Using a Positive Lens to Explore Social Change and Organizations

Building a Theoretical and Research Foundation
The Response: What Does This Book Contribute to the Understanding of Social Change and Organizations?

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We began this book with a belief that social change and organizations are deeply connected, and that a positive lens can be used to unlock new ways of understanding and enabling change processes. Along the way, the chapters portray and unpack this connection by disclosing new lines of sight on prevailing theories, for example, elaborating understanding of factors leading to organizational success and survival through analyzing dual pressures of legitimacy and accountability in charter schools (Beckman & Gatewood, Chapter 18), or by using practice theory in the empirical context of sustainability to propose an alternative view of change agency as a distributed phenomenon (Feldman, Chapter 9). The chapters also unpack the connection by excavating stories and the embedded wisdom that might otherwise not have been told, for example, Sawa Heroes (Branzei, Chapter 2), and by bringing forward important pathways for the analysis and practice of change, for example, alternative models of philanthropy (Meyerson & Wernick, Chapter 5).
As well, along the way, chapters not only affirm but also complicate the notion of positive. In affirming positive, the contributors explicitly detail or assume that tending to the positive does not mean overlooking or ignoring the negative, nor does it mean the absence of conflict or differences of opinion. Indeed, examining social change focuses attention squarely on very negative human conditions of poverty, environmental degradation, differential access to quality education, health care disparities, access to quality treatment, and so on. Rather than being ignored as occurs in society, these negative conditions are squarely faced as the chapter authors examine individual and collective action undertaken to create alternative and more desired scenarios. Additionally, some chapters (Sonenshein, Chapter 3; Riddell et al., Chapter 8; Pratt et al., Chapter 13) explicitly complicate the idea of positive by connecting differences of opinion and conflict with notions of generativity and intergroup harmony. Other chapters complicate the positive by suggesting that positive is not a universal condition in social change efforts. That is, even in change processes oriented to creating desired alternative futures, some actors can be disadvantaged, for example, in developing sustainable coffee production practices (Perez-Aleman, Chapter 10), without explicit efforts to build capability at the local level, farmers and economies would have been disadvantaged. The question of who benefits and who is disadvantaged or even harmed from efforts for desired social change is an important one. Similarly, the chapters also complicate the positive temporally, noting that what is positive at one point in time is not necessarily considered positive at another point. Thus, all of the chapters connect the positive and negative to illuminate new possibilities for human agency and theorizing the connection between social change and organizations.

Although no concluding chapter can fully traverse the terrain visited in the 16 chapters and four commentaries, we end this book by looking across these contributions. In particular, we explore the ways they add value to the field of organization studies through uncovering and enriching the theoretical elements of resources, processes, and outcomes that help to explain how social change is imagined, enacted, and accomplished in and of organizations and organizing efforts. We close with an invitation to you, the reader, to join us in further exploring this meaningful frontier of research that connects organizations and social change.
RESOURCES AND SOCIAL CHANGE: UNCOVERED AND ENRICHED

Resources are part of the currency through which change is accomplished. Some organizational researchers conceptualize resources as forms of wealth or forms of support that have economic, social, or emotional value (e.g., Rousseau & Ling, 2007). Other researchers think of resources as elements that are dynamically produced in the doing of activities (e.g., Feldman, 2004). Either way, resources fuel and enable change, which makes them central to theories of social change. Resources have been an important element in theorizing from a positive perspective on organizations as they help researchers see and theorize how new capabilities and capacities emerge and facilitate change processes (Dutton & Glynn, 2008). In addition, resource creation and resource use are critical elements in capturing the generative dynamics of social change.

The chapters illuminate two sets of insights about resources, social change, and organizations. First, they illuminate new resources and resource flows that differ from resources typically considered by organizational scholars. Second, the chapters embellish and elaborate how more “typical” resources might be central to social change processes and outcomes.

Highlighting the Power of “New” Resources

The book’s chapters underline the importance of human-based resources in fueling and enabling social change processes. These are resources that are ephemeral in the sense of immediate measurability, but substantive in terms of their role in enabling and fueling social change at the individual and collective levels.

