

P A R T

V

CONCLUSION

Moving Forward: Positive Relationships at Work as a Research Frontier

Jane E. Dutton
Belle Rose Ragins

We began this volume with a belief that crossing theoretical boundaries and crossing levels of analysis with a focus on positive relationships at work (PRW) would yield new insights and open new frontiers for inquiry in organizational studies. By unpacking the construct of PRW we recognize that a focus on *relationships* is a corrective to the more atomistic accounts of behavior in and of organizations (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Kahn, 1998; Leana & Rousseau, 2000). A focus on *positive* directs attention to connections that are mutually beneficial in some way. The focus on *work* situates understanding of these relationships in a context of social structures in which people live and are employed for temporary or more extended periods of time. The chapters in this volume are full of insights and directives for future inquiry. Although no concluding chapter can do full justice to 16 original chapters and 3 integrative discussion chapters, we look across these contributions and see two major ways that a PRW lens adds value to organizational studies: through explanation and through extension. We use these two major clusters of contributions to articulate how a focus on PRW is a high-prospect research frontier.

A PRW LENS EXPLAINS

Through focusing on PRW the chapters in this book offer three types of explanatory contributions: (a) a better understanding of the theoretical mechanisms that explain work relationships; (b) a more situationally embedded

account of the nature and effects of work relationships; and (c) a deepened investigation of generative dynamics involving PRW.

PRW and Theoretical Mechanisms

It is exciting to consider the chapters' insights about the kinds of theoretical mechanisms that explain how PRW are created, sustained, challenged, and repaired, as well as insights on how PRW influence organizational, unit, and individual-level outcomes. A focus on PRW opens up the investigation of theoretical mechanisms underlying work relationships. By mechanisms we mean "the theoretical cogs and wheels that explain why one thing leads to another" (Anderson et al., 2006, p. 1). Mechanisms describe how one variable or construct influences another. By opening up we mean that the focus both introduces new theoretical mechanisms and expands the consideration of old mechanisms to understand relational dynamics or relational impacts.

The chapters offer numerous new theoretical mechanisms that are worthy of study. Many of these came from importing ideas from other disciplines that are not typically connected to organizational studies. These new mechanisms augment current theoretical models in use, and invite new types of theoretical inquiries about relational theories and phenomena in organizations. For example, Heaphy's (chap. 3, this volume) focus on the human body (its physiological systems, its subjective experience, and its cultural interpretations) offers three novel and different ways to understand how positive relationships shape behavior, through how they affect the body. One illustration of the mechanisms in her account involves explaining how PRW prompt physiological reactions (e.g., reducing blood pressure, strengthening immune system functioning, and activating neuroendocrine responses) that increase health. Ancona and Isaacs (chap. 12, this volume) apply ideas from family systems theory to propose the mechanisms through which teams create healthy outcomes. They elaborate a mechanism of structured interaction patterns that explains whether and how a team achieves sustainable effective performance. Their model proposes how structured patterns of interactions, composed of a particular set of acts that capture how team members interact with one another, allow a team to monitor, and correct itself over time, producing a set of healthy outcomes. Fletcher (chap. 19, this volume) brings in ideas from the Stone Center relational theory as a model of human development to reconstrue leadership as relational activity, highlighting the importance of considering issues of power and gender as central constructs. All three chapters illustrate the possibilities for using related areas of inquiry to open new domains of theoretical exploration for the study of PRW.

Other authors articulate mechanisms through which PRW work by creatively grafting and blending theoretical accounts that already have some currency in organizational studies. For example, Roberts (chap. 2, this volume) describes three paths through which positive relationships with others at work foster the creation of a more fulfilling identity for an individual. Her identity-enhancement mechanisms include self-learning, inspiration creation, and social support provision. Ragins and Verbos (chap. 5, this volume) use ideas from relational cognition theory to unpack the way that individuals see and act in connection to each other, and they apply these insights to explain the development of high-quality relational mentoring. Davidson and James (chap. 7, this volume) link relationship conflict with ideas from learning theory to posit under what conditions people can constructively build PRW across the divide of social and individual differences. Blatt and Camden (chap. 13, this volume) have a more interaction-based account of how PRW affect a sense of community. They suggest that in PRW, people interact in ways that create emotional sharing with others, experienced inclusion, felt importance, and generation of mutual benefits, which together create felt community even for individuals who have a temporary association with an organization. Kahn (chap. 10, this volume) describes a full set of mechanisms that underlie the power of PRW to attach people to their work and to their workplaces. These mechanisms include task accomplishment, career development, sense making, provision of meaning, and personal support. Glynn and Wrobel (chap. 17, this volume) marry positive relationships to forces of institutionalization, opening up consideration of how PRW are symbols that convey meaning and thus participate in the process of organizational and individual legitimation and status. To the best of our knowledge their chapter is the first in organizational studies to use the mechanism of institutionalization to explore and explain how positive relationships shape legitimacy and identity at the organizational level.

