The Theory and Practice of Compassion in Work Organizations

or

Seeing Organizations Differently: Three Lenses on Compassion

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One of the unspoken realities of life in organizations is that people suffer. Someone who has just been told that she has breast cancer confronts a jolt to her confidence and her sense of mortality, and these feelings frequently play out at work as well as in other spheres of her life. Someone who is dealing with dashed hopes of promotion or is feeling marginalized at work may experience sadness and deflation. Someone who is dealing with the breakdown of a personal relationship, or is struggling with difficult financial issues, or is working overtime to care for an aging parent may feel a loss of control and a growing sense of hopelessness that affects his work, despite the preferences of some organizations that such emotions be checked at the door. Since the desire to see organizations as purely rational and calculated systems is not only a managerial desire, but also one that has a long history in organizational studies (see Mastenbroek, 2000; Rafaeli & Worline, 2001; Taylor, 1911), a chapter on compassion in organizations may seem somehow out of place in a handbook for organizational scholars. This desire to simplify organizations, to dilute their emotional and relational qualities, and to quantify the terms of organizational life in tidy units has been challenged on many fronts in organizational theory (see e.g. Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Dutton, 2003a; Fineman, 1996, 2000; Fletcher, 1999; Frost, 2003; Rafaeli & Worline, 2001; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). A chapter on compassion in organizations is another challenge to an oversimplified understanding of organizations. The value of seeing compassion in organizations is that it brings the organic, the moving and heartfelt, the emotional, and the relational elements of life into sharp relief. A chapter on compassion shows us that we cannot truly see organizations until we allow people to speak the unspoken reality of suffering and the human response to that suffering that is compassion.

Feeding the wolf of compassion

> *He said to them, "A fight is going on inside me … it is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One wolf represents fear, anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other wolf stands for joy, peace, love, hope, sharing, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, friendship, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you, and inside every other person, too." They thought about it for a minute and then one child asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?" The old Cherokee simply replied… "The one you feed."*
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> *-- Cherokee Proverb (www.snowowl.com)*

As revealed in this proverb, organizations can either feed the wolf of ego or the wolf of compassion. Organizational research, too, feeds the wolf of ego or the wolf of compassion. Unfortunately, we tend to know much more about what feeds the wolf of ego, with a strong bias in psychological and organizational research toward understanding negative or detrimental conditions rather than positive or virtuous ones (Cameron & Caza, 2004; Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Historically, the emphasis on scientific management and what has become known as Taylorism (Taylor, 1911) provided a strong foundation for stripping away a focus on humanity in the workplace. Much of current economic theory of organizations also ignores the impact of organizations on their members or on society as a whole (Walsh, Weber & Margolis, 2003). Because of the field's emphasis on scientific management and economic outcomes, emotion has been construed as illegitimate in organizations and organizational research (see Ashkanasy, Hartel, & Zerbe, 2000; Fineman, 2000; Rafaeli & Worline, 2001). However, as Fineman (this volume) observes, work organizations are sites of pain, and the ignorance about emotional aspects of organizing is being challenged. Organizational scholars have begun to examine the emotional effects of such things as change (Kotter, 2002), control mechanisms (Fineman & Sturdy, 1999), decision making (Maitlis & Ozceilk, 2004) and downsizing (Cameron, 1998; Cameron, Freeman, & Mishra, 1993). Attention to pain in organizations is evident in research and commentary on workplace

incivility (e.g., Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001), abusive bosses (Tepper, 2000), corrosive politics (e.g., Williams & Dutton, 1999) and work-family conflict (Rice, Frone & McFarlin, 1992). Each of these sources of pain can contribute to a toxic workplace, one in which employees feel their confidence weakened, their self-esteem undermined, and their hope diminished or destroyed (Frost 2003). Looking across this large body or organizational research, we find much to feed the wolf of ego and little to nourish the wolf of compassion.

Not feeding the wolf of compassion has costs, however. Organizational researchers have recently renewed a call to consider organizations as contexts that produce outcomes that are important to society and the public good, apart from economic concerns (Walsh, Weber, & Margolis, 2003). This call hearkens back to the roots of the humanistic response to Taylor's ideas (e.g. Herzberg, 1966; McGregor, 1960; Mayo, 1946). It also reminds us of management scholars such as Follet (1918) who revisioned the study of organizations as systems that either promoted or depleted the public good. Similarly in organizational psychology, Likert (1967) and Katz and Kahn (1978) urged for an understanding of organizations as systems with enormous impact on members' psychological health and thriving, and the Tavistock school (e.g. Whitehead, 1938) showed that human responses to workplace phenomena are not necessarily predictable with economic models, validating that human psychology is essential in understanding basic organizational processes. All of these roots of organizational studies help to feed the wolf of compassion. By suggesting images of organization that are organic rather than mechanistic, and through his suggestion that our organizational images are important in how they influence our thinking about the reality of organizational life, Morgan (1997) provides another important foundation that feeds the wolf of compassion. Organizational researchers have built upon organic images of organizations to suggest that organizations can be studied as care-giving

systems (Kahn, 1993), sources of social support (House, 1981), and sources of healing and health (Dutton, Lilius, & Kanov, 2003; Frost, 2003). A recent line of theory from Sandelands and colleagues (2003; Sandelands & Worline, 2004; Worline, 2004) suggests that organizations are sites of social life, and that we must understand the holistic nature of social life in building a more viable field of organization studies and positive organizational scholarship. From these foundations in emotion, humanistic organization, organic images of organization, positive organizational scholarship, and social life, we can begin to see a building body of work that supports an expansive vision of organizations as sites of life.

In this chapter, we begin the work of feeding the wolf of compassion by discussing the definitional issues that come into play in understanding the concept. We then locate compassion at the crossroads of three different conversations in organization studies: relational work, narratives, and organizing. By situating compassion at the crossroads of three distinct and independent groups of theories, we are able to use three different lenses to see the phenomenon of compassion. By invoking the notion of "lenses," we mean to suggest that scholars may see compassion differently depending upon the theoretical tradition and empirical conversation from which they approach the topic (Allison, 1971; Morgan, 1997). Each of these three lenses offers a view of compassion that is unique, and each is situated in a broader ongoing conversation within organization studies. We conclude the chapter by looking across these three lenses to a new vision of compassion in organizations and what that vision shows us about organizations more generally. Ultimately, focusing on the human response to suffering in organizations begins to unpack scholars' understanding of the proactive, creative, and generative potential that lies unstudied in organizations and that is a wellspring of nourishment for the wolf of compassion.

Defining compassion

While attention to compassion in organizations is relatively recent (e.g. Frost, 1999), discussions of the concept span both time and discipline, found in conversations across religion, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and medicine dating back two thousand years. In building a working definition of compassion, we provide a brief overview of the intellectual history of the idea. Central to this history is the role of compassion in religious ideology and theology. Despite their fundamental philosophical differences, varied religions have placed compassion as central to their belief systems. For example, the Biblical tradition teaches compassion as "a duty to divine law, as a response to divine love, and a sign of commitment to the Judeo-Christian ethic" (Wuthnow, 1991, p. 50), and Judaism mandates to emulate God in his attribute of compassion (Sears, 1998). Islam is based in the same emulation of compassion between God and humanity, with the Prophet declaring in the Qu'ran, "O people, be compassionate to others so that you may be granted compassion by God." Compassion has also been equated with humanity across religions, from Buddhist philosophy that considers the basic nature of human beings to be compassionate (Dalai Lama, 1995) to the Christian perspective on compassion as "full immersion in the condition of being human" (Nouwen, McNeill, & Morrison, 1983, p. 4). Gupta (2000) suggests similarity with Hindu philosophy, in which everything in the world is God, enabling us to see that we are the same and that we should extend ourselves to help others.

A similar consistency can be found between early philosophical discussions of compassion through to more contemporary accounts. Aristotle saw compassion as a painful emotion directed at another's misfortune or suffering, and described three elements necessary for the experience of compassion: that one must see the suffering of another as serious, one must believe that the suffering is not deserved, and one must acknowledge that they have vulnerabilities similar to those of the sufferer (Aristotle, 1939). These elements are found in the

writings of later philosophers (e.g., Rousseau, 1979; Schopenhauer, 1995; Smith, 1976) and in contemporary work in moral philosophy (Blum, 1980; Harrington, 2002; Mead, 1962; Nussbaum, 1996, 2001; Post, 2003; Reich, 1989; Solomon, 1998; Wuthnow, 1991). Across time and philosophers, compassion has been framed both as innate (Himmelfarb, 2001; Smith, 1976; Wuthnow, 1991) and as contributing to the well-being of communities and individuals (Blum, 1980; Nussbaum, 2001; Post, 2003; Rousseau, 1979; Wuthnow, 1991).

