THE GRATEFUL WORKPLACE: A MULTILEVEL MODEL OF GRATITUDE IN ORGANIZATIONS

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Gratitude is a valuable emotion with an array of functional outcomes. Nonetheless, research on gratitude in organizations is limited. In this article we develop a multilevel model of gratitude composed 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 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.

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, thus 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, in only a handful of studies have scholars 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 set 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, "Until general psychological theories are linked to organizational contextual variables they will remain inadequate to explain what goes on in organizations" (1995: 77; see also Gelfand, Leslie, & Keller, 2008). Research on the consequences of emotions in general and gratitude in particular suggests that organizations can greatly benefit from an explicit consideration of how gratitude

emerges and influences workplace outcomes across multiple levels of analysis (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001).

In this article we seek to accomplish several interrelated goals. First, we offer a multilevel model of gratitude, examining its manifestations at the event, individual, and organizational levels of analysis. Second, we explore the unique organizational antecedents of gratitude, with a focus on human resource (HR) initiatives aimed at cultivating gratitude. Third, we identify key contingencies of gratitude emergence, highlighting the challenges that organizations are likely to face in their efforts to promote employee gratitude. Fourth and finally, we examine the consequences of building gratitude within organizations at multiple levels of analysis. From a theoretical perspective, we offer insight into how gratitude unfolds at work, with broader implications for the emergence and influence of other emotions in the workplace. From a managerial perspective, we highlight both the utility of workplace gratitude and the challenges of fostering it, focusing on organizational systems that can help practitioners build organizational change

efforts aimed at the cultivation of gratitude. A visual representation of the proposed model is given in Figure 1.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS: GRATITUDE AT THREE LEVELS

The scholarly history of gratitude is extensive, spanning disciplines as diverse as theology, philosophy, sociology, and psychology (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). Given this diverse history, it is perhaps not surprising 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.

FIGURE 1
A Multilevel Model of Gratitude in Organizations
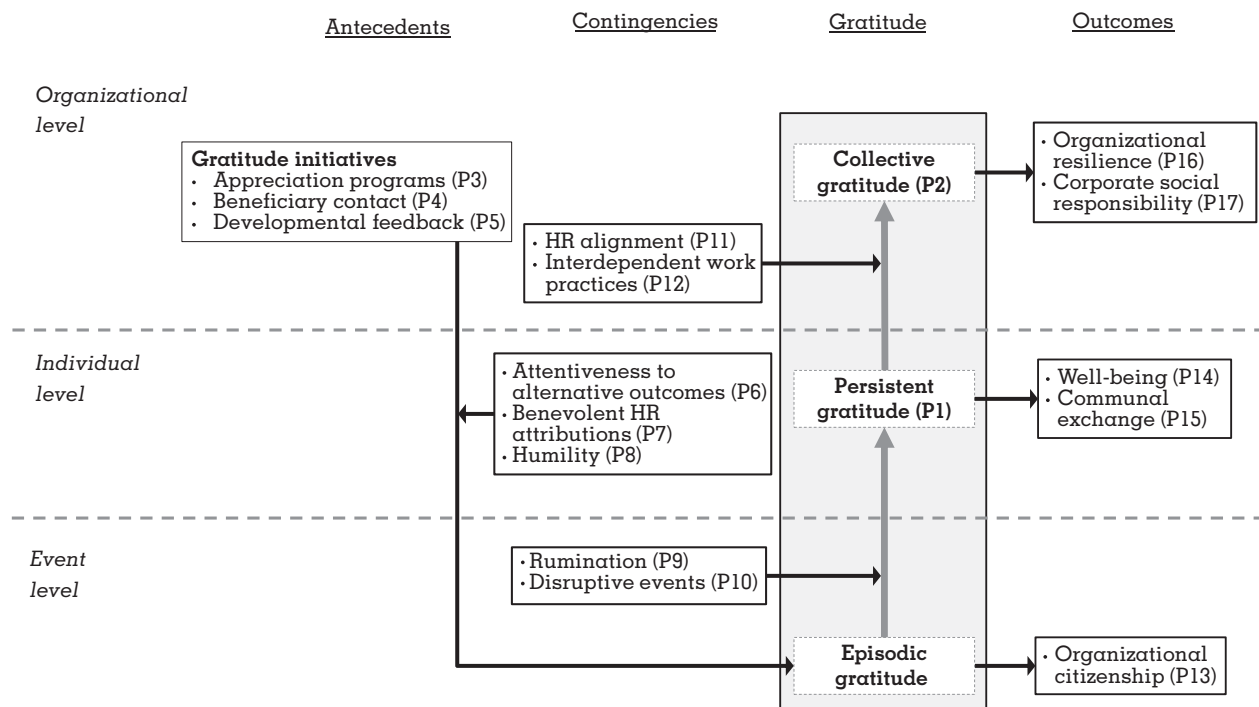
Episodic Gratitude

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 him 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 it therefore requires a "willingness to recognize the unearned increments of value in one's experience" (Bertocci & Millard, 1963: 389).

