HANDBOOK OF
TRANSFORMATIVE COOPERATION

New Designs and Dynamics

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The Transformative Potential of Compassion at Work

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Cooperation can only strengthen mankind, because it helps us recognize that the most secure foundation for the new world order is not simply broader political and economic alliances, but rather each individual's genuine practice of love and compassion. For a better, happier, more stable and civilized future, each of us must develop a sincere, warm-hearted feeling of brother- and sisterhood.

—The Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lama suggests that individuals are the primary architects of human society. He believes that society can be transformed in a positive way through individual expressions of love and compassion. This chapter takes this idea to heart by exploring how seemingly small interpersonal acts can have big, systemwide effects. By argument and example, we hope to reveal the ways that daily instances and expressions of compassion among individuals within a social system, particularly work organizations, can contribute to an organization's capability for cooperation (OCC).1

By OCC we refer to an organization’s collective ability to cooperate. Capability is defined by the organization's ability both to increase its cooperation and to improve its competence in cooperating. Consistent with the theme of this book, we define cooperation as voluntary acts of working with others for shared advantage (Smith, Carroll, and Ashford, 1995). Our definition follows from research by social dilemma theorists

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who see cooperation in decisions where joint interest is maximized (Kopelman, Weber, and Messick, 2002). The definition goes beyond the idea of cooperation as a simple contribution of effort to the completion of interdependent jobs that has been described by researchers in economics, social psychology, and business in their investigations of phenomena such as social loafing and free riding in groups (Latane, Williams, and Harkins, 1979; Wagner, 1995). Cooperation is often achieved by collaboration, defined as joint decision making by key stakeholders about the future in a particular problem domain (Gray, 1989). In accord with the thesis of this book, our argument is that greater levels of organizational and interorganizational capability for cooperation contribute to positive global change and human prosperity (Cooperrider and Dutton, 1999).

An organization’s greater capability for cooperation shows up in many ways. It may be manifest in an organization’s higher rate and greater success in partnering, particularly in partnering that is integrative and mutual (Austin, 2000; Eisler, 2003; McGill, 2007). It may show up in more extensive and effective coordination processes. For example, Gittell (2003) argues that firms vary in their capacity to do complex coordination of interdependent tasks and that greater relational competence is largely responsible for higher coordination effectiveness. In her studies of coordination in both the airline industry and hospitals, a capacity to coordinate well depends on a willingness and competence in cooperating across diverse and interdependent parts of an organization.

An increased capability for cooperation at the organizational level may also show up in less dramatic and costly ways such as more prosocial behavior between members in the organization (Batson and Shaw, 1991) or increased levels of interpersonal helping (Settton and Mosholder, 2002). It may also be manifest in the everyday language of organizational members. The language of “we,” of care, of help, and of enabling reflect and affirm the existence of a higher capability for cooperation and for connection more generally (see, for example, Dutton, 2003; Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000). It may also be manifest in the everyday conduct of meetings, gatherings, and programs where an attitude of cooperation permeates these micro-occasions, and people both see and act on the potential of mutual gains available from working together for shared goals. Where OCC is greater, there is an increased likelihood that cooperation will occur and be more varied, and the organization will be better at enabling and supporting cooperation.

Our aim in this chapter is to develop an understanding of the mechanisms through which compassion among members of an organization generates resources, shared values and beliefs, and skills, all of which help to build the organization’s cooperation capacity. Resources are the materials in use that facilitate cooperation, or what people draw on and use when they cooperate (Feldman, 2004). Shared values and beliefs provide a sense of direction and motivation. They are what guides cooperation, and they help people (both individuals and groups) understand why they should cooperate (that is, for what purpose) and how they should approach cooperation. Finally, the skills are the means by which people cooperate; they are the know-how that informs how people actually do cooperate. Taken together, these three effects of compassion contribute to an organization’s capability for cooperation. We argue that interpersonal acts of compassion build resources, strengthen values and beliefs, and cultivate critical skills, thus building OCC. A visual depiction of the three mechanisms through which compassion affects OCC is presented in Figure 5.1. We use a pillar metaphor to suggest that an organization’s capability for cooperation rests on three pillar features: resources, values and beliefs, and skills.