For example, one resource mentioned in many of the chapters is energy, or the sense of vitality or effervescence of an individual or group. A positive lens spotlights the role of energy as a critical resource for individual and collective activities (Spreitzer, Lam, & Quinn, 2011). When mentioned in the context of social change, one appreciates the role that various forms of this resource play in helping collectives stay engaged and dedicated to an alternative way of living (Rimac et al., Chapter 4), sustaining interest in making a difference with staff treating children struggling with mental health (Wells, Chapter 14), or in maintaining
loan officers’ dedication in working solutions with microfinance cli-
ents (Canales, Chapter 20). In all of these cases, energy is theorized and
treated as a resource that importantly fuels the change process, which
is particularly critical when change agents are confronting challenging
and often depleting issues.

Hope is both an individual and collective resource that enables change.
Several of the book’s authors theorize hope as pivotal to creating and
sustaining social change. Branzei (Chapter 2) elaborates how hope is
produced and reproduced through three core relational processes that
enable change agents to initiate and accelerate change. Golden-Biddle
and Correia (Chapter 12) theorize how hope fosters change momentum
that spreads and sustains change by loosening the hold on prior expec-
tations, opening up possibilities, and cultivating trust. Together these
chapters paint hope as a vital and dynamic resource that can be actively
cultivated through both individual and collective actions. Both chapters
build on the core idea of hope as relational accomplishment (Carlsen,
Hagen, & Mortensen, 2011; Ludema, Wilmot, & Srivastva, 1997) and
showcase the role of leaders in fostering hope that fuels action in dire
and challenging situations.

Beyond energy and hope, the chapters point to personal worth
(Rimac et al., Chapter 4) and identity security (Pratt et al., Chapter 13)
as examples of states that alter the capacities of individuals or groups to
think, feel, or behave in ways that enable openings for new practices and
ways of thinking to emerge and movement toward change to occur. A
positive lens allows glimpses into individual and collective states that take
on new significance as enablers of change. At the same time that these
resources fuel the change process, they are conditions that are valuable in
and of themselves. Thus, expanding consideration of resources important
to social change processes widens appreciation of psychological and social
states that are beneficial human goods that have value independent of the
outcomes that they produce.

**Enriching Understanding of Resources Known to Be Important to Social Change**

The chapters are replete with insights about resources that organiz-
ational scholars have identified as critical to social change. The chap-
ters add nuance to these previous accounts by illuminating additional
pathways by which these resources alter change processes and change outcomes. For example, several chapters affirm the importance of positive relationships as critical to change outcomes and processes. Positive relationships manifest themselves in various forms including high levels of intergroup trust, which, in the case of the Great Bear Rainforest (Riddell et al., Chapter 8), created a platform for developing innovative solutions around forest preservation. In Canales account (Chapter 20), trust was the resource that facilitated loan officers’ customization of solutions for microcredit clients who were having a tough time meeting their obligations. In these cases, positive relationships functioned as resources that actors in the change process drew from in creating flexible and creative solutions on the ground, as part of the social change process.

Legitimacy, collective efficacy, and positive emotions are additional resources identified in various chapters as states that facilitate change by building strength and momentum and breaking down barriers that could arise in the change process. A positive lens helps us see how these resources function in social processes to build capability and broaden options that make change more achievable and thus more likely. So, for example, Sonenshein’s (Chapter 3) description of issue selling illustrates how change agents can cultivate legitimacy of an issue’s meaning by how they frame the content of an issue. His chapter reminds us that small moves and contextually appropriate actions can create resources that ease the change process. The Pratt et al. account (Chapter 13) of physician–administrator conflicts reminds us that not all positive emotions are unequivocally helpful in change processes as positive emotions can at times promote exclusion dynamics that retard change. Pratt and his coauthors identify what they call satisfied positivity, which contains elements of creative abrasion. These authors develop an argument for why this form of positivity is more facilitative of change in the context they were studying. Further, several of the chapters highlight how resources created in one phase of the change process can fuel and resource generation in another. Howard-Grenville (Chapter 11) notes in her commentary that this resourcing process fits an image of “unfolding and unpredictable emergence rather than replication.” Thus, understanding resource dynamics in change processes—how they are created and what difference they make—is a critical contribution of application of a positive lens.
PROCESSES AND SOCIAL CHANGE: UNCOVERED AND ENRICHED

