Energizing social interactions at work:

An exploration of relationships that generate employee and organizational thriving

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Advisor: Andrew Soren, MAPP

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Abstract
A company's greatest asset is its people. In our increasingly service-based economies, social relationships and swift coordination among employees are the means by which a lot of work gets done. Thus, whether organizations -and their employees- flourish or languish largely depends on the quality of the social connections they nurture. The quality of the workplace connections can be defined as life giving (high quality) or life depleting (low quality). Positive social interactions facilitate organizational learning, cooperation, effectiveness, and employee loyalty, among many other desirable outcomes. High-quality connections are brief, mutually beneficial, and dynamic dyadic interaction, which have the power to energize people with vital resources to do their work well. Positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship –the science of how people and organizations flourish- provide us with tools that can help bring about high-quality connections. This paper defines positive relationships at work, with a particular focus on high-quality connections, examines the benefits of high-quality relationships and connections, and provides a framework for building high-quality connections. The paper shows that high-quality connections are a pathway to building individual and organizational flourishing.

Keywords: relationships, high-quality connections, positive psychology, positive organizational scholarship

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Acknowledgments

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This paper is dedicated to my family and friends for their unconditional love and to Joane who is a constant source of positivity and high-quality connections in my life.

Introduction

"People are dying at work!" It did not surprise me that professor Dutton started her lecture to our Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) class at the University of Pennsylvania in May of 2015 with this alarming cry. In my 25-year experience at leading financial institutions, well-being and work have often been mutually exclusive. Financial firms do many things well. Creating work environments that support virtuous practices while allowing employees to thrive is not one of them. Thus, compared to other industries, finance and banking have higher voluntary turnover (Compensation Force, 2013) and absenteeism rates (Workforce Institute, 2005), and lower employee engagement levels (Gallup, 2015). But there is evidence that, in the Western world, most people are searching for more meaning and well-being in their lives (Seligman, 2002). My conviction is that work, under certain conditions, can be highly enjoyable and rewarding as a source of meaning and well-being. So in June 2014, I walked away from my job as a senior manager to study positive psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, the birthplace of the science of individual and organizational flourishing.

Positive psychology and other positive organizational approaches suggest that the role of organizations is to enhance individual and organizational thriving while upholding humanistic principles (Cameron, 2008). Indeed, research shows that flourishing workplaces produce more positive emotions that generate desirable outcomes, such as lower absenteeism, increased loyalty, and higher business performance (Seligman, 2011). There is also ample evidence that jobs that were redesigned to include employee well-being as a goal generally produced happier work units that also tended to be more productive (Diener & Seligman, 2004).

This is a liminal moment for business organizations, as a new generation of people, the so-called millennials, wants to flourish at work (Gen Y, 2013). Positive psychology identifies

relationships as one of the major pathways for human flourishing (Seligman, 2011). Human beings are naturally social creatures and our interactions with others are just as vital as food and water (Lieberman, 2013). As most adults spend a significant amount of time interacting with other individuals at work, the workplace is an important contributor to individual well-being, in particular because it offers the potential for positive relationships (Diener & Seligman, 2002). In fact, research shows that relationships and work are among the major contributors to individual well-being (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008). Thus, it could be argued that the ultimate competitive advantage for a knowledge-based organization in today's information age is its people and that only people, in the right context, can make good organizations great, in large part through their positive, high-quality relationships.

Sadly, more than half of U.S. workers (52.3%) declare themselves unhappy in the workplace (Conference Board, 2014). The Gallup Organization (2015) found that a majority (51%) of full-time workers in America are not engaged in their jobs while another 17.5 percent are actively disengaged. At the same time, businesses are facing formidable challenges globally and the corporate environment is ever changing, highly dynamic, and information-rich. In our increasingly service-based economies, businesses produce services rather than products and social relationships and swift coordination are the means by which a lot of work is done (Dutton & Heaphy, 2006). For example, the three industries within the services division that experienced the most growth in the last decade have been business services (personnel supply and computer services), health care, and social services (BLS, 2013b). The growth of the service industry in the past two decades means that much of service work is knowledge work that is mostly done through connecting with other people. Going forward, it begs the question, "will the masses of disengaged employees' behavior actively contribute to their company's success … or failure?"

In sum, high-quality connections that recharge people with vital resources to do their work well are one of the major pathways to building positive and thriving workplaces. As a consequence, corporate performance increasingly depends on positive social connections. Therefore, organizations would be well inspired to focus on generative processes that contribute to developing positive relationships and high-quality connections so that people do not die but, instead, flourish at work.

The purpose of this paper is to better understand the impact of positive social relationships in organizations and to identify the major pathways to develop high-quality connections. Chapter one offers a brief state of well-being and engagement in the workplace. Chapter two provides a general overview of positive psychology applications in organizations. Chapter three discusses the importance of relationships, with an emphasis on positive relationships at work. Chapter four examines high-quality connections. Chapter five considers some major pathways to build high-quality connections. Finally, possible extensions of the concept of positive relationships for future work and some general conclusions are discussed.

Chapter 1. Well-Being and Work: An Oxymoron?

Lives of Quiet Desperation

Positive psychology research shows that work occupies a central place in the human quest for meaning as a primary source of purpose, identity, and belongingness (Michaelson, Pratt, Grant, & Dunn, 2014). According to a recent poll, an overwhelming majority of people considers that work is very important (35.6%) or rather important (44.3%) (World Values Survey, 2011). In America, more than three in four (83%) persons age fifteen and over spend the majority of their waking hours in a work-related activity (BLS, 2013a). Inevitably, their experience at work will greatly impact the quality of their life. Indeed, work provides not just an income, but perhaps more importantly, work affects self-esteem, and creates opportunities for engagement, meaning, and relationships (Seligman, 2011).

In the U.S. as in other Western countries, while overall levels of economic prosperity are on the rise, so are levels of depression and anxiety, and life satisfaction has not risen (Seligman, 2011; Easterbrook, 2003). Rather unexpectedly, studies reveal that once basic living standards have been met, happiness varies more with the quality of human relationships than with income (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2013). Also, our most rewarding experiences are normally connected with human relationships (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004). When asked what makes life most worth living, a majority of people answer that it's their interpersonal relationships (Peterson, 2006). For example, a recent survey highlighted that for three out of four U.S. employees their relationship with co-workers was what most engaged them at work (SHRM, 2015). Positive relationships give life and energy to individuals and their organization, whereas negative relationships sap the energy out of them and lead to individual and corporate floundering (Ragins & Dutton, 2007). In the literature, positive social interactions

have been called appetitive, as they are characterized by the pursuit of rewarding and desirable outcomes, while negative ones are aversive, or characterized by unwelcome and punishing outcomes (Reis & Gable, 2003).

Well-being is important not only for the workers themselves, but also for organizations; workers high in well-being perform better, have better relationships, earn better incomes, and are better organizational citizens, among other positive outcomes (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Companies with higher numbers of engaged employees have lower business costs, improved performance outcomes, such as higher productivity figures and customer rating, less turnover and absenteeism, and fewer safety incidents (Gallup, 2015). As one might expect, presenteeism – showing up at work, but contributing little- is uncommon with those most satisfied with their jobs (Robertson & Cooper, 2011).

In Western societies, roughly three out of four workers are now overwhelmingly dedicated to providing services, such as transportation, banking, entertainment, or retail trade, rather than goods, and in the U.S. it's four out of five (BLS, 2013b). Much of service work is knowledge work that requires frequent interactions with others. Therefore, sustainable corporate performance is predicated on positive social connections and swift coordination as the means by which work occurs, including within and between businesses and with all the organization's stakeholders (Ragins & Dutton, 2007). Thus, corporations should be interested in developing high-quality relationships in the workplace.

Often in modern life, however, individuality trumps connectedness and belongingness. Studies show that there has been a general breakdown of interpersonal relationships and an overall decline of face-to-face interactions (Pearson & Porath, 2005). As well, incivility, or employees' lack of regard for one another, is a growing and costly phenomenon. For example, a

study by Pearson and Porath, (2005) of more than 2,400 people across the U.S. and Canada, found that incivility erodes organizational values, depletes organizational resources, and negatively impacts job satisfaction and organizational loyalty. Recent research has found that only about 16 percent of people have extremely positive interactions on any given day (T. Rath, personal communication, February 6, 2015). In sum, it has been argued that one of the main offsets to the private benefits of economic growth is a decline in the quality of human relationships, as measured by increased solitude, communication difficulties, fear, distrust, family infidelity, and reduced social engagement (Bartolini, 2011). As Easterbrook (2003) laments, money seems to have bought us unhappiness.

Not coincidentally, a recent survey pinpoints that more than half of U.S. workers (52.3%) declare themselves unhappy at work (Conference Board, 2014). This sorry state of affairs has been the norm since the early 90s when job satisfaction hovered around 60 percent. The historical low of 42.6 percent was recorded in 2010, following the financial collapse of 2009 and the ensuing so-called Great Recession. While employee satisfaction surveys reflect how employees feel about their work situation, engagement measures an employee's emotional investment in an organization and the amount of discretionary effort he or she expends to create value at work. Gallup (2015) defines engaged employees as involved in, enthusiastic about, and committed to their work and workplace. The Gallup Organization (Gallup, 2015) found that a majority (51%) of full-time workers in America are not engaged in their jobs. Another 17.5 percent are actively disengaged meaning that they are potentially hostile to their organizations. That leaves just less than one-third (31.5%) of U.S. workers who thrived in their jobs. Gallup's (2015) latest engagement report highlights that no more than 13 percent of employees worldwide

are engaged in their jobs while 24 percent are actively disengaged. In other words -to misquote Thoreau- a large majority of employees lead lives of quiet desperation at work.

Interestingly, engagement surveys also found that over one-third (38%) of American workers considered that their supervisor focuses on their weaknesses or negative characteristics (Gallup, 2013). Almost a quarter (22%) of these employees are actively disengaged at work. Even more alarming is the fact that one in four American workers feels ignored by their manager. Undoubtedly, this undercuts employees' abilities, as they feel repressed by negative contexts. Research confirmed that the time of day when people are least happy is when they are in the presence of their line manager (Kahneman et al., 2004).

These dismal results suggest that too many managers are out of touch with their workers and that they rely on mechanical incentives and command (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2013). A point we shall discuss next.

The Command-and-Control Paradox

By and large, until the late 1980s, managers were expected to be problem-solvers who applied problem-solving techniques in a command-and-control style. For scholars of management and organizations, the prevailing characteristic of command-and-control organizations is their ability to identify problems and come up with adequate solutions. It all started over a century ago when Taylor (1911) published *Scientific Management*, which emphasized economic rationality and the efficient division of labor as the pathways to productivity. At the time, workers were mostly toiling in factories and were considered hired hands trained to conduct standardized jobs. The administrative approach of the late 1920's defined the tasks of the manager -planning, controlling, organizing, and commanding- and

developed principles for effective, hierarchical management. The command-and-control model would reign supreme to this day.