![Organizational Capability for Cooperation](image)

**Figure 5.1.** Core arguments linking compassion at work to cooperation capability of an organization.
Starting Assumptions About Compassion

Our arguments are based on an assumption that experiences of pain and compassion are fundamental to being human. As human institutions, organizations are sites that inevitably harbor the emotional pain and suffering of their individual members (Dutton and others, 2002; Frost and Robinson, 1999; Frost, Dutton, Worline, and Wilson, 2000). Moreover, the presence of pain in work organizations has serious financial, psychological, and social costs for organizations and their members (Frost, 2003). As the “heart’s response to suffering” (Kornfield, 1993), compassion plays an important role in organizational life through its ability to lessen or alleviate pain. Compassion is a relational process that involves noticing another person’s pain, experiencing an emotional reaction to his or her pain, and acting in some way to help ease or alleviate the pain (Frost and others, 2006; Kanov and others, 2004). Consistent with the Buddhist argument, compassion suggests no self as it implies no boundary between the self and the other (Gray, 2003). Compassion is a form of caregiving that is typically invisible or devalued in work organizations (Eisler, 2003; Kahn, 1993). Organizations enable or disable compassion by facilitating or hindering the noticing, feeling, and responding to pain of their members, processes that we argue contribute to the creation of resources, the strengthening of certain shared beliefs and values, and the cultivation of key relational skills (Dutton, Worline, Frost, and Lilis, 2006). Our understanding of the healing power of compassion is rooted in the medical and nursing literatures, where scholars and practitioners emphasize the importance of attending to patients’ emotional anguish as well as their physical health (Cassell, 2002; Reich, 1989). Compassion enables medical practitioners to achieve a deeper level of healing in their patients because it connects them more fully with their patients and allows them to treat the whole person rather than just illnesses and injuries (Brody, 1992; Cassell, 2002).

While the healing potential of compassion plays an important role in organizations, compassion also contributes in important ways to organizations’ social fabric. By social fabric we mean the overall pattern in the quality of relationships between people in an organization. As suggested in the medical and nursing literatures, compassion heals by and through the relationship it helps to create between health care providers and their patients (Reich, 1989). Historical, philosophical, and theological sources also recognize the ability of compassion to create, strengthen, and sustain human connection and community (Clark, 1997; Dalai Lama, 1995; Glaser, 2005; Wuthnow, 1991). In general, compassion is widely regarded as a basic social force that builds and reinforces connections between people.

We argue that in the context of work organizations, compassion has particularly important social and relational effects. Namely, compassion among organizational members builds, strengthens, and sustains the cooperation capability of those organizations. While we discuss cooperation capability as building from within organizations, consistent with the theme of this book, we also see it as critical in order to create the conditions by which organizations can be a powerful force for change in a broader sense (Harman and Horman, 1990). We now turn our attention to the mechanisms through which compassion achieves these ends.

The core claim of our chapter is that small acts of compassion are generative—they produce vital and renewable resources, generate and strengthen critical values and beliefs, and develop critical relational skills. We illustrate these claims with stories we have gathered from two studies of experienced compassion at work (Frost et al., 2006; Lilis, Worline, Maitlis, Kanov, Dutton, and Frost, 2007). Together these three products cultivate an organizational social fabric that strengthens an organization’s cooperation capability both by improving the collective competence of the whole and by increasing the load capacity of the whole for doing cooperative work. We first develop foundational arguments linking compassion to these resources and then propose a process through which this cooperation capability is enacted.

Three Pillars in Building the Compassion-to-Cooperation Link

Compassion Creates Resources

Compassion in organizations creates critical resources that are useful for creating and sustaining system-level relational capacities. By resources we mean relational outcomes or assets that can be drawn on in use (Feldman, 2004) to facilitate cooperative or collaborative action between people. Specifically, we argue that compassion between organizational members increases trust and felt connections between members and generates positive emotions, both of which increase the potential for OCC. Within an organization, compassion not only generates such
resources in those directly involved in a compassionate interaction, but also generates resources in third-party organizational members who witness or are made aware of these compassionate interactions.

Trust. Compassion between individuals increases levels of interpersonal trust, or the degree of confidence that one has and one’s willingness to act on the basis of the words, actions, and decisions of others (McAllister, 1995). When someone experiences compassion directly or witnesses its occurrence, they feel greater trust that, should they be faced with a difficult time in their own lives, they can count on those around them. An employee at Midwestern Health System (MHS) describes the impact of seeing the capacity for compassion in his coworkers:

A coworker with seven children needed immediate bypass surgery. His disability insurance only gave his family two-thirds of his normal income—we knew that wasn’t enough. I set up a tax-free trust fund and ended up getting a little over $5,800—more than enough to cover his losses of being off work for the extended period of time. I couldn’t believe that our lab of seventy-five came up with that much money in less than one week. It still means a lot to me—to know I work with such caring people.

