

Creating Transformative Cooperation through Positive Emotions

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This chapter provides a description of how positive emotions can be influential in generating transformative cooperation in organizations. With prominent contributions from positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000), academics and practitioners across scholarly disciplines have turned their attention toward the emotional dimensions of workplace enterprise. Emotions, as an integral part of the human design, are inextricably linked to social interactions. Therefore, we look at how positive emotions can impact people's daily life experiences in a variety of ways, including how they relate to others and create new relationships. The essence of our argument is that transformative cooperation can be created through the broadening and building capacities of positive emotions as organizations undergo attempts to instill positive change. Our discussion considers how organizations can use Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1987), fueled by positive emotions, to evoke positive change. To do so we use research that supports the *broaden-and-build theory* (Fredrickson, 2000a) to help explain the process—actions that lead to the creation of new designs in transformative cooperation.

Defining our Starting Point

As people engage in organizational change they may observe new designs or forms of organizing. We address a rather distinctive form of transformation, one that is seemingly different from those set forth in existing typologies (e.g., Bartunek and Mock 1987; Golembiewski 1976). This new form, referred to herein as *transformative cooperation*, emerges when efforts to infuse organizational rejuvenation are employed. Transformative cooperation appears to be unique in that it is a collaborative process marked by the continuous flow of growth and the ongoing development of new and dynamic organizational forms. Descriptions of

organizational transformation have previously been referenced as second order, radical, or gamma change, (e.g., Golembiewski, Billingsely and Yeager 1979) and, in general, transformation is portrayed as a fundamental shift in how people view, understand, interpret, or make sense of their organization and/or job role. We also consider transformative cooperation as second order change, one that contributes to a shift in how people see their organization and their function within it. But unlike prior descriptions, we see transformative cooperation as ongoing and sustained movement. The dynamic nature of this process is manifest in the establishment of new relationships and social connections that create these new organizational forms, which continue to progress over time.

This movement has been observed in organizations as individuals gather and focus on what they value most, directing their attentions toward what gives life to their organization. The progression of this type of collective inquiry is frequently accompanied by positive emotions such as enthusiasm, appreciation, joy, interest, and curiosity. And, what emerges from this process is of form of sustained growth and development. As people work together to discover what they value most, they build upon their shared strengths to create more strength. The effort promotes valuing and capacity building, which ultimately seems to expand the enterprise. As with the theory of positive organizational change, the technique known as Appreciative Inquiry is a way to generate the process. This change technology is used to evoke transformative cooperation, and it evolves over the course of several stages. The process commences with the elevation of inquiry, moves to a fusion of strengths, and, finally, activates positive energy and the creation of additional capacity within the organization (Cooperrider and Sekerka 2003). Each stage is triggered by increased inquiry into what is most valued and seems to result in an expansion of relationships. In order for us to understand how this process works and how

positive emotions may be the influential drivers, we begin with an explication of our theme.

What does *transformative cooperation* mean?

Transformative Cooperation

To design or create something, individuals must apply their knowledge, skills, and passion to the art of conceptualizing something novel. If we endeavor to create a new organizational form through transformation, events must be generated that signal a major shift from existing processes to alter the nature and function of behaviors. As implied, this activity must be performed in concert with others. *Operari*, the Latin root word for cooperation, suggests that we must act and work together (Webster's 1996). However, the meaning goes further in that these shared actions establish mutual benefit. Thus cooperation starts with a simple act of working in relation together, but results in shared advantages for all involved. Given this framework, we see new designs in transformative cooperation as processes that bring organizational members together to create innovative forms of social interaction that benefit all who participate. With this as our starting point, we now describe how positive emotions influence and contribute to the process, setting forth propositions to illustrate our argument.

To show how this process occurs in organizations, we use Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1987) a method to create transformational change (Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros 2003). More specifically, we describe how the positive emotions that can be generated in this type of activity have useful cognitive and social capabilities. Relying on the research that demonstrates the benefits of positive emotions, we argue that their presence helps to engender transformative cooperation in organizations by building relational strength, adding capacity and expansion at both the individual and organizational levels.

