



The Grateful Workplace: A Multilevel Model of Gratitude in Organizations

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**THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE:
A MULTILEVEL MODEL OF GRATITUDE IN ORGANIZATIONS**

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ABSTRACT

Gratitude is a valuable emotion with an array of functional outcomes. Nonetheless, research on gratitude in organizations is limited. In this paper, we develop a multilevel model of gratitude comprised of episodic gratitude at the event level, persistent gratitude at the individual level, and collective gratitude at the organizational level. We then consider the types of human resource initiatives that organizations can develop to cultivate employee gratitude and the contingencies of gratitude's emergence at the individual and organizational levels of analysis. Finally, we elucidate the benefits of gratitude for organizations and their employees. The sum result is a deeper understanding of how gratitude unfolds in organizations and the role that organizations themselves can play in influencing emotions at multiple levels in the workplace.

Keywords: emotion; gratitude; appreciation; multilevel; human resource practices

THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE:**A MULTILEVEL MODEL OF GRATITUDE IN ORGANIZATIONS**

Organizations are often criticized as environments that cultivate egocentrism and selfishness (Mueller, 2012; Vogel, 2006). Media reports on corporate greed and financial scandal seem to reinforce this critique, with many observers lamenting employees' growing sense of entitlement (Twenge & Campbell, 2010). Organizations consequently suffer from a range of troubles including increased conflict, incivility, deviance, and turnover (Fisk, 2010; Harvey & Martinko, 2009). At the same time, there is evidence of an alternative. Some organizations cultivate appreciation and thankfulness, promoting high-quality relationships and prosocial behavior (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). In these organizations, gratitude can play a critical role.

A growing body of work in the social sciences has shown that gratitude improves life satisfaction (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002), reduces aggression (DeWall, Lambert, Pond, Kashdan, & Fincham, 2012), and motivates prosocial behavior (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Tsang, 2006). However, only a handful of studies have examined its role in organizations (Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Kaplan et al., 2014; Waters, 2012). Even in domains where gratitude would seem to play a central role (e.g., servant leadership, organizational citizenship, and customer service), it is scarcely mentioned.

An understanding of gratitude in organizations requires explicit attention to how the organizational context shapes the emergence and functions of gratitude itself. Organizations are not simply extensions of everyday social interactions. Rather, the organizational context introduces a unique suite of constraints and affordances that influence how individual employees feel, think, and act on a daily basis. As noted by House, Rousseau, and Thomas-Hunt (1995), "Until general psychological theories are linked to organizational contextual variables they will

THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 remain inadequate to explain what goes on in organizations” (77; see also, Gelfand, Leslie, &
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5 Keller, 2008). Research on the consequences of emotions in general and gratitude in particular
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7 suggests that organizations can greatly benefit from an explicit consideration of how gratitude
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9 emerges and influences workplace outcomes across multiple levels of analysis (McCullough,
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11 Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001).
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15 In this paper, we seek to accomplish several interrelated goals. First, we offer a multilevel
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17 model of gratitude, examining its manifestations at the event, individual, and organizational
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19 levels of analysis. Second, we explore the unique organizational antecedents of gratitude, with a
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21 focus on human resource initiatives aimed at cultivating gratitude. Next, we identify key
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23 contingencies of gratitude emergence, highlighting the challenges that organizations are likely to
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25 face in their efforts to promote employee gratitude. Finally, we examine the consequences of
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27 building gratitude within organizations at multiple levels of analysis. From a theoretical
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29 perspective we offer insight into how gratitude unfolds at work, with broader implications for the
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31 emergence and influence of other emotions in the workplace. From a managerial perspective, we
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33 highlight both the utility of workplace gratitude and the challenges of fostering it, focusing on
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35 organizational systems that can help practitioners build organizational change efforts aimed at
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37 the cultivation of gratitude. A visual representation of the proposed model is given in Figure 1.
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Insert Figure 1

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS: GRATITUDE AT THREE LEVELS

50
51 The scholarly history of gratitude is extensive, spanning disciplines as diverse as
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53 theology, philosophy, sociology, and psychology (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). Given this
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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diverse history, it is perhaps no surprise to find that scholars have likewise conceptualized gratitude in many different ways (McCullough et al., 2001). Focusing on the unique contours of the organizational context, we propose a multilevel model that conceptualizes gratitude as (1) an episodic emotion at the event level, (2) a persistent tendency to feel grateful at the individual level, and (3) a shared sense of gratitude at the organizational level. As shown in Figure 1, we conceptualize these phenomena as causally related, with gratitude at the event level emerging over time at the individual and organizational levels.

Episodic Gratitude

At the event level, we define gratitude as *a feeling of appreciation in response to an experience that is beneficial to, but not attributable to, the self* (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). Gratitude at this level is an emotion in the classic sense – an affective phenomenon that persists for a brief period of time (Elfenbein, 2008). Many different experiences can generate feelings of gratitude. In its most prototypical form, people experience gratitude after receiving a tangible or intangible benefit from a benefactor (McCullough et al., 2001). For example, an employee might experience a feeling of gratitude when a coworker sacrifices her free time to help the beneficiary meet a deadline. Similarly, an employee might experience gratitude when a manager spends an afternoon helping her develop new skills. In each of these cases, the perceived benevolence and sacrifice of the benefactor play critical roles. In this sense, episodic gratitude is not elicited by an experience itself but rather by its interpretation, and thus requires a “willingness to recognize the unearned increments of value in one’s experience” (Bertocci & Millard, 1963: 389).

In this paper we focus on gratitude that arises in the organizational context or due to an employee’s membership in an organization. As with any emotion, episodic gratitude in organizations can be expected to vary dramatically in its frequency and intensity (Frijda, Ortony,

THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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Sonnemans, & Clore, 1992). Low-intensity feelings of gratitude might arise from a small favor from a coworker or customer. High-intensity gratitude might instead arise when a coworker prevents an employee from getting fired or saves a project at the last minute. The frequency and intensity of these experiences can in turn be expected to influence gratitude's consequences, with frequent, high-intensity gratitude facilitating the strongest effects (Frijda et al., 1992).

In Table 1 we distinguish gratitude from four related emotions: happiness, compassion, pride, and elevation. As with other positive emotions, people generally enjoy feeling grateful (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). However, gratitude can be distinguished from these other emotions along three key dimensions: (1) the trigger event, (2) the impact of the trigger on the self, and (3) the prosocial action tendency. For example, whereas gratitude is triggered by personally relevant benefits, compassion is triggered by the suffering of a third party. As these distinctions show, the nomological net of gratitude is unique. Any model of gratitude in organizations must treat gratitude as a distinct phenomenon and avoid grouping it together with other positive emotions (Hu & Kaplan, 2015).