The person telling this story conveys amazement at the sheer amount of financial support shown by his coworkers, and through his characterization of them as “caring people” he suggests his impression of them as people who can be trusted or counted on to act with similar compassion in the future. This trust allows people to suspend a self-focus and develop an understanding that they will not be taken advantage of (Porter, Lawler, and Hackman, 1975), thus creating conditions in which they are more open to finding areas of mutual interest and shared advantage, making cooperation more likely and more effective.

Quality of connection. In a closely related way, compassion alters the felt connection between people, increasing the quality of the connection. In high-quality connections there is more engagement and a heightened sense of give and take (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003). Some people actually verbalize a bond that is formed with those who have provided compassion. One MHS employee describes the connection she felt with the people who had helped her through a difficult period in her own life:

For six months I tried to hold down my job while attending to my critically ill mother’s needs. Daily I was asked how she was doing, how I was doing, and what can we do to help. Very often there was not anything they could do to help, but knowing that they cared and were willing was a wonderful boost to my spirit. The bond you develop with coworkers after an experience like this is irreplaceable.

This story demonstrates the increase in quality of connection that can be created between compassion receivers and compassion givers. Acts of compassion can also strengthen bonds between those who work together to provide compassion to someone in pain. Another employee from MHS describes a time when her supervisor’s pet was diagnosed with cancer and eventually died. During this time, she and her coworkers showed great compassion for their supervisor:

As each day passed, my supervisor shared more details and past happy stories about her pet. We all listened every day, sympathizing with her every day—until the day came when she called in to work telling us she would be in late because Tooter finally passed away. Just knowing how much her pet meant to her, we all decided to chip in and send her family some flowers in honor of Tooter. We all shared a moving experience. It brought us all closer—not just as coworkers, but as friends.

This example shows clearly the change in the quality and strength of the connection felt between coworkers as a result of their collective expression of compassion. This effect is not limited to those who actually participate in the compassionate episode; in some instances, being witness to compassion may alter the quality of connection between people. In a study of academics and their experience of compassion at work, we heard this effect expressed in many ways. As one person describes the experience, “After someone has been compassionate, they loom as an important person in my life” (Frost, Dutton, Worline, and Wilson, 2000, p. 37). In another story an art professor told of a time a student was sharing artwork that embodied her partner’s suicide. When she described how she reacted with compassion, she also provided testimony to how people at all levels of involvement in this compassion episode felt a change in connection and in the kinds of reactions that were called forth:

We have all been touched by death, if not suicide, in some way. . . . So I just talked about that. . . . None of us could understand the pain she had experienced. . . . and that it was incredibly valuable for all of us to have her share it with us, what it meant and how her life would be
I didn’t have MS? Of course. But would I give up this opportunity to witness and be on the receiving end of so much love? No way.” She feels deep gratitude for the compassion her coworkers showed her, which Emmons (2003) argues creates an important social resource in that it increases the likelihood of future prosocial behaviors.

For those who witness acts of compassion occurring around them, experienced compassion may lead to a sense of pride. In MHS, compassion is expressed not only between coworkers, but toward patients and their families as well. Although compassion may often be taken for granted as “part of the job description” for health care workers, it is clear from the following story that this form of compassion has a significant impact on those who witness it:

When an extremely obese patient’s kidneys shut down, due to the fact that his family had no money and he weighed over seven hundred pounds when he died, no funeral home would accept his body. Our chaplain arranged to have a funeral service in the chapel, and several nurses from critical care donated money for flowers. Within four hours time they had over twenty family members present for a viewing and farewell ceremony. The case management department also found a funeral home to cremate the body free of charge. I was so impressed by the love and compassion I saw demonstrated for a family of no reputation. I was proud to work at MHS.

The person who shared this story with us was able to verbalize the pride she felt in her coworkers and her organization as a whole as a result of the compassion she observed. A sense of pride, argues Fredrickson (2000), creates the urge to share with others the source of this sense of pride, and to continue to act in ways that will maintain or enhance it. We argue, then, that the pride felt after being involved in a compassionate episode is an important social resource because by sharing the story of compassion with others, the recipients of the compassion experience is strengthened, and people are more likely to act in ways that are aligned with this characterization. In addition, bearing witness to such an act also inspires people to act in ways that benefit the greater good (Haidt, 2003), thus prompting further acts of compassion.