In this article we focus on gratitude that arises in the organizational context or because of 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, Sonnemans, & Clore, 1992). Low-intensity feelings of gratitude might arise following 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, in turn, can 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: the trigger event, the impact of the trigger on the self, and 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).

Persistent Gratitude

Gratitude researchers have 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, which we define as *a stable tendency to feel grateful within a particular context*.

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

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

Once formed, persistent gratitude operates in several interrelated ways. First, individuals who

TABLE 1
Definitions and Comparisons Among Gratitude and Related Emotions

Positive Emotion	Definition	Distinguishing Features		
		Trigger Event	Impact of Trigger on the Self[a]	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, Thomson, & Navarro, 2014: 414)	Observation of a moral exemplar	Low	High[b]

[a] 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).

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

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 they therefore 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, whereas employees without gratitude schemas would not. Second, they become better able to recall past gratitude-inducing experiences and use them to interpret their environments (DeCoster & Claypool, 2004). For example, they might frequently recall the actions of a particularly helpful supervisor during a challenging time. Third, they become more likely to interpret ambiguous events through the lens of gratitude-inducing appraisals (Wilkowski, Robinson, Gordon, & Troop-Gordon, 2007). For example, they might interpret help with a deadline as worthy of gratitude, whereas another employee might perceive it as an act of reciprocated exchange or an attempt to steal the spotlight. Persistent gratitude can thus be expected to exert effects

that are comparatively enduring, influencing how employees respond to a wide range of situations.

> *Proposition 1: Persistent gratitude at the individual level emerges from episodic gratitude at the event level.*

Collective Gratitude

Beyond the event and individual levels, gratitude can also emerge at the organizational level. We term this organizational-level construct collective gratitude, which we define as *persistent gratitude that is shared by the members of an organization*. Collective gratitude occurs through an emergent process in which individuals' own experiences of persistent gratitude converge to manifest as a shared organizational-level phenomenon (Rousseau, 1985). Put differently, collective gratitude "is the result of bottom-up processes whereby phenomena and constructs that originate at a lower level of analysis, through social interaction and exchange, combine, coalesce, and manifest at a higher collective level of analysis" (Kozlowski, 2012: 267).

We conceptualize this emergence as compositional, where emergence at the organizational level stems from a high level of consensus in persistent gratitude at the individual level. This is what Chan (1998) referred to as a direct consensus model, the focus being on agreement across individual employees' experiences. Later in this article we consider factors that are likely to facilitate the emergence of gratitude at the organizational level. However, we also note that such emergence is likely to be facilitated by the uniquely relational nature of gratitude itself. Unlike many other emotions, gratitude is highly social and other oriented (Watkins, 2014). Intersecting lines of research have noted that gratitude tends to be expressed explicitly, both through words of thanks to one's benefactors and through action (Eisenberg, Miller, Shell, McNalley, & Shea, 1991). Thus, employees are likely to be particularly aware of others' gratitude, facilitating emotional contagion and social learning.

The implications of sustained, shared, organizational-level gratitude are significant. Once formed, collective gratitude acts as part of the social context of the organization (Ferris et al., 1998). In other words, it becomes a defining feature of the organization itself, shaping the way employees construe the organization and their place within it.

> *Proposition 2: Collective gratitude at the organizational level emerges from persistent gratitude at the individual level.*

Key Assumptions: Reciprocal Dynamics and Gratitude's Targets

Although not formalized as propositions, two assumptions regarding the structure of gratitude in organizations deserve attention. First, collective gratitude and persistent gratitude are likely to have additional top-down effects that reinforce gratitude at the event and individual levels. We presume that collective gratitude will exert a top-down positive effect on episodic and persistent gratitude, consistent with the broader literature on the assimilative pressures of organizations and their associated norms (Schein, 2010). Similarly, we presume that episodic and persistent gratitude are reciprocally related. Second, we note that gratitude is likely to have many distinct

yet overlapping targets. A pay raise might lead an employee to feel grateful for both her immediate supervisor and the organization's upper-level leadership. Similarly, an employee who receives help meeting a deadline might experience gratitude toward the helpful coworker as well as the supervisor who encouraged the employees to work together. However, we adopt a more holistic approach that encompasses multiple targets and presumes that they are interrelated.