Benefits of Positive Emotions

Emotions are generally associated with action tendencies (Frijda 1986; Lazarus 1991; Levenson 1994). Fredrickson (2000a) describes how positive emotions broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires, which widen the array of the thoughts and actions that come to mind. For example, enjoyment creates the urge to have fun and push the limits, interest to inquire and probe, gratitude to help others, and so on. Emotions provide us with inputs and ideas about ways to behave and also serve as internal guides to suggest possible courses of action. Typically, these sets of behavioral options narrow as we create a path toward action. We tend to choose or move to adopt, consciously or unconsciously, specific responses as a result of the emotions we experience. Central to this thesis is that action tendencies are what make emotions evolutionarily adaptive. That is, certain actions have proved effective in the preservation of life—our survival.

While negative tendencies and responses have been well researched, the benefits associated with positive emotions have generally received less scholarly attention. When Fredrickson first asked, "What good are positive emotions?" she introduced the broaden-and-build theory (1998, 2000a). Her theory and subsequent research have provided the catalyst for organizational scholars to develop an enhanced or revised understanding of organizational change. Rather than focusing on the influences of negative reactions and how to alter them, researchers began to demonstrate the power behind positive emotions, finding that their adaptive benefits go beyond survival mechanisms. Specifically, positive emotions can broaden peoples' capacity to generate ideas, increase their alternatives for action, and contribute to their overall well-being. Because of these features, positive emotions also have the ability to build enduring personal resources (Fredrickson and Joiner 2002; Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003).

Important for transformative cooperation, research has shown how positive emotions signal both present moment (Diener, Sandvik, and Pavot 1991) and long-term optimal functioning (Fredrickson 1998, 2000a). Emotions have the potential to contribute to daily optimal functioning and, perhaps more importantly, to support us on an ongoing basis as we work with, interact, and relate to others. As most of us spend many of our waking hours engaged in work-related activities, the benefits of positive emotions can extend well beyond simply feeling good at any given moment. We know that positive actions often associated with positive emotions are not simply end-states—they can in turn stimulate individual and organizational growth and performance.

Although the empirical evidence is still limited (Fineman 1993, 1996), scholars have established a link among positive emotions, work achievement, and higher-quality social environments (Staw, Sutton, and Pelled 1994). Positive emotions help employees obtain favorable outcomes at work in multiple ways, contributing to greater persistence, more favorable reactions to others, and helping actions (Haidt 2000). These features have been associated with greater work achievement and a higher-quality social milieu. Such positive emotional climates are also known to contribute to enhanced performance, with studies showing how their presence increases customers and company sales (George 1998). If positive emotions are the means to achieve organizational performance-related outcomes, we see that their capacity to broaden and build may also be influential in creating transformative cooperation. Evidence from studies examining individual transformation also depict the vital role of positive emotions in the process of change. Researchers describe how affective markers signal the operation of healing and transformational processes (Fosha 2004). Given that positive emotions are associated with change, well-being, and both organizational and individual effectiveness, we consider how

participation in Appreciative Inquiry draws on positive emotions as favorable influencers to instill transformative cooperation.

Organizational Transformation

Looking at emotions in organizations, Dehler and Welsch (1994) describe work itself—simply engaging in one’s task—as an emotional experience. Yet management theorists typically neglect the impact of emotions, moods, and feelings in their analyses, with cognitive perspectives dominating much of the social sciences (Tichey and Sherman 1993). That is, until recently. In the past decade, the study of emotions has emerged as a legitimate topic of inquiry (Kemper 1990). A pronounced focus on positive emotions has surfaced, especially with the advent of the Positive Psychology Movement in the late 1990s (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000). As Fineman (1993) remarked, once we removed the “facade of rationality” from organizational goals, purposes, tasks and objectives, we can find a “veritable explosion of emotional tones” (1993, p. 1). And, as organizational behavior scholars continue to take liberties to extend their work beyond the scientific management paradigm, our ability to understand new designs in organizational dynamics expands.