In sum, important social resources are created by the increase in trust, quality connections, and positive emotion that accompany experienced compassion.
Compassion strengthens shared values and beliefs.

Compassion transforms the social context in which it occurs by strengthening certain values and beliefs by making them more visible and actionable. First, compassion as symbolic action affirms the values of dignity and mutual respect. Compassion as expressed human connection is a living testimony to the value that human beings have for each other. An employee at MHS describes the treatment of a homeless woman who had repeatedly trespassed in their office tower and had observable psychiatric disturbance. Building management called the hospital’s behavioral health staff to obtain information about community resources and then, on behalf of the woman, contacted those agencies, which then intervened to assist the woman. Says the employee, “Given a choice between an expedient ‘taking care of a problem’ and trying to go the extra mile to help an individual, staff chose the compassionate route.” Witnessing the dignity and respect evident in the building management’s actions may have served to affirm the value of the whole.

Compassion also affirms the value of the common good. Acts of compassion provide evidence of a sense of commitment that a community of people have to one another. Compassion in organizations is behavior that is other-focused at its core. It dissipates self-interest and center stages other-interest, affirming the existence of common ground and common good and strengthening the social whole (Wuthnow, 1991). Blum (1980) argues that compassion carries with it a sense of shared humanity, and this promotes the experience of equality. It transcends social boundaries and connects people to one another in a more fundamental way—at the level of their basic humanity. A story from another employee at MHS describes how even as a temporary employee she experienced compassion from a coworker:

At a point in my life when I was struggling to recover from a sad stretch of underemployment and debt pressure, I was employed here as a temporary employee, with no benefits. Not being very talkative, I was surprised to find myself “unloading” on a coworker and sharing with her my concern over lack of health benefits for my kids. A day or so after this, when I’d forgotten all about the conversation, the coworker came up to me with a brochure for a low-cost health program for which I might qualify. I was touched and impressed. I felt this person’s act to be representative of organizational values, and this was a material factor in accepting my permanent position here.

This example demonstrates beautifully how small acts of compassion can have large effects. This relatively small action both affirmed for the person telling the story her place as an equal and strengthened what she believed to be important organizational values. Beyond the personal meaning this had for her, it made her want to become a more permanent part of the community.

Finally, compassion in organizations reminds people of their interdependence with one another, strengthening this as a shared belief. It reminds them of their own importance in the lives of others, and affirms that they can rely on one another, especially during difficult times. An employee at MHS tells of a time when a coworker found out that both of her parents had cancer:

She needed to take a leave to care for her parents. Our department donated vacation hours and personal hours and was able to present her with a check for over $1,000. We also donated meals that we delivered to her and spent time sitting with her or for her so she could run errands or rest. Ultimately her father passed away and now her mom resides with her and her family. My friend is back to work, but as her mom’s cancer progresses I’m sure she’ll need to take off again and we’ll all be there to help again. What comes around goes around. We have to be here for each other.

In sum, compassion in organizations is interpersonal behavior that cultivates a culture where people recognize and value their interconnectedness, contributing to a more heightened sense of community and collective identity. It increases OCC by affirming joint interests and shared fate, while at the same time helping people to feel safe and valued through mutual respect and the honoring of each person’s humanity.

Compassion cultivates critical skills.

Although people are born with a capacity to be compassionate (Nussbaum, 1996), in many institutions—whether families, schools, or work organizations—that “natural” capacity is dulled and sometimes erased. Thus when people are compassionate or witness others being compassionate, it awakens certain innate skills and deepens people's capacity to
exercise them as well. A story from MHS exemplifies how after experiencing compassion during a difficult time in one’s own life, people are more likely to act with compassion themselves:

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in January 1999. I did not realize that I worked with so many caring, giving, wonderful people. I was flooded with hugs, prayers, gifts, and tons of support throughout my various surgeries and chemotherapy. I was so overwhelmed when food was delivered to my house to feed my family of six by this group of very caring people. I have never felt so loved. This experience has given me a deeper commitment to my coworkers. . . . I find myself contributing to all other calls for sharing and giving.