ANTECEDENTS OF GRATITUDE

Gratitude's antecedents are multifaceted and occur at multiple levels of analysis. Our focus is on the organizational-level antecedents of gratitude, allowing for an understanding of the precise role of the organization itself in gratitude emergence. At this level the most direct path to influencing employee gratitude is through gratitude-focused HR practices, which we term *gratitude initiatives*. Drawing from the HR literature and the gratitude literature, we identify three initiatives particularly likely to facilitate employee gratitude—appreciation programs, contact with beneficiaries, and developmental feedback—and examine their effects on episodic gratitude (Ostroff, Kinicki, & Tamkins, 2003). Our goal is not to provide a comprehensive account of initiatives that facilitate gratitude but, rather, to provide concrete, illustrative examples of how organizations might begin the process of fostering gratitude.

Appreciation Programs

Everyday interactions with peers, supervisors, and subordinates provide many opportunities for gratitude. Employees frequently go above and beyond their assigned tasks by helping each other and engaging in proactive, prosocial behavior. These extra-role efforts are typically aimed at improving their colleagues' lives and the functioning of the organization (Van Dyne, Cummings, & Parks, 1995). However, in fast-paced and performance-driven work environments, beneficiaries may not always take the time to express gratitude, leaving benefactors feeling as though their actions are overlooked and ignored. From an organizational practice perspective, one path to addressing this issue and fostering gratitude is employee appreciation programs.

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

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, can strengthen interpersonal relationships, and can institutionalize gratitude by showing employees that the organization values grateful emotions.

> *Proposition 3: Appreciation programs increase episodic gratitude.*

Contact with Beneficiaries

Although people frequently feel gratitude when they receive help from others, past research has demonstrated that they also feel gratitude for the opportunity to give help to others. For example, in a two-week study of hospital personnel, Cheng, Tsui, and Lam (2015) found that employees frequently listed their ability to help their patients as an important source of daily gratitude. Although many organizations cite their positive impact on customers' lives as a core component of their missions, the link between employees' actions and the benefits they produce is often unclear (Grant, 2007). We argue that organizations can inculcate gratitude by highlighting these connections through beneficiary contact programs.

Research has identified contact with beneficiaries as an important job design principle (Grant, 2007; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Some jobs, such as janitorial work, involve infrequent direct contact with beneficiaries, whereas other jobs, such as firefighting, involve more frequent and meaningful contact (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Interest in these differences across industries has sparked research on interventions that can increase employees' contact with beneficiaries. For example, Grant et al. (2007) instituted an organizational practice whereby employees at a university donations call center directly interacted with their beneficiaries (in this case scholarship recipients). Among their effects, such interventions have been shown to improve employees' feelings of social worth, prosocial motivation, and job persistence (Grant & Berg, 2012; Grant & Gino, 2010). Moreover, Dutton, Roberts, and Bednar (2010) suggested that prosocial characteristics such as kindness, benevolence, and helpfulness become more accessible through beneficiary contact.

Past research has typically focused on the impact of beneficiary contact programs for employee performance and commitment, but beneficiary contact should also directly impact employee gratitude. Individuals intrinsically enjoy helping each other (Schwartz & Sendor, 1999), actively seek out meaningful work when choosing their careers (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009), and directly acknowledge their impact on others as a principle source of gratitude in the workplace (Cheng et al., 2015). Grant, Dutton, and Rosso (2008) proposed that opportunities to help others serve a psychological benefit, promoting employee gratitude by enhancing the fulfillment employees find in their work. Anecdotal evidence likewise supports the link between gratitude and beneficiary contact. In one example a florist

discussed her appreciation for the opportunity to give her customers useful advice and help them pick the "right" bouquet (Bowe, Bowe, & Streeter, 2009).

Proposition 4: Beneficiary contact interventions increase episodic gratitude.

Developmental Feedback

Beyond the help received and given to others, employees may also feel gratitude for the personal growth and competencies they develop on the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Unfortunately, in many organizations leaders offer employees limited feedback on their development, leaving them unaware of their progress (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). For example, in one survey 70 percent of employees indicated that they had never had a meaningful discussion about performance with their managers (Schneier, 1995). As a result, employees often feel anxious, unsure of their progress, and unsatisfied with their relationships with their leaders. Developmental feedback can play a key role in addressing these issues, providing employees with a clear understanding of their personal growth trajectories while producing gratitude for the progress they have made.

Developmental feedback refers to a manager's efforts to provide employees with useful information enabling them to learn and develop their skills (Zhou, 2003). Unlike routine performance evaluations, developmental feedback is future oriented and focused on employees' personal improvement (Li, Harris, Boswell, & Xie, 2011). It is designed to leverage employees' intrinsic motivation, helping them see how they are progressing and where they might go next. At the broadest level, developmental feedback can be conceptualized as a component of high-quality mentoring relationships, which "promote mutual growth, learning, and development" (Ragins, 2012: 519). Past research has shown that developmental feedback, when delivered in a context that emphasizes mutual trust and respect, helps employees be more creative (Zhou, 2003) and more effective performers (Li et al., 2011).

