

# **Organizational Compassion as a Complex Social Relational Process**

*A thesis submitted by*

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*In partial fulfilment of the requirements of*

**Doctor of Philosophy**

Faculty of Business

University of Technology, Sydney

December 2012

## **CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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## STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PAPERS CONTAINED IN THE THESIS

The following list summarises Ace Simpson's particular contributions to the joint papers in this thesis.

Paper	Ace Simpson's Contribution
<p>Simpson, A., Clegg, S. &amp; Pitsis, T. (under review). I used to care but things have changed: A genealogy of compassion in organizations. <i>Journal of Management Inquiry</i>.</p> <p>Production Note: Ace Simpson: <u>Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p> <p>Production Note: Stewart Clegg: <u>Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p> <p>Production Note: Tyrone Pitsis: <u>Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p>	<p>Overall 88%</p> <p>Conceptualisation 95%</p> <p>Analysis 95%</p> <p>Writing 75%</p>
<p>Simpson, A., Clegg, S., Pitsis, T., Lopez, M.P., Rego, A., Cunha, M. P. (under review). Practicing compassion in organizations: The ideal and the real. <i>Organization</i>.</p> <p>Production Note: Ace Simpson: <u>Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p> <p>Production Note: Stewart Clegg: <u>Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p> <p>Production Note: Tyrone Pitsis: <u>Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p> <p>Production Note: Miguel Pereira Lopez: <u>Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p> <p>Production Note: Armenio Rego: <u>Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p> <p>Production Note: Miguel Pina e Cunha: <u>Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p>	<p>Overall 75%</p> <p>Conceptualisation 80%</p> <p>Analysis 70%</p> <p>Writing 75%</p>
<p>Simpson, A., Clegg, S. R., Cunha, M. P. (under review). Expressing compassion in the face of crisis: Organizational practices in the aftermath of the Brisbane floods of 2011. <i>Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management</i>.</p> <p>Production Note: Ace Simpson: <u>Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p> <p>Production Note: Stewart Clegg: <u>Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p> <p>Production Note: Miguel Pina e Cunha: <u>Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p>	<p>Overall 85%</p> <p>Conceptualisation 80%</p> <p>Data collection 100%</p> <p>Analysis 80%</p> <p>Writing 80%</p>

<p>Simpson, A., e Cunha, M. P., Clegg, S. R. (under review). The sociomateriality of compassion: Lessons from a crisis. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>.</p>	<p>Overall 84%            Conceptualisation 80%            Data collection 100%            Analysis 75%            Writing 80%</p>
<p>Acc Simpson: <u>Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p>	
<p>Miguel Pina e Cunha: <u>Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p>	
<p>Stewart Clegg: <u>Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p>	
<p>Simpson, A., Clegg, S. &amp; Pitsis, T. (under 3<sup>rd</sup> review). The dynamics of compassion: A framework for compassionate decision making. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>.</p>	<p>Overall 86%            Conceptualisation 85%            Data collection 100%            Analysis 85%            Writing 75%</p>
<p>Acc Simpson: <u>Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p>	
<p>Stewart Clegg: <u>Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p>	
<p>Tyrone Pitsis: <u>Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication.</u></p>	

## **Acknowledgements**

Although this doctoral thesis is my personal achievement, I am indebted to many people who have generously supported me through the journey of completing this project. First and foremost I must thank my supervisor, Dr Tyrone Pitsis. He introduced me to the field of Positive Organizational Scholarship and helped me to clarify my research topic as a study of the relationship between organizational compassion and power. He challenged my ideas through frequent discussions where he employed his favoured Socratic questioning method, which helped me clarify my arguments. He also encouraged and supported me, connected me with other academics, and provided ongoing editorial support. I am fortunate to have had Tyrone as my supervisor.

I am also deeply indebted to my supervisor, Professor Stewart Clegg. This thesis has benefited immensely from Stewart's sociological emphasis, and his knowledge and experience as one of the world's foremost authorities on organizational power. Stewart was particularly generous with his time and knowledge since the middle of my PhD candidature, when Tyrone transferred from UTS Business School to University of Newcastle Business School in the UK. I am indebted to Stewart for his quick feedback, suggestions, advice, and ongoing editorial corrections. He has also been kind enough to collaborate with me on each of my journal article submissions.

I am grateful to others who have helped with suggestions, references, writing input, and editorial corrections. Most notable are my other co-authors Miguel Pinha e Cunha, Miguel Pereira Lopez, and Armenio Rego. Additionally, Kjersti Bjørkeng, Arne Carlsen, Ingrid Carsen, and Ravi Kathuria provided feedback and editorial support, as well as valuable comments on early drafts of my doctoral assessment and some thesis chapters. I also received some transcription support from Lexi Acibar. Once the thesis was complete, I had further professional editorial support from Carol D'Costa, which was restricted to copyediting and proofreading.

I am also grateful to my interviewees from 18 different organizations who generously gave their time to share their experiences of organizational support (or lack of) during the Brisbane floods.

Finally, I wish to thank my immediate friends and family. The ongoing support and interest that my wife, Tamara, my parents, aunts and uncles, siblings, mentors and close

friends have shown in my work has been a great source of inspiration. The opportunity to share my challenges and celebrate my successes with family and friends has kept me motivated and committed through this ‘rollercoaster’ PhD journey. Irrespective of all the support, I accept full responsibility for all errors and omissions that may remain within this work.

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## **Abstract**

The past two decades have seen a growing acknowledgement of the significant role played by emotion in organizations, with a consequent emergence of interest in organizational compassion. The most in-depth body of research on organizational compassion has been conducted by academics associated with the fledgling Positive Organizational Scholarship community. While this literature has spurred scholarly theorising and research of compassion, a gap in this literature is its under-acknowledgement of compassion as a complex social relational process enmeshed in power dynamics. A related limitation is the lack of appropriate acknowledgement that as a social phenomenon, the outcomes of compassion relations are a mix of positivity and negativity. To the contrary, much of the literature assumes compassion to be an inherent psychological trait, or an eternal moral imperative, that leads to positive individual and collective outcomes.

I have sought to demonstrate through theoretical and empirical research that organizational compassion relations are inseparable from social relations of power. The findings of these studies have been written up as five articles submitted to organization and management journals and then collected together for submission as a dissertation by publication. Two articles are theoretical, while three present the findings of empirical research using narrative and discursive methodologies.

Narrative methods were used in two studies to analyse the same interview data collected from 25 employees from 18 organizations. The interviews concerned the support provided to them (or the lack of support) when the Brisbane CBD was evacuated in January 2011 due to the flooding of the Brisbane River. The fact that the interviewees were from different organizations allowed comparison of narratives from different organizational settings, during a time of crisis that affected the entire community. Cross comparison of these narratives provided an opportunity for deeper insight into the power dynamics of organizational compassion, in both structural and practical aspects.

In a further study, discursive analysis was applied to naturalistic data available through 278 user comments from two online news articles. The unsolicited user comments from each case provided divergent arguments indicating that legitimacy as a giver or receiver

of compassion is highly contested and is embedded within power considerations of privilege, obligation, control, and exploitation.

The overall contribution of this thesis is to provide theoretical frameworks as well as empirical observations analysing the variables that contribute to the social construction of organizations deemed more or less compassionate and, in so doing, providing an empirically supported sociological definition of organizational compassion.

## **Preface**

### **My journey into organizational compassion research**

The submission of this thesis on the dynamics of compassion in organizations is the culmination of a journey that began long before my doctoral studies commenced almost three years ago. In my home country of New Zealand, I had enrolled as a psychology major hoping to find answers to help others, and myself, live more fulfilled and happy lives. I was in for disappointment. Psychology, I discovered, was a discipline focused on average deficits of mental illness as opposed to promoting extraordinary human strengths. Psychologists can measure and treat depression, alcoholism, and schizophrenia – no small achievement. The cost of this progress, however, has been that little attention has been given to understanding what makes people flourish (Seligman, 2002). My disappointment in psychology continued until I discovered positive psychology, a new field within the discipline devoted to the study of well-being, human strengths, and the things that give life meaning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). On discovering positive psychology, I knew that this was what I had been looking for.

Positivist science has focused on the hard facts of measurable material phenomena. Positive psychology is often no less positivist but is differentiated from the earlier tradition by its commitment to using the scientific process to study abstract constructs that were previously the domain of philosophy and spirituality. From before the time of Buddha, through to the human potential movements of the 1970s, and the self-help explosion of the 1990s, claims have been made for techniques that increase happiness. Positive psychology accepts none of these claims on face value. Rather, it subjects such claims to rigorous testing using the scientific method. Findings of positive psychology demonstrate that happiness can be increased through practices of expressing gratitude, forgiveness, kindness, counting personal blessings, and self-reflection of personal strengths (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

What of measuring love, happiness, and meaningful existence? Emotions and values such as these have traditionally been the domain of philosophers and poets. Positive psychology claims to have developed reliable methods to measure the experience of trait happiness and state happiness; however, it has yet to develop measures of the happiness derived from having purpose and meaning in life (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Measuring such emotional and spiritual experiences is difficult as these

are subtle constructs (Nettle, 2006). For my Honours year at the Auckland University of Technology, I used such measures to research the relationship between happiness and quality of life (QoL). As I conducted this research, I realised that the measures I was using were dubious. How can a five-question psychological scale measure such a complex issue as happiness? In such situations the limitations of the positivist approach to science come to the fore. Although it can be helpful, positivist science does not hold all the answers – particularly when it comes to factors related to being human. On understanding these points, I decided that I wanted to be a scientist sensitive to humanist considerations, prepared to use qualitative methods if that was what the research question demanded.

As I contemplated doing post-graduate PhD research in positive psychology, I decided I wanted to do qualitative research. I also made the decision that I wanted to do research that was relevant and therefore decided to undertake research in an organizational setting. I approached potential supervisors doing positive psychology research in psychology departments across New Zealand, Australia, and the UK. On hearing of my interest in doing positive psychology research within a work setting, two of the potential supervisors I was in communication with suggested that I approach Dr Tyrone Pitsis at the UTS Business School. Tyrone, I learned, was a member of a community of scholars interested in applying a positive focus to organizational studies in the emerging discipline called Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS). The POS community is concerned with studying that “which is positive, flourishing, and life-giving within organizations” (Cameron & Gaza, 2004, p. 1).

I decided to conduct my PhD research under the banner of POS, rather than that of positive psychology. The findings of my earlier Honours research had indicated that the correlation between happiness and aspects of QoL relating to material facilities or circumstances were limited. The correlation between happiness and QoL domains relating to psychological well-being, however, were significant. I became interested in the psychological dispositions that supported happiness and found that some of the most prominent among them were the relational emotions of gratitude, forgiveness, altruism, and compassion. I theorised that the first three could be thought of as sub-domains of compassion. Hence, I concluded that compassion was the most important factor for cultivating happiness. The Dalai Lama (2009) supports this conclusion with his statement, “If you want to be happy, be compassionate. And if you want others to be

happy, be compassionate.” I was delighted to discover that a major area of focus of research and theory in POS is organizational compassion, with at least 15 articles published on the subject by POS scholars. Using the POS compassion literature as my point of entry, I made the study of organizational compassion the focus of my PhD research.

### **Conducting organizational compassion research**

As I engaged with organizational compassion literature, I started to get a sense of the critiques I wanted to offer. Initially, my concern was with expanding on the underdeveloped notion of compassion as a mode of power. I had a sense that power imbalances in compassion relations relate to manipulative motivations. As I became more involved with the power literature, it became increasingly obvious that power asymmetries exist in all compassion relations – even when the motives are positive.

Power is both positive and negative and often both concurrently. At first, I had a sense that negative experiences in ‘compassion’ relations arise when givers abuse compassion to manipulate the receivers. As I went deeper into the literature and my research, however, I realised that even when compassion is genuine in its intentions, it can potentially nonetheless produce negative outcomes both for givers and receivers. Nothing is purely black or white, positive or negative in this world: everything is a blend of both, resulting in different shades of grey.

It has also been difficult to overcome my own psychological and moral conceptualisations of compassion as something that is intrinsic and ‘transcendent’. Conditioning has made it a challenge to conceptualise compassion as constituted socially through relations of power. My historical analyses have indicated, however, that the modes and targets of compassion mobilisation have varied throughout history. There is no absolute standard of what it means to be compassionate. History indicates ongoing debates about the criteria for legitimate giving and receiving of compassionate support.

Finally, bringing these conceptualisations of compassion together into a single definition has also been challenging. I struggled to develop a sociological definition of organizational compassion for almost a whole year. I wanted a definition of organizational compassion that accounted for the inherent power relations and potential negative outcomes experienced by both givers and receivers. Only in the second year of

my studies did I put forward an alternate definition to the one-sided definition found in the organizational compassion literature. I describe organizational compassion as an ongoing process of concern, assessment and responding. To elaborate, as a relational process organizational compassion involves individual or collective capability for ongoing concern about the suffering and well-being of others; ongoing assessments of givers and receivers of compassion legitimacy (by givers and receivers); and decisions to respond with giving, refusing, or receiving compassionate care – reinforcing power relations.

It has taken the full journey of this PhD research to begin to formulate these ideas in a consistent manner. In this respect, the submission of journal articles for publication has been helpful. Critiques by reviewers of the journal articles have, at times, been demoralising and disheartening. These critical reviews, however, have also been very positive in helping me develop my understanding and arguments.

### **Confirmation in Bhutan**

As I came to the conclusion of my PhD journey, I went on a 14-day tour to the Kingdom of Bhutan. Surprisingly, on this journey I found confirmation for the arguments I have made in this thesis that organizational compassion is inseparable from knowledge and power. Further, my understanding of the meaning and significance of this idea broadened to a greater extent than I have articulated in this thesis.

I was aware that the modern state of Bhutan has attempted to amalgamate modernity and tradition through a government emphasis on modernisation efforts in education, health and economic development, along with synchronic efforts in ecological and cultural preservation (Wangchhuk, 2008). In contrast to highlighting Gross Domestic Product as a measure of national performance, in 1972 the King of Bhutan declared an official policy objective of increasing the nation's Gross National Happiness (GNH) by building an economy that serves, rather than supersedes, the country's spiritual values (Bates, 2009). Scholars associate Bhutan's focus on GNH as a direct expression of the Buddhist principles of wisdom and compassion (McDonald, 2003). Tashi (2011, p. 19) writes "GNH, besides fostering a compassionate point of view or feeling for others, is also about compassionate engaged action".

Arriving in Bhutan, observation of the semiotic imagery at the entrance of each Dzong (a fortress-monastery that also functions as a district administrative centre) served as an important reminder to me of the importance of compassion in the secular and spiritual administration of Bhutanese society. Painted at the entrance to most Dzongs was the image of the Buddha of Compassion, honoured side by side with the Buddha of Wisdom and the Buddha of Power. The semiotic intention of this imagery is to influence the collective psyche as to what is prioritised and how things are done in society.