Contemporary work in social science offers further insight into the nature of compassion that builds on religion and philosophy in two particular ways. First, through investigating the biological basis of compassion, neuropsychologists suggest a link between feelings of compassion and activity in particular regions of the brain (Nitschke, 2001) that are also activated when people contemplate harm to others (Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001). Other biopsychological findings indicate that helping others triggers brain activity in portions of the brain also activated by the experience of pleasure (Rilling et al., 2002). Taken together, this research suggests that the brain is hardwired to respond to the suffering of others, thus supporting the religious and philosophical claims for compassion as an innate human instinct. Second, through their treatment of empathy, both social psychologists (e.g., Mead, 1962; Batson, 1991; Davis, 1983) and sociologists (Clark, 1997; Nussbaum, 2001; Shott, 1979) have expanded on Aristotle's third requirement for compassion, seeing oneself as similarly vulnerable to the sufferer. Social scientists take a similar view on empathy as a product not only of perceiving the other as in need, but also of adopting the perspective of the other. Further, psychologists provide evidence for a link between felt empathy and the likelihood of engaging in helping behavior (Batson, 1991; Davis, 1983).

Finally, interest in compassion as a moral imperative can be found within the medical (e.g., Barber, 1976; Brody, 1992; Cassell, 2002; Dougherty & Purtillo, 1995) and nursing literatures (Benner, Tanner, & Chesla, 1996; von Deitze & Orb, 2000). Here, compassion is seen as an essential component of patient care that is "directly related to the recognition and treatment of patient suffering" (Cassell, 2002, p. 442), as enabling physicians to fulfill their central duties to their patients (to put the patient's interests first, to deliver proper care, and to maintain confidentiality) (Dougherty & Purtillo, 1995), and as bringing medical practitioners closer to their patients to achieve a deeper level of healing (Benner et al., 1996; Brody, 1992; von Dietze & Orb, 2000).

In our working definition of compassion, we pull from several disciplines. Drawing from Clark's (1997) discussion of sympathy as a three part process, we identify compassion as comprised of three interrelated elements: noticing another's suffering, feeling empathy for the other's pain, and responding to the suffering in some way. *Noticing* involves a process of becoming aware of another's emotional state, and typically requires being open and attentive to emotional cues and to what is happening in one's context (Frost, 2003). *Feeling* for the other's pain involves empathic concern (Batson, 1994; Davis, 1983) or "taking the attitude" of the other person (Mead, 1962, p. 366; Shott, 1979). In this way, compassion resembles empathy (Batson, 1994; Davis, 1983), but goes beyond this to involve a response to suffering. *Responding* indicates action that reaches beyond feeling and attempts to alleviate or overcome the other's condition in some way (Nussbaum, 2001; Reich, 1989; von Dietz & Orb, 2000). Compassion defined in this way as a three-part human experience does not require a successful outcome. The necessary link is between the noticing of suffering, feelings of concern, and attempts to help alleviate suffering.

THREE WAYS OF SEEING COMPASSION IN ORGANIZATIONS

We have argued for compassion's value as a subject in organizational studies by situating it within some of the historical traditions in the field and by linking it to current scholarly research interests. Other arguments are offered by viewing compassion through three distinct theoretical lenses. These three lenses on compassion are tied to three well-established, independent perspectives on organizations. Seeing compassion as a topic of research through each of these three perspectives helps to provide a wider vista of possibilities for how the study of compassion informs organizational studies research.

The three lenses we bring to compassion are 1) compassion as interpersonal work; 2) compassion as narrative and 3) compassion as organizing. In the discussion of each lens, we first discuss important defining features of the lens which anchor compassion in different theoretical conversations. After discussing compassion through the lens, we discuss the core insights offered by each lens, opening up different ways of seeing individual, unit, and organizational functioning. And finally, we identify how each lens evokes new and interesting research questions. Table 1 presents a comparative summary of the three lenses.

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Lens 1: Interpersonal work

The everyday interpersonal work that takes place in organizations has been well documented in the organizational literature, with interpersonal helping as a major topic. Research in this arena describes workplace helping in two major ways. One is more tangible and task-focused, seen in

organizational citizenship behavior (see Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000, for a review), prosocial behavior (Brief & Motowildo, 1986), and workplace social support (House, 1981). Another way of conceptualizing helping is more person-focused and relational, such as caregiving (Kahn, 1993) and relational practice (Fletcher, 1998). While organizational research has tended to emphasize the importance of more tangible and task-focused forms of helping for individual employees (e.g., stress) and organizational outcomes (e.g., turnover), Kahn (1993), Fletcher (1998) and others have highlighted both the existence and consequential nature of relational work that, in Fletcher's (1999) terms gets "disappeared" in organizational theory. This research demonstrates that relational work is not just 'nice' or 'soft', but is crucial in order to accomplish the work of the organization.

Defining features of this lens. We have earlier defined compassion as entailing the noticing of pain, feeling empathetic concern, and responding to pain in some manner. One defining feature of seeing compassion as interpersonal work is that compassion as noticing, feeling, and responding takes effort. In this view, compassion is a form of interpersonal work that happens in the space between two people (Josselson, 1992), and in that sense it depends on the joint qualities and behaviors of the people involved. Seeing compassion as interpersonal work reveals that compassion consumes both cognitive effort and emotional energy (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Seen through this lens, compassion is skilled interpersonal labor that is increasingly recognized as essential to caring occupations in social work and health care (Kahn, 1993; von Deitze & Orb, 2000), teaching occupations (Noddings, 1984), and in work organizations more generally (Fletcher, 1998; Jacques, 1993).

At the same time, this view assumes that the work of compassion, like other forms of relational work, is gendered through its association with the work of women in the private

sphere. In organizations, the skilled work of compassion may also be associated with the enactment of power differences, and often remains invisible, or disappeared. And yet, for all of its invisibility in organizations, compassion—like other forms of relational work—has important consequences for the accomplishment of work. Seeing compassion as interpersonal work assumes that the "work" is productive, in the sense of creating consequences for the individuals doing and/or receiving compassion. Researchers have associated the interpersonal work of compassion with negotiation performance (Alfred, Mallozzi, Matsui, & Raia, 1997); our own work suggests that experiencing compassion (either as a direct recipient or as a witness) changes how people see themselves, their colleagues, and their organizations (Lilius et al., 2004). Compassion as interpersonal work, while often invisible and associated with the enactment of power differences, is nevertheless associated with important outcomes that may have significance beyond the immediate feelings and acts of compassion.

Compassion as interpersonal work. While the concept of compassion as a three-part process of noticing, feeling, and responding is new, existing research identifies a number of interpersonal behaviors that we see as important elements of compassion as interpersonal work. Here, we highlight six behavioral elements, drawn from a variety of organizational research, that illustrate interpersonal behaviors embedded in the process of compassion (Benner et al., 1996; Fletcher, 1998; Hallowell, 1999; Kahn, 1993):

1) *Making oneself physically available to another*—Simply being present with someone who is suffering (Hallowell, 1999; Kahn, 1993);
2) *Making oneself psychologically available to another*—Minimizing distractions and focusing on the person in pain, as well as being emotionally available to make an empathetic connection with someone (Hallowell, 1999);

3) *Empathizing* – Taking the perspective of the other and communicating understanding of their feelings/experience (Fletcher, 1998; Kahn, 1993);
4) *Inquiring* – Asking for information that will allow someone to understand and respond to the needs of another (Kahn, 1993);
5) *Listening without judgment*— Builds cognitive and emotional data sources so a person wanting to help can understand the state of the other, and reserving judgment allows for noticing pain and the development of empathy (Frost, 2003; Kahn, 1993);
6) *Creating a holding space for pain*—A "holding space" serves as an environment in which people have an opportunity deal with anxiety, express their pain, grieve and/or regroup (Frost, 2003; Kahn, 2001; Heifetz, 1994).