The chapters in the book also add to what we know about processes and social change. Organizational researchers have created a large body of work that examines organizational change (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron, 2001; Weick & Quinn, 1999). The process of change, central to effective implementation, has been conceptualized in two primary ways. Some organizational researchers conceive the change process longitudinally as unfolding over time through a series of steps or phases, and as requiring a significant break from the past (Lewin, 1947; Swidler, 1986). Other researchers think about change processually (Langley, 1999): change as itself comprised of processes that are temporally constituted and emergent (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Process has also been an important theorizing element from a positive perspective on change in organizations, as researchers disclose generative dynamics of organizing and theorize how they lead to human flourishing and capability development (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011; Dutton & Glynn, 2008).

Yet, in focusing on the phenomenon of social change, the chapters in this book do not only detail process. They also show how people’s desires, fears, and hopes for a better world inspire the creation of alternative possibilities for the common good. It is this grounding in desired future potential impact, regardless of problem domain and level of analysis, which enables the chapters to illuminate two sets of insights about processes of social change and organization. First, they affirm attention on human agency in social change, elaborating in particular the projective element (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) and its significance in accomplishing social change. Second, they elaborate and extend understanding of generative dynamics in change.

Enriching Understanding of the Projective Element of Human Agency in Social Change

The book’s chapters emphasize the significance of human agency, by which we mean, following Emirbayer & Mische (1998, p. 962), a “temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past ... but
also oriented to the future and toward the present.” Given the emphasis on social change, many of the chapters highlight the future-oriented temporal dimension of human agency referred to as “a projective capacity to imagine alternative possibilities” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 962) as a central process for generating and enabling social change. In particular, the commentary chapter by Reay (Chapter 16) highlights that paying attention to future alternative possibilities, instead of becoming distracted by barriers, unlocks capacities and processes that facilitate social change.

Some chapters disclose processes that enable consideration of future-oriented possibilities for social change at the individual and collective levels. Chapter 9 by Feldman shows how artifacts can act as important mediators of individual change agency by opening up individuals’ attunement to, and exploration of, new possibilities for practicing sustainability. At a more macro-level, Chapter 7 by Hoffman et al. highlights how hybrid forms of organizations use their missions and views of their role in society in ways that call forth positive meaning that opens new possibilities for thinking about goals, engaging in practices, and partnering with others.

Other chapters disclose the deeply relational dimension of “experimental enactments” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 988), defined as “alternative courses of action…tentatively enacted in response to currently emerging situations.” Such experiments help to test and revise desired future scenarios enabling the accomplishment of social change. Branezi (Chapter 2) identifies three relational forms of agency (referencing, relating, and rotating) that infuse hope in emerging change situations people regard as hopeless. Christensen (Chapter 19) details the enactment of a three-way partnership of American and Kenyan universities and the founder of a microfinance organization, Jamii Bora, “to co-create something better than any party could create alone.” Aware of their limits as experts, U.S. members sought “in general, to do things on their terms,” a stance that involved simple everyday things like playing games and walking slowly with the older Jamii Bora members. In Chapter 12 by Golden-Biddle and Correia, trialing the new model of care enabled physicians to experience working in a “TRIO” with different clinical professions.

At a more macro level, these enactments are expressed through the creation of new associations by local coffee producers and government (Perez-Aleman, Chapter 10) in response to globally adopted standards for improving ecological sustainability; of two types of nontraditional philanthropic foundations (Meyerson & Wernick, Chapter 5) that, instead of
funding large existing organizations, focus on funding local grassroots efforts or using venture capital to quickly scale start up efforts; and of the charter school movement (Beckman & Gatewood, Chapter 18), founded to create access to quality education for children in high poverty, urban communities. Finally, still other chapters disclose how these enactments can often be enabled by quite small moves, as in loan officers (Canales, Chapter 20) who bend rules to address client needs in response to emerging situations in their lives; or in supervisors who, after training about work-family issues (Leana & Kossek, Chapter 17), inquire about people’s families and how these inquiries led to positive outcomes for low income workers.