**Figure 1: The Buddha of Compassion (centre), flanked by the Buddha of Wisdom (left), and the Buddha of Power (right).**

The relationship between Compassion, Wisdom, and Power is that neither one is complete without the other two. Compassion without Wisdom is merely sentimentalism. Similarly, Compassion without Power cannot lead to active responding to elevate the suffering of others. Therefore, Compassion, Wisdom, and Power need to be cultivated together in order to benefit society. The three Buddhas were arranged in different configurations. While some illustrations had Compassion as the central figure, in other depictions it was Wisdom, flanked by Compassion and Power.





**Figure 2: The Buddha of Wisdom (centre), flanked by the Buddha of Compassion (left), and the Buddha of Power (right).**

The idea conveyed with Wisdom as the central figure, is that Wisdom without compassion leads to arrogance. Similarly, Wisdom without Power will not lead to any practical application of the learning. Wisdom must be cultivated with Compassion and Power, to be of benefit to oneself or others.



**Figure 3: The Buddha of Power (centre), flanked by the Buddha of Wisdom (left), and the Buddha of Compassion (right).**

Finally, a third configuration has Power as the central figure flanked by Wisdom and Compassion. The idea illustrated here is that Power without Compassion can be self-serving and exploitative. Similarly, Power without Wisdom will be destructive. In summary: compassion, wisdom, and positive power should not be cultivated in isolation of each other. They must be cultivated together to be of benefit to society.

The semiotics of this explanation intrigued me, as they not only provided support for my arguments in this thesis that one needs to theorise compassion related to power and knowledge but also afforded additional nuances. In each chapter of my thesis, I have argued that compassion is enacted through social knowledge, embedded within relations of power, and that it can have negative outcomes. I have further argued that greater awareness of the potential negative power implications of organizational compassion is needed to help researchers and managers bring greater reflexivity to practices of compassion within organizations. The Bhutanese Buddhist view provides positive application of this argument by emphasising that without wisdom, compassion will have negative outcomes, and without positive power, the enactment of compassion is impossible. Therefore, to avoid despotism in leadership, compassion must be nurtured side by side with wisdom and positive power (Ura, 2004). An important insight that is not covered in the Bhutanese conceptualisation of compassion, but which is addressed in my thesis, is that as a relational process the definitions of compassion need to take into account the activities of the givers and receivers.

For the future I have decided to design and conduct a study on how Compassion, Wisdom, and Power influence the administration of Bhutanese society, which I believe will make for a valuable and ‘powerful’ contribution to management and organizational studies. For the time being, however, I believe my thesis already constitutes a significant contribution as it stands and it is to this claim that I focus attention in my thesis.

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# **Introduction**

## **Overview of the relevant literature**

Over the past three years of my PhD research, almost every time I introduced the topic of my PhD, people would smile and ask if the concept of a compassionate organization was a misnomer, or an oxymoron. To most it seemed surprising: the ideologies of business have rarely been noted for their compassion (Morgan, 2006). In this introduction, I will initially present a review of early organizational approaches and theories, which argued that emotions have no place in rational organizations. Here I will present a history of Taylor's (1911) "scientific management", the appropriation of the ideas of Weber (1978), and the emergence of Mayo's (1975) human relations movement.

The rest of the introduction is structured as follows: After presenting the literature on rational organization, I will review more recent literature by various theorists who argued to the contrary, that organizations are in reality places of emotion. I will present the arguments of Albrow (1992) and Fineman (2000), who called for an end to the silence on emotions in organizations. I will also give attention to Flam's (1990a) sociology of emotion, along with her three-part rational-normative-emotionality model of human agency, which she applies to the organizational setting.

I will suggest that it is within the context of a warming of attitudes towards emotions in organizations that the organizational interest in compassion has emerged. Following that, I will review the literature that is specifically focused on organizational compassion. One of the first scholars to publish on organizational compassion was Solomon (1998). He was followed by Frost (1999), who inspired what emerged as a community of scholars focused on the study of organizational compassion under the banner of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS). This community has published at least 15 academic publications on the topic to the time of submission, which I will review.

I will then present a critique of this organizational compassion literature, drawing attention to three primary gaps or limitations in POS theorising and research on organizational compassion. Following this critique, I will present an overview of five theoretical and empirical articles in which I have sought to address these limitations

with my supervisors and colleagues. These five studies have been submitted for publication in leading academic journals, and are presented as chapters in this thesis. Finally, I will conclude this introduction with a summary of the major contributions of my research to advancing academic knowledge about organizational compassion, including articulating a more sociological approach to the theorising and study of organizational compassion, prescriptions for the nurturing of a compassionate organization, and presenting a model of compassion legitimacy criteria.

### *Rational organization*

Traditionally, the dominant ideologies in use in the business community have stressed somewhat uncompassionate views of the mechanisms of business: utilitarian models of shareholder value and evolutionary models that argue for the survival of the fittest have not been noticeable for their fellow-feeling for non-shareholders and those whom the prevailing sentiment labels as the less fit (Ghoshal, 2005). From such ideologies have developed well-worked theories, such as transaction cost economics (Williamson, 1981, 1998), principal-agency theory (Ross, 1973), and rational choice theory (Simon, 1955). ‘Scientific’ theories of this sort provide management with the fiction of a ‘morally neutral’ rational approach to organization based upon the assumption that social relations are similar to physics, exhibiting predictable mechanical laws, and are thereby free of the limitations of unpredictable and chaotic sentimental emotion (MacIntyre, 1981; Roberts, 1984).

The genesis of this mechanical view of management emerged from the late 1800s, when management engineers in the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) sought to translate the techniques of mechanical engineering to the creation of efficiency in the workplace (Shenhav & Weitz, 2000). The objective was to regulate *uncertainty* by seeking understanding of scientific laws that would make management rational and predictable and thereby more efficient and profitable. The leading theorist and advocate of this new ‘scientific management’ was an engineer named Frederick Winslow Taylor. The influence of ‘Taylorism’, as the approach came to be labelled, reigned until the 1930s as a mostly unquestioned ‘scientifically’ justified system of work design that acted to control work and workers (Cooke, 2003; Morgan, 2006).

Advocates of this rational mechanical approach to management thought that they had found support for its tenets in the writings of the German sociologist Max Weber.

Consequently, Weber was adopted as a predecessor adding scholarly legitimacy to a 'classical' management theory sorely in need of such laurels (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006). Of particular interest to Weber is the way authority systems emerge and are institutionalised in an efficient organizational bureaucracy (Clegg, 2005). In Weber's own words, as "bureaucracy develops more perfectly, the more it is dehumanised, the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational and emotional elements which escape calculation" (Weber, 1978, p. 975). It was writing such as this that endeared Weber to the rationalists, despite other more equivocal passages in which far less succour would have been found.

The premises of scientific management were controversial in their day: managers resented the need to cede power to new scientific managers and workers resented the intensification of effort that the system meant for them. Holes began to appear in the mechanistic assumptions as scientists tested hypotheses derived from them, most notably in interpretation of work done by the Human Fatigue laboratory at Harvard, from which interpretation emerged Elton Mayo's (1975, 2003) human relations movement. Mayo emphasised the importance of paying attention to the human social and emotional needs of employees, yet his objective was, fundamentally, no different than that of Taylor (O'Connor, 1999). Mayo was not so much concerned with acting humanely in the interests of employees, but with proposing more subtle forms of social control. He advocated an emphasis on the emotional needs of employees in the interests of increasing control, efficiency, and productivity. Mayo labelled his soft mechanical approach as the 'science of organizational behaviour'.

### *Emotional organization*

It was some time before theorists began to challenge the myth of the purely rational mechanical organization, devoid of emotionality, by asking 'if there was a ghost within the machine'. Most notably, perhaps, Albrow (1992, p. 314) made a call to break "the silence on feelings in organizations", advocating "recovery of the irrational" and "relocating feelings as a focal point for organization studies". Albrow also sought to dismantle some of the theoretical support for the conceptualisation of organization as mechanical and emotionless. He argued that Weber had been misrepresented and appropriated by those who sought to make virtues of what Weber considered

weaknesses or deficiencies. Rather than writing of the dehumanising effects of rational bureaucracy as a prescription of the ideal, Weber was describing what he conceived as the negative outcomes of what transpires when bureaucracy is pushed to the extreme. To counter the notion of organizations as rational entities with no place for emotion, Albrow (1992, p. 323) presented numerous examples of organizations as “emotional cauldrons”. Fear, embarrassment, pride, lust, greed, passion, guilt, love, and hate, all feature within organizational relations and decision-making processes. Support for these arguments can be found in studies indicating that for many managers, fear and greed often remain the primary motivations for decision-making, frequently to the detriment of the organization’s long-term interest (Huczynski, 1993; Jackall, 1988).

Fineman (2000) argues that emotions are woven into the roles, decisions, culture, meanings, production, and politics that constitute organizational life. He is critical of the idea that emotions interfere with rationality and therefore should be eliminated from organizations. Ideas of this sort are found within psychoanalytic theory, which holds that unconscious fears, shame, and guilt interfere with rational cognitive processes. Fineman responds by questioning the privileging of rationality over emotionality. More importantly, he questions the emotionality/rationality distinction as a false premise. It is impossible to separate one from the other – boundaries between the two are always blurred and murky. Emotions and rationality are mutually constituted, not just by each other, but also in conjunction with the social context. In this regard, Fineman is also critical of the traditional approach of conceptualising emotions as being imbued with psychological determinism. Instead, he argues for conceptualising emotions as constituted and managed socially through the interrelations of biological factors with social variables of power, discourse, and the environmental context.

Flam’s (1990a) sociology of emotion argues that traditional economic, decision, and organizational theory have posited the rational human agent as a free, calculating, consistent, and selfish decision maker, who can undisturbedly set up their order of preferences. In contrast, the emotional human is traditionally conceptualised as unfree, inconsistent, indifferent towards cost and oriented towards others. Rationality is thereby characterised by voluntary self-discipline and control. Emotionality on the other hand is conceptualised as involuntary, a situation in which feelings spontaneously invade, overwhelm, and upset the social order – even against the agent’s will. Consequently, emotions are the target of individual, group, and organizational attempts at suppression,

regulation, and neutralisation through the institution of social-normative feeling and expression rules. The product of such attempts is the constrained human, with blended rational-normative-emotionality. Flam argues that this blended rational-normative-emotional model is a more realistic three-dimensional perspective of human agency and choice. It accounts for the rational-irrational and consistent-inconsistent behaviour found in other-oriented endeavours where there is little benefit to the individual agent, such as love, or collective group behaviours of social action, sports, or war.

Flam (1990b) next turned her attention to emotionality among corporate actors, who are traditionally conceived as goal-oriented decision makers and problem solvers, who operate according to an established strategy and set of values. Corporate actors, however, are people and people are emotional. Many organizations are family owned businesses in which the cauldron of emotionality that characterises normal family life is hardly absent. Additionally, political parties, lobbies, and professional associations are often born from emotion-based collective action. Charities, foundations, and state departments, for example, are created to nurture and regulate otherwise arbitrary and inconsistent feelings of compassion for those in need. Similarly, trade and professional associations are formed to nurture solidarity within the group and trust within the public. Consequently, the objective of constructing and sustaining specific emotions is entwined with corporate goals of helping those in need, solidarity, trust, or profit.

Within organizations 'top-down' initiatives seek to mobilise emotions to increase employee loyalty and commitment to increase profits. Mobilisation cycles are bound to economic stagnation cycles, along with cycles of war mobilisation. Between organizations and individuals there are rules directing the expression of 'appropriate' emotions based upon the expectations of established cultural norms and organizational objectives. These are rules of prescription and proscription. Prescribed emotions support organizational goals, show deference to organizational hierarchy, and 'represent' the corporate image. Examples include the emotional labour and potential burnout inherent in the smiles of flight attendants, members of caring professions, and sales personnel – where the employee has to induce or suppress emotions in support of organizational objectives (Hochschild, 1979, 1983; Kahn, 1993). Proscribed emotions are those perceived as obstacles to organizational goals, showing defiance towards organizational hierarchy and etiquette, and 'non-representative' of the corporate image (Flam, 1990b).



### *Compassionate organization*

Solomon (1998) was one of the first theorists explicitly to discuss compassion within organizations, approaching the topic from the perspective of moral psychology, which is contrasted with moral philosophy and business ethics. While the latter are abstract, apathetic, and confusing, the former is grounded in the engagements of real living people, living real lives. Solomon's main concern is the overriding culture of highlighting and even celebrating the perception of organizations as places of brutal Darwinian 'dog eat dog' competitiveness. Notions of organizations as places of humanity and compassion are frequently met with derision, cynicism, and even contempt. A famous example is Friedman's (1970) charge that business executives who contribute to social causes are engaged in "pure and unadulterated socialism". Solomon (1998) challenges the stereotypical chauvinistic view of the organization as calculating, competitive, and self-interestedly purely profit focused as merely a matter of perception. A similar response is offered to the argument that business "cannot be said to have responsibilities" because "only people have responsibilities" (Friedman, 1970). According to Solomon (1998), as employees, managers, and executives conceive of their job with such stereotyped imagery, this perception becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. In contrast, Solomon posits that as communities, corporations are in practice also places of humanity, in which care and compassion are in fact an expectation and requirement of various employment positions. Solomon advocates the importance of changing perceptions towards a more realistic conception of business as not merely confined to 'business' but also to living the good life within a business society.

Another early theorist to write explicitly on compassion in organizations, and certainly the first theorist to publish in a leading management journal, was Peter Frost (1999). Frost discussed five potential "tracks" for exploring compassion in organizations. The first track is through relational practices in which compassion often disappears in organizations. The second is self-respect and dignity that is often lost when people's human worth is ignored by an absence of compassion. Third is toxic handling, where people can become poisoned by the toxicity of relations while trying to dissipate pain in the organizational system. Fourth, aesthetic sensitivity is enhanced when compassion opens the mind and intellect. Finally, compassion can be considered to be a genetic endowment to support survival. Frost concludes that although compassion is so central to understanding organizations, it has been mostly ignored and invisible in

organizational theory. In order to understand organizations properly, this imbalance has to be righted.

*Theorising and researching organizational compassion in POS*

Frost took up the call for further research on organizational compassion with a group of academics within the emerging field of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS). As explained in the Preface, POS parallels positive psychology with its shift away from a focus on negative deficits towards a concern with strengths, virtuousness, positive affect, flow-engagement, and meaning (Berstein, 2003; Dutton & Glynn, 2008). Among the areas of focus for positive organizational scholars, compassion has generated considerable interest. At least ten journal articles and five book chapters by POS scholars such as June Dutton, Peter Frost, Jason Kanov, Jacoba Lilius, Sally Maitlis, and Monika Worline (many of whom were at some stage in their careers affiliated with the University of Michigan), represents the most in-depth and systematic body of work on compassion in organizations. In this thesis, I have largely limited the scope of the critique of theory and research on compassion in organizations to the literature contributed under the banner of POS.

The first empirical study of organizational compassion was a research project conducted by Frost et al. (2000) based upon narratives provided by 22 academics. The authors describe an organizational ecology of compassion, where organizational policies, values, leadership, and practices either facilitate or inhibit compassion relations within the organization. The study concludes that compassion in organizations positively transforms the environment by making others feel cared for, affirmed, and connected. The dynamics of power in compassion relations is also mentioned as a potential area of research as yet unexplored.

