ABSTRACT

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Seeing Organizations Differently: Three Lenses on Compassion

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L E A D I N G   I N   T H O U G H T   A N D   A C T I O N

One of the unspoken realities of life in organizations is that people suffer. Someone who has just been told that she has breast cancer confronts a jolt to her confidence and her sense of mortality that play out at work as well as in other spheres of her life. Someone who is dealing with dashed hopes of promotion or is feeling marginalized at work may experience sadness and deflation. Someone who is dealing with the breakdown of a personal relationship, or is struggling with difficult financial issues, or is working overtime to care for an aging parent may feel a loss of control and a growing sense of hopelessness that affects his work, despite the expectation in many organizations that such emotions be checked at the door. People with these burdens carry them wherever they go, regardless of expectations that suffering should not affect work. While organizational rules and policies can sometimes lessen or alleviate pain, compassion can help to make a heavy burden of suffering more bearable. This chapter is founded on the assumption that compassion is a healing force that is indispensable in organizations.

The desire to see organizations as purely rational and calculated systems is not only a managerial one, but also one that has a long history in organizational studies (see Mastenbroek, 2000; Taylor, 1911). For this reason, a chapter on compassion in organizations may seem somehow out of place in a handbook for organizational scholars. Many theorists have challenged the desire to simplify workplaces, to dilute their emotional and relational qualities, and to quantify the terms of organizational life in tidy units (see e.g. Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Dutton, 2003; Fineman, 1996, 2000; Fletcher, 1999; Frost, 2003; Rafaeli & Worline, 2001; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). This chapter is a response to those challenges. The value of seeing compassion in organizations is that it brings the organic, the moving and heartfelt, the emotional, and the relational elements of life into sharp relief. A chapter on compassion shows us that we

cannot fully see organizations until we allow people to speak the unspoken reality of suffering and reveal the human response to suffering that is compassion.

Feeding the wolf of compassion

> *He said to them, "A fight is going on inside me … it is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One wolf represents fear, anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other wolf stands for joy, peace, love, hope, sharing, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, friendship, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you, and inside every other person, too." They thought about it for a minute and then one child asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?" The old Cherokee simply replied… "The one you feed."*
> *-- Cherokee Proverb (www.snowowl.com)*

The two wolves in this old Cherokee proverb can also be found fighting it out in organization studies. The first we regard as the wolf of ego, characterized by self-interest and negativity; the second as the wolf of compassion, characterized by humanity and virtue. While both wolves get fed in practice, organizational scholars spend a disproportionate amount of time attending to the wolf of ego in their theories and research. Historically, scholarship demonstrates a strong bias, apparent in psychological and organizational research, toward understanding negative or detrimental conditions rather than positive or virtuous ones (Cameron & Caza, 2004; Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The emphasis on scientific management and what has become known as Taylorism (Taylor, 1911) provided a strong foundation for stripping away a focus on humanity in the workplace, a tendency that has continued with organizational scholars demonstrating greater concern for society's economic ends rather than its social ones (Walsh, Weber & Margolis, 2003). Organizational research has thus tended to feed the wolf of ego at the expense of the wolf of compassion.

Because of the field's emphasis on scientific management and economic outcomes, emotion was long construed as illegitimate in organizational research (Fineman, 1993; 2000). However, as Fineman (2003) observes, work organizations are sites of pain, and the ignorance

about emotional aspects of organizing is costly. According to the Grief Recovery Institute, the hidden cost of workplace grief exceeds $75 million per year (www.grief-recovery.com). Many scholars have challenged our ignorance about the emotion at work. For example, the last decade has seen a growing interest in the emotional toll of change (Kotter, 2002), control mechanisms (Fineman & Sturdy, 1999), decision making (Maitlis & Ozceilk, 2004), and downsizing (Cameron, 1998; Cameron, Freeman, & Mishra, 1993). This increasing attention to emotional pain in organizations is also evident in research and commentary on workplace incivility (e.g., Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001), abusive bosses (Tepper, 2000), corrosive politics (e.g., Williams & Dutton, 1999) and work-family conflict (Rice, Frone & McFarlin, 1992). We now have an increasingly clear picture of how various sources of pain contribute to a toxic workplace, one in which employees feel their confidence weakened, their self-esteem undermined, and their hope diminished or destroyed (Frost 2003). In the meantime, the wolf of compassion grows ever hungrier.

Two harbingers of change in the field offer hope. Both an increased concern with the public goods created by organizations, and a focus on images of organizations that are more organic than mechanistic suggest that there are organizational research perspectives compatible with feeding the wolf of compassion. For example, researchers have recently issued a renewed call to consider organizations as contexts that produce outcomes important to society and the public good, apart from economic concerns (Walsh, Weber, & Margolis, 2003). This call hearkens back to the roots of the humanistic response to Taylor's ideas (e.g. Herzberg, 1966; McGregor, 1960; Mayo, 1946). It also reminds us of management scholars such as Follet (1918), who re-visioned the study of organizations as systems that either promoted or depleted the public good. Similarly in organizational psychology, Likert (1967) and Katz and Kahn (1978) urged

scholars to develop an understanding of organizations as systems with enormous impact on members' psychological health and thriving. At the same time, the Tavistock school (e.g. Whitehead, 1938) showed that human responses to workplace phenomena are not necessarily predictable with economic models, validating that human psychology is essential in understanding basic organizational processes. More recently, researchers have suggested that organizations can be studied as care-giving systems (Kahn, 1993), sources of social support (House, 1981), and sources of healing and health (Dutton, Lilius, & Kanov, 2003; Frost, 2003). These works, in honoring the humane and virtuous aspects of organizational life, open the door for the perspective that we offer in this chapter, a perspective intended to feed the wolf of compassion.

In this chapter, we first discuss the definitional issues that surround the idea of compassion. We then situate compassion at the crossroads of three different and independent theoretical perspectives or lenses—interpersonal work, narrative, and organizing—as a way of offering three distinctive viewpoints from which to see the phenomenon of compassion. By invoking the notion of "lenses," we mean to suggest that scholars may see compassion differently depending upon the theoretical tradition and empirical conversation from which they approach the topic (Allison, 1971; Morgan, 1997). Each of the lenses offers a view of compassion that is unique, and each is situated in a broader, ongoing perspective within organization studies. We conclude the chapter by looking across these three lenses to see how the study of compassion elaborates and enriches our view of life in organizations. Ultimately, focusing on the human response to suffering in organizations enables scholars' understanding of the proactive, creative, and generative potential that lies unstudied in organizations and that is a wellspring of nourishment for the wolf of compassion.

<u>Defining compassion</u>

While attention to compassion in organizations is relatively recent (e.g. Frost, 1999),

discussions of the concept span both time and discipline. Meditations on compassion are found

in conversations across religion, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and medicine dating back

two thousand years. In building a working definition of compassion, we provide a brief overview

of the intellectual history of the idea. Central to this history is the role of compassion in religious

ideology and theology. Despite their fundamental philosophical differences, all of the great

world religions have compassion as their overarching ideal (Armstrong, 1994). For example, the

Biblical tradition teaches compassion as "a duty to divine law, as a response to divine love, and a

sign of commitment to the Judeo-Christian ethic" (Wuthnow, 1991, p. 50), and mandates

humanity to emulate God in his attribute of compassion (Sears, 1998). Islam is based in the same

emulation of compassion between God and humanity, with the Prophet declaring in the Qu'ran,

"O people, be compassionate to others so that you may be granted compassion by God."

Compassion has also been equated with humanity across traditions, from Buddhist philosophy

that considers the basic nature of human beings to be compassionate (e.g. Dalai Lama, 1995) to

the Christian perspective on compassion as "full immersion in the condition of being human"

(Nouwen, McNeill, & Morrison, 1983, p. 4). Gupta (2000) suggests an additional similarity with

Hindu philosophy, which teaches that everything in the world is God, and therefore that we are

all the same and that should extend ourselves to help others.

Early philosophical discussions of compassion through to more contemporary accounts

demonstrate a similar consistency. Aristotle saw compassion as an emotion directed at another's

misfortune or suffering, and described three elements necessary for the experience: one must see

the suffering of another as serious; one must believe that the suffering is not deserved; and one

must acknowledge that he or she has vulnerabilities similar to those of the sufferer (Aristotle, 1939). The same elements are found in the work of later philosophers (e.g., Rousseau, 1979; Schopenhauer, 1995; Smith, 1976) and in contemporary moral philosophy (Blum, 1980; Harrington, 2002; Mead, 1962; Nussbaum, 1996, 2001; Post, 2003; Reich, 1989; Solomon, 1998; Wuthnow, 1991). Across time, compassion has been framed both as innate (Himmelfarb, 2001; Smith, 1976; Wuthnow, 1991) and as contributing to the well-being of communities and individuals (Blum, 1980; Nussbaum, 2001; Post, 2003; Rousseau, 1979; Wuthnow, 1991).