A different form of theoretical blending is illustrated by chapters that consider how PRW develop or change. For example McGinn (chap. 14, this volume) theorizes and illustrates how a shared history, a densely connected structure of interaction, and regular communication within a community of longshoremen strengthens positive community during a time of duress. Baker and Dutton (chap. 18, this volume) combine a variety of literatures to develop propositions about how clusters of organizational practices affect the creation of positive social capital, which is how they define and elaborate PRW. They examine how these practices create the motivation to interact and opportunity to interact in particular ways.

A fourth category of mechanism-based contributions comes from the authors who seek to unpack or reinvent core relationship-related constructs. For example, Pratt and Dirks (chap. 6, this volume) offer an account of trust

and trust repair, based on a commitment rather than social-exchange-based view of trust. Greenberg (chap. 8, this volume) challenges how we think about ideas of justice (and interactional justice in particular) by redirecting attention away from how injustice is prevented and toward how positive organizational justice is enabled.

A critical contribution of a PRW lens is to complicate and enrich the set of theoretical mechanisms used to explain relational dynamics and relational outcomes. A natural next step is to put these new insights to the empirical test in organizational contexts. We now turn to the second contribution of a PRW perspective: a more situationally embedded account of the nature and effects of organizational relationships.

PRW and Situational Embeddedness

Any work relationship is by definition embedded, meaning it is located in an evolving, interdependent, and nested set of contextual influences that are changing over time. Any full account of how PRW develop and change, and how they have impact, must in some way, take into account this contextual embedding or situatedness. Embeddedness focuses on the nested (or constitutive) aspects of contexts in shaping behavior or action (Dacin, Ventresca, & Beal, 1999). A focus on situated embeddedness of inter- and intraorganizational action is a topic of growing interest for organizational scholars (e.g., Dacin et al., 1999) who have been interested in the social embedding of individual and collective action. The chapters in this volume offer insight into three types of embeddedness related to PRW: cultural, historical, and structural.

Cultural Embeddedness. Relationship as an idea is culturally embedded in the sense that what relationship means and what aspects are valued are socially constructed (Gergen, 1994). The social embeddedness of both relationship and “positive” is a core theme in Duck’s commentator chapter (chap. 9, this volume) and it is a theme that threads through many of the volume’s chapters. For example, ideas of positive relationships that are created in a mentoring context are shaped by organizational and cultural contexts that create expectations about what mentoring is and what it can become (Ragins & Verbos, chap. 5). Similarly, Fletcher (chap. 19) discusses how ideas about and contributions from relational leadership are implicitly tied to the cultural construction of gender, and the identification of relational responsibility and competence with women rather than men. Heaphy’s (chap. 3) chapter on bodily insights articulates how culture acts as a form of toolkit (Swidler, 1986) that constrains how individuals interpret bodily cues, consequently shaping how they interrelate with each other. From a different angle, Glynn and Wrobel (chap. 17) suggest that cultural

constraints on an organization's identity shape how relationships can be used as a resource to cultivate trust and legitimacy. Although the kind of relationships that Glynn and Wrobel study differs from the other chapters (e.g., focusing on family relationships), their theory underlines the power of the broader culture in shaping the meaning of relationships and thus, the way that relationships are understood and acted on by people in them and people who observe them.

Historical Embeddedness. Relationships are created in a context with a past. Fragments and elements of the past shape the probability and form of PRW in the present. We see this historical embedding of PRW vividly in the accounts by McGinn (chap. 14) and Golden-Biddle, GermAnn, Keay, and Procyshen (chap. 16, this volume). McGinn (chap. 14) documents the role of shared history and the power of past accounts of collective action in fueling longshoremen's capacity to create a positive community in unsettled times. Golden-Biddle and colleagues (chap. 16) explain how the creation of cultural symbolic forms in the past shapes the possibility of creating positive relationships in the future for a community that was undergoing dissolution. In both cases, the shared meaning of the past around connection infused the possibility for relationship in future times because of how it shaped people's capacity to narrate themselves and their participation in collective action of some kind.