In addition, compassion improves peoples’ emotional attunement or their sense of being able to gauge the emotional state of another person. This is one of the reasons that compassion has become a behavior and value the medical profession is trying to foster (Brody, 1992; Cassell, 2002; von Dietze and Orb, 2000). For example, Patricia Benner and her colleagues have shown through their study of expert nurses the importance of emotional attunement, or sensing and adapting one’s emotional awareness to the emotional state of another, as central to the provision of quality care (Benner, Tanner, and Chesla, 1996). In a study of compassion at work in university contexts, we found that people did sense changes in the degree to which other people attuned to one another as a result of experiencing compassion. One study participant explained that her friend Jenny had become more attuned to her through episodes of compassion:

Like the times when Jenny asks me if I’m okay, I know that someone cares about me. . . . There’s no rhyme or reason for when she asks me, but when she asks me I need to be asked. She knows that somehow. . . . We feel the life of each other. . . . and it means so much to me and I know she knows that. [Frost, Dutton, Worline, and Wilson, 2000, p. 33]

Compassion may enhance emotional attunement by improving listening skills or other forms of interpersonal connecting. For example, in one study of how peer supporters with multiple sclerosis provided care and support to people with the same disease, a significant shift in listening skills resulted from this form of compassion. As one person put it:

There is a quietness when I’m talking to someone, and I’m listening to them; I have to make an effort not to try to top them. It’s gotten easier. And I can listen, and I become quite interested in what he’s talking about. That’s a change. There’s quietness in the soul because of it. [Schwartz and Sendor, 1999, p. 1572]

The mode of connecting in compassion is one of being other-focused, resulting in a fine-tuning of one’s receptors to the changed emotional and cognitive states of another person.

Compassion also develops and strengthens enabling skills. By enabling skills we mean the set of behaviors of one person that allow others to be more successful at what they are doing (Dutton, 2003). People learn through the expression of compassion that small acts of caring enable another person to carry on in the face of his or her pain or grief. Thus, compassion opens the door to responding with one’s presence, one’s attention, one’s touch—simple moves that communicate a “being with” the other person. This type of awareness expands people’s repertoires of how they can enable others—often moving people from thinking that they have to enable with grand gestures (as implied, for example, by extensive mentoring programs or buddy systems) to the realization that small expressions of their own humanity can be important enabling moves. This expansion of response repertoires echoes what Miller and Stiver (1997) argue happens when people act in mutuality with one another.

Here compassion in organizations cultivates skills that allow people to focus on and attend to others. When people are overly self-focused, they often exhibit a decrease in prosocial behavior (Gibbons and Wicklund, 1982). Instances of compassion, however, create conditions in which the condition of others becomes more salient and people are able to suspend their own self-interest and put the needs of others ahead of their own. Compassion thus cultivates skills that lead to collectivist behavior, where the well-being of the group takes precedence over personal interests, and this leads to increased levels of cooperation (Wagner, 1995).

Building OCC Through Individual Acts of Compassion

In the preceding sections we identified three sets of ingredients that are foundations for building an organization’s collective capability for cooperation. The goal of this section is to provide a theoretical sketch of
how interpersonal acts of compassion among organizational members, through the generation of essential resources, values and beliefs, and skills, contribute to the cooperative capability of the whole organization. To this point we have shown that interpersonal acts of compassion generate relational resources, shared values and beliefs, and critical interpersonal skills, all of which increase individuals’ capabilities for cooperation. Now we develop a framework for understanding how such acts among individuals build and contribute to a system-level capability for cooperation, and how this capability in turn influences the actual doing of cooperation among individual organizational members.

Interpersonal acts of compassion among individuals can develop into a system-level capability for cooperation as members of the organization develop a shared awareness of the acts. The generation of resources, the promotion and reinforcement of values and beliefs, and the cultivation of critical skills occur when organizational members become increasingly aware of compassionate acts, just as they do when members witness these acts directly. One way that awareness can spread throughout an organization is through informal storytelling. When acts of compassion occur within an organization, members, particularly those directly involved and those who witness the acts, may share the story of what happened with their coworkers during informal interactions and conversations.

As organizational members communicate with one another and spread the word about compassionate acts, they move toward a shared understanding of the events as well as of the meaning and significance of the events. In seeing that others in the organization are responded to with compassion, those who hear stories of compassion often develop a sense that they too, as fellow organizational members, would be taken care of in a difficult time. As a result, the trust, the deepened sense of connection to others, and the positive emotions that compassionate acts generate will be able to spread. The sharing of stories is also how organizational members come to develop an idea of “how things work around here,” and this increases the likelihood that the values and beliefs reflected in the acts will come to be shared by those who hear and tell the stories. Telling stories of compassionate acts is also instructive in that it teaches others about how to be compassionate and act compassionately. In this way, stories also help to cultivate the critical skills.

