on how we work and communicate has shifted increasingly towards virtual formats. This research supports the idea that individual and collective connections can be created in this new virtual world.
Learning

This learning benefit also carries over to the workplace. Scholars have researched the connection between high-quality connections and organizational learning. The subsequent findings showed that learning behaviors are affected both indirectly and directly when experiencing HQCs (Carmeli et al., 2009). We have previously addressed the direct effect HQCs have on workplace learning; the indirect effect becomes apparent when considering the psychological safety of organizational members. These findings affirm the link between psychological safety and learning behaviors as well as the role played by highly regarded relationships in producing and supporting a psychologically safe workplace atmosphere.

Capacity

High-quality relationships, built from high-quality connections, allow individual members to establish a higher capacity to transfer complex information and ideas, which is critical to problem solving and the creation of new and creative ways to approach the work process. This has the dual benefit of allowing members of HQCs to feel valued and connected. Therefore, the capacities, as well as the subjective experience of participating in a HQC can contribute to a better functioning organization (Carmeli et al., 2009).

The quality of the relationship is partly defined by its emotional carrying capacity (Carmeli et al., 2009). The higher the capacity, the more emotional information the relationship can receive and process. This means that when stress levels rise or things do not go as anticipated, individuals will be able to withstand the emotional weight and continue to collaborate at a high level.
**Resilience**

Along with a relationship’s capacity, the quality of connection is also defined by tensility. The tensility of a relationship refers to its ability to bend while withstanding strain, allowing for changing conditions, and the ability to return to form after difficulties (Carmeli et al., 2009). Both capacity and tensility are needed to be able to absorb unexpected setbacks within the workplace. When we speak about these terms together, we are referring to the *resilience* of an individual, group/team, or organization. Resilience is a term frequently used by leaders to describe a quality they value highly within their membership and organization. It is a sign of strength and agility and is often referred to as a key reason for an initiative’s success or failure. Ironically, for all the deserved acknowledgement resilience receives, the foundation for that quality, which we understand to be HQCs, or how we treat and interact with one another is hardly mentioned. Without HQCs creating high level relationships, organizational resilience is not possible.

**Gratitude**

HQC's can be nurtured through several different practices. In addition to these works, there is further scholarship that suggests that practices of gratitude may be the strongest contributing factor in deepening high-quality bonds among the current workforce population. Dutta & Chajer (2021) discuss the powerful influence that practices of expressing gratitude have on the building of HQCs in a workplace environment. Expressing gratitude and humility can often go hand and hand, both can be elements missing from interpersonal interactions in Hollywood. Gratitude has been called the amplifier and correlates with traits connected to positive emotional functioning, lower dysfunction, and positive social relationships (Wood et al., 2010). The research found that grateful people tend to be less angry and hostile, depressed, and
emotionally vulnerable (Wood et al., 2010). Most importantly, studies suggest that gratitude is associated with adaptive traits including the development and maintenance of positive relationships (Wood et al., 2010). These are all elements important to strong producers and positive production.

**Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioral**

In addition to Dutton’s frameworks, scholars have focused on three mechanisms that can be used to build and strengthen HQCs: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. These are the fundamental social-psychological pathways through which workplace HQCs are built and strengthened (Stephens et al., 2012). The cognitive mechanisms highlight both the conscious and unconscious thoughts of individuals that may predispose them to building HQCs. Emotional mechanisms point to how a person’s feelings help to open them up to connection and are shared between people in ways that support the building of HQCs. Finally, behavioral mechanisms are focused on the actions and ways of interacting that help to explain the quality of the connection the two team members form (Stephens et al., 2012).