Contemporary work in social science offers further insight into the nature of compassion, and builds on theology and philosophy in demonstrating that compassion is an innate human instinct (Keltner, 2004). First, investigating the biological basis of compassion, neuroscientists suggest a link between feelings of compassion and activity in particular regions of the brain (Davidson, 2002, 2003; Nitschke, 2001) that are also activated when people contemplate harm to others (Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001). Other biopsychological findings indicate that helping others triggers brain activity in portions of the brain also activated by the experience of pleasure (Rilling et al., 2002). Taken together, this research suggests that the brain may be adapted to respond to the suffering of others, thus supporting the religious and philosophical claims for compassion as innate. Second, social psychologists (Batson, 1991; Davis, 1983) and sociologists (Clark, 1997; Mead, 1962; Nussbaum, 2001; Shott, 1979) have expanded on Aristotle's third requirement for compassion—seeing oneself as similarly vulnerable to the sufferer—in ways that have clarified the construct. For instance, sociologists identify empathy as an important element of compassion and regard empathy as a product not only of perceiving another person as being in need, but also of adopting the other's perspective (Clark, 1997; Nussbaum, 2001). Social psychologists provide empirical evidence of a link

between felt empathy and the likelihood of engaging in helping behavior (Batson, 1991; Davis, 1983).

Finally, interest in compassion as a moral imperative appears in the medical (e.g., Barber, 1976; Brody, 1992; Cassell, 2002; Dougherty & Purtillo, 1995) and nursing literatures (Benner, Tanner, & Chesla, 1996; von Deitze & Orb, 2000). Here, compassion is seen as an essential component of patient care that is "directly related to the recognition and treatment of patient suffering" (Cassell, 2002, p. 442). Medical scholars suggest that compassion enables physicians to fulfill their central duties to their patients (to put the patient's interests first, to deliver proper care, and to maintain confidentiality) (Dougherty & Purtillo, 1995), and brings medical practitioners closer to their patients to achieve a deeper level of healing (Benner et al., 1996; Brody, 1992; von Dietze & Orb, 2000).

In our working definition of compassion, we pull from each of these disciplines. Drawing from Clark's (1997) discussion of sympathy as a three part process, we identify compassion as comprised of three interrelated elements: noticing another's suffering, feeling empathy for the other's pain, and responding to the suffering in some way. *Noticing* involves a process of becoming aware of another's emotional state, and typically requires being open and attentive to emotional cues and to what is happening in one's context (Frost, 2003). *Feeling* for the other's pain involves empathic concern (Batson, 1994; Davis, 1983) or "taking the attitude" of the other person (Mead, 1962, p. 366; Shott, 1979). In this way, compassion resembles empathy (Batson, 1994; Davis, 1983), but goes beyond this to involve a response to suffering. *Responding* indicates action in which one attempts to alleviate or overcome the other's condition in some way (Nussbaum, 2001; Reich, 1989; von Dietz & Orb, 2000). Compassion defined in this manner, as a three-part human experience, does not require a successful outcome. The necessary

link is between one's noticing of suffering, feelings of concern, and attempts to help alleviate that suffering.

THREE WAYS OF SEEING COMPASSION IN ORGANIZATIONS

We have introduced compassion as a subject in organizational studies by situating it within important historical traditions and by linking it to current scholarly research interests. Next, we offer three distinct theoretical lenses through which to view compassion. These lenses are tied to three well-established, independent perspectives on organizations and each identifies a different research agenda. Seeing compassion as a topic of research from each of these three perspectives provides a wide vista of possibilities for the study of compassion. Together, all three lenses help us see how organizational research may feed the wolf of compassion.

The three lenses we bring to compassion are: 1) interpersonal work; 2) narrative; and 3) organizing. In the discussion of each lens, we first highlight important defining features of the lens that anchor compassion in the theoretical perspective. After discussing compassion through the particular lens, we examine the core insights it offers, opening up different ways of seeing individual, unit, and organizational functioning. Finally, we offer new and interesting research questions evoked by each lens. Table 1 presents a comparative summary of the three lenses. While very different from one another, each of these lenses offers an appreciative perspective, highlighting what is positive and generative in compassion as it occurs in organizations. We acknowledge, however, that there are other, potentially darker sides to compassion as it relates to concepts such as power and gender, which we examine later in the paper.

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Lens 1: Interpersonal work

Interpersonal work is the work that happens in the space between two people (Josselson, 1992). While such work has often been "disappeared" in organizations (Fletcher, 1998), this type of skill in crafting connections and managing the relational space between people is increasingly recognized as essential to the core work of occupations such as nursing (Benner et al., 1986), social work and health care (Kahn, 1993; von Deitze & Orb, 2000), teaching occupations (Noddings, 1984), and in work organizations more generally (Fletcher, 1998; Jacques, 1993). The activity that we term "interpersonal work" is the effortful handling of interpersonal interactions. The success or failure of interpersonal work is a product of the joint qualities and behaviors of the people involved in a work interaction and is an activity that consumes both cognitive effort and emotional energy (Miller & Stiver, 1997). We assume that interpersonal work is productive in the sense of creating consequences for the individuals engaged in it. For example, the skilled work of a toxin handler who helps a colleague who has been berated by a boss is a form of interpersonal work that can help that colleague carry on and is productive in that it allows both of them to complete their work (Frost, 2003).

Interpersonal work often involves some kind of helping behavior, and a variety of forms of everyday interpersonal work have been well documented, such as organizational citizenship behavior (see Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000, for a review) and prosocial organizational behavior (Brief & Motowildo, 1986). Kahn (1993; 1998), Fletcher (1998) and others have emphasized more relational and person-focused forms of interpersonal work and have highlighted both the existence and consequential nature of relationship-centered

interpersonal work. These lines of research demonstrate that relational work is not just 'nice' or

'soft', but is crucial in order to accomplish the work of the organization.

<u>Compassion as interpersonal work</u>. Compassion as interpersonal work can show up in all

kinds of situations in which employees experience pain. The interpersonal work of noticing pain,

feeling empathetic concern, and responding to pain in some manner takes effort and often has

important consequences. Researchers have associated the interpersonal work of compassion with

negotiation performance (Alfred, Mallozzi, Matsui, & Raia, 1997), and our own work suggests

that experiencing compassion (either as a direct recipient or as a witness) changes how people

see themselves, their colleagues, and their organizations (Lilius et al., 2004). Compassion as

interpersonal work, while often invisible and sometimes associated with the enactment of power

differences, is nevertheless associated with important outcomes that may have significance

beyond the immediate feelings and acts of compassion. Below, we offer an example which we

use both to elaborate how compassion as interpersonal work looks, and to begin the discussion of

how different forms of interpersonal work illustrate the skill involved in noticing, feeling and

responding to suffering.

> At an offsite meeting of three hundred of Cisco's managers, Janet Skadden, a new
> manager in human resources, wanted to try something different. She had come to Cisco
> from Tandem, a company whose relaxed, interpersonal culture encouraged employees to
> participate in activities like trust-building games. Skadden hoped such games might help
> the Cisco engineers loosen up a little, especially given the beachfront atmosphere of the
> meeting. But, to put it mildly, Skadden's exercises didn't go over well. When the
> attendees returned to the office, they were still talking about Skadden's "beach games."
> Skadden was despondent. But CEO John Chambers, who'd witnessed Skadden's efforts
> at the beach, came to her office and told her what a great job she'd done in pulling the
> offsite together. When Skadden pointed out that her exercises had bombed, Chambers
> said: "The minute you stop trying to do things like that, I'm going to be really
> disappointed. If you're not taking risks and trying new things, you're not trying hard
> enough. I loved the fact that we tried something different" (Kruger, 1997, p. 152).