Many employers are still applying management practices which belong to a business model inherited from the late nineteenth century that is negatively biased toward finding and fixing problems and employee weaknesses (Seligman, 2011). This negative bias should not come as a big surprise. Even though it has been demonstrated that people usually experience positive events three times more often than negative ones (Gable & Haidt, 2005), focusing on problems, faults, shortcomings, and potential threats is a well-entrenched human tendency that serves basic evolutionary purposes by keeping us out of harm's way. Researchers Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, and Vohs (2001) showed that minimizing danger (avoidance) and maximizing reward (approach) is an overarching, organizing principle of the brain. In other words, human beings respond more strongly to negative events than to comparatively positive ones and we react more strongly to unpleasantness or threats than to pleasurable experiences and opportunities.

Hamel (2009) writes that most organizations have consistently favored bureaucratic, hierarchical, command-and-control structures aimed at resolving problems of efficiency and scale of mass production. He argues that today's environment is highly volatile and requires organizations to be adaptable and resilient, in addition to focused and efficient. For that to happen, employees are expected to bring initiative, imagination and passion to work every day. Furthermore, employees are becoming increasingly diverse and want to be empowered and engaged by meaningful work and supportive managers (Kahn, 2007; Seligman, 2011). Let us consider this claim by using the example of the millennials.

In 2015, millennials (born 1982 - 1993) will become the largest generation in the U.S. workforce. A recent survey shows that their skills and interests are very different from those of previous generations (Elanceodesk, 2015). For example, millennials are more agile and creative and three out of four (79%) would consider working for themselves to have flexibility, the ability to choose what to work on, and control of their own destiny (Elanceodesk, 2015). A different survey showed that 61 percent of millennials consider soft skills (attitude/personality) more important than hard skills (IQ) (Gen Y, 2013). Another key finding is that millennials care more about the people they work with, exciting work, and good mentorship and less about money than hiring managers realize. In other words, the drivers that used to work for baby boomers (born 1946 -1964), such as money, status, and power, are not necessarily applicable to millennials (Elanceodesk, 2015). Are business organizations ready to meet these new expectations? Not exactly. The survey points to disjoints between the millennials' inability to find work and the hiring managers' difficulty to find and retain them.

The paradox of the command-and-control ethos is that the more it is used the less effective it becomes, especially with today's workforce. The millennials' focus on soft skills calls for thinking patterns that focus on the big picture, on relationships, and emotions. Their need for positive relationships and meaningful work is more than what traditional command-and-control employers usually provide. Also, it has be argued that command-and-control systems reflect a deep mistrust of employees' motivation and potential (Hamel, 2009). The belief that self-interest is the only thing that motivates people individually and corporately is wrong and misses so much of what actually makes us. Let us consider this point further in the next section.

The Limits of Carrot-and-Stick

In the early 1930s, as a consequence of the stock market crash, the needs of workers made their appearance in the management literature. The famous Hawthorne studies (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939) showed for the first time that when workers received increased attention they worked harder. This research also highlighted that simply eliminating the negative aspects in the workplace may prevent dissatisfaction but it did not necessarily produce positive outcomes such as satisfaction, motivation, and performance. The human relations school that grew out of this research highlighted the importance of employee morale and participation. In sum, workers also had "hearts" and managers were advised to take worker's feelings, attitudes and social needs into account and to involve them in work issues.

More than fifty years ago, McGregor (1960/2006) first applied the findings of behavioral science to the world of business. He believed that the human aspect of work is crucial to organizational effectiveness. Thus, he argued that a central weakness of many companies and managers is that the company's leadership is not consciously aware of what it assumes about its employees even though assumptions about what motivates employees strongly influence management style. McGregor proposed two contrasting theories on human motivation and management: Theory X and Theory Y.

Theory X assumes that employees naturally dislike work and will avoid it if they can. The only way to motivate them to produce good results is to incentivize them (carrot-and-stick). This calls for an authoritarian style of management that controls workers and leaves them little room to maneuver (command-and-control). McGregor recognized that X-Type workers are the minority nowadays and are mostly found in large-scale production environments typical of command-and-control workplaces, which assume that humans are intrinsically self-interested.

Theory Y, on the other hand, assumes that employees are self-motivated to perform at work and fulfill their potential and that they crave responsibility. In a Theory Y organization, the management style is participative and employees at lower levels of the organization are involved in the decision-making process. This style is better suited to knowledge work and professional services that require knowledge sharing and continuous improvement. In the Western world, we live in a Theory Y world where the companies' source of competitive advantage is, more often than not, their human potential at every level of the organization, rather than their capital, technological resources or size (Heil, Bennis, & Stephens, 2000).

This is consistent with more recent findings on human motivation, defined as what moves you to take action. Indeed, Ryan and Deci (2000) argue that what motivates people is pursuing intrinsic goals and engaging in activities that satisfy the three innate psychological needs for autonomy (agency), competence (effectiveness) and relatedness (connection). Intrinsically motivated behaviors are performed out of personal interest and are inherently satisfying. By definition, they are self-determined behaviors, such as reading books for fun, practicing sports for pleasure, or working hard at a task with other colleagues because it is personally rewarding on different levels. On the other hand, extrinsically motivated behaviors (popularity, money, status) are instrumental to obtain something else (piece of mind, well-being) or to avoid punishment.

Interestingly, a study found that people usually overestimate the amount of satisfaction they will get from material things (extrinsic motivators) and underestimate the satisfaction they derive from human connections (Konow & Earley, 2008). For example, many people choose jobs that will make them unhappy but pay well. The sages of humanity have warned us that money should be nothing more that a means to an end. Yet so often we confuse means with ends

and sacrifice social relationships (end) for money (means). The prevailing carrot-and-stick model assumes that employees are motivated by financial incentives, what psychologists call extrinsic motivators. Wall Street epitomizes the "carrot-and-stick," "pay-for-performance" model.

Surely, employees expect a decent compensation for their work. Both psychology and business have generally supposed that money offered choices and that the more personal choice, the greater well-being (Grant & Schwartz, 2011; Schwartz, 2006). However, studies show that job satisfaction does not depend on absolute pay (Schwartz, 2006). It turns out that in the race for status, it is all about relative position. Social comparison is a curse in that people feel good or bad with regard to income only compared to others. For example, individuals are more satisfied when their income his higher than the income of others in their organization or their industry (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Additionally, studies on hedonic adaptation show that people more or less rapidly get used to their new circumstance, good or bad (Schwartz, 2006). For example, the psychological effects of a big bonus or a salary raise abate with time. Finally, research shows that income alone is not a good predictor of well-being because wealth and materialism have negative outcomes, in particular with regard to social relationships (Diener & Seligman, 2004).

So, while a growing number of companies claim to espouse humanistic and empowerment ideas and ideals, many more continue to operate in the same old command-and-control, carrot-and-stick way. Leading organizational scholars have started to investigate approaches to managing people and organizations that, instead of focusing exclusively on problem-solving and carrot-or-stick, also seek to develop strengths, abundance, and possibilities (Linley, Garcea, Harrington, Trenier, & Minhas, 2011). To find out more, let us move on to a brief examination of positive scholarly approaches.

Chapter 2. Positive Organizational Studies

Positive Psychology

In his 1998 American Psychological Association Presidential Address, Seligman (1999) introduced positive psychology as a science that seeks to understand positive subjective experience, such as positive emotions and flow, positive individual traits, like character strengths and virtues, and positive social institutions, including families, schools or corporations. This was quite a departure from psychology-as-usual, which, since World War II, had largely embraced a disease model of human nature that focused mostly on combating human pathology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Peterson, 2006). For example, in applied clinical psychology, interventions are methods or actions used for the treatment of mental disorders. The goal of the intervention is to improve from negative states to normal states. Seligman (2002) reported that more than 99% of psychological research since World War II has focused on negative phenomena (e.g., illness, disease) or the transition from negative to normal states.

Interestingly, the original mission of psychology as a science included: "Curing mental illness, making the lives of all people more productive and fulfilling, and identifying and nurturing high talent" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 6). So in the late 1990s, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), and other prominent psychologists, while agreeing that curing human suffering was a worthwhile goal, also argued that psychology had forgotten its mission of identifying and promoting human excellence. They made the case that focusing on reducing negative mental states is not the same as promoting positive mental health. As such, they suggested that a science that would focus on improving normal life and nurturing talent and well-being was needed. Finally, they invited psychologists to complement –not replace- the traditional

areas of psychology with a renewed focus on how to cultivate positive human flourishing

(Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Positive psychology has progressively embraced both constructive (pursuing happiness)

and mitigative (reducing unhappiness) approaches because happiness and unhappiness are not

contradictory opposites in a full human life (Pawelski, 2013). Indeed, the good and the bad, the

positive and the negative, the beneficial and the harmful are all very real components of the

whole range of human concerns, emotions, and endeavors and, as such, need to be considered in

the study of well-being. Recent research concludes that the positive in positive psychology is

more than the absence of the negative and that the domain of positive psychology is both the

quest for the good life and the acceptance of the negative in life (Pawelski, 2014, 2013).

In a seminal article, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) noted that positive

psychology intends to apply the same rigorous scientific methods -surveys, data analysis, cause

and effect- to the study of what makes life worth living, as traditional psychology applies to the

study of disease, dysfunction, and disorder. The contribution of contemporary positive

psychology is to have built a well-defined field of inquiry within psychology that scientifically

studies what makes life worth living (Peterson, 2006). Thus, in contrast to psychology-as-usual,

positive psychology focuses on flourishing (vs. languishing) and strengths (vs. weaknesses),

builds the best (vs. repair the worst), and is drawn by the future (vs. driven by the past).

The quest for human flourishing has been a universally valued, if elusive, human passion

(McMahon, 2013). Over two thousand years ago, Aristotle (1984) suggested that the supreme

goal of all human activities is happiness (or *eudaimonia*). The term "positive psychology" was

first introduced as a title in Maslow's (1970) book *Motivation and Personality*. Indeed, starting

in the 1950's, *psychological humanists* cautioned other psychologists that human life is not only

about deficiency and pathology because people also have positive needs –to be healthy and

happy, and to develop their potential. The *humanistic approach* to human motivation and

personality emphasizes that humans are not simply responding to external stimuli (trait

perspective) or driven by internal tensions (psychodynamic perspective) (Maslow, 1968, 1970).

They also need to grow and develop their potential through a process of self-actualization

(Maslow, 1968).