Insert Table 1

Persistent Gratitude

Gratitude research has overwhelmingly adopted an episodic perspective. However, it is unlikely that gratitude exists exclusively at the event level. More durable manifestations of gratitude are likely at the individual and organizational levels (Ashkanasy & Ashton-James, 2007; Rosenberg, 1998). We argue that gratitude emerges at the individual level in the form of persistent gratitude, defined as *a stable tendency to feel grateful within a particular context*.

THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 The idea of persistent gratitude is rooted in the existing multilevel emotion literature,
4 which notes that individuals differ in “the threshold for the occurrence of particular emotional
5 states” (Rosenberg, 1998: 249). Yet whereas most of the individual-level emotion literature
6 focuses on traits, our conceptualization of persistent gratitude focuses on the broader notion of a
7 schema. Schemas are mental structures that function as heuristics, directing attention and
8 regulating action. Especially when the available information is ambiguous, schemas enable quick
9 responses in a given domain through default strategies and behavior (Bargh & Ferguson, 2000).
10 Emotion schemas, in turn, are mental structures that specifically predispose individuals to
11 experience a particular emotion in a given domain (Jenkins & Oatley, 1996).

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25 According to network theories of emotion (Bower, 1981; Leventhal, 1980), emotion
26 schemas develop linearly through repeated pairings of stimuli and emotions (Tomkins, 1995).
27 For example, an employee with an abusive supervisor might develop an anxiety-based emotion
28 schema at work, compiled over time as the product of repeated anxiety-producing episodes
29 (Hobman, Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2009). As one such emotion schema, persistent gratitude
30 can be expected to emerge in an organization when an employee experiences frequent and
31 intense episodic gratitude within the organization.

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Once formed, persistent gratitude operates in several interrelated ways. First, individuals
who develop persistent gratitude “have specific appraisal tendencies leading to gratitude-relevant
interpretations of the behavior of other people” (Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, & Joseph, 2008:
282) and thus are likely to become more attentive to gratitude-inducing stimuli in their
organizations (Compton, 2003). For example, they might notice a leader’s helpful advice where
employees without gratitude schemas would not. Second, they become better able to recall past
gratitude-inducing experiences and utilize them to interpret their environments (DeCoster &

THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 Claypool, 2004). For example, they might frequently recall the actions of a particularly helpful
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5 supervisor during a challenging time. Third, they become more likely to interpret ambiguous
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7 events through the lens of gratitude-inducing appraisals (Wilkowski, Robinson, Gordon, &
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9 Troop-Gordon, 2007). For example, they might interpret help with a deadline as worthy of
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11 gratitude, whereas another employee might perceive it as an act of reciprocated exchange or an
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13 attempt to steal the spotlight. Persistent gratitude can thus be expected to exert effects that are
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15 comparatively enduring, influencing how employees respond to a wide range of situations.
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20 *Proposition 1: Persistent gratitude at the individual level emerges from episodic*
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22 *gratitude at the event level.*
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Collective Gratitude

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26 Beyond the event and individual levels, gratitude can also emerge at the organizational
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28 level. We term this organizational-level construct collective gratitude, defined as *persistent*
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30 *gratitude that is shared by the members of an organization*. Collective gratitude occurs through
31
32 an emergent process, whereby individuals' own experiences of persistent gratitude converge to
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34 manifest as a shared organizational-level phenomenon (Rousseau, 1985). Put differently,
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36 collective gratitude "is the result of bottom-up processes whereby phenomena and constructs that
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38 originate at a lower level of analysis, through social interaction and exchange, combine,
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40 coalesce, and manifest at a higher collective level of analysis" (Kozlowski, 2012: 267).
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46 We conceptualize this emergence as compositional, in which emergence at the
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48 organizational level stems from a high level of consensus in persistent gratitude at the individual
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50 level. This is what Chan (1998) referred to as a direct consensus model, wherein the focus is on
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52 agreement across individual employees' experiences. Later in this paper we consider factors that
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54 are likely to facilitate the emergence of gratitude at the organizational level. However, we also
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 note that such emergence is likely to be facilitated by the uniquely relational nature of gratitude
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5 itself. Unlike many other emotions, gratitude is highly social and other-oriented (Watkins, 2014).
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8 Intersecting lines of research have noted that gratitude tends to be expressed explicitly, both
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10 through words of thanks to one's benefactors and through action (Eisenberg, Miller, Shell,
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12 McNalley, & Shea, 1991). Thus, employees are likely to be particularly aware of others'
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14 gratitude, facilitating emotion contagion and social learning.
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18 The implications of a sustained, shared organizational-level gratitude are significant.
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20 Once formed, collective gratitude acts as part of the social context of the organization (Ferris et
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22 al., 1998). In other words, it becomes a defining feature of the organization itself, shaping the
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24 way employees construe the organization and their place within it.
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28 *Proposition 2: Collective gratitude at the organizational level emerges from*
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30 *persistent gratitude at the individual level.*
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Key Assumptions: Reciprocal Dynamics and Gratitude's Targets

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34 Although not formalized as propositions, two assumptions regarding the structure of
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36 gratitude in organizations deserve attention. First, collective gratitude and persistent gratitude are
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38 likely to have additional top-down effects that reinforce gratitude at the event and individual
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40 levels. We presume that collective gratitude will exert a top-down positive effect on episodic and
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42 persistent gratitude, consistent with the broader literature on the assimilative pressures of
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44 organizations and their associated norms (Schein, 2010). Similarly, we presume that episodic and
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46 persistent gratitude are reciprocally related. Second, we note that gratitude is likely to have many
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48 distinct yet overlapping targets. A pay raise might lead an employee to feel grateful for both her
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50 immediate supervisor and the organization's upper level leadership. Similarly, an employee who
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52 receives help meeting a deadline might experience gratitude toward the helpful coworker as well
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 as the supervisor who encouraged the employees to work together. However, we adopt a more
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5 holistic approach that encompasses multiple targets and presumes that they are interrelated.
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ANTECEDENTS OF GRATITUDE