Here we propose that developmental feedback is positively associated with employee gratitude. For example, hospital employees expressed as a key source of gratitude opportunities to develop new clinical skills (Cheng et al., 2015). As noted by Ragins (2012), interactions such as mentoring are likely to be directly related to employees' thriving at work, helping them develop their skills and become the best people they can be (Moss & Sanchez, 2004). Developmental feedback thus signals to employees that others in the organization care about their personal and professional well-being, leading them to become aware of the benefits provided by the job and the organization for their self-improvement.

Proposition 5: Developmental feedback increases episodic gratitude.

CONTINGENCIES OF GRATITUDE EMERGENCE

Although gratitude initiatives have the potential to positively impact employees, they also exist within an institutional framework that presents challenges and risks. If perceived as a means of pressuring employees to compete or work longer hours, appreciation programs and beneficiary contact initiatives might lead to jealousy and envy (Smith & Kim, 2007) and increase stress and burnout (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). Similarly, developmental feedback initiatives might produce cynicism when perceived as disingenuous, or might otherwise lead to excessive pride. These risks are not unique to gratitude initiatives. The effects of organizational practices are often inconsistent, hinging on a variety of moderating factors (Hong, Liao, Hu, & Jiang, 2013). Similarly, many factors may moderate the emergence of gratitude across levels of analysis (Fulmer & Ostroff, 2016). In this section we highlight several key contingencies of gratitude initiatives and gratitude emergence at the individual and organizational levels. Each of these contingencies and their associated risks is summarized in Table 2.

Contingencies of Episodic Gratitude Emergence

Gratitude can be a particularly challenging emotion to cultivate. People often acclimate to the benefits they receive, causing gratitude to give way to indifference and even entitlement (Harvey & Dasborough, 2015). To avoid such acclimation, scholars have argued that a beneficiary must (a) be aware of the benefits he or she receives, (b) perceive the intentions of the benefactor to be genuine (rather than instrumental), and (c) perceive the received benefits to be costly to the benefactor (Tesser, Gatewood, & Driver, 1968;

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 because of a lack of sharing and social learning

Wood et al., 2008). Drawing from this literature, we argue that gratitude initiatives are most likely to facilitate gratitude in the context of attentiveness to alternative outcomes, benevolent HR attributions, and humility.

Recognizing the benefit: Attentiveness to alternative outcomes. Gratitude initiatives provide employees with many beneficial experiences. However, employees' feelings of gratitude are contingent on their recognition of those benefits, which can be difficult to sustain. According to Frijda's (1988) "law of habituation," people tend to become accustomed to their situations and are likely to experience decreasingly intense emotional reactions to the benefits they consistently receive over time.

One of the most direct ways for employees to maintain a recognition of the benefits that gratitude initiatives provide is to attend to possible alternatives. As noted by Frijda, "Adaptation to satisfaction can be counteracted by constantly being aware of how fortunate one's condition is and how it could have been otherwise, or actually was otherwise before" (1988: 354). Attention to alternative outcomes is consistent with the notion of counterfactual thought (Kahneman & Miller, 1986) and is particularly relevant to gratitude when directed toward less desirable alternative outcomes, such as working for an organization with

less helpful colleagues or fewer opportunities (Epstude & Roese, 2008). Similarly, gratitude can be expected to emerge by considering the challenges one has faced in the past (Fagley, 2012).

Although individuals can be expected to vary in their dispositional attentiveness to alternative outcomes, social cognitive research suggests that these alternatives can also be made more salient by the situation (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Evidence indicates that one of the most reliable elicitors of attentiveness to an alternative outcome is the psychological closeness of that outcome (Morris & Moore, 2000). For example, individuals who entered the workforce during the recession (and therefore faced poor employment prospects) were particularly grateful for their jobs (Bianchi, 2013). Beyond timing, research suggests that attentiveness to alternatives is particularly likely when one's situation is counter to the norms of a particular region, industry, or organization (Buck & Miller, 1994).

> *Proposition 6: Attentiveness to alternative outcomes facilitates the emergence of episodic gratitude from gratitude initiatives.*

Recognizing the benefactor: Benevolent HR attributions. Another step in inculcating gratitude is for employees to recognize that the

benefactor is acting benevolently, rather than instrumentally. To this end, HR attributions are likely to play a critical role. Nishii, Lepak, and Schneider defined HR attributions as "causal explanations that employees make regarding management's motivations for using particular HR practices" (2008: 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 employees attribute gratitude initiatives to benevolent motives, they are likely to respond 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 employees attribute such initiatives to less benevolent motives, they 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 they 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.