**PERMA and HQCs as Related to Positive Production**

Small but significant human interactions can have impact, including improved cognitive performance, physiological benefits, and adaptation from illness (Stephens et al., 2012). Connections and relationships can also increase development and growth, enhance identities, and generate moments of learning and inquiry (Stephens et al., 2012). The collective benefits of human connections enhance the creative spaces significantly, such as greater levels of trust, increased ability to learn from failure, boosted cooperation, and enhanced organizational processes (Stephens et al., 2012).
Producers that practice leadership through a lens of caring and respectful engagement not only boost individual creative work involvement, but also enhance mutual leader-follower relationships of meaningfulness in and at work (Stephens & Carmeli, 2017). Organizations that encourage high-quality relationships display learning behaviors such as frequently seeking new information, challenging the validity of work-based assumptions and devoting time to figuring out ways to improve the work process; this is done through the ongoing process of reflection and action (Edmondson, 1999). As a result of this process, learnings are acquired, shared, and combined (Argote et al., 2001). In production, departments can often work in isolation. To encourage extended relationships beyond one’s department on set, for example, large lunch tables can be set up that require large groups of people to sit together and talk. This allows people to build bonds beyond their circle and usually results in new discussions and discovered commonalities. Connection need not be complicated; a great tool on set, and arguably anywhere, is a smile. Simply coming on set in the morning with a big smile and greeting everyone with a thank you for being there, sets an enthusiastic tone and sustained positive energy for the day.

*A Bunch of Amateurs* is a small movie that won the audience award at a major film festival. It is a simple human story of passion, relationships, and support set among a small group of people with a deep love for filmmaking. They not only have a devotion to the magic of Hollywood, but they also care about each other.*A Bunch of Amateurs* is proof of our overriding commitment to the essential human need of relationships. How can we combine their wholesome enthusiastic love for film and connectedness to enhance the rest of the entertainment industry? The following section will examine how contributions from the well-being model PERMA and high-quality connections can enhance relationships on a film production.
POST PRODUCTION

Practical Tools and Tips to Positive Production

We have explored positive psychology’s PERMA and positive organizational scholarship’s high-quality connections. Next, we will explore how these concepts can be integrated to enhance relationships to create a positive production. A review of the literature (PERMA and HQCs) explains that the strength of individual and organizational relationships can be a significant contributor to positive production. For individuals to thrive attention must be given to the intention, the duration, and the specific environment of those relationships. The texture of relationships should consider feelings of support and love (Gable & Gosnell, 2011), duration (Dutton, 2011), lived experience (Stephens et al., 2012), passion, time, and energy (Vallerand & Verner-Filion, 2013), joy and gratitude (Fredrickson, 2004), resilience (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004), engagement and social needs (Peterson, 2006, Maslow, 1968), belonging (Seligman, 2011), arousal and energy (Stephens et al., 2012), and feeling, thinking, and cognition (Gable & La Guardia, 2007).

We will use the evolving work of Stephens, Dutton, and Seligman that encourages mutual respect, connection, vitality, positive regard for contribution, feelings of respect, care, and engagement, to advance the concept of positive production.

Practical Tools and Tips to Positive Production

Respectful Engagement

A Positive Producer’s Approach. The first pathway to building high-quality connections is respectful engagement. Respectful engagement is considered a catalyst and cultivator of creativity and is one of the four pathways to High-Quality Connections. It is described as engaging in a way that sends a message of value and worth (Dutton, 2003). This
pathway encourages engagement, active listening, caring feedback, and treating others with kindness, dignity, and respect (Dutton, 2003). This behavior can increase positive emotions, the first pillar in Seligman’s (2011) well-being model PERMA. The emotional, social, and physical benefits of HQCs are significant and immense (Stephens et al., 2012). Small, but significant interactions at work can have high impact: improved cognitive performance, physiological benefits, increased recovery, and adaptation from illness or loss (Stephens et al., 2012). Further benefits may include increased development and growth, attachment to community and organization, enhanced identity, and enabled moments of learning and inquiry. Among the various individual benefits of HQC, there is evidence of collective benefits such as increased ability to learn from failure, greater levels of safety and trust, improved organizational processes, and increased cooperation (Stephens et al., 2012). Broaden and build research also suggests that those experiencing positive emotions are more creative and imaginative (Fredrickson, 2009).