Dutton et al. (2002) explore how compassionate leaders support the cultivation and legitimisation of compassion relations within an organization by recognising and attending to employee suffering, which provides the organization with legitimised contexts for meaning, action, and building a collective capacity for compassion. Leaders facilitate a legitimised context for meaning in response to pain by creating an environment in which people can freely express and discuss the way they feel. This helps employees to make sense of their pain, seek or provide comfort, and imagine a more hopeful future. When organizational leaders acknowledge a painful death as an

awareness-triggering event, there is a greater chance that this awareness will be of the generative, reflective type, rather than the anxious, withdrawing type. Compassionate leadership facilitates healing and growth after trauma, whereas organizational neglect can lead to feelings of resentment and anger among employees.

The first publication on organizational compassion specifically to describe its purpose as contributing to Positive Organizational Scholarship was a journal article by Kanov et al. (2004). The authors of this paper drew upon Clark (1987, 1997) to define compassion as a three-fold relational process of noticing, feeling, and responding to pain. *Noticing* entails developing awareness of another's emotional state, possibly through openness to their emotional cues and life events. *Empathy* relates to feeling another's pain, while *responding* involves an effort to alleviate the other's suffering condition. The significant contribution of this article is that the authors expand this definition to the organizational context as collective noticing, feeling, and responding to pain within the organization. Such a collective capability is termed 'compassion organizing'. After this publication, collective noticing, feeling, and responding to pain became components of a standard definition of organizational compassion, subsequently used in at least seven publications to date.

As an example, Dutton et al. (2006) describe a case study of Michigan State University's compassionate response towards three MBA students when their dorm burned down. The authors analyse the process by which compassion organization unfolded in a coordinated manner as collective noticing, feeling, and responding to pain. In this process, existing routines and strong relational ties ensured the sharing of information about suffering. Organizational leaders also legitimised compassion by publicly noticing and responding to suffering, which lead to unusual flexibility in the allocation of generally restricted resources to provide support. This article is also positioned as a contribution to the greater objectives of POS – studying the organizational cultivation of collective goods such as virtue, wisdom, and integrity, which “represent the best of the human condition” (Dutton, Worline, et al., 2006, p. 90).

Frost et al. (2006) describe three lenses for viewing compassion in organization. The first lens, *interpersonal work*, involves listening, creating holding space for pain, small moves, and other helping behaviours between two or more employees. The second lens, *compassion narratives*, describes how vivid experiences of compassion are collected,

maintained, and shared through stories. Narratives express how people feel about their organization and co-workers – forming the organizational identity. The third lens, *collective compassion organizing*, is about the collective recognising, feeling, and responding to pain within the organization, facilitating the coordinated mobilisation of social, emotional, and physical resources. One of the significant conclusions brought out through analysing compassion through these lenses is that compassionate acts – such as sending a note, giving a hug, or offering words of comfort to someone who is ill or in grief, instil hope and a strengthened sense of self-concept or personal identity. These acts also positively transform member identification with colleagues and the organization. The article also acknowledges the importance of a critical perspective, which considers the potentially negative outcomes of compassion relations as power asymmetries, exclusion, and manipulation.

Dutton et al. (2007) describe many positive organizational outcomes of relational processes that facilitate expressing and reaffirming compassion within organizations. Compassion relations *build resources* of trust, pride, connection, and motivation. They also *strengthen values* of respect, dignity, and the common good. Finally, by enhancing emotional sensitivity, compassion relations also *cultivate critical relational skills* to facilitate recognising, feeling, and responding to other's pain. Leaders can facilitate the nurturing of compassion within the organization by recognising and rewarding compassionate acts, and telling stories to spread relational resources, values, behaviours, beliefs, and the critical skills that compassion generates.

Research by Lilius et al. (2008) also uncovered similar positive benefits of organizational compassion relations, including strengthening positive emotion, individual identity and organizational commitment. The qualitative study involving 239 hospital employees found that compassionate acts, such as providing emotional support, time, flexibility, and material goods to support other organizational members in distress are associated with higher levels of affective positive emotions and organizational commitment. The same research group conducted narrative research using 159 hospital employee responses describing stories of compassion at work. They found that acts of compassion at work provided members with a greater sense of personal identity, as well as a greater sense of identification with co-workers and the organization as a whole.

Another empirical study by Lilius et al. (2011) argues for a relational view of compassion based upon practice theory. Certain relational practices, of high quality connections and permeable boundaries, were seen to facilitate a work unit's collective compassion capability. In the study, co-workers were found to manage their involvement in compassion relations in terms of how burdensome and exhausting it was sometimes experienced to be. The authors acknowledge the importance of organizations fostering a sustainable capability for compassion, while noting the potential negative effects of compassion within organizations. The acknowledgement that the effect of compassion relations is not necessarily positive was an important advance. It should be clear that while many organizations have established policies for compassionate care, even these could cause suffering through unforeseen and inadvertent consequences.

Lilius et al. (2012) provide a review of this literature, which they summarise in terms of the *benefits* of organizational compassion, the *processes* that support organizational compassion, and the *mechanisms* of support. The *benefits* of showing organizational compassion for employees, particularly in times of crisis, include post-traumatic-growth (Dutton et al., 2002), strengthening positive identity (2006), building resources of positive emotions (Dutton et al., 2007), and enhancing employee commitment to the organization and co-workers (Dutton et al., 2007). *Processes* that facilitate organizational compassion include compassionate leadership (Dutton et al., 2002; Dutton, Worline, et al., 2006) and the creation of certain organizational conditions, such as holding regular meetings and open architecture, which ensure people regularly congregate and, therefore, have a greater chance of noticing signs of distress (Kanov et al., 2004). *Mechanisms* for organizational compassion include the establishment of a harm notification network and the establishment of compassionate policies, routines and systems (Dutton et al., 2002; Dutton et al., 2007; Frost et al., 2006; Kanov et al., 2004; Lilius et al., 2008) as well as values reflecting respect for humanity and individual personality (Dutton et al., 2007; Dutton, Worline, et al., 2006).

Dutton and Workman (2011) discuss compassion as a generative force that motivates action by opening up insights and expanding resources. Reflecting on an article written 12 years earlier in which Frost (1999) called for consideration of compassion in organizational research and theory, the authors describe how Frost's call has shifted the attention of researchers to a neglected aspect of organizations. First, researchers using a compassion lens have learned to recognise pain and suffering in organizations and to

find deeper wisdom about organizational relations in tales of organizational compassion. Second, researchers have learned to recognise individual and collective compassion capabilities that are mostly ignored or not given due attention within organizations but which foster greater resilience, healing, and effectiveness. Finally, a compassion lens has directed the attention of researchers to the small moves of everyday interactions and the lasting impact they can have on individuals and institutions. The effects of Frost's compassion call include not only altering the practices of organizational compassion researchers but also opening up new lines of research and conversation. As evidence, the authors cite the 2011 Academy of Management theme of "Daring to Care: Passion and Compassion in Management Practice and Research". The conference received more than 7000 submissions and led to the production of a special edition of the *Academy of Management Review* (AMR) in October 2012.

A summary of the special issue of the *Academy of Management Review* on care and compassion is provided in Rynes, Bartunek, Dutton, and Margolis' (2012) editorial commentary. The editors suggest that future research and theory on care and compassion in organizations will continue through three strategies of contending and replacing, complementing, as well as symbolically integrating, existing organizational theories. Contending and replacing is important with regard to theoretical assumptions about organizational life perceived as oppositional to care and compassion. Here, the editors refer to assumed dichotomies: justice, as opposed to caring; economic contractual relations, as opposed to compassionate relationships; self-interest, as opposed to motives that are other regarding, and perceptions of employees as independent and self-sufficient agents as opposed to focusing on interdependent relations. The second strategy involves not representing care and compassion as one alternative theoretical perspective but promoting it as a complementary approach that reveals crucial knowledge about organizational life that remains hidden by other theoretical approaches. Finally, carrying this idea further, the editors argue that a lens of compassion and care can work symbolically with other theoretical accounts to broaden understanding and provide explanations that would be impossible without such symbolic integration.

With regard to furthering the practice of compassion in organizations, the editors summarise the articles as proposing implications under three categories: audience for applying recommendations, suggested actions, and hoped for outcomes. The target for

recommendations applied to the whole organization, management and leadership, as well as individuals within the organization. Recommended actions included increasing awareness, organizing training programs, having caring role models, changes to hiring and retention practices, and structural changes. The editors summarised the expected outcomes of increased compassion and care in organizations described in the articles as enhanced individual well-being, more caring interactions and organizational culture, and more supportive organizational structures. The editors comment on the basis of these proposed audiences and outcomes that if care and compassion were to come to the forefront of organizational scholarship it would result in a radical shift. Rather than targeting managers and productivity, scholarship would be pitched to people at all organizational levels. Similarly, rather than assuming that profits are the objective of organizations, consideration would also be given to the happiness, health, and well-being of employees and clients, as well as other stakeholders associated with organizations.

Two of the articles included within the special issue of *AMR* on care and compassion are contributions by Lilius and Maitlis, members of the POS compassion lab. Lilius (2012) challenges research indicating that compassionate care-giving roles at work are likely to lead to burnout and that recovery can only be achieved by taking off-work breaks away from the care-giving roles. She argues that there is variability in care-giving interactions, with some that are restorative as opposed to depleting. For example, in some care-giving interactions there is a higher quality of connection between the caregiver and the client. In these instances, the caregiver requires less regulatory resources for the provision of care, and they extensively generate key personal resources of self-affirmation and positive affect. For the caregiver, the generation of key personal resources is restorative, and it has the effect of offsetting the degenerative ego depletion that occurs in more challenging interactions requiring greater regulatory resources. Nonetheless, the generation of extensive personal resources leads to an experience of a breakthrough that can enhance the caregiver's sense of professional identity and accomplishment. Lilius concludes that her findings provide insight on the way organizations can enhance their effectiveness "in the business of providing compassionate care" (p. 584).

Lawrence and Maitlis (2012) argue for an organizational focus on an "ethic of care". They contrast this approach with most writing on organizational compassion as a

response to suffering, an ethic of care that is ongoing, regardless of whether or not the 'other' is suffering or flourishing. An ethic of care conceives of the 'other' not as independent and self-sufficient, but as related and interdependent. Further, it shifts the care-giving role from an anchoring in caring professions, such as in the medical field, to an anchoring in loving relationships. Lawrence and Maitlis argue that due to the enduring nature of relationships within teams, along with the certainty of constructed narratives, organizational care could be enacted in the narrative construction of team members within organizations. The authors describe three types of caring narratives: how team members describe their sparkling moments, how they describe their struggles, and the stories they tell of future hopes. Lawrence and Maitlis further speculate about the organizational characteristics that would support such an ethic of care. Structurally, they argue that bureaucracy isolates individuals, affords impersonal rather than personal interactions, codifies communications rather than encouraging spontaneity, and disguises dominance. They recommend an alternative to bureaucracy based upon a web of multiple relational networks between individuals, rather than lines connecting position boxes in a hierarchy. Culturally, they suggest that organizations that emphasise values of expressed rather than concealed humanity, holistic personhood, and treating people as more than their employment position will be those that support an ethic of care. Similarly, leadership that legitimises care and compassion by recognising, appreciating, supporting, and rewarding caring behaviours also supports an organizational ethic of care. Finally, Lawrence and Maitlis argue for the importance of skilled caregivers who are emotionally available and able to create holding spaces for pain, as those who receive care will become more competent in providing it to others.

## **Critique**

### *Significant gaps in organizational compassion theory and research*

While engaging with the organizational compassion literature, a few significant gaps or oversights became apparent. These gaps relate to the under-acknowledgement of power relations, negative outcomes, and the social constitution of organizational compassion. These limitations make theory and research on organizational compassion less sophisticated and realistic than might otherwise be the case. In the following sections, I will point out these limitations in the literature. I will also seek to demonstrate that organizational compassion relations are inseparable from considerations of power, potential negative outcomes and the influence of the social-historical context in which



compassion relations are constituted. Although these concepts are intertwined and overlap with each other, in the interests of academic lucidity I will deal with each as a separate constructs.

### *Power*

The first gap I became aware of as I engaged with the organizational compassion literature is the under-acknowledgment of power in compassion relations. Where power considerations are acknowledged in organizational compassion literature it is mainly in the “limitations” or “further research” sections of the articles. Articles by Frost (1999) or where he is the lead author, Frost et al. (2006; 2000), are an exception here, as he does consider power, albeit with limited attention. Power asymmetries are inherent in all human relations, including the positive relations between teachers and students, parents and their children, as well as supervisors and workers (Foucault, 1987). Compassion is no exception; it involves a relational and iterative process of needing, offering, receiving, and also of accepting support. Considerations of power include concerns with ‘disappearing’ the voice and concerns of the other through domination, control, and exploitation (Boje & Rosile, 2001; Clegg, 1975, 1989; Clegg et al., 2006; Clegg & Haugaard, 2009). Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that organizational research cannot be complete unless it addresses issues of power. Although such power considerations are inherent in compassion relations (Clark, 1987, 1997), they are largely neglected by the organizational compassion literature.

Failure to acknowledge the role of power in compassion relations is also a limitation of the dominant definition of compassion as individual or collective noticing of another’s suffering, feeling empathy for their pain, and responding to the suffering in some manner (Kanov et al., 2004). The problem with this definition is that it privileges the feelings of the giver while ignoring or ‘disappearing’ the experience of the receiver. A unidirectional conception of compassion would accommodate both the person noticing, feeling and responding to the pain of the other, as well as the experience of the suffering person towards whom the gesture of compassion was made. Experiences of this type can include feelings of being patronised, being placed in a position of indebtedness, having one’s suffering taken advantage of for organizational objectives, or on the positive side, deep appreciation and gratitude.

Organizational compassion can further be divisive when the suffering of some individuals is unnoticed, marginalised, or excluded, while that of others is recognised and responded to organizationally (Frost et al., 2006). Institutionalised compassion may compound the suffering of those excluded by creating envy and resentment towards co-workers who are the beneficiaries of compassionate support. Organizational compassion can thus be viewed as a form of selective attention and non-attention embedded within particular compassion organizing processes. These arguments suggesting how organizational compassion is embedded within power relations also indicate potential negative outcomes of compassion relations, which will be further expanded in the following section.

### *Dynamic dualism*

The second gap that became apparent as I engaged with the organizational compassion literature is that it rarely appreciates that the outcomes of compassion relations can be both positive and negative. Again, where the negative outcomes are considered in organizational compassion literature, it is mainly in the “limitations” or “further research” sections of the articles. Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips (2006) have noted examples of major organizational efforts expended in the name of a care and concern for the welfare of certain categories of other, such as Aboriginal half-caste children in Australia, or young women deemed sinful in the view of the Catholic Church, that can hardly be deemed compassionate in their effects. Yet there is evidence to suggest that they were, in some respects, compassionate in their intentions. The intention attributed to a policy is no guarantee of its acuity in practice. Compassionate intentions can as easily produce harsh outcomes as positive ones; compassion can as easily be manipulative as emancipatory. The negative outcome of organizational compassion relations can also be seen in the extensive organizational research describing *compassion labour* (Ashforth & Humphreys, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1996), which can lead to burnout due to *compassion fatigue* (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Employees in the nursing, sales, or service professions where the job requires that they display and maintain emotions of care and concern are particularly vulnerable to such conditions.