Similarly, efforts to impose organizational change that previously relied upon scientific management-based programs, such as the use of restructuring as the standard response to competitive pressures, have also continued to evolve. With studies to show that downsizing and re-engineering have not improved organizational performance (Dehler and Welsch 1994), many continued to press on for deeper levels of change. Consequently, we learned that structural approaches to changing organizations represented only part of a solution to the complex challenge of transformation. The role that emotions play in the process of transformation may serve as the missing link between rational and non-rational dimensions of

human change behavior. We view both of these features as integral components in the process of successfully accepting, implementing, and sustaining transformative cooperation, but we specifically address how emotions energize this activity.

We believe that if transformative cooperation is desired, the power to fuel such endeavors resides in the emotional side of the workplace enterprise. Recent research has deepened our understanding of emotions in the workplace, providing clues as to how positive emotions may contribute to new designs in transformative cooperation. We know that positive emotions are related to individuals' ability to establish positive meaning in their work (Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001). Moreover, positive emotions can be cultivated and drawn from experiences of competence, achievement, involvement, significance, and social connection (Folkman 1997; Fredrickson 2000a; Ryff and Singer 1998). When individuals help others seek positive meaning in their daily work experiences using Appreciative Inquiry, emotions such as gratitude, appreciation, and joy emerge (Sekerka and Goosby Smith 2003).

Therefore, one way to instill positive meaning, worth, and value in organizations is through strength-based approaches to transformation. The most prevalent strategies still tend to employ functional and structural solutions. But as suggested, they have come up short, never fully achieving the projections of optimal efficiency or effectiveness (Miles, Snow, and Sharfman 1993). Given that first-order functional changes are not sufficient for establishing transformational behavioral changes, second-order processes are necessary to establish a shift in how the organization and work are perceived, construed, or understood (Bartunek and Moch 1987). But even when transformation has been achieved, rarely do researchers examine how these initiatives are sustained. What appears to have been omitted from the transformation change equation is the notion of sustainability. How are these processes to create ongoing growth

continued? How can a transformation become ongoing, self-directed, and internally-perpetuated so that growth and development are nurtured and can continue after the initial shift occurs? We believe that this sort of sustained transformational movement requires the impacts derived from individual and collective positive affective responses.

Empirical research on the use of Appreciative Inquiry has been limited (Bushe 1998; Bushe and Kassam 2005). However, there is some evidence that engagement in Appreciative Inquiry, one of the most prevalent strength-based techniques, elevates positive psychophysiological outcomes (Sekerka 2002; Sekerka and McCraty 2002). Specifically, as organizational members discover what they mutually value, they begin to work together in new ways, which can help establish renewed meaning in their work. An objective of the process is to help members collaboratively highlight, observe, and define their organization's positive core. To do so, throughout an Appreciative Inquiry the participants engage in activities within pairs, small groups, and in full stakeholder forums. This is designed to help members collectively identify what they value most from their organizational experiences (Ludema et al. 2004). Through a variety of collaborative exercises, participants share positive memories and stories with one another and discuss what they appreciate about their work life together.

As participants focus on these collective strengths, assets, and what is most valued, they cooperatively create new strategies to design their organization's future. Building on the organization's existing positive core, members begin a process of self-directed organizing (Cooperrider and Whitney 2001). People literally move to align themselves in new ways by forming groups that agree to take on new functions. They rally around their shared strengths, which generates enthusiasm, appreciation, hope, and interest. As a result of this movement, new relationships and new forms of organizational relating emerge. Moreover, this action of working

collaboratively, using positive experiences as levers for change, supports the creative thinking necessary for envisioning the future. This process is explicit and establishes joint ownership of the activities from the onset, and it actually commences the act of transformational cooperation.

Cooperrider (2001) explains that this effort is triggered by the complementing duality of positive images followed by positive action. It starts with an experience of elevating the positive, fostered by mutual inquiry into what participants collectively value. It continues with the process of extension, as people expand their relatedness to others. Described in a theory of positive organizational change (Cooperrider and Sekerka 2003), we edify this work by showing how positive emotions may act as initiators of transformative cooperation.