In this story, Chambers does not sugarcoat Skadden's failure. As Skadden told us in an interview, it was clear to both of them that her exercise did not work. What he does, however, is the essence of compassion as interpersonal work. First, he notices, feels, and responds to her experienced pain in failing at her first challenge as a new organizational member. Skadden described to us her surprise that Chambers, as CEO, noticed how she was feeling. Further, he responded to her pain in a way that frames her efforts as a worthy attempt at innovation. His comment, "I loved the fact that we tried something different," expresses empathetic concern that will help to raise her sprits and to ease her pain, particularly as he talks about it as a shared effort ("we"), linking himself to the event. The often unstated and easily overlooked elements of interpersonal work are implicit in Chambers' compassion, including noticing what had happened in terms of Skadden's role in the outcome and her body language at the end of the session, feeling empathetic concern that she likely would be upset and somewhat deflated by the experience, and taking action through words to give her an emotional lift and a vote of confidence. In this example, Chambers' actions, which are barely noticeable to others but deeply meaningful to Skadden, demonstrate the skilled performative elements of compassion as interpersonal work. In doing the work of compassion, the space between the two people is shaped, through the timing, the content, the focus and the whole interaction sequence, to leave the person in pain better off. And, while this is a story of a CEO and a vice president, in the simplicity of its plot line, this story illustrates the commonality of compassion as interpersonal work in organizations. Disappointments, failed attempts, and unexpected setbacks are natural and frequent experiences of work, and others in the workplace often perform similar interpersonal work of compassion when they notice the pain caused by these events and respond to it in some manner.

While thinking about compassion as a form of interpersonal work is relatively new to the field of organizational studies, research on some of the skills involved in this type of work is not new. Researchers have identified a number of interpersonal behaviors that are involved in the performance of compassion as interpersonal work. We elaborate two of these behavioral forms here—open listening and holding space—to illustrate ways that compassion as interpersonal work may appear in organizations.

Open Listening . Listening in ways that convey an openness to the experience of the other is an illustration of one behavioral form that is involved in compassion but may not be recognized as such in organizational research. Listening in this way can help the three aspects of compassion: noticing, feeling and responding. Since the focus of listening is on the "other," open listening steers attention to both verbal and non-verbal aspects of messages and facilitates noticing that a person is in pain. Listening also draws the listener into the emotional space of another, enhancing the possibility for empathy. The information gathering aspects of listening help guide appropriate responses to the needs of the sufferer (Kahn, 1993). Listening is a process for gaining a cognitive and emotional understanding of the state of others as well as providing a means for sensing and feeling the pain of another person. The centrality of open listening in responding to another person's pain explains why listening is such a key interpersonal practice for physicians and others whose work routinely involves dealing with the suffering of other people (Candib, 1995). Open listening is an important practice in other work contexts as well, as people who listen in this way are receptive to ways in which pain is expressed, and are therefore more likely to notice a broader range of pain triggers.

Kahn (1998:44), for instance, describes the case of an office manager in a department store who is upset at her own ineffectiveness at supervising one of her staff. When she brings her

problem to the business owner, the owner openly listens then asks a few questions, without prejudging her situation or jumping to quick answers. He tells the manager how impressed he is that she is trying to learn how to be more effective, and shares a similar situation that he faced in the past. Finally, the owner offers feedback about how to reframe the situation in a less constraining way. This example illustrates how listening increases the likelihood that someone like the office manager will be heard rather than ignored, rebuffed, or admonished for her behavior. By listening and withholding judgment, the business owner was more likely to pick up cues about the nature of the manager's situation, the pain in her sense of inadequacy, and her needs for the future. The owner's expressions of support include sharing an experience that signals the congruence of his feelings with hers. His praise and his suggestions can help to restore the manager's confidence. A close look at listening as an element of compassion shows that compassion takes work, often skilled work, that is built on perspective and experience and developed over time.

Creating a holding space for pain. Another form that compassion as interpersonal work may take involves creating conditions in which conversations, reflections, and steps toward growth and connection can be addressed (Benner et al., 1996). One way to describe the establishment of these conditions is captured in the idea of creating a "holding space," a psychological space that provides an environment in which people have an opportunity to grieve and to regroup (Frost, 2003; Heifetz, 1994; Kahn, 2001). The term *holding environment* (Winnicott, 1960) was first used in psychoanalysis to capture the relationship between a therapist and a patient in which "the therapist 'holds' the patient in a process of developmental learning in a way that has some similarities to the way a mother or a father hold their newborn or maturing children" (Heifetz, 1994: 104). In organizations, Heifetz (1994), Kahn (2001), and Frost (2003) suggest that the idea

of a holding environment works as a means of helping employees manage pain, debilitating stress, or anxiety. Creating a holding space can sometimes involve changing the physical conditions, such as providing a private office where problems can be discussed, or it can involve changing the emotional conditions, such as making the time to be present with the person in pain (Frost, 2003; Hallowell, 1999). The practice of holding space entails finding ways to create and sustain an emotional and physical zone that will provide the sufferer with respite. Respite may differ across people. For example, creating holding space for one person may mean granting a day off; for another, quiet time in an office; or for someone else, a release from work responsibilities for a few weeks. Giving careful attention to the form of the holding space created in each particular situation becomes part of doing the work of compassion.

The value of seeing compassion as interpersonal work. Viewing compassion in organizations through the lens of interpersonal work highlights the emotional and connective features of such work in ways that help scholars grasp what people do when they are being compassionate. We elaborate four key insights that come from this lens on compassion.

First, seeing compassion as interpersonal work emphasizes the *work of compassion*. Having defined compassion as a three-part human experience that involves noticing pain, feeling empathetic concern for another, and responding to alleviate pain, we imply that compassion is effortful. This lens expands on that implication. The interpersonal work of compassion encompasses a wide range of activities, such as open listening and creating a holding space for pain.

Second, seeing compassion as interpersonal work highlights the *competence or skillful action involved in doing compassion*. This competence comes not only from skillful execution of interpersonal behaviors, but also from emotional attunement. To be successfully implemented,

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interpersonal work such as open listening and creating holding space places emotional demands on those engaged. For instance, open listening requires cognitive attention toward others while remaining non-judgmental and it demands emotional energy to be empathetic (Miller & Stiver, 1997). This lens suggests that skill in offering compassion can be built over time, as people become better at listening, attunement, and communication. In addition, this lens suggests that the experience of receiving compassion depends on the shared competence of the recipient and the person offering support, who jointly create a situation that alleviates suffering. For instance, pain in organizations can often be overlooked or misinterpreted unless the listener actively engages empathically and commits to listen for emotions in the messages that those in pain allow themselves to send.

Third, this view facilitates seeing that the work of compassion, like other forms of relational work, is often *gendered* through its association with the work of women in the private sphere. Compassion as a form of interpersonal work is often rendered invisible because it is an expertise that is not domain specific (such as medical expertise or engineering expertise), but is a form of expertise that travels across domains (Jacques, 1993). In addition, where compassion as work is seen as "soft" and not "tough enough," it may reduce a person's perceived potential for leadership or other roles with power and prestige (Acker, 1990; Kanter, 1977; Mumby & Putnam, 1992). As a consequence, the skilled work of compassion may also be associated with the enactment of power differences, which often renders the work of compassion invisible or 'disappeared' (Fletcher, 1999). Consideration of the gendering of compassion as interpersonal work inside many organizations raises questions about whether this form of work is recognized and valued. For instance, as women come to be associated with a given job or role, its status

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diminishes (Pfeffer & Davis-Blake, 1987) and therefore when the interpersonal work of

compassion is acknowledged in organizations it may quickly become devalued.

Fourth, seeing compassion as interpersonal work demonstrates the *potential impact of*

small moves. Small actions in an organization can make big differences. Even seemingly simple

things, such as taking a few minutes to visit someone who is suffering or offering a card with a

few words of comfort to someone who has experienced a loss can renew a sense of hope in the

recipient (Frost, 2003; Frost, Dutton, Worline, & Wilson, 2000). In the story from Cisco, the few

words from CEO Chambers to Janet Skadden helped transform her experience of failure.

Hallowell (1999) has called these "human moments" at work, when someone is physically and

psychologically present for another person. Hallowell suggests that compassion can help the

sufferer reconnect to his or her workplace and feel valued. Other research indicates that a few

hours permitted off from work, a hug, a note of caring, sharing a story of vulnerability, and other

small acts can help transform people's sense of themselves, change the way they relate to their

colleagues, and shape the way they view their organizations (Lilius et al., 2004).

Research possibilities for compassion as interpersonal work. Seeing compassion as

interpersonal work highlights several possibilities for research on the concept. We elaborate only

two of the many possible avenues for generative future research on compassion as interpersonal

work:

> **1. The shape of compassion as interpersonal work**: We have argued here that
> compassion is a type of interpersonal work, and that as such it is effortful. Generative
> future research in this domain would involve investigating the microdynamics that
> comprise "the work of compassion." Such research would address questions such as:
> How is compassion expressed in particular kinds of work organizations? How are
> noticing, feeling and responding to pain shaped by the culture and routines that
> distinguish particular organizational units? How does the expression of compassion vary
> across organizations, across units within organizations, across task groupings, and so
> forth? Do people vary in their ability and willingness to offer compassion at work, and
> what accounts for that variation?