More recently, Seligman (2011), in his well-being theory, has identified five basic

elements that contribute to well-being: **P**ositive emotions, **E**ngagement, **R**elationships, **M**eaning,

and **A**ccomplishment. These elements constitute the so-called PERMA Model. Each element is

pursued for its own sake, increases well-being, and can be measured independently. Thus,

positive psychology postulates that well-being is, in part, an acquired skill that can be improved

through the sustained and voluntary use of our mental and physical capacities (or strengths)

(Seligman, 2011). Therefore, it is important to note that human strengths support each element of

PERMA (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Peterson and Seligman (2004) define character strengths as positive (or desirable, morally

valued) traits or dispositions like curiosity, humor, perspective, or hope. They have identified

twenty-four character strengths that lead to the six universal virtues of wisdom, courage,

humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. For Niemiec (2013), strengths are elements of

character that are valued in and of themselves, the positive components of our character, and

what is best in us. The author argues that while personality comprises all the facets of someone's

personality, character strengths only highlight positive elements. According to this view,

strengths serve as pathways for developing a life of greater virtue that are distinctive to the

individual. Character refers to what people care about doing and who they are and that each

human being has a unique mix of character strengths. Niemiec also suggests that all the strengths are present in everyone, albeit with varying degrees, and can be developed to some degree. Finally, strengths are used in combination rather than in isolation, depending on the context. Consideration of character strengths allows organizations to align around collective strengths and to highlight where opportunities exist to connect individuals to their work in a positive and productive way (Niemiec, 2013). These findings seem to confirm the Aristotelian principle that human beings love to practice their natural strengths ("doing what you do best"), probably because it produces the flow state. Indeed, strengths, as well as goals and persistence, are the pillars of "flow" defined as the psychological state that accompanies highly engaging and meaningful tasks (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Just as positive psychology focuses on human flourishing as a desired outcome and on the ways to achieve it (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2011), other disciplines in science and the humanities have started to operationalize and empirically study the best of human condition. This "eudaimonic turn" is defined as "An increased interest in well-being, human flourishing, and thriving" (Pawelski & Moores, 2013, p. 7). Csikszentmihalyi describes this shift as a "Metaphysical orientation" whereby good things in life are just as valid as bad things (as cited in Pawelski & Moores, 2013, p. 7).

We will see next that, within the discipline of organizational studies, various research fields are oriented toward positive-focused research, and on positive relationships at work in particular.

Positive Organizational Scholarship

Since positive psychology was founded, positive trends have emerged in organizational and management scholarship, such as Positive Organizational Scholarship (Cameron, Dutton, &

Quinn, 2003) and Positive Organizational Behavior (Luthans, 2002). These scientific fields incorporate positive psychology principles and focus on understanding the conditions, phenomena, and processes that lead to flourishing in organizations (Dutton & Sonenshein, 2009; Luthans, 2002). They recognize that organizations can reach their bottom-line goals by enhancing employee's experience at work.

Cameron and Spreitzer (2012) advance that while positive organizational scholarship does not ignore dysfunctional or typical patterns of behaviors, it is most interested in applying a positive lens to address problems and challenges in organizational life. As such, it emphasizes what is inspiring and generative to individuals and organizations and leads to developing human strengths, resilience, restoration or exceptional performance. Like positive psychology, POS has a strong focus on rigorous, evidence-based approaches to the academic study of people in organizations. For this paper, I will use POS as an umbrella concept for the various positive organizational approaches.

What is the scholarly domain covered by the term *positive* in POS? Four themes can help navigate the conceptual boundaries of this basic concept (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012):

(1)   Interpreting challenges and obstacles through a positive lens (as opportunities and strengths-building opportunities);

(2)   Focusing on "Positively deviant performance" (vs. ordinary success) (p. 2);

(3)   Emphasizing an affirmative bias such as positive emotions, strengths, and resources (vs. problems, threats, and weakness);

(4)   Examining virtuousness or the best of humankind for its own sake.

Positive organizational scholarship (POS) is premised on the belief that individuals and their organizations are *eudaimonic* -they seek goodness for its own sake, and *heliotropic*, -they

turn toward what is life giving (i.e., sun, energy, positivity) (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Thus, a POS focus directs attention to generative (e.g., life building, capability-enhancing, capacity-creating) dynamics in organizations that foster positive deviance or performance that exceeds the norm (Cameron, 2008). POS advocates a positive transformation in organizations that promotes an affirmative bias toward optimism (rather than pessimism), strengths (rather than weaknesses), abundance (rather than scarcity), and supportive (rather than critical) communication (Cameron, 2013).

Some critical voices have raised questions about some POS aspects that, in their opinion, deserve further consideration (Caza & Carroll, 2012). For example, what goals and values does POS explicitly pursue? What is the meaning of positive and negative? Can anything be entirely positive or negative? What, if any, outcomes are worth pursuing, in addition to profit or at the expense of profit? This critical view argues that some basic POS assumptions on the dominance of financial gain and management deserve to be examined in more detail for POS to achieve its goal of creating desirable outcomes.

In sum, the goal of POS is to improve the lives of those in organizations by encouraging more empowering and humane organizational practices (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). Thus, positive organizational approaches complement the traditional organizational focus on problem-solving, dysfunctional employees, burnout, or unethical behavior by focusing on understanding the best of human condition and the ways to nurture positivity in organizations (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Luthans, 2002).

For the longest time, I convinced myself that highly hierarchical, command-and-control corporate cultures would not easily embrace positive strategies. Today, my conviction is that it is precisely in industries such as finance that a positive transformation is most needed and can have

the greatest impact. One of the major pathways for this positive transformation to happen is

through developing positive social relationships in the workplace. The next section tells why

relationships matter.

Chapter 3. Social Animals

The Scientific Case for Relationships

Aristotle (1984) famously declared that man is a social animal. As Csikszentmihalyi (1990) put it, "We are biologically programmed to find other human beings the most important objects in the world" (p. 164). Humans instinctively like to be together and share, to act in a prosocial way, to give and receive love (Haidt, 2006). It is well documented that our biological bodies are hardwired for close relationships and that the capacity to love and be loved is intrinsically human (Peterson, 2006). Additionally, Gable and Gosnell (2011) showed that close relationships are strongly linked to health as they build certain biological systems and buffer the negative impact of stress. Their research found that humans are endowed with separate brain networks for social thinking that work like a reflex. Thus, in response to social contact, the brain releases oxytocin, a powerful hormone that makes us trustworthy and motivates us to help others.

Darwin (1998/1871) himself, the father of the theory of natural selection, declared that humans are a social species *par excellence.* He proposed that survival of the fittest takes place not only between individuals but also within and between groups. As humans evolved in small, codependent groups, connections and community were essential for survival. Darwin argued that social groups who are internally altruistic are more fit to outcompete selfish groups and survive. Recent sociobiology studies confirm that our inherited advanced social behavior is the key to multilevel selection, including between-groups selection, and explains natural selection (Wilson & Wilson, 2007). Recent studies by Fowler and Christadis (2008) provided evidence that happiness is a collective phenomenon. Their research found that happiness spreads across social networks and that individual happiness depends on the happiness of those they are connected with.

Maslow (1968) was one of the early theorists to point out that the motive to love and belong is a powerful force in human behavior. In his pyramid of human needs, relationships come right after the safety need of employment. But young mammals have a basic need for physical contact with their mother and infants depend on love for their survival (Haidt, 2006). Lieberman (2013) argues that, as a mammal, you need social connection more than anything and that to thrive we have to relate to other people and be attached to them. This seems to be confirmed by Harlow's famous cloth and wire monkey experiments, which demonstrated that the mother provides much more than food and that the physical contact between baby and mother was essential to the infant (Suomi & Leroy, 1982). In the early 1930s, Harlow bred Rhesus macaques for his experiments. The primates that were not raised with their mothers were noticeably more reclusive and displayed poorer social habits. In order to test the mother-infant bond, Harlow and his collaborators created inanimate surrogate mothers made from wire, wood, and cloth. They presented the infant monkeys with two surrogate mothers: One held a bottle with food and the other held no food but was clothes covered. In a rather counterintuitive finding, the infants overwhelmingly chose to spend their time clinging to the cloth mother. They only visited the wire mother to feed. Harlow concluded that the mother/infant relationship depended not only on nursing and that love and contact comfort was key to the psychological development and health of infants.

Along the same lines, in the 1950s, Bowlby (1951) studied orphans and concluded that children need an adult caregiver, as much as food, to develop properly. In his attachment theory, he developed the idea that safety and exploration guide children's behavior. The author observed that maternal love, attachment bonds, and caregiving are central processes in human behavior and that social separation causes pain in infants. He concluded that children need a secure base

(i.e., a primary caregiver) to be comfortable before they explore and launch into the world on their own. Adult love relationships rely on both the attachment system and the care-giving system (Haidt, 2006).

Another important aspect of relationships is that people turn to others both to cope with negative events and to share good ones. When good things happen in our lives, we often like to savor them with our close ones. Gable and Gosnell (2011) showed that when others respond in an active and constructive way, it builds trust, positive affect, and subjective well-being. The authors studied the impact of close relationships on positive processes like social support, capitalization and self-expansion. They highlight that close relationships help self-expansion by, among other things, incorporating the resources, perspectives, and identities of close others. In sum, through building complementary partnerships with others, individuals can incorporate new strengths into their own lives that have the potential to compensate for their own weaknesses (Reis & Gable, 2003). Thus, the motive to belong has a positive « approach-orientation» as we seek out the many benefits of being with others.

In particular, Seligman (2011) noted that happiness cannot be achieved without social relationships. For example, one study of very happy people found that the only external factor that distinguishes them is rich and satisfying relationships and concluded that social relationships do not guarantee high happiness, but the latter does not appear to occur without them (Diener & Seligman, 2002). Consequently, we don't want to be alone, or rejected, and take measures to avoid these experiences (Haidt, 2006). Instead, we want to belong, to have social relationships, and to fit in. Our urge to connect with other people is a superpower that keeps us close to others (Lieberman, 2013).

The way we feel about ourselves (self-esteem) is powerfully shaped by how others view

us and the social pain that comes from loss or rejection from the group is not just a metaphor; it is very real and distressing. Solitary confinement, for instance, is considered the harshest punishment precisely because one is completely isolated from others. What then might be the consequences of a life of solitude? Poor quality relationships or a lack of social ties are associated with a substantial decrease in overall health (Gable & Gosnell, 2011). Worse still, Durkheim demonstrated that people who have fewer social constraints, bonds and obligations were more likely to commit suicide (as cited in Haidt, 2006). As *homo habilis* would have predicted, it is suicidal to treat life in society as a selfish zero-sum game.

These considerations demonstrate that close, positive relationships give structure and meaning to our lives and produce numerous desirable outcomes. As Peterson (2006) famously declared, other people matter. Let us turn now to an examination of social relationships at work.

Relationships at Work

At work, too, other people matter. A recent U.S. survey highlighted that the top engagement condition for 79 percent of respondents was their relationship with co-workers (SHRM, 2015). According to Ragins and Dutton (2007), relationships and swift coordination are the means by which work is done and meaning is found in organizations. For Stephens, Heaphy, and Dutton (2012), the importance of connections in the workplace rests on four assumptions:

    (1)   Humans are intrinsically social and have a need to belong, which makes connections an essential part of their social experience in organizations.