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10 Gratitude's antecedents are multifaceted and rest at multiple levels of analysis. Our focus
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12 is on the organizational-level antecedents of gratitude, allowing for an understanding of the
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14 precise role of the organization itself in gratitude emergence. At this level, the most direct path to
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16 influencing employee gratitude is through gratitude-focused human resource (HR) practices,
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18 which we term *gratitude initiatives*. Drawing from the HR and gratitude literatures, we identify
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20 three initiatives particularly likely to facilitate employee gratitude—appreciation programs,
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22 beneficiary contact, and developmental feedback—and examine their effects on episodic
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24 gratitude (Ostroff, Kinicki, & Tamkins, 2003). Our goal is not to provide a comprehensive
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26 account of initiatives that facilitate gratitude, but rather to provide concrete, illustrative examples
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28 of how organizations might begin the process of fostering gratitude.
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34 **Appreciation programs.** Everyday interactions with peers, supervisors, and subordinates
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36 provide many opportunities for gratitude. Employees frequently go above and beyond their
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38 assigned tasks by helping each other and engaging in proactive, prosocial behavior. These extra-
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40 role efforts are typically aimed at improving their colleagues' lives and the functioning of the
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42 organization (Van Dyne, Cummings, & Parks, 1995). However, in fast-paced and performance-
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44 driven work environments, beneficiaries may not always take the time to express gratitude,
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46 leaving benefactors feeling as if their actions are overlooked and ignored. From an organizational
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48 practice perspective, one path to addressing this issue and fostering gratitude is through
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50 employee appreciation programs.
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy, and Quinn (2005) conceptualize formal appreciation
4 programs as “occasions in which organizations have planned and institutionalized opportunities
5 to endow individuals with expressions of positive affirmation” (718). Common examples include
6 retirement events and celebrations of product launches (Mosley & Irvine, 2015). At one
7 consulting firm, top management emails descriptions of team members’ core strengths, and why
8 they are appreciated, to the head of the company. These emails are then shared with the entire
9 team (Roberts et al., 2005). Organizations can also benefit from the formalization of practices
10 that are typically less formal. Dutton (2003) details the story of a meeting that began with an
11 appreciative introduction whereby the meeting’s facilitator expressed appreciation for the
12 strengths of each person in the room. At the Administration and Finance office of the University
13 of California, Berkeley, an appreciation website allows employees to document each other’s
14 contributions. These documents are then shared with the entire organization (Smith, 2013).

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Appreciation programs are most likely to foster gratitude when they focus on praising employees and teams for their effort and perseverance. Conversely, they are less likely to foster gratitude when they single out one employee’s performance at the expense of others, such as rewarding a top sales associate at a car dealership (Brun & Dugas, 2008). From the recipient’s perspective, appreciation programs have the potential to show employees that they are valued by the organization, ensuring that they do not perceive themselves as taken for granted or otherwise ignored by their coworkers and managers. From a third party perspective, these person-focused programs can help employees recognize the integral role that their colleagues play in their own success and the success of the organization as a whole, strengthen interpersonal relationships and institutionalize gratitude by showing employees that the organization values grateful emotions.

Proposition 3: Appreciation programs increase episodic gratitude.

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3 **Contact with beneficiaries.** Although people frequently feel gratitude when they receive
4 help from others, past research has demonstrated that they also feel gratitude for the opportunity
5 to give help to others. For example, in a two-week study of hospital personnel, employees
6 frequently listed their ability to help their patients as an important source of daily gratitude
7 (Cheng, Tsui, & Lam, 2015). Although many organizations cite their positive impact on
8 customers' lives as a core component of their missions, the link between employees' actions and
9 the benefits they produce is often unclear (Grant, 2007). We argue that organizations can
10 inculcate gratitude by highlighting these connections through beneficiary contact programs.
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13 Research has identified contact with beneficiaries as an important job design principle
14 (Grant, 2007; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Some jobs, such as janitorial work, involve infrequent
15 direct contact with beneficiaries while other jobs, such as firefighting, involve more frequent and
16 meaningful contact (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Interest in these differences across
17 industries has sparked research on interventions that can increase employees' contact with
18 beneficiaries. For example, Grant et al. (2007) instituted an organizational practice whereby
19 employees at a university donations call center directly interacted with their beneficiaries (in this
20 case, scholarship recipients). Among their effects, such interventions have been shown to
21 improve employees' feelings of social worth, prosocial motivation, and job persistence (Grant &
22 Berg, 2012; Grant & Gino, 2010). Moreover, Dutton, Roberts, and Bednar (2010) suggest that
23 prosocial characteristics such as kindness, benevolence, and helpfulness become more accessible
24 through beneficiary contact.
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27 Whereas past research has typically focused on the impact of beneficiary contact
28 programs for employee performance and commitment, beneficiary contact should also directly
29 impact employee gratitude. Individuals intrinsically enjoy helping each other (Schwartz &
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 Sendor, 1999), actively seek out meaningful work when choosing their careers (Bunderson &
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5 Thompson, 2009) and directly acknowledge their impact on others as a principle source of
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7 gratitude in the workplace (Cheng et al., 2015). Grant, Dutton, and Rosso (2008) propose that
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9 opportunities to help others serve a psychological benefit, promoting employee gratitude by
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11 enhancing the fulfilment they find in their work. Anecdotal evidence likewise supports the link
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13 between gratitude and beneficiary contact. In one example, a florist discussed her appreciation
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15 for the opportunity to give her customers useful advice and help them pick the “right” bouquet
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17 (Bowe, Bowe, & Streeter, 2009).
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22 *Proposition 4: Beneficiary contact interventions increase episodic gratitude.*
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24 **Developmental feedback.** Beyond the help received and given to others, employees may
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26 also feel gratitude for the personal growth and competencies they develop on the job (Hackman
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28 & Oldham, 1976). Unfortunately, in many organizations, leaders offer employees limited
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30 feedback on their development, leaving them unaware of their progress (Kluger & DeNisi,
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32 1996). For example, in one survey, 70% of employees indicated that they have never had a
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34 meaningful discussion about performance with their managers (Schneier, 1995). As a result,
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36 employees often feel anxious, unsure of their progress, and unsatisfied with their relationships
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38 with their leaders. Developmental feedback can play a key role in addressing these issues,
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40 providing employees with a clear understanding of their personal growth trajectories while
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42 producing gratitude for the progress they have made.
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48 Developmental feedback refers to a manager’s efforts to provide employees with useful
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50 information that enables them to learn and develop their skills (Zhou, 2003). Unlike routine
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52 performance evaluations, developmental feedback is future-oriented and focused on employees’
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54 personal improvement (Li, Harris, Boswell, & Xie, 2011). It is designed to leverage employees’
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 intrinsic motivation, helping them see how they are progressing and where they might go next.
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5 At the broadest level, developmental feedback can be conceptualized as a component of high-
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7 quality mentoring relationships, which “promote mutual growth, learning, and development”
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9 (Ragins, 2012: 519). Past research has shown that developmental feedback, when delivered in a
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11 context that emphasizes mutual trust and respect, helps employees be more creative (Zhou, 2003)
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13 and more effective performers (Li et al., 2011).
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17 Here we propose that developmental feedback is positively associated with employee
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19 gratitude. For example, hospital employees expressed opportunities to develop new clinical skills
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21 as a key source of gratitude (Cheng et al., 2015). As noted by Ragins (2012), interactions such as
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23 mentoring are likely to be directly related to employees’ thriving at work, helping them develop
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25 their skills and become the best people they can be (Moss & Sanchez, 2004). Developmental
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27 feedback thus signals to employees that others in the organization care about their personal and
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29 professional well-being, leading them to become aware of the benefits provided by the job and
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31 the organization for their self-improvement.
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36 *Proposition 5: Developmental feedback increases episodic gratitude.*
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CONTINGENCIES OF GRATITUDE EMERGENCE