Other chapters emphasize that the history of a relationship is also an important consideration. Ragins and Verbos (chap. 5) propose that members' prior experiences and history of relationships shape relational knowledge that guides their current behaviors and expectations. Davidson and James (chap. 7) illustrate how prior experience in diverse work relationships creates personal learning that guides the development of future relationships. These chapters underline how history creates a type of path dependence that either fosters or diminishes the possibility of PRW in the future.

Structural Embeddedness. Social structures and practices also create the conditions for connecting in more or less positive ways. We see this theoretical claim in Baker and Dutton's chapter (chap. 18) which identified six features of organizational contexts (what they call enablers) that as institutionalized practices, make more probable the creation of positive social capital (as a form of PRW). Blatt and Camden (chap. 13) make a similar point by suggesting that organizational routines and practices make it more or less important for people with temporary membership status to build community in microinteractions. Some of the chapters (cf. Higgins, chap. 11; Kahn, chap. 10; Ragins & Verbos, chap. 5) point to the social embeddedness of any dyadic connection as situated in a system of other developmental connections, which they refer to as the constellation perspec-

tive. These authors point to the importance of considering the full range of developmental ties that underlie a PRW to understand the content and process of a particular relationship dynamic. In all of these chapters, structures of power, participation, and practice shape the conditions for interrelating, which make more or less likely the creation and sustenance of PRW. Scholars of PRW would be wise to consider the structural, historical, and cultural embedding of relational structures and dynamics. However, our chapters also hint at what we call mutual embedding in that relationships also constitute and affect social structure and culture, which is part of how they contribute to various generative (e.g., resource-producing) dynamics that we discuss next.

PRW and Generative Dynamics

One of the most exciting overall themes threaded in many chapters is captured by Rousseau and Ling's (chap. 20, this volume) summary point that "PORs substantially multiply the potentialities of people and organizations." Although this is referred to in different ways in the various chapters, the core idea is that PRW are resource-producing. Resources are assets (supplies or supports) that have economic, social, or emotional value. Resources are "entities that are centrally valued in their own right or act as a means to obtain centrally valued ends" (Hobfoll, 2002, p. 307). The claim about multiplying potentiality is at the core of the assertion that PRW are generative. Generative means a capacity to produce or procreate. Rousseau and Ling add that generative means "having the power to originate and propagate something that would not exist otherwise." Various chapters capture the generative possibilities of PRW in different ways.

PRW are generative through their capacity to enrich or energize. The connection between PRW and energy is one way of looking at PRW that allows researchers to consider how PRW are connected to life-giving dynamics. The most direct development of the tie between PRW and energy is presented by Quinn (chap. 4, this volume), who details how PRW create energy within the connection (by people interpreting interrelating in ways that foster autonomy, competence, or belongingness) and how this energy, through mechanisms of creating mutual resources, providing feedback, and fueling attachment, reaffirms and strengthens PRW. This assertion is also implied by authors who use the Stone Center relational theory (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997) where positive connections are defined, in part, by their zest or energy-producing qualities (e.g., see Baker & Dutton, chap. 18; Fletcher, chap. 19). In these authors' accounts, the generative capacities of PRW are created and sustained through the production of energy as resource in the connection, which in turn fosters other forms of resourcefulness (e.g., trust, inspiration, or positive emo-

tions like contentment or joy). Heaphy (chap. 3) provides a means to more explicitly tie PRW to life-giving dynamics by developing the argument for how PRW are related to health-enhancing physiological changes for individuals in the connection. Ancona and Isaacs (chap. 12) also suggest that a PRW perspective facilitates thinking about teams as living systems that reflect on their own functioning and engage in creative actions that facilitate generative “alive” dynamics.