2. Consequences of the interpersonal work of compassion: We have argued that small moves in organizations have the potential for large impact through their effect on suffering and also through their effect on people's sense of self, sense of others, and sense of the organization We have assumed that there are positive consequences for a sufferer who receives compassion from other members of their organization. We have suggested that there also are organizational benefits from such acts of compassion. Generative future research along these lines would explore short-term vs. long-term effects of compassion. It would show empirically the effects of such expressions of care, for the recipient, for the provider, and for the organization.

Lens 2: Narrative

While the first lens focuses on compassion as a form of interpersonal work, a narrative perspective highlights that lived experience is captured, stored, and told in storied ways (Bruner, 1986), and that people express what they know and how they feel in organizations through stories (O'Connor, 1998). For purposes of this chapter, we define narratives very simply as "verbal acts consisting of someone telling someone else that something happened" (Smith, 1981, p.182). People understand their actions as being temporally organized (McAdams, 1993), lending power to a view of stories as a representation of experience. People use stories and narrative to make sense of their organizations (Weick, 1995). As ways of creating meaning and making sense of organizations, narratives provide a window into many aspects of organizational life. People tell stories for a reason - "to complain, to boast, to inform, to alert, to tease, to explain or excuse or justify…" (Schegloff, 1997, p. 97). This implies that where a story begins and ends, what it includes and excludes, what it highlights or suppresses are all choices that a narrator makes, choices that help reveal something about organizational and personal reality.

Besides having a reflective quality, stories also constitute organizational reality. Stories are often collected, categorized, and analyzed for insights into organizational life (Boje, 1991). Narratives have a "re-storying" quality (Connelly & Clandidnin, 1990), in that they "give birth to many different meanings, generating 'children' of meaning in their own image" (McAdams,

1993, p. 30). In this way narratives are social products that both reflect and constitute life inside organizations; that is, stories reflect ideas about "what happened" at the same time that they construct identities of individuals and of collectives (Gergen & Gergen, 1998). In this view, stories shape and animate life in particular directions, rather than serving as static reflections of activity. Thus we connect compassion narratives to the general body of theory in organization studies that focuses on how people make meaning of their experiences and what those meanings, in turn, allow people to do.

Compassion as narrative. A narrative view of compassion provides a storied view of responses to pain, helping to reveal the rich detail that comprises compassion. This lens brings alive the ways in which people understand and experience compassion at work by highlighting the key symbols and plot-lines that organization members use to describe their experience (Martin, Feldman, Hatch, & Sitkin, 1983). Compassion narratives capture the micro-moves that happen as people "work the context" to create a compassionate response (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2004). Another aspect of the narrative view is that it allows researchers to move between compassion as an individual experience and compassion as a collective experience. Through employees' and outside observers' stories of collective responses to pain, we come to see elements of organizations, such as value systems, belief systems, and cultural systems that support a compassionate response to pain. Finally, narratives are powerful windows into the construction of identities, both individual and collective (Gergen & Gergen, 1998). We draw specifically upon notions of self-identity and organizational identity (Whetten and Godfrey, 1998) in our discussion of the ways that compassion as narrative illuminates identity in organizations.

In discussing compassion as narrative, we focus on three key ideas that stand out when we look through this lens. The first is that compassion as narrative reveals a hidden side of organizations, showing us the feeling tone of organizations evidenced by how they handle pain and suffering. The second idea is that narratives show us how organizational identity is constituted and reconstituted, as people see the organization anew in its response to pain. The third idea is that a narrative lens informs us about the construction of self-identities of those within organizations.

Compassion narratives reveal the feeling tone of an organization. Painful events calling for compassion are often unexpected and can draw attention away from other key organizational issues. Under these conditions, people's shared beliefs and values in the organization emerge from where they are typically hidden, revealing how people in the organization handle suffering. Unexpected moments provide windows into the organization that are captured in the stories that are shared among members. For instance, Reuters is an organization whose caring actions immediately following the crisis of 9/11/01 were depicted in stories that affirmed important organizational values. In their efforts to track the whereabouts of missing staff members, Reuters staff learned that several employees had perished. Reuters' handling of this sad outcome was reflected in its response to Nelly Braginsky whose son, Alex, had died in the attack. Phil Lynch, the CEO of Reuters America, had called her on a Tuesday night and the next day she met with Lynch and HR manager Sharon Greenholt (Dutton et al., 2002b). Greenholt's narrative follows:

> "She (Braginsky) refused to believe that anything had happened. This was understandable. Reuters did everything they could to help her with this. Phil Lynch called her in the mornings to make sure she had eaten breakfast. We got her a car to take her around New York. We got her sandwiches to keep her fed on her visits to the hospitals. She shared stories of her son. We were very conscious that we would not challenge what she thought. The family drove the process. It was heart wrenching, as the families would call with possible scenarios that might eliminate the possibility that their sons were in the

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WTC. We kept saying we will do everything we can, and we did" (Dutton et al, 2002b, p. 7).

The theme of compassionate responsiveness revealed in this story was echoed in several other stories circulating in the organization about how Reuters dealt with the families of deceased employees and of managers' and employees' efforts to get the company back serving its customers. These narratives of compassion are told and retold, ultimately contributing to a shared recognition of the value placed by the company on its employees. One employee commented, "Watching Phil Lynch get so involved with the families—so quickly—with their personal lives, bringing them in, comforting them, involved with their personal pain—I saw the heart—not just the company, not just technology and lines—I saw the heart of the company in him responding to the families" (Dutton et al., 2002b, p. 7). Narratives like these expose the hidden values regarding responsiveness to human pain in Reuters and reveal an organization's feeling tone, or what the story teller calls 'the heart' of the organization.

Compassion narratives shape organizational identity. A second key idea that comes from seeing compassion as narrative is its connection to organizational identity. Narratives not only reflect organizational values, but also shape organizational identities. Organizational identity is typically construed as what members take to be central, distinctive, and enduring about their organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Compassion narratives, as they circulate through the organization, may build upon or contradict existing ideas of "what the organization is." As stories of compassion are shared, they shape employees' understandings of their organization in new ways, building an appreciation of their workplace as caring and responsive (or lacking in care and responsiveness). Such narratives are thus constitutive of the collective organizational identity. The story below provides an illustration:

Recently (on a Monday) I was told my stepbrother had been killed in an auto accident. I called my manager at home to find out what to do about my schedule as I would have to travel from Michigan to Tennessee for the funeral and to be with my family. My manager was very sympathetic, told me not to worry about coming in the rest of the week and not to worry about any paperwork—she would fill out what was needed so I would not lose any pay. When I returned home from Tennessee I had already received cards from my manager and coworkers and a plant with a sympathy card from the organization itself. I am proud to work for an organization that is large enough to have the technology and facilities that we do, but small enough to still know that people are the important part. (Employee, Midwest Hospital)

Here, the narrator tells of the sudden loss of a family member and of how her colleagues' responses shaped her sense of the organization as both competent and humane. Looking closely at this narrative in the wake of this painful event, we can see the narrator's construction of her manager as sympathetic, her coworkers as responsive and caring, and the organization at large as people-focused and humane. A narrative lens on compassion thus reveals how individuals come to construct the identity of their organization and its members through the compassionate responses that they witness and share. Moreover, the organizational identity in turn has a powerful influence on employees' behavior (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994), shaping their expectations of how to respond to painful events and the suffering of others. In this way, compassion narratives are not only constitutive of organizational identity, but also of an organization's responses to future tragedies.

Compassion narratives constitute members' identities. In addition to shaping the identity of an organization, narratives are also used by individuals to construct their own identities (Gergen & Gergen, 1998). As Reissman (1993) explains, "in telling about an experience, I am also creating a self – how I want to be known by others" (p. 11). Through compassion narratives, organizational members make sense of who they are. A third key idea that comes from seeing compassion as narrative, then, is that members' identities are constructed in part through their

stories of encounters with pain and compassion in their organizations (Maitlis, 2004; White & Epston, 1990). Viewed in this way, narratives of compassion help to constitute organizational members' identities.

We see compassion narratives as helping to construct individual identities in a story from research at a Canadian not-for-profit organization where a manager described what it was like to be part of a workplace in which compassion was shown to members experiencing pain. She spoke of a time when she found herself in a role that was too large for her and that she did not feel competent to perform. She explained, "when I was finding things just too overwhelming and felt that I had just too many balls in the air that I didn't feel capable of managing, I felt awful for that, and ashamed and inadequate and all that stuff." She went on to describe how her colleagues responded to her plight, saying, "I was very nurtured and supported by the organization in a lot of ways." Through her story of compassion at work, she began to construct herself more positively, as capable and energized by her job ("It's fun and it feeds me and I learn a lot and that's always really critical for me") and also as someone who gives to others ("I feel nurturing") (Maitlis, 2004). In this narrative of compassion, we see a woman's identity shifting from someone who is failing and inadequate to someone who is a capable, engaged, passionate and nurturing colleague

The value of seeing compassion as narrative. In general, the narrative lens helps us form a richer picture of compassion as it takes place in organizational contexts. Hearing stories of compassionate responses to pain brings compassion to life in vivid detail, demonstrating the phenomenon in ways that are compelling and different from numerical displays or statistical tests. In addition, examining compassion through the lens of narrative yields four distinct and important insights about the nature of compassion in organizations.