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39 Although gratitude initiatives have the potential to positively impact employees, they also
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41 exist within an institutional framework that presents challenges and risks. If perceived as a
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43 means of pressuring employees to compete or work longer hours, appreciation programs and
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45 beneficiary contact initiatives might lead to jealousy and envy (Smith & Kim, 2007) and increase
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47 stress and burnout (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). Similarly, developmental feedback
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49 initiatives might produce cynicism when perceived as disingenuous, or otherwise lead to
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51 excessive pride. These risks are not unique to gratitude initiatives. The effects of organizational
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 practices are often inconsistent, hinging on a variety of moderating factors (Hong, Liao, Hu, &
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5 Jiang, 2013). Similarly, many factors may moderate the emergence of gratitude across levels of
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7 analysis (Fulmer & Ostroff, 2015). In this section, we highlight several key contingencies of
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9 gratitude initiatives and gratitude emergence at individual and organizational levels. Each of
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11 these contingencies and their associated risks is summarized in Table 2.
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Insert Table 2

Contingencies of Episodic Gratitude Emergence

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25 Gratitude can be a particularly challenging emotion to cultivate. People often acclimate to
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27 the benefits they receive, causing gratitude to give way to indifference and even entitlement
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29 (Harvey & Dasborough, 2015). To avoid such acclimation, scholars have argued that a
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31 beneficiary must (a) be aware of the benefits she receives, (b) perceive the intentions of the
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33 benefactor to be genuine (rather than instrumental), and (c) perceive the received benefits to be
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35 costly to the benefactor (Tesser, Gatewood, & Driver, 1968; Wood et al., 2008). Drawing from
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37 this literature, we argue that gratitude initiatives are most likely to facilitate gratitude in the
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39 context of attentiveness to alternative outcomes, benevolent HR attributions, and humility.
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43 **Recognizing the benefit: Attentiveness to alternative outcomes.** Gratitude initiatives
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45 provide employees with many beneficial experiences. However, employees' feelings of gratitude
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47 are contingent upon their recognition of those benefits, which can be difficult to sustain.
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51 According to Frijda's (1988) "law of habituation", people tend to become accustomed to their
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53 situations and are likely to experience decreasingly intense emotional reactions to the benefits
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55 they consistently receive over time.
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 One of the most direct ways for employees to maintain a recognition of the benefits that
4 gratitude initiatives provide is to attend to possible alternatives. As noted by Frijda (1988),
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6 “adaptation to satisfaction can be counteracted by constantly being aware of how fortunate one’s
7
8 condition is and how it could have been otherwise, or actually was otherwise before” (354).
9
10 Attention to alternative outcomes is consistent with the notion of counterfactual thought
11
12 (Kahneman & Miller, 1986) and is particularly relevant to gratitude when directed to less
13
14 desirable alternative outcomes, such as working for an organization with less helpful colleagues
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16 or fewer opportunities (Epstude & Roese, 2008). Similarly, gratitude can be expected to emerge
17
18 by considering the challenges one has faced in the past (Fagley, 2012).
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25 Although individuals can be expected to vary in their dispositional attentiveness to
26
27 alternative outcomes, social cognitive research suggests that these alternatives can also be made
28
29 more salient by the situation (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Evidence suggests that one of the most
30
31 reliable elicitors of attentiveness to an alternative outcome is the psychological closeness of that
32
33 outcome (Morris & Moore, 2000). For example, individuals who entered the workforce during
34
35 the recession (and therefore faced poor employment prospects) were particularly grateful for
36
37 their jobs (Bianchi, 2013). Beyond timing, research suggests that attentiveness to alternatives is
38
39 particularly likely when one’s situation is counter to the norms of a particular region, industry, or
40
41 organization (Buck & Miller, 1994).
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46 *Proposition 6: Attentiveness to alternative outcomes facilitates the emergence of*
47
48 *episodic gratitude from gratitude initiatives.*
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50
51 **Recognizing the benefactor: Benevolent HR attributions.** Another step in inculcating
52
53 gratitude is for employees to recognize that the benefactor is acting benevolently, rather than
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55 instrumentally. To this end, HR attributions are likely to play a critical role. Nishii, Lepak, and
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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Schneider (2008) define HR attributions as “causal explanations that employees make regarding management’s motivations for using particular HR practices” (507). Employees’ attributions for their organizations’ HR practices are a central contingency of their effects. Thus, “the effect of HR practices is not likely to be automatic and always as expected; instead, their effect will reside in the meanings that employees attach to those practices” (Nishii et al., 2008: 504).

In particular, we focus on benevolent HR attributions. Benevolent attributions reflect a belief that an HR practice was enacted to improve employees’ well-being. Less benevolent HR attributions conversely reflect a belief that an HR practice was enacted to extract more output from employees. When attributed to benevolent motives, employees are likely to respond to gratitude initiatives with enthusiasm and engagement. For instance, they might nominate their coworkers for appreciation awards, attend events that provide beneficiary contact, and follow up with their mentors after developmental feedback sessions. In contrast, when attributed to less benevolent motives, employees are unlikely to engage with the initiatives. Instead, they might feel manipulated and coerced, and experience negative emotions such as anger and contempt.

As with other attributional phenomena, HR attributions can be expected to emerge from both dispositional and situational forces (Kelley, 1973). For example, some individuals are more dispositionally cynical than others, and by association tend to hold more cynical attributions for prosocial behavior (Rioux & Penner, 2001). Attributions can likewise be shaped by the signals sent by the other party. Employees are particularly likely to develop benevolent HR attributions when the organization treats them justly and management demonstrates its trustworthiness over time (Ployhart & Ryan, 1997).

Proposition 7: Benevolent HR attributions facilitate the emergence of episodic gratitude from gratitude initiatives.

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2
3 **Recognizing the cost: Humility.** As a third step in ensuring that organizations' gratitude
4 initiatives are successful, employees must perceive that the benefits they receive carry more costs
5 for the benefactor than what might be reasonably expected. In this final contingency of episodic
6 gratitude, employee humility is likely to play a critical role.
7
8

9
10 At its core, humility entails a recognition and acceptance that "something greater than the
11 self exists" (Ou et al., 2014: 37). It connotes a willingness to view oneself accurately, an
12 appreciation of others' strengths and contributions, and an openness to feedback and new ideas
13 (Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013), with positive implications for employee performance and
14 adaptiveness (Owens & Hekman, 2012).
15
16

17
18 Initiatives such as beneficiary contact provide many opportunities for employees to feel
19 gratitude, but also provide opportunities for employees to feel excessive pride. Employees might
20 become overly enamored with their impact on the organization's stakeholders, improving their
21 self-efficacy but reducing their connectedness to others. As previously reviewed, gratitude only
22 emerges when individuals perceive that others have exerted effort and sacrificed to help them
23 (Wood et al., 2008). When the benefit that is received is perceived as wholly commensurate with
24 one's own efforts, pride is more likely to emerge than gratitude (Hu & Kaplan, 2015). As noted
25 by Owens et al. (2013), humility "entails the recognition and appreciation of knowledge and
26 guidance beyond the self" (1518) and is thus uniquely situated to temper feelings of pride.
27
28