    (2)   Connections are dynamic and depend on how people feel, think, and behave while interacting with others.

    (3)   Organizations perform their work through social processes;

therefore connections are key elements in the accomplishment of work.

(4)   Connections vary in quality. Differences in quality reflect how healthy and well-functioning the dyadic interaction is at a particular point in time.

Traditionally, most research on interpersonal connections has been conducted outside of work contexts. Also, there has been a stronger focus on the structure of relationships (e.g., social networks) (Oliver & Ebers, 1998) and less focus on the quality of dyadic relationships (Ragins & Dutton, 2007). However, Ragins and Dutton (2007) point out that even though relationships take place within networks, we have a relationship with a person, not a network. Where there has been focus on quality, the focus was limited to the relational domain (e.g., boss-subordinate). Such is the case in Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, a relationship-based, dyadic perspective to leadership (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). As well, other fields and disciplines have paid attention to positive work relationships, such as theories of social capital, mentoring, network theory, trust, social support, learning, and psychological growth (Ragins & Dutton, 2007).

Social exchange theory has been the dominant paradigm that has been applied to the study of relationships (Homans, 1961). This economic model of social interactions posits that social behavior is the result of an exchange between maximizing benefits and minimizing costs. Thus, the worth of a relationship is the net result of the costs to us (time, effort) minus the benefits we get out of it (utility). Ragins and Dutton (2007) argue that this perspective cannot fully explain positive work relationships. Social-exchange theory, for instance, assumes fixed resources even though positive work relationships create new individual and organizational

resources, such as motivation or psychological safety (Baker & Dutton, 2007; Carmeli & Gittel, 2009). In addition, social exchange theories tend to focus on more enduring relationships, thereby ignoring more transient but potentially high-impact connections (Ragins & Dutton, 2007; Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009).

Thus, Ragins and Dutton (2007) make the case that relationships are a central yet relatively understudied aspect of organizational life. They also decided to do something about it, as we will discuss in the following section.

Positive Relationships at Work (PRW)

Ragins and Dutton (2007) founded the interdisciplinary academic field of positive relationships at work (PRW) in 2007, which underscores the fact that interpersonal work relationships have not always been at the forefront of academic research. The authors argue that relationships traditionally have been relegated to the background of organizational research as if employees ceased to have a need for meaningful relationships once they entered the workplace (Kahn, 2007). Instead, PRW places relationships front and center in organizational life (Dutton & Ragins, 2007). PRW takes a holistic view of relationships in the workplace by recognizing that the ability to develop high-quality relationships influences interactions within and outside the workplace. The field of PRW recognizes that relationships and connections can be a source of individual and collective growth, learning, and flourishing. Also, PRW is interested in identifying the conditions, contexts, and behaviors that enable the creation and maintenance of human connections in the workplace.

Defining PRW

Relationships exist along a continuum of quality (from negative to positive) and within networks (inside and outside the workplace), and they are dynamic and changing rather than

static states (Dutton & Ragins, 2007). Relationships are fluid and dynamic because past interactions influence present interactions which my affect future ones (Berscheid, 1999). While there is no single, unanimous definition of positive relationships at work, Ragins and Dutton (2007) highlight three central principles:

(1)   **Focus on relationships**. Relationships can occur at the dyadic, group, community, and organizational level. Hinde (1979) defines them as a sequence of interactions that involves some degree of mutuality (i.e., two-directional), whereby one member takes some account of the behavior of the other. Thus, they are invisible even though their effects on the relationship are very real, as we will see shortly.

(2)   **Focus on the organizational and work context.** Positive relationships at work exist within the context of organizations, work, and careers. Therefore, they may include relationships within or outside the workplace, as well as virtual or electronic relationships (e.g., virtual meetings, emails).

(3)   **Focus on positive**. What distinguishes positive work relationships is the fact that they are experienced as mutually beneficial by producing any kind of positive state, process, or outcome for the relationship (e.g., trust, respect, energy, engagement).

Attributes and Dimensions of PRW

Positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and positive organizational scholarship (Cameron, 2013; Cameron & Caza, 2004; Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003) have taught us that approaching relationships with an affirmative bias (i.e., focusing on opportunities, strengths, and optimism) produces positive outcomes both for individuals and organizations.

Within positive organizational scholarship, PRW focuses on models that explain "states of abundance" (what is right) instead of deficiencies (what is wrong) (Ragins & Dutton, 2007, p. 4). The field of PRW embraces the positive sociological perspective that certain patterns of relationships are more generative, enriching, and enhancing than others (Dutton & Rains, 2007). Ragins and Dutton (2007) assume that, "Relationships at work can become a source of growth, vitality, learning, and generative states of human and collective flourishing" (p. 7).

PRW exhibit the following attributes and dimensions (Ragins & Dutton, 2007; Dutton, 2003; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003):

- Mutually beneficial (Fletcher, 2007)

- Involve high-quality connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003)

- Meet relational needs (Kahn, 2007)

- Increase resource-producing capabilities and energy (Quinn, 2007)

The Business Case for PRW

Positive psychology research has found that, in the Western world, differences in well-being are more frequently attributable to social relationships and enjoyment at work (Diener & Seligman, 2004). As noted earlier, positive organizational scholarship considers positive relationships as one of the mechanisms that emphasize positive dynamics (i.e., virtuous practices) within individuals, groups and institutions that make organizations -and their members- flourish (Dutton & Sonenshein, 2009; Cameron & Caza, 2004).

Also, the landscape for work and careers is rapidly changing. More and more, organizations depend on interpersonal connections to accomplish their goals and relationships are the means by which work occurs (Dutton & Ragins, 2007). Often, the quality of the connections between employees determines organizational performance and employee

engagement. Thus, working well with others has become one of the most important skills in the workplace. In addition, employees tend to change jobs more easily and are tied less to organizations and more to relationships (Ragins & Dutton, 2007, p. 6). As a result, loyalty and engagement to organizations depend more on relationships than on economic incentives.

The beneficial effects of positive relationships on physical and emotional health and cognitive, team, and organizational performance have been demonstrated convincingly (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008; Dutton & Ragins, 2007; Fredrickson, 2009, 2012b; Heaphy & Dutton, 2007). Some of the direct individual benefits of positive relationships include: people live longer, succumb to fewer illnesses, tolerate pain better, work harder, perform better on the job, make more money, display more mental acuity, make higher quality decisions, are more creative and flexible in their thinking, are more resilient, are better corporate citizens, cope better with stress, learn faster, have better memories, experience less depression, and recover faster from surgery.

In another study, Gittell, Cameron, Lim, and Rivas (2006) examined airline industry responses to the tragedy of September 11. As a consequence of lower ridership levels, most airline companies eliminated thousands of jobs to cut costs but others did not, thereby breeding a sense of security, trust, and loyalty in their employees. The study concluded that the airlines that recovered successfully after the crisis had developed relational reserves over time (e.g., loyalty, trust, security) that they could draw on.

In sum, positive relationships contribute to a transformation of the workplace towards improved quality of life that has the potential to produce positive business outcomes by developing human strengths and virtues. Thus, positive relations at work are vital for both employees and organizations. As such, organizations often try to improve working relationships.

Within relationships research, Dutton (2003) suggested that there was a need for richer,

more generic relational constructs that capture quality of connection between two or more

people. In what follows, I provide an examination of what she defined as high-quality

connections.

Chapter 4. High-Quality Connections

Defining HQCs

In a seminal paper, Dutton (2003) introduced the concept of high-quality connection (HQC) to describe a particular form of positive relationship at work. The author defines HQCs as brief, mutually positive, energizing, constructive, and dynamic dyadic work interactions between the organization's stakeholders (e.g., colleagues, bosses, subordinates, customers). In contrast to longer-term relationships that imply a repeated interaction, HQCs are weak or stronger ties that do not require deep, intimate, or prior knowledge. Therefore, they are particularly relevant to work relations, which often are brief exchanges between relative strangers or within an ongoing relationship. A connection is born between two people when the contact between them involves mutual awareness and social interaction. Josselson (1995) has defined connections as the space between a dynamic relationship.

Dutton (2003) defines the quality of the workplace connection between people as life giving (high-quality) or life depleting (low-quality). The positivity of HQCs manifests itself in how they feel for the two people involved (uplift, energy), what they do (clearer thinking, acting with competency), and in their positive outcomes (flourishing and thriving). The interaction is meaningful for each individual and gives a temporal and emotional dimension to the connection.

Structural Features of HQCs

Dutton and Heaphy (2006) identify three key structural features that define the capacities of HQCs.

(1)   First, HQCs imply greater strength as measured by their higher *emotional carrying capacity*. Emotional carrying capacity is defined as the expression of

more absolute emotions (depth), as well as a greater range of positive and

negative emotions (width) in the relationship.

(2)   Second, HQCs have greater *tensility*, which is the dyad's ability to absorb and

withstand strain in the face of conflict (resilience) within the relationship.

(3)   The third and last characteristic of HQCs is that they differ by their higher

degree of *connectivity*, which involves creativity and openness to new ideas

and perspectives.

Therefore, HQCs create a positive emotional space that broadens our mindset and builds

future possibilities (Fredrickson, 2009).

Theoretical Perspectives on the Power of HQCs

The power of the HQC is felt and has repercussions for the individual, and potentially for

the organization. Briefly, HQCs thrive on mutual positive regard, active engagement, and trust

and contribute to individual and organizational flourishing. Dutton (2003; Dutton & Heaphy,

2006, Dutton & Ragins, 2007) has identified four interrelated theories that explain the power of

HQCs: Exchange, identity, growth (or development), and knowledge (or learning). All of these

perspectives help explain the generative capacities of positive relationships and understand how

and why the quality of connections at work really matters.

Exchange Perspective

Rooted in sociology (Homans, 1961) and social psychology (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959),

the exchange perspective highlights the useful resources and rewards (e.g., trust, social support,

positive emotions, advice) that are generated and exchanged during social interactions. For

example, network theory asserts that as long as people feel that the relation has utility in terms of

resources, then that relationship will prosper (Baker, 2000). Leader-member exchange (LMX)

theory is another illustration of how relations between leaders and team members are the source of exchanges of valued resources (e.g., support, commitment, promotion) that, potentially, build the relationship (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Identity Perspective

The identity lens focuses on the role that HQCs play in co-creating the meaning that employees can and do make of themselves and of the organization (Roberts, 2007). In short, this theory integrates the fact that our identities are co-created by our interactions with other people (Potter & Wetherell, 1984). As such, HQCs provide the psychological safety for employees to express their true selves at work, or to re-craft their work identity (Carmeli & Gittel, 2009). For example, a study found that HQCs are important for cultivating and developing perceptions of psychological safety and, ultimately, are associated with learning behaviors in organizations (Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009). In sum, HQCs provide support that can facilitate the emergence and expression of people's identity.

