What makes life worth living? For most people, the answer is relationships: friends, family, and loved ones. Too often, work relationships are not included in this list. Yet people spend most of their time at work, and work relationships are central not only for how work gets done, but also for the quality of our lives. Like other relationships, work relationships reflect the full spectrum of quality. At their best, they can be a generative source of enrichment, vitality, and learning that helps individuals, groups, and organizations grow, thrive, and flourish. At their worst, they can be a toxic and corrosive source of pain, depletion, and dysfunction. Despite the criticality of work relationships for individuals, groups, and organizations, organizational scholars have yet to understand the dynamics, mechanisms, and processes that generate, nourish, and sustain positive relationships at work.

This book is designed to put the field of positive relationships at work on the research map by crafting a multidisciplinary volume that uncovers the mechanisms and dynamics of positive work relationships. We envision positive relationships at work (PRW) as a rich new interdisciplinary domain of inquiry that focuses on the generative processes, relational mechanisms, and positive outcomes associated with positive relationships between people at work. PRW examines the conditions, processes, and mechanisms in organizational relationships that increase the capacity for growth, learning, generativity, and resilience in individuals, groups, and organizations.

This introductory chapter starts by giving the reader a brief overview of how positive relationships at work relates to the positive scholarship move-
ment. We then examine why this book is needed and provide the reader with the mission, vision, and objectives of the book. Next, we offer a foundation for defining positive relationships at work based on a distillation of the approaches used by the contributors to this volume. From there, we give the reader a practical overview of the roadmap of the book. This is followed by an appreciative summary of the book chapters that invites our readers to explore this rich new research frontier.

**POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK AND THE POSITIVE SCHOLARSHIP MOVEMENT**

As a new area of inquiry, the field of positive relationships at work builds on the positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2002), positive organizational (Cameron & Caza, 2004; Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003), and positive organizational behavior (Luthans, 2002; Luthans & Youssef, 2004) scholarship movements by shifting the lens from models that explain deficiencies to models that explain states of abundance. These positive scholarship movements offer the observation that by focusing on the problems, pathologies, and limitations associated with the worst of conditions we fail to capture the processes, states, and outcomes associated with the best of conditions. In a nutshell, we need to shift our perspective from the shadow to the light, from “what is wrong” to “what is right.”

The field of positive relationships at work applies this paradigm to work relationships, and builds on the positive psychology view that relationships are a central source of life satisfaction, enrichment, development, and personal growth for individuals (cf. Berscheid, 1999; Reis & Gable, 2003; Snyder & Lopez, 2002). It also builds on a positive sociological lens (e.g., Baker, Cross, & Wooten, 2003) that suggests that certain patterns of relationships are more generative, enriching, and enhancing than others.

However, we envision PRW as offering organizational scholars more than just a positive perspective on relationships in organizations. PRW seeks to explain how relationships affect organizations through multiple levels and mechanisms and therefore deepens our understanding of the role of relationships in organizational life. Relationship science scholars observe that human behaviors do not occur in a vacuum, but take place within the context of relationships (cf. Berscheid, 1999). PRW embraces this perspective by viewing relationships as “front and center” in organizational life. Under this view, relationships represent not only the essence of meaning in people’s lives, but they also reside deep in the core of or-
ganizational life; they are the means by which work is done and meaning is found in organizations.

**WHY THE TIME IS RIGHT FOR THIS BOOK**

There are three key reasons why the time is right for a book on positive relationships at work.

**We Need to Build Bridges Across Silos of Scholarship**

To date, our knowledge of positive work relationships has been obtained through isolated pockets of theory and research that are scattered across fields and disciplines. The idea of positive work relationships, for example, is central in theories of social capital (Coleman, 1988), mentoring (Kram, 1985), network theory (Burt, 1992), leader–member exchange (Graen & Scandura, 1987), trust (Kramer & Tyler, 1996), social support (Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996), learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and psychological growth (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Although attention to this topic spans a broad swath of literature, our understanding of positive relationships at work is limited by silos of scholarship that rarely speak across levels, dependent variables, or fields of inquiry. We need a platform that allows us to reflect the richness of positive work relationships by weaving together threads from different disciplines, levels of analysis, and perspectives.

**We Need to Put Relationships at the Foreground of Organizational Studies**

Relationships are central to the meaning and being of life. As Berscheid (1999) so eloquently observed, “... relationships with other humans are both the foundation and the theme of the human condition: We are born into relationships, we live our lives in relationships with others, and when we die, the effects of our relationships survive in the lives of the living, reverberating throughout the tissue of their relationships” (p. 261).

In spite of the centrality of relationships to our life experience, relationships traditionally are placed in the background of organizational life (cf. Gersick, Bartunek, & Dutton, 2000; Kahn, 1993, 1998, chap. 10, this volume). This perspective not only ignores the significance of workplace relationships but also takes a needlessly segmented view of people in the workplace; that although relationships are central to employees’ lives they are somehow able to turn off this need once they enter the workplace. In contrast, a holistic approach understands that relationships are central to life
both within and outside the workplace, and that the need for authentic relationships is not left at the workplace door.