This is a non-exhaustive sampling that suggests a broad range of interpersonal behaviors critical to the process of compassion. Further research is necessary to map the boundaries of this domain and create a more comprehensive list. For the sake of illustration, below we offer a more detailed discussion of two of these behavioral elements of compassion: listening without judgment and creating a holding space for pain.

*Listening without judgment***.** Since the focus of listening is on the "other" it steers attention to verbal and non-verbal aspects of messages and facilitates noticing that a person is in pain. Listening also draws the listener into the emotional space of another, enhancing the possibility for empathy. The information gathering aspects of listening help guide appropriate responses to the needs of the sufferer (Kahn, 1993). Listening is a process for gaining a cognitive and emotional understanding of the state of others. The centrality of listening in responding to another person's pain explains why listening without judgment is such a key interpersonal practice for physicians and others whose work routinely involves dealing with the suffering of

other people (Candib, 1995). Listening without judgment is an important practice in other contexts as well. Kahn (1998:44), for instance, describes the case of an office manager in a department store who is upset at her own ineffectiveness at supervising one of her staff. When she brings her problem to the business owner, the owner listens then asks a few questions, withholding judgment. He tells the manager how impressed he is that she is trying to learn how to be more effective, and shares a similar situation that he faced in the past. Finally, the owner offers feedback about how to reframe the situation in a less constraining way. In this example, listening increases the likelihood that the office manager is heard, rather than ignored, rebuffed, or admonished, for her behavior. By listening and withholding judgment, the business owner will more likely pick up cues about the nature of her situation, the pain in her sense of inadequacy, and her needs for the future. The owner's expressions of support include sharing an experience that signals the congruence of his feelings with hers. His praise and his suggestions can help to restore the manager's confidence. A close look at listening as an element of compassion shows that compassion takes work.

Creating a holding space for pain. One significant aspect of compassion as interpersonal work involves creating conditions in which conversations, reflections, and steps toward growth and connection can be addressed (Benner et al., 1996). A "holding space" serves as an environment in which people have an opportunity to grieve and to regroup (Frost, 2003; Kahn, 2001; Heifetz, 1994). The term *holding environment* (Winnicott, 1960) was first used in psychoanalysis to capture the relationship between a therapist and a patient in which, "the therapist 'holds' the patient in a process of developmental learning in a way that has some similarities to the way a mother or a father hold their newborn or maturing children" (Heifetz, 1994: 104). In organizations, Heifetz (1994), Kahn (1994), and Frost (2003) suggest that the idea

of a holding environment works as a means of helping workers manage pain, debilitating stress, or anxiety. A holding space involves physical aspects, such as a private office where problems can be discussed, and emotional aspects, such as making the time to be present with the person in pain (Frost, 2003; Hallowell, 1999). The practice of holding space entails finding ways to create and sustain an emotional and physical zone that will provide the sufferer with respite from the pain. Space for one person may mean granting a day off; for another, quiet time in an office; for someone else, a release from work responsibilities for a few weeks. Giving careful attention to the form of the holding space created in each particular situation becomes part of doing the work of compassion.

Finally, as space does not permit us to elaborate on all of the behavioral elements of compassion, we provide a story from a corporate workplace to illustrate many of the defining features of compassion as interpersonal work:

> At an offsite meeting of three hundred of Cisco's managers, Janet Skadden, a new manager in human resources, wanted to try something different. She had come to Cisco from Tandem, a company whose relaxed, interpersonal culture encouraged employees to participate in activities like trust-building games. Skadden hoped such games might help the Cisco engineers loosen up a little, especially given the beachfront atmosphere of the meeting. But, to put it mildly, Skadden's exercises didn't go over well. When the attendees returned to the office, they were still talking about Skadden's "beach games." Skadden was despondent. But CEO John Chambers, who'd witnessed Skadden's efforts at the beach, came to her office and told her what a great job she'd done in pulling the offsite together. When Skadden pointed out that her exercises had bombed, Chambers said: "The minute you stop trying to do things like that, I'm going to be really disappointed. If you're not taking risks and trying new things, you're not trying hard enough. I loved the fact that we tried something different" (Kruger, 1997, p. 152).

In this story, Chambers does not sugarcoat Skadden's failure. It is clear to both of them that her exercise did not work. What he does, however, is the essence of compassion as interpersonal work. First, he notices, feels, and responds to her experienced pain in failing at her first challenge as a new organizational member. He responds to her pain in a way that frames her efforts as a

worthy attempt to try something new. His comment, "I loved the fact that we tried something new," expresses empathetic concern that will help to raise her sprits and to ease her pain, particularly as he talks about it as a shared effort ("we"), linking himself to the event. Implicit in Chambers' compassion are the often unstated elements of interpersonal work, including noticing what had happened, Skadden's role in the outcome, and her body language at the end of the session, feeling empathetic concern that she likely would be upset and somewhat deflated by the experience, and taking action through words to give her an emotional lift and a vote of confidence. In this example, Chambers' actions, which are barely noticeable to others but deeply meaningful to Skadden, demonstrate the skilled performative elements of compassion as interpersonal work. In doing the work of compassion, the space between the two people is shaped, through the timing, the content, the focus and the whole interaction sequence, to leave the person in pain better off. And, while this is a story of a CEO and a vice president, in the simplicity of its plot line, this story illustrates the commonality of compassion as interpersonal work in organizations. Disappointments, failed attempts, and unexpected setbacks are natural and frequent experiences of work, and others in the workplace notice the pain caused by these events and respond.

The value of seeing compassion as interpersonal work. Viewing compassion in organizations through the lens of interpersonal work highlights the emotional and connective features of such work in ways that help scholars grasp what people do when they are being compassionate. We elaborate three key insights that come from this lens on compassion.

First, seeing compassion as interpersonal work emphasizes the *work of compassion*. Having defined compassion as a three-part human experience that involves noticing pain, feeling empathetic concern for another, and responding to alleviate pain, we imply that compassion is

effortful. This lens expands on that implication. The interpersonal work of compassion encompasses a wide range of activities such as listening without judgment, creating a holding space for pain, and perspective taking.

Second, seeing compassion as interpersonal work highlights the *competence in doing compassion*. This competence comes not only from skillful execution of interpersonal behaviors, but also from emotional attunement. To be successfully implemented, interpersonal work such as listening and holding space places emotional demands on those engaged. For instance, listening requires cognitive attention to be non-judgmental, and demands emotional energy to be empathetic (Miller & Stiver, 1997). When people competently enact enabling behaviors such as these, the consequences are substantial for those who are suffering. This lens suggests that skill in offering compassion can be built over time, as people become better at listening, attunement, and communication. In addition, this lens suggests that the experience of receiving compassion depends on the shared competence of the recipient and the person offering support, who jointly create a situation that alleviates suffering. For instance, pain in organizations can often be overlooked or misinterpreted unless the listener actively engages empathically and commits to listen for emotions in the messages that those in pain allow themselves to send.

Third, seeing compassion as interpersonal work demonstrates the *potential impact of small moves*. Small actions in an organization can make big differences. Even seemingly simple things, such as taking a few minutes to visit someone who is suffering or offering a card with a few words of comfort to someone who has experienced a loss can renew a sense of hope in the recipient (Frost et al., 2000; Frost, 2003). In the story from Cisco, the few words from CEO Chambers to Janet Skadden help transform her experience of failure. Hallowell (1999) has called these “human moments” at work, when someone is physically and psychologically present for

another person. Hallowell suggests that compassion can help the sufferer reconnect to his or her workplace and feel valued. Other research indicates that a few hours permitted off from work, a hug, a note of caring, sharing a story of vulnerability, and other small acts can help transform people's sense of themselves, change the way they relate to their colleagues, and shape the way they view their organizations (Lilius et al., 2004).

Research possibilities for compassion as interpersonal work**:** Seeing compassion as interpersonal work highlights several possibilities for research on the concept. We elaborate only four of the many possible avenues for generative future research on compassion as interpersonal work:

1. The shape of compassion at work: We have argued here that compassion is a type of interpersonal work, and that as such it is effortful and time-consuming behavior. Generative future research in this domain would involve investigating the microdynamics that comprise "the work of compassion." Such research would address questions such as: How is compassion expressed in particular kinds of work organizations? How does the expression of compassion vary across organizations, across units within organizations, across task groupings, and so on? Do people vary in their ability and willingness to offer compassion at work, and what types of variables account for that variation?