The interpretation presented above suggests that the outcomes of compassion relations are rarely ever just positive or negative: most of the time they are dynamically dualistic. The dualisms of positivity and negativity are not fixed, but fluid. What appears as

positive from one perspective may be negative from another. What may be judged as utterly negative can, with time, become the turning point to something wonderful – and vice versa. Judgements of compassion are ongoing, indeterminate and subject to revisions based upon the priorities, relevancies, and connections made retrospectively and prospectively at any given moment.

### *Social constitution*

The third gap that became apparent is that the organizational compassion literature mostly conceives of compassion as a psychological state or moral imperative, rather than as a social construct. Conceptualisations of compassion as constituted in an interrelated web of agency, social relations, contingency dynamics, and social ideologies and values (Berlant, 2004; Nussbaum, 1996) is mostly lacking in the literature. This oversight ignores history, which has seen changes both in the usage of the term compassion (Garber, 2004) and modes of expressing compassion, including notions of who is worthy of compassion (Clark, 1997).

Both philosophers such as Nietzsche (1966, 1998) and historians of ideas such as Foucault (1977, 1983) have discussed how society's élites, interest groups, and other 'emotional entrepreneurs' broker shifts in cultural notions of the norms of humanitarian care, clarifying, reinforcing, or questioning established grounds for support and lobbying for the adoption of new ones (Clark, 1997; Clegg et al., 2006). An example is the institution of the British Poor Laws between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries. While apparently humanitarian in nature, these laws emerged out of a confluence of shifting economic conditions and changes in definition and perception of the poor (Lees, 1998). Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, increasing privatisation of communally accessible land from which the poor etched out an existence on 'the commons' caused the poor to become dispossessed, wandering vagabonds (Clegg et al., 2006). The vagabond was of concern to civil society, where poverty became associated with immorality, largely through the necessities of petty theft in order to live as well as resistance in the shape of attacks on the crops, especially the hayricks, belonging to those who had colonised the common land. The Poor Laws were introduced to address this issue. Over the following centuries, ongoing debates, reforms and repeals of the Poor Laws centred on humanitarian concerns relating to the scale, scope, and eligibility

for support. The disciplinary intent of these laws, however, was to minimise the number of poor by getting them into work (Poovey, 1995).

According to feminist critique, organizations and rationality have both been viewed as masculinist (Ferguson, 1984): from this perspective, compassion is often conceptualised socially as a specifically feminine characteristic (Grant, 1988; Pullen & Simpson, 2009). As Gherardi (1994, p. 597) suggests, traditional gender stereotyping in organizations expects female staff to manifest “caring, compassion, willingness to please others, generosity, sensitivity, solidarity, [and] nurturing”. Work that manifests these characteristics can often be invisible to dominant authorities (Gherardi 1994; Townley, 1993). Compassion, as a feminine trope, is thus socially regarded as subordinated rather than emancipated.

Arguments on the appropriateness of compassion in civil society shape how compassion is enacted and constituted socially (Berlant, 2004). Two traditional objections against compassion relate to both sentimentality and patronising the receiver (Nussbaum, 1996). The first objection as articulated by Adam Smith (1776) finds compassion as irrational or sentimental, and therefore inconsistent, unfair, and partial. According to this view, compassion is not the appropriate perspective for fair and just management, leadership, or administration (du Gay 2008). The risk of compassion in administration, as du Gay (2008) elaborates, is that questions of elective affinity, based on criteria that favour certain categories of persons, enter into decision-making. Rather than countering power relations, such actions actually embed them in covert subjective forms. Thompson (Thompson, 1965) argued that the opening of public funds for compassion initiatives would not necessarily empower those in need so much as empower state bureaucrats, whose sense of duty weighs lightly against the burden of perceived obligations to communities, ethnicities, and specific clients. Empowerment of this sort creates further power asymmetries between political actors and their ‘clients’, with all the attendant problems of clientelism (Uhr, 1994) where goods and services are exchanged for political support.

In response, whereas compassion is often thought of as sentimental with an emphasis on feelings, it can additionally involve cognitive processes of analysis, rationality, and even calculation (Nussbaum, 2003; Woodward, 2002). To a new generation of public administration scholars in the 1970s, the integrity of the bureaucrat and the bureaucratic

process proved irksome (Marini, 1971; Shachar, 2000). The restrictions of a bureaucratic ethos were seen to limit service to those in need. From this perspective, the poor, powerless, and dispossessed required the compassion rather than the administrative wisdom of officialdom. Officials were urged to show compassion for the 'other' [see Hansel, 1999 on Levinas] and to abandon the ethical neutrality of their position as state servants (Bauman, 1989; Longstaff, 1994).

The second objection is that compassion undermines a receiver's humanity by treating them not as a dignified agent but as a passive victim or subordinate. For Fay (2008), a Lacanian scholar, compassion is to be seen as an adjunct of derision, as part of the false promise that one will be treated as a person, whose otherness, subjective voice and desire modern management theories of leadership claim to promote. Rather than opening up to the subject, 'compassionate' care can instead foreclose through the suffering realisation that one is being treated as an object, a resource, or a number (also see Eisenberg 2006). Conservative politicians often echo such perspectives, arguing that providing social support treats people as victims of life's difficulties, rather than respecting them as agents independently capable of improving their own circumstances (Berlant, 2004).

Nussbaum (1996) responds to this second objection by arguing that people can be simultaneously victims and dignified agents. Victimhood and agency are not a binary incompatibility. There is no logical rule that dictates that if a person is viewed as a dignified agent they cannot be also seen as a victim and vice versa. Dignified women are sometimes victims of rape, dignified journalists are sometimes victims of censorship, dignified property owners are sometimes the victims of vandalism and dignified children are sometimes the victims of abuse. The potential for dignified agents to become victims of various forms of mistreatment and abuse reinforces the need for ongoing concern about their well-being, ongoing protection, and for compassion in times of distress.

As stated, considerations of power, dualistic outcomes, and social constitution that are lacking in the organizational compassion literature are all intertwined. Dualistic outcomes in compassion relations are clearly due to the dynamics of power asymmetries. Similarly, in the social constitution of compassion, it is the powerful élites who have the greater say in defining what plights are legitimised as worthy of compassion, and in

deciding what constitutes an appropriate mode of responding. In the following section, I present an overview of the research I have conducted in cooperation with my supervisors and other academic colleagues to address these oversights and limitations.

### **Thesis chapter outline**

I have attempted to address these gaps in theory and research on organizational compassion through theoretical and empirical research, which I have written up and submitted to leading academic journals. Two of the articles are theoretical, and three present the findings of empirical research. These five, self-contained journal articles have been assembled together as the chapters of this thesis.\* Each article contributes to the overall research problem of exploring organizational compassion as a complex social relational process embedded within relations of power. Consequently, there is some overlap in terms of presenting the research problem, the literature review, and examples used. Nonetheless, each article is unique in that it approaches the research problem from different angles, using different research methodologies and theoretical frameworks to generate unique insights.

#### *Chapter One*

Chapter One is a theoretical article submitted to the *Journal of Management Inquiry* entitled “I used to care but things have changed: A genealogy of compassion in organizations”. In this article, my co-authors (my supervisors Clegg and Pitsis) and I use the philosopher Nietzsche’s genealogical method, which was developed further by Foucault, to explore organizational compassion. The genealogical method involves tracing the forgotten historical contingency and ignoble conditions of emergence of values currently held in high esteem and assumed as eternal principles. We structure our analysis on a model articulated throughout Foucault’s work involving the three axes of knowledge, power and subject. Using these as a framework, we investigate Nietzsche and Foucault’s theorising on each of these topics, which we apply to constructing a genealogy of compassion in organizations from the relevant literature. Our analysis finds the history of compassion in organizational theory and practice as rooted in a concern with more efficient employee discipline, motivation, and productivity, rather

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\* While I use Australian/British spelling in the Preface, Introduction, Chapter linking pages, and Conclusion of this thesis (with the exception of the word ‘organization’ and its derivatives), in the chapters I use US spelling as they were written as journal submissions and therefore use the spelling conventions of the respective journals. Likewise, I use different layout conventions for the individual chapters in accordance with the conventions of the respective journals.

than actual care and compassion. Our study also demonstrates that organizational compassion is a social-historical construct; that it is a relational process embedded within power relations and that its outcomes involve the subjectification of the individuals in compassion relations. These considerations are given only token attention in organizational compassion definitions, theory, and research. We therefore also put forward an alternative definition of compassion in organizations. Our definition describes organizational compassion as a collective social relational process characterised by ongoing concern for the well-being of others, assessments by givers and receivers of the other as a legitimate giver or receiver of compassionate support, as well as power related decisions about how to respond – be it as giving, receiving, or refusal of compassionate support.

### *Chapter Two*

Chapter Two is another theoretical article entitled “Practicing compassion in organizations: The ideal and the real” that my co-authors (Clegg, Lopes, Pitsis, Cunha, Rego) and I submitted to the journal *Organization*. In this article, we juxtapose contradictory notions of compassion. The dominant religious, moral, and psychological perspectives are idealistic in nature, stressing compassion as a principle that is always good and positive. Idealistic conceptualisations of this nature are also dominant in organizational compassion research and theory, where organizational theorists have stressed compassion’s positive benefits. We argue that while such idealistic views can provide aspirational benefit to individuals, they are not entirely appropriate in the organizational context. Organizations are social in nature and therefore require a social perspective that realistically accounts for the complexity and the contingency of compassion as a social relational process.

For the remainder of the paper, we provide a sociological perspective on compassion in organizations, one that embraces its many facets, messiness, and complexities. Our approach involves engaging with social practice theory as a theoretical lens for analysing compassion relations. There are divergent and convergent approaches to social practice theory that vary between theorists. The essential agreed principle is that all social phenomena are constituted through practices (Bourdieu, 1984; 1998; 1992; Giddens, 1984; Nicolini, 2012). Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) have summarised three key ideas from the writings of various practice theorists: 1) social construction, 2)

mutual constitution, and 3) dynamic (non)dualism. First, day-to-day actions are held as consequential in producing the contours of social life (Giddens, 1984). Second, social relations are mutually constituted both by human-to-human and human-object interactions with technological artefacts as well as natural objects. Here, relation refers to the view articulated by Foucault (1977) that all phenomena are interdependent and thus interrelated. Third and finally, dualisms that are often treated as dichotomous antithetical concepts such as body and mind, cognition and behaviour, free will and determinism, individual and institution, subjective and objective, are viewed with scepticism (Reckwitz, 2002). Any such apparent opposition is taken as being constituted dynamically and thus to be fluid, a perspective that protects the practice theorist from the fallacies of objectivist reification and subjectivist reductionism (Taylor, 1993).

Using these three concepts of practice theory as a framework, we analyse theory and research on organizational compassion. Rather than conceiving of compassion as an inherent psychological trait or eternal moral imperative, we argue that compassion is socially constructed through the scripts, (cognitive) structures, and practices which people take for granted in making sense of their world. Further, compassion relations are enacted in networks of economic, cultural, and social powers that affect the distribution of status, distinction, and resources. Enacting compassion means to enact relations of power. Finally, compassion relations produce dynamically (non)dualistic outcomes of positive and negative experiences both for the givers and receivers. We conclude that idealistic psychological and moralistic conceptualisations of compassion are useful as an aspirational and motivational ideal. For researchers and practitioners seeking to study and nurture compassion within an organizational context, however, more realistic social perspectives that account for complexity and mixed outcomes are of greater value.

### *Chapter Three*

Chapter Three presents the findings of an empirical study entitled “Expressing compassion in the face of crisis: Organizational practices in the aftermath of the Brisbane floods of 2011” that Clegg, Cunha, and I submitted to the *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*. The context for this research is the organizational responses of compassionate support provided (or lack thereof) to



employees during floods that swept Brisbane, one of Australia's state capitals in January 2011. The flooding led to the evacuation of the city's central business district and the closing of many businesses for up to a week, or in many cases, much longer. In October/November, I made a couple of trips to Brisbane, each lasting two weeks, where I conducted 25 interviews with employees from 18 different organizations. Through the interviews, I collected narratives of their experiences of workplace relations through the duration of flood.

To analyse our findings we used the same framework as in Chapter Two, based upon the three key ideas of practice theory summarised by Feldman and Orlikowski (2011). By combining these ideas from practice theory with our data, we generated three practical policy insights concerning the nurturing of compassion within organizations. The first insight is based upon our finding that the most responsive organizations conceived of their employees not as workers doing a job, but as metaphorical family or as "people more important than money". Relating this finding to the practice theory principle of social constitution, we concluded that for those who wish to nurture a compassionate organization, it is imperative to articulate compassionate organizational discourses and categorisation schemas. The second insight is based upon the finding that the most responsive organizations had an established culture of care even outside of the flood context. Relating this finding to the practice theory principle of mutual constitution of all social phenomena, we argued that it is difficult for an organization to mobilise resources to provide compassionate support in a moment of crisis when compassionate practices are not already embedded in ongoing organizational routines and policies. The third insight is based upon the finding that even in organizations that attempted to provide support, employees experienced the care in different ways. While most were grateful, some were ambivalent, and others were suspicious or critical. We combined this finding with the practice theory principle of dynamic dualism to conclude that both positive and negative power asymmetries are present in compassion relations; therefore, rather than assuming positive experiences, outcomes should be assessed on an ongoing basis. Overall we argue that these findings provide insight into compassion responding as a continuous ongoing process best cultivated in times of normality, rather than a reactionary episodic event initiated in a moment of disaster. Compassion cannot be feigned in a critical moment, for it is deeply engrained, ambiguous, or absent in the fabric of organizational practices.

## *Chapter Four*

In Chapter Four, I report the same empirical findings described previously, the difference being that these findings are analysed from the perspective of the principle that all social practices are mutually constituted in relations of sociomateriality (Schatzki, 2001). This article entitled “The sociomateriality of compassion: Lessons from a crisis” co-authored with Cunha and Clegg is under review at the *Journal of Business Ethics*. Sociomaterial configurations refer to human-to-human and human-object relations (Orlikowski, 2007; Suchman, 2007). Sociomateriality materialises in interactions between non-human material objects and settings within the human social relational context. In this paper, we employ sociomateriality as a lens for analysing the provision of compassionate support by organizations to their employees in a crisis situation. We also develop an argument about ethical agency and human accountability for compassion responding.

Organizational theorists typically conceive of compassion as an emotion or as an ethical virtue. The relationship between the social and the material is thereby mostly taken for granted or ignored. In contrast, we stress the significance of the material world for compassion responding and analysis, over considerations of language, discourse, and other cognitive processes. We further argue that the material in social relations is not ethically neutral, and that ethical agency is not limited to human actions. Rather, both humans and materiality are ethical agents in the materialisation of sociomaterial events.