Growth and Development Perspective

The growth perspective pinpoints how HQCs allow employees to develop their potential and grow. Growth occurs through empathetic and mutually empowering connections at work (Josselson, 1995). This theory builds on attachment theory by showing that positive relationships support physical health and development (Bowlby, 1951). Also, HQCs satisfy the basic human need to belong. Dutton and Heaphy (2006) describe how HQCs with others foster human development as follows:

> Psychological growth occurs in mutually empathetic interactions, were both people
>
> engage with authentic thoughts, feelings, and responses. Through this process they
>
> experience mutual empowerment, which is characterized as a feeling of zest,

effectiveness of the other person, greater knowledge, sense of worth, and a desire for

more connection. (p. 272)

In short, HQCs provide growth, secure contexts for organizational caregiving, and

developmental relationships.

Knowledge Perspective

The knowledge (or learning) lens is interested in HQCs as micro-contexts that enable

learning. Positive connections allow for knowledge to pass from one person to another in an

efficient and mutually enriching fashion. HQCs create a safe space (micro-contexts) for

exploration and experimentation, thus enabling people to expand their knowledge and develop

new common knowledge and ways of being. For example, recent research shed new light on

knowledge creation as informal social processes emerging during daily work at two

organizations involved in management consulting and oil exploration (Aarrestad, Brøndbo, &

Carlsen, 2015). The study concluded that HQCs are ignited by the dynamic of high-stakes

projects and that caring questioning (i.e., open-ended and appreciative questions) and

collaborative spaces enlarged the sensory-motor connectivity in knowledge creation.

Positive Outcomes of HQCs

Much attention has been granted to studying how work contexts generate stress and other

physiological damages, much less to how work affects human flourishing (Dutton & Heaphy,

2006). Positive psychology research has found that the relationship between happiness and

success is reciprocal: success can contribute to happiness and happiness leads to more success in

multiple life domains such as health, relationships, and work performance (Lyubomirsky, King,

& Diener, 2005). In other words, well-being is a worthwhile pursuit, both as an end in itself or as

a means toward other ends. In the next section, we summarize the main findings of various

studies that investigated how positive relationships and connections contribute to an

organization's success (Dutton, 2003, Dutton & Heaphy, 2006; Ragins & Dutton, 2007;

Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2012; Reis & Gable, 2003).

Individual Outcomes

People in HQCs have three subjective experiences that have the power to energize people

(Stephens & Heaphy, Dutton, 2007; Quinn & Dutton, 2005; Dutton & Heaphy, 2006). These

subjective and emotional experiences help explain why these human-to-human HQCs are

experienced as life-giving.

(1)   First, HQCs generate feelings of *vitality and aliveness*. In other words, people

in HQCs experience increased feelings of mental and physical energy and

eagerness to act. HQCs become a source of energy that is transformative,

generates trust, support, and resiliency (Berscheid, 2003).

(2)   Second, being in a HQC results in having a heighted sense of *positive regard*,

of feeling known, loved (in a non-romantic way), deeply connected, accepted,

and respected. HQCs build individual commitment and engagement. They do

so by providing psychosocial support, inspiration, and feedback that allow

individuals to become more aware of their strengths. This helps transform

conflict into a source of learning and personal growth, and promotes perceived

fairness. This was demonstrated by two studies by Carmeli and Gittell (2008)

on how organizations support employees to engage in learning from failures.

Their research found that psychological safety mediated the link between

high-quality relationships and learning from failures in organizations.

(3)   Finally, when people are in a HQC, they experience *felt mutuality*, as both

people have a sense of joint participation, connection, and responsiveness. Therefore, people learn more easily when they interact positively with others (Fredrickson, 2009). HQCs generate positive emotions that promote broader thinking, adaptation to change, enhanced self-image, job satisfaction, and greater organizational citizenship (Diener & Seligman, 2004).

In addition to their subjective and emotional properties, high-quality connections have been associated with positive physiological outcomes for health and well-being. Studies by Dutton and Heaphy (2006) highlight various short-term and longer-term effects of HQCs, including: lower physiologic responses to stress, longer life-span, lower risk of death, stronger immune system, more energy, lower anxiety, higher activity of the sympathetic nervous system, higher affiliative behavior, positive social contact, and attenuated blood pressure and heart response.

Group Outcomes

On the group level, high-quality connections foster better learning, adaptability and creativity (Stephens & Heaphy, Dutton, 2007; Dutton & Heaphy, 2006). They do so by creating positive spirals of meaning that have the power to uncover human potential, facilitate engagement and self-discovery, and generate positive emotions and trust (Fredrickson, 2009). In addition, they create the conditions for the experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In flow we are working at full capacity and our skills are attuned to the challenge at hand. Finally, positive relationships meet employees' relational needs and increase the psychological attachment to the workplace, bring balance and health in teams, and promote a sense of belonging, identity and community.

Organizational Outcomes

Positive relationships infuse the corporate culture with meaning and create resources (Carmeli, Brueller, Dutton, 2009; Carmeli & Gittell, 2008; Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2007). Additionally, positive relationships are a form of positive social capital that expands the generative capacity of individuals and groups and helps them achieve their personal and professional goals in new and better ways. Also, high-quality relationships can become a competitive advantage that increases productivity and performance by enhancing cooperation, adaptability, dynamism, and the attachment of employees, customers, and suppliers. Thus, positive work relationships can be a source of energy, enrichment, meaning, and learning that help individuals and their organizations thrive and flourish.

Impact of Low-Quality Connections

While a high-quality connection is nourishing, energizing, growth-fostering, life-giving, and resilient, a low-quality interaction damages the tie between people and is growth-depleting (Dutton, 2003). Low-quality connections are often the result of workplace incivility (Porath & Pearson, 2010). Porath and Person give the following examples of incivility: taking credit for other's efforts, passing blame for own mistakes, talking down to others, not listening, belittling others, withholding information, making demeaning or derogatory remarks to someone, or avoiding someone. Their recent research pinpoints that rudeness and incivility at work have increased in the last two decades and that over half of people were disturbed by incivility (Porath & Pearson, 2012). The way we treat one another in the workplace matters, way beyond relationship-forming.

The direct and indirect costs of incivility are enormous and some have calculated them in the tens of billions of dollars for the U.S. economy (Porath & Pearson, 2010). When corrosive or

toxic relationships take over, the effectiveness and sustainability of the organization are compromised. At the individual level, incivility is reflected in a significant drop in employee's mental and physical health and performance (Pearson & Porath, 2005). Studies show that, as a result of experiencing incivility, employees decrease work effort, time at work, work quality, and productivity (Pearson & Porath, 2005; Porath & Pearson, 2010), make more errors due to a lack of concentration and an inability to focus. Other studies highlight that for individuals, the negative consequences of low-quality relationships include disengagement, uncivil behavior, anxiety, depression and emotional exhaustion (Ragins & Dutton, 2007). Interestingly, witnessing incivility by employees, even vicariously, tends to turn customers away (Porath, MacInnis, Folkes, 2010). For the organization, the negative spiral caused by low-quality connections can be destructive because they permeate the fabric of the company and have a contagious effect on corporate culture (Dutton, 2003).

In short, while civility lifts people up, incivility holds people down. Low-quality connections have long-lasting emotional and physiological damages for individuals and organizations as they deplete and degrade (Dutton & Heaphy, 2006; Pearson & Porath, 2005). The positive outcomes of HQCs –and the potentially dire consequences of low-quality connections and incivility- behoove us to deepen our knowledge of the processes through which HQCs build human and organizational strength, health, and flourishing in work organizations. The next chapter will do just that.

Chapter 5. Pathways to High-Quality Connections

The importance of positive relationships at work can hardly be overstated. We have noted earlier some of their positive outcomes for individuals, groups, and organizations. Also, Kouzes and Posner (2003) argue that leadership is about caring, about relationships, and about what you do. Their research found that only one factor significantly differentiated the top managers: high scores on affection, warmth, and fondness toward others. In other words, we work harder for people we like. As the authors conclude:

> Success in leadership and success in life has been, is now, and will continue to be a function of how well people work and get along with one another. Success in leading will be wholly dependent upon the capacity to build and sustain those human relationships that enable people to get extraordinary things done on a regular basis (p. 3).

This last section tells how to build and sustain those high-quality relationships. Stephens et al. (2012) expand on previous high-quality connections research (Dutton, 2003; Dutton & Heaphy, 2006; Carmeli, Brueller, Dutton, 2009) and propose a conceptual model that explores how HQCs are established in organizations. The authors identify three distinct social-psychological mechanisms as the major interrelated pathways (or processes) that, in addition to the organizational context, build and strengthen HQCs, as follows (see figure 1):

(1) Cognitions (other-awareness, impressions of others, perspective-taking)

(2) Emotions (positive emotions, emotional contagion, empathy)

(3) Behaviors (respectful engagement, task-enabling, play)
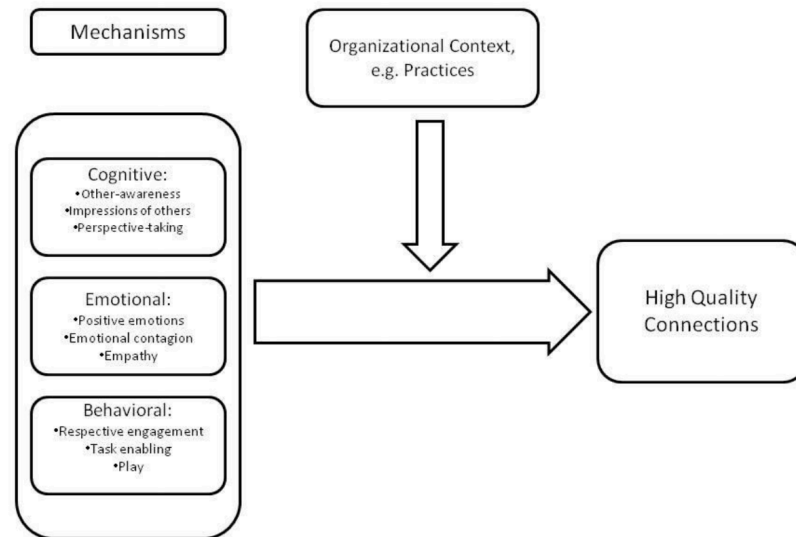
Figure 1. Contributors to HQCs (Source: Stephens et al (2012), p. 40)

The mechanisms approach proposed by Stephens et al (2012) is valuable to better understand how HQCs at work are built and develop. In particular, it evidences that there are multiple avenues within each mechanism that build HQCs. In other words, the examples (or sub-processes) that are provided for each overlapping mechanism are not exhaustive. Rather, each sub-process is merely illustrative of the underlying mechanism. For example, Stephens et al. (2012) do not include trust and compassion, two key elements for building high-quality connections.