2. Triggering and witnessing dynamics of compassion in the workplace: We have argued that small moves in organizations have the potential for large impact through their effect on suffering and also through their effect on people's sense of self, sense of others, and sense of the organization. Generative future research along these lines would address the particular types of pain that evoke compassion in the workplace, and map the relationships between expressions of pain and expressions of compassion, as captured in the spirit of questions such as: Are there certain kinds of pain and suffering that are more or less likely to evoke the compassion of others (e.g., the death of a loved one versus an experience of sexual harassment at work), and if so, what accounts for these differences? Is it easier for some people to accept expressions of compassion than for others, and if so what accounts for those differences? What effects does witnessing the expression of compassion have on co-workers, and are there discernable differences in these witnessing dynamics across groups, organizations, or types of pain triggers?

3. Enablers of compassion at work: We have argued that compassion is enabled by particular interpersonal behaviors, and that these interpersonal behaviors require cognitive and emotional skills of various kinds. We have used listening without judgment and creating holding space for pain as examples of these interpersonal behaviors. Generative future research would involve investigation into the particular sets of

interpersonal behaviors that are required for compassion across different contexts, as well as the cognitive and emotional skills involved in those behaviors.

4. Consequences of interpersonal expression of compassion: We have assumed that there are positive consequences for a sufferer who receives compassion from other members of their organization. We have suggested that there also are organizational benefits from such acts of compassion. Generative future research along these lines would show empirically the effects of such expressions of care, for the recipient, for the provider, and for the organization. It seems possible also that there could be tradeoffs between investment in delivering care and doing other organizational tasks. What costs (as well as benefits) might the expression of compassion entail, for organization members and for the organization itself?

Lens 2: Narrative

While the first lens focuses on compassion as a form of interpersonal work, a narrative perspective highlights that lived experience is captured, stored, and told in storied ways (Bruner, 1986), and that people express what they know and how they feel in organizations through stories (O'Connor, 1998). For purposes of this chapter, we define narratives very simply as "verbal acts consisting of someone telling someone else that something happened" (Smith, 1981, p.182). People understand their actions as being temporally organized (McAdams, 1993), lending power to stories as a representation of experience. And further, we assume, as other organizational scholars have, that people use stories and narrative to make sense of their organizations (Weick, 1995). As ways of creating meaning and making sense of organizations, narratives provide a window into many aspects of organizational life. People tell stories for a reason - "to complain, to boast, to inform, to alert, to tease, to explain or excuse or justify…" (Schegloff, 1997, p. 97). This implies that where a story begins and ends, what it includes and excludes, what it highlights or suppresses are all choices that a narrator makes, choices that help reveal something about organizational and personal reality.

Besides having a reflective quality, stories also constitute organizational reality. Stories are often collected, categorized, and analyzed for insights into organizational life (Boje, 1991). Narratives have a "re-storying" quality (Connelly & Clandidnin, 1990), in that they "give birth to many different meanings, generating 'children' of meaning in their own image" (McAdams, 1993, p. 30). In this way narratives are social products that both reflect and constitute life inside organizations; that is, stories reflect ideas about "what happened" at the same time that they construct identities of individuals and of collectives (Gergen & Gergen, 1998). In this view, stories shape and animate life in particular directions, rather than serving as static reflections of activity. Thus we connect compassion narratives to the general body of theory in organization studies that focuses on how people make meaning of their experiences and what those meanings, in turn, allow people to do.

Defining features of this lens. A narrative view of compassion provides a storied view of responses to pain, helping to reveal the rich detail that comprises a compassionate response. Through the presentation of feelings and acts embedded in their social contexts, this lens brings alive the ways in which people understand and experience compassion at work. Compassion narratives highlight the key symbols and plot-lines that organization members use to describe their experience (Martin, Feldman, Hatch, & Sitkin, 1983), and in so doing, capture the micro-moves that happen as people "work the context" to create a compassionate response (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2004). Another aspect of the narrative view is that it allows us to move between compassion as an individual experience and compassion as a collective experience. Through stories of collective responses to pain, we come to see elements of organizations, such as value systems, belief systems, and cultural systems that support a compassionate response to pain. Finally, narratives are a powerful window into the construction of identities, both

individual and collective (Gergen & Gergen, 1998). We draw specifically upon notions of self identity and organizational identity (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Brickson, 1997) in our discussion of the ways that compassion as narrative illuminates identity in organizations. Narratives of compassion help people understand who they are in organizations, and they also enable members to make sense of the organization itself as a place of work.

Compassion as narrative. We discuss three key ideas that stand out when we look through the lens of compassion as narrative. The first is that compassion as narrative reveals a hidden side of organizations, showing us how an organization handles pain and suffering. The second is that compassion as narrative informs us about the construction of self-identities of those within organizations, drawing upon narrative as constitutive (Gergen & Gergen, 1998). The third idea is that narratives show us how organizational identity is constituted and reconstituted, as people see the organization anew in its response to pain.

Compassion narratives reveal the heart of the organization. Narratives of compassion show organizational members and scholars how people in the organization handle the suffering and pain that is present in the workplace. Painful events calling for compassion test organizations and their members, as they are often unexpected and can draw attention away from other key organizational issues. Under these conditions, an organization's shared beliefs and values emerge from where they are typically hidden, and are often captured in the stories shared among members. Reuters is an organization whose caring actions immediately following the crisis of 9/11/01 were depicted in stories that displayed and affirmed important organizational values. In their efforts to track the whereabouts of missing staff members, it was revealed that several employees had perished. Reuters' handling of this sad outcome was reflected in its response to Nelly Braginsky whose son, Alex, had died in the attack. Phil Lynch, the CEO Reuters America,

had called her on a Tuesday night and the next day she met with Lynch and HR manager Sharon Greenholt (Dutton et al., 2002b). Greenholt's narrative follows:

> "She (Braginsky) refused to believe that anything had happened. This was understandable. Reuters did everything they could to help her with this. Phil Lynch called her in the mornings to make sure she had eaten breakfast. We got her a car to take her around New York. We got her sandwiches to keep her fed on her visits to the hospitals. She shared stories of her son. We were very conscious that we would not challenge what she thought. The family drove the process. It was heart wrenching, as the families would call with possible scenarios that might eliminate the possibility that their sons were in the WTC. We kept saying we will do everything we can, and we did" (Dutton et al, 2002b, p. 7)

The theme of compassionate responsiveness revealed in this story was echoed in several other stories circulating in the organization about how Reuters dealt with the families of deceased employees and of managers' and employees' efforts to get the company back serving its customers. As they were told and retold around the organization, these narratives of compassion contributed to a shared recognition of the value placed by the company on its employees. The narratives expose the hidden values regarding responsiveness to human pain. One employee commented "Watching Phil Lynch get so involved with the families—so quickly—with their personal lives, bringing them in, comforting them, involved with their personal pain—I saw the heart—not just the company, not just technology and lines—I saw the heart of the company in him responding to the families" (Dutton et al., 2002b, p. 7). Often left aside or overlooked for more "mission critical" aspects of culture, this story from Reuters helps make clear the ways in which compassion narratives reveal the heart of an organization's culture and uncover shared values and beliefs concerning human responsiveness to pain.

Compassion narratives constitute members' identities. Narratives not only reflect organizational values, but also *construct identities* of individuals and of collectives (Gergen & Gergen, 1998). As Reissman (1993) explains, "in telling about an experience, I am also creating

a self – how I want to be known by" others (p. 11). Through compassion narratives, we make sense of who we are for ourselves. A second key idea that comes from seeing compassion as narrative, then, is that members' identities are constructed in part through their stories of encounters with pain and compassion in their organizations. Viewed in this way, narratives of compassion help to *constitute* organizational members' identities. Brewer and Gardner (1996) have suggested that identity operates at multiple levels, with individual identity connected in important ways to a person's belonging to and distinctiveness from a variety of social collectives.

