Hatching new ideas through conversation: A research incubator on positive relationships at work

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Primary sponsor: Organizational Behavior (OB) Division

Proposed co-sponsors: Managerial and Organizational Cognition (MOC) and Research Methods (RM) Divisions

ABSTRACT

The development of positive relationships at work is important to both employees and organizations. Individuals who maintain positive workplace relationships tend to experience more positive emotions and have higher job and life satisfaction. Within academia, the study of positive relationships at work is rapidly growing, incorporating new methodologies, theories, and approaches that build upon our existing knowledge. The purpose of our proposed PDW is to facilitate the continued growth of the positive workplace relationships literature by offering scholars the opportunity to share and receive feedback on their current work. More specifically, participants will submit a brief synopsis describing a current project (our PDW is open to work at any stage; i.e., theory development, data collection, analysis) and how it fits under the broad umbrella of positive relationships at work. Based on their applications, individuals with similar interests will be placed in small groups led by facilitators with expertise in the topic area. Throughout the session, participants will have the opportunity to receive feedback on their projects from knowledgeable peers and experts. In addition to helping individuals develop their own unique research ideas, we also intend our PDW to be a forum for continuing to build and grow a community of scholars passionate about positive workplace relationships.

INTEREST TO SPONSORING DIVISIONS

Primary sponsor. This PDW aligns with the mission of the **Organizational Behavior (OB)** Division in a number of ways. First, research on relationships at work informs many of the topics in the division's domain, including interpersonal processes and outcomes such as trust, leadership, teamwork, socialization, and development. Thus, we anticipate a highly interactive session with participants from across a range of disciplines. Second, research on relational dynamics and mechanisms continues to be a relatively underdeveloped area of organizational behavior. The incubator format of our workshop is designed to help advance scholarship in the area of relationships at work. We have invited a diverse group of experienced scholars to facilitate small group discussions among participants with shared interests in workplace relationships. We believe this approach will encourage dialogue that bridges perspectives and generates novel ideas. Finally, this PDW contributes to community building within the OB Division, specifically by strengthening the Positive Relationships at Work Microcommunity, many of whom identify the OB division as their primary "home" within the Academy.

Other potential sponsors. We believe this session will also be of interest to the **Managerial and Organizational Cognition (MOC)** Division because work relationships play an important role in how individuals come to socially construct and make sense of their jobs, their work, and their personal identities. Further, our session is modeled after the incubator-type PDWs that are a trademark of the MOC division. Finally, our PDW fits well with the **Research Methods (RM)** Division because studying relationships, particularly when the relationship is the unit of analysis, presents a unique set of methodological challenges. Our facilitators have experienced and worked through these challenges first-hand, and can offer participants feedback related to study design, measurement, and modeling of their research ideas.

WORKSHOP FORMAT

The proposed PDW is designed to facilitate rich and valuable conversations between experienced scholars and those working on manuscripts that advance the scholarly field of positive relationships at work. We will select prospective participants based on a 1,000-word description of their project, including the primary research questions or hypotheses, methodology, the current stage of the project, and what they hope to gain from the session. Participants will be capped at 40 individuals in order to maintain a participant-to-facilitator ratio of approximately 2:1. Once accepted, individuals will be matched with facilitators based on facilitator methodological expertise and common theoretical interests.

PDW Structure

We will begin the workshop with a welcome and overview of both the Positive Relationships at Work Microcommunity (the organizing group) and the agenda for the day, including introductions among the 4 participants and 2 facilitators at each table. Though facilitators will lead and direct the conversation, each participant will be expected to read the other submissions from their table group in advance and contribute feedback during the session. Participants will have 30 minutes to describe their project and solicit feedback from others at the table. After the first two individuals have presented (i.e., after the first hour), we will take a 10-minute break before continuing with the second two participants at the table.