Our sociomaterial focus calls for an alternate method of analysis. In addition to using narrative analysis to explore the socio-materialisation of organizational compassion responding, we also used sequence analysis, which is essentially concerned with the emergence of phenomena as “an ordered list of elements” (Abbott, 1995, p. 94). We applied sequence analysis by coding the order of events interviewees described as they recounted their experience of the unfolding of the flood. We only coded an event into the dataset the first time an interviewee mentioned it in the interview, omitting future references. Our findings revealed that organizational compassion responding in the Brisbane floods materialised in a general dominant sequence of five events relating to: technologies of communication; policy concerns and resource availability; tangible support; supporting others; and as a means for reconnecting.

We suggest that the social and material are entangled in the materialisation of compassion relations and that compassion organizing is significantly influenced by the sequential arrangement of material artefacts. Further, while agency rests with both human agents and material objects, in the unfolding of crisis human agents are accountable for intervening in the prevailing sociomaterial configurations, to *materialise* compassionate responding.

### *Chapter Five*

Chapter Five reports the empirical findings of another study on compassion entitled “The dynamics of compassion: A framework for compassionate decision making”. The article was co-authored with my supervisors (Clegg and Pitsis) and submitted to a special issue of the *Journal of Business Ethics* on Positive Organizational Ethics (POE). After three reviews, the guest editors have recommended the article for inclusion in the special issue and we are awaiting the final decision of the Editor-in-Chief.

The study is a discursive analysis of 278 user comments of two online newspaper reports on compassion related issues. Case One from *The Courier Mail* described victims of the Queensland (Australia) floods of 2010/2011, with 109 user comments mostly debating the validity of a receiver’s compassion legitimacy. Case Two from *The Guardian* described tourists from the UK and other western countries volunteering in orphanages in developing African and Asian countries, with 159 user comments debating the validity of a giver’s compassion legitimacy.

The unsolicited user comments from each case provided a rich source of data, with divergent arguments brought forward indicating the complexity of these topics. The data show that legitimacy as a giver and receiver of compassion is highly contested, and that not all purported compassion relations are legitimate. Recognition of a worthy recipient or giver of compassion constitutes a socially recognised claim to power and privilege. Using Clegg’s (1989) circuits of power as a theoretical framework, we analysed the data to construct a model that presents the different social expectations and assumptions of the legitimate giver and the legitimate receiver of compassionate support. These are distilled and presented as propositions related to both the receiver and giver of compassion. With regard to the receiver of compassionate support, people generally interpret a sufferer to be a worthy and legitimate receiver of compassion when they present (at least one of) the following characteristics (the more characteristics, the

stronger the case): 1) the suffering person is not responsible for their own suffering – it is not of their own doing; 2) the suffering person had no prior knowledge of any risk or danger; 3) the suffering person has no means to address the situation; or 4) the suffering person’s distress, although self-inflicted, is rooted in deeper systemic organizational or social issues. The opposite of these propositions apply in terms of the illegitimate receiver of compassionate support. With respect to the giver of compassionate support, people generally interpret a person as a worthy and legitimate giver of compassionate support when they present (at least one of) the following characteristics (the more characteristics, the stronger the case): 1) profit is of little consideration in providing support; 2) the giver has a legitimate relationship with the receiver (either as a friend/colleague, family, an authorised professional caregiver – doctor, police, etc., government department, or reputable non-governmental organization); 3) the receiver experiences positive outcomes as a result of their support and 4) the provision of support is not tied to various conditions and reforms designed to give the provider greater advantage and control and make the receiver dependent. Again, the opposite of these propositions applies in terms of the illegitimate giver of compassionate support.

We frame our model as a contribution to POE, which has endeavoured to shift the focus of organizational ethics from repressing deviant behaviour, towards promoting positive ethical practice (Stansbury & Sonenshein, 2012). Our model does not assume that compassion is, *a priori*, universally positive. Rather, we treat it as a social practice that requires mindful ethical reflexivity, aware that positivity and negativity in compassion relations are dependent on context. We suggest that managers and policymakers within organizations can use this model to reflect ethically on their conduct and assess how others may view the legitimacy of their compassion relations.

### **Justification of methodologies**

The methodological approaches used in any research require justification, which I will provide in the following section. In the theoretical study described in Chapter One of this thesis I use a genealogical method, while for the two empirical studies reported in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of this thesis I respectively use methodologies of narrative analysis and discursive analysis.

### *Genealogical analysis*

The genealogical method was developed by Nietzsche and refined by Foucault to analyse considerations of power in the privileging of certain values in society (1992; 1985). The method involves uncovering the hidden histories of complex relational forces that facilitate the emergence of values, from ignoble origins to the status of self-evident truths. Use of this method in Chapter One is appropriate considering that I seek to reveal the mostly ‘disappeared’ power dynamics inherent in organizational compassion relations. Applying this method to the history of organizational theory from Taylor’s (1911) “scientific management”, to Mayo’s (1975) human relations movement, to the emergence of psychological methods (Muchinsky, 2006), including positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001), and even positive organizational scholarship (Fineman, 2006b), reveals hidden objectives in the evolution of concern for employee well-being and organizational compassion. For the greater part of this history the objective has been to increase efficiency and productivity, along with greater employee motivation, discipline, and control – rather than an actual care and compassion for employees.

### *Narrative analysis*

Narrative analysis is the method I use for analysis of interview data collected from 25 employees from 18 organizations, relating to the support provided to them (or lack of) during the Brisbane floods as presented in Chapters 3 and 4. The context for this approach came about when, after failing to gain research access to a Brisbane-based organization to do my research, I decided, in consultation with my supervisors, to bypass the organizational gatekeeper. Instead I would directly approach employees from various organizations for interviews. This was the basis of my ethics submission on 15 June 2011, and I received ethics clearance on July 24. In October/November I made a couple of trips to Brisbane, each lasting two weeks, to conduct interviews that lasted between 25 minutes to an hour. In these loosely structured interviews, I asked employees to describe what unfolded on the day of the floods and for the days that followed, particularly in relation to their work situation, including how their work communicated with them. In response, employees shared narratives about their flood experiences. These included many cases of panic, instructions to leave work immediately, or orders to stay back to flood proof the workplace, struggles to get home

through flooded roads, patterns of poor or clear communication with work and colleagues through the flood situation, concern about their families, and mighty clean-up efforts once the flood had receded.

Although I initially sought to interview employees from a single organization, the fact that my interviewees were from different organizations allowed me to compare narratives from different organizational settings. This gave me an opportunity to gain deeper insight into the dynamics of organizational compassion both in structural and practical aspects. Through descriptions of characters and plots, the narratives allowed me access to compassion dynamics as individual and collective experiences and opened up value, belief, and support systems, which underlie the established modes of organizational compassion dynamics.

Narrative research forms the greater part of empirical organizational research into compassion to date (Frost et al., 2006). An analysis by Rhodes and Brown (2005) of how narrative research has contributed to organizational theory reveals five usages of narratives organizations. These are: 1) sense-making; 2) communication; 3) change/learning; 4) politics and power as well as, 5) identity and identification.

*Sense-making* is dependent on storytelling, according to Weick (1995), as a means of comprehending experiences, ascertaining causes of events, talking about things that are absent, providing knowledge or a guide to action, and conveying shared values, meanings, and beliefs. In this manner, organizations can be seen as constructed of narratives. It is not likely, however, that everyone in an organization makes the same sense of the same stories, indicating pluralism in the ways sense can be made of organizational narratives. From a *communication* perspective, narratives are events assembled and reassembled into stories through which meanings are presented, contested, and (sometimes) agreed upon, forming different inter-subjective simultaneously existing organizational realities (Browning, 1992). As a means of *change*, organizational stories aid diagnostic organizational analysis of norms and practices or organizational culture, and are a way of envisioning possible new realities based upon creative narrative recreations of past events and experiences (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Boje, 1993). In this manner, narratives link an organization's past, present, and future. Considered in terms of *power*, narratives can be used by organizations to discursively construct and reconstruct "truth", which is presented differently, depending

on the audience, to dramatize control, compel belief, and colonise memory in a manner that avoids questioning and challenge (Brown, 1985). Finally, narratives form *identity* through grand narratives of community, culture, ethnicity, society, family, and individual personality over time (Rappaport, 2000).

The narratives collected on organizational compassion during the Brisbane floods certainly shared aspects of sensemaking, communication, politics, power, and change, as well as identity and identification. The interesting thing about my data in comparison to the Rhodes and Brown (2005) analysis, however, is that while Rhodes and Brown describe narratives constructed *by* organizations, my data consists of narratives constructed *by employees about* organizations.

### *Sequence analysis*

Sequence analysis was used as an additional research methodology in Chapter 4. As I applied narrative analysis to the interview transcripts from 25 interviewees whose work was affected by the Brisbane floods, I noticed a pattern in the unfolding of the organization compassion responding events the interviewees described. I therefore concluded that my data demanded to be analysed using sequence analysis, a methodology researchers use to assess the unfolding of events in a narrative context (Anheier & Katz, 2006; Griffin, 1993).

Sequence analysis is a response to a shift in focus in the social sciences where analysis has changed from units to context, from attributes to connections, and from causes to events (Abbott, 1995). Sequence analysis has been used to study qualitative data relating to all varieties of social phenomena. Examples of sequence analysis within social science include analyses of the stages in career path development (Abbott & Hrycak, 1990; Blair-Loy, 1999; Chan, 1995), the rhetorical structure of sociological articles (Abbott & Barman, 1997), and the successive steps in ritual dance performances (Abbott & Forrest, 1986).

There is no single technique used in sequence analysis but its most important feature is analysis of the ordered nature of elements in a dataset (Abbott & Tsay, 2000).

Following sequence analysis in biology, some social researchers have developed software to calculate complex quasi-statistical algorithms for assessing the distances

between the sequences found in a dataset (Abbott, 1995; Abbott & Hrycak, 1990; Ragin & Strand, 2008). We applied sequence analysis by coding the *order of events* interviewees described in their recounting of their flood experiences. Our rich qualitative data sufficiently demonstrated the sequential materialisation of compassion responding without a need for further analysis using quasi-quantitative-statistical methodologies.

### *Discursive analysis*

Discursive analysis is used in a study of 278 user comments from two online newspaper articles described in Chapter 5. The context for this study came about as I struggled to gain access to an organization to study compassion in the organizational setting. I enrolled into the doctoral program in March 2010 and successfully completed my Doctoral Assessment in November 2010 with a proposal to research compassion within organizations. In January 2011, the Brisbane CBD was evacuated due to flooding of the Brisbane River and I decided to make the Brisbane floods the context for my research. Through the summer of 2010 and autumn of 2011, I struggled to gain access to a Brisbane-based organization to study the support provided (or lack of) by the organization to employees during the floods. While waiting to gain access to research participants, in March 2011, I undertook this discursive study of two online newspaper reports on compassion related issues, generating data from 278 user comments from two online news stories. *The Courier Mail* article described victims who had lost their lives in the Queensland (Australia) floods of 2010/2011, with 109 user comments mostly debating the legitimacy of a receiver of compassionate support. *The Guardian* article reported on tourists from the UK and other western countries who travel to developing African and Asian countries to volunteer in orphanages, with 159 user comments debating the legitimacy of a giver of compassionate support. These unsolicited comments were a source of rich data indicating the complex power asymmetries embedded within compassion relations. I wrote up the findings with my supervisors Pitsis and Clegg for a special edition of the *Journal of Business Ethics*, which features as Chapter Five in this thesis.

Discursive analysis is an established tradition in the study of power and organizations (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000). It is a methodology pioneered by luminaries such as Foucault (1977) and Clegg (1975; 1989), among others. Compassion, much as power, is



a subtle concept and as Clegg, Courpasson and Philips (2006) argue, discourse analysis “takes the mind out of the body” and materialises it in the language of discourse (p. 319). Texts and language flow through day-to-day rhetoric and discourse. There is no necessity for the construction of complex instruments of research when all the intricacy a researcher could want is available in the mundane discourses of routine life. The study of such texts in discursive research does not entail any particular practice for collecting data or analysis (Grant & Hardy, 2004). Rather, it is constituted and defined by its theoretical assumption that reality is socially constructed, privileging certain ways of thinking, talking, and constructing knowledge about particular topics, while dismissing others. Discursive analysis in organizational studies seeks to unravel the ways that discourse orders things (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000).

Alvesson and Karreman (2000) present a model for organizational discursive analysis that they describe as a ladder from micro discourse to macro Discourse (with a big ‘D’). Micro-level analysis involves analysis of language as a social text in a micro context. Meso-level analysis consists of looking for general social themes in the broader societal context. Mega-level analysis looks for signs of domination, control, and moral issues within an organizations culture or ideology. Alvesson and Karreman’s ladder approach to discursive analysis acknowledges texts as complex social artefacts.

### **Contribution the thesis makes to the literature**

The essential contribution of this thesis is to advance debate and knowledge within the field of organizational compassion research, specifically conceptualising organizational compassion as embedded within relations of power. My research has emphasised three major limitations inherent in theorising and research on compassion within organizations. These relate to its focus on compassion as a psychological state, rather than as a social construct; its tendency to neglect the power considerations that are inherent in compassion relations and its neglect of the negative outcomes of compassion relations that naturally arise alongside the positive ones. In bringing attention to these limitations, I have not sought to undermine the efforts of researchers studying organizational compassion but rather to contribute further to them by providing a more nuanced and mature understanding of organizational compassion relations. The research findings have demonstrated compassion as a social-historical construct, as embedded in power relations, and as having dynamic dualism in terms of positive and negative

outcomes. I have also presented and applied frameworks based upon genealogy, practice theory and circuits of power to bring attention to the social constitution, power relations and dynamic dualism inherent within compassion relations. The articulation and presentation of these frameworks constitute another important contribution to the study of organizational compassion. Other related contributions include providing a sociological definition of organization; providing specific prescriptions for the development of a compassionate organization and providing a model of compassion legitimacy evaluative criteria.

### *Sociological definition*

A sociological definition of compassion within organizations was required to address the limitations of the psychological definition that dominates in organizational compassion theory and research as noticing, feeling, and responding to pain. Consequently, I have defined organizational compassion as a collective capability for *ongoing concern* about others' well-being within the organization, *assessments* of compassion legitimacy by givers and receivers, and *decisions to respond* by providing, accepting, or refusing compassionate support – which *reinforces power relations* and produces *mixed outcomes* of positivity and negativity. The significant contribution of this definition, which has been supported by empirical research findings, is that it includes both givers and receivers; accounts for power relations as well as suggesting the potential for both positive and negative outcomes in compassion relations.

### *Implications for nurturing organizational compassion as an ongoing process*

A second contribution has been to articulate three practical policy implications for nurturing a compassionate organization as an ongoing process, rather than as a reactionary episodic event. The first is that managers and researchers wishing to nurture a compassionate organization should use compassionate organizational categorisation schemas and discourses in describing and engaging with employees. The second is that compassion must be embedded within ongoing policies, routines, contingencies, and practices. The third implication is that even in organizations where a sincere attempt is made to provide support to employees, this support will be experienced in both positive and negative ways. Therefore, rather than assuming positive outcomes, these need to be assessed on an ongoing basis. In summary, compassion cannot be faked in the moment of crisis because the intensity of crisis forces a 'moment of truth' where actual

organizational values and attitudes are revealed; therefore it must be nurtured as an ongoing process in times of relative normality.