We see compassion narratives as helping to construct individual identities in a story from research at a Canadian not-for-profit organization, where a member described what it was like to be part of a workplace in which compassion was shown to members experiencing pain. She spoke of a time when she had found herself in a role that was too large for her, explaining, "when I was finding things just too overwhelming and felt that I had just too many balls in the air that I didn't feel capable of managing, I felt awful for that, and ashamed and inadequate and all that stuff". She went on to describe how the organization responded to her plight, saying, "I was very nurtured and supported by the organization in a lot of ways". Reflecting back on the difficult period, she said, "I'm so devoted to the organization, in a way, I feel ownership. I feel proud, I feel nurturing, I want it to succeed" (Maitlis, 2004). Being a member of a unit that responds with compassion to life's difficulties not only helps the unit be more productive (see Worline et al, 2004), but also helps the members' individually create identities for themselves. In this woman's case, her story reveals how, through her experience of compassion, her identity shifted from failing and inadequate to capable and proud.

Compassion narratives align and re-align organizational identity. A third key idea that comes from seeing compassion as narrative is the connection of compassion to organizational identity. Organizational identity is typically construed as what members take to be central, distinctive, and enduring about their organization (Albert & Whetten, 1981). Compassion narratives, as they circulate through the organization, build upon already-established ideas of organizational identity and may help members' align or re-align their perceptions of the organization with the unfolding reality. As stories of compassion are shared, they shape employees' understandings of their organizations in new ways that are more consistent with the reality of the organization's response to painful and traumatic events. Such narratives are thus constitutive not only of members' identities as discussed above, but also of the collective organizational identity. Through their telling, stories of compassion become ways of aligning and re-aligning the organizational identity with what they see as the organization's response to pain. The story below provides an illustration.

> Recently (on a Monday) I was told my stepbrother had been killed in an auto accident. I called my manager at home to find out what to do about my schedule as I would have to travel from Michigan to Tennessee for the funeral and to be with my family. My manager was very sympathetic, told me not to worry about coming in the rest of the week and not to worry about any paperwork—she would fill out what was needed so I would not lose any pay. When I returned home from Tennessee I had already received cards from my manager and coworkers and a plant with a sympathy card from the organization itself. I am proud to work for an organization that is large enough to have the technology and facilities that we do, but small enough to still know that people are the important part. (Employee, Midwest Hospital)

Here, the narrator tells of the sudden loss of a family member and of how her colleagues' responses affirmed her sense of the organizational identity as both competent and human. The story at once reflects how this narrator feels about the company, and at the same time the creation of this narrative helps re-create the narrator's sense of the organizational identity.

Looking closely at this narrative we can see the narrator making sense of who she is in the wake of this painful event, of who her manager and her co-workers are, and ultimately of the kind of organization in which she works. A narrative lens on compassion thus reveals how individuals come to align the identity of their organization and its members with the compassionate responses that they witness.

Reuters' response to the terrorist attacks in New York offers another powerful example of the role of compassion narrative in the shaping of organizational identity. Reuters' executives used virtual town hall meetings to communicate with staff following the terrorist attacks. Using teleconferencing technology to accomplish this goal allowed employees from all over the Americas to hear and discuss news about the company and its members.

> The (first) meeting opened with Phil's showing a Reuters' picture Shannon Stapleton took of Father Mychal, the beloved and deceased chaplain of a New York firefighters, being carried away from Ground Zero in a chair by his fire fighting colleagues. He then read the letter from the family of Father Mychal that described how grateful they were for the memory preserved in this picture. Phil used this story to affirm the meaning and importance of Reuters, what it does as an organization, and its importance to people as well as to clients and markets. Phil went on to explain that this picture captures what Reuters is as a company—what Reuters does to serve the people of the world. (Dutton et al, 2002b, p.10).

After employees had had a chance to discuss Lynch's messages, a manager commented, "You sometimes forget what our company does. Through these events people saw what Reuters does…. You could see the impact…" Phil's talking about the picture of Father Mychal "had a profound effect on a lot of people I think. It helped people [to realize] that we provide a valuable service to people." Another person explained, "I think it reminded them what was important about what we do. Rather than it just being about kind of hawking an information product at a customer. That, I think, made a lot of people feel very good about working for the company." (Dutton et al, 2002b, p.10) These responses to the shared narratives in Reuters reveal the ways in

which the organization's response to a traumatic event generated opportunities for employees to re-align their perceptions of the organizational identity with the reality of the unfolding response. As individuals recount and retell members' responses to a tragedy, they come to see their organization's identity more clearly, and in the case of Reuters, they saw a more trusting and capable community to which they were proud to belong.

The value of seeing compassion as narrative. In general, the narrative lens helps us form a richer picture of compassion as it takes place in organizational contexts. Hearing the stories of compassionate responses brings compassion to life in vivid detail, demonstrating the phenomenon in ways that are compelling and different from numerical displays or statistical tests. In addition, examining compassion through the lens of narrative yields four distinct and important insights about the nature of compassion in organizations.

First, seeing compassion as narrative reveals hidden elements of an organization's culture, what we have called the heart of the organization, and through this *shows us the emotional tendencies of a collective*. It has been argued that narrative is one way to tap into latent values and beliefs at work in an organization (Czarniawska, 1998; Schein, 1996). Compassion narratives help organizational researchers identify latent beliefs about appropriate responses to pain and different types of values that deal with putting humanity on display in the organization. As we collect and examine stories of compassion in a workplace, we begin to uncover these shared beliefs and values and see how they inform the collective emotional tendencies in an organization. Huy (1999) has suggested that emotion operates powerfully at the collective level. Compassion narratives help us understand how emotions such as empathy may be shared; these narratives also reveal ways in which collective emotions become (or do not become) a basis for collective action.

Second, seeing compassion as narrative reveals how *exposure to stories affects people in important ways*. As compassion stories are shared in organizations, we see how they help people make sense of who they are within that context. Because stories help to constitute members' identities, they have dramatic effects on the possibilities for growth and development. Exposure to stories of compassion in organizations—hearing them, telling them, and re-telling them—may also influence how people are able to construct their identities outside of work (Gergen & Gergen, 1998; Somers, 1994). Given the permeability of the boundaries between work and home (Hochschild, 1997), narratives of compassion in organizations may help people grow into more caring and confident people across life domains.

Third, seeing compassion as narrative reveals the construction and re-construction of organizational identity in ways that make plain how *members align and re-align their understanding of the organization with their perceptions of its actions.* Organizational scholars have suggested that organizational identity is not a static feature of organizations (Brickson, 1997). Seeing compassion as narrative helps make clear how an organization's response to an unexpected painful event can serve as a prompt for members to align their sense of the organization with the organization's unfolding reality. In this way, compassion as narrative is constitutive not only of individual members' identities, but of organizational identity as well.

Finally, seeing compassion as narrative *provides an opportunity for critical analysis*, allowing researchers to see what is highlighted and what is held back. Compassion narratives uncover whether the surface stated values that reside in the organizational mission statement have teeth in capturing the reality of lived experience inside the organization. Narrators make choices in telling a story such as where the story begins and ends, what details it includes and excludes, and what aspects are emphasized or suppressed. These choices can inform a

researcher's understanding of what is happening in an organization. Probing the stories people tell of their workplaces can reveals what else may be going on in the organization that is not stated. In this way, compassion narratives may be used, for instance, to produce and reproduce an organization's power structure and therefore can become a window into the "workings of power" in a situation (Mumby, 1987; 1988). Analyzing compassion narratives from multiple aspects, as well as for the silences that they introduce, may shed light on possible alternative interpretations of workplace experiences. By examining the content, structure, and narrative choices within compassion stories, we enhance the richness that emanates from the compassion narrative and widen the lens of understanding about the organization and its members.

Research Possibilities. Seeing compassion through a narrative lens raises many research possibilities. Below, we highlight four areas that we see as generative for further research:

1. **How narratives of compassion shape interpretation and action over time**. When people hear and talk about compassion in relation to one major incident, they may compartmentalize this and keep it separate from their everyday work. Generative future research could examine when and how compassion narratives circulate, and when and how they take on different interpretations over time. For instance, when are compassion narratives taken to be reflective of the organization as a whole and when are they simply taken to be indicative of one compartmentalized response?

2. **The construction of individual and organizational identity.** Because narratives are constitutive of identity, generative future research could investigate the micro-processes through which individual and organizational identities are constructed. For example, what is the nature of the processes through which people's understandings of themselves and their organizations are shaped following a compassionate response to suffering? How do these processes differ when a person witnesses, rather than personally experiences, such a response? And what is the nature of these micro-processes in the context of a failure to experience or witness compassion in response to pain?

