

# UNDERSTANDING INTERACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS: HIGH QUALITY CONNECTIONS

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT  
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PDW ON POSITIVE WORK  
RELATIONSHIPS

# GOALS FOR TODAY'S SESSION

Provide an incredibly short (and personal) history of work on high quality connections

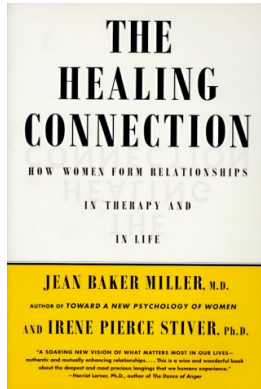
Reflect on your own experiences of high quality connections/relationships

Share sampling of theory and research



# IN 2001, RELATIONALITY WAS IN THE AIR....

Psychology



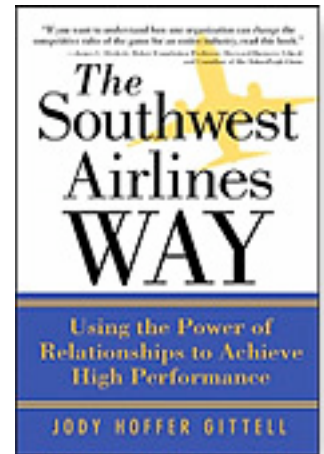
## The Greening of Relationship Science

Ellen Berscheid  
*University of Minnesota, Twin Cities Campus*

Sociology

## Manifesto for a Relational Sociology<sup>1</sup>

Mustafa Emirbayer  
*New School for Social Research*



Organizations

## Relationality in Organizational Research: Exploring *The Space Between*

Hilary Bradbury • Benjamin M. Bergmann Lichtenstein  
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Cleveland, Ohio 44106*  
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## LEARNING FROM ACADEMIA: THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS IN PROFESSIONAL LIFE

CONNIE J. G. GERSICK  
*University of California, Los Angeles*

JEAN M. BARTUNEK  
*Boston College*

JANE E. DUTTON  
*University of Michigan*

# THEORETICAL MOTIVATIONS

- Call for more relational constructs (Baron and Pfeffer, 1994; Bradbury and Lichtenstein, 2000; Kahn, 1998; Emirbayer, 1997)
- Historically, stronger focus on structure of relationships (e.g., network studies)
- Less focus on quality of relationships between two or more people
- Where has been focus on quality (e.g., LMX), focus on limited relational domain (boss-subordinate)
- Constructs that capture quality or relationship (trust, strength) steeped in exchange-based construal of relationship
- Tend to focus on more enduring relationships, ignoring more transient but potentially high impact connections