**We Need to Extend Our Boundaries of Knowledge About Relationships in Organizations**

Our knowledge about relationships in organizations is limited in at least three ways. First, the dominant theoretical paradigm that has been applied to the study of relationships, social exchange theory (e.g., Blau, 1964; Homans, 1974), is limited in explaining processes in positive work relationships. Social exchange theory views relationships as a means for exchanging resources for the purpose of achieving utility or power. This perspective uses an economic model of social interactions and fails to address communal norms evident in high-quality relationships (cf. Ragins & Verbos, chap. 5, this volume). In addition, a social exchange perspective assumes fixed resources and fails to acknowledge processes in positive work relationships that generate and create new resources (cf. Baker & Dutton, chap. 18, this volume), thus expanding “the pie” of individual and organizational resources (cf. Rousseau & Ling, chap. 20, this volume).

Second, we have a limited understanding of how positive work relationships interact with other aspects of social life within and outside organizations. Our research is often artificially constrained by organizational boundaries and we have failed to examine the effects of internal and external communities on organizational relationships (cf. discussion by Blatt & Camden, chap. 13, this volume; McGinn, chap. 14, this volume) and behaviors (e.g., Ragins, in press). We have not considered the symbolic meaning of relationships and how work relationships become institutionalized in organizational contexts and cultures (cf. Glynn & Wrobel, chap. 17, this volume; Golden-Biddle, GermAnn, Reay, & Procyshen, chap. 16., this volume). We have a limited understanding of relationship building and repair (cf. Pratt & Dirks, chap. 6, this volume) and the effects of gender, diversity, and identity on relationships in organizations (cf. Davidson & James, chap. 7, this volume; Fletcher, chap. 19, this volume; Roberts, chap. 2, this volume).

Third, our knowledge about relationships in organizations needs to be expanded to take into account the changing landscape of work and careers. Workplaces and work itself are increasingly interdependent, making connection the norm and relationships the means by which work occurs. Sustainable organizational performance and effective individual development are therefore increasingly dependent on the quality of relationships between people at work. In addition, with the rise of the protean career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 1996), employees are tied less to organizations and more to relationships that are developmental and growth enhancing
Consequently, loyalty and commitment to organizations are grounded more on social and relational than economic bases. Finally, as relationships take a more primary role in organizational life, we need to be able to transform relationships from states of just “getting by” and surviving to states of thriving (cf. Harvey & Pauwels, 2003; Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005).

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK: OUR MISSION AND VISION

The goal of this book is to put Positive Relationships at Work on the research map. We do this by composing a volume that builds a solid foundation for this promising new area of scholarly inquiry. Our vision is to offer a multidisciplinary exploration of how relationships at work become a source of growth, vitality, learning, and generative states of human and collective flourishing.

To pursue this expansive adventure we knew we had to approach this topic from multiple levels: individual, dyadic, group, organizational, and community. Each level offers critical and useful insights into the dynamic and generative processes underlying positive relationships in organizations.

Although a multilevel perspective is vital for offering a comprehensive view of positive work relationships, we also recognize the need to weave the threads from different levels together so that we can offer readers a theoretical tapestry that reflects the dynamic richness of positive relationships in the workplace. Our goal is to give our readers an invitation to engage in a new multidisciplinary area of research, but also provide a broad perspective that allows us to build insights across levels of analysis.

Last, we want to breathe new life into established areas of scholarship by applying a PRW lens to established areas of organizational research. We want to inspire future scholars by offering a research agenda that links established areas with the promising new field of positive relationships at work.

With these visions in mind, this volume is designed to meet three key objectives:

1. To establish Positive Relationships at Work as a new interdisciplinary, multilevel domain of inquiry.
2. To facilitate the application of a Positive Relationships at Work perspective to new and established areas of organizational behavior, organizational theory, and organizational strategy.
3. To offer an engaging invitation and multilevel map for guiding future research on positive relationships at work.

We selected a stellar group of multidisciplinary scholars and invited them to apply their knowledge, insight, and expertise toward creating a volume that achieves these ambitious objectives. In the fall of 2004 these scholars, who represent such fields as interpersonal relationships, interpersonal communication, organizational strategy, organizational theory, organizational behavior, and a variety of psychological disciplines (industrial-organizational, clinical, community, and social psychology), came to Ann Arbor, Michigan, to participate in a book-building conference. Our goal was to generate a new field of research on positive relationships at work by crafting a foundation-setting book. These vanguard scholars took this task to heart, and the result is a collection of thought-provoking chapters that define the emerging research domain of positive relationships at work.

Our first challenge was to define PRW. Let us now turn to an overview of the key aspects of this construct.

DEFINING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK

For years, interpersonal relationship scholars have struggled to define what precisely constitutes a positive relationship (cf. Berscheid, 1994, 1999; Duck, 1994; Reis & Gable, 2003). We soon discovered a similar challenge in defining positive relationships at work. Like other positive relationships (cf. Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Reis & Gable, 2003), positive work relationships can be defined in terms of the states or processes in the relationship, the experienced quality of the relationship, or the outcomes of the relationship. We asked the authors in this volume to try to include their definition or perspective on positive work relationships in organizations in their chapters, and we quickly discovered that although there is some common ground, there is also significant diversity in the approach to this construct. Perhaps there is no single “best” definition of PRW that reflects an absolute consensus across levels and disciplines. Given that the field is in its research infancy, we believe that an expansive approach that incorporates a full range of perspectives is appropriate and needed; an approach that opens rather than closes doors to future research.