Following the last feedback session, we will take another short break (10-minutes) before wrapping up the session with a large group debrief in which we discuss key learnings and takeaways related to both individuals' work as well as the field of positive relationships at work more broadly. We will conclude by thanking our facilitators and participants and offering information on how to stay connected with the Positive Relationships at Work Microcommunity.

Total workshop duration (3 hours – 180 minutes)

- Part 1: Welcome, overview and introductions (15 minutes)
- Part 2a: Feedback discussions on pre-submitted proposals (2 x 30 minute discussions; 60 minutes total)
- Break (10 minutes)
- Part 2b: Feedback discussions on pre-submitted proposals (2 x 30 minute discussions; 60 minutes total)
- Break (10 minutes)
- Part 3: Reflections and large group debrief (20 minutes)
- Part 4: Closing (5 minutes)

OVERVIEW OF WORKSHOP

Positive relationships at work represent a burgeoning area of research within organizational behavior (Ashforth, Schinoff, & Rogers, 2016; Creary, Caza, & Roberts, 2015; Eberly, Holley, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2011; Humberd & Rouse, 2016; Leavitt & Sluss, 2015; Ollier-Malateere, Rothbard, & Berg, 2013). As this literature stream develops, it is critical to create opportunities for scholars to collaborate and seek feedback on work-in-progress. The primary goal of our PDW is to continue to foster a community of researchers who can contribute to this important body of scholarly work. Our PDW is designed to allow positive relationships scholars to connect with one another and to provide relevant and knowledgeable feedback on new and ongoing research projects from scholars who have published research in this domain.

The recent interest in positive relationships at work is spurred in part because of the value that positive relationships provide to both individual employees and the broader organizations in which they are embedded (Colbert, Bono, & Puranova, 2016; Dutton & Ragins, 2007). The literature on positive relationships at work can be traced back to early studies on mentoring (e.g., Kram, 1985) as well as scholars' own reflections on how and why workplace relationships alter the work experience for individuals (Gersick, Bartunek, & Dutton, 2000). Since Gersick and colleagues' seminal work, understanding what positive relationships are and how they shape the

4

workplace has taken many different forms, including high quality connections (Dutton, 2003; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), relational coordination (Gittell, 2001; Gittell & Douglass, 2012), and relational identity and identification (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Sluss & Ashforth, 2008).

More recently, scholars have addressed positive workplace relationships through a network lens. This work highlights how dyadic relationships function within a constellation of multiple relationships (Methot, Lepine, Podsakoff, & Christian, 2016), including those which serve developmental functions (Dobrow, Chandler, Murphy, & Kram, 2012; Murphy & Kram, 2014). Furthermore, new research has started to examine how online social networks collide with face-to-face interactions, and how such boundaries impact respect and liking within the workplace (Ollier-Malaterre, et al., 2013).

However, much work remains to be done. For example, we still lack consensus on how to best measure workplace relationships, nor do we have a holistic theory that describes how relationships are developed and maintained. Additionally, we have little insight into the necessary relational work that positive relationships demand, including the various forms, functions, and outcomes that such work may take. Consequently, the proposed PDW aims to meet the following goals:

1. Provide relevant and knowledgeable feedback to participants on new and ongoing research projects from scholars with expertise in positive relationships at work.

2. Provide opportunities for new collaborations to emerge among participants in order to further develop our understanding of positive relationships at work.

3. Continue to foster and grow a thriving community of scholars who address positive relationships at work in their research.

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ORGANIZERS' DECLARATION

We, Melissa Chamberlin, Lyndon Garrett, Kerry Roberts Gibson, and Beth Schinoff,
certify that all organizers and facilitators have stated that they agree to participate in this
workshop if it is accepted, and that they are not in violation of the *Rule of Three + Three.* We
understand that if this submission is accepted, all of the listed participants must be registered for
the meeting to take part in the session. We understand that the scheduling and audio-visual
requests are requests only. If our proposal is accepted, the PDW chair will let us know whether
our requests are approved.

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