3. **The role of power and status in the enactment of compassion.** We have suggested that compassion narratives allow a critical window into views of organizations. Generative future research might analyze compassion narratives gathered at different levels of an organization in order to investigate the impact of power on the way compassion is experienced. Some examples of this type of question include: How does organizational power and status affect the way in which compassion is enacted? How does it shape

members' interpretations of compassionate acts? How is the enactment and interpretation of compassion influenced by access to resources such as time, money and leaders.

4. **The discursive construction of compassion.** Also in line with our suggestion of narratives as a window into a critical perspective on organizations, generative future research could examine several elements of the construction of compassion through stories and narrative. For instance, such research might look at the ways in which different groups in an organization construct compassion narratives. How do the tropes used by men and women differ? How does the structure of compassion narratives vary in different social, cultural and institutional contexts?

Lens 3: Organizing

While a lens on compassion as interpersonal work examines the phenomenon from the individual and dyadic level, and a view of compassion as narrative moves between the individual and the cultural, the third lens, compassion as organizing, looks at compassion specifically as a collective process. Reconceptualizing "organizations" into processes of organizing is one of the core insights of Weick's (1979) work, which has been echoed recently by Heath and Sitkin (2001). Weick (1979) proposed a way of looking at organizations that combined a natural systems and an open systems perspective to examine the processes that create, maintain, and dissolve social collectives, suggesting that the continuous execution of such processes composes the organization. Heath and Sitkin (2001) have renewed a call for organizational research that focuses on the processes by which people coordinate goal-directed activities, shifting from a structural and top-down view to one that emphasizes proactive human actors and emergent social processes. In viewing compassion as organizing, we adopt this shift in focus and look toward the ways in which compassion becomes a collective accomplishment.

Defining features of this lens. This lens on compassion highlights the different processes that enable a group of people to organize around pain, presenting compassion as a collective accomplishment that unfolds over time. It highlights the path dependence and time dependence

of the social accomplishment of compassion as pain is collectively detected, felt and acted upon. An organizing lens reveals the ebbs and flows of activities involved in compassion as a collective process. It also invites consideration of how features of the organizational context (e.g., routines, networks, etc.) facilitate or hinder compassion through their shaping of three key social processes: legitimating, propagating and coordinating. In addition, this lens suggests that the proactive behaviors of individuals in organizations will give rise to complex processes that unfold in nonlinear ways.

Compassion as organizing. We consider three facilitating processes in this section: legitimation, propagation, and coordination. Each process is known to be important in organizational studies, but here we describe the potency of each process in helping to explain how compassion unfolds as a collective process (Kanov et al., 2004).

Legitimating: Legitimating is a process that ensures that actions of an entity are desirable, proper and/or appropriate (Suchman, 1995). Legitimation happens through multiple means in organizations, but its natural effect is to grant individuals freedom to feel and act in particular ways. Where the noticing of pain is legitimate, where the expression of feelings is legitimate, and where acting toward others ways that facilitate healing is legitimate, then the organizing of compassion is more likely to take place and to be enacted with competence. We define competence here in terms of the speed, scope, scale and customization of the response to the needs of the person in pain (Dutton et al., 2004). For example, some organizations have created policies and procedures that allow employees to donate vacation time to a type of collective bank, and then developed procedures that allow employees to use this donated time if they need it to care for a sick spouse or family member (e.g., Dutton et al., 2002a). While this process directly facilitates the coordination of care, it also bestows the practice of giving time to

others with acceptability as a type of “proper” investment in another person’s welfare at a time of need. These policies often have names that imbue them with an appropriate and desirable formality (e.g., Employee Vacation Investment programs). Also, by turning this voluntary action into a form of routine, the management (or whomever institutionalizes the practice) imbues the process with legitimacy (Feldman & Pentland, 2003), that in turn fuels further noticing of pain, and eases the coordination of individual responses.

Legitimating can also facilitate compassion organizing by granting people the freedom to display feelings, which in turn facilitates coordination of responding. In particular, actions of leaders offer important symbolic endorsement of what is appropriate or inappropriate feeling (Pfeffer, 1981). Leaders’ actions can quickly make illegitimate the expression of grief and shock which so often accompany pain, stifling collective responding. For example, in one organization that we studied, the unexpected death of a visitor was never acknowledged publicly by top management despite personal requests by employees to acknowledge the tragedy. Employees who witnessed or heard about the death were demoralized by this response and felt uneasy about their own grief and disconnected from the feelings of their co-workers. No organizational guidance or permission was available to them (Dutton et al., 2002a). In contrast, the former Dean B. Joseph White interrupted his well-scripted annual “state of the school” address to alumni of the University of Michigan Business School to tell the audience of the plight of three business school students who lost all their belongings in a fire early that morning. He assured the students publicly and with expressed feelings of concern for their well-being that they would have a temporary place to live and he took action by writing a personal check while in front of the audience to signal his support. The impact of his words and actions drew the attention of many people to the students’ suffering and gave momentum to widespread efforts within the business

school community to offer assistance to the students (Dutton et al., 2004; Frost, 2003). In this example, Dean White facilitated the collective noticing, feeling and responding to pain through his use of power in his own actions that legitimated feelings and responding for others inside and outside the organization.

Propagating: Propagating describes the process of spreading ideas and information between people. In the case of compassion as organizing, propagating is a process that facilitates collective noticing, collective feeling and collective responding to member's pain. Propagating is key to compassion organizing as it is often the means through which feelings that prompt action are mobilized, and the means through which individuals learn about others' responses, allowing them to accelerate or diminish their own responding in relation to that of others.

Propagating information can be facilitated by established systems in the organization (e.g. e-mail networks within the organization, video conferencing facilities, town hall meetings and the like). Following the terrorist attacks on New York in September 2001, Reuters' management adapted its systems for tracking information and clients and its virtual town hall meeting technology to communicate information and concern about the well-being of its employees (Dutton et al., 2002b). Leaders can also serve as propagators of information within the organization, either by initiating a flow of information that is shared by others, extending it to other people or sustaining it over time. In the 1990's, Newsweek Chairman and editor-in-chief Richard Smith informed his staff that one of the magazine's veteran editors, Maynard Parker had been diagnosed with leukemia. His daily briefings to staff updated them on their colleague's condition and sustained communication about Parker's situation (Dutton et al., 2002a). Former Dean White's State of the School address intervention noted earlier not only served as a

legitimating mechanism for shared noticing and feeling among his audience; it also spread the word to a wider audience about a condition of suffering in the organization (Dutton et al., 2004).

The above discussion of legitimation and propagation reveals a recursive relationship between them. When ideas and emotions are spread about someone who is suffering, it helps to legitimate the situation and how it is viewed and felt, which in turn can widen the scope of shared responses to the situation. What has been noticed as a legitimate observation by organizational members makes it more probable that it will be spread in the system.

Coordinating: Coordinating refers to the process by which people arrange interdependent actions in ways that they believe will enable them to accomplish their goals (Weick, 1979). Coordination is often essential to compassion organizing as it facilitates the transformation of shared noticing and feeling into a collective responding to suffering. Without structures and systems in place that facilitate in coordinating member responses, joint efforts to offer compassion may fail as good intentions dissipate for lack of means and resources to turn efforts into tangible help. Coordinating can be done formally, as in the case of Cisco Systems, which has developed a Serious Health Notification System that allows information about suffering employees to reach the CEO quickly (Kanov et al., 2004). Employees use this system to alert coworkers about a painful situation of a colleague, ensuring that the word gets out and people can mobilize to help. Coordinating can also be done informally, as people improvise and take on emergent roles that allow resources to be directed effectively and efficiently to persons in need (Dutton et al. 2004). For example, in the school fire example, several MBA students crafted roles for themselves (e.g., resource collector, emotional buffer) that allowed the offerings of help to be more efficiently organized without overwhelming the fire victims. In the example of Maynard Phelps' fight with his leukemia, several secretaries volunteered to facilitate the offerings of blood

and other gifts, which immediately started upon notification of his condition. As his care extended in time, these secretaries took on new responsibilities and altered their roles to make the adjustments necessary to ensure the organization was getting him the help that he needed.