First, seeing compassion as narrative reveals *hidden elements of an organization's culture*, where culture is defined as shared beliefs or values that shape, in part, people's emotional experience at work. It has been argued that narrative is one way to tap into latent values and beliefs at work in an organization (Czarniawska, 1998; Schein, 1996). Compassion narratives help organizational members (as well as organizational researchers) to identify latent beliefs about appropriate responses to pain. As scholars collect and examine stories of compassion in a workplace, they begin to uncover these shared beliefs and values and to see how they inform the collective emotional tendencies in an organization.

Second, seeing compassion as narrative reveals how *exposure to stories affects people in important ways*. As compassion stories are shared in organizations, they help people make sense of who they are within that context. Because stories help to constitute members' identities, they have dramatic effects on the possibilities for growth and development in the organization. Exposure to stories of compassion—hearing them, telling them, and re-telling them—may also influence how people are able to construct their identities outside of work (Gergen & Gergen, 1998; Somers, 1994). Given the permeability of the boundaries between work and home (Hochschild, 1997), narratives of compassion in organizations may help people grow into more caring and confident people across life domains. For example, in a study of the physician billing department at Midwest hospital, the majority of interviewees in the 30-person unit told how the stories of compassion that reflected their own and others' experiences helped them to see new possibilities of how to care for loved ones at home (Worline et al., 2004).

Third, seeing compassion as narrative helps organizational researchers see the construction and re-construction of organizational identity in ways that make plain how *members align and re-align their understanding of the organization with their perceptions of its actions.*

Organizational scholars have suggested that organizational identity is not a static feature of organizations (Gioia, Schultze and Corely, 2000). Seeing compassion as narrative helps make clear how an organization's response to an unexpected painful event can serve as a prompt for members to align their sense of the organization with how they perceive it responding to incidents of pain and suffering over time. In this way, compassion as narrative is constitutive not only of individual members' identities, but of organizational identity as well.

Finally, seeing compassion as narrative *provides an opportunity to hear multiple voices in an organization*. Compassion narratives, as told by organizational members, uncover whether the surface stated values that reside in the organizational mission statement have teeth in capturing the reality of lived experience inside the organization. Organizational members as narrators make choices in telling a story such as where the story begins and ends, what details it includes and excludes, and what aspects are emphasized or suppressed. In this way, organizational members may use compassion narratives to produce and reproduce an organization's power structure. Narratives can therefore become a window into the "workings of power" in a situation (Mumby, 1987; 1988). Narratives can reveal the legitimacy accorded to certain forms of pain in an organization: for example, that losing a loved one is regarded as a more legitimate source of pain than experiencing sexual harassment. Less legitimate forms of pain are more likely to go unnoticed and be left unattended, which is particularly problematic where these forms of pain are specific to members of marginalized groups (e.g., women are more likely than men to experience the pain of sexual harassment). By examining the content, structure, and narrative choices within compassion stories, we enhance the richness that emanates from the compassion narrative and widen the lens of understanding about the organization and its members.

Research Possibilities. Seeing compassion through a narrative lens raises many research possibilities. Below, we highlight three areas that we see as generative for further research:

1. **How narratives of compassion shape interpretation and action over time**. When people hear and talk about compassion in relation to one major incident, they may compartmentalize this and keep it separate from their everyday work. Generative future research could examine when and how compassion narratives circulate, and when and how they take on different interpretations over time. For instance, when are compassion narratives taken to be reflective of the organization as a whole and when are they simply taken to be indicative of one compartmentalized response?

2. **The construction of individual and organizational identity.** Because narratives are constitutive of identity, generative future research could investigate the micro-processes through which individual and organizational identities are constructed. For example, what is the nature of the processes through which people's understandings of themselves and their organizations are shaped following a compassionate response to suffering? How do these processes differ when a person witnesses, rather than personally experiences, such a response? And what is the nature of these micro-processes in the context of a failure to experience or witness compassion in response to pain?

3. **The discursive construction of compassion.** Also in line with our suggestion of narratives as a window into a critical perspective on organizations, generative future research could examine several elements of the construction of compassion through stories and narrative. For instance, such research might look at the ways in which different groups in an organization construct compassion narratives. How do the tropes used by men and women differ? How does the structure of compassion narratives vary in different social, cultural and institutional contexts?

Lens 3: Organizing

The third lens, compassion as organizing, looks at compassion specifically as a process that unfolds collectively across individuals. This lens regards compassion as a social accomplishment that requires active coordination across actors that gives rise to complex, nonlinear processes in the organization. As actions unfold through time, the organizing lens focuses scholars on various aspects of the organization, such as routines or networks of contact, that give shape to complex processes. Reconceptualizing "organizations" into processes of organizing is one of the core insights of Weick's (1979) work, which proposed a way of looking at organizations that combined a natural systems and an open systems perspective. Weick

(1979), and more recently Heath and Sitkin (2001), encourage scholars to examine the processes that create, maintain, and dissolve social collectives, and the processes by which people coordinate goal-directed activities. An organizing lens shifts the emphasis of inquiry from a structural and top-down view to one that emphasizes proactive human actors and emergent social processes. In viewing compassion as organizing, we adopt this shift in focus and look toward the ways in which compassion becomes a collective accomplishment of multiple actors in combination with processes of legitimation, propagation, and coordination.

Compassion as organizing. This lens on compassion highlights the different processes that enable a group of people to organize around pain, highlighting the path dependence and time dependence of the social accomplishment of compassion. An organizing lens reveals the ebbs and flows of activities involved in accomplishing compassion as a collective process. This lens also invites consideration of how features of the organizational context (e.g., routines, networks) facilitate or hinder compassion through their shaping of three key social processes: legitimating, propagating and coordinating. An organizing lens on compassion suggests that the proactive behaviors of individuals who notice and respond to pain in organizations will give rise to complex processes that unfold in nonlinear ways.

In this section we consider three processes that facilitate compassion in organizations: legitimation, propagation, and coordination. Each process is known to be important in organizational studies; here we describe the potency of each process in helping to explain how compassion unfolds as a collective process (Kanov et al., 2004).

Legitimating. Legitimating is a process that ensures that actions of an entity are desirable, proper and/or appropriate (Suchman, 1995). Legitimation happens through multiple means in organizations, but its natural effect is to grant individuals freedom to feel and act in particular

ways. Where the noticing of pain is legitimate, where the expression of feelings is legitimate, and where acting toward others ways that facilitate healing is legitimate, the organizing of compassion is more likely to take place and to be enacted with competence. We define competence here in terms of the speed, scope, scale and customization of the response to the needs of the person in pain (Dutton, Frost, Worline, Lilius, & Kanov, 2002a; Dutton et al., 2004). For example, some organizations have created policies and procedures that allow employees to donate vacation time to a type of collective bank, and then developed procedures that allow employees to use this donated time if they need it to care for a sick spouse or family member (e.g., Dutton et al., 2002a). While this process directly facilitates the coordination of care, it also bestows the practice of giving time to others with acceptability as a type of "proper" investment in another person's welfare at a time of need. These policies often have names that imbue them with an appropriate and desirable formality (e.g., Employee Vacation Investment programs). By turning this voluntary action into a form of routine, the management (or whomever institutionalizes the practice) imbues the process with legitimacy (Feldman & Pentland, 2003), that in turn fuels further noticing of pain, and eases the coordination of individual responses.

Legitimating can also facilitate compassion organizing by granting people the freedom to display feelings, which in turn facilitates coordination of responding. In particular, actions of leaders offer important symbolic endorsement of what is appropriate or inappropriate feeling (Pfeffer, 1981). Leaders' actions can quickly make illegitimate the expression of grief and shock, which so often accompany pain, ultimately stifling collective responding. For example, in one organization that we studied, the unexpected death of a visitor was never acknowledged publicly by top management despite personal requests by employees to acknowledge the tragedy. Employees who witnessed or heard about the death were demoralized by this lack of response

and felt uneasy about their own grief and disconnected from the feelings of their co-workers. No organizational guidance or permission was available to them (Dutton et al., 2002a). In contrast, the former dean of Big Ten business school interrupted his well-scripted annual "State of the School" address to alumni in order to tell the audience of the plight of three business school students who lost all their belongings in a fire early that morning. He assured the students publicly that the school would support them, expressed feelings of concern for their well-being, and in a powerful symbolic demonstration of the legitimacy of responding to pain, he took action by writing a personal check while in front of the audience. The impact of his words and actions drew the attention of many people to the students' suffering and gave momentum to widespread efforts within the business school community to offer assistance to the students (Dutton et al., 2004; Frost, 2003). In this example, the dean facilitated the collective noticing, feeling and responding to pain through his use of power and his actions legitimated empathetic feelings and desirable responding for others associated with the organization.