PRW are generative in the sense of creating meaning about the self, about others, or about a collective, which in turn cultivates additional resources (e.g., positive emotions, knowledge, or trust) that make more likely other generative patterns of interaction. For example, Roberts (chap. 2) suggests PRW foster positive self-meaning as individuals in PRW are more likely to share feedback about strengths, contributions, and other positive impacts that foster identity and behavioral changes. Awareness of the positive impact one has on others creates psychosocial resources that further allow people to take risks and move forward in ways that Roberts labels identity-enhancement processes. Blatt and Camden (chap. 13) suggest that if individuals behave in ways toward each other that cultivate a sense of value and worth, this positive meaning creates a valued sense of community (even among temporary workers) that further fosters contribution and task performance. McGinn (chap. 14) suggests that groups in or across organizations that share a history create a shared narrative for the community and for individual members that fosters effective responses when confronted with disruptive change. In this case, shared history among long-shoremen cultivates positive self-narratives that foster community, which creates a capacity to adapt and respond. In all three examples the conditions of positive relationships contribute to a capacity to create a type of self or group meaning that further generates resources like a sense of community or a sense of positive identity, which in turn fosters adaptation, attachment, and successful task performance.

Some of the chapters imply PRW are generative through creating and sustaining various cultural and structural forms, which further sustain and fuel PRW. For example, Golden-Biddle and colleagues (chap. 16) use the Wetoka Health Unit to show how PRW both create and are sustained by various cultural symbolic forms. By symbolic forms they mean shared representations that direct experience and express meaning. They show by example and analysis that cultural forms (like a unit’s mission) are enlivened and affirmed through PRW, and how these cultural forms, in turn, create and sustain PRW. The reciprocal dynamic between cultural form and PRW creates a type of resilience or capacity for a system (and its leaders) to endure conditions of extreme change. McGinn (chap. 14) argues that a community of works that is joined through PRW is generative through having a sense of identity that can empower and enable change, as well as by having

a way of interrelating that cultivates trust, attraction, and communication that further sustains the community in times of change.

An important point for understanding the generativity of PRW is that within these kinds of relationships, the capacity to grow, change or evolve comes from within the connection (Feldman, 2005) because of the connection's capacity to produce other resources. A focus on the generativity of PRW centers on the endogenous resourcefulness of this form of human connection. For example, Glynn and Wrobel (chap. 17) show how family relationships (as positive organizational relationships) function as a kind of resource themselves, through the role they play in legitimating and conferring an identity for an organization. Baker and Dutton (chap. 18) argue that generalized reciprocity and high-quality connections are each generative forms of positive relationships that through internal dynamics of the way that people behave with each other produce further resources such as positive emotion, trust, knowledge, and creativity. Fletcher (chap. 19) explains how the enactment of fluid expertise in connection by a leader fosters a desire for more connection that generates mutual growth, which contributes to what Fletcher calls growth-in-connection spirals. Golden-Biddle and her colleagues (chap. 16) demonstrate the endogenous resourcefulness of PRW in the context of change. They argue that when PRW exist and organizational change is required, this kind of connection broadens people's capacity to undertake change by creating both hope and a sense of control, and thus, a heightened capacity for purposeful action. These four chapters and many of the others in this volume invite inquiry into different forms of endogenous resourcefulness in PRW that explain heightened capacities for action for individuals, and collectives who are connected to each other in mutually beneficial ways. As noted by Rousseau and Ling (chap. 20), these investigations should also consider limits on resourcefulness because of the scarce or fixed nature of some of the relationship-based resources (e.g., time, attention, or physical energy).

A PRW LENS EXTENDS

Inquiry into PRW also stretches and elaborates the possibilities for theoretical insights and empirical inquiry. We see four major ways that a PRW lens extends insights for organizational and management scholars: (a) by widening the scope of variables connected to relational processes and structures, (b) by enriching well-defined research domains, (c) by emphasizing the processual nature of relationships over time, and (d) by identifying new research topics.

Widening the Scope

Like a new camera lens for studying organizations, a focus on PRW broadens the view of what we see as important in organizations. A focus on PRW redirects attention to human growth and development at work, which as Rousseau and Ling (chap. 20) remind us, is an important but nearly forgotten focus in organizational studies. A PRW lens resurrects interest in growth and development both as an outcome of PRW and also as mechanism through which PRW affect a variety of other outcomes. Beyond growth and development a PRW lens invites consideration of how relationships at work connect to identity change (at the individual and organizational levels), authenticity, resilience, health and human physiology, psychological well-being, identification, engagement and attachment to an organization, task performance, effective team functioning and health, capacities and processes of individual and organizational change, leadership processes, and organizational legitimation.