The value of seeing compassion as organizing. Seeing compassion as organizing reveals that compassion can be a collective accomplishment. It focuses attention on how groups of people are able, in a coordinated way, to offer care to someone or some group of people in pain. Instead of attending only to the efforts and competencies of individual compassion-givers, as was the case with the first lens, we are able to see aspects of organizing that make compassion possible. It augments our understanding of compassion in work organizations in at least four ways.

First, compassion as organizing makes salient the organizational *interdependencies* inherent in collective compassion. Compassion as organizing requires interlinked observations, feelings and actions that are directly and indirectly are enabled by properties of the organization. For example, coordinated responses to situations of suffering may act on pooled, sequential or reciprocal interdependence (Thompson, 1967). When a group of coworkers get together to decide how best to help a suffering colleague, they pool their observations, feelings and ideas for assistance to respond compassionately to the situation. This may be the most common form of interdependency enacted between a sufferer and those offering help. However, the relationship becomes reciprocal when offers of help are modified in response to the reactions of the person in pain. Students being helped after they had lost all their possessions in a fire (earlier example) eventually signaled that they were feeling embarrassed about all the attention they were getting and indicated that they felt overwhelmed by all the material goods that they had received (Dutton

et al., 2004). A compassionate response in such cases would be to stop the flow of assistance or to adjust it in light of what is learned from the sufferer.

Second, an organizing lens highlights that compassion *is a dynamic process* and highlights the influence of *feedback loops* on the nature and direction of compassionate acts. People who share how they feel about what they see may find the level of their emotions amplified or dampened by what they learn from others. Access to one another's feelings and thoughts facilitated by organizational practices and systems will likely influence how the compassion process unfolds. People may find themselves learning more about what is being noticed, felt and proposed as they hear or read the communications of others. A tug of concern for a sufferer may grow into a swell of empathy as coworkers learn how others feel about the situation On the other hand, initial empathy for a sufferer may be drained when an employee reads or hears from others in the organization that they don't see the situation as worthy of concern. An audience of emotionally neutral people may change into one of sympathetic concern for someone when a leader announces an emotionally painful event and frames the condition as worthy of compassion (e.g. the "state of the school" address by former Dean White). Sometimes these dynamics can create a process of collective compassion that has a life of its own. For example, the staff at Newsweek initially provided babysitting help to the family of a colleague stricken with leukemia. Others volunteered to donate blood. Still others stepped forward to donate platelets (Dutton et al., 2002a; Frost, 2003). The dynamic nature of organizing alerts us to the temporality in collective compassion (episodes of helping that come to an end), of punctuation (e.g. the Dean's intervention at the state of the school address) and of nonlinearity (members enter the process at different times and in different ways and their inputs can change the direction and nature of responses).

Third, an organizing lens illustrates the *historical embeddedness* of compassion. A shared delivery of compassion in an organization may draw on the cultural memory in an organization of how collective responses were made to suffering in the past. The organized response to students affected by the campus fire took place in the context of collective responses to suffering by organizational members in previous years (Dutton et al., 2004). The effects of collective compassion may also feed forward to what is expected of organizational members in subsequent moments of suffering. A coworker who knows that help was previously provided when someone was in pain may expect to receive care and assistance when she is hurting. The institutionalized effects of completed collective compassion may thus support or constrain the actions of subsequent members of the organization when facing new instances of employee pain and suffering.

Fourth, the organizing lens illustrates the *secondary effects* of collective compassion. The delivery of collective compassion through existing practices and routines of organizations increases members' confidence in rising to painful challenges and may improve the quality and robustness of such mechanisms and may help members accomplish other goals and objectives. For example, colleagues of Parker at Newsweek not only coordinated their efforts to respond to his leukemia. Several more junior editors took on additional responsibilities in the newsroom and challenges of Newsweek's work, including the sensitive task of breaking the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. The magazine subsequently won an award for their reporting of this event (Dutton et al, 2002a; Frost. 2003). Whitaker, a Newsweek editor observed: "Everyone rallied around in a very impressive and moving way" (Frost, 2003, p. 171). Smith noted "The efforts of everyone involved were aimed at putting out the best possible magazine each week." (Frost, 2003, p. 171)

Research Possibilities: As with the previous lenses, this view offers several research possibilities that explore different facets of compassion in work organizations. .

1. **Examining the costs and benefits of organizing for compassion**. Allocating organizing mechanisms to address the need for compassionate responses to suffering likely shifts resources (e.g. time, energy and money) from other organizational initiatives and requirements. Is this a cost or a benefit to the organization and to its members? Does the cost of making legitimate such practices such as we described at Cisco, (a 48 hour notifications to a leader of conditions of suffering, or creating a system for delivering medical care to employees when away from their home country) outweigh the benefits that flow from such initiatives? What are the benefits, to individuals, to the organization of sharing feelings and of taking time and using the organization to deliver care and compassion? We might ask also what particular characteristics of legitimation, propagation and coordination are most critical to competence in compassion organizing?

2. **Pressures to routinize compassion**.
   Non-routine or non-programmed activities in organizations tend over time to become routinized. Compassion seems to be tailored to the particular needs of a person in pain and to their context. Relevant questions here might be: Is customization of response a necessary condition of compassion in a work organization? Can compassion be delivered from a standardized program? Is there a tipping point beyond which institutionalized responses to compassion fail to achieve their objective? How can the personalization of institutionalized compassion be preserved?

3. **Distinguishing collective from individual compassion**.
   What characteristics and processes influence the value of collective compassion over individual efforts to be compassionate? Is there a "critical mass" of effort or other variables that provide advantage to collective compassion? What are the necessary organizational characteristics that influence this outcome?

4. **Establishing the limits of organizing on collective compassion**
   Legitimating some things implies that other things will necessarily be illegitimate. What are differences across organizations in terms of what are and are not legitimate types of pain or compassion? What accounts for these differences? Understanding such differences across organizations could be a key to understanding why some organizations seem more or less compassionate than others

IMPLICATIONS

This chapter provides some nourishment for the wolf of compassion. We have explored the historical, religious, and interdisciplinary roots of compassion, and we have discussed three distinct ways of seeing compassion in organizations. Each of these lenses takes a

particular focus on human pain and illuminates how it is addressed in organizational contexts. Each perspective is anchored in a family of organizational theory that provides a unique conversation for scholars who attempt to understand compassion. As Morgan (1997) discusses, any one theoretical perspective center-stages certain interpretations while obscuring others. Part of the power of seeing compassion through these three different theoretical lenses, then, is that we are able to provide a more complete view of compassion in work organizations by generating both complementary and competing insights (Allison, 1971; Morgan, 1997).

Comparative perspectives on compassion. While each lens provides its own important view of compassion, an additional power that comes from presenting compassion through three different lenses is the capacity to compare ideas across theoretical frameworks. Table 1 suggested the power of a comparative perspective by showing the key assumptions and insights of each lens alongside one another. For the sake of illustration, here we take one example from our data and look at it through each of the three lenses.

> I work in the Finance Dept at Midwest Hospital. We have a program that allows employees to donate their unused vacation time to a fellow employee that is experiencing undue financial hardships, due to unusual circumstances such as illness, fire, accident, or death. I have witnessed an incredible amount of compassion among the staff at Midwest while administering this program. The employees' caring and willingness to give up their benefits to help a co-worker in need is extraordinary. Time and again Midwest's staff recognizes a need, takes the steps to get the cause approved and campaigns to get others to help. It's this genuine caring for those we work with that makes me glad I work at Midwest. I have also witnessed the profound impact this program has on the co-worker receiving their help. It's great! (Employee, Midwest Hospital)

In looking across the three lenses on compassion, several aspects of this narrative are instructive. For example, if we were to understand compassion as interpersonal work, we could see that the narrator uses a number of strands of evidence related to relational practice to convey the message that people are very compassionate at Midwest Hospital (e.g. "time and again Midwest's staff recognizes a need, takes the steps to get the cause approved, and campaigns to get others to

help"). If we were to understand compassion as narrative, we could also see in this account the ways that the narrator constructs his own and others' identities through the story, suggesting that part of the identity of the organization is its caring competency (e.g. "…makes me glad I work at Midwest"). And finally, if we were to understand compassion as organizing, we could suggest that the vacation donation program provides a set of routines of institutionalizing compassion in such a way that it becomes legitimated and easily coordinated within the organization.