Recognizing the cost: Humility. As a third step in ensuring that organizations' gratitude initiatives

are successful, employees must perceive that the benefits they receive carry more costs for the benefactor than what might be reasonably expected. In this final contingency of episodic gratitude, employee humility is likely to play a critical role.

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

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

Humility has been characterized as a malleable interpersonal trait that is susceptible to change over time (Owens & Hekman, 2016). Therefore, although it is an individual difference, it can be influenced by interventions. Owens et al. (2013) have noted that humility notably involves accurate self-perception, including a reduction in overconfidence and a concomitant recognition that forces beyond the self are a necessary component of success. Indeed, scholars have begun to examine the efficacy of humility interventions (Romanowska, Larsson, & Theorell, 2015) and humility-based leadership training programs (Hayes & Comer, 2010).

Proposition 8: Humility facilitates the emergence of episodic gratitude from gratitude initiatives.

Contingencies of Persistent Gratitude Emergence

As previously discussed, persistent gratitude entails the development of an emotion schema, and it is therefore predicated on frequent and strong feelings of gratitude within the organization. However, episodic gratitude by itself is unlikely to be sufficient for persistent gratitude to readily emerge. To develop a gratitude schema, employees must also engage in continual retroactive thought about their gratitude. Furthermore, disruptive experiences that run counter to this schema must be minimized.

Reinforcing a schema: Rumination. Individuals differ in the extent to which they are influenced by affective episodes, and one key predictor of these differences is rumination. Whereas scholars typically discuss rumination within the context of negative emotions (Whitmer & Gotlib, 2013), it is also possible to ruminate over positive emotions. Gilbert, Nolen-Hoeksema, and Gruber have defined this positive rumination as "the tendency to respond to the positive state with recurrent thoughts of one's positive emotional state and positive self-qualities" (2013: 737). It is an internal, cognitive process that involves consciously thinking about a positive emotion after it occurs—involving such terms as *reminiscing* and *basking* (Martin & Tesser, 1996)—which continues over an extended period of time (Wang, Liao, Zhan, & Shi, 2011).

Research on positive rumination suggests that employees who tend to savor and focus on their individual gratitude experiences will be most likely to translate their episodic gratitude into persistent gratitude. Positive rumination enhances the benefits of individuals' positive emotions, leading to higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression (Feldman, Joormann, & Johnson, 2008). In contrast, a failure to ruminate over positive events can create persistent negative moods and even depressive symptoms (Rottenberg, Kasch, Gross, & Gotlib, 2002). Most directly, research has demonstrated that individuals who tend to ruminate over positive emotions subsequently experience them more frequently than their peers (Quoidbach, Berry, Hansenne, & Mikolajczak, 2010). In contrast, individuals who do not ruminate tend to dampen their positive emotions, focusing on the low likelihood that the emotions will be experienced in the future. Here we hypothesize that rumination will facilitate the development of gratitude-based emotion schemas, heightening the accessibility of individuals' gratitude-inducing experiences and ultimately strengthening the link between episodic and persistent gratitude.

> *Proposition 9: Rumination facilitates the emergence of persistent gratitude from episodic gratitude.*

Weakening a schema: Disruptive events. Emotion schemas develop from persistent patterns of emotion in a given context. However, schema development may be compromised by disruptive events (Morgeson, 2005; Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015). In past research scholars have examined the notion of disruptive events in a multitude of ways, typically focusing on how a variety of exogenous shocks (Vergne, 2012) and unexpected disturbances (Yukl, 2002) interrupt employee perceptions and outcomes. For example, Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, and Inderrieden (2005) found that environmental shocks such as job offers, corporate mergers, layoffs, and high-intensity arguments with coworkers dramatically shifted employees' perceptions of their organizations and ultimately exhibited a significant impact on employee turnover.

Disruptive events, particularly those that are of high intensity, are most likely to mitigate the emergence of persistent gratitude when they directly counter the association between gratitude and the work environment. Examples include the arrival of a new CEO who encourages transactional leadership principles and the introduction of new performance standards that pit employees against each other. Such events are likely to introduce variability in employees' experiences with gratitude in the organization, disrupting the emergence process for persistent gratitude (Harvey & Dasborough, 2015). With mixed messages about the link between gratitude and the organizational context, it no longer remains clear how to interpret ambiguous information, and the gratitude-based emotion schemas that employees develop are likely to be less strong and stable.

> *Proposition 10: Disruptive events mitigate the link between episodic gratitude and persistent gratitude.*

Contingencies of Collective Gratitude Emergence

Following the development of persistent gratitude, an important question is whether collective gratitude might emerge at the organizational level of analysis. Here we argue that this is most likely to occur when the organizational context facilitates a convergence of persistent gratitude across individuals, induced through HR alignment and interdependent work practices.