29
30 Humility has been characterized as a malleable interpersonal trait that is susceptible to
31 change over time (Owens & Hekman, 2015). Thus, although it is an individual difference, it can
32 be influenced by interventions. Owens et al. (2013) note that humility notably involves accurate
33 self-perception, including a reduction in overconfidence and a concomitant recognition that
34 forces beyond the self are a necessary component of success. Indeed, scholars have begun to
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 examine the efficacy of humility interventions (Romanowska, Larsson, & Theorell, 2015) and
4
5 humility-based leadership training programs (Hayes & Comer, 2010).
6
7

8 *Proposition 8: Humility facilitates the emergence of episodic gratitude from*
9
10 *gratitude initiatives.*
11

12 **Contingencies of Persistent Gratitude Emergence**

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14
15 As previously discussed, persistent gratitude entails the development of an emotion
16
17 schema, and thus is predicated on frequent and strong feelings of gratitude within the
18
19 organization. However, episodic gratitude by itself is unlikely to be sufficient for persistent
20
21 gratitude to readily emerge. To develop a gratitude schema, employees must also engage in
22
23 continual retroactive thought about their gratitude. Furthermore, disruptive experiences that run
24
25 counter to this schema must be minimized.
26
27

28
29 **Reinforcing a schema: Rumination.** Individuals differ in the extent to which they are
30
31 influenced by affective episodes, and one key predictor of these differences is rumination.
32
33 Whereas scholars typically discuss rumination within the context of negative emotions (Whitmer
34
35 & Gotlib, 2013), it is also possible to ruminate over positive emotions. This positive rumination
36
37 is defined as “the tendency to respond to the positive state with recurrent thoughts of one’s
38
39 positive emotional state and positive self-qualities” (Gilbert, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Gruber, 2013:
40
41 737). It is an internal, cognitive process that involves consciously thinking about a positive
42
43 emotion after it occurs, involving such terms as “reminiscing” and “basking” (Martin & Tesser,
44
45 1996), which continues over an extended period of time (Wang, Liao, Zhan, & Shi, 2011).
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51 Research on positive rumination suggests that employees who tend to savor and focus on
52
53 their individual gratitude experiences will be most likely to translate their episodic gratitude into
54
55 persistent gratitude. Positive rumination enhances the benefits of individuals’ positive emotions,
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 leading to higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression (Feldman, Joormann, &
4 Johnson, 2008). In contrast, a failure to ruminate over positive events can create persistent
5
6 negative moods and even depressive symptoms (Rottenberg, Kasch, Gross, & Gotlib, 2002).
7
8 Most directly, research has demonstrated that individuals who tend to ruminate over positive
9
10 emotions subsequently experience them more frequently than their peers (Quoidbach, Berry,
11
12 Hansenne, & Mikolajczak, 2010). In contrast, individuals who do not ruminate tend to dampen
13
14 their positive emotions, focusing on the low likelihood that the emotions will be experienced in
15
16 the future. Here, we hypothesize that rumination will facilitate the development of gratitude-
17
18 based emotion schemas, heightening the accessibility of individuals' gratitude-inducing
19
20 experiences and ultimately strengthening the link between episodic and persistent gratitude.
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27 *Proposition 9: Rumination facilitates the emergence of persistent gratitude from*
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29 *episodic gratitude.*
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31
32 **Weakening a schema: Disruptive events.** Emotion schemas develop from persistent
33
34 patterns of emotion in a given context. However, schema development may be compromised by
35
36 disruptive events (Morgeson, 2005; Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015). Past research has
37
38 examined the notion of disruptive events in varied ways, typically focusing on how a variety of
39
40 exogenous shocks (Vergne, 2012) and unexpected disturbances (Yukl, 2002) interrupt employee
41
42 perceptions and outcomes. For example, Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, and Inderrieden (2005) found
43
44 that environmental shocks such as job offers, corporate mergers, layoffs, and high-intensity
45
46 arguments with coworkers dramatically shifted employees' perceptions of their organizations
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48 and ultimately exhibited a significant impact on employee turnover.
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53 Disruptive events, particularly those that are of high intensity, are most likely to mitigate
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55 the emergence of persistent gratitude when they directly counter the association between
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 gratitude and the work environment. Examples include the arrival of a new CEO who encourages
4
5 transactional leadership principles and the introduction of new performance standards that pit
6
7 employees against one another. Such events are likely to introduce variability in employees'
8
9 experiences with gratitude in the organization, disrupting the emergence process for persistent
10
11 gratitude (Harvey & Dasborough, 2015). With mixed messages about the link between gratitude
12
13 and the organizational context, it no longer remains clear how to interpret ambiguous
14
15 information, and the gratitude-based emotion schemas employees develop are likely to be less
16
17 strong and stable.
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22 *Proposition 10: Disruptive events mitigate the link between episodic gratitude*
23
24 *and persistent gratitude.*
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Contingencies of Collective Gratitude Emergence

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29 Following the development of persistent gratitude, an important question is whether
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31 collective gratitude might emerge at the organizational level of analysis. Here, we argue that this
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33 is most likely to occur when the organizational context facilitates a convergence of persistent
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35 gratitude across individuals, induced through HR alignment and interdependent work practices.
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39 **Sending clear signals: HR alignment.** The notion of HR alignment is rooted in the
40
41 strategic human resources management (SHRM) literature, which finds that HR practices are
42
43 most effective when thought of as "bundles" around a coherent culture or goal (Becker &
44
45 Huselid, 2006). For example, some HR bundles are oriented toward work-family balance (Perry-
46
47 Smith & Blum, 2000), with interrelated practices that ensure such balance through their
48
49 compensation systems, training programs, and leave policies.
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53 Within the context of gratitude, an organization could be said to possess an aligned
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55 system of gratitude-oriented practices if it deploys multiple distinct gratitude initiatives in
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 tandem. An organization with strong HR alignment simultaneously employs appreciation
4 programs, contact with beneficiaries, developmental feedback policies, and related practices. In
5
6 contrast, an organization with weak HR alignment might utilize appreciation programs but offer
7
8 few opportunities for beneficiary contact. Similarly, an organization with weak HR alignment
9
10 might employ its practices inconsistently across people and time (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).
11
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15 A fundamental assumption of the HR literature is that HR systems send stronger signals
16
17 to employees when they are aligned (Schneider, Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002). Following this
18
19 logic, HR alignment should strengthen the link between persistent gratitude and collective
20
21 gratitude. A single HR initiative aimed at employee gratitude conveys weak and ambiguous
22
23 signals, and is therefore likely to create high variability in persistent gratitude across employees.
24
25 For example, whereas some employees might develop persistent gratitude through their
26
27 experiences with a beneficiary contact program, others might fail to do so due to their
28
29 experiences with a poor feedback system. Thus, HR systems aligned toward employee gratitude
30
31 are most likely to send strong signals that will facilitate collective gratitude emergence.
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36 *Proposition 11: HR alignment facilitates the emergence of collective gratitude*
37
38 *from persistent gratitude.*
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41 **Facilitating interaction: Interdependent work practices.** Organizations vary
42
43 dramatically in how they structure their work. One important component of this variation is
44
45 interdependence (Wageman, 1999). In some organizations, work is highly independent:
46
47 communication is minimal among employees and reward systems emphasize individual
48
49 achievement. Prototypical examples include real estate agencies and car dealerships, where
50
51 employees are given independent responsibility for particular sales and paid a commission based
52
53 on their individual performance. In other organizations, work is highly interdependent:
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 employees communicate frequently and must rely on each other to achieve the desired outcome.
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5 Common examples include medical teams and advertising agencies, where employees must rely
6
7 on each other's expertise and are collectively judged on group outcomes such as patient mortality
8
9 (Klein, Ziegert, Knight, & Xiao, 2006; Wageman, 1995).
10
11