Respectful engagement is an essential element of connectedness and producing a culture of creativity. The entertainment industry tends to reward loud talking, fast moving, and quick decision making. Understanding a situation is fundamental to reacting to it. Good producers evaluate the adversity by actively listening and pausing to assess a situation’s urgency or emergency level. Although emotion regulation can overlap with coping, it refers to the attempt to influence the emotion experienced and how one experiences or expresses the emotion (Gross, 1998). The central part of emotion regulation is the activation of a goal to influence the emotion trajectory (Gross et al., 2011). Adjusting your reactions, emotions, and behaviors is critical to developing and maintaining personal relationships and professional success (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).
Positive Pro Tip. In production, everything is perceived to be an emergency. Most things are not. Reivich and Shatté’s (2002) exercise, Adversity – Behavior – Consequence (ABC), asks individuals to control the consequence by taking the time to assess the most appropriate behavior, or reaction to the adversity, or potentially difficult situation. By evaluating the adversity, appropriately regulating the behavior to create the desired consequence, producers can be more effective problem-solvers and build stronger relationships. Adversity will confront our daily lives at home, school, or work; that is a constant. Emotions and behaviors can be influenced by our thoughts, positively or negatively. Relationships are nurtured in environments that are deliberate and intentionally supportive and optimistic—not reactionary and emotional.

Task Enabling

A Positive Producer’s Approach. The second pathway to building high-quality connections is task-enabling. Producers, almost by definition, are enablers. Getting a film to the finish line requires constant enabling of others. It is the job of the producer to facilitate all others’ success through a series of multiple independent tasks. This can be done through teaching, assisting, and facilitating everyone on set. It may come in the form of emotional support, protection, encouragement, or sharing. It also involves giving and receiving caring feedback.

Task enabling can seem like a leadership style, but in fact it can happen between individuals on any level of the organization (Dutton, 2003). Look at the call sheet as layers of protection. Producers can enable the people above from the multitude of snags that occur every minute. Producers also work to protect and enable the team below to improve performance. From practical observation, a crew generally will take on the leadership style of the producer and that will reverberate through the different departments. Task enabling is extremely important to help
initiate and maintain feelings of connection through communicating positive regard and affirmation (Dutton, 2003).

Task enabling can invigorate individuals by enabling those that successfully enable others; therefore, heightening their own self-worth (Dass & Gorman, 1985). The enhanced sense of self-worth and identity can also lead to more connection between the individuals (Dass & Gorman, 1985). This suggests that the benefits of enabling others goes beyond the feeling of the immediate task leading to more opportunities for connection and mutual empowerment (Dutton, 2003).

The famous Nun Study examined 678 members of the American School Sisters of Notre Dame Research born before 1917 (Patzwald & Wildt, 2004). This research examined their diaries and found those that expressed higher amounts of positive emotions could live up to 10.7 years longer (Patzwald & Wildt, 2004). Specifically, those that engaged in generosity plus positivity may experience a significant boost in health and longevity (Patzwald & Wildt, 2004). Generosity can be a gift to another, but it is also a gift to oneself.

**Positive Pro Tip.** One way to enable is in moments of crisis to practice active listening and emotion regulation. One might ask themself, “How can I enable this person or situation to a solution and protect the team?” In many competitive industries, people may exploit others’ missteps by publicizing their shame and blame. This is not the pathway to getting the best out of the team. One should always look for a path to protect and enable people around them, for this behavior spreads. If the producer is a positive influencer, then the department heads will follow that lead. The opposite is true. When the producer is adversarial, the other leaders tend to adapt that behavior.
Trust

**A Positive Producer’s Approach.** The third pathway to building high-quality connections is Trust. Trusting requires acting on positive expectation on someone else’s intentions and behaviors (Dutton, 2003). Trust is also a resource that can increase with use (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996) as well as create a self-fulfilling cycle between two individuals acting in a trusting way (Zak et al., 1998). Trust in a work setting can be difficult because it requires being vulnerable, paying attention, and relying on others to follow through on their commitments. Trusting in filmmaking can have high consequences. Whether it is trusting someone with the safety on set or a documentary subject trusting the filmmaker to tell an accurate story, trust is front and center for successful relationships. Trust can lead to collaborative relationships that freely share resources, grant access, delegate responsibility, and seek input (Dutton, 2014).