NEED FOR RICHER, MORE GENERIC RELATIONAL CONSTRUCTS THAT  
CAPTURE QUALITY OF CONNECTION BETWEEN TWO OR MORE PEOPLE

## TWO EVENTS

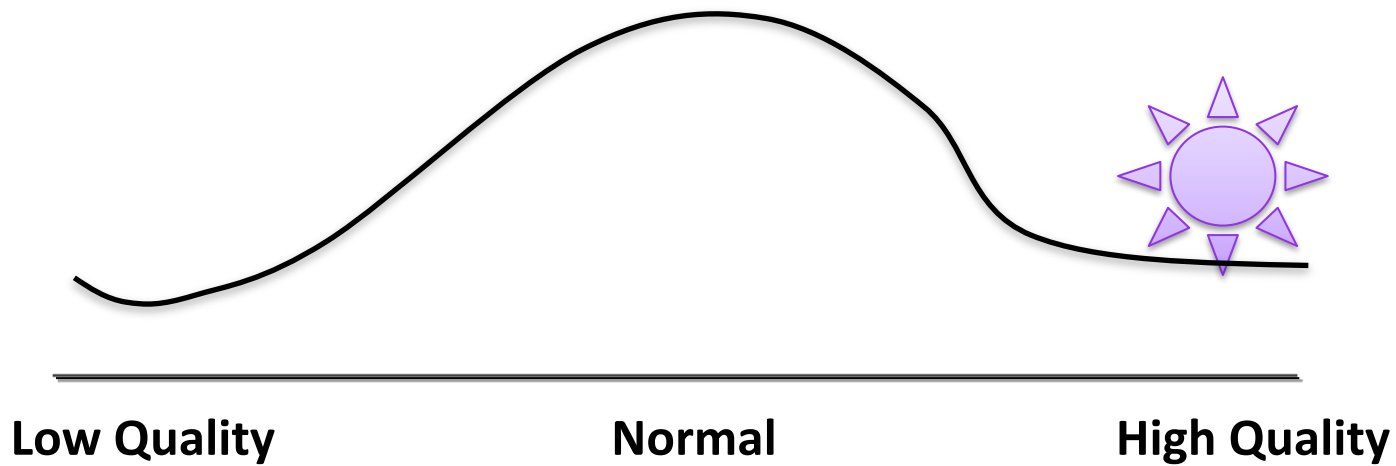


How do organizational contexts influence human flourishing?



How can people make a difference in their communities and organizations in the wake of crisis and trauma?  
*Essays in Leading in Trying Times*

# THE VARIANCE IN QUALITY OF CONNECTIONS OR RELATIONSHIPS IN YOUR LIFE



# ***PAIR & SHARE:*** **WHAT ARE HIGH QUALITY CONNECTIONS OR RELATIONSHIPS?**

- Pair up
- Share a story of a high quality connection you have at work/in school/home
- Identify common features



# HIGH QUALITY CONNECTIONS

## CONNECTION V. RELATIONSHIP

### Connections

- Involve interaction and mutual awareness
- Momentary, no assumption of prior interactions

### Relationships

- Enduring associations between two people (Reis, 2001)





# HIGH QUALITY CONNECTIONS: SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

Felt vitality and aliveness

Positive regard

Felt mutuality



FlashReport

Strangers in sync: Achieving embodied rapport through shared movements

Tanya Vacharkulksemsuk\*, Barbara L. Fredrickson

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# HIGH QUALITY CONNECTION: FEATURES OF THE TIE

Greater emotional carrying capacity:

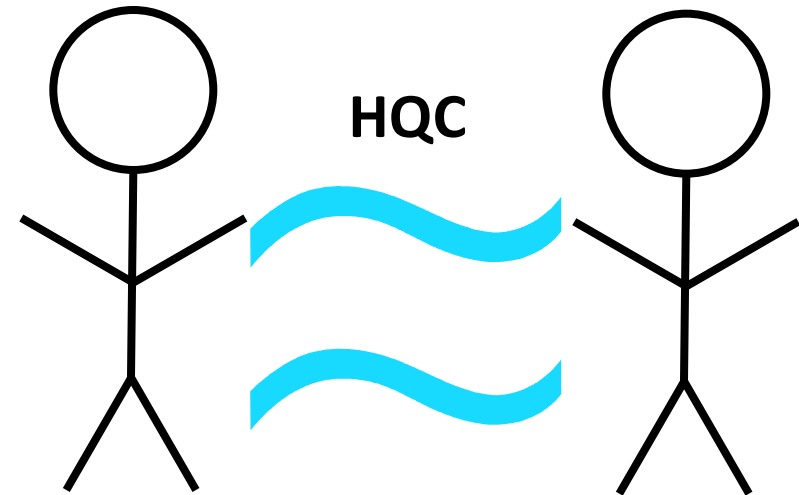
- carries more emotions, and both positive and negative emotions

Greater tensility

- ability to bend and withstand strain

Connectivity

- openness to new ideas



Learning Behaviours in the Workplace:  
The Role of High-quality Interpersonal  
Relationships and Psychological Safety