**Highlighting a Broader Repertoire of Generative Dynamics for Social Change**

The chapters in this book are chock-full of generative dynamics, defined by organizational researchers as “life-building, capability-enhancing, capacity-creating dynamics in and of organizations that can explain human flourishing and the cultivation of strengths across levels of analysis” (Dutton & Glynn, 2008, p. 694). Generative dynamics are particularly important for understanding how challenging change is accomplished over time, as they highlight how elements in the change process are transformed in ways that increase or build capability or capacity.

Some chapters elaborate understanding of generative dynamics by situating accounts of personal development within collective projects for a common good. As a result, these chapters show how generative dynamics can transform individuals and, as discussed further in the outcomes section, how that transformation can positively alter the change process. For example, in Chapter 14 by Wells a “system of care paradigm” becomes the foundation for shifting the organization’s control over care to the children and their caregivers. This loosening of control along with attention on strengths rather than deficits of the children enables managers to amplify support for frontline clinicians to take loving action toward the children. In Chapter 8 by Riddell et al., individual members of the ENGOs encountered situations “calling forth their own transformation” that enabled them to alter contentious relationship dynamics and enlist others “to collaboration toward a shared vision.” Chapter 15 by Myers and Wooten describes a training session for health nurses and midwives about engaging patients as partners in co-creating health. In the session, practitioners
themselves engage discovery learning while also being taught to facilitate a “discovery learning” group process that cultivates a safe space for patients to share problems.

Other chapters point to a new form of generative dynamic by highlighting the tensions that surface in the social change process, for example between economic and social goals, stakeholders’ differing visions for the future, or hypothesized solutions. This form of generative dynamic complicates positivity by regarding tension as not only positive but generative because it holds the potential for opening up new possibilities. Tensions are not to be resolved, but rather the differences held so that they may generate and open up consideration of alternative actions and solutions for going forward (Howard-Grenville, Chapter 11). The generativity of tension emerges in holding rather than eliminating differences. For example, Sonenshein (Chapter 3) describes a process of “generative dialoguing,” which is discourse about a social issue that widens and enriches conversation by enabling the airing of “productive differences” that can sustain debate. Similarly, two other chapters highlight the generativity of tension in retaining differing or oppositional views and forces for change. Pratt et al. (Chapter 13) use the idea “creative abrasion” to describe the importance of holding the tension in identities between physicians and administrators as a way to loosen up intractable identity conflicts. Rather than eliminating difference, they emphasize the need to build upon and retain differences “in the service of a greater whole.” Riddell et al. (Chapter 8) use the idea of creative destruction to describe a “release” in the standstill among opposing views of stakeholders trying to reach a solution on the Great Bear Rainforest and the subsequent opening up of new possibilities for interacting. In this process, the ENGO leaders come to see their opponents differently.

Finally, some chapters disclose a form of generative dynamic that is other-focused, joining recent literature calling attention to other-focused psychological processes grounded in a desire to benefit others. For example, prosocial sensemaking (Grant, Dutton, & Russo, 2008, p. 903) reveals how employees interpret their own and their company’s actions and identities in “more caring terms.” Similarly, “perspective-taking” is an other-focused psychological process that, in enabling prosocial motivation, strengthens the association between intrinsic motivation and creativity (Grant & Berry, 2011). Other-focused social processes are similar to other-focused psychological processes in their basis in a desire to benefit others, but differ in their emphasis and explicit attention on organizing
collective efforts. In our chapters, examples of other-focused social processes include the four deliberate processes constituting the engagement process that kept American students and faculty focused on “the men and women in Jamii Bora rather than our peers or a class grade” (Christensen, Chapter 19), and the “tollgate” mechanism in a new model of inpatient care (Golden-Biddle & Correia, Chapter 12) that keeps attention focused on the patient and on getting the patient well rather than organizational or clinician convenience.

In sum, the chapters raise new possibilities for exploring the underlying motives and core processes that inform, shape, and enable efforts to envision and create social change. The application of a positive lens focuses researchers on what in the process builds capacity and capability and it names these dynamics generative. The next section addresses how the lens opens up considerations around the outcomes associated with social change.