Propagating. Propagating refers to the spreading of ideas, feelings, and information between people. Propagating is critical for compassion organizing in that it facilitates collective noticing, collective feeling, and collective responding to organizational member's pain. For instance, propagating with respect to noticing another's pain might occur as follows: A person notices that a fellow organizational member is in pain and she communicates this to some of her co-workers. This promotes collective noticing by spreading the information about what she noticed to others in her organization so that they too become of aware of the person's pain. Similarly, expressing or communicating her feelings to others facilitates the development of collective feeling. Propagating facilitates collective responding in that the spreading of ideas

about how to respond to a person's pain allows individuals to see their own responses relative to others, enabling responses to be coordinated.

Propagating can be facilitated by established systems in the organization (e.g. e-mail networks within the organization, video conferencing facilities, town hall meetings). Following the terrorist attacks on New York in September 2001, Reuters' management adapted its systems for tracking information and clients and its virtual town hall meeting technology to communicate information and concern about the well-being of its employees (Dutton et al., 2002b). Cisco Systems' Serious Health Notification System is another example of a propagating mechanism. It involves organizational members working together in a systematized way to quickly communicate information about suffering employees to the CEO so that a response may be initiated (Kanov et al., 2004). Leaders can also serve as propagators of information within the organization, by initiating a flow of information that is shared by others or by extending and sustaining an information flow over time. In the 1990's, Newsweek Chairman and editor-in-chief Richard Smith informed his staff that one of the magazine's veteran editors, Maynard Parker had been diagnosed with leukemia. He used his daily briefings to staff to update them on Parker's condition and to provide sustained communication about the situation (Dutton et al., 2002a). The dean's State of the School address described above not only served as a legitimating mechanism for shared noticing and feeling among his audience, it also served as a propagating mechanism to spread the word about suffering to a wider audience (Dutton et al., 2004).

The above discussion of legitimation and propagation reveals a recursive relationship between them. When ideas and emotions are spread about someone who is suffering it helps to legitimate the situation, which in turn can widen the scope of shared responses to the situation.

What has been noticed and shared as a legitimate observation by organizational members makes it more probable that it will be spread in the system.

Coordinating. Coordinating refers to the process by which people arrange interdependent actions in ways that they believe will enable them to accomplish their goals (Weick, 1979). Coordination is often essential to compassion organizing as it facilitates the transformation of collective noticing and feeling into collective responding to suffering. Without structures and systems in place that coordinate member responses, joint efforts to offer compassion may fail as good intentions dissipate for lack of means to turn efforts into tangible help. Coordinating can be done institutionally, as is the case with many organizations where employees are automatically notified if an organizational member suffers from a serious illness or death. Many organizations have designated policies and practices for helping members facing these circumstances. Coordinating can also be done spontaneously, as people improvise about how to respond and take on emergent roles. These spontaneous actions often allow resources to be directed effectively and efficiently to persons in need (Dutton et al., 2004). For example, in the school fire example, several MBA students crafted roles for themselves (e.g., resource collector, emotional buffer) that allowed the offerings of help to be more efficiently organized without overwhelming the fire victims. In the example of Maynard Parker's fight with his leukemia, several secretaries volunteered to manage blood donations, which immediately flooded in upon notification of his condition. As his care extended in time, these secretaries took on new responsibilities and altered their roles to make the adjustments necessary to ensure the organization was getting him the help that he needed.

The value of seeing compassion as organizing. Seeing compassion as organizing reveals that compassion is often a collective accomplishment in organizations. It focuses attention on

how groups of people are able or unable to notice and respond to a person in pain in a coordinated way. Instead of attending only to the efforts and competencies of individual compassion-givers, as was the case with the first two lenses, through this lens we are able to see mechanisms of legitimating, propagating, and coordinating make up compassion organizing. This lens augments our understanding of compassion in work organizations in at least four ways.

First, compassion as organizing makes salient the organizational *interdependencies* inherent in an organizational response to pain. Compassion as organizing requires interlinked observations, feelings, and actions, and these interlinked elements of compassion are directly and indirectly enabled by properties of the organization. For example, coordinated responses to situations of suffering may act on pooled, sequential or reciprocal interdependence (Thompson, 1967). When a group of coworkers get together to decide how best to help a suffering colleague, they pool their observations, feelings and ideas for assistance to respond compassionately to the situation. This may be the most common form of interdependency enacted between a sufferer and those providing care. However, the relationship becomes reciprocal when expressions of compassion are modified in response to the reactions of the person in pain. The sufferer thus plays a critical role by communicating his or her emotional state, while those providing care must be receptive to this communication and let it guide their response. For example, the students who lost all their possessions in a fire, as described earlier, eventually signaled that they were feeling embarrassed and overwhelmed by all of the attention and material goods they had received (Dutton et al., 2004). Compassion organizing in this case involved stopping or adjusting the flow of assistance in light of what was learned from the sufferers.

Second, an organizing lens highlights that compassion *is a dynamic process* and reveals the influence of *feedback loops* on the nature and direction of compassionate acts. People who

share how they feel may find the level of their emotions amplified or dampened by what they learn from others. Access to one another's feelings and thoughts facilitated by organizational practices and systems will likely influence how the compassion process unfolds. A tug of concern for a sufferer may grow into a swell of empathy as coworkers learn how others feel about the situation. On the other hand, initial empathy for a sufferer may be drained when an employee reads or hears from others in the organization that they don't see the situation or the person as worthy of concern. An audience of emotionally neutral people may change into one of sympathetic concern for someone when a leader announces an emotionally painful event and frames the condition as worthy of compassion (e.g. the "state of the school" address by the former business school dean). Sometimes these dynamics can create a process of collective compassion that takes on a life of its own, as was the case with the response of the staff at Newsweek to a colleague stricken with leukemia. The dynamic nature of organizing alerts us to the temporality in collective compassion (episodes of helping that come to an end), of punctuation (e.g. the Dean's intervention at the state of the school address), and of nonlinearity (members enter the process at different times and in different ways and their inputs can change the direction and nature of responses).

Third, an organizing lens illustrates the *historical embeddedness* of compassion. A shared delivery of compassion in an organization may draw on the cultural memory of how collective responses were made to suffering in the past in an organization. . In the example used above of responses to a fire, the organized response to students affected by the fire provided the backdrop for a later episode of emergent compassion organizing in response to an earthquake in India that touched the lives of several students' families (Dutton et al., 2004). The effects of collective compassion may also feed forward to inform what is expected of organizational members in

subsequent moments of suffering. A coworker who knows that help was previously provided when someone was in pain may expect to receive assistance when she is hurting. The institutionalized effects of collective compassion organizing may support or constrain the actions of subsequent members of the organization when facing new instances of employee pain and suffering.

Fourth, the organizing lens illustrates the *secondary effects* of collective compassion. The delivery of collective compassion through existing practices and routines in organizations increases members' confidence in rising to painful challenges. It may also improve the quality and robustness of existing routines and practices that help members accomplish other goals and objectives. For example, the Newsweek staff not only coordinated their efforts to respond to their colleague's leukemia, but several junior editors took on additional responsibilities in the newsroom, including the sensitive task of breaking the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. The magazine subsequently won an award for their reporting of this event (Dutton et al, 2002a; Frost. 2003). Whitaker, a Newsweek editor, observed: "Everyone rallied around in a very impressive and moving way" (Frost, 2003, p. 171). Smith noted "The efforts of everyone involved were aimed at putting out the best possible magazine each week." (Frost, 2003, p. 171)

Research Possibilities: As with the previous lenses, this lens offers several unique research possibilities that explore different facets of compassion in work organizations.

1. **Examining the costs and benefits of organizing for compassion**. Allocating organizing mechanisms to address the need for compassionate responses to suffering likely shifts resources (e.g. time, energy and money) from other organizational initiatives and requirements. Is this a cost or a benefit to the organization and to its members? Does the cost of institutionalizing practices (e.g., Cisco's Serious Health Notification System or a mechanism for delivering medical care to employees away from their home country) outweigh the benefits that flow from such initiatives? What are the benefits, to individuals, to the organization of sharing feelings and of taking time and using the organization to deliver care and compassion? We might also ask what particular

characteristics of legitimation, propagation and coordination are most critical to competence in compassion organizing?