With these caveats in mind, we would like to offer readers a basic foundation for defining positive relationships at work that reflects the common ground discovered through building this book. We then offer a brief bird’s-eye overview of how the contributors to this volume defined PRW with an eye toward articulating some of the complexities in defining this construct.
A Foundation for Defining Positive Relationships at Work

Focus on Relationships. At its most basic level, positive relationships at work are relationships between individuals that can occur at the dyadic, group, community, and organizational level. Traditionally, relationships are defined as a sequence of interactions between two people that involves some degree of mutuality, in that the behavior of one member takes some account of the behavior of the other (Hinde, 1979). Relationships are dynamic and fluid; present interactions are affected by past interactions and may influence future interactions. Relationships do not reside in the individual but are reoccurring interconnections that exist within the tissue or oscillating rhythm of interactions between two people (Berscheid, 1999). They are therefore invisible and are often discerned by observing the effects of the relationship.

Focus on the Organizational and Work Context. Positive relationships at work are a type of relationship that exists within the context of organizations, work, and careers. Positive work relationships, which some of our contributors used interchangeably with the term positive organizational relationships, are connected to the organization in some way, but may be situated within or outside of organizational boundaries. They may include relationships between individuals who work together in the same organization as well as relationships that are focused on work and careers that extend beyond the organization’s boundaries. Positive relationships at work may therefore include developmental networks and mentoring relationships that span organizational boundaries, as well as relationships between individuals sharing a common profession, occupation or work community that is tied to the organization. Finally, positive relationships at work are not restricted to face-to-face interactions; like other work relationships, positive work relationships may be developed or sustained as virtual or electronic relationships.

Focus on Positive. What distinguishes positive work relationships from other work relationships is the notion of “positive.” Although the definition of positive varies with different disciplines, lenses, and social constructions, we offer the idea of positive work relationships as a reoccurring connection between two people that takes place within the context of work and careers and is experienced as mutually beneficial, where beneficial is defined broadly to include any kind of positive state, process, or outcome in the relationship. This definition, however, just brushes the surface of positive relationships at work. The contributors to this volume flesh out this basic definition and
Approaches to Defining Positive Relationships at Work

**Positive Work Relationships as High-Quality Connections.** Many of the contributors to this volume (see Heaphy, chap. 3; Higgins, chap. 11; Quinn, chap. 4; Baker & Dutton, chap. 18) define positive relationships at work as a *high-quality connection*. According to Dutton and Heaphy (2003; see also Dutton, 2003) high-quality connections (HQC) involve short interactions or long-term relationships that are marked by vitality, mutuality, and positive regard. HQCs have three key features. First, HQCs have higher *emotional carrying capacity* than other relationships and interactions. Emotional carrying capacity reflects the expression of more emotions as well as a greater range of positive and negative emotions in the relationship. Second, HQCs have greater levels of *tensility*, which is the relationship’s ability to bend and withstand strain in the face of challenges or setbacks. Finally, HQCs are distinguished from other relationships and interactions by their capacity for *connectivity*, which involves generativity and openness to new ideas and influences, as well as the ability to deflect behaviors that terminate generative processes.

**Experiences, Processes, and Outcomes.** Other contributors offer complementary perspectives by defining positive work relationships in terms of the experience and processes of the relationship. Kahn (chap. 10, this volume) views positive work relationships as those that *enable* individuals to personally engage in their work. He explains that positive work relationships meet members’ *relational needs* and allow them to be authentic, present, and intellectually and emotionally available at work. Roberts (chap. 2, this volume) builds on this idea by defining positive work relationships as involving a sense of *relatedness and mutuality* that creates the possibility for greater self-discovery, heightened sense of self-efficacy, and identity enhancement. Quinn (chap. 4, this volume) points to the importance of *energy* in positive work relationships and observes that although positive relationships are more than energy, without energy there could not be positive relationships. Pratt and Dirks (chap. 6, this volume) remind us that positive work relationships offer support not only when times are good, but also in the face of adversity. They define positive relationships in terms of relationship resiliency and the capacity to *build and repair trust*. Duck (chap. 9, this volume) points out that, like other interpersonal relationships, positive relationships at work are *socially constructed* relationships, and that their dynamic natures make them fluid works in progress rather than static final
states. Blatt and Camden (chap. 13, this volume) define positive relationships in terms of positive connections that lead to feelings of inclusion, a felt sense of being important to others, experienced mutual benefit, and shared emotions. They contend that positive work relationships can occur in the present and do not require a shared history or a future of interactions, although other contributors disagree and hold that positive work relationships require a history, a present, and an anticipated future (cf. Golden-Biddle et al., chap. 16, this volume).

Some contributors offer guidelines for assessing whether a work relationship is positive. Applying Stone Center Relational Theory (Miller & Stiver, 1997), Fletcher (chap. 19, this volume) defines positive work relationships as ones in which *mutual growth-in-connection* has occurred, and offers specific evaluative criteria for assessing this state. In particular, relationships are positive when both members experience the “five good things” of zest, empowered action, increased sense of worth, new knowledge and the desire for more connection. Grounded more in organizational settings, Greenberg (chap. 8, this volume) defines positive work relationships as both involving and leading to states of *positive organizational justice*.