Therefore, I propose a model that is largely inspired by Stephens et al. (2012) and also draws on the existing literature on HQCs (Dutton, 2003; Dutton & Heaphy, 2006; Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009). This model consists of the same social-psychological mechanisms. However, it includes compassion as an emotional mechanism and replaces play by trust as a behavioral mechanism, as follows:

(1) Cognitions (other-awareness, impressions of others,)

(2) Emotions (positive emotions, emotional contagion, empathy, compassion)

(3) Behaviors (task-enabling, trust, respectful engagement)

Cognitive Mechanisms

Stephens et al. (2012), describe cognitive mechanisms are conscious and unconscious mental processes that prime people to build high-quality connections, such as other-awareness, impressions of others, and perspective-taking. The authors note that individuals' cognitions are the foundations of HQCs as they determine future actions.

Other-Awareness

In order to establish connection, one needs to be aware of the presence of others, who they are, and their distinct behavior as this provides some context for one's actions. For example, other-awareness toward a supervisor has been found to indicate an orientation toward connecting and to enhance leader-behavior-subordinate satisfaction and relationships (Gardner, Dunham, Cummings, & Pierce, 1989).

Impressions of others

In addition to other-awareness, the quick impressions -less than 5 minutes- we form about others can also shape how connections develop. Research by Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick (2007) suggests that in encounters with others we must determine, immediately, whether the other is friend or foe, and, then, whether the other has the ability to enact those intentions. When the other is perceived as warm and competent, it triggers positive emotions and behaviors that explain both interpersonal and intergroup social cognition. As Lieberman (2013) writes, we are mind-readers of others' thoughts and feelings based on our observation of their nonverbal behaviors. When these initial impressions are accepting and engaging, we are attracted to these individuals. Similarly, we stay away from people whom we perceive as anxious or unwilling to cooperate or collaborate (Dutton, 2003).

Perspective-taking

Perspective-taking is imagining yourself in another person's shoes. Perspective-taking goes beyond other-awareness by mentally representing the other's experience as one's own, thus preparing us to show care and concern. As such, it is motivated by pro-social disposition (Grant & Berry, 2011). As the cognitive component of empathy, perspective-taking in combination with empathy's affective component, motivates altruistic behavior and helping. It also facilitates predicting another person's behavior and reactions and the shaping of one's own behaviors in ways that demonstrate care and concern. Research highlights that close relationships help self-expansion by, among other things, incorporating the resources, perspectives, and identities of close others (Gable at al., 2004). For example, studies by Grant and Berry (2011) found that pro-social motivation generated perspective-taking, which encouraged employees to develop novel and creative ideas.

Emotional Mechanisms

Stephens et al. (2012) define emotional (i.e., physiological) mechanisms as feelings that open individuals up to connection and are shared between people. In addition, emotions strengthen and build HQCs by altering individual's orientations toward others and opening up an inviting in further interaction. In my experience, emotions have not really been welcome in the workplace. Generally, employees were expected to keep their emotions under control at all times or, better still, to check them at the door. Yet, organizations are slowly realizing that the whole person comes to work.

I have noted earlier that the command-and-control model requires a form of thinking that is deeply analytical, rational, logical, and sequential. It is unquestionable that Western culture tends to prize rational thinking over emotions. Americans hold rationality as one of their core

values and they believe that scientific reasoning is the best way to apprehend the world, and that people think analytically about what they perceive as objective reality (Stewart & Bennett, 1995). Classical economists have assumed that *homo economicus*, or economic human, has the uncanny ability to always look to maximize the utility of his actions.

While rational choice works relatively well with limited options, it also has its limits and is seldom totally … rational. Indeed, in real life, we usually have incomplete and inaccurate information and in many cases we are not capable of analyzing the information available to make the wise choice. Since the 1980s, behavioral economists have challenged the assumption of rationality by demonstrating that most people are risk averse: they react differently when faced with the possibility of losses or potential gains. In a famous example, Kahneman and Tversky (1979) found that financial losses produce more than twice the psychological impact as equivalent gains. Recent research tends to indicate that emotions are not separate from reason but rather the foundation of reason because they tell us what to value (Lieberman, 2013). Neuroscience has shown that, in fact, we are social and emotional animals, not rational animals (Lieberman, 2013).

Positive Emotions and Emotional Contagion

In human history, for good reason, people have relied on their emotions to overcome threats and survive in a mostly hostile environment. Darwin (1998/1871), in his groundbreaking theory of natural selection, argued that in the face of danger, negative emotions narrow our options and prepare us for action by building an individual's vital resources for survival in the instant. The survival payoff of negative emotions is high and psychology has developed extensive knowledge about how fear, anger, or disgust help us respond to imminent danger and avoid risks (Fredrickson, 2013a).

Most people in the Western are no longer struggling to survive hostile conditions. Instead, they are searching for more meaning and well-being in their lives and positive emotions, such as joy, gratitude, interest, love, respect, and the like, may help them thrive (Seligman, 2002). Fredrickson (2009) argues that emotions are not genetically fixed and that we are free to choose and change our emotions through our actions and thoughts. In her well known broaden and build theory, she argues, that positive emotions broaden our mindset and allow us to discover and build new skills, social ties, knowledge, and behaviors. They create an upward spiral that, over time, improves odds for survival, health and fulfillment.

Research shows that people with high positive emotions experience bigger boosts in positivity in response to routine daily events through what Fredrickson (2013a) calls "positive potentiation" (p. 3). In other experiments, positive emotions have proved helpful to combat negative emotions by allowing one to take a longer view and develop plans for the future (Fredrickson, 2009). Studies demonstrate that positive emotions signal safety, broaden our mindset and allow us to discover and build new skills, social ties, knowledge, and behaviors (Fredrickson, 2009). Consequently, organizations that enable positive climates through high levels of compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, integrity, trust, and optimism perform better (Cameron, 2008).

Does that mean that the prescription for human flourishing is to replace all negativity by positivity? Not hardly. In fact, too much positivity can become problematic too. For example, Fredrickson (2013a) has observed that over-happy, people can become reckless, take more risks, or pay less attention to their health. Also, overly optimistic people lose touch with reality and appear shallow or superficial. Finally, positive emotions can interfere with intense attention and detail-oriented thinking.

For years, researchers have been looking for the optimal positivity to negativity ratio. The term positive climate refers to a work context where positive moments vastly outnumber negative ones (Dutton, 2003). Gottman (1994), for instance, is recognized as the leading expert on the science of marriage. His research shows that 5:1 positive to negative interactions is the *magic ratio* for a marriage to flourish within ten years. By contrast, marriages fail when the ratio falls below 1:1. Fredrickson (2009) and her colleague Losada also found a very precise tipping point at which positivity produced flourishing. The ratio they proposed was 3:1 (i.e., three times as many positive as negative emotions). Since then, other scholars have examined the claims made by Fredrickson and Losada and found no theoretical or empirical justification for the equations they used in their original 3:1 positivity ratio (Brown, Sokal, & Friedman, (2013). Fredrickson (2013a) admitted that the calculations of the nonlinear dynamic model developed by Losada that led to the 3:1 ratio might have been flawed, because she never really understood them. Nonetheless, she insists that within bounds, higher positivity ratios are predictive of various beneficial outcomes and contribute to flourishing. What seems clear is that the appropriate amount of positive emotions has the potential to be a vital force –an upward spiral- by broadening people's mindsets about possibilities and building resources for the future (Fredrickson, 2009).

Research on positive emotions, emotional contagion, empathy, and compassion accounts for how emotions explain the building and strengthening of connections. For example, recent studies by Stephens, Heaphy, Carmeli, Spreitzer, and Dutton (2013) focused on emotional carrying capacity (ECC) –expressing more emotions constructively- as a source of individual and team resilience. These scholars found that emotional carrying capacity is positively related to individual and team resilience. ECC also mediates the link between relationship closeness and

individual resilience, and between trust and team resilience. The authors concluded that expressing more emotions in relationships is a key mechanism in explaining resilience in individuals and teams.

Other studies highlight that gratitude is a skill that, when actively practiced, amplifies satisfaction about the past (Seligman, 2011).

Empathy and Compassion

Empathy occurs when a person is self-aware and vicariously experiences another person's emotional state (Stephens, 2012). In other words, empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else's position, to see the other side of an argument. During my career, empathy was not very highly regarded in a world largely dominated by cool detachment and rationality. Indeed, business decisions are generally motivated by strategic and economic considerations, rarely by humanistic concerns. At one point, three of the new top managers in our division had PhDs in Physics (!) and no previous experience in finance. To me, the message was clear: this is a workplace that, above all else, values rigor, discipline, logical thought, rationality, cold-blooded decision-making, emotional distance, and cool reason.

Yet, we empathize naturally and thrive during positive relationships (Lieberman, 2013). Also, empathy is central to emotional and social intelligence. Salovey and colleagues (2004) define emotional intelligence as the ability to process emotions in the self and others accurately and appropriately and using them as guides for our thoughts and actions. The authors postulate that the ability to understand one's own emotions and others' leads to fewer conflicts with peers and may even predict success in personal relationships, among other positive outcomes. For example, research showed that the most effective naval commanders were the ones with higher emotional intelligence, who are also the most liked (Bachman, 1988). Other studies examined the

link between emotional intelligence and interpersonal relations (Schutte, Malouff, Bobik, Coston, Greeson, Jedlicka, … & Wendorf, 2001). Their results indicate that the participants with higher scores for emotional intelligence had higher scores for empathic perspective-taking and self-monitoring in social situations, higher scores for social skills, and more cooperative responses toward partners.

Bloom's (2013) research suggests that human beings are born with a moral sense and that it is human nature to feel for others. He argues that our capacity to act in the best interest of the group is the product of evolution, including multilevel selection. Still, he contends, both empathy and our innate morality have real limitations and there are ugly aspects of our natures that lead us astray and that we must overcome. As he stated, "our evolved system can be bigoted and parochial and sometimes savagely irrational" (2013a, p. 100) as people are naturally closer to friends and family than to unrelated strangers. Our value judgments about others are often based on group membership and our moral powers are mostly used with kin or the in-group. In other words, we are naturally nice to those around us, but prone to bigotry and to feel fear and anger toward strangers. Bloom's view of human nature relies on our imagination, our reason, and our compassion to override the limitations of our natures and expand our morality to include others.

Consistent with Bloom's perspective, Armstrong (2011) argues that while empathy focuses on experience, compassion focuses on action in order to help another individual. Thus, compassion takes empathy one step further and is the key to addressing suffering and combating incivility in organizations. Dyadic compassion happens when one person notices the suffering of another person, feels empathic concern, and reacts to it (Kahn, 1993). Fletcher (2007) notes that when an organizational member exhibits competent compassion, it becomes a key relational skill or practice. Research also suggests that compassion makes a difference in relational perceptions.