2. **Pressures to routinize compassion**.
   Non-routine or non-programmed activities in organizations tend over time to become routinized yet it seems important that compassion be tailored to the particular needs of a person in pain and to their context. Relevant questions here might be: Is customization of response a necessary condition of compassion in a work organization? Can compassion be delivered from a standardized program? Is there a tipping point beyond which institutionalized responses to compassion fail to achieve their objective? How can the personalization of compassion be preserved when it is institutionalized?

3. **Distinguishing collective from individual compassion**.
   What characteristics and processes influence the value of collective compassion over individual efforts to be compassionate? Is there a "critical mass" of effort or other variables that provide advantage to collective compassion? What are the necessary organizational characteristics that influence this outcome?

IMPLICATIONS

This chapter provides some nourishment for the wolf of compassion. We have explored the historical, religious, and interdisciplinary roots of compassion, and we have discussed three distinct lenses on compassion in organizations. Each of these lenses takes a particular focus in organizational studies and applies that focus to the issue of human pain, illuminating how suffering is addressed in organizational contexts. As Morgan (1997) discusses, any one theoretical perspective center-stages certain interpretations while obscuring others. Part of the power of seeing compassion through these three different theoretical lenses is that we are able to provide a more complete view of compassion in work organizations by generating both complementary and competing insights (Allison, 1971; Morgan, 1997).

Comparative perspectives on compassion. While each lens provides its own important view of compassion, an additional power that comes from presenting compassion through three different lenses is the capacity to compare ideas across theoretical frameworks. Table 1 suggests the power of a comparative perspective by showing the key assumptions and insights of each

lens alongside one another. For the sake of illustration, here we take one example from our data and look at it through each of the three lenses.

> I work in the Finance Dept at Midwest Hospital. We have a program that allows employees to donate their unused vacation time to a fellow employee that is experiencing undue financial hardships, due to unusual circumstances such as illness, fire, accident, or death. I have witnessed an incredible amount of compassion among the staff at Midwest while administering this program. The employees' caring and willingness to give up their benefits to help a co-worker in need is extraordinary. Time and again Midwest's staff recognizes a need, takes the steps to get the cause approved and campaigns to get others to help. It's this genuine caring for those we work with that makes me glad I work at Midwest. I have also witnessed the profound impact this program has on the co-worker receiving their help. It's great! (Employee, Midwest Hospital)

In looking across the three lenses on compassion, we see different aspects of this story as important and informative. For example, if we were to understand compassion as interpersonal work, we could pay attention to the strands of evidence from relational practice to understand the work that people in this context are doing that is seen as compassion (e.g. "time and again Midwest's staff recognizes a need, takes the steps to get the cause approved, and campaigns to get others to help"). If we were to understand compassion as narrative, we could also look at how the person telling this story constructs others' identities through suggesting that part of the identity of the organization is its caring competency (e.g. "…makes me glad I work at Midwest"). And finally, if we were to understand compassion as organizing, we could attend to the vacation donation program, which provides a set of routines for institutionalizing compassion in such a way that it becomes legitimated and easily coordinated within the organization.

Compassion as a window into organization studies

Not only is there value in considering the differences highlighted by the three lenses, but their commonalities also have important implications for organization studies. At the core of each lens lies the assumption that compassion is worthwhile in its own right. In this chapter, we have argued that compassion is central to and expressive of the very essence of being human. As

such, our examination of compassion draws our attention to the human side of organizations and organizing, one that is often overlooked in traditional organization studies. None of the lenses has focused on outcomes such as organizational performance or efficiency, for while these are often the concern of mainstream organizational research, they all too often trump or overshadow the humanity of organizational life. Along with Cameron and colleagues (Cameron, 2003; Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2003), we argue that although compassion may contribute to high performance and financial success, such outcomes are peripheral to the meaning and impact of compassion. Compassion connects us with the aliveness of organizational life, putting us in touch with the human condition and reminding us that work organizations are fundamentally human institutions capable of caring for, healing, and enlivening people (Cameron et al., 2003; Frost et al., 2000). Organizations that adopt compassionate practices as strategic means to an end may weaken or destroy the integrity of such practices. As such, compassion is currently in a precarious position as it sits on the fringe of organization studies. If we attempt to understand the nature and significance of compassion in work organizations in ways typical of our field (e.g., aiming to identify the competitive edge associated with compassion or questioning the value of compassion in terms of the bottom line) we will likely end up with only a shell of a construct that is a far cry from the rich and timeless images of compassion throughout history. If instead we recognize that the study of phenomena like compassion begs for a different approach to organizational inquiry—one that emphasizes human experience and social life—then we will allow ourselves to enter into a dimension of organizational life that is often invisible and unappreciated (Sandelands, 2003).

A critical lens on compassion

While the lenses we have used in this chapter highlight the good that can come from individual and collective acts of compassion in organizations and the generative power of compassion narratives, we also see value in bringing more critical perspectives to the study of compassion. Doing so raises different sets of questions that merit serious attention.

For example, looking critically at compassion as interpersonal work brings to the forefront the possibilities of "compassion work" and "compassion labor". In parallel with Hochschild's (1983) notion of "emotion work," compassion work can be seen as the effort put into "feeling compassionate" and "doing compassion" in day-to-day living. This can be demanding and difficult for individuals who feel they "ought" to engage in emotions and perform actions that may be at odds with how they are actually feeling towards a given person, project, or priority. Similarly, organizational researchers' interest in emotional labor and bounded emotionality (e.g., Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2003; Martin, Knopoff & Beckman, 1998; Mumby & Putnam, 1992) leads us to consider the notion of "compassion labor," as the organizational appropriation of compassion work. This is common in jobs in which being compassionate is part of the role requirement, such as counselors, social workers, physicians, and nurses, where incumbents are paid, in part, to notice, feel and respond compassionately to those in pain. It is likely that these individuals experience some of the costs of compassion as a form of labor, especially if, as is often the case, they work in organizations that lack compassion for their own employees. Those who do not adequately "do compassion" may suffer reproof from their managers, while those who do may experience "compassion burnout." Compassion burnout has been discussed as the physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion that comes from spending too much time engaged in the work of providing care and compassion to others, and this form of burnout is all too commonly found in the helping

professions (Collins & Long, 2003; Figley, 1995; Meyerson, 1998; Rainer, 2000). In addition to burnout, because it often means interacting directly with toxins, compassion workers can be toxin handlers of sorts, with attendant risks to their emotional and physical health (Frost, 2003). These aspects of compassion in organizations are worthy of more investigation and attention.

Another critical lens demands an appreciation of the role of power in compassion as interpersonal work. Anyone may feel compassion for another, but not all individuals are equally free to engage in compassionate behavior; nor is compassion always wanted from those who wish to give it. For example, we might expect to see more "upward" (enacted from a junior employee toward a senior one) than "downward" compassion in organizations, as those in junior positions are more attentive to the conditions of those above them (Fiske & Depret, 1996). Power plays a role in the enactment of compassion, and those at lower levels may find it required "deference work" to offer help to someone senior. At the same time, research suggests that people higher up in the hierarchy are less attentive to the conditions of those below them, making it less likely that senior managers will even notice pain among lower level employees (Fiske & Depret, 1996). Alternatively, it could be argued that employees at higher levels will be less comfortable revealing their pain to those junior to themselves. Whichever of these dynamics plays out in a given organization or situation, we argue that any examination of compassion at work must acknowledge the role of power in its enactment.

Looking at compassion as interpersonal work also raises questions about the meanings and displays of compassion in other than North American contexts. Since there is considerable cross-cultural variation in the meaning and expression of emotions such as grief and despair (Armon-Jones, 1986; Heelas, 1996), we should also expect differences in the extent to which and ways in which compassion is expressed in, for example, North American, European, and Asian

societies. While compassion may be regarded as innate and instinctual (Keltner, 2004), its form and its appropriateness and acceptability will vary with the context in which it is enacted. Indeed, seen as a component of cultural life, successfully carrying out the work of compassion is contingent upon having learned to interpret suffering and a response to that suffering according to the values, norms, and expectations of the culture in which one is participating.