**Teams, Organizations, and Communities.** Positive relationships can also be defined from the vantage point of relationships that are nested within teams, organizations, and communities. Ancona and Isaacs (chap. 12, this volume) define positive relationships in teams as a *structured pattern of interrelating* that creates an overall generative pattern of healthy team functioning. Golden-Biddle and her colleagues (chap. 16, this volume) define positive organizational relationships as patterns of interacting that are characterized by a recurring but not necessarily intimate bond in which groups of people develop a sense of mutuality, positive regard, and respect for one another. McGinn (chap. 14, this volume) examines work relationships within positive communities, and explains that positive communities involve networks of supportive relationships. According to McGinn, a community is positive when its members recognize and rely on their membership as a valuable resource.

**Resource Perspective.** Positive organizational relationships can also be defined as a resource for individuals, groups, and organizations. Baker and Dutton (chap. 18, this volume) view positive work relationships as a form of positive social capital that expands the generative capacity of people and groups, thereby helping them achieve their goals in new and better ways. Through HQCs and generalized reciprocity, positive work relationships increase the *resource-producing capabilities* of individuals and groups. Rousseau and Ling (chap. 20, this volume) point out that positive relationships expand the resources organizations exchange with their members; positive work re-
Relationships take a generative role in creating, expanding, and sustaining resource-rich interactions between organizations and their members.

**Relationship Type.** Finally, some contributors define particular types of positive relationships in organizations, such as diverse work relationships (Davidson & James, chap. 7, this volume), leader–member dyads (Fletcher, chap. 19, this volume) and mentoring relationships (Ragins & Verbos, chap. 5, this volume). These chapters illustrate that although there are common themes that define positive work relationships, the type of relationship plays an important role in how positive work relationships are defined, perceived, and evaluated. For example, Davidson and James (chap. 7) point to the critical role that conflict and learning play in overcoming stereotypes and developing positive relationships across differences. Along similar lines, Fletcher (chap. 19) observes that cultural constructions of gender influence the views, expectations, and evaluations of relationships involving female leaders. Ragins and Verbos (chap. 5) point to the importance of relational schema and cognitive processes in members’ perceptions, expectations, and evaluations of the quality of their relationship.

**Summary.** This preview illustrates the diversity and complexity involved with defining positive relationships at work. Positive relationships at work can be defined in terms of processes, experiences, and outcomes. They can be viewed as embedded relationships that occur in groups, organizations, and communities. They can be defined in terms of meeting people’s needs—needs that continually change based on the constellation of other relationships in the organization and community. Positive work relationships are therefore fluid relationships that evolve and change over time, people, context, and culture. Understanding these relationships requires a holistic approach that incorporates multiple levels and relationships that occur outside the organizations’ boundaries. Finally, the very concept of positive may be shaped not only by the external social, organizational, and cultural context, but also by the internal, psychological, and cognitive processes that drive members’ perceptions, expectations, and evaluations of the relationship.

Now that we have a preliminary definition of positive relationships at work, let us turn to an overview of the structure and contents of the book.

**ROADMAP FOR THE BOOK**

We know that positive work relationships may both affect and be affected by individual attributes, dyadic properties of the relationship, properties of groups and communities, and the broader organizational context. With this
in mind, Exploring Positive Relationships at Work is organized into three parts that span the micro-to-macro spectrum: (a) individuals and dyads, (b) groups and communities, and (c) organizations and organizing.

A unique feature of the book is the use of a connecting commentator chapter at the end of each of these three parts. The commentator chapters uncover and discuss integrative themes that emerge within the sections. The commentators invited to take the lead writing these chapters (Duck, Kahn, and Rousseau) are preeminent scholars in their respective fields, and their connecting chapters weave together themes, theories, and perspectives within each level of analysis.

The contributors to this volume represent a select group of scholars who have deep expertise in their field or on some aspect of positive relationships at work. To provide coherence and integration across chapters, we asked our authors to write their chapters with two goals in mind. First, they were asked to integrate and build on each others’ chapters across and within levels of analysis. Our book-building conference provided a substantive platform for achieving this goal, which was further reinforced by posting chapter drafts on our book Web site. Second, to stress the importance of linking their area of expertise to the new domain of positive relationships at work, we asked contributors to address three questions in their chapters. First, how does their chapter advance the construct of positive relationships at work? Second, what are the processes or mechanisms underlying positive relationships at work? Last, how does their perspective on positive relationships at work invite future research?

The book concludes with our summary chapter, which summarizes the theoretical mechanisms underlying positive relationships at work, articulates the value of a positive relationship at work perspective for organizational scholarship, and sets the course for navigating future research in this exciting new area of inquiry.

We now focus our attention to an overview of the chapters in this book. In particular, we offer our readers an appreciative summary that attempts to capture the core essence and unique contributions of each chapter.