### *Sequential materialisation of compassion responding*

Another contribution to the literature on organizing compassion has been to highlight the roles played by object-to-human interactions in the materialisation of compassion responding as a sequential sociomaterial process. Here compassion organizing is conceptualised as a complex process involving multiple networks of victims and helpers, the state, companies, NGOs, the media, as well as insurance agencies. Our study found sociomateriality generally materialises compassion responding in five sequential ‘events’ of: 1) communication technologies; 2) policy and resource access; 3) tangible support; 4) supporting others; and 5) reconnecting. We suggest that in the materialisation of organizational compassion responding, human agency is ethically accountable to compassionately intervene in the sociomaterial configurations that cause others undue harm.

### *Social model of compassion legitimacy criteria*

I have also articulated a model of compassion legitimacy criteria that people use to justify or contest the giving and receiving of compassionate support. My research suggests that people generally interpret a person to be worthy of receiving compassionate support when they are not responsible for their own suffering; they had no prior knowledge of the risk of suffering; they have no means to address the situation or the suffering is rooted in deeper social issues. The same criteria apply in reverse with regard to the person who is not a legitimate receiver of support. Similarly, people generally interpret a person as a worthy and legitimate giver of compassionate support when profit is of little consideration in providing support, there is a legitimate relationship with the receiver (either as a friend/colleague, family, an authorised professional caregiver, government department, or reputable NGO), the receiver experiences positive outcomes as a result of the support, and support is not tied to conditions designed to give the provider greater advantage and make the receiver dependent. Again, these criteria apply in reverse with regard to the illegitimate giver of compassionate support. These legitimacy criteria suggest compassion relations are also highly contested as power relations. My co-authors and I suggest that researchers, managers, and policymakers within organizations can reflexively engage with these

criteria to develop their ethical strength by making better-informed decisions in organizational compassion practices.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, in this introduction I have presented a review of early organizational theories and approaches, which held that there is no place for emotions in rational organizations. These views were eventually challenged by more recent literature, which argued that in reality organizations are 'emotional cauldrons'. I suggested that it was within this context that the first publications on organisational compassion appeared in the late 1990s. Early individual efforts in the study of organizational compassion were carried forward by a community of scholars studying organizational compassion under the banner of POS. These scholars have published more than 15 academic publications on organizational compassion – representing the most in-depth body of literature on the topic. I reviewed this literature, bringing attention to three primary gaps or limitations – all centred on the under-acknowledgement of the role of power in compassion relations. I presented a review of theoretical and empirical research efforts where I have sought to address these limitations. This effort has brought about several original contributions to knowledge of organizational compassion dynamics. These include the articulation of a sociologically based definition of organizational compassion, several practical prescriptions for the nurturing of a compassionate organization, and a model of compassion legitimacy criteria. A common feature of these contributions is that they reveal organizational compassion as embedded in relations of power.

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## Chapter One

The concern of this thesis is with understanding organizational compassion as complex social process embedded within relations of power. Two of the most significant theorists of power were Nietzsche and Foucault (Mahon, 1992). They described power as operating at the deepest levels of society in a manner that is mostly invisible, making its influence all the more insidious. Nietzsche, and later Foucault, developed a genealogical method to make visible the unseen ways power influences social practices through unquestioned assumptions, values, and knowledge. The power of socially accepted knowledge is in the taken-for-grantedness of truths that are in reality socially constructed – often purposefully by powerful ruling elites. By applying the genealogical method, Nietzsche and Foucault sought to uncover the assumptions of taken-for-granted knowledge, and thereby to divest social knowledge of its power. Essentially, application of genealogical theory entails seeking to uncover how the truths of a particular historical period transfer to another without analytical questioning either of the teleological assumptions, or of the historical switchmen who stand to benefit from their perpetuation (Clegg, Courpasson, and Phillips, 2006).

In this chapter submitted to the *Journal of Management Inquiry*, my co-authors (my supervisors Clegg and Pitsis) and I apply the genealogical method to exploring organizational compassion. We structure our analysis on a model involving the three axes of knowledge, power, and subject. Investigating Nietzsche and Foucault's theorising on each of these topics, we apply their ideas to construct a genealogy of compassion in organizations. Our analysis finds the history of compassion in organizational theory and practice as rooted in a concern with more efficient employee discipline, motivation, and productivity, rather than actual care and compassion. Despite these less than noble origins, we conclude that organizational compassion can nevertheless remain an important social objective. We qualify, however, that this value will normally be conditional on researchers and practitioners not simply assuming compassion is good, but rather reflexively engaging with the complexities of compassion's asymmetric power dynamics and potential subjectifying effects on individuals.

**“I used to care but things have changed<sup>2</sup>”: A Genealogy of Compassion in  
Organizational Theory**

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<sup>2</sup> The title comes from “Things have changed”, composed by Bob Dylan, copyright 1999 Special Rider Music.

**“I used to care but things have changed”:**

**A Genealogy of Compassion in Organizational Theory**

**Abstract**

In this paper we explore Nietzsche’s concerns about compassion and its’ contribution to the weakening of society, and compare and contrast Nietzsche’s idea with Foucault’s theorizing on the humanization of society as a mode of control in the context of business organizations’ use of compassion as a technology of power. Using a genealogical method we trace the history of concern with compassion in organizational theory and practice as a mode of employee discipline, motivation, and productivity. The paper is structured on a model articulated by Foucault, rooted in Nietzsche’s work, involving the three axes of knowledge, power and subject. This structure serves both as a framework for our investigation into the works of Nietzsche and Foucault as well as for our investigation into compassion in organizations.

**Keywords**

Positive organizational scholarship; compassion; positive psychology; organization studies; genealogy; power; Nietzsche; Foucault.

“This problem of the *value* of compassion and of the morality of compassion... *we stand in need of a critique of moral values, the value of these values itself should first of all be called into question*”.

Nietzsche (1998, pp. 7-8)

## **Introduction**

Compassion is viewed as an eternal and foundational principle in major world religions such as Christianity and Buddhism. In *2 Corinthians* (1:3-4) Jesus is described as “The father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves received from God”. In the Buddhist tradition compassion is defined as that which makes the heart of the noble quiver at the suffering of others – where these others are not restricted to humans but also include all sentient beings (Narada, 2006). Buddhist compassion involves feeling others’ pain as one’s own, recognising that all beings are entangled in the same cycle of suffering (Goldstein, 1976). Inherent within Buddhist understanding is that by expressing compassion for others, the giver receives personal benefits of inner well-being and enlightenment.

While faith and philosophy interpret compassion in terms of absolute truths, social science must be more empirically nuanced and theoretically justified. In this article we employ a genealogical method referring to the works of Nietzsche and Foucault. We begin with an initial review of the existing literature on compassion in organizing. We primarily present literature from the field of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS), because this field represents the most in depth and systematic body of work on compassion in organizations. We show that while POS has advanced understanding of compassion several gaps remain for exploration. These gaps involve under



acknowledgement of (1) the social construction of compassion, (2) the mutual constitution of compassion relations by both givers and receivers in power relations, and (3) the ‘subjectification’ of participants in compassion relations.

We address these gaps by referring to the works of Nietzsche and Foucault to construct a genealogical study of compassion in organization theory using the axes of knowledge, power, and subject. We draw upon these authors because of their pioneering genealogical work in acknowledging the social constitution of taken-for-granted social practices—including a social emphasis on compassion and humanitarianism (Sznajder, 1998). Foucault’s work has been especially significant in the field of organization studies, questioning notions of science as a legislated regime of truth and inspiring attempts to redefine disciplinary analysis in the organizations field (Burrell, 1988; Calas & Smircich, 1999; Clegg, 1989, 1994; Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994).

Our research focuses on the social-historical construction of compassion in organizations, particularly on how the new emphasis on compassion within organization can be interpreted as a form of domination and control, a technology of power. In raising these questions, our objective is not to undermine the efforts of scholars researching organizational compassion. Rather we seek to enhance the body of scholarship by bringing a revitalized realism and deeper understanding of politics to the interpretation of organizational compassion. To this end, our questions echo the similar question raised by Nietzsche (1998, pp. 7-8) in the *Genealogy of Morals* with which we tagged this introduction.

### **Compassion in Organization Studies**

Compassion has increasingly been researched under the banner of Positive Organizational Scholarship, a relatively new direction within organizational sciences

concerned with studying that “which is positive, flourishing, and life-giving within organizations” (Cameron & Gaza, 2004, p. 1). POS parallels positive psychology, which has shifted away from the traditional focus of psychology on deviance, illness and pathology towards a concern with strengths, virtue, positive affect, flow-engagement, and meaning (Berstein, 2003; Dutton & Glynn, 2008). Areas of interest within positive organizational scholarship include the development of human strengths, virtue, forgiveness, resilience, courage, and other positive emotions within the organizational context. Amongst these, compassion has generated considerable interest from positive organizational scholars (see Dutton et al., 2007; Frost, 1999). Indeed so central is the concept of compassion that POS scholars developed the Compassion Lab which includes a website ([www.compassionlab.org](http://www.compassionlab.org)) on which resources relating to organizational compassion theory and research are made accessible, including publications, on-line presentations, and teaching materials. We have limited the scope in this article to ten leading POS publications on compassion in organizations identified as written by members of the Compassion Lab (see Table 1). This literature includes six articles published in leading organization and management journals, and four chapters from academic book collections.

**Table 1: POS theorising and research on compassion in organizations**

<b>Authors (Year of publication)</b>	<b>Defines compassion as recognising, feeling, &amp; responding to pain</b>	<b>Organizational definition as collective recognising, feeling, &amp; responding</b>	<b>Acknowledges negative effects of compassion relations</b>
<b>Journal articles</b>			
Frost (1999)	Dictionary definition	No	Yes – section on toxic relations
Dutton, Frost, Worline, Lilius & Kanov (2002)	No definition	No	No
Kanov, Maitlis, Worline, Dutton, Frost & Lilius (2004)	Yes	Yes	Yes – few sentences on emotional burden
Dutton, Worline, Frost & Lilius (2006)	Yes	No	Yes – under limitations
Lilius, Worline, Maitlis, Kanov, Dutton & Frost (2008)	Yes	No	No
Lilius, Worline, Dutton, Kanov, Maitlis & Frost (2011)	Yes	Yes	Yes – extensive consideration of emotional burden
<b>Book Chapters</b>			
Frost, Dutton, Worline & Wilson (2000)	No	No	Yes – suggested further study on power
Frost, Dutton, Maitlis, Lilius, Kanov & Worline (2006)	Yes	Yes	Yes – entire section on critical perspective
Dutton, Lilius, & Kanov (2007)	Yes	No	No
Lilius, Kanov, Dutton, Worline & Maitlis (2012)	Yes	Yes	Yes – suggested further research

POS literature primarily identifies compassion as a psychological state, defining it as a three-fold process of recognizing, feeling, and responding to another’s pain (Table 1, column 1) (Dutton, Glynn, & Spreitzer, 2006; Dutton et al., 2007; Frost et al., 2006; Lilius et al., 2012; Lilius et al., 2011; Lilius et al., 2008). This standard POS definition of compassion has been expanded to the organizational context by Kanov et al. (2004) as *collective* recognizing, feeling, and responding to suffering, a model that has been embraced by subsequent POS studies (Table 1, column 2) (Frost et al., 2006; Lilius et al., 2012; Lilius et al., 2011). This definition is limited, as it is psychological in nature and underrepresents the sociological and power political dynamics in the experience of compassion. It does not consider compassion as a social construct embedded within power relations in which participants experience both positive and negative outcomes

(Berlant, 2004; 1987, 1997; 2003; van Kleef et al., 2008), often in quite ambivalent ways.

For the most part POS theorizing and research on compassion focuses on positive findings indicating that compassionate dealings with staff, particularly in times of crisis, lead to many beneficial outcomes for the employee and the organization (Lilius et al., 2012). These include enabling post-traumatic employee healing and learning to adapt, as opposed to giving rise to emotions of resentment and anger (Dutton et al., 2002), as well as strengthening of positive emotions and commitment to the organization and co-workers (Frost et al., 2000; Lilius et al., 2008). Other outcomes include building resources of pride, trust, connection, and motivation; strengthening values of dignity, respect, and common good; and cultivating critical relational skills through enhanced emotional sensitivity (Dutton et al., 2007).

POS research suggests that organizational compassion can be facilitated through processes whereby leaders cultivate and legitimize compassion relations by paying attention to employee suffering (Dutton et al., 2002; Dutton, Worline, et al., 2006). Regular meetings and open architecture also facilitate processes that create conditions that foster acknowledgement of suffering as they ensure that people regularly congregate and notice irregular states of suffering (Kanov et al., 2004). Mechanisms for organizational compassion responding described by POS research include promoting values of respect for humanity and individual personality (Dutton et al., 2007; Dutton, Worline, et al., 2006) and establishing harm notification networks that systematize awareness of employees in need. Empirical examples of policy mechanisms presented as supporting compassionate responding include allowing employees to donate unused vacation time to employees in need (Lilius et al., 2008) and creating formal roles (such as ombudsman) and formal programs (employee assistance programs) (Lilius et al.,

2012). These structures support a given hegemonic idea of socially accepted and idealistic norms and organizational values all geared towards positive outcomes.

Rather than assuming compassion's effects are necessarily positive and beneficial, we argue that the experiences of givers and receivers in compassion relations are likely to be multifaceted, on-going, and ambiguous in implication. While power relations and negative outcomes of compassion relations are acknowledged in the POS literature, they are hardly developed, occurring largely in the "limitations" or "further research" sections of the articles (Table 1, column 3) (Dutton, Worline, et al., 2006; Frost, 1999; Frost et al., 2006; Frost et al., 2000; Kanov et al., 2004; Lilius et al., 2012; Lilius et al., 2011). Our concerns are that the treatment of compassion in contemporary organizational inquiry views compassion as a positive emotional state, ignoring the roles played by social interpretation, power relations, and the subjectification of compassion givers and receivers. We seek to address these tensions by employing genealogical method, after Nietzsche and Foucault, to study compassion in organizations. We will illuminate the three axes of knowledge, power, and subject explicit in Foucault and implicit in Nietzsche. We will show how this genealogical method can better frame inquiry into organization studies that deals with compassion as a complex, dynamic relational phenomenon.

## **Genealogy**

The genealogical method as a process of argument and critique was founded by Nietzsche and gradually embraced by Foucault (Minson, 1985). The method of genealogy is characterized by addressing current values held in high esteem by tracing their historical contingency and ignoble conditions of emergence. Rather than searching for pristine purity in the origin of concepts, genealogy seeks to uncover a complex

multiplicity of relational forces that provide the conditions for the emergence of entities, values, and events. Current values often have a forgotten or hidden history. The transformation of murky origins into normally accepted values is a matter of concrete histories that demonstrate the firm disassociation of origins and outcomes.