OUTCOMES AND SOCIAL CHANGE: UNCOVERED AND ENRICHED

Social change efforts are often undertaken with a specific, desired outcome in mind. For instance, those involved in the effort may seek to improve how they serve a deserving client base or to protect a particular environmental resource. However, the chapters in this book remind us that the positive effects of change efforts are not limited to single, narrow outcomes that are measurable at particular “endpoints.” Instead, a host of beneficial outcomes flow from social change processes.

The authors of the four part commentaries (Steckler & Bartunek, Chapter 6; Howard-Grenville, Chapter 11; Reay, Chapter 16; Pearce, Chapter 21) all point to the broad scope of possible outcomes that may result from social change efforts. Commentators Steckler and Bartunek explain that such efforts often produce numerous beneficial effects because they create “ripples beyond specific target beneficiaries to strengthen and improve communities in proximity and society at large, both in the ‘now’ and into the future.” This eloquent statement draws attention to two categories of positive effects beyond the focal outcome fueling the change effort. First, effects may be seen at multiple levels: society, the organization,
and the individual. Second, although they may be less overt, strengths—at the level of the individual as well as the collective—may emerge and live on beyond the specific and intended change.

**Multilevel Effects: Positive Outcomes for Society, the Organization, and the Individual**

Looking across the parts of the book, there is ample evidence that social change efforts often produce positive effects at three levels: society, the organization, and the individuals engaged in the change effort.

**Societal Level**

First, social change efforts are often directed toward large-scale outcomes that represent amelioration of key social problems in areas such as poverty, the environment, and health care delivery. The chapters in the book broaden our thinking about these outcomes by providing new insights into the range and magnitude of positive societal outcomes that are possible, even in domains where problems have been characterized as intractable. Examples of large-scale positive effects span the four primary parts of the book. In the *Change Agency*, Part II, we see positive outcomes in the form of reduced workplace discrimination or improved coordination for disaster relief efforts (Sonenshein, Chapter 3), greater diversity in philanthropic funding of social change initiatives (Meyerson & Wernick, Chapter 5), and a sense of inclusion and dignity for members of Sekem (Rimac et al., Chapter 4). In the *Environment and Sustainability*, Part III, strides are made in terms of increasing the availability of environmentally friendly products (Hoffman et al., Chapter 7), negotiating solutions to crucial issues of conservation (Riddell et al., Chapter 8), and shifting production practices to promote ecological sustainability (Perez-Aleman, Chapter 10). In the *Health Care*, Part IV, care is improved for hospital patients (Golden-Biddle & Correia, Chapter 12), children with mental health challenges (Wells, Chapter 14), and African-American women and their babies (Myers & Wooten, Chapter 15). Finally, in the *Poverty and Low-Wage Work*, Part V, progress is made in creating better working conditions for the poor (Leana & Kossek, Chapter 17), improving access to quality education (Beckman & Gatewood, Chapter 18), and alleviating poverty in Kenya and Mexico (Christensen, Chapter 19; Canales, Chapter 20).
The chapters in this book help us notice and identify less sweeping societal-level effects as well. These more micro outcomes, which seem to flow from the everyday "tweaking" of commitments and actions of those engaged in the change process, are powerful in that they offer "along the way" benefits as well as potentially adding up over time to create more measurable, meaningful change outcomes, such as those mentioned earlier. For example, in Chapter 14, Wells explains how single encounters between a mental health worker and child can become infused with loving actions, thus helping incrementally to improve children's mental health overall. Similarly, in Chapter 15, Myers and Wooten discuss how the co-creation of health approaches developed by Focus on Pregnancy and County Health Coalition led to better maternal and child health.

Organizational Level

There may be positive effects for the organization's internal "workings" (e.g., learning processes may become more sustainable, leaders may become more attuned to the importance of human agency) and/or external interactions (e.g., stronger relationships with external partners and customers). For example, hybrid organizations develop deep, mutually beneficial ties with their consumers because of their shared social values (Hoffman et al., Chapter 7), hospital physicians and administrators find new paths to collaboration and greater intergroup harmony (Pratt et al., Chapter 13), and front line mental health workers become not only more effective but also able to be more loving in delivering care (Wells, Chapter 14). In addition, Mexican microfinance organizations are better able to navigate inherent contradictions through the positive deviance in certain loan officers' enactment of organizational rules (Canales, Chapter 20).