12
13 Interdependent work practices have a wide range of implications for group processes and
14
15 performance. For example, they tend to increase information sharing (Crawford & Haaland,
16
17 1972) and help groups leverage the benefits of informational diversity (Jehn, Northcraft, &
18
19 Neale, 1999). Here, we propose that interdependent work structures also increase the likelihood
20
21 that persistent gratitude will emerge at the organizational level as collective gratitude. In
22
23 interdependent work structures, employees must rely on each other as a fundamental aspect of
24
25 daily work. They become more emotionally connected and attuned to each other's actions
26
27 (Kanov et al., 2004). As a result, employees in interdependent organizations will be more likely
28
29 to discuss their feelings of gratitude, as well as demonstrate their gratitude nonverbally. Such
30
31 interactions and communications facilitate the spread of emotions within the organization (Kelly
32
33 & Barsade, 2001). Thus, persistent gratitude is most likely to become a shared feature of the
34
35 organization when interdependent work structures are in place (Lissack & Letiche, 2002).
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41 *Proposition 12: Interdependent work practices facilitate the emergence of*
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43 *collective gratitude from persistent gratitude.*
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CONSEQUENCES OF GRATITUDE

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48 Past research has argued that "emotions not only make us feel something, they make us
49
50 feel like doing something" (Gross & Thompson, 2007: 5). Here, we suggest that gratitude results
51
52 in a targeted set of outcomes for employees, their relationships, and the organization. As shown
53
54 in Figure 1, gratitude at each level of analysis is likely to have outcomes at the same level.
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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Nonetheless, we recognize that cross-level effects are likely. For instance, it is reasonable to suspect that grateful emotions will produce momentary shifts in well-being (Watkins, 2014).

Episodic Gratitude and Citizenship

Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) refer to employee behaviors that indirectly contribute to the functioning of the organization, but are less formally rewarded and more discretionary than in-role job tasks (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006). Examples include filling in for a coworker during an emergency and making new employees feel welcome. These OCBs in turn make organizations more attractive places to work (Organ et al., 2006), facilitate effective organizational functioning (Bolino, Turnley, & Bloodgood, 2002), and have direct links to organizational performance (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009).

Scholars have long argued that feelings of gratitude encourage prosocial behavior, facilitating interpersonal exchange and acts of sacrifice (Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008). Several mechanisms for this effect have been posited. Despite its brevity, feelings of gratitude can shift how beneficiaries perceive their benefactors as well as other people in general. Specifically, research suggests that gratitude draws beneficiaries' attention to others' positive qualities. As a result, they are more willing to associate with other people when they feel grateful than when they do not (Algoe et al. 2008). Individuals also become more approach-oriented and report greater interest in spending time with others and strengthening their relationships when feeling grateful (Watkins, 2004). They similarly become more motivated to enhance others' reputations (Algoe et al., 2008). One recent study provided empirical support for these arguments, demonstrating that daily changes in employees' feelings of gratitude are positively associated with daily OCBs (Spence, Brown, Keeping & Lian, 2014).

Proposition 13: Episodic gratitude increases organizational citizenship.

Persistent Gratitude and Well-being

Subjective well-being is a multifaceted phenomenon, broadly defined by individuals' evaluations of their lives as a whole (Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1995: 851). Individuals who report high levels of subjective well-being tend to exhibit low levels of anxiety, depression, and social dysfunction (Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006), with positive implications for employee behavior and performance (Ford, Cerasoli, Higgins, & Decesare, 2011).

Several streams of research converge to support the effects of persistent gratitude on well-being. The most compelling work has employed experimental designs, examining the causal effect of gratitude. Lambert, Fincham, and Stillman (2012) experimentally demonstrated that gratitude decreases depressive symptoms through positive reframing. Kaplan et al. (2014) similarly demonstrated a direct effect of a gratitude writing intervention on employee well-being. Research on the mechanisms underlying these effects indicates that gratitude draws attention to positive events (Lambert, Graham, & Fincham, 2009) and facilitates the persistent use of effective coping strategies, including support-seeking behavior and a tendency to identify growth opportunities (Wood et al., 2008; Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010). As gratitude experiences coalesce into a persistent schema, individuals become more consistently attuned to positive life events, and better able to cope with the challenges they face, with lasting implications for individuals' long-term well-being (Lambert et al., 2009).

Proposition 14: Persistent gratitude increases well-being.

Persistent Gratitude and Communal Exchange

Employees possess many different types of relationships with their coworkers, managers, and other organizational stakeholders. One way to differentiate these relationships is according to their reliance on a communal norm versus an exchange-based norm. Exchange-based norms

THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 are characterized by a short-term focus, whereby benefits are given in exchange for benefits
4 received. Communal norms, in contrast, are need-based and do not clearly specify obligations.
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8 Whereas communal norms are characterized by trust and closeness, exchange norms are not
9
10 (Clark & Mills, 2011). As noted by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), communal norms evolve
11
12 within organizations when employees develop future-orientated relationships characterized by
13
14 high levels of trust between parties.
15
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18 Drawing from this literature, we argue that persistent gratitude is likely to fundamentally
19
20 shift how employees think about workplace relationships, moving from an exchange-based norm
21
22 toward a communal-based norm. Scholars have demonstrated that over time, gratitude is
23
24 associated with the development of high-quality relationships (Kaplan et al., 2014; Lambert,
25
26 Clark, Durtschi, Fincham, & Graham, 2010). From the beneficiary's perspective, gratitude draws
27
28 attention to the benevolence and affection of the benefactors, providing a supportive context for
29
30 their relationship (Clark, 1983). From the benefactor's perspective, gratitude draws attention to
31
32 the beneficiary's future intentions, letting the benefactor know that the recipient values the
33
34 benefactor and is likely to engage in future relationship maintenance behaviors (Algoe, 2012). In
35
36 this manner, gratitude drives a positive spiral of reciprocity and altruistic norms in relationships.
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41 *Proposition 15: Persistent gratitude increases communal exchange.*
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43 **Collective Gratitude and Organizational Resilience**