Nietzsche's genealogy is itself value laden as he used it with the intent of enhancing life and creativity (Hussain, 2011; Mahon, 1992). His approach was to question prejudices of traditional philosophy which favors notions of substance, unity, duration, identity, materiality, cause and being—relocating notions traditionally considered as eternal into processes of becoming. According to Nietzsche all Platonic notions of form in Continental European philosophy needed to be uprooted and given an all-too-human spin, to point out their shortcomings and dangers.

Foucault (1985) personally acknowledged his roots in the Nietzschean genealogical tradition, a relationship analyzed by many scholars (for examples see Lash, 1984; Merquior, 1987; Rorty, 1986; Sheridan, 1980). Much as his predecessor Nietzsche, Foucault's genealogies are focused on undermining taken-for-granted current assumptions to provide opportunities for enhancing life. In contrast with Nietzsche's speculative inductive arguments, however, Foucault's approach is grounded in scholarship, interrogating seemingly unimportant details and statements in apparently obscure documents, to recreate the historical conditions leading to current conditions of existence. Foucault's analyses involve more sophistication and detail than anything found in the Nietzschean corpus—of the two, it has been said, Foucault is the better genealogist (Mahon, 1992; Minson, 1985).

### Three Axes

In this article we structure our genealogical analysis of compassion in organizational theory and research around three axes articulated by Foucault (1983): the axes of knowledge, power and subject. Foucault mentions throughout his work that the axes are inseparable, that if one focuses on power, one will find knowledge as well as the subject. We shall separate the axes for academic clarity. The knowledge axis relates to the “truths” through which people are constituted as subjects. In defining the nature of reality knowledge creates the conditions for normalizing and legitimizing accepted values. The power axis relates to the relational processes that constitute people as subjects through interactions with others. Power is embedded in all social relational exchanges—defining the nature of the relationships and of the individuals engaged within them. The subject axis relates to the ethics through which people are constituted as moral agents. In promoting certain value as ethical and others as wrong, a regime of subjectification is reproduced, using the individual’s self-surveillance and control as a mode of social ordering. Although there is no general agreement among scholars as to how to label Foucault’s axes, there is a consensus on their importance throughout Foucault’s later works. Minson (1985), for example, describes these axes as ethics, power, and subjectivity; while Hall (2001) discusses “Foucault’s major themes” of discourse, power/knowledge, and subject. In this article we use knowledge, power, and subject, as labeled by Mahon (1992).

Acknowledging that these themes are present in each of Foucault’s later works, we nonetheless select different works to highlight each axis. Foucault’s (1986a) *Archaeology of knowledge* is the basis for our analysis of the knowledge axis, his *Discipline and punish* (Foucault, 1977) is the work we use to look at the power axis, while for analysis of the axis of subject, we use *The care of the self* (Foucault, 1986b),

the final book of his three volume *History of sexuality*. The earliest of these works, the *Archaeology of Knowledge* only hints at Foucault being a Nietzschean genealogist while from 1975 onwards, with the appearance of *Discipline and Punish*, and with the appearance of the first volume of his multivolume *History of sexuality* the following year, Foucault's work demonstrates his maturity and self-awareness as a master of the Nietzschean genealogical method.

We also see these axes as the prime themes in Nietzsche's writings. We concur with Mahon (1992) that they can be read consecutively as the topic for each of the three chapter's of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of morals*: chapter one dealing with knowledge, two with power, and three with subjectification. Although Nietzsche uses different terms and even definitions, we read him as articulating a corresponding model with constructs of *meaning* or *interpretation* (knowledge), *will* (power), and *goal* (subjectification). In the final sections of the third chapter Nietzsche (1998, pp. 123-124) discusses the dominant Western morality or 'ascetic ideal' as he terms it, as a "closed system of will, goal, and interpretation" centered on a morality of compassion that needs to be challenged. In his own words:

For what is the meaning of this power of this ascetic ideal, the *monstrous nature* of its power? Why has it been granted this amount of space? Why has it not met with more effective resistance? The ascetic ideal expresses a will: *where* is the opposing will that might express an *opposing ideal*? The ascetic ideal expresses a *goal*—and this goal is sufficiently universal that all other interests of human existence to seem narrow and petty in comparison; it relentlessly interprets periods, peoples, men in terms of this goal, it allows no other interpretation, no other goal, it reproaches, negates, confirms exclusively with reference to *its* interpretation (--and has there ever existed a system of interpretation more fully



thought through to its end); it subordinates itself to no other power, it believes rather in its own prerogative over all other powers—it believes that no power can exist on earth without first having had conferred upon it a meaning, a right to existence, a value as an instrument in the services of *its* work, as a path to *its* goal, to its *single* goal... Where is the opposition to this closed system of will, goal, and interpretation?

We address Nietzsche's call to oppose closed systems of interpretation within the context of compassion within organizations. Our objective is not to dismantle the system but rather to bring attention to its operation. For strategies of power operate everywhere, and wherever there is power, there is resistance—and both power and resistance can be thought of as negative and positive (Clegg et al 2006). In embracing this challenge we use Foucault's (1983) articulation of the three domains of genealogy as the framework for investigation. Under the heading of each axis we will, in sequence, look at Nietzsche and Foucault's genealogies of knowledge, power, and subject, which we apply to the historical development of concern with compassion in organizations, particularly as it is articulated in the POS literature.

## **Knowledge**

### *Nietzsche on knowledge*

In the first chapter of Nietzsche's (1998) *Genealogy of morals*, he demonstrates the capacity of knowledge to define the nature of reality and thereby create the conditions for legitimizing certain values. In short, Nietzsche gives an account of morality where valuations of good, bad, and evil are held to be socially and historically constructed, and embedded within power relations. Nietzsche constructs a historical account to establish the distinct origins of the valuations "good/bad" and "good/evil" where the two senses

of “good” have radically opposed meanings. Nietzsche is critical of the “English psychologists” lack of historicity in seeking to do moral genealogy by explaining values such as the “good” of altruism and in terms of a utility that was forgotten as the value was normalized. According to Nietzsche, it was the patricians, elites, the nobility, the aristocrats, who, in ancient times, called themselves and their powers “good”, proclaiming their values to be life asserting and determining what was to be labeled weak and life denying, declaring it to be “bad”. Gradually, the resentment and envy the weak felt in the face of oppression by the powerful gave rise to “a slave revolt in morality” led by the priests. Aristocratic values were inverted and a “slave morality” arose wherein the pride, courage, strength, and valor that aristocratic morality valued as “good” were equated with “evil”, and weak qualities of meekness, pity, and compassion, were called “good”. This priestly mode of valuation of “good/evil” began with Judaism and was carried forward by Christian morality, which was embraced by the oppressed masses of the Roman Empire. By inventing the valuation of evil, slave morality is provided with a constant enemy. For unlike noble morality, which forgets about its enemies immediately after having dealt with them, slave morality requires enemies to sustain itself. The weak constantly seek to vanquish the strong by deceiving themselves into the belief that the meek are blessed and will attain eternal life. Nietzsche concludes his first chapter explaining a struggle over thousands of years between the opposing valuations “good/bad” and “good/evil”. What began with Judaism as the triumph of *ressentiment* or bad conscience, was preserved by Christianity, paused by the Renaissance, resumed by the Reformation, and refreshed by the French Revolution. In defining what constitutes reality and morality, knowledge creates the conditions for legitimacy.

*Foucault on knowledge*

Foucault's method for questioning accepted knowledge is apparent in *The archaeology of knowledge* (Foucault, 1986a). Foucault's genealogy involves challenging accepted knowledge claims through historical analysis pinpointing how the meaning of these knowledge claims is often inverted over time. In this work Foucault directs his analysis towards discursive formations, bracketing issues of truth and meaning. Rather than seeking deeper or transcendental sources of meanings in discourse, Foucault references historical documents to analyze the conditions in which truth claims and meanings come to exist in different historical periods. Avoiding hermeneutical or anthropological interpretation, or even a search for structural homogeneity in a discursive entity, he restricts his focus to analyzing historical differences and mutations that emerge in discursive practices. In questioning the historical emergence of various discursive formations such as values, Foucault reveals the sources of the value's anthropological constraints.

Foucault (1977) applies this approach throughout *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* where he interrogates French historical documents to challenge the commonly accepted knowledge that the penal reforms that abolished public torture and executions in the early modern era were driven by humanitarian concerns. On the contrary Foucault suggests that the "humanitarian" reforms were instituted as part of a continuing process of subjectification—the construction of the modern individual subject. According to Foucault's analysis, the public spectacle of torture and execution formerly seen as providing a spectacle of the sovereign's power ensuring public fear and subordination to his or her rule, instead revealed that the sovereign's power actually depended on the people's participation and agreement with the sovereign's verdicts. Problems arise particularly in cases where the masses disagreed with the sovereign and sympathized with the prisoner. At such times scenes of public torture and execution

became sites of resistance and conflict as riots occurred, assisting the prisoner to escape. Eventually, the high political premium paid for the public execution meant it was ultimately non-efficient. The excessive and haphazard force of the sovereign and his Jacobin successors had to be reformed to allow for greater stability of the properties held by the bourgeoisie. Reformists lobbied for the even distribution of the power to judge and punish, where the state became a form of public power. Punishment thereby became “gentle”, not out of humanitarian concerns but out of concern for greater state order, stability and control. Foucault’s historical analysis thereby challenges accepted knowledge about the humanitarian concern of reformists and inverts it with an opposite concern of more effective control and subjugation of society.

#### *Knowledge of compassion in organization studies*

We will now apply Nietzsche and Foucault’s genealogical method to questioning the increasing value placed on care and compassion in management and organizational discourse. Our approach traces the history of the management discipline leading up to the emergence of the human relations movement whence care of the worker has arisen as an increasing concern. We also look at research indicating that over the past century, accepted knowledge about how to be compassionate has also changed. Our analysis indicates that even with the increased attention to care and compassion in management and organizational discourse, the prevailing concern has always been about productivity, efficiency, and profit—where humans were viewed more as machines than as people. Care and compassion in organizations thereby emerges as another malleable tool that the manager can draw upon to achieve greater efficiency and productivity within the organization.

What is missing in conventional genealogies of management is a little prehistory. One influential recent account of the historical origins of American management, referring to “management’s dirty little secret”, traces modern management’s genesis back to the period of pre-Civil War US ante-bellum slavery (Cooke, 2003), and the development of a technology of power for controlling slave labor. Historical texts from this period indicate that the terms *management*, *productivity*, *experiment*, *science*, *cost saving*, *human machines*, and *efficiency* were used in reference to the management of slaves on American plantations where owners were concerned about the management of their assets. Slavery is not mentioned in the dominant accounts.

The dominant historical account of the evolution of management holds that organizational science initially emerged with the industrial revolution in the US in the late 1800s (Shenhav, 1995, 1999; Shenhav & Weitz, 2000). At this time a group of engineers united as the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) agreeing to standardize the symbols, labels, and letter coding they used in their practice. Their objective was to *regulate uncertainty* by making production predictable and rational, seeking understanding of the scientific laws that applied in the operation of the physical materials and machines they worked. Later the ASME translated its approach from the technical domain to the social and organizational domains for the operation of “human machines” (Shenhav & Weitz, 2000). As the industrial revolution progressed, engineers were increasingly positioned as a new employee category, the manager. *Technical uncertainty* was reframed as social and *organizational uncertainty*, giving birth to “scientific management” a scientifically justified structure of political control. Frederick Taylor, an engineer, was the leading theorist and advocate of scientific management and so this approach came to be known as Taylorism.

Taylor observed work, redesigned it, and conducted workplace training to achieve greater organizational output. In *The principles of scientific management*, Taylor (1911) describes four main management principles: 1) replace rule of thumb work practices with scientific methods, 2) scientifically select and train workers, 3) cooperate as a group rather than working as individuals, and 4) appropriately divide tasks between management (planning) and workers (execution). Illustrating the effectiveness of his methods, Taylor demonstrated that workers who carried iron ingots according to a specific work-rest schedule increased their productivity from 12.5 tons of iron moved per day to 47.0, with increased worker earnings. Efficiency was also increased, reducing the costs of moving a ton of iron from 9.2 cents per ton to 3.9 cents. Taylorism, as a system of control over the workers, dominated management theory until 1932 (Cooke, 2003; Morgan, 2006).

By the 1930s, scientific management was falling out of favor, a sentiment reinforced by the emergence of the great depression when people questioned how efficient scientific organizations could cause such turmoil. In this context Mayo's (1975, 2003) theories emphasizing the importance of human relations over mechanical determination gained appeal. Mayo is famous for explaining the surprising result of productivity experiments that involved manipulating lighting and other variables at the General Electric plant in Hawthorne, Chicago (Smith, 1998). No matter how the variables were manipulated with increases and decreases of lighting, productivity kept raising. Mayo, at the time a professor at Harvard Business School, explained this outcome in terms of the following principle: when workers form an informal group of social relations in response to the interest shown in them (in this case by academic researchers), productivity rises (Mayo, 1975, 2003). The principle has come to be known as the Hawthorne effect. Mayo's theories did not explicitly legitimate exercising of compassion; rather they advocate the

importance of paying attention to the human social and emotional needs of employees. As enlightened as they may appear, however, they are steeped in the same objectives as Taylorism (O'Connor, 1999). Just as Foucault's penal reformists were not concerned with being humane but with social control so in Mayo we find less of an emphasis on the human needs of employees and rather more a concern with interests of increasing control, efficiency, and productivity—via the agency of a scientific approach to management. Mayo and his colleagues were largely responsible for legitimizing managerial control as an academic discipline as a “science of organizational behavior” (O'Connor, 1999). The idea of managing people was “given” the scientific-empirical stamp of appeal and approval, which proved so successful in other disciplines and fields of study.

From the perspective of the philosophy of science, however, the very idea of “scientific management” is a farce as humans are not subject to the same precise functional cause and effect explanations as in physics or biology (Fournier & Grey, 2000; Ghoshal, 2005). On the contrary, human action is associated with sociological, teleological, and psychological explanations. Yet, the “science” misnomer in “scientific management” is not entirely accidental. Rather, it serves to dehumanize workers and their organizational context, reducing them an element to be calculated in calibrating the rational precision of machines (Frost et al., 2006).

It might be argued that the recent focus on compassion in organization shares a similar managerial agenda. In making the case for organizational compassion POS literature highlights the organizational benefits including strengthened positive attitude and commitment towards the organization and co-workers (Frost et al., 2000; Lilius et al., 2008), minimization of employee resentment and anger after painful experiences (Dutton et al., 2002), and increased motivation and value for the common good (Dutton

et al., 2007). Positive emotions such as compassion are promoted as an efficient form of organizational control and increased productivity. Fineman (2006b) for one, makes the assertion of emotional engineering, claiming that the dark side of POS's promotion of positivity in organizations is its use as a tool for empowerment that does not, in fact, empower: the employee is not offered economic, social, and political tools so much as rhetoric. Fineman further questions POS assumptions that its knowledge has an absolute goodness/positivity, suggesting that goodness/positivity is a social construct, hence variable in different times, places, and circumstances.