Individual Level

Individuals involved in the change process also experience a range of positive outcomes. For example, in Chapter 3 by Sonenshein, a woman receives several major promotions because of her efforts to provide equal employment opportunities for women and minorities. In Chapter 10 (Perez-Aleman), the coffee industry's shift to more sustainable production practices leads to the inclusion rather than exclusion of poor coffee producers in learning and using more environmentally friendly growing
practices. Similarly, in Chapter 13 (Pratt et al.), physicians and health care administrators, who often clash over resources and identity, come to see each other as well as themselves in new ways. Other positive outcomes at the individual level include an improved work environment and opportunity to undertake more meaningful work for health care employees at ThedaCare (Golden-Biddle & Correia, Chapter 12), increased engagement for mental health front line staff (Wells, Chapter 14), and greater job satisfaction and expression of prosocial motivation for business school faculty (Christensen, Chapter 19).

**Enduring, Strength-Based Outcomes**

Looking across the chapters in this book, we also noticed the humanity evidenced during the change processes. The stories in these chapters are not only about hope; in their reading they inspire hope that social change benefiting the common good can be accomplished. In paying closer attention to these stories, we began to see change as itself bolstering human strengths, commonly defined as good or beneficial qualities of a person. In psychology, Peterson and Seligman (2004) have developed a “VIA” classification of six character strengths that emerge with consistency across a wide range of philosophical and religious discussions. In addition to changes occurring in individual expressions of these strengths, we saw glimpses in the chapters of changes in collective strengths as well.

In some of the chapters, these strengths were called forth explicitly and named, while in others they were quietly implicit. Regardless of whether they were trumpeted or whispered, three particular strengths embedded in the chapter stories caught our attention: humility, compassion, and courage. Such strengths are particularly significant in that they are enduring—that is, they “last” beyond the so-called “end” of a specific change process. The existence of these strengths reminds us that change efforts rarely have a fixed endpoint, but rather involve an ongoing—and sometimes cyclical—process.

**Humility**

This strength, which “entails a deeply held belief of shared human limits and worth that shapes how individuals view themselves (objectively), others (appreciatively) and new information (openly)” (Owens, Rowatt, &
Wilkins, 2011, p. 262), is bolstered in change as when individuals or collectives embrace the possibility of being wrong and the need to rely on others' wisdom. In some instances in the chapters, humility was an intentionally sought outcome. For example, Christensen (Chapter 19) explains how the faculty and students from the U.S. business school cultivated collective humility. From the outset, they acknowledged they would make mistakes and underscored the need to learn from their local Kenyan partners by living and interacting with them. The students amplified the development of individual humility in affording each other “room” to enact humility in his/her own way.

In other chapters, the development of humility was not an intentional goal but rather a beneficial byproduct of the change process. Based on their experiences over the course of multiple interventions, the Sawa Heroes (Branzei, Chapter 2) came to realize they needed help from local partners to effect change, thus demonstrating their individual humility. In Chapter 7 (Hoffman et al.), Bena Burdá became a successful leader and majority-owner of Maggie’s Organics, but remained personally humble: she knew she had to maintain “lasting friendships with employees” and “supplier partnerships based on interpersonal connections” because she could not achieve her social mission alone. Finally, in Chapter 13 (Pratt et al.), the hospital physicians and administrators gained humility as a group as they worked through the change process. As they began to identify not just with their separate professional groups but also with an inclusive, subordinate group, they accepted that, despite differences of opinion, each group had something worthwhile to contribute to solving common problems.

Compassion

This strength centrally involves the noticing, feeling, and responding to others’ suffering (Lilius, Kanov, Dutton, Worline, & Maitlis, 2011). In addition to the individual-level expression, it is the “reliable capacity of members of a collective to notice, feel, and respond to suffering” (Lilius, Worline, Dutton, Kanov, & Maitlis, 2011, p. 874). In the contributions to this book, the augmenting of compassion as strength results from seeking to care more effectively or fully for deserving populations.