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# HIGH QUALITY CONNECTIONS: PHYSIOLOGICAL CORRELATES AND EFFECTS

## Cardiovascular system

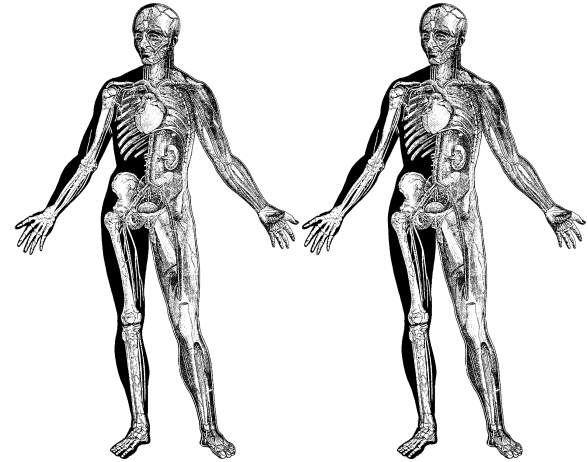
- Heart rate and blood pressure

## Immune system

- Stronger immune response under stress

## Neuroendocrine system

- Oxytocin released, healthier cortisol patterns



## A FEW CLOSING THOUGHTS

There are a variety of ways to study high quality connections and relationships

*e.g., methods, research areas, DV/IV/moderator, theoretical & empirical*

The quality of connections/relationships, and relational perspectives, are developing outside of POS and PRW

*e.g., trust, negative relationships, mentoring, social network theory, LMX, development over time*

Staying connected to the phenomenon of HQCs is motivating and generative



# THANKS TO MY HQC COLLABORATORS!

Jane Dutton

Stephanie Creary

JP Stephens

Elana Feldman

Gretchen Spreitzer

Kathy Kram

Avi Carmeli

Rick Bagozzi



# Past, Present, and Future Investigation of Positive Relationships at Work

AOM PDW 10297

**Kim Cameron**  
**University of Michigan**



# Everyone Knows: Relationships Matter

- Physical health effects
- Emotional health effects
- Cognitive performance effects
- Team performance effects
- Organizational performance effects



# Some Effects of Positive Relationships

- People live longer (+11 years).
- People succumb to fewer illnesses.
- People have higher survival rates after serious illness or accident.
- People tolerate pain better.
- People work harder.
- People perform better on the job.
- People make more money (+30%).
- People display more mental acuity.
- People make higher quality decisions.
- People are more creative and more flexible in their thinking.
- People are more adaptive and resilient after trials and trauma.
- People engage in more helping behaviors and citizenship activities.
- People recover twice as fast from surgery.
- Men have half the incidence of prostate cancer.
- People develop greater immunity to colds and flu viruses.
- People have fewer heart attacks and they recover faster.
- People develop better ability to cope with stress and to develop resilience.
- People learn faster and remember more material longer.
- People experience less depression.

SOURCES: Diener & Diener, 2008; Dutton & Ragins, 2007; Fredrickson, 2008; Heaphy & Dutton, 2007





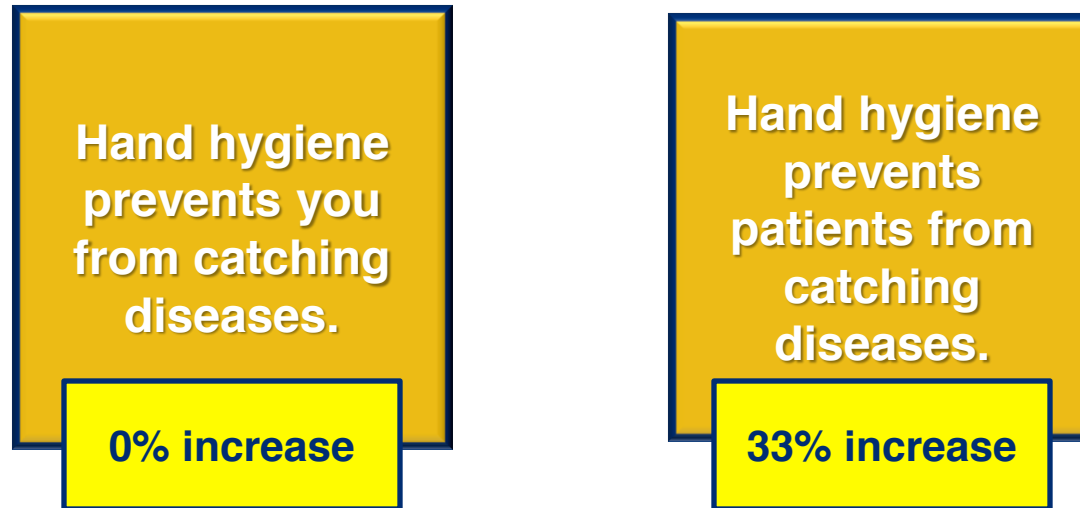


# Why?



# An Explanation for Relationship Effects

- **Goals of entering freshmen** (Crocker)
- **Kidney dialysis patients** (Brown)