Sending clear signals: HR alignment. The notion of HR alignment is rooted in the strategic human resources management literature, which shows that HR practices are most effective when thought of as "bundles" around a coherent culture or goal (Becker & Huselid, 2006). For example, some HR bundles are oriented toward work-family balance (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000), with interrelated practices that ensure such balance through their compensation systems, training programs, and leave policies.

Within the context of gratitude, an organization could be said to possess an aligned system of gratitude-oriented practices if it deploys multiple distinct gratitude initiatives in tandem. An organization with strong HR alignment simultaneously employs appreciation programs, contact with beneficiaries, developmental feedback policies, and related practices. In contrast, an organization with weak HR alignment might utilize appreciation programs but offer few opportunities for beneficiary contact. Similarly, an organization with weak HR alignment might employ its practices inconsistently across people and time (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

A fundamental assumption of the HR literature is that HR systems send stronger signals to employees when they are aligned (Schneider, Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002). Following this logic, HR alignment should strengthen the link between persistent gratitude and collective gratitude. A single HR initiative aimed at employee gratitude conveys weak and ambiguous signals and, thus, is likely to create high variability in persistent gratitude across employees. For example, whereas some employees might develop persistent gratitude through their experiences with a beneficiary contact program, others might fail to do so because of their experiences with a poor feedback system. Thus, HR systems aligned toward employee gratitude are most likely to send strong signals that will facilitate collective gratitude emergence.

Proposition 11: HR alignment facilitates the emergence of collective gratitude from persistent gratitude.

Facilitating interaction: Interdependent work practices. Organizations vary dramatically in how they structure their work. One important component of this variation is interdependence (Wageman, 1999). In some organizations work is highly independent: communication is minimal among employees, and reward systems emphasize individual achievement. Prototypical examples include real estate agencies and car dealerships, where employees are given independent responsibility for particular sales and paid a commission based on their individual performance. In other organizations work is highly interdependent: employees communicate frequently and must rely on each other to achieve the desired outcome. Common examples include medical teams and advertising agencies, where employees must rely on each other's expertise and are collectively judged on group outcomes, such as patient mortality (Klein, Ziegert, Knight, & Xiao, 2006; Wageman, 1995).

Interdependent work practices have a wide range of implications for group processes and performance. For example, they tend to increase information sharing (Crawford & Haaland, 1972) and help groups leverage the benefits of informational diversity (Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999). Here we propose that interdependent work structures also increase the likelihood that persistent gratitude will emerge as collective gratitude at the organizational level. In interdependent work structures employees must rely on each other as a fundamental aspect of daily work. They become more emotionally connected and attuned to each other's actions (Kanov et al., 2004). As a result, employees in interdependent organizations will be more likely to discuss their feelings of gratitude, as well as demonstrate their gratitude nonverbally. Such interactions and communications facilitate the spread of emotions within the organization (Kelly & Barsade, 2001). Thus, persistent gratitude is most likely to become a shared feature of the organization when interdependent work structures are in place (Lissack & Letiche, 2002).

Proposition 12: Interdependent work practices facilitate the emergence of collective gratitude from persistent gratitude.

CONSEQUENCES OF GRATITUDE

Gross and Thompson argued that "emotions not only make us feel something, they make us feel like doing something" (2007: 5). Here we suggest that gratitude results in a targeted set of outcomes for employees, their relationships, and the organization. As shown in Figure 1, gratitude at each level of analysis is likely to have outcomes at the same level. 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 their 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 their employment 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, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010; Wood et al., 2008). 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 their long-term well-being (Lambert et al., 2009).

Proposition 14: Persistent gratitude increases well-being.

Persistent Gratitude and Communal Exchange

Employees have 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 are characterized by a short-term focus, where benefits are given in exchange for benefits received. Communal norms, in contrast, are need based and do not clearly specify obligations. Whereas communal norms are characterized by trust and closeness, exchange norms are not (Clark & Mills, 2011). As noted

by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), communal norms evolve within organizations when employees develop future-orientated relationships characterized by high levels of trust between parties.

Drawing from this literature, we argue that persistent gratitude is likely to fundamentally shift how employees think about workplace relationships, moving from an exchange-based norm toward a communal-based norm. Scholars have demonstrated that, over time, gratitude is associated with the development of high-quality relationships (Kaplan et al., 2014; Lambert, Clark, Durtschi, Fincham, & Graham, 2010). From the beneficiary's perspective, gratitude draws attention to the benevolence and affection of the benefactors, providing a supportive context for their relationship (Clark, 1983). From the benefactor's perspective, gratitude draws attention to the beneficiary's future intentions, letting the benefactor know that the recipient values the benefactor and is likely to engage in future relationship maintenance behaviors (Algoe, 2012). In this manner gratitude drives a positive spiral of reciprocity and altruistic norms in relationships.