**AN APPRECIATIVE SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS**

**Individual and Dyad Section**

The book begins with an examination of the individual and dyadic factors that affect and are affected by positive relationships at work. The authors in this part break new ground and offer new perspectives on positive work relationships by uncovering and exploring a rich and diverse range of topics, such as identity, the body, energy, trust, mentoring, diversity, and justice.
We start with Roberts’s chapter (chap. 2), which offers critical insights into the identity processes underlying PRW. Positive relationships are associated with a range of positive outcomes, and Roberts uncovers the identity mechanisms that may drive this relationship. She observes that by providing psychosocial support, inspiration, and feedback, positive work relationships allow individuals to learn more about the valued and distinctive aspects of their own identities. She suggests that positive relationships create identity enhancement by allowing individuals to discover their sources of strength, competence, and contributions. According to Roberts, this creates a generative process; as individuals become more aware of their strengths, they change their self-views to be aligned with the positive appraisals of others. Even more intriguing is the proposed interplay between identity and positive relationships. Roberts identifies this as a mutually reinforcing cycle: As relational identities are enhanced and enriched, the relationship becomes even more positive. Her account offers a compelling explanation for the mechanisms underlying positive relationships at work and explains, from an individual perspective, how relationships can be transformed from damaging disconnections to growth-enhancing connections.

Heapy’s chapter (chap. 3) breaks important new ground by examining the relationship between PRW and the human body. Heapy draws on a full range of physiological literature, and her chapter opens an exciting portal into a new area of scholarship on physiology and relationships. She presents three ways of conceptualizing the human body that offer insights into the physiology of positive organizational relationships. First, by viewing the body as a physiological system, she examines how organizational relationships affect physical health through the mechanism of relationship quality. Second, she examines the effects of bodily cues as subjective indicators of the quality of the relationship. She observes that bodily cues allow individuals to make sense of their relationship and that the skillful use of bodily cues is a form of interpersonal competence that emerges in positive relationships. Heapy astutely observes that we underestimate the importance of bodily cues in organizational life, and her analysis allows us to view the body not as a threat to individual’s work performance, but as a source of competence. Last, she offers an assessment of how cultural contexts offer interpretative frameworks that help individuals make sense of the role of bodies in relationships at organizational, institutional, and societal levels. The Heapy chapter offers a provocative analysis of the body and thoughtful directions for future research on the physiological outcomes associated with positive relationships at work.

Quinn’s chapter (chap. 4) analyzes the role of energy in positive connections and relationships at work. Energy is defined as a positive affective experience involving the feeling of being eager to act and capable of acting. Quinn contends that energy is necessary for the development of high
quality connections and offers a dynamic model of the reciprocal relationship between energy and positive connections at work. He explains that the quality of a connection affects the experience of energy, and energy in turn is necessary for the development of high-quality connections. His chapter offers a thorough and perceptive analysis of three primary mechanisms through which energy influences the quality of workplace connections: mutual resource creation, feedback, and attachment. These mechanisms involve three ideas: that employees build new valuable resources when they are energized, that attachment develops when parties experience energy in an interaction, and that members then use this energy as feedback to infer information about the quality of their interaction. A key insight from this chapter is that energy represents a source of transformation and change in relationships, and that employee energy and the quality of work connections engage in a dynamic feedback relationship that evolves over time.

Ragins and Verbos (chap. 5) examine the natural connection between mentoring and positive relationships at work. They observe that the field of mentoring can inform, and be informed by, a focus on positive relationships at work. At its best, mentoring personifies positive relationships at work, and their chapter begins with insights from mentoring research that deepen the understanding of positive relationships at work. They observe that positive work relationships are needs-based relationships that are nested within a constellation of other career relationships that may transcend organizational boundaries. They explain that like mentoring relationships, positive relationships at work may evolve through life cycles that transform over time and through states of relational quality. Ragins and Verbos then turn the table and apply a positive lens to the mentoring arena. They critique the mentoring literature and present the construct of relational mentoring as the most positive state in the continuum of mentoring relationships. The second part of their chapter then offers a theoretical model of mentoring schemas that integrates relational cognition theory, relational schema theory, and models of relational self to explicate the processes underlying schema development and expectations in positive relationships. They propose that individuals develop particularistic and generic relational schema about positive relationships that serve as a mental guide for developing and sustaining relationships. These schemas are formed through sources of relational knowledge and involve feedback loops that perpetuate the creation of positive relationships at work. Their model of mentoring schemas offers a useful bridge between social cognition theory and our understanding of the psychological and cognitive processes underlying positive relationships at work.

Pratt and Dirks (chap. 6) offer a compelling appraisal of the role of trust in positive relationships at work. They begin by observing that trust is cen-
tral to all positive relationships. They go on to observe that positive relationships are more resilient than other relationships in that positive relationships can offer their members support even in the face of adversity. Pratt and Dirks reason that if positive relationships are characterized by resilience, it is important to understand not only the role of trust in positive relationships, but also the processes involved with the breaking and repair of trust. They make the case that traditional social exchange perspectives do not address how trust is repaired and regained in relationships, and thus fall short in capturing processes in positive relationships. As an alternative to social exchange perspectives, Pratt and Dirks use a relationship-based commitment perspective that focuses on members’ commitment to the relationship. They explain that whereas social exchange perspectives allow for the positive and negative aspects of a relationship to cancel each other out, a commitment-based perspective allows members to experience both positive and negative elements simultaneously, leading to a state of ambivalence. They contend that the resolution of this ambivalence becomes the fuel for trust, and that the ability to manage positive and negative elements simultaneously gives the relationship energy and resilience. Pratt and Dirks reconceptualize trust as a volitional acceptance of the existence of both the vulnerability and the benefits associated with being in the relationship. By offering a new lens on the building and rebuilding of trust, this thought-provoking chapter offers a powerful explanation for the resiliency underlying positive relationships at work.