- **Predicting change in hospitals** (Grant)
- **99,000 people die of healthcare acquired infections each year. That translates into 271 people per day or a Boeing 767 airliner crashing and killing all on board every day. MRSA – Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus – alone is estimated to kill around 19,000 people annually in the United States.**



# One Important But Neglected Attribute

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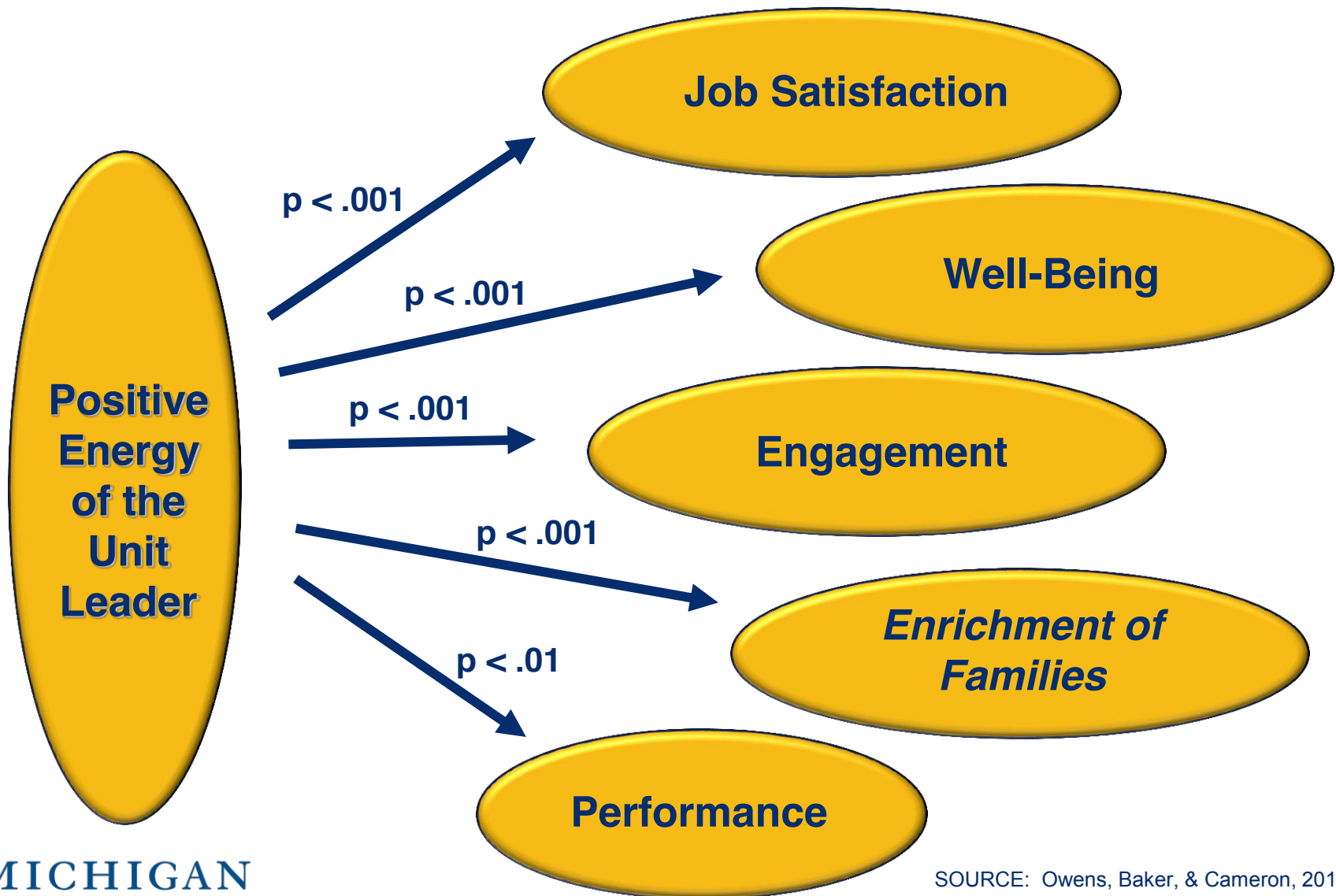
- **Relational Energy**