Compassion as a window into organization studies

Not only is there value in the differences highlighted by the three lenses, but their commonalities also have important implications for organization studies. At the core of each lens lies the assumption that compassion is worthwhile in its own right. In this chapter, we have argued that compassion is central to and expressive of the very essence of being human. As such, our examination of compassion draws our attention to the human side of organizations and organizing, one that is often overlooked in traditional organization studies. None of the lenses has focused on outcomes such as organizational performance or efficiency, for while these are often the concern of mainstream organizational research, they all too often trump or overshadow the humanity of organizational life. Along with Cameron and colleagues (Cameron, 2003; Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2003), we argue that although compassion may contribute to high performance and financial success, such outcomes are peripheral to the meaning and impact of compassion. Compassion connects us with the aliveness of organizational life, putting us in touch with the human condition and reminding us that work organizations are fundamentally human institutions capable of caring for, healing, and enlivening people (Cameron et al., 2003; Frost et al., 2000). Organizations that adopt compassionate practices as strategic means to an end risk weakening or destroying the integrity of such practices. As such, compassion is currently in

a precarious position as it sits on the fringe of organization studies. If we attempt to understand the nature and significance of compassion in work organizations in ways typical of our field (e.g., aiming to identify the competitive edge associated with compassion or questioning the value of compassion in terms of the bottom line) we will likely end up with only a shell of a construct that is a far cry from the rich and timeless images of what compassion is and what it means. If instead we recognize that the study of phenomena like compassion begs for a different approach to organizational inquiry—one that center stages human experience—then we will allow ourselves to enter into a dimension of organizational life that is often invisible and unappreciated.

Challenges to the study of compassion in organizations. Many of the research questions discussed above present challenges for the study of compassion in organizations. Below we discuss five particularly significant ones.

One specific challenge is to determine the reach and extent of compassion in organizations, across institutional fields, groupings of various kinds, job types, and employees. One possibility is that compassion will be found more often in human service organizations, such as hospitals or universities, than elsewhere, or that the type of compassion found in such organizations will differ from what is found elsewhere. For instance, the type of compassion in human service organizations is often routinized in various ways that are uncharacteristic of the spontaneous expressions of compassion as interpersonal work that we discuss in this chapter. Exploring and understanding the implications of such differences are important next steps in mapping the terrain of compassion in organization studies.

Another challenge is that compassion, or compassion that becomes a social collective accomplishment, may be more likely in high performing organizations, where adequate slack in

the system allows room for individual and collective responses to pain. Would we expect to find compassion in an organization struggling to stay afloat during a major financial crisis? As is often the case after natural disasters (Sanchez, Korbin, & Viscarra, 1995), some of the companies showing greatest compassion during the 9/11 crisis were unable to maintain this stance in the hardship of the months that followed (SHRM/eePulse, 2002). The challenge of understanding the presence and expression of compassion at various stages in the lives of organizations is one that must be met in studying compassion in work organizations.

A third challenge to the study of compassion in organization studies is to look across types of jobs and types of organizations for the ways that compassion takes unique shape in various contexts. For example, collective compassion as an organized process is perhaps more likely in organizations where the organization's leadership and cultural values publicly endorse compassionate acts (Dutton et al., 2004). In addition, compassion is probably more common in jobs that endow incumbents with sufficient autonomy to be able to help a co-worker who is overloaded. While we argue that compassion is still possible in highly controlled and standardized or "McDonaldized" (Ritzer, 1998) jobs, we acknowledge that it is less likely to proliferate where workers have minimal latitude over what they do and how they do it (cf. Fineman, this volume).

A fourth challenge to the study of compassion in organization studies is an appreciation of power and how it plays into the phenomenon. For example, it may be more unusual to see "upward" compassion (enacted from a junior employee toward a senior one) in organizations. Power plays a role in the enactment of compassion, and perhaps those at lower levels find it "inappropriate" to offer help to someone senior, while those at higher levels experience

discomfort at sharing their suffering with those more junior. Questions like these deserve further attention in research on compassion and its role in organizational life.

A fifth challenge to the study of compassion in organizations is to develop an understanding of its unexpected consequences. For instance, while we believe that compassion provides significant benefits for both the giver and the receiver (Dalai Lama, 1995; Lilius et al., 2004; von Deitze & Orb, 2000), there are also less positive outcomes associated with compassion in organizations that include negative emotional reactions such as envy and resentment, particularly from those who feel their suffering has gone unnoticed or been ignored while the suffering of others has been met with compassion. A related challenge is to understand burnout experienced by those continuously engaged in compassionate acts at work (Collins & Long, 2003; Figley, 1995; Rainer, 2000), and the toll on those handling toxic emotions in organizations (Frost, 2003). The expression of compassion may have significant consequences beyond the immediate good of relieving suffering. Organizational researchers must undertake longitudinal and multi-method studies to uncover these unanticipated consequences.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of compassion in work organizations has a short history, but a promising future. In this chapter we have sought to illuminate the possibilities that different lenses from organizational studies create for the study of compassion. We have demonstrated that the use of these lenses will help identify fruitful topics for future research and can lead to the creation of a systematic body of knowledge about compassion in organizations. We have also addressed some of the challenges that face researchers who are interested in pursuing the study of compassion in organizations. Something perhaps less obvious, but equally important, is that we have tried

throughout the chapter to evoke the emotional tone of compassion and to underscore that its role is to make a contribution of healing to those who are suffering. We attempt to treat compassion as a gift, not a commodity (Hyde, 1979).

We look forward with enthusiasm to the time, a few years hence, when perhaps this chapter will be revised for a new edition of the *Handbook of Organizational Studies* and the depth and range of understanding of compassion in work organization will be significantly greater than it is today. We believe that such a future will serve well the field of organizational studies, and will have contributed too to the experience of more healthy organizations and organizational members. As we expand our knowledge of organizations to encompass not only topics like compassion, but also thriving, resilience, vitality and social life, then the wolf of empathy, compassion, hope and generosity will then have been truly well fed.

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Table 1: Three ways of seeing compassion in organizations

	Compassion as interpersonal work	Compassion as narrative	Compassion as organizing
Main idea	Compassion is one of the many everyday interpersonal interactions or types of relational work that take place in organizations	Compassion is carried in language and stories in ways that help people make sense of pain and make meaning of their experiences at work	Compassion becomes a collective accomplishment through processes that create, maintain, and dissolve social units
Core assumptions of this lens	• Relational and interpersonal work requires skill and competence • Relational and interpersonal work is often gendered and disappeared • Relational and interpersonal work is consequential and productive	• Compassion narratives reflect the hidden reality of pain in organizations • Compassion narratives help constitute the human response to pain • Narratives are powerful windows into the construction of individual and collective identities	• Different processes in organizations enable people to notice, feel, and respond to pain • Features of the organizational context facilitate or hinder noticing, feeling, and responding to pain • Agentic activity by proactive individuals can amplify collective response to pain
Central ideas about compassion as seen through this lens	Compassion involves a three-part human experience of noticing, feeling, and responding. Several types of well-known interpersonal interactions help to facilitate elements of this experience	Compassion narratives reveal important shared values and beliefs that are the heart of organizations. Compassion narratives also help constitute organizational members' identities and realign them with organizational identity.	Compassion becomes an effective collective accomplishment when individual agentic actions are legitimated, when attention and information about pain is propagated, and when systems are in place that allow for easy coordination of effort.
Key insights developed through this lens	• Compassion is effortful work that involves expenditure of cognitive and emotional energy • Compassion depends on skilled interpersonal interactions and emotional attunement • Small acts of compassion may have large consequences	• Compassion narratives show the emotional tendencies of a collective • Exposure to compassion narratives in organizations affects people in consequential ways, often having a developmental effect • Compassion narratives reveal a process by which members re-align their sense of the organizational identity with their perceptions of organizational action • Compassion narratives open the door for critical analysis of power dynamics, political aspects of organizations, and what is left unsaid about pain	• Compassion as organizing relies on interdependent observations, feelings, and actions • Compassion as organizing is subject to nonlinear dynamics and feedback loops that influence the shape of the response • Organizing processes are embedded in time and may feed into expectations for compassionate response in the future • Organizing compassion has secondary effects such as raising the level of efficacy to meet challenges in a system