A PRW lens also widens the lens for considering who is in relationship with each other. For example, a focus on positive community (cf. Blatt & Camden, chap. 13; McGinn, chap. 14) invites consideration of how temporary and ephemeral connections as well as long-term, institutionalized connections can be transformed in feeling and function by patterns of positive interactions and the structures that shape and sustain interaction. A focus on developmental networks (cf. Higgins, chap. 11; Kahn, chap. 10; Ragins & Verbos, chap. 5) extends consideration to how people inside and outside of an organization's boundaries are connected to one another in ways that create growth, development, authenticity, and successful performance on the job. A focus on family relationships as a particular form of PRW (e.g., Glynn & Wrobel, chap. 17) extends consideration of how the boundaries of different institutions (e.g., work organization and family) come together in creating legitimacy, trust, and other social assets that affect organizational as well as individual actions.

Enriching Current Domains

The focus on PRW does more than widen the scope of inquiry; it also deepens and enriches how organizational scholars consider current domains of research. Three of the many examples of domain enrichment involve mentoring, organizational change, and team dynamics. Ragins and Verbos (chap. 16) demonstrate that a focus on PRW enriches mentoring research by elaborating the characteristics and processes that underlie high-quality mentoring relationships. Further, a PRW frame draws attention to how relational cognition theory can explain the patterns in mentoring processes and the outcomes these forms of mentoring relationships facilitate. Golden-Biddle and col-

leagues (chap. 16) use a focus on how positive relationships shape culture, and culture shapes positive relationships, to explain how leaders are able to sustain organizational change in challenging times. Finally, Ancona and Isaacs (chap. 12) enrich how scholars think about teams by shifting the focus from “team dysfunction to team repair and improvement” through focusing on how the sequences of moves enacted by team members create a process dynamic that fosters effective and healthy team performance. All three chapters of these illustrate how a focus on PRW enriches current research domains by introducing new mechanisms of explanation, connecting variables that are not traditionally connected, and opening up the boundaries that surround a particular research topic. Other forms of domain enrichment are illustrated by Roberts’s (chap. 2) enrichment of identity research, Greenberg’s (chap. 8) enrichment of the justice literature; Pratt and Dirks’ (chap. 16) enrichment of the trust literature; Higgins (chap. 11) and Kahn’s (chap. 12) enrichment of the developmental relationships domain, Davidson and James’s (chap. 7) enrichment of the diversity literature, Fletcher’s (chap. 19) enrichment of the leadership domain, Glynn and Wrobel’s (chap. 17) enrichment of theories of institutionalization, and Baker and Dutton’s (chap. 18) enrichment of theories of social capital.

Emphasizing Process

Duck (chap. 9) reminds us that relationships are fluid, continuous, dynamic, and processual (and that relationships and the positivity of the relationships are continuously produced and reproduced over time). Several of the chapters in the volume have their eye on process—how PRW are created, sustained, repaired, renewed, and routinized or institutionalized over time. For example, Quinn (chap. 4) provides an explanation of the dynamics between PRW and energy, which helps to unpack the processual mechanisms that account for different relational trajectories (e.g., virtuous vs. vicious cycles) in people’s patterns of interrelating at work over time. Pratt and Dirks (chap. 6) have an explicit process focus, and their chapter provides a commitment-based view of how the positive and negative in connection are important for sustaining commitment necessary to repair trust disruptions and violations. Davidson and James (chap. 7) open up a process lens by depicting the relationships built across differences as involving a continuous process of negotiating and learning from difference-related conflict and power dynamics. Golden-Biddle and colleagues (chap. 16) also explicitly focus on the process of organizational change, and how the dynamics of PRW are created and mutually reinforced through cultural symbols, over time in ways that enable large-scale changes to occur. Their account reminds us that understanding change processes within a PRW also implies consider-

ing how PRW are nested within larger change processes. The chapters invite consideration of the embedded processual dynamics of PRW over time.