Given that compassion emerges often most vividly in settings where the focus is on delivering care to others, it is not surprising that the most compelling instances of compassion emerge in Health Care, Part IV of the
book. Indeed, we see strong evidence of compassion as a reliable and lasting strength in three of the healthcare chapters. In Chapter 15 (Myers & Wooten), two agencies serving pregnant African-American women developed care approaches that went beyond addressing issues of health, thus encouraging providers to cultivate and express compassion in their relationships with patients. Focus on Pregnancy’s model emphasized the need to help with psychosocial as well as medical needs, while County Health Coalition’s directed attention toward issues related to racial disparity. In both organizations, caring for patients shifted from transactional “visits” to compassionate “healing relationships.” Similarly, by making the patient more central to effective health care delivery, the ThedaCare collaborative care model (Golden-Biddle & Correia, Chapter 12) encouraged and bolstered collective compassion, as providers shifted to view each patient as a human with unique care needs, rather than as a medical condition. Finally, in Chapter 14 (Wells), managers enabled front line staff to develop and express collective compassion, in the form of “loving actions,” for mentally ill children.

**Courage**

The strength-based outcome of courage, or “the ability to do something that frightens one” (Oxford Dictionaries Online, 2011), is portrayed in several chapters. Courage has been classified by psychologists (Park & Peterson, 2003, p. 35; Peterson & Seligman, 2004) as a character strength; it is defined as “emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal.” When scholars consider courageous individual action in the context of organizations, they note that while action on the one hand is constrained by organizational rules and form, it at the same time remains possible for individuals to express “principled action that violates the status quo” (Worline & Quinn, 2003).

While collective courageous action is possible, in the chapters of this book, courage is depicted as an individual strength bolstered in change processes. Issue sellers (Sonenshein, Chapter 3) are good examples of why courage may result from involvement in change. Individuals who engage in issue selling are often motivated by passion, but this motivation may not be enough to persevere in the face of adversity and initial failures. In order to push forward, past ineffective attempts, issue sellers must build deep stores of courage. For instance, one issue seller’s first attempt to
secure domestic partnership benefits for gay and lesbian employees at HP was a failure because of her tactics. However, rather than accepting defeat, she drew on her courage to try again, this time with a different (and more successful) approach.

Another example of courage resulting from social change lies in Chapter 20 (Canales). The “Spirit of the Law” loan officers at the microfinance organization in Mexico are likely to rely on courage more than their “Letter of the Law” counterparts because, by bending the rules of their employer, they expose themselves to greater risk in case of defaulted loans. Even though their flexible approach enables them in many situations to be better at their jobs, they are likely to be aware that their less orthodox approach will come under scrutiny should something go awry. Their courage likely develops iteratively: each time they apply discretion with successful results, they add to their reserve of courage for future discretionary actions.

Additional Strengths

Although we elaborated only three strength-based outcomes—those we saw as appearing consistently throughout this book—there are hints in several chapters of other strengths that need further exploration in future research. For instance, in Chapter 4, Sekem’s daily circle practice leads to a strength centered on inclusivity. In this chapter, the participation of Sekem’s members in the daily circle practice seems to spur the development of a collective participatory strength that “trickles down” to the individual level as well. Similarly, in Chapter 7 (Hoffman et al.), there appears to be a symbiotic, hybrid organization-customer strength that bears additional elaboration. We see the positive lens as inviting further inquiry into how the accomplishment of social change relies on and builds human strengths that help us explain how a social change process unfolds and how it leaves residues that live on beyond the immediate change effort.

CONCLUSION

The field of organization studies is starting to pay more attention to the connection between organizations and social change. It is represented
in the various streams of research described in the introduction. It also is represented in the vision of the Academy of Management (n.d.): “We inspire and enable a better world through our scholarship and teaching about management and organizations.”

As we move forward, we are enthused and inspired by the contributions in this book made by applying a positive lens in the study of social change and organizations. The stories told, themes revealed, and theories explicated herein at once reveal explanation and dare us to imagine how organizations might better serve the common good. Importantly, the chapters, in the detailing of resources, processes, and outcomes associated with social change, help enrich and uncover new ways of understanding and enabling change processes. We end by inviting you to join in the growing and deepening inquiry into the connection between organizations and social change, and the use of a positive lens to open up new ways of thinking and theorizing that have been overlooked. Just imagine the difference our collective inquiries could make for our field’s work and our world.

REFERENCES