According to Frei & Morriss (2020), for a relationship to have trust, it must have three components. The first, rigor of logic (Frei & Morriss, 2020). Do you believe I have the knowledge? The second, empathy (Frei & Morriss, 2020). Do you believe I have your best interest in mind. Lastly, authenticity (Frei & Morriss, 2020). Do you believe I am being myself and am I giving you the space to be yourself? Hollywood can fall short on all three of these components. Through understanding and a commitment to trust, many relational problems may decline.

When we abandon the persistent cutthroat competitive setting and enable others to feel confident, valued, and accomplished, we all experience enhanced positive affect and creativity. Trusting relationships are more efficient and enjoyable. Creating a culture that supports psychological safety may be one way to increase trust. Psychological safety describes
the perception of the consequences of taking interpersonal risks in specific environments, such as a workplace (Edmondson, 1999). In an environment that encourages psychological safety, people are more comfortable to make mistakes, and more confident to speak up and ask questions (Edmondson, 2018). Psychological safety promotes environments where colleagues trust and respect each other and feel free to be honest (Edmondson, 2018).

High psychological safety and high performance standards promote a learning culture, and benefits include: mistakes reported quickly, workplace engagement, increased creativity and performance (Edmondson, 2018). Organizational research has supported the idea that psychological safety is a critical concept in understanding how people effectively cooperate to attain a common goal (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Shifting behavior - especially organizational behavior - requires people to feel secure and capable. Psychological safety helps people overcome defensiveness and anxiety that comes with learning new data that contradicts expectations and hopes (Schein, 1992). The interpersonal effects of psychological safety and trust are essential to create circumstances that foster enhanced relationships and creativity.

**Positive Pro Tip.** Whether you have a crew of ten or one hundred, trusting your crew is essential. Hiring top talent and then getting out of their way is any producer’s best defense. According to Patty McCord, Netflix Chief Talent Manager, the reason for Netflix’s success was simple: 1) Hire the top talent 2) Create an environment of open feedback and candor 3) Develop a culture of freedom and responsibility (Hastings & Meyer, 2022). Releasing processes and procedures to create freedom requires trust. Crew members want to be treated as adults, not children that feel micromanaged. Resisting the natural producers urge to micro-manage will encourage better performance with your crew. As a producer, try not to “step-in” when you see a
difficult situation until you are invited. When you allow your crew to lead and problem solve, you are showing you trust and believe in their competency and ability to do their job.

**Play**

**A Positive Producer’s Approach.** *Play* is the fourth and final pathway to building high-quality connections. Play creates moments of connection and positive emotions. As briefly discussed, the broaden-and-build theory shows us how positive emotions can expand beyond the immediate moment (Fredrickson, 2004). For example, when we feel joy, this emotion may encourage the urge to play, broadening the momentary thought-action repertoire (Fredrickson, 2004). Another benefit of a broadened mindset is it allows us to reframe seemingly ordinary experiences into micro-moments of connection with others, thus making it feel like an extraordinary experience. A broadened outlook allows us to build new essential resources of well-being, not only psychologically, but also socially, intellectually, and physically. Accumulating these experiences serve as deposits in a metaphoric well-being bank that can be later accessed or withdrawn from in times of need (Fredrickson, 2004). This positive upward spiral supports the idea of kindness and enabling to enhance opportunities of heightened creativity behind the camera. Play at work has also been associated with creativity and innovation because it can develop cognitive skills and nurture new knowledge (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006). The significant role of play can easily be overlooked. But this is the entertainment industry, shouldn’t we entertain?

Humor is often used on set among crew members as a way to express gratitude, as well as to admonish (Bechky, 2006). One way to develop role expectation and strengthen social order on a film set is through humor (Bechky, 2006). When you watch *A Bunch of Amateurs* you can see the light-hearted ways the club members interact. Although they dedicate many hours to working
hard on their film, they have fun. How can producers use these natural occurrences of crew levity to impact their team’s positive emotions, relationships, and creativity?