> *Proposition 15: Persistent gratitude increases communal exchange.*

Collective Gratitude and Organizational Resilience

Organizations face many threats to their long-term survival. Fluctuating market conditions, changing consumer demands, and many other forces constantly challenge organizations' viability. In the face of such adversity, some organizations thrive. Many even use adversity as an opportunity for growth and development (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003). Caza and Milton (2012) refer to this capacity of an organization to exhibit effective adaptation in the face of adversity as resilience. In resilient organizations employees respond to new demands with optimism and persistence. For example, Meyer (1982) detailed the story of a hospital that exhibited resilience by successfully adapting to a strike. In less resilient organizations adversity leads to lasting problems with employee stress, counterproductive work behavior, and turnover.

Sutcliffe and Vogus (2003) explicated a number of factors that predict organizations' capacity

for resilience and suggest a direct link to collective gratitude. First, resilience is most likely to occur in organizations with significant relational capital. As already noted, gratitude is closely aligned with the maintenance of such capital (Watkins, 2014). Gratitude initiatives set the stage for high-quality relationships, strengthening employees' dedication and increasing their willingness to voice their concerns (Lambert & Fincham, 2011). Second, resilience is most likely to occur in organizations when employees see a direct link between the organization and their personal growth. This aspect of resilience is directly associated with employees' shared gratitude for developmental opportunities embedded in organizations' HR systems. Finally, resilience is most likely to occur in organizations where employees enjoy high levels of trust, which past research has directly linked to gratitude (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). Thus, collective gratitude can be theorized as promoting organizational resilience by ensuring sustained relational capital, opportunities for personal growth, and interpersonal trust.

> *Proposition 16: Collective gratitude increases organizational resilience.*

Collective Gratitude and Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been defined as "actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law" (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001: 117). The scope of CSR initiatives is broad. CSR might include the development of a sustainable supply chain, a community engagement program, or a customer safety initiative. Although CSR research has traditionally remained in the purview of business ethicists and corporate strategists, scholars have increasingly displayed an interest in the microfoundations of CSR (Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2013). Within this literature scholars have emphasized that CSR depends upon employees who engage in extra-role behavior aimed at acting in a socially responsible manner (Vlachos, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2014).

Converging lines of research suggest a direct link between collective gratitude and CSR. As previously noted, gratitude promotes an other orientation characterized by enhanced connection to others and prosocial behavior, including a pay-it-forward distribution of benefits to third

parties (McCullough, Kimeldorf, & Cohen, 2008). This suggests that when gratitude emerges as a collective organizational-level phenomenon, the organization will become increasingly receptive to an organizational strategy aimed at promoting others' well-being. Consistent with this notion, grateful employees will show a higher concern with the organization's social responsibility than will less grateful employees (Andersson, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2007). As one anecdotal example of this link, Panasonic both lists gratitude among its core values and invests heavily in CSR (Panasonic, 2015). In sum, CSR represents an expansive prosocial response to gratitude at the organizational level. It extends throughout and beyond the organization, even to individuals with whom employees seldom directly interact.

> *Proposition 17: Collective gratitude increases corporate social responsibility.*

DISCUSSION

Gratitude is a powerful force with a wide array of desirable consequences, reflected by its prominence in philosophy, literature, and religions throughout the world. Although societies have long recognized the benefits of gratitude, little is known about its role in modern organizations. As noted by Emmons, "There is virtually no hard research on gratitude in organizations" (2003: 84), highlighting the need for theoretical development. Unfortunately, little progress has been made since Emmons' original comment more than a decade ago. In this article we have offered a model that begins to examine how organizations can develop employee gratitude and that identifies some of the key benefits and challenges of this effort.

Theoretical Contributions

Our article makes a number of theoretical contributions. First, we broaden scholars' understanding of gratitude itself and argue that a multilevel approach to gratitude in organizations is vital (Ashkanasy & Ashton-James, 2007; Rosenberg, 1998). The most widely examined form of gratitude—episodic gratitude—is at the event level. However, over time, gratitude can emerge at the individual level in the form of persistent gratitude and as a collective gratitude that is shared by the organization's members.

Second, we contribute to research by moving beyond the gratitude literature's primary focus on gratitude's event-level antecedents and proposing that organizations can reap the benefits of gratitude by implementing gratitude-targeted HR initiatives. In doing so we situate gratitude research squarely within the organizational sciences. By highlighting the benefits of a set of coherent organizational practices, we also complement past research on positive organizing around such phenomena as compassion (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006) and forgiveness (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012).

