

Exploring Positive Relationships at Work: Building a Theoretical and Research Foundation.

Jane E. Dutton and Belle Rose Ragins, eds. Mahwah, NJ: LEA, 2007. 421 pp. \$45.00, paper.

In the seven years since the publication of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) *American Psychologist* special issue on positive psychology, the fields of psychology and organization science have witnessed a burgeoning interest in developing our understanding of what brings out the best in humans and organizations. Growing out of a book-building conference, this volume clearly adds much to that expanding body of scholarship.

"What makes a life worth living?" is the provocative question that opens this book on positive work relationships. Editors Dutton and Ragins suggest that positive work relationships play an underappreciated yet central role in the answer to that question and, indeed, represent the essence of meaning in people's organizational lives. They characterize positive work relationships as relationships embedded in groups, organizations, and communities that meet people's changing needs. These relationships can be defined in terms of generative processes, relational mechanisms and experiences, and positive outcomes.

In their introductory chapter, Ragins and Dutton set three objectives for the book: (1) to establish positive relationships at work as a new, multilevel domain, (2) to facilitate application of the concept to new and established areas of organization science, and (3) to inspire future research on the topic. The sixteen original chapters that make up the core of the book are organized into three sections that underscore its multilevel focus: individuals and dyads, groups and communities, and organizations and organizing. Each section also includes a commentary chapter that draws out common themes and theoretical underpinnings across the chapters in that section. The volume closes with an integrative concluding chapter by the editors that identifies common themes across all contributions in the book and suggests future research agendas.

The individual and dyads section, as might be expected on a book about relationships, is the most extensive. It comprises seven original chapters that address a breathtaking array of topics, including self-actualization (Roberts), energy (Quinn), body metaphors (Heaphy), mentoring (Ragins and Verbos), diversity and conflict (Davidson and James), trust repair (Pratt and Dirks), and positive organizational justice (Greenberg). The groups and communities section includes chapters that address teams (Ancona and Isaacs), temporary workers (Blatt and Camden), developmental networks (Higgins), neighborhood work communities (McGinn), and the role of positive relationships in fostering organizational attachment (Kahn). The organizations and organizing part of the volume examines how organizations can be effectively designed to promote positive relationships (Baker and Dutton), as well as how leadership and power (Fletcher), culture (Golden-Biddle, GermAnn, Reay, and Procyshen), and familial relationships

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(Glynn and Wrobel) affect positive relationships and the organizations in which they are embedded.

Of particular value are the commentary chapters that serve to integrate the contributions in each section and provide historical and theoretical perspectives on the respective chapters. This is a practice editors of similar volumes would do well to emulate. For example, commenting on the seven chapters in the individual and dyadic section of the volume, Duck underscores the fluidity of relationships and notes that no relationship is wholly positive or negative. Moreover, he observes that evaluations of positivity are profoundly affected by the context in which the relationship is embedded. Thus societal and organizational norms and assumptions will strongly influence how relationships are perceived. Rousseau and Ling, in their commentary chapter in the organizations section, highlight the critical role that resources play in understanding positive relationships at work. They argue that positive relationships not only generate resources but also amplify the potential of those resources and promote their efficient and effective use. Rousseau and Ling also emphasize that organizational sciences have a rich history in positivity and draw linkages between the current positive scholarship movements and the humanistic and socio-emotional work that characterized organizational research in the 1950s and 1960s.

The book is at once an attempt to define a scholarly domain and to explore the theoretical underpinnings of a line of inquiry. As such, it shifts lenses regularly, at one time attempting to circumscribe the conceptual map, at others, broadening the range of theoretical and empirical explorations, incorporating novel approaches to both. Not surprisingly, given the range of contributions, the chapters in the book address such issues and the book's overarching objectives in greater or lesser detail and depth depending on their purpose and their scope. Undoubtedly, this book will be a valuable, essential resource for scholars interested in pursuing this rich line of research, which promises to continue to be at the forefront of organizational scholarship. Taken together, the chapters and the commentaries in this volume demonstrate the pervasiveness of relationships in organizational life and point the way toward theoretical and empirical advances in our understanding of how those relationships contribute to generating and sustaining the best in ourselves and our organizations.

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