versus

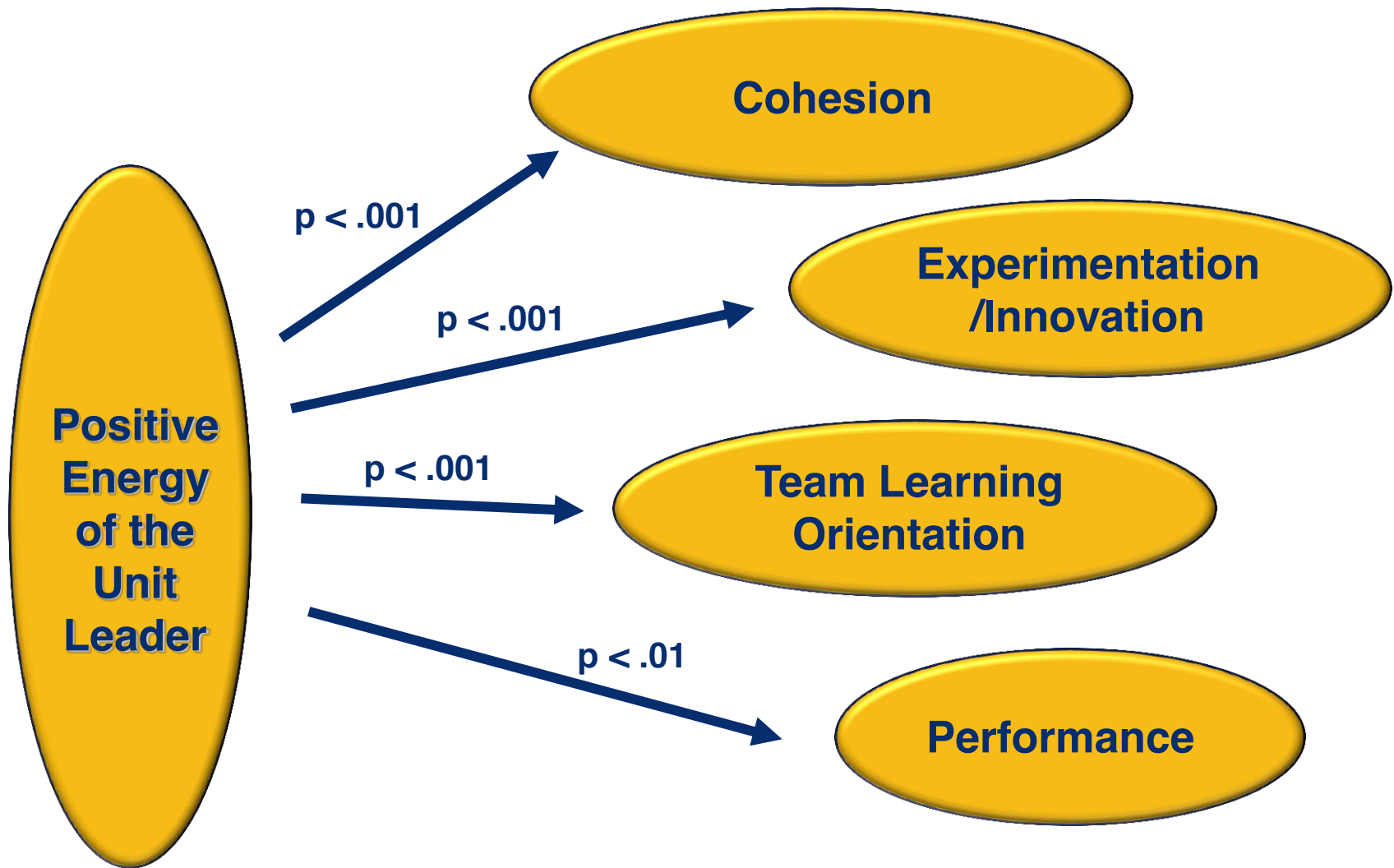
- Physical Energy
- Emotional Energy
- Cognitive Energy



