

**Improving Lives at Work:  
The Impact of Positive Relationships on Multiple Forms of Well-being**

**Submission #: 14297**

Proposed sponsor: Organizational Behavior (OB) Division

Other Possible Sponsors: Managerial and Organizational Cognition (MOC) Division, All-Academy Theme (AAT)

**ABSTRACT**

This PDW is designed to address how positive relationships at work influence societal well-being. Workplace relationships represent a burgeoning research area that offers insights into how individuals make sense of the world, with implications for individuals and the teams and organizations they inhabit. This PDW aims to address the specific role that workplace relationships have on four specific dimensions of well-being: physical, psychological, social, and financial. Through a hybrid design that includes short research presentations, an expert panel, and both small and large group discussions, this workshop connects research on positive relationships at work with each of the identified four components of well-being. The proposed session is also designed to provide opportunities for Positive Relationships at Work Microcommunity members and other scholars interested in relationships research to connect and build scholarly collaborations.

## INTEREST TO SPONSORING DIVISIONS

**Primary sponsor.** For the past several years, the **Organizational Behavior (OB) Division** has sponsored the proposed PDW, and we believe our session would again fit well within this division. This year, our session explores the influence of positive relationships at work on multiple aspects of well-being. We believe that understanding how positive relationships at work improve lives by promoting psychological, physical, financial, and social well-being is a fundamentally OB question. As experts in both positive workplace relationships and these areas of well-being, our research presenters and panelists will not only summarize the advances that have been made in these areas, but also outline new directions and challenges. More broadly, research on relationships at work connects to many of the topics in the division's domain, including interpersonal processes and outcomes such as trust, leadership, teamwork, socialization, and development. As such, we believe the proposed PDW will encourage a highly interactive session with participants from across a range of OB topic areas. Finally, this session continues to successfully serve as a gathering for scholars interested in studying relationships at work, including members of the Positive Relationships at Work Microcommunity, many of whom identify the OB division as their primary "home" within the Academy.

**Other potential sponsors (MOC and AAT).** We believe this session will also be of interest to the **Managerial and Organizational Cognition (MOC) Division**. Work relationships play an important role in how individuals socially construct and make sense of their work and their personal identities, making this PDW a natural fit with the MOC division. Finally, this year's PDW is organized around the AOM theme, making the session a good candidate for the **All-Academy Theme (AAT)**. Furthering our understanding of positive relationships at work has direct relevance to understanding how organizations can "contribute to the betterment of society through elevating the health and well-being of those who live in it" (AAT call for submissions).

## **WORKSHOP FORMAT**

The proposed PDW is designed to facilitate several key outcomes, such as sparking new directions and expanding the reach of the field of positive relationships at work, generating conversations between early and experienced scholars related to the four dimensions of well-being mentioned above, and providing a space in which members of the Positive Relationships at Work Microcommunity and other relationship scholars can connect.

### **PDW Structure**

We will begin the workshop with an overview of the Positive Relationships at Work Microcommunity and the agenda for the day, as well as a brief welcome activity. After this overview and introduction, four research presenters will briefly introduce projects that explore the connection between positive relationships and one of the dimensions of well-being (physical, psychological, social, and financial). Next, expert panelists, one representing each well-being dimension, will engage the audience in an interactive question-and-answer session. We will have a short break after the panel discussion, followed by an interactive community-building activity geared toward developing high quality connections among members of the research community. This activity will then be used to transition participants to a series of small table group discussions. Specifically, research presenters and panelists will facilitate conversations at each table for two successive rounds of discussion. Following the second round, we will conclude the PDW with a large group debrief in which we discuss key learnings and takeaways related to each of the well-being dimensions, the field of positive relationships at work more broadly, and individuals' own research projects. We will end the workshop with information on how to stay connected with the Positive Relationships at Work Microcommunity. We include a more detailed schedule of the workshop in Appendix A.

## OVERVIEW OF WORKSHOP

As the idea that organizations play a fundamental role in societal well-being continues to gain traction, one does not have to look far to recognize that positive relationships between organizational entities (e.g., members, collectives, etc.) are a critical mechanism through which that well-being is realized (Brickson & Akinlade, 2017). For example, recent work at the interpersonal level has found that positive relationships at work are strongly associated with outcomes such as individual flourishing, life satisfaction, and meaningful work (Colbert, Bono, & Puranova, 2015). Despite the beneficial outcomes that flow from positive relationships, we lack a holistic understanding of how these types of relationships influence the physical, psychological, social, and financial dimensions of well-being. Our PDW reviews current work being conducted at the intersection of positive relationships at work and the four stated facets of well-being, and provides actionable steps to address the many questions that remain.