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45 Organizations face many threats to their long-term survival. Fluctuating market
46
47 conditions, changing consumer demands, and many other forces constantly challenge
48
49 organizations' viability. In the face of such adversity, some organizations thrive. Many even
50
51 utilize adversity as an opportunity for growth and development (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003). Caza
52
53 and Milton (2012) refer to this capacity of an organization to exhibit effective adaptation in the
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 face of adversity as resilience. In resilient organizations, employees respond to new demands
4
5 with optimism and persistence. For example, Meyer (1982) details the story of a hospital that
6
7 exhibited resilience by successfully adapting to a strike. In less resilient organizations, adversity
8
9 leads to lasting problems with employee stress, counterproductive work behavior, and turnover.
10
11

12
13 Sutcliffe and Vogus (2003) explicate a number of factors that predict organizations'
14
15 capacities for resilience and suggest a direct link to collective gratitude. First, resilience is most
16
17 likely to occur in organizations with significant relational capital. As already reviewed, gratitude
18
19 is closely aligned with the maintenance of such capital (Watkins, 2014). Gratitude initiatives set
20
21 the stage for high-quality relationships, strengthening employees' dedication and increasing their
22
23 willingness to voice their concerns (Lambert & Fincham, 2011). Second, resilience is most likely
24
25 to occur in organizations when employees see a direct link between the organization and their
26
27 personal growth. This aspect of resilience is directly associated with employees' shared gratitude
28
29 for developmental opportunities embedded in organizations' HR systems. Finally, resilience is
30
31 most likely to occur in organizations where employees enjoy high levels of trust, which past
32
33 research has directly linked to gratitude (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). Thus, collective gratitude
34
35 can be theorized to promote organizational resilience by ensuring sustained relational capital,
36
37 opportunities for personal growth, and interpersonal trust.
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44 *Proposition 16: Collective gratitude increases organizational resilience.*
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46 **Collective Gratitude and Corporate Social Responsibility**

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48
49 Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been defined as "the commitment of a business
50
51 to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, and
52
53 the local community and society at large to improve their quality of life." (World Business
54
55 Council for Sustainable Development, 2004). The scope of CSR initiatives is broad. CSR might
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3 include the development of a sustainable supply chain, a community engagement program, or a
4
5 customer safety initiative. Whereas CSR research has traditionally remained in the purview of
6
7 business ethicists and corporate strategists, scholars have increasingly displayed an interest in the
8
9 microfoundations of CSR (Jones, Willness, & Madley 2013). Within this literature, scholars have
10
11 emphasized that CSR depends upon employees, who engage in extra-role behavior aimed at
12
13 acting in a socially responsible manner (Vlachos, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2014).
14
15

16
17 Converging lines of research suggest a direct link between collective gratitude and CSR.
18
19 As previously reviewed, gratitude promotes an other orientation characterized by enhanced
20
21 connection to others and prosocial behavior, including a pay-it-forward distribution of benefits to
22
23 third parties (McCullough, Kimeldorf, & Cohen, 2008). This suggests that when gratitude
24
25 emerges as a collective organization-level phenomenon, the organization will become
26
27 increasingly receptive to an organizational strategy aimed at promoting others' well-being.
28
29 Consistent with this notion, grateful employees show a higher concern with the organization's
30
31 social responsibility than less grateful employees (Andersson, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2007).
32
33 As one anecdotal example of this link, Panasonic both lists gratitude among its core values and
34
35 invests heavily in CSR (Panasonic, 2015). In sum, CSR represents an expansive prosocial
36
37 response to gratitude at the organizational level. It extends throughout and beyond the
38
39 organization, even to individuals with whom employees seldom directly interact.
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46 *Proposition 17: Collective gratitude increases corporate social responsibility.*
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48 DISCUSSION

49
50 Gratitude is a powerful force with a wide array of desirable consequences, reflected by its
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52 prominence in philosophy, literature, and religions throughout the world. Whereas societies have
53
54 long recognized the benefits of gratitude, little is known about its role in modern organizations.
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 As noted by Emmons (2003), “there is virtually no hard research on gratitude in organizations”
4
5 (84), highlighting the need for theoretical development. Unfortunately, little progress has been
6
7 made since Emmons’ original comment more than a decade ago. In this paper, we proposed a
8
9 model that begins to examine how organizations can develop employee gratitude, and identifies
10
11 some of the key benefits and challenges of this effort.
12
13

Theoretical Contributions

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16
17 Our paper makes a number of theoretical contributions. First, we broaden scholars’
18
19 understanding of gratitude itself, and argue that a multilevel approach to gratitude in
20
21 organizations is vital (Ashkanasy & Ashton-James, 2007; Rosenberg, 1998). The most widely
22
23 examined form of gratitude—episodic gratitude—is at the event level. However, over time,
24
25 gratitude can emerge at the individual level in the form of persistent gratitude and as a collective
26
27 gratitude that is shared by the organization’s members. Second, we contribute to research by
28
29 moving beyond the gratitude literature’s primary focus on its event-level antecedents, and
30
31 proposing that organizations can reap the benefits of gratitude by implementing gratitude-
32
33 targeted HR initiatives. In doing so, we situate gratitude research squarely within the
34
35 organizational sciences. By highlighting the benefits of a set of coherent organizational practices,
36
37 we also complement past research on positive organizing around phenomena such as compassion
38
39 (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006) and forgiveness (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012).
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46 Third, we contribute to the literature by considering the contingencies of gratitude
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48 emergence across levels and, in doing so, further explicating patterns of gratitude emergence at
49
50 the event, individual, and organizational levels. Looking beyond its antecedents and
51
52 contingencies, we contribute to the literature by considering gratitude’s consequences. Research
53
54 on the outcomes of emotion-based phenomena is limited within the organizational sciences,
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3 especially with respect to positive emotions (Hu & Kaplan, 2015). As a result, practitioners are
4
5 left with little guidance as to the likely long-term implications of employees' workplace
6
7 emotions. Our model connects gratitude to critical outcomes such as employee citizenship and
8
9 organizational resilience. In this way we emphasize that gratitude can exert influences on the
10
11 micro, meso, and macro aspects of organizations.
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15 Finally, we note that our research has implications for understanding the role of other
16
17 emotions in organizations. Beyond gratitude, organizations interested in cultivating emotions
18
19 such as pride, hope, and compassion can benefit from examining how their organizational
20
21 practices facilitate these emotions. For example, organizations characterized as "dirty work"
22
23 might benefit from practices that increase employees' pride (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999).
24
25 Similarly, organizations facing difficult challenges and low odds of success might benefit from
26
27 cultivating hope. A complete understanding of the emotional life of employees requires a
28
29 nuanced approach that differentiates discrete emotions across levels of analysis.
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33 34 **Practical Considerations**