The interest in relationship processes is augmented by a focus on mutually reinforcing dynamics that alter the speed, form, and impacts of PRW. Many of the chapter authors use the term *positive spirals* to depict the presence of mutually reinforcing dynamics that accelerate or increase the impacts of PRW. Kahn (chap. 15, this volume) notes that PRW can become self-perpetuating as people engage in action toward each other in ways in which they both feel valuable, seen, cared for, appreciated, and engaged. These actions create momentum for more positive acts that creates a pattern of what Kahn calls begetting. In his words “a positive movement from one group or community begets another until the acts take on a life of their own and become deeply woven into the life of the group or community.” Roberts (chap. 2) describes a different kind of mutually reinforcing dynamic. She suggests that PRW activate an identity enhancement dynamic, where people move faster and more effectively in their own growth and development. She explains that in PRW, people experience more trust, which allows people to be more vulnerable with each other and self-disclosing, which aligns expectations and increases understanding, further strengthening PRW. Ragins and Verbos (chap. 5) identify a spiral associated with relational mentoring as a form of PRW. In their model, being in a relational mentoring connection with another could cultivate interdependent self-construals, relational identities, and a secure attachment style that affects one’s relational mentoring schema, which further perpetuates the cycle of generative connection. A key question raised by these chapters is whether it is the positive spirals or mutually enhancing dynamics that help to explain the power of PRW. As Rousseau and Ling (chap. 20) put it, PRW are gifts that keep on giving. They are the kinds of connections between people that are expansive, producing opportunities for growth and the creation of new resources. Although different authors describe this amplifying and mutually reinforcing dynamic in different ways, a focus on PRW encourages consideration of the nonlinear effects of positive organizational relationships at work.

Identifying New Research Topics

The final point about how a PRW focus extends research is derivative from the first three; a PRW focus invites consideration of a range of new research topics. Each chapter explicitly addresses new research questions that arise from its particular take on PRW. Here we try to look across chapters to see some commonalities in the kinds of new research topics that a focus on PRW invites. The review of explanations and extensions that we have just completed suggests a variety of new research topics that include testing

the newly identified mechanisms underlying PRW, testing the situationally embedded bases of PRW, and empirically exploring the generative mechanisms. However, we offer a few more invitations for new research that were not explicitly covered in our previous points but are brought up by the chapter authors.

Several of the chapters invite consideration of the antecedents of PRW. A core topic that several chapters suggest is a focus on relational competence, and a deepening of researchers' understanding of how people as individuals or as part of a connection develop knowledge and skills to interrelate positively more effectively over time. For example, Quinn (chap. 4) suggests that skilled conversational practice can enable PRW. Davidson and James (chap. 7) suggest processing emotion, reframing conflict, and giving and receiving feedback are core competencies critical to learning in relationships built across differences. Blatt and Camden (chap. 13) suggest that the ability to form connections quickly and to detach oneself effectively from organizations may be critical to building PRW for people involved in new forms of employment. All of these chapters introduce new research topics around relational competence: its origins, its form, and its effects.

Several chapters raise considerations about aspects of the context that foster and sustain PRW. For example, Heaphy (chap. 3) invites consideration of whether there are certain kinds of organizational conditions that strengthen the connection between PRW and the body because of culture's impact on how people are likely to see and experience their bodies. Golden-Biddle and colleagues (chap. 16) assert that different organizations have differing cultural capacities for building PRW. Kahn (chap. 10) reminds us of how formal structures of groups and communities can be impactful in terms of shaping the possibility of building PRW. The chapters by both Kahn (chap. 10) and Fletcher (chap. 19) suggest that leadership is important in both establishing conditions for PRW and interrupting negative spirals that could undermine PRW.

Still another take on PRW is to consider what the base conditions are for this kind of generative connection between people. Kahn (chap. 10) suggests it is abundance, safety, boundaries, and positive spirals. McGinn (chap. 14) suggests it is shared history, a densely connected structure of interaction, and regular communication. Ancona and Isaacs (chap. 12) also cite the importance of safety but they wonder how attention, validation, empathy, and support also shape the possibilities of PRW in teams. Future research will need to sort out the relative importance of these different base conditions as a cornerstone for understanding PRW.