For example, a study showed that employees who reported experiencing compassion at work were more likely to being emotionally committed to their organization, and described their colleagues in positive terms (Lilius, Worline, Maitlis, Kanow, Dutton, & Frost, 2008). In the case of relational resilience, a compassionate attitude has been shown to repair the connective tissue of the relationship (Porath & Pearson, 2012).

As previously noted, incivility or the lack of organizational compassion leads to low-quality connections. Civility, on the other hand, pays dividends. Porath, Gerbasi, and Schorch, (2015) define civility as behavior involving politeness and regard for others. In their recent study in a biotechnology company, those regarded as civil were more likely to be sought after for advice and twice as likely to be considered as leaders. Civility elicits perceptions of warmth and competence, which, as noted earlier, explain both interpersonal and intergroup social cognition (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). In addition, high-quality relationships are affected by civility and can also play a role in facilitating an empathic perspective (Eisenberg, 2000). Studies by McCall and Lombardo (1983) have shown that most incivility is committed down the hierarchy and that the key characteristic of an executive's failure is an insensitive, abrasive or bullying style. In conclusion, leading with compassion implies the ability to see goodness within self and toward others (Haidt, 2006).

Yet, there are several challenges to that lofty goal of reciprocity and empathic concern. Armstrong (2011) argues that for a compassionate ethos to be applied, we must first transcend our selves and our ego-bound existence. Haidt (2012) writes that "behind every act of altruism, heroism, and human decency you'll find either selfishness or stupidity" (p. 150). Pearson and Porath (2005) imply that civility may require a level of respect for other co-workers that is often

lacking in today's workplace. To understand this point better, in the next section I will consider some very practical actions that promote civility, thus high-quality connections, at work.

Behavioral Mechanisms

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) notes that relationships make us extremely happy when they go well, and extremely sad when they don't work out. Since we depend so much on the affection and approval of others, we are extremely sensible to how they treat us. For Stephens et al. (2012), behavioral mechanisms are the conscious and unconscious actions that people take in response to a person, system, environment, or stimulus.

The following section provides a brief description of various behaviors of interpersonal communication that contribute to building high-quality connections during everyday social interactions, namely task-enabling, trusting, and respectful engagement.

Task-enabling

According to Stephens et al. (2012), task-enabling occurs when we deliberately use strategies to help the successful performance of others, thereby energizing individuals, generating commitment, and facilitating the learning process within the organization. Task-enabling can happen at all levels in the organization regardless of the employee's hierarchical position.

For Stephens et al. (2012), the first way task-enabling builds connection is by investing resources (e.g., time, advice, experience, motivation, money) in them. It makes the recipient better off and builds their desire to invest in return. This can happen by paying back to the initial investor or by investing in another person. This fosters growth, enhances performance and strengthens the connection. Second, when one person at work communicates positive regard and affirmation to another colleague, it builds connection. For example, finding ways to make

another person's job easier communicates an awareness of and valuing of someone else's work. Third, task-enabling builds connection by positively transforming the task enabler's self-image. Indeed, the enabler experiences a heightened sense of pride that leads to further efforts to build connection.

The authors argue that investing in others yields mutual rewards while also enhancing the organization's capacity to learn and adapt. A workplace where task-enabling is the norm is a safer environment for experimenting new things because mistakes are more quickly detected and corrected and people can learn from (Dutton, 2003). Finally, the chance to help others –through teaching, designing, advocating, accommodating, and nurturing- builds HQC and motivates people to work harder in the workplace.

Various studies by Grant (2013; 2014) highlight that task-enabling (or altruistic or pro-social) behaviors build deeper and broader connections and add more meaning and purpose to our life. Grant's big insight was that for most people in most lines of work, doing something meaningful means helping others. For example, meeting the beneficiary of one's work to be reminded of how it was helping others. Helping others improves engagement in various ways. One reason might be self-perception (I am a good corporate citizen, hard worker). Another reason is that it makes us feel good. A third explanation is that we like to see others showing they care. Just like in any family, people who are strongly attached will work harder to support the family and help it thrive. Also, Grant has demonstrated that corporate cultures of successful *givers* work best and screen out the *takers* who are all about self-interest and zero-sum solutions. The research concludes that you can influence others most effectively when you help them achieve what they want in a way that also helps you and simultaneously serves greater good.

Trust

Pratt and Dirks (2007) highlight that trust is central to all positive relationships. According to Dutton (2003), trusting means acting toward others in a way that conveys your belief in their integrity, dependability, and good motives. In other words, acting with trust involves acting on positive expectations about other people's behavior and intentions. When trust prevails in a relationship, you assume that the other person is acting with your best interests in mind. Trust creates a self-fulfilling cycle between people by encouraging them to be more mutually trusting. In a trusting connection, both people expect high-integrity behavior from each other. As a consequence, both people experience more freedom to be authentic, to let their guard down, and to be flexible.

Pratt and Dirks (2007) make the case that positive words and actions that create trust include sharing valuable information, appropriate self-disclosure, using inclusive language, giving away control and responsibility, granting access to valuable resources, and soliciting and acting on input. We also create trust by the things we do or do not say, including accusing others of bad intent, demeaning others, check-up behaviors and surveillance, and punishing people for errors (Dutton, 2003). What you say or don't say, and what you do or don't do builds or destroys trust and HQCs. For example, research by Helliwell and Huang (2010, 2011b) has shown that among employed people, trust in management predicts life satisfaction more reliably than health, marital status, or income level. The same study also found that having more intense social relations in general was correlated with higher life satisfaction.

In several studies, Barling, Kelloway, and Iverson (2003) have noted that high-quality jobs -those that provide employees with the means and opportunity to do great work- are characterized by extensive training and enough autonomy to use that training The authors

contend that trust leads to good things for employees (morale and safety) and employers

(performance). They conclude that jobs in many fields should be redesigned to accommodate the

reality that people don't like to feel they are being controlled. Barling's conclusions about the

power of trust on employee autonomy echo previous research on self-efficacy. Indeed, self-

efficacy is a belief that one can perform the behaviors that will lead to certain outcomes

(Bandura, 2001, 2006). When a person possesses a high sense of self-efficacy, she believes that

she can behave in ways that lead to desirable outcomes. Thus, self-efficacy can have a significant

effect on performance by affecting the direction of action.

Respectful Engagement

It is common sense that we all want to be appreciated and nobody likes to be criticized.

As the saying goes, "If you want to gather honey, don't kick at the beehive." Dutton (2003)

argues that respectful behaviors show that we care and value another person, thereby satisfying

the basic human needs for respect and dignity. For example, in a recent survey of job

satisfaction, nearly three out of four respondents (72%) considered that respectful treatment of all

employees at all levels was very important to them (SHRM, 2015). With time, communicating in

a supportive and positive fashion lays a foundation of trust, honesty, respect, and commitment, as

a pre-condition for generating high-quality connections (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2012).

While criticism puts most people on the defensive, respectful engagement energizes the

relationship and has an infectious effect on others (Dutton, 2003). Indeed, James (1890)

remarked, that the deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated. At the

same time, respectful engagement builds loyalty, and facilitates work coordination and learning,

thus positively impacting performance. Knowing we are in an organization that cares for us, for

other employees, and for the community creates attachments that are surprisingly effective at keeping us engaged and motivated.

Let us now take a closer look at some of the behaviors that create respectful engagement and facilitate HQCs.

Conveying Presence

Dutton (2003) remarks that every time you come into contact with another person (virtually or in real time) is an opportunity to be fully present or not. When two people are deliberately engaged with each other, a sense of mutual connections emerges that is energizing. Presence (psychological or physical) is the basis of all the other engagement strategies. Being present psychologically means being available and receptive, and open to change. Conveying presence implies dedicating all my attention to the present interaction by minimizing distraction.

Conversation is not always necessary to make contact. You can make contact and convey presence through body language. Your body sends silent, yet important, signals regarding your readiness and willingness to be open and engaged with another person. For instance, research has found that only 7 percent of message pertaining to feelings and attitudes is conveyed by words, 38 percent by tone of voice (paralinguistic), and 55 percent by body movements and facial expressions (Mehrabian, 1972).

Dutton (2003) points to availability as another way to signal presence. How do you respond to others' requests for time, attention, or physical presence? Extend arms with the palms up and gesture the person into your office while saying something like, "You seem very upset and so it's important to me that we talk now." This leaves no doubt in people's minds that they are important and that she is available for connection. Be focused on the here and now as

opposed to the past or future, turn off phone, turn away from computer, and establish eye contact to signal interest and availability.

The power of respectful engagement has been demonstrated by studying the relationship between doctor and patients in America. Levinson (1994) analyzed the relationship of malpractice claims with physician-patient communication. What she found is that the breakdown in communication between patients and physicians and patient dissatisfaction are the critical factors leading to malpractice litigation. In 70 percent of the malpractice claims, the patients reported feeling deserted or devalued, or found that the physician delivered information poorly and failed to understand the patient's perspective. Interestingly, there was no difference in the amount or quality of information the physician gave their patients. The difference was entirely in *how* they talked to and treated their patients. Her conclusion is simple: You don't sue a doctor who treats you with respect.

Being Genuine and Communicating Affirmation

According to Stephens et al., (2012) respectful engagement means removing fronts and being authentic. You do so providing honest and open feedback, expressing genuine interest in the other person's point of view, and conveying emotions and feelings that are congruent with the situation. In a study, Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) showed that hospital cleaners derived meaning and pleasure from their job largely because the patients spoke to them in an appreciative way during their interactions.

Some of the strategies for communicating affirmation include:

- *Affirming Someone's Situation* means recognizing and understanding another person's situation especially in times of crisis.

- *Looking for the Value in the Other:* Imagining and seeing others in a positive light,

looking for the value in another, and giving them the benefit of the doubt conveys

affirmation. This type of practice is transformative in that it allows you to speak more

freely about your own thoughts and feelings, while at the same time, you support

others in their aspirations.

- *Expressing Recognition:* By practicing frequent recognition you affirm the value of

  the person to whom it is offered. This can be done by acknowledging efforts,

  introducing people appreciatively, and recognizing outstanding performance.

- *Demonstrating Genuine Interest:* Showing appreciation for the whole person (e.g.,

  family, hobbies) conveys that you are genuinely interested in people's feelings,

  thoughts, or actions and reinforces the interpersonal connection.

- *Treating Time as Precious:* People's time is as important as yours. It is a precious and

  rare commodity in organizations show up on time, grant time, apologize for wasting

  time and respectfully ask for time.