**Relationships at work and physical well-being.** We are beginning to understand the physiological implications of positive relationships at work. Scholars have established, for example, that social support buffers the negative effects of stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985), and that positive relationships can lead to increased energy (Quinn, 2007). In perhaps the most explicit examination of physical health and positive interactions, Heaphy and Dutton (2008) theorize how positive social interactions influence individuals' cardiovascular, immune, and neuroendocrine systems, which then fortifies these systems, over time leading to better physical health. Yet, many questions endure. For instance, the nature of relationships is shifting rapidly with rising virtuality. Do positive relationships still have the same influence on our physical health when mediated by communication technology (Heaphy, 2007; Heaphy & Dutton, 2008)?

**Relationships at work and psychological well-being.** Scholars have also noted that

relationships can be beneficial to individuals' psychological well-being. Indeed, research has shown that fostering and maintaining positive relationships can improve cognitive functioning and emotional health (Carmeli, Dutton & Hardin, 2015; Kark & Carmeli, 2009; Stephens, Heaphy, Carmeli, Spreitzer, & Dutton, 2013). Perhaps most telling, former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy (2017) cited the decline of positive relationships at work as a primary factor in what he labelled society's "loneliness epidemic." But what are the contextual factors that foster (or inhibit) the psychological effects of positive relationships? How can organizations cultivate quality connections that promote vitality and mental well-being? Do these same connections form when organizations "force" relationship-building through mandatory social activities?

**Relationships at work and social well-being.** The question of how positive relationships at work influence social well-being more broadly also persists. Scholarly work has only begun to explore how relationships with others can influence the larger social dynamic. For example, recent work has suggested that maintaining workplace relationships from a prior job can buffer the challenges individuals face when transitioning to a new job or career (Walsh, Halgin, & Huang, 2017). In addition, work by Gonzales, Ragins, Ehrhardt, and Singh (2016) found that having friendships within the community reinforces employees' ties with their organization and encourages deeper commitment to the workplace. Furthermore, positive workplace relationships have also been shown to enhance work-family enrichment, and ultimately result in individuals' thriving (Carmeli & Russo, 2016). In sum, the impact of relationships within the workplace extend beyond the work environment into the broader community. Yet much work remains. For example, how do friendships formed through work enhance broader community well-being?

**Relationships at work and financial well-being.** Finally, positive relationships at work can create financial well-being by improving coordination across interdependent tasks, thus

improving the quality of products and services and the utilization of resources. For example, relational coordination - the coordination of work through role-based relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect - enables organizations to achieve high performance along multiple dimensions that are required for financial success (e.g., Cramm & Nieboer, 2012; Gittell et al, 2000; Gittell, 2001; Gittell et al., 2008; Medlin, et al., 2005; Noël et al., 2013; Pagell et al., 2015). Although positive relationships help to ensure the financial success of firms, there are at least two limitations to be explored. First, research has demonstrated that maintaining positive personal relationships at work, such as friendship, may actually detract one's attention and energy from work-related tasks, perhaps decreasing effectiveness and maybe even the financial well-being of the firm (Methot, LePine, Podsakoff, & Christian, 2016). Second, even when positive relationships serve as a source of financial success for organizations, they do not ensure the equitable distribution of financial well-being for workers. This concern is consistent with data that show steadily increasing productivity in the U.S. since the 1970's while real wages have remained nearly constant. These factors highlight the need for more work in this area.

In sum, scholars have done significant work related to positive workplace relationships and well-being. Yet, we still have numerous opportunities to expand our knowledge in ways that broaden the scholarly literature, and also have genuine impact on the lives of individuals at work and in society more broadly. To this end, we aim to meet three goals in our PDW: (1) Foster generative dialogue among scholars who have explored positive relationship at work from a variety of perspectives, methodologies, and theoretical approaches; (2) Offer opportunities to develop new directions for scholarship and create a space for new collaborations to emerge and grow; and, (3) Continue to cultivate an engaged group of scholars who tackle challenging and relevant questions through a lens of positive relationships at work.

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### **ORGANIZERS' DECLARATION**

We, Melissa Chamberlin, Gabby Cunningham, 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.



## REFERENCES

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## APPENDIX A

### Workshop Schedule (duration: 180 minutes)

- Welcome Activity (15 minutes)
- Research Presentations (5 minutes each; 30 minutes total, with transitions)
  - Sabine Sonnentag on physical well-being
  - Avi Carmeli on psychological well-being
  - Belle Rose Ragins on social well-being
  - Silvia Dorado on financial well-being
- Panel (45 minutes)
  - Angie Passarelli on physical well-being
  - Brianna Caza on psychological well-being
  - Ian Walsh on social well-being
  - Jody Hoffer Gittel on financial well-being
- BREAK (10 minutes)
- Welcome Back Activity (15 minutes)
- Small Table Discussions - 2 rounds (20 minutes each; 40 minutes total)
- Large Group Debrief (20 minutes)
- Closing (5 minutes)