Davidson and James (chap. 7) tackle a critical dilemma in the diversity arena: How can employees transform diverse relationships steeped in cynicism, mistrust, and enmity into relationships that are productive, nurturing, and energizing? They offer a key insight that this transformation occurs through two primary mechanisms: conflict and learning. They observe that salient differences between members in diverse (cross-difference) relationships trigger schemas, stereotypes, and expectations that set the stage for conflict. They examine the positive nature of conflict in cross-difference relationships, and propose that the opportunity to transform this conflict into learning is the only means by which high-quality relationships across differences emerge. Their chapter offers a penetrating examination of how individuals move beyond stereotypes and conflict to a learning approach. They propose that the path to learning begins with an individual’s personal experiences with members of diverse groups, but is also influenced by the members’ investment in the relationship and hinges on core skills or relational competencies that allow members to move the relationship from a state of conflict to a state of growth, learning, and engagement. Developing high-quality relationships across differences is often a daunting task, and this chapter gives sharp insights into how conflict generated in diverse relation-
Greenberg (chap. 8) takes a fresh perspective by applying a positive lens to the domain of organizational justice. He observes that the field of organizational justice has focused more on the avoidance of injustice than on the attainment of justice as a positive outcome of organizational relationships. Greenberg identifies the need to bring balance to the study of organizational justice by refocusing attention from the individual's negative reactions of injustice to the positive side of the spectrum. Toward that goal, he offers the idea of positive organizational justice, which he defines as “deliberate efforts to promote, enhance, and sustain perceived fairness in the workplace in a manner that develops the positive capacities of individuals and organizations.” He reviews the three established forms of justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional) with a positive organizational justice lens and offers an incisive critique of the strengths and limitations of these perspectives as they relate to positive relationships at work. His chapter identifies the underlying states and conditions that promote positive organizational justice and offers the idea of a self-regenerating cycle of positive organizational justice. This chapter offers breadth and balance to field of organizational justice and will be a catalyst for future research on positive organizational justice.

The part on individual and dyadic elements of positive relationships concludes with an insightful commentator chapter by Duck (chap. 9). As a renowned scholar in the field of personal relationships, Duck draws on more than 20 years of scholarship to integrate the chapters in this section and to offer a number of key insights on positive relationships at work. First, he reminds us that relationships exist in a state of interdependence, and although the chapters in this section focus on the individual and dyadic level of analyses, these levels are embedded in other levels involving groups, organizations, and communities. Second, he observes that relationships are social constructions that are not inherently positive or negative. He points out that the construct of positivity is socially grounded and therefore the qualities associated with positive relationships reflect assumptions embedded in the organization and in the broader societal context. Third, he observes that the fluid, continuous, and dynamic nature of relationships makes them “open-ended enterprises” that reflect “unfinished business” rather than final states. He reminds us that positivity is not a perpetual state, but rather a predominant form of the relationship; we cannot expect individuals to view positive relationships as positive all the time. Finally he points out that positive work relationships differ from other types of relationships in terms of intimacy, length, and whether they are voluntarily formed. By drawing on the related field of personal relationships, Duck’s
chapter deepens and broadens our understanding of positive relationships at work.

Groups and Communities Section

In this part we shift our attention from individual and dyadic aspects of the relationship to aspects of positive relationships that are embedded within the broader context of groups and communities. Although relationships are often viewed from a micro perspective, the contributors to this part push the boundaries and expand our vision by viewing positive relationships as nested within the context of networks, teams, groups, and communities.

We start with Kahn’s chapter (chap. 10), which offers a rich analysis of how constellations of positive relationships help workers become attached to their organizations. He stresses the fundamental point that relationships are central to organizational life and individual’s workplace experiences. He then identifies five dimensions of meaningful connections among people at work (task accomplishment, career development, sense making, provision of meaning, and personal support) and observes that these dimensions enable people to build relationships that meet instrumental, expressive, cognitive, identity, growth, and relatedness needs. Kahn uses this framework to examine the structure of relational constellations, which are defined as sets of relationships that individuals draw on to meet their needs. He explains that relational constellations vary in effectiveness, and identifies four types of constellations that vary by scope and the degree to which they meet members’ relational needs. He makes the case that positive relational constellations bring a sense of psychological attachment that generalizes to the workplace. Kahn offers the idea that meaningful connections at work are not only sources of attachment, but also allow workers to bring their true authentic selves to the workplace. This conceptual insight offers exciting new possibilities for future research on relational constellations, organizational attachment and the development of authentic selves in the workplace.