Several of the chapters encourage empirical inquiry into how positive and negative elements are combined in interrelating and their impact on the quality and outcomes of PRW. Kahn (chap. 10) reminds us that in PRW

people are acknowledged for what he calls their shadow and their light, a view that usefully complicates the portrait of individuals when they are in PRW. Pratt and Kirks (chap. 6) explicitly suggest both positive and negative elements are essential to resilient relationships. Davidson and James (chap. 7) imply a connection between the positive and negative elements in connection by writing about the important role of conflict in building PRW across difference. Rousseau and Ling (chap. 20) invite consideration of negative feedback as important for explaining how PRW self-regulate and achieve equilibrium—implying that a focus on positive spirals, without attention to negative feedback as a corrective, would be an inaccurate and incomplete view of how PRW dynamics work.

Several authors make a call for a more contingent approach to PRW, asking under what conditions PRW and other variables are likely to be more or less related. For example, Roberts (chap. 2) inquires if there are certain conditions that foster stronger relationships between PRW and an individual's identity. Higgins (chap. 11) suggests consideration of people's career states and adult development stages is important for looking at how PRW are formed in developmental networks. Blatt and Camden (chap. 13) as well as Rousseau and Ling (chap. 20) encourage inquiry into how the nature of the psychological and employment contract of members within an organization affects the form and trajectory of PRW.

Finally, several researchers suggest that the meaning of *positive* in positive relationships is socially constituted. As Duck (chap. 9) suggests, "there is no such thing as inherently positive or inherently negative relationships." He suggests instead that societal standards for such judgments are important considerations for understanding how people come to see a relationship's goodness or benefit. Thus, scholars' interest in PRW needs to keep a theoretical and empirical eye on the shifting criteria for understanding a relationship's positivity.

CONCLUSIONS AND LOOKING FORWARD

Organizational and management studies have paid intermittent attention to work relationships under such diverse topical headings as networks, mentoring, leader–follower connections, alliances and partnerships, and social support. This volume attempts to fuse and energize this diversity through a focus on relational states and processes that are positive in the sense of being mutually beneficial in some way to two or more members who are interrelating or in connection in some way.

A focus on positive relationships at work explains and extends organizational scholarship in a direction that we find inviting and critically important for both the worlds of theory and practice in organizations. We close

our concluding chapter with an explicit invitation to deepen inquiry into PRW as a research frontier that holds promise and possibility. The promise and possibility is partially revealed in four forms of improved understanding. First, by understanding how PRW originate, develop and change, organizational scholars can better understand how people's health, capability for action, resilience, career success, and task performance are shaped by the microrelational context of PRW. Second, by better understanding how PRW affect outcomes at the individual, dyadic, network, and organizational levels, organizational scholars can better understand the relational origins and relational supports for individual, group, and collective actions. Third, by taking a multilevel perspective that considers nested levels of communities and connections inside and outside the organization, we allow for a richer and more complete picture of the relational worlds of work. Fourth, and finally, by considering the dynamics of PRW over time, and the generativity in this form of relationship at work, organizational scholars get a better view and deeper understanding of the relational foundation of organizing, and in particular, the capacity for resourcefulness generated by PRW.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, P., Blatt, R., Christianson, M., Grant, A., Marquis, C., Newman, E., et al. (2006). Social mechanisms in organizational research: Insights from a collective journey. *Journal of Management Inquiry*.
- Bradbury, H., & Lichtenstein, B. M. (2000). Relationality in organizational research: Exploring the space between. *Organization Science*, *11*, 551-564.
- Dacin, T., Ventresca, M., & Beal, B. D. (1999). The embeddedness of organizations: Dialogue & directions. *Journal of Management*, *25*, 317-356.
- Feldman, M. (2005, August). *Understanding endogeneity*. Paper presented at the National Academy of Management, Honolulu, HI.
- Gergen, K. (1994). *Realities and relationships*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hobfoll, S. E. (2002). Social and psychological resources and adaptation. *Review of General Psychology*, *6*, 307-324.
- Jordan, J., Kaplan, A., Miller, J. B., Stiver, I., & Surrey, J. (Eds.). (1991). *Women's growth in connection*. New York: Guilford.
- Kahn, W. A. (1998). Relational systems at work. In B. M. Staw & L. L. Cummings (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior* (pp. 39-76). Greenwich, CT.: JAI.
- Leana, C., & Rousseau, D. (Eds.). (2000). *Relational wealth: The advantages of stability in a changing economy*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, J. B., & Stiver, I. (1997). *The healing connection*. Boston: Beacon.
- Swidler, A. (1986). Culture in action: Symbols and strategies. *American Sociological Review*, *51*, 273-286.