Research by Reis and Gable (2003) shows that people turn to others not only to cope with

negative events (i.e., social support) but also to share good ones. The process of sharing positive

events with a close relationship partner (e.g. best friend, spouse, colleague) has been called

capitalization (Langston, 1994). Studies have shown that capitalization processes lead to

increases in positive affect, life satisfaction, and belongingness and generally help fortify

relationships under certain conditions (Gable et al., 2004). Their research shows that positive

emotional exchanges play a crucial role in building relationship resources. Thus, when others

respond in an active and constructive way (ACR), it builds trust, positive affect, intimacy, and

subjective well-being. Another study highlighted that responses to positive events were better at

predicting relationship well-being than responses to negative events (Gable, Gonzaga, &
Strachman, 2006). Relationships in which good news are openly shared and received with
genuine excitement by prolonging discussion on the good news, asking questions, or suggesting
celebratory (Active-Constructive) activities tend to flourish. However, the other three response
styles are destructive to the relationship. Research has found that in dating/cohabitating couples,
when the partner did not give active constructive responses, the relationship was at risk of
dissolving within months (Maisel & Gable, 2009; Gable et al., 2004).

Listening Effectively

Active listening creates understanding and shows respectful engagement but it also
requires effort because there are potentially many distractions (Dutton, 2003). Studies have
shown that we spend 60 percent of our communication time listening (Barker et al, 1980) but we
retain just 25 percent (Nichols & Lewis, 1954). At the same time, too often the listener focuses
on goals for the interaction as opposed to listening to the other person or they just wait for their
opportunity to speak (Dutton, 2003).

Dutton (2003) argues that listening that engages another respectfully is empathetic (vs.
critical), active (vs. passive), and expansive (vs. reductive). Empathetic listening is other-
centered. It involves putting yourself in another person's shoes and realizing that it is our job to
know as much as we can about the other's perspective by attentively listening to them. Two
concrete actions to become a more empathetic listener are acknowledging the feelings expressed
by the other person (e.g., "I hear what you are saying") and try to more fully understand the
context of that person.

According to Dutton (2003), being active means being responsive as a listener so as to
encourage further communication. You do so by paraphrasing (e.g., "Let me make sure I am

hearing you correctly. What you are saying is …"), summarizing (e.g., "So if I pull together the ideas that you have just related …", clarifying (e.g., "What I hear you say is …"), soliciting feedback (e.g., " Do you get the sense that I am hearing correctly what you are saying?"

Communicating Supportively

Dutton (2003) argues that the way we communicate has a huge impact on respectful engagement: What we say and how we say it should denote respect, appreciation, and dignity (Stephens et al., 2012). Therefore, words and questions should be engaging, affirmative, and positive as much as possible because they are fateful and eventually orient the direction of the communication (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). Communication that is open and conveys affirmation and openness improves the connection. In contrast, unsupportive communication such as sarcasm, negative comparisons, threats, or win-lose interactions hinder the other person's ability to tune in and understand your message.

For example, Cameron (2013; 2008) suggests that when delivering negative messages, two major potential obstacles are: defensiveness and disconfirmation. In defensiveness, the receiver of the message feels threatened and self-protects by reacting aggressively, angrily or by becoming competitive. Disconfirmation is common when people feel disrespected or put down. As a result, people may try to build themselves up or withdraw. This happens when the sympathetic nervous system (i.e., fight or flight) gets activated. During emotionally charged situations such as telling an employee his position has become redundant or responding to a client's complaint, the business leader must have the ability to maintain an open dialogue and strengthen the relationship by showing respect. Approaching difficult conversations in a respectful fashion builds and strengthens the relationship by activating the parasympathetic system (i.e., rest and digest). In other words, delivering a difficult message by establishing

emotional security, respect, and supportive communication allows the discussion to move from gridlock to dialogue. Dutton (2003) suggests the following strategies for communicating supportively:

- *Rely on requests as opposed to demands.* The focus on requests changes the tone, feel, and outcome of the engagement. When we hear demands we expect that blame or punishment will follow not responding to the request. Our options are submission or rebellion. Instead, when you make a request, the other person can freely choose a response. By using positive action language you can reframe negative statements (I don't want you to call me every day) in terms of positive actions (I want you to check with me once a week).

- *Ask engaging, affirmative questions as much as make declarations*. Questions create context and orient a change of direction in discussions (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012). That's why, whenever possible, they should be engaging, affirmative, and positive.

- *Communicate in specific rather than general* terms to avoid all the hazards of misinterpretation ("I need updates from you every Friday" instead of "Provide me with regular updates").

- *Make statements descriptive rather than evaluative*: Objectively and dispassionately describe events, reactions, and consequences without evaluating the person or the behavior. Stay descriptive about the behavior or event and describe the outcomes or reactions associated with the behavior (vs. motives or attributions without causes).

- *Focus on the problem not on the person:* Focus on the situation with regard to standards or expectations rather than personal opinions.

We have reviewed the following social-psychological connecting pathways to building high-quality connections, defined as short, work-based interactions that are marked by trust, mutual regard, and active engagement and energize people:

(1) Cognitions (other-awareness, impressions of others,)

(2) Emotions (positive emotions, emotional contagion, empathy, compassion)

(3) Behaviors (task-enabling, trusting, respectful engagement)

This model is largely inspired by Stephens et al. (2012) and also draws on the existing literature on HQCs (Dutton, 2003; Dutton & Heaphy, 2006; Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009). The list is not exhaustive and future research will identify other avenues. All the proposed strategies have been shown to contribute to the quality of the interpersonal connection, under certain conditions, and require work and persistence.

Future Directions

The field of positive relationships at work is still in its infancy. Consequently, we know relatively little about how positive relationships emerge and mature or what their role is in organizational life. In spite of the importance of positive relationships for organizational and individual thriving and success, only a few studies have been published on the practices and contexts that foster high-quality relationships in the workplace (Dutton, 2003; Baker & Dutton, 2007). There are a limited number of empirical studies that focus on understanding how positive dyadic work relationships develop (Stephens at al. 2012; Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009). Many more are needed in order to explore further this vital process. For example, what is the sequential process through which positive relations emerge, mature, and in some cases, die? What would be the different steps in the process?

The proposed blueprint of the mechanisms that help to explain how HQCs are built is still very much in the preliminary phase and needs further testing and refinement. Certainly, there are other mechanisms that explain how HQCs form and develop, such as warmth or acceptance. Future research is needed to explore them and their interrelations, in particular, longitudinal studies.

Future research could also explore high-quality interactions in different industries, organizations (size, type), work relationships (clients, peers, managers, subordinates), cultures, genders, or across generations. In addition, further exploration might focus on other relational constructs (e.g., trust, social support, communication) and how they impact high-quality connections. More research might also be able to shed additional light on the relationship of HQCs with individual and organizational performance, employee well-being, or in/civility in the workplace.

Finally, another topic that needs to be further studied is the impact of the context on relationships. Dutton (2003) argues that the organizational context contributes to shape the connection-building process. She suggests that while most people want to be good, whether they are or not largely depends on the context. In her view, the organizational perspective, not the individual's, has the power to lift every employee up because the context is like organizational soil that helps people grow. For example, appreciative inquiry (AI) is a philosophy based on discovering (i.e., inquiry) and elevating people's strengths (i.e., appreciate) to create positive change (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). Its success is premised on creating a positive context where people can safely develop appreciation, relationships, knowledge, opportunities, and action plans for the future of their organization (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012). Also, self-determination theory teaches us that whether humans are self-motivated or not largely depends on their social-contextual conditions (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The good news is that cultures are dynamic and can be changed -even if it takes time- because we have agency as individuals (Dutton, 2003). How can we design contexts that build more HQCs? What are the common features of virtuous organizational mechanisms? Who are the people involved?

Providing training in organizations is one way to transfer academic knowledge and research to practitioners. My conviction is that once organizations realize the power (positive or destructive) of relationships, they will more consciously take them into account in their daily practices. In my future work, I will develop training materials to enhance positive interpersonal relationships and effective communication in corporate settings. I am convinced that organizations –and their members- have much to gain from incorporating the lessons of positive organizational research on positively deviant performance.

Conclusion

« No man is an island,

Entire of itself,

Everyman is a piece of the continent,

A part of the main.»

-John Donne (1572-1631)

John Donne's well-known meditation about death is also a reflection on the idea that human beings are not isolated from one another but instead very much interconnected. Research shows that the pursuit of generative dynamics, such as positive relationships, has the potential to enhance organizational and employee thriving (Dutton, 2003). Thus, the purpose of this paper was to better understand the impact of positive social relationships in organizations and to identify major pathways to develop positive connections and interactions. First, I have briefly reviewed the state of employee well-being and interpersonal relationships in the workplace. I have also provided a general overview of positive psychology in organizations.

Then, I have discussed the sources, characteristics, and consequences of positive social relationships. I have defined high-quality connections as everyday, short-term, dyadic, positive interactions at work that are marked by trust, mutual regard, and active engagement. We have seen that high-quality connections generate vitality and unlock possibilities at the individual and organizational levels. I have reviewed the research that shows how positive relationships benefit individuals in their physical and psychological well-being as well as in their work performance by providing more positive emotions and energy, as well as other life-giving resources. At the organizational level, I have argued that high-quality connections foster cooperation, coordination, employee loyalty, and learning.

Finally, I have considered three mechanisms that contribute to build high-quality connections: (1) cognitions (other-awareness, impressions of others, perspective-taking); (2) emotions (positive emotions and emotional contagion, empathy and compassion); (3) behaviors (task-enabling, trusting, respectful engagement). In closing, I have suggested possible extensions of the concept for future work. My conclusion is that corporate success and sustainability are largely dependent on positive social relationships and high-quality connections. Therefore, organizations should be interested in embracing their responsibility to increase the quality of interpersonal connections.

In a landmark article, the Nobel laureate Milton Friedman (1970) argued that, "There is one and only one responsibility of business -to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game." This economic perspective elevates profit to the top of all organizational priorities and is still largely prevalent in most Western business organizations. In the last twenty years, however, other approaches have challenged the preeminence of financial results. For example, as a consequence of ever increasing societal demands, global business is being forced to acknowledge its responsibility to a wider group of stakeholders (e.g., employees, customers, society, environment) (Carroll & Buchholtz, 1999). Thus, global firms are gradually adopting more responsible forms of business practice in order to maximize sustainable performance in both financial and societal terms. This shift recognizes that corporations have obligations to stakeholders other that stockholders and outcomes other than business performance (e.g., sustainability) that are valuable in themselves (Caza & Carroll, 2012).

As well, positive organizational scholars are broadening our perspective of corporate success beyond economic outcomes (Caza & Carroll, 2012). By introducing virtuousness in

organizations, positive organizational studies recognize that businesses can reach their bottom-line goals while displaying moral excellence (Cameron & Winn, 2012). Some evidence suggests that the pursuit of positive concerns and practices, such as virtuousness, may account for variance in performance (Cameron & Winn, 2012; Cameron & Caza, 2004). As Seligman (2011) proposed, "The positive corporation and the individuals therein must cultivate meaning, engagement, positive emotion, and positive relations as well as tending to profit" (p. 231).

It might well be said that life is about constant give and take and that our interactions with others, to a large extend, determine success (Grant, 2013). Certainly, while success is often defined at the individual level, it is rarely a solitary pursuit because no man is an island, entire of itself.

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