Higgins’s chapter (chap. 11) navigates new terrain by presenting a contingency perspective on developmental networks and PRW. Working within the mentoring arena, her chapter shifts the level of analysis from dyadic relationships to constellations of relationships within relationship networks. Higgins points out that prevailing perspectives on mentoring fail to examine how constellations of relationships and network structures affect a given mentoring relationship. Whereas traditional perspectives take a “more is better” approach and assume that the more help that is given in a relationship the better, or that larger networks are better than smaller networks, Higgins observes that the helpfulness of a given mentoring relationship depends on the unique needs of the protégé as well as the structure
Ancona and Isaacs (chap. 12) take a bold step across disciplines by using family systems theory as a paradigm for understanding the positive side of teams. They start by critiquing traditional models of team functioning. They point out that these models are mechanistic and take a narrow input–process–output perspective in which the whole is viewed as the sum of its parts. Under this view, the key to high-performing teams involves simply moving or changing a given part (i.e., putting the right people on the team, offering the right incentive, or changing a given behavior), thus failing to analyze the underlying structures that create team behavior or explain the generative processes that characterize effective teams. Ancona and Issacs address these deficits by offering an alternative paradigm: a “living system” perspective on teams. Under this view, teams are seen as living, self-regulating systems that reflect on their own functioning and engage in creative actions that lead to generative processes and structural balance. Ancona and Isaacs explain that a positive or balanced team has a set of structures that continuously monitor, correct, and produce healthy team outcomes. They develop this idea by applying a family systems lens, which views families in terms of self-regulating systems. Using the family systems “four-player model,” Ancona and Issacs examine how four central acts that occur in teams work together to create a system of structural balance and health in teams. They explain that it is not just the existence of all four acts, but the unique sequence and dynamics across acts that determine team effectiveness. By using family systems theory to understand team dynamics, this innovative chapter expands our vision and understanding of positive relationships in teams.

Blatt and Camden (chap. 13) explore the role of positive relationships in cultivating a sense of community at work. Their chapter addresses a pressing dilemma in the new economy: Given the increase in temporary workers, how can organizations cultivate a sense of community among workers who have no past, no future, and no membership in the organization? Blatt and Camden explain that a sense of community, which is defined as a subjective state of belonging, meets workers’ fundamental needs of belonging and offers a powerful source of attachment and connection to the organization. However, they observe that the methods used to cultivate community with
permanent workers (i.e., strengthening markers of identity and culture) exclude rather than include temporary employees. Blatt and Camden used in-depth interviews to uncover the experience of community among temporary employees, and found that temporary workers’ sense of community is developed through small acts of positive connecting with other coworkers, rather than through the macro-organizational practices that are frequently used with permanent workers. They found that temporary workers reported that their sense of community did not develop over time, nor was it expected to last; it developed swiftly and involved positive in-the-moment connections that offered feelings of inclusion, a felt sense of importance, perceptions of mutual benefits, and the experience of shared emotions. Their study illustrates that positive connections can enable the experience of belonging at work, even in the absence of a shared past or an anticipated future. This chapter offers critical insights for understanding how positive relationships at work influence community in workforces blended with permanent, temporary, part-time, and virtual workers. It also points to the fact that even as work life becomes infused with discontinuity, people’s need for positive relationships remains constant.

McGinn (chap. 14) further extends our vision of positive relationships at work by offering an analysis of the role of positive communities in workers’ lives. She explains that a community is a set of individuals that share or hold something in common, and may therefore be geographical, conceptual, or behavioral. McGinn uses a case study of a community of longshoremen in San Pedro, California, to examine how positive communities help workers deal with external changes that threaten their livelihoods and lifestyles. She observes that positive communities are characterized by mutually supportive relationships that are recognized as a valuable resource by their members. McGinn discovered that through shared history, shared structure, and shared communication practices, positive communities offer workers a source of identity, a base for interpretation of events and a channel of influence. Her rich analysis illustrates that communities can shape the ways members think about themselves and one another, their work, and their workplaces. This chapter offers the valuable insight that the positive relationships developed in communities can be a tangible, vital, and influential force in the workplace, and further dispels the notion of non-permeable work–community boundaries.

Drawing on the chapters in this section, Kahn’s commentator chapter (chap. 15) identifies the underlying conditions that create and sustain positive relationships in groups and communities. He observes that positive relationships at work sustain, and are sustained by, work groups and communities. He explains that groups and communities sustain positive relationships by offering their members good harbors that offer shelter from the storms of organizational life. Good harbors allow people to work with each
other in bounded and safe ways, allow them to be vulnerable and authentic, and offer shape and meaning to their work experiences. Kahn offers the core insight that positive relationships in groups and communities are created through positive spirals, endlessly looping positive acts that are ongoing, self-regulating, and self-perpetuating. He explains that positive spirals are marked by “begetting”—a positive movement from one group or community begets another until the acts take on a life of their own and become woven into the life of the group or community. Through positive acts, groups and communities create an abundance of connection with one another, stockpiling goodwill and positive energy that members can draw on in the course of their work. In this thoughtful and perceptive chapter, Kahn reminds us that positive relationships are difficult to create and sustain, and that they are both “a marvelous and a fragile thing.”

Organizations and Organizing Section

The final part of the book approaches positive work relationships from an organizational level and tackles the challenge of exploring how organizations affect, and are affected by, positive relationships at work. By viewing positive relationships through a macro lens, this section offers an important bridge between positive relationships and such topics as organizational culture, identity, effectiveness, and change.