Third, we contribute to the literature by considering the contingencies of gratitude emergence across levels and, in so doing, further explicating patterns of gratitude emergence at the event, individual, and organizational levels. Looking beyond gratitude's antecedents and contingencies, we contribute to the literature by considering gratitude's consequences. Research on the outcomes of emotion-based phenomena is limited within the organizational sciences, especially with respect to positive emotions (Hu & Kaplan, 2015). As a result, practitioners are left with little guidance as to the likely long-term implications of employees' workplace emotions. Our model connects gratitude to critical outcomes such as employee citizenship and organizational resilience. In this way we emphasize that gratitude can exert influences on the micro, meso, and macro aspects of organizations.

Finally, we note that our research has implications for understanding the role of other emotions in organizations. Beyond gratitude, organizations interested in cultivating emotions such as pride, hope, and compassion can benefit from examining how their organizational practices facilitate these emotions. For example, organizations characterized as doing "dirty work" might benefit from practices that increase employees' pride (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Similarly, organizations facing difficult challenges and low odds of success might benefit from cultivating hope. A complete understanding of the emotional life of employees requires a nuanced approach that differentiates discrete emotions across levels of analysis.

Practical Considerations

Balancing the benefits and risks of gratitude. In this article we have painted a primarily positive view of gratitude in organizations. Nonetheless, it is important to note that efforts to cultivate gratitude come with risks and challenges. If launched in a cynical environment or with an overemphasis on instrumental outcomes, appreciation programs might lead employees to develop feelings of jealousy and anger. Beneficiary contact programs might lead to employee burnout if they increase employees' perceived workloads, and developmental feedback sessions could lead to resentment if employees view them cynically. Even the consequences of gratitude may come with risks. Scholars have shown that the desire to engage in organizational citizenship can lead to unethical behavior, such as lying on behalf of the organization (Umphress, Bingham, & Mitchell, 2010). Similarly, CSR programs might negatively impact financial performance if launched without a consideration of an organization's strategic mission (Porter & Kramer, 2006). From these risks it is clear that although gratitude presents many opportunities, it also requires careful management.

Maintaining gratitude over time. For organizations seeking to cultivate long-term gratitude, a central challenge is ensuring that employees maintain their gratitude over time. To address this challenge, we emphasize the practical importance of focusing on gratitude's contingencies both within the episodic level and across levels. For example, if employees begin to react to gratitude initiatives with cynicism, the organization might need to examine its culture and work to create a more trusting environment. Similarly, if employees begin to react to gratitude initiatives with indifference, the organization might need to examine employees' attentiveness to alternative outcomes and minimize the presence of disruptive events. Presumably, employee gratitude is most likely to be sustained over time when it successfully emerges at the individual level as an emotional schema, as well as at the organizational level.

How should gratitude be measured? As an important next step in organization-based gratitude research, scholars must give careful consideration to gratitude measurement.

Looking first to episodic gratitude, gratitude can be measured with emotion checklists in a manner similar to other emotions, such as anger and compassion. In this process scholars should be particularly careful to distinguish gratitude from other related emotions, such as inspiration and awe (Haidt, 2003). To measure persistent gratitude, scholars must assess the frequency with which employees tend to experience gratitude in the workplace. An example item, for instance, might state, "While at work, I often feel a sense of gratitude." Scholars might also adopt a more granular approach, examining the tendency to feel gratitude within a particular unit of the organization or while interacting with a particular colleague. When examining persistent gratitude, researchers must also carefully differentiate the construct from related phenomena, such as perceived organizational support. At the organizational level, we recommend that collective gratitude be measured via a direct consensus approach (Chan, 1998), and we encourage scholars to explore patterns of collective gratitude across subgroups (Harrison & Klein, 2007).

We also note the importance of measuring gratitude's emergence across levels. There is a dearth of quantitative research on emergence in general (Kozlowski & Chao, 2012), which is largely because of methodological challenges. For researchers to document emergence, longitudinal research is necessary (Fulmer & Ostroff, 2016). To examine emergence from episodic gratitude to persistent gratitude, researchers can utilize experience sampling methods. To examine emergence from persistent to collective gratitude, researchers can measure persistent gratitude within an organization and assess its convergence over time. Ideally, researchers can survey employees at key points in time, such as when a new unit forms or a new initiative is enacted. Such research can provide valuable information about the length of time needed for collective gratitude to emerge and can assess the role of specific situational constraints and affordances.

Conclusion

Most people believe that gratitude is a desirable positive emotion (Gallup, 1999). Nonetheless, there is a fundamental lack of attention to

what gratitude "looks like" in organizations and to the organizational practices that enable employees to experience gratitude on a daily basis. As noted by McCraty and Childre, "In the absence of conscious efforts to engage, build, and sustain positive perceptions and emotions, we all too automatically fall prey to feelings such as irritation, anxiety, worry, frustration, judgmentalness, self-doubt, and blame" (2004: 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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