Etymological inspection of changes in the way the word compassion is used, and the manners in which compassion is enacted in Western society support Fineman's (2006a, 2006b) assertions about the social construction of positive emotions such as compassion, a view that echoes the concerns of Nietzsche and Foucault. According to Garber (2004), between the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries the Latin derived word *com* (together) *passion* (suffer) had two usages. It was used to denote *suffering together* where compassion is a "fellow feeling" of suffering between equals. It was also used to denote *suffering on behalf of another* where compassion is not between equals but shown by one who is free from suffering, towards an unfortunate other who suffers. By the seventeenth century the first sense had fallen out of usage, leaving the latter sense with its associations that hover between condescension and charity.

Historically, modes of expressing compassion have also been seen to change.

Particularly illustrative of such change is Clark's (1997) discursive analysis of *The New York Times'* Neediest Cases Appeal between 1912 and 1972 with additional data from 1982, 1985, 1992, and 1996. She found this over the period, aid suggestions from *The Times* had evolved from a uni-dimensional view that held poverty as the single most serious plight with which suffering humanity must contend, to a multi-dimensional view



of hardship where emotions are given more significance than was previously the case. Consequently, the grounds for compassion encompass a wider spectrum of distressful emotions and complexes, such as “teen identity crisis,” “stress”, “psychological burnout”, and “midlife crisis”. Abuse and victimization also became more common themes in the *Times*’ Neediest Appeals.

Clark (1997) comments that such shifts in cultural notions of the norms of compassionate care do not arise from nowhere; often they are brokered by various interest groups or emotional entrepreneurs who clarify or reinforce established grounds for compassion and lobby for the adoption of new ones. Clark suggests that this greater inclusion is related to occupational groups such as social workers, probation officers, and psychologists adopting medical models in an attempt to borrow status from the medical professions (Simpson, 2010; Wampold, Ahn, & Coleman, 2001). “Victims” of inner demons or substances such as alcoholics, drug abusers, and problem gamblers are in need of continuous support on the basis of such models. The subject is “*normalized*” to the extent he or she adopts the recommendations of the model or program. The numbers of programs for such “disorders” have grown markedly over recent decades. Consequently, the number of compassion-worthy plights has also swelled as cases that justify the structured apparatuses that have emerged. The greeting card industry is an example of emotional entrepreneurship, promoting the expression of care, with the purchase of ready-made sympathy as a greeting card. Sympathy cards not only to express condolence on the loss of a loved one, but also sympathy for illness with the “get-well” card. Clark (1997) points out that the range of card-identified conditions has been expanding to include being “down”, working for an excessively “demanding boss”, and “coping” with household chores.

Overall, Garber (2004) and more significantly Clark's (1997) analyses lend support to Fineman's (2006b) criticism of the POS approach of presenting positive emotions such as compassion in absolute normative terms. Goodness/positivity is in fact a social construct with variable value according to the time, place, and circumstance.

Compassion is an abstract concept rather than a real "thing" be it a state, trait, or moral imperative, as often assumed in the reviewed literature on compassion in organization. Genealogical analysis suggests that the increased attention to compassion in society or organizations is as much, if not more, concerned with efficient social control enacted by emotional engineers and entrepreneurs as it is about care. The literature reviewed takes for granted the dominant discourse of hierarchies in which managers are responsible for the suffering or compassion meted out to people at work. Discursive formations that underlie the structure of knowledge and its intimate relations with values within organizations, in this sense, create subjects (subjectification). The objective is to make people more dependent, integrated, participatory, and conforming within society—or in the case of the literature reviewed, more committed, motivated, and positive in their attitude towards the organization in which they work and the society within which they operate. We now turn to consider the second of our three axes—the axis of power.

## **Power**

### *Nietzsche on power*

Nietzsche's view of power is founded on the notion of a "will to power" which is described in the second chapter of his *Genealogy of morals*. In this chapter Nietzsche describes the gradual civilization and moralization of human nature, with a corresponding decay in the "will to power" that underlies human behavior. The decay of this will is linked with the development of punishment and bad conscience or self-

remorse: *ressentiment*. The origin of punishment, according to Nietzsche, is a pre-moral creditor/debtor relationship. Development of an active memory establishes that promises can be made and control can be exercised over the future. Control over the future facilitates the development of a conventional morality. As autonomous individual products of this morality, humans come to see that they may inflict harm on those who fail to keep their promises. Punishment is a transaction in which pain is inflicted upon the breaker of promises (the debtor) as compensation to the person to whom the broken promise was made (the creditor). The erosion of the will to power is thereby linked to notions of guilt that are tied to the concept of debt and culminate in the self-doubt and negative conscience of Christianity. Nietzsche reminds us that power may be seen as the source of life enrichment and creativity, and the loss of such power as the cause of decay.

#### *Foucault on power*

Power did not become an explicit concern in Foucault's work until the genealogical phase of its development with *Discipline and Punish* (1977). Continuing with the theme of penal reform in the modern era, Foucault argues that the reformer's theory of "gentle" or humane punishment represented the initial shift away from the excesses of force as wielded by the sovereign, towards a more standardized mode of punishment. The next move towards the prison, however, was the consequence of the emergence in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century of a new "technology" of disciplining the body and the ontology of the "human as machine". This new discipline was concerned with the most minute and precise characteristics of the human body. Using this new technology, bodies were individuated for given tasks, control, training, and observation, enabling them to perform duties within newly emerging forms of economic, political, and military organizations. Foucault suggests that the implementation of individuality was within systems that

officially were egalitarian, such as an explicitly coded judicial framework and representative parliamentary regimes. In practice, however, the system that guaranteed rights was supported by non-egalitarian asymmetries of micro-power. These are the disciplines, such as psychology, medicine, criminology, and education, which create “docile bodies” that function mechanically in factories, military units, and classrooms. The construction of docile bodies by disciplinary institutions is done without excessive force. It requires constantly monitoring the movements of the bodies under control, and the molding of the body into the proper form by ensuring the internalization of the disciplinary individuality.

Bentham’s Panopticon design is the ultimate expression of such a modern disciplinary technology. In the Panopticon, a supervisor’s ability to watch many unseen ensures that power functions automatically—permanent in effect, even if discontinuous in action. The panopticon is centralised as if the hub of a wheel with many spokes radiating out, creating a cellular hexagon. Continuous surveillance induces those surveyed to adopt the dominant viewpoint and objectify themselves in terms of the panoptical gaze and the judgements that it registers. Such technologies of power became embedded in a wider network of schools, hospitals, military barracks, and factories. Operating under the scientific authority, this vast network of structures creates “disciplinary careers” that provide apparent freedom to the body, while colonizing the mind and soul. The panopticon is probably more widely used today than ever before: in work, corrections, commerce and military contexts, often electronically. Monitoring and surveillance by digital cameras has become part of a “normalised” network of subject control and power. Those who work with computers within organizations can be assured that their work behaviour is under scrutiny, as are mobile phones, ATM machines, convenience stores, neighbourhood streets, and so on.

### *Power in organizational compassion studies*

Power is deeply embedded in all social relational acts: as such it is of central importance in the analysis of organizations (Clegg and Haugaard 2009). Clegg (1989) describes power not as a thing with essential qualities but rather as relations between people struggling for meaning; in organizations, they do so in specific relations of production. Power thus concerns decisions made or delayed, certainty established or marginalized, actions taken or ignored, evils tolerated or addressed, privileges bestowed or withheld, and rights claimed or violated. And yet, despite the centrality of power in organizational life it has often been “overlooked”, “ignored”, “marginalized”, “trivialized”, “slighted”, and “restricted” in organizational discourse (Clegg et al., 2006, pp. 2, 6). This applies even more so when looking at the positive dimensions of power (Clegg et al., 2006), even within POS theory and research.

A prime example of the marginalizing of power in POS compassion literature that is relevant to our discussion is the widely used POS definition of compassion that we presented earlier. In this definition compassion is described as noticing, feeling, and responding to pain. Expanded to the organizational context it involves collective recognizing, feeling, and responding (Kanov et al., 2004). The problem with this definition is that it privileges the experience of the giver of compassion and ignores the experience of the receiver. It is a psychological definition, as opposed to one that is social-relational, and therefore not of great benefit to the organizational studies context. As a social relational process, compassion is mutually constituted by a giver and a receiver and therefore necessarily entails power inequalities that are created or reinforced through compassion exchanges. Power is embedded in compassion relations as they involve a person in a position to excise compassion or not, towards another who

may or may not choose to accept to become the object or subject of compassion (Bamford, 2007; Cartwright, 1984, 1988; Frazer, 2006; Frost et al., 2006).

As there is potential for both the giver and receiver in compassion relations to use the power of compassion for domination, control, and manipulation—compassion relations involve legitimacy assessments on both sides of the relation. With respect to the compassion giver, legitimacy and worthiness assessments focus on the power motives of the person providing support. The giving of compassion can patronize and belittle the receiver by highlighting their problems and deficiencies. Additionally, compassion can be given to manipulate the receiver into positions of intimacy or indebtedness (1987, 1997; Schmitt & Clark, 2006). Indebtedness certainly affects power relations and may be entered into voluntarily or imposed upon the receiver.

The power of the receiver in compassion relations is invested in their power to accept or refuse compassionate support. Refusal by a receiver can diminish a giver's social status, as well as reinforce the status of the person who rejects such support (1987, 1997; Schmitt & Clark, 2006). When a giver's assistance is accepted, public acknowledgment of such help through displays of gratitude can also be a way of raising the receiver's social status through linkages with influential supporters. The receiver's power is also invested in their perceived legitimacy as a victim needy of compassionate support.

Clark describes how issues are perceived as aligned with one or other end of a blame(less) continuum. The high power end of the continuum constitutes the blameless victim of fate, circumstance, others, or the "system". People who encounter a blameless problem are seen as "plagued", "befallen", or "besieged" and are highly worthy of compassion because they are victims of circumstance beyond their control.

Considerations of power and domination are even more significant when compassionate support is institutionalized at the organizational level. For an organization that demonstrates high capabilities for compassion, the returns can be great. Instilling hope and a strengthened sense of self-concept or personal identity, and greater member identification with the organization and co-workers, are just some of the employee benefits discussed earlier. Additionally, actions performed by a leader might propagate a projection of an image as a caring individual or organization. The aligning of the organization with a compassion worthy cause, such as philanthropic efforts or fundraisers, can also be enacted as a tool of power to increase employee motivation, effectiveness and efficiency; as well as a public relations maneuver to improve the public's perception of the organization (Frost et al., 2006).

At the heart of the approach called 'compassionate capitalism' is the idea that organizations can be more efficient, effective, profitable, when they engage with their employees and communities by making philanthropy part of their strategic mission (Kavan, 2005). This stands in contrast to Friedman's (1970) assertion that the sole purpose of an organization is to make profit for its shareholders and therefore companies should not devote resources to initiatives that distract from the profit margins. The ideology espoused by 'compassionate capitalism' is that companies wishing to achieve and sustain success in today's world, must value and practice community service, and invest resources of time, money, and expertise into that purpose. Advocates of this approach are critical to the common practice of isolating corporate giving within the silo of a single department under a single director – without a clear mission (Kavan, 2005).. The compassionate mission of the organization should be aligned with its strategic mission and embedded as a living and breathing part of its organizational culture. When the compassionate and corporate missions of an

organization are aligned, investment into compassionate giving will not come at the expense of business objectives, but will rather support them. Missions of this sort are part and parcel of public relations. Customers and shareholders will be more comfortable doing business with a company that has a reputation not only as a good place to do business, but also as a good member of the community. Values of corporate compassion and social responsibility will also instill a higher level of integrity within the employees.

The examples provided above indicate that organizational compassion relations are clearly relations of power. Unfortunately, however, the power aspects of compassion in organizations are mostly conspicuous by their absence from the organizational compassion literature. This privileging of knowledge about the positive aspects of compassion in organizations, while generally excluding or downplaying knowledge of its many potential negative effects, is itself an act of power.

## **Subject**

### *Nietzsche on subjectification*

For our analysis of Nietzsche's view on the subjectification of the individual, we turn to his discussion on the "ascetic ideal" in the third and final chapter of his *Genealogy of morals*. The ascetic ideal speaks to the human need for a goal – a reason for living. Nietzsche indicates that the weak turn to artists, philosophers, and priests, for this value. The artists however, turn to the philosophers, and through history "true" philosophers have gone under the guise of ascetic priests with slogans of "poverty, chastity, humility" to avoid persecution. For the priest, the ascetic ideal is the "supreme license for power". As the "saviour" of the physiologically inhibited and the weak from their on-going discontent, the ascetic priest has a range of disciplines. These include "innocent"



harmless strategies such as: a general silencing of the feeling of life, mechanical activities, and petty joys—especially “love of one's neighbor”, herd organization, and awakening a feeling of communal power whereby an individual's discontent with themselves is lost in their delight at the community's prosperity. The “guilty” strategy entails invoking an “orgy of feeling” or emotion and results in the weak becoming weaker and more dependent by reversing the direction of *ressentiment* inwards to oneself. The weak are instructed to seek the causes of their distress not in others but in themselves, in their own “sin”. The overall objective is “to *exploit* the bad instincts of all the suffering to the end of self-discipline, self-surveillance, and self-overcoming” (Nietzsche, 1998, p. 107).

Nietzsche views this ascetic ideal as responsible for all sorts of personal and social maladies. He further describes it as a closed system that has been imposed upon the entirety of civilization—not only in the West with Judaism and Christianity but also in the East with Indian Shankya, Vedanta, and Buddhism. He considers and dismisses different possible opponents of the ascetic ideal, including science. According to Nietzsche, science is rather the “most recent and noblest form” of the ascetic ideal. Any opposition to the ascetic ideal by science is only apparent. It has succeeded at merely demolishing the temporary outer appearances of the ideal, replacing it only with a scientific ideal that too rests on human society's self-contempt. Nietzsche (1998, p. 104) links this culture of self-contempt with a culture of compassion:

So that we ourselves especially, my friends, may defend ourselves at least for a little while longer against the two worst plagues which could have been reserved for us in particular—*against great disgust at man! against great compassion for man?...*

### *Foucault on subjectification*

Throughout Foucault's work we see an interest in the creation of the subject through various powers including dominant knowledge and ethics. Societal structures are supported by discursive practices based on dominant forms of embedded knowledge and power that creates the individual or subject. The structures—be they organizational, academic, military, or correctional are constituted by a system of codification which is essentially an institutionalized and normalized strategy of power and knowledge. The dyad power-knowledge is inseparable. Yet Foucault claims cryptically that where one finds power, there is always resistance. We find the clearest examples of resistance to power, in Foucault's focus on the "Self" as a reinvention or form of empowerment.

For our specific analysis of Foucault's view on the subject we turn to his discussion on the *History of sexuality*, particularly the third volume entitled, *The care of the self* (Foucault, 1986b). This work analyses ancient Greek and Roman discussions on sex and relationships, including the relationship with oneself. The cultivation of the self is a discipline, a practice of contemplation, learning, exercise, meditation, diet, nutrition, journaling, and sex that is regulated as better or worse according to time, place, and circumstance. Care of the self extends to the care of the other—as relationships of friendship, kinship, and social obligations. Social relations intensify and care of others deepens to the level of care that one would offer to oneself. Self-care functions as a micro-politics of power or in contemporary terms: empowerment. Foucault analyses ancient discussions