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A Multi-level Model of Organizational Virtue Development:

Relational leadership and positive spirals toward the virtuous organization

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Agenda

- Overview of model
- Theoretical foundations
- Highlights and Implications
- Next steps: Future research
- Selected references



Model

- **Dyad level**
 - Relational leadership episodes
 - RL experience results in mutual growth and positive emotions
 - Desire for more connection and empowered action trigger additional RL episodes with others
- **Group level**
 - Positive group emotion via emotional contagion and elevation
 - Intragroup and intergroup acts of care/connection
- **Organizational level**
 - Positive and caring climate
 - Intergroup emotional contagion
 - Institutionalization of caring practices
- **Societal level**
 - Positive stakeholder relationships
 - Care/acts for societal and environmental sustainability

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Theoretical Foundations

Organizational Virtue (Cameron & Winn, 2012)

- Cameron & Winn (2012) defined and operationalized OV as organizational practices emphasizing:
 - Compassion
 - Forgiveness
 - Gratitude
 - Trust
 - Optimism
 - Integrity
- Virtue expressed and developed in action at individual and organizational levels

Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions (Fredrickson, 2001)

Relational Leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Fletcher, 2012)

Ethics of Care (Noddings, 2013)

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Theoretical Foundations

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Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions (Fredrickson, 2001)

- Positive emotion broadens cognitive repertoires and builds relational resources
- Broadening cognition increases attention, recognition, empathy, and creativity in recognizing and responding to needs

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Relational Leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Fletcher, 2012)

- Leaders and followers as relational beings in unfolding dynamic co-creation
- Relational ontology
- Relational Cultural Theory (Miller & Stiver, 1997) posits 5 positive outcomes of relational leadership episodes: zest, empowered action, increased sense of worth, new knowledge, and desire for more connection

Ethics of Care (Noddings, 2013)

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- Relational, concrete acts in provision of others' needs locally (caring for)
- Concern and motivation to effect change globally (caring about)
- Foundational moral obligation

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Highlights and Implications

- Micro-level power to effect change: relational leadership micromoments trigger positive spirals through organization
- Emergent care, positivity, and organizational virtue: originate in any part of the organization
- Reinforcing feedback loops: between each pair of levels amplify the effects of care and positivity through organization
- Intervention: increased potential for effective low cost high impact intervention to increase care and positivity in organizations; may supplement and amplify effects of larger scale top-down positive change efforts



Future Research Agenda

I hope that my programme of research will contribute more generally to:

- Help clarify the process of relational leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006) as framed by Fletcher (2012) in terms of Relational Cultural Theory (Miller, 1976).
- Identify antecedents and outcomes of relational leadership episodes in order to shed light on possible causal mechanisms underlying this process. For example, studying the role of Ethics of Care in contributing to the relational stance antecedent to Positive Relational Leadership (mutual growth-in-connection) episodes.
- Conduct longitudinal studies of internal and external outcomes related to relational leadership and organizational virtue
- Add voice from the relational perspective to the typically individualistic Positive Psychology and Positive Organizational Scholarship literature.
- Bring about positive change in our social construction of leadership to include the caring and relational values currently marginalized and devalued relative to individualism in Western society.

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