Golden-Biddle et al. (chap. 16) leads off this section with a rich examination of the complex dynamics underlying the relationship between organizational culture and positive relationships at work. They explain that culture consists of symbolic forms through which individuals experience and express meaning in the workplace. Symbolic forms are representations involving language, goals, beliefs, and mission. Their case analysis of a Canadian health care organization offers keen insights into how cultural symbols shape organizational members’ capacity to cultivate and sustain positive organizational relationships. Golden-Biddle and her colleagues discovered that culture not only shapes positive relationships, but that positive relationships shape culture by keeping symbolic forms alive and reinfusing them with meaning and significance. When capitalized on by leaders, this interdependence helped the organization transition through times of turmoil and change. These scholars found that positive relationships became a life-enriching and energy-producing resource that broadened organizational members’ repertoires for dealing with change, and helped members reframe experiences from helplessness and lack of control to hope and purposeful action. This chapter offers the critical perspective that positive work relationships affect not only dyads and groups, but are also cultural products with symbolic meaning that can reflect and revitalize organizational culture.
Glynn and Wrobel (chap. 17) break important new ground by applying an institutional perspective to the study of positive family relationships at work. Their chapter examines the identity and institutional mechanisms that make family relationships an endogenous resource for organizations. Endogenous resources come from within the organization, usually through its people or cultural values. Glynn and Wrobel propose that family relationships can give an organization an identity when the family of the founder, CEO, or other prominent figure is displayed as part of the identity of the organization (e.g., Levi-Strauss, Harley-Davidson, Hewlett-Packard). According to Glynn and Wrobel, these positive family relationships become a form of social capital for the organization; they signal the firm’s expertise, abundance, and trustworthiness. Glynn and Wrobel propose that positive family relationships can characterize, enliven, and legitimate a firm and its offerings to public audiences. The chapter addresses a critical gap in the literature by examining how organizational identities are grounded in personal identities that spring from positive family relationships. Their analysis of how identity mechanisms claim familial relationships as core attributes of the firm offers an innovative appraisal of the intertwining of personal and organizational identities. Another creative aspect of the chapter is their use of institutional theory to understand how institutional mechanisms serve to graft one social institution (family) to another (the firm). This chapter offers a fresh theoretical perspective on the use of positive family relationships as an endogenous resource over the life cycle of the firm and makes an important link between institutional and identity theory and organizational outcomes associated with PRW.

Baker and Dutton (chap. 18) expands our understanding of positive relationships at work by offering a new framework for understanding how social mechanisms and organizational practices foster the development of positive social capital at work. They start with introducing the concept of positive social capital. They explain that social capital is positive if it expands the generative capacity of individuals and groups and helps them achieve their personal and professional goals in new and better ways. They then explore how two forms of positive social capital (high-quality connections and reciprocity) increase the resource-producing capabilities of individuals and groups. A key insight of this chapter is the connection between positive social capital and organizational practices. Baker and Dutton offer the idea that different organizational practices activate and affirm employees’ motivation to participate in generative connections and systems of relationships. They ground this framework by identifying clusters of human resource practices (selection, socialization, evaluation, rewards) as well as other everyday work practices (conduct of meetings, collaborative technologies, practices of interpersonal helping) that, through motivation and opportunity mechanisms, enable the development of positive social capital in
organizations. This chapter offers a powerful framework for understanding how organizational systems and patterns of “everyday doing” can create or destroy positive social capital in organizations.

Fletcher (chap. 19) brings a vital new lens to the topic by conceptualizing leadership as a type of positive work relationship that is influenced by gender, power, and societal dynamics. The chapter applies a psychological model of human growth and development, the Stone Center relational theory (SRT), to the leadership arena to develop the concept of relational leadership. Fletcher explores the components of relational leadership, and proposes that it influences the relational climate of organizations through a spiraling process that leads to relational outcomes at multiple organizational levels. A key contribution of this chapter is its emphasis on societal factors that affect positive relationships at work. SRT offers a feminist orientation that deals directly with the issue of power differences in relational interactions, and Fletcher applies this perspective to leadership relationships. Fletcher explains that relational behaviors may be misinterpreted as displays of powerlessness for women and other groups with a history of less power in society. The experience and consequences of relational leadership may therefore be affected by the power associated with group membership. This chapter offers the necessary insight that systemic societal dynamics associated with power and group membership may influence organizational members’ ability to develop, nurture, and sustain PRW.

The last part of this volume concludes with a commentator chapter by Rousseau and Ling (chap. 20) that deepens our understanding of positive relationships at work as a resource for organizations. Drawing on the chapters in this part, Rousseau and Ling offer an incisive analysis of the connection between positive organizational relationships and the resources exchanged by organizations and their members. They observe that positive organizational relationships are a critical form of resource exchange that serves as an intervening mechanism between situational and individual features and organizational responses. They capture the idea that positive work relationships make their participants “resource-rich” by creating efficiencies in the use of resources and by generating new resources that are scarce and valued. Rousseau and Ling point to the generative essence of positive organizational relationships, and make the critical point that positive relationships “substantially multiply the potentialities of people and organizations” and are generative in their ability to expand the array of available organizational resources (“the pie”). Their chapter also offers an interesting historical perspective by pointiung out that a positive relationship at work perspective reclaims and resurrects themes of human growth and development that were prevalent in organizational research in the 1950s but were downplayed as organizational studies moved from social sciences to business schools. This insightful chapter not only illustrates the
mechanisms through which positive work relationships create resources in organizations, but also highlights the importance of reclaiming a humanistic perspective that recognizes the influence of positive relationships in organizational life.

THE INVITATION

As this appreciative overview illustrates, the chapters in this volume offer a rich and multilayered foundation for building and nourishing positive relationships at work as a new field of inquiry. As a multidisciplinary and multilevel area of scholarship, PRW offers an abundant vista of exciting new research possibilities. We invite you to join us in exploring this promising new research frontier.

REFERENCES


1. POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK: AN INTRODUCTION