# Positive Relational Energy & Individuals



# Positive Relational Energy & Units



SOURCE: Owens, Baker, & Cameron, 2012

# Positive Energizers

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- Those who positively energize others are higher performers. Position in the *energy* network is four times the predictor of performance compared to position in *informational or influence* networks.
- Positive energizers tend to enhance the work of others. People who interact with or are connected to energizers also perform better.
- High performing firms had three times as many positive energizing networks than low performing firms.

SOURCES: Baker, 2003; Owens, Baker, & Cameron, 2012.



# *Positive Relationships at Work: What We Know and Where We Need to Go*



**Belle Rose Ragins**  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

*PDW Session: Past, Present and Future Investigations of Positive Relationships at Work*

**National Academy of Management Meeting.  
Boston, MA. August 3-7, 2012**

## What We Know

- ◆ **Relationships are a central but understudied aspect of organizational life**
  - Relationships “*shape how people think, how they feel, and what they do.*” (Kahn, 2007: 189)
  - “*Relationships are central to the meaning and being of life... They are the means by which work is done and meaning is found in organizations.*” (Ragins & Dutton, 2007:5)
- ◆ Relationships exist along a **continuum of quality**
- ◆ Relationships are **dynamic and changing**
- ◆ Relationships exist within **constellations and networks** (within and outside the workplace)
- ◆ Categories/labels don't fully capture relationships



# What We Need to Know About Positive Relationships at Work

## ◆ What does “positive relationships” really mean?

### ◆ Relationships can be defined in terms of:

- States, processes, or affective experiences
- Experienced quality
- Relationship outcomes



### ◆ Attributes and Dimensions

- Mutually beneficial (Fletcher 2007; Miller & Stiver, 1997)
- Involve high quality connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003)
- Meet relational needs (Kahn, 2007)
- Increase resource-producing capabilities (Baker & Dutton, 2007); energy (Quinn, 2007)



## How do Relationships Move Across the Continuum of Quality?

- ◆ What are the antecedents and processes underlying relationship transitions?
  - From marginal to positive; from positive to negative?
- ◆ How do positive relationships begin?
  - Tipping point of high quality connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003) or mentoring episodes (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007)
- ◆ How do positive relationships end?
  - Do they transition to another form?

# Do our Categories Constrain Our Understanding of Relationships?



- ◆ No two relationships are the same, but our labels guide our:
  - Relational Schemas (Baldwin, 1992, 1997; Planalp, 1985)
  - Expectations (Ragins & Verbos, 2007)
  - Perceptions of quality in the relationship
- ◆ Work relationships cast into monolithic categories
  - E.g., we see “mentoring” as a monolithic relationship, despite variations in the relationship. We wouldn’t expect our friends to be the same, but we expect all mentors to be alike.
- ◆ What is the impact of this categorization process on the development, expectations and evaluations of relationships at work?

# Relationships and Networks



- ◆ Relationships are nested within networks but.....
  - We have a relationship with a person, not a network*
- ◆ Relational Caches (Kram & Ragins, 2007; Ragins, 2012)
  - Relational caches are a transportable set of relational skills and competencies that transfer across time, relationships and settings.
  - Relational caches may be passed between members of relationships; creates positive cycles across relationships.

# Expanding Our Horizons



- ◆ Relationships occur within and outside the workplace
- ◆ Holistic perspective (Ragins, 2008, 2012): individuals do not leave their relational skills at the workplace door, but carry them into other relationships in homes, communities, professional networks (and vice versa)
- ◆ The ability to develop high quality relationships outside the workplace should spillover to influence relationships within the workplace and vice versa (Ragins, 2012)
- ◆ Iterative cycles of positive relationships nested in workplace, community, home and profession.

# Questions, Comments, Ideas?



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