With its roots in social constructionism and connections to critical perspectives, the narrative lens raises particularly pertinent questions about compassion stories as strategic products of self-interested actors. One aspect of this critical perspective concerns attention to whose voices are heard in narratives of compassion, and whose are marginalized or silenced. Returning to the story about the vacation donation program, we see, on one hand, an organization in which compassionate responding is enabled by a powerful institutional mechanism. Endorsed by employees, it leads to compassionate acts that leave the narrator enthusing about his colleagues and workplace. At the same time, it raises questions about what is not told: Are there negative consequences for members who choose not to donate to the program? What happens to employees who do not want to be helped—are they treated differently because they refuse to "get with the program"? Moreover, no attention is drawn in this story to the fact that the compassionate program costs the organization little beyond expenses to administer. Has the compassion of many members of the organization been co-opted by the organization through this distribution of costs? Every narrative offers only a partial story; applying a critical lens to narratives of compassion helps reveal those storylines that may not be immediately visible.

Another set of critical issues relating to narratives as strategic resources concerns the relationship between narrator and narrative and what this reveals about the story that is told. The vacation donation story is also revealing about the narrator himself and his relationship to the

compassionate acts he describes. From a critical perspective, we might ask: Why does he tell this particular story? Is it to enhance his standing as a compassionate person? Is he a champion of a caring workplace and the story helps promote the practices that sustain this care? Does he seek to highlight the importance of his role at Midwest? He is, after all, the administrator of the program he so strongly endorses. Does the story celebrate a truly compassionate workplace, or is it a vehicle to reinforce organizational rhetoric about Midwest as a place to work or that might help the organization to secure external resources for its goals? The narrative taken at face value gives a sense of a caring organization in which employees share in the commitment to help suffering colleagues. By critically examining the content, structure, and the narrative position of the story, however, we widen the lens of inquiry about the organization, its members, and the compassionate acts described.

A critical perspective is also valuable to the lens of compassion as organizing, or compassion as a collective accomplishment. Having highlighted the processes that produce compassion at the collective level, we should also ask: When and where are these processes not likely to be found in an organization? What are their costs to an organization? Who are the beneficiaries of compassion organizing and who is overlooked? What happens when these processes become merely instrumental means to non-compassionate ends? While compassion as organizing may occur in any kind of organization, it may be especially likely in high performing organizations, where adequate slack in the system allows room for collective responses to pain. Would we expect to find compassion in an organization struggling to stay afloat during a major financial crisis? As is often the case after natural disasters (Sanchez, Korbin, & Viscarra, 1995), some of the companies showing greatest compassion during the 9/11 crisis were unable to maintain this stance in the hardship of the months that followed (SHRM/eePulse, 2002). Perhaps

only certain organizations can "afford" compassion at certain points in time. Similarly, compassion may be more common in jobs that endow incumbents with sufficient autonomy to be able to help a co-worker who is overloaded. While compassion is still possible in highly controlled and standardized or "McDonaldized" (Ritzer, 1998) jobs, we should acknowledge that it is less likely to proliferate where workers have minimal latitude over what they do and how they do it (cf. Fineman, this volume).

It is also important to note that even in places where collective compassion is widely expressed, there will still be individuals who continue to suffer, unaided by those around them. Whether their suffering is ignored or simply goes unnoticed, whether they belong to a group that is marginalized in the organization, or whether the oversight is more circumstantial, these individuals may feel envious and resentful about the attention that their co-workers receive, adding to their pain. Compassion can thus be divisive in organizations, with the potential to be seen as favoritism by those going without. This may be endemic to a company's compassion organizing processes, but is especially likely, for example, in a restructuring or downsizing situation where many suffering individuals do not receive equally compassionate treatment.

Finally, we should be aware that compassion organizing can be motivated less by a desire to alleviate suffering than by instrumental goals, such as good public relations or increased productivity. While a leader may engage in a variety of actions that legitimate and help propagate compassionate responses, these actions may be driven by his or her wish to appear to be a caring person, for the hope of winning a "best employer" award, or by a belief that employees will be more efficient and effective if organizational systems and policies are in place to support them in times of need. The genuine expression of suffering and response to it are likely to be inhibited or abused in organizations in which compassion organizing is coordinated

to accomplish only instrumental goals (Fineman, 2003; this volume). Although the focus of this chapter has been appreciative, examining compassion through a critical lens is one key to a fuller understanding of the phenomenon in organizations.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of compassion in work organizations has a short history, but a promising future. In this chapter we have sought to illuminate the possibilities that different lenses in organizational studies create for the study of compassion. We have demonstrated that the use of these lenses will help identify fruitful topics for future research and can lead to the creation of a systematic body of knowledge about compassion in organizations. We have also raised possibilities from the application of critical lenses on compassion that provide additional invitations to inquiry for those who are interested in studying compassion in organizations. Something perhaps less obvious, but equally important, is that we have tried throughout the chapter to evoke the emotional tone of compassion and to underscore that its role is to make a contribution of healing to those who are suffering. We attempt to treat compassion as a gift, not a commodity (Hyde, 1979).

His holiness the 14th Dalai Lama says in his lecture *Living the Compassionate Life* (Shambhala Sun Online, 2004), that, "Whether people are beautiful or plain, friendly or cruel, ultimately they are human beings, just like oneself. Like oneself, they want happiness and do not want suffering." Our focus on compassion in organizations grows from this fundamental observation about our common humanity. Within every organizational system are human beings, like ourselves, who want happiness and who do not want suffering—human beings who suffer and who respond to one another's suffering with compassion. An emphasis on understanding

compassion in organizations helps us see the proactive and responsive actions that coworkers take toward one another, and, however small those actions may be, their true significance in human terms. Ultimately, an emphasis on compassion in organizations is highly consequential, as the Dalai Lama writes in the same lecture:

> I believe that at every level of society—familial, national and international—the key to a happier and more successful world is the growth of compassion. We do not need to become religious, nor do we need to believe in a particular ideology. All that is necessary is for each of us to develop our good human qualities. I believe that the cultivation of individual happiness can contribute in a profound and effective way to the overall improvement of the entire human community.

A focus on compassion in organizations shows us the potential for cultivating more positive and healthy organizations. Like the Dalai Lama, we believe an emphasis on compassion may improve the condition of the human community at large.

With such a vision for the potential of studying compassion in organizations, we look forward with enthusiasm to the time, a few years hence, when perhaps this chapter will be revised for a new edition of the *Handbook of Organization Studies* and the depth and range of understanding of compassion in organizations will be significantly greater than it is today. We believe that such a future will serve to build the field of organizational studies and will contribute to the experience of more healthy organizations and organizational members. As we expand our knowledge of organizations to encompass topics like compassion, and also thriving, resilience, vitality and social life, then the wolf of compassion, hope and generosity is truly well fed.

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Table 1: Three ways of seeing compassion in organizations

	Compassion as interpersonal work	Compassion as narrative	Compassion as organizing
Main idea	Compassion is a form of everyday interpersonal interactions that takes place in organizations	Compassion is carried in language and stories in ways that help people make sense of pain and make meaning of their experiences at work	Compassion becomes a collective accomplishment through processes that create, maintain, and dissolve social units
Core assumptions of this lens	• Interpersonal work requires skill and competence • Interpersonal work is consequential and productive	• Compassion narratives reflect the hidden reality of pain in organizations • Compassion narratives help constitute the human response to pain • Narratives are powerful windows into the construction of individual and collective identities	• Different processes in organizations enable people to notice, feel, and respond to pain • Features of the organizational context facilitate or hinder noticing, feeling, and responding to pain • Agentic activity by proactive individuals can amplify collective response to pain
Central ideas about compassion as seen through this lens	Compassion involves a three-part human experience of noticing, feeling, and responding. Several types of well-known interpersonal interactions help to facilitate elements of this experience	Compassion narratives reveal important shared values and beliefs that are the heart of organizations. Compassion narratives also help constitute organizational members' identities and realign them with organizational identity.	Compassion becomes an effective collective accomplishment when individual agentic actions are legitimated, when attention and information about pain is propagated, and when systems are in place that allow for easy coordination of effort.
Key insights developed through this lens	• Compassion is effortful work that involves expenditure of cognitive and emotional energy • Compassion depends on skilled interpersonal interactions • Compassion as interpersonal work may be gendered and rendered less visible than other forms of interpersonal work • Small acts of compassion may have large consequences	• Compassion narratives show the emotional tendencies of a collective • Exposure to compassion narratives in organizations affects people in consequential ways, often having a developmental effect • Compassion narratives reveal a process by which members re-align their sense of the organizational identity with their perceptions of organizational action • Compassion narratives allow access to the multiple voices of an organization, revealing different experiences of compassion at work	• Compassion as organizing relies on interdependent observations, feelings, and actions • Compassion as organizing is subject to nonlinear dynamics and feedback loops that influence the shape of the response • Organizing processes are embedded in time and may feed into expectations for compassionate response in the future • Organizing compassion has secondary effects such as raising the level of efficacy to meet challenges in a system