**Positive Pro Tip.** Food is very important in production, and breakfast can be a great way to start the day off with a little more energy than just the normal safety meetings. Producers, ask your crew members to think of an item or an activity that brings them great joy. Ideally, they can bring an artifact to set that represents their joy. Every morning during breakfast, ask people to share their items along with a two-minute explanation of why it brings them so much joy. Exercises like this encourage PERMA pillars and are one pathway to increasing high-quality connections.

**WRAP**

**Conclusion**

Within Hollywood, there are people that behave according to their values, who treat people with kindness and respect, believe in inclusion and fairness, celebrate the success of others, and share credit and blame. There is also the opposite: individuals only concerned with self-serving interests, and those who will do whatever is necessary to get to the top, even when that means compromising themselves and their values.

While being kind and collaborative may encourage nice working environments, is it the most effective way to run a film production? Positive production is not idealistic; it is achievable. Hollywood’s dogged and devaluing relationships have been accepted as a necessary evil of entrance into the industry. It is not. These traditional standard operating procedures may claim lengthy film slates and hefty bottom-lines. But when employees are devalued, worn out, and beaten down, sick days over all low efficiency is more likely, which can affect the production schedule. The power lies in positive production, assembling creatives that remain supportive of
each other, and true to their individual telos, or purpose. Instead of exploiting people’s passion for the industry, producers should lead by nurturing and encouraging relationships and creating an environment of trust and enabling.

Thom Powers is the programmer for the Toronto International Film Festival and NYC Docs, and an influential force in the independent film world. Two years ago, he moderated a film festival in which I participated. During the session, he asked the audience if anybody had seen the prolific director Stanley Nelson's most recent film *Miles Davis: The Birth of Cool*.

“We have the producer in the audience today.” Thom said. As he walks towards her, she stands up and grabs the microphone from Thom Powers and says, “Nearly 20 years ago I worked with this person as a production assistant on a music video and she was calm, cool, so kind and in control. I knew I wanted to be a producer. She is here in this audience. Her name is Capella.” She ran over and gave me a big hug. We worked together on my very first big production. At the time, my only skill was the ability to treat others with kindness and respect. I felt tremendous gratitude for being even a small part of this young producer’s amazing success.

Our lives are the sum of all our tiny daily choices. Aristotle might consider this “practical wisdom,” our ability to make constant decisions with limited information while guided by our moral expertise (Schwartz, 2020). The distinct differences between philosophy and psychology’s approaches to meaning are important to note. While psychologists question the meaning in life, philosophers ponder the meaning of life. Both are important when trying to navigate the multitude of layers in the film industry. Good people can get influenced by ego, monetary motivations, and decision-making that may not be consistent with their moral fabric. This does not make them bad people; it may just mean that they need a reset, or a reminder of the beauty of this industry and the people in it.
If fish swim and birds fly, what do humans do? We matter. The research shows that humans need to matter, we need to add value and be valued (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). When leaders understand this central human need, they can relate to, inspire, and motivate just about anyone, anywhere. It is fascinating to see top leaders cross years of arduous bridges including graduating from top business schools and climbing the competitive corporate ladders, but they have difficulty crossing the bridge of humanity. Kindness, compassion, and interpersonal connection matter.

This paper explored theories on Seligman’s (2011) well-being model PERMA and Dutton’s (2003) high-quality connections to advocate for positive relationships as the new normal in Hollywood and beyond. It also offered practical applications for producers to strengthen relationships and encourage *positive production*. This conceptual toolkit can also be offered to other industries that tend have a tradition of devaluing relationships and used as an opportunity to reexamine the much-needed evolution on how people treat each one another.

If *relationships* are not the answer, you are asking the wrong question. When we build and strengthen relationships based on the high-quality connection pathways of respectful engagement, trust, enabling, and play we are inciting some of the deepest human needs to matter. Just as our amateurs are inspired to assemble each week as a common collective, industries and organizations can enthuse with the connections we form. Leaders in any industry, specifically the film industry, can do this.

It’s Hollywood! Creativity, inspiration, imagination, and magic are boundless.
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