Because many positive emotions have distinctive social origins, people generally experience them when interacting with others (Watson et al. 1992). It's no surprise, then, that participants involved in an Appreciative Inquiry feel good as a result of their engagement. We believe, however, that positive emotions contribute to the movement and sustainability of the process because of their enduring and expansive qualities. This is visible during later phases of AI, when groups propose positive questions derived from the stories they've shared during the initial discovery phase. By sharing these high moments with others in their organization, participants use the inquiry as a springboard for conversation, dialogue, and increased participation. Moreover, as self-identified groups begin to emerge around shared interests, the dialogue continues and new roles begin to emerge.

As workers recall their own experiences and use them to create their organization's future, the process affirms, empowers, and encourages self-efficacy and the valuing of self and others. The conversation can instill energy in action (Quinn and Dutton 2005) because members recall when they were most effective, and they all share in the creation and ownership of their

collective future. This evokes enthusiasm, joy, interest, and hope (Sekerka and Goosby Smith 2003). But these emotions are not static. The positive emotions can spread throughout the organization—a cascading impact—similar to the phenomenon of emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson 1994, 1993). Here, positive emotions move throughout the organization via chains of events that carry positive meaning for others. These conversations and interactive work continue and are sustained long after the actual Appreciative Inquiry process ends. Taken together, this information leads us to expect that the:

Proposition 1: Participants engaged in an Appreciative Inquiry are likely to experience positive emotions, which contribute to a more positive organizational emotional climate.

Cognitive Broadening

Positive emotions broaden our scope of attention (Fredrickson and Branigan 2005) and broaden our habitual modes of thinking and acting (Isen 1987). This can have an influence how we see ourselves, giving us a broader scope of self-perception. In this way, positive emotions help people come together and grow closer. And, as this occurs, the line between the self and others can become blurred and harder to delineate (Waugh and Fredrickson, 2005). To the extent that people view coworkers or their organization as a part of themselves, resource allocation can be perceived as shared ownership, and the differences between self and others can become less pronounced. As this happens, people can, to some extent, internally adopt the characteristics of others and begin to view them as their own.

The inclusion of others in how we see ourselves has the potential to give us a wider perspective and, when focusing on others appreciatively, can put people at ease in social contexts. Conversely, when focusing on organizational problems, negative emotions may be elevated and an *us versus them* mindset can be promulgated (Gilmore, Shea, and Useem 1997).

This is often followed by blaming and finger-pointing as people try to target causality of problems (Sekerka and Goosby Smith 2003). A positive approach using Appreciative Inquiry helps facilitate a reframing process (Bolman and Deal 1997), which is necessary for prompting the shift required for transformation. In short, it helps alter the way members currently see their organization and the roles they previously assumed can be recast in a meaningful and favorable light.

For example, those who may currently use a political frame, in which resources are scarce and generate competition, can shift perceptual understanding by engendering different assumptions. Beliefs that were once associated with competition can shift to alternative views, now based upon assumptions that see achievements as providing benefits to all involved. The cognitive broadening that positive emotions trigger may contribute to this process, bringing a wider view into focus, one that is more inclusive and represents a more cooperative stance. This can also be a turning point, with the organization moving from a more reactive stance—where problem solving and a functional orientation are directed toward survival—to a more generative one. Positive emotions coupled with collaborative values can help an organization to thrive, in that its members are motivated to create new organizational forms that benefit both individuals and their organizations.

As positive emotions widen self-perspectives, they may also motivate people to enter and maintain relationships, thus promoting the inclusion of resources, attitudes, and characteristics of others into one's repertoire of self. We suggest that the appreciative process and the changes that members experience, in association with positive emotions, may petition cognitive broadening to include an increase in organizational identity. Dutton and her colleagues found that when a person's self-concept adopts the attributes of the organization, this connection is defined as

organizational identification (Dutton and Dukerich 1991; Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994).

Given that positive emotions contribute to an expansion of self, this may be linked to people identifying more with the organization and their coworkers. This expectation is expressed by the following proposition:

Proposition 2: A positive emotional organizational climate will contribute to increases in organizational identification.

This increased organizational identification may be a catalyst that helps to extend relational support in the workplace, which we now describe.