Storytelling can also occur in organizations via more formal channels. For instance, MHS used to distribute a monthly newsletter called Caring Times to the hospital’s entire staff. This newsletter was composed of stories about hospital employees engaging in caring and compassionate acts. Practices such as this serve two important functions. First, they encourage hospital employees to look for instances of compassion and tell stories about what they see. Second, they legitimize the stories and spread them throughout the organization in a way that articulates not only what happened but also the storyteller’s experience of what happened. Thus the sharing and propagation of these stories communicates the relational resources, values, beliefs, and skills to others throughout the organization. By making this type of storytelling an institutionalized practice, organizations can increase the likelihood that individual members will regard these important products as being characteristic of the organization as a whole. For instance, to the extent that any one story reflects the values of mutual respect and dignity, it is likely that people will develop a sense that such values are endorsed and shared by the organization as a whole rather than see them as the exclusive values of the storyteller. It is important, however, for organizations to use caution when attempting to formalize or institutionalize compassion. If an organization’s rhetoric about the value of compassion is not consistent with the way the organization does business, formal mechanisms for spreading the word about compassion may come across as insincere and manipulative, thus undermining their intended effects.

Organizational leaders can play important roles in increasing awareness of compassionate acts throughout their organizations by acknowledging the acts of others and by modeling compassion in their own actions (Boytzis, Smith, and Tresser, 2003; Dutton and others, 2002). Being that leaders typically are highly public figures in their organizations, these practices serve to spread the word about compassion in ways that are analogous to formal storytelling. Also, to the extent that leaders embody the organizational whole, these practices endorse and legitimate compassionate action on behalf of the organization (Frost, 2003).

Leadership practices and formal and informal storytelling help to spread the relational resources, values and beliefs, and critical skills that compassionate acts generate throughout a social system, thus building the system’s collective capability for cooperation. To the extent that
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such a capability is present in an organization, individual members will be able to act more cooperatively (the load factor) and to do so more effectively (the competence factor). The relational resources serve as the basic raw materials on which individuals can draw in their daily actions so that they will act in ways that reflect a heightened sense of trust, a deepened sense of connection with others, and positive feelings of gratitude and pride. Thus individuals will be well-equipped to cooperate. Additionally, when individuals collectively value dignity, respect, and the common good, and when they believe in interdependence, they will be more likely to take a cooperative approach to their work. These shared values and beliefs will also improve people's cooperative competence because they will help people align their actions with those of others in the organization. Finally, the critical skills that compassionate acts generate serve as means for acting cooperatively, thus improving people's cooperative competence.

The Importance of Bridging Compassion and OCC

This chapter has developed our understanding of how daily expressions of compassion among members of work organizations build and enable an organization's capability for cooperation as a whole through three mechanisms. Compassion among members of organizations generates renewable resources, strengthens values and beliefs, and cultivates skills. In describing how the seemingly trivial actions and expressions of individuals can have big, systemwide effects, this theoretical framework bridges microlevel processes and system-level properties.

By looking at organizations through a lens of compassion, we can see how seemingly small interpersonal actions can have big, systemwide effects. First, the expression of compassion is a relational process that creates renewable resources of trust, quality connections, and positive emotions. Second, acts of compassion express and reaffirm the shared values of dignity, mutual respect, the common good, and interdependence by making the values visible and actionable to members throughout an organization. Finally, acts of compassion, as interpersonal exercises of noticing, feeling, and responding to others' emotional states, strengthen members' compassion skills and cultivate their ability to attune emotionally to and enable one another. Through each of these three mecha-

nisms, interpersonal acts of compassion build a system's capability for cooperation. In closing, we return to the Dalai Lama (2007):

A mind committed to compassion is like an overflowing reservoir—a constant source of energy, determination and kindness. This mind is like a seed; when cultivated, it gives rise to many other good qualities, such as forgiveness, tolerance, inner strength and the confidence to overcome fear and insecurity . . . we should not limit our expressions of love and compassion to our family and friends. Nor is compassion only the responsibility of clergy, health care, and social workers. It is the necessary business of every part of the human community.

Note

1. The majority of our examples come from a survey of the employees of a Midwestern health system (referred to as Midwestern Health System) and from a study of academic staff and faculty.

References