35
36 **Balancing the benefits and risks of gratitude.** In this paper, we have painted a
37
38 primarily positive view of gratitude in organizations. Nonetheless, it is important to note that
39
40 efforts to cultivate gratitude come with risks and challenges. If launched in a cynical
41
42 environment or with an over-emphasis on instrumental outcomes, appreciation programs might
43
44 lead employees to develop feelings of jealousy and anger. Beneficiary contact programs might
45
46 lead to employee burnout if they increase employees' perceived workloads, and developmental
47
48 feedback sessions could lead to resentment if employees view them cynically. Even the
49
50 consequences of gratitude may come with risks. Scholars have shown that the desire to engage in
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52 organizational citizenship can lead to unethical behavior, such as lying on behalf of the
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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3 organization (Umphress, Bingham, & Mitchell, 2010). Similarly, CSR programs might
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5 negatively impact financial performance if launched without a consideration of an organization's
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7 strategic mission (Porter & Kramer, 2006). From these risks, it is clear that although gratitude
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9 presents many opportunities, it also requires careful management.
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12 **Maintaining gratitude over time.** For organizations seeking to cultivate long-term
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14 gratitude, a central challenge is ensuring that employees maintain their gratitude over time. To
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16 address this challenge, we emphasize the practical importance of focusing on gratitude's
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18 contingencies both within the episodic level and across levels. For example, if employees begin
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20 to react to gratitude initiatives with cynicism, the organization might need to examine its culture,
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22 and work to create a more trusting environment. Similarly, if employees begin to react to
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24 gratitude initiatives with indifference, the organization might need to examine employees'
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26 attentiveness to alternative outcomes, and minimize the presence of disruptive events.
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28 Presumably, employee gratitude is most likely to be sustained over time when it successfully
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30 emerges at the individual level as an emotional schema as well as at the organizational level.
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36 **How should gratitude be measured?** As an important next step in organization-based
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38 gratitude research, scholars must give careful consideration to gratitude measurement. Looking
39
40 first to episodic gratitude, gratitude can be measured with emotion checklists in a manner similar
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42 to other emotions such as anger and compassion. In this process, scholars should be particularly
43
44 careful to distinguish gratitude from other related emotions such as inspiration and awe (Haidt,
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46 2003). To measure persistent gratitude, scholars must assess the frequency with which
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48 employees tend to experience gratitude in the workplace. An example item, for instance, might
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50 state: "While at work, I often feel a sense of gratitude." Scholars might also adopt a more
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52 granular approach, examining the tendency to feel gratitude within a particular unit of the
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3 organization or while interacting with a particular colleague. When examining persistent
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5 gratitude, researchers must also carefully differentiate the construct from related phenomena,
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7 such as perceived organizational support. At the organizational level, we recommend that
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9 collective gratitude be measured via a direct consensus approach (Chan, 1998), and encourage
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11 scholars to explore patterns of collective gratitude across subgroups (Harrison & Klein, 2007).
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15 We also note the importance of measuring gratitude's emergence across levels. There is a
16
17 dearth of quantitative research on emergence in general (Kozlowski & Chao, 2012), largely due
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19 to its methodological challenges. For researchers to document emergence, longitudinal research
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21 is necessary (Fulmer & Ostroff, 2015). To examine emergence from episodic gratitude to
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23 persistent gratitude, researchers can utilize experience sampling methods. To examine emergence
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25 from persistent to collective gratitude, researchers can measure persistent gratitude within an
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27 organization and assess its convergence over time. Ideally, researchers can survey employees at
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29 key points in time, such as when a new unit forms or a new initiative is enacted. Such research
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31 can provide valuable information about the length of time needed for collective gratitude to
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33 emerge and assess the role of specific situational constraints and affordances.
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38 **Conclusion**

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40 Most people believe that gratitude is a desirable positive emotion (Gallup, 1999).
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42 Nonetheless, there is a fundamental lack of attention to what gratitude "looks like" in
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44 organizations and to the organizational practices that enable employees to experience gratitude
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46 on a daily basis. As noted by McCraty and Childre (2004), "In the absence of conscious efforts
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48 to engage, build, and sustain positive perceptions and emotions, we all too automatically fall
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50 prey to feelings such as irritation, anxiety, worry, frustration, judgmentalness, self-doubt, and
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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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blame” (242). By making gratitude a fundamental part of the employee experience, leaders and managers can leverage the benefits of gratitude for employees and the organization as a whole.

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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

Table 1. Definitions and comparisons among gratitude and related emotions

Positive Emotion	Definition	Distinguishing Features		
		Trigger event	Impact of trigger on the self*	Prosocial action tendency
Gratitude	A feeling of appreciation in response to an experience that is beneficial to, but not attributable to, the self.	Receipt of benefits from outside the self	High	High
Happiness	“The degree to which someone evaluates positively the overall quality of his or her present 'life as a whole.’” (Veenhoven, 2000: 267)	A broad array of positive forces	High	Low
Compassion	"The emotional response of caring for and wanting to help those who are suffering." (Weng et al., 2013: 1171)	Others' suffering	Low	High, but limited to suffering individuals
Pride	“A pleasurable emotion resulting from actions that indicate that the self is indeed good, competent, and virtuous.” (Haidt, 2003: 860)	Positive outcomes attributed to the self	High	Low
Elevation	“An emotion a person may experience when seeing an action the person deems morally virtuous.” (Siegel et al., 2014: 414)	Observation of a moral exemplar	Low	High**

*As discussed by Haidt (2003), whereas some emotions are primarily elicited by events that directly impact the self (e.g. gratitude arises from a direct benefit to the self), others are more easily elicited by simply observing a third party (e.g. compassion).

**But see Siegel et al. (2014) for evidence that gratitude entails a broader prosocial action tendency than elevation.

THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

Table 2. Contingencies of gratitude emergence

Contingency	Effect on gratitude emergence	Level of gratitude affected	Risks if not addressed
Attentiveness to alternative outcomes	Positive	Episodic	Employees will habituate to the benefits they receive from gratitude initiatives
Benevolent HR attributions	Positive	Episodic	Gratitude initiatives will produce feelings of anger and contempt
Humility	Positive	Episodic	Gratitude initiatives will produce feelings of pride and envy
Rumination	Positive	Persistent	Employees will lose sight of the times they recently felt grateful
Disruptive events	Negative	Persistent	Employees will begin to focus on competition and entitlement instead of gratitude
HR alignment	Positive	Collective	Only a small number of employees who engage in specific HR practices will develop persistent gratitude
Interdependent work practices	Positive	Collective	Persistent gratitude will not be reinforced across employees due to a lack of sharing and social learning

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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

Figure 1. A Multilevel Model of Gratitude in Organizations

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THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE

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