Relationship Building

As positive emotions help broaden the mindset of workers, they may impact interactions and ultimately contribute to cooperative transformation through increases in relational strength. During an Appreciative Inquiry this is visible through the creation of self-organized project teams, coalitions, and opportunity circles, all of which cultivate new ideas and learning (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1999). Broadened mindsets obviously carry short-term benefits, but they also instill more indirect and long-term adaptive benefits. We propose that the act of cognitive broadening actually helps to build enduring relational resources.

Research supports the notion that the resources accrued during positive emotional states are durable and outlast the transient state that led to their acquisition (Fredrickson 2000b). Consequently, the incidental effects of positive emotional experiences serve to increase relational resources. Individuals can then draw from these enduring resources in subsequent moments and while in different emotional states. This provides further support for the link between positive emotions and their known role in helping to transform individuals to become more creative, knowledgeable, resilient, socially integrated, and healthy. Individuals who regularly experience positive emotions are not stagnant. Instead, they continually grow towards further optimal

functioning (Fredrickson 1998, 2003; Fredrickson and Joiner 2002). We suggest that this same principle holds true when using strength-based approaches to instill cooperative efforts to establish transformative cooperation.

For example, evidence from social psychological experiments have shown that people induced to feel positive emotions become more helpful to others than those in neutral emotional states (Isen 1987). Building on this research, organizational studies have demonstrated that salespeople who experience more positive emotions at work are more helpful to their customers (George 1998). This occurs because salespeople experiencing positive emotions are more flexible, creative, empathic and respectful. Interestingly, being helpful not only springs from positive emotional states, but also can produce them. For example, people who give help may feel proud of their actions, and this experience of pride not only creates a momentary boost in self-esteem, but can also prompt people to envision more significant future achievements in similar domains (Fredrickson 2000b). Thus, to the extent that helping others instills positive emotions, it may motivate people to help again in the future.

Just as the person who gives help will experience positive emotions, the person who receives help is likely to feel the complementary positive emotion of gratitude. Gratitude not only feels good, but it also produces a myriad of beneficial social outcomes (McCullough et al. 2001). Gratitude, according to McCullough and his colleagues, reflects, motivates, and reinforces moral social actions in both the giver and receiver of help. The feeling of gratitude identifies moral action because it surfaces when individuals acknowledge that another has been helpful to them. It motivates moral action because grateful people often feel the urge to repay those who have helped them. Finally, gratitude reinforces moral behavior because giving thanks or acknowledgment rewards help-givers, making them feel appreciated and more likely to help

others in the future. This reflects a robust association between positive emotions and social support, which serves to build social and relational strength. This expectation is expressed by the following proposition:

Proposition 3: A positive emotional organizational climate will contribute to increases in organizational relational strength.

The scenario on helping also illustrates how positive emotions can spread throughout organizations and among members and customers, and how the effects of positive emotions can accumulate, compound, and add value to the collective. Add to this rich picture the further studies that point to how positive emotions help to curb organizational conflict by promoting constructive interpersonal engagement, and you see their capacity-building qualities (Baron 1992). Importantly, positive emotions propagate within organizations not simply because smiles are contagious (i.e., through facial mimicry), but because these emotions stem from and create meaningful interpersonal encounters. Accordingly, the broaden-and-build theory predicts that positive emotions at work serve to support both individuals and organizations in their ability to function at higher levels. Thus, positive emotions are an individual and collective resource that can act as reinforcements to promote social interaction, instill responsibility, and advance achievement.

Losada's work, in concert with Fredrickson's theory, uses nonlinear dynamics to depict a model of team performance, finding that a ratio of positive to negative affect at or above 2.9 characterizes flourishing mental health (Losada and Heaphy 2004; Losada and Fredrickson, in press). These findings suggest that there are principles to describe the relations between positive affect and individual and organizational flourishing. This relates to the movement toward optimal organizational functioning, in that positive emotions fuel individuals to contribute to the effectiveness of their organization (Fredrickson 2000b, 2001). A range of empirical evidence

supports this prediction, albeit indirectly. For instance, researchers at the Gallup Organization frequently examine links between employee engagement and favorable business outcomes, such as employee turnover, customer loyalty, net sales, and financial revenues (Fleming 2000a, 2000b; Harter 2000). These studies suggest that employee engagement is associated with positive emotional experiences.

We believe that there is a connection between positive emotions in the workplace and relational strength in the organization. In this respect, positive emotions add value to the organization by increasing relational expansion, which produces increases to social capital. The presence of this resource can contribute to growth and favorable performance outcomes. Because positive emotions are influential in creating relational strength, we see them as the antecedent for organizational effectiveness, as expressed in the following proposition:

Proposition 4: Increases in organizational relational strength will contribute to organizational growth and performance.

Building a Better Community

An underlying assumption in our work is that organizations are uniquely positioned to help build a better society. At present, we view their role and associated contribution, previously known as corporate responsibility, as going through a transformation of its own. We see movement away from a problem-centric approach as the motivational driver for corporate social action. Our contention is that this transformation is fueled by the positive emotional climates of organizations, where their transformative cooperation has extended outward to include their greater community.

The prior frames that drove organizational change looked at resources as scarce commodities. But today's strength-based approaches to change use corporate relational assets as levers for creating more value, capacity, and the edification of new resources. Therefore, it is

expected that when organizations set aside their former win-lose survivalist modalities for a more dynamic collective capacity-building focus, strengths can be leveraged ubiquitously and limitations can become outdated social constructs. This moves the corporation beyond the view of being a fixed, concrete, and a finite organizational entity, one where self-preservation is the reality. It shifts the prior underlying assumptions, altering the view to depict the workers and the organization as images of part of the greater good—the larger whole. In short, organizational identities are broadened to a unified collective that extend beyond the confines of traditional organizational boundaries. No longer is social action based on the need to resolve issues and problems, but rather, actions are resulting from the view that the community is part of the organization and visa versa.

With this expansion comes the creation of a reality in which all are viewed as a part of the larger whole (Barros and Cooperrider, 2000). It is a picture that continually evolves through sustained rejuvenation. We propose that this is fueled, in part, by the resources generated by positive emotions, where a more holistic stance is energized with and through acts of kindness, compassion, giving, and helping others. It is sustained by the renewed belief, focus, and trust in the goodness of the universal infinite whole. As this cycle—one of continuous value creation—is established, we believe that individuals, organizations, institutions, and governments can be transformed into more compassionate and harmonious environments, as reflected through new designs of transformative cooperation.

The benefits of positive emotions and their association with expansion of relational capacities may be boundless. This is the very essence of creating new designs in transformative cooperation: positive emotions provide the foundation for optimal organizational functioning, which may have the unlimited potential to extend outward to society. The expansion of

relatedness is not bound by the confines of an organization. It is a capacity unconstrained by time or space. Our contention is that new designs in transformative cooperation are energized by positive emotions, which set the stage for unlimited potential for growth and development that moves outward into the community and society at large. Thus, our final proposition to express this idea is:

Proposition 5: Increases to organizational relational strength will contribute to the community's growth and development.

Taken together our propositions build on the theory of positive organizational change by further explicating how positive emotions serve as the cornerstone for transformative cooperation.

Conclusion

In this chapter we described how transformative cooperation can be created through Appreciative Inquiry, which serves to stimulate, generate, and benefit from positive emotions. As members work together to seek out value within their organization, this contributes to the presence of a positive emotional climate. The positive emotions serve to broaden cognitive resources, as represented by an expansion of self. We considered how an expression of this extension may contribute to increased organizational identity, which can help extend thoughts and actions that serve to build relational strength. Such positive environments are conducive to social support, social connections, and social capital that can contribute to sustained organizational effectiveness. Resources derived from positive emotions can add value to organizations by contributing to their improved functioning and performance over time. Thus, positive emotions serve as a link between momentary experiences of the organizational members and the long-range indicators of optimal organizational functioning.

As this cycle continues, we expect that positive emotional experiences may generate outcomes that are boundaryless and reverberate outward, beyond the confines of the organization. Thus, the impacts to optimal individual and organizational functioning can ultimately contribute to building a stronger community. In conclusion we see how transformative cooperation has the capacity to emerge and extend outward, into the lives of others, with perhaps unlimited capacity to serve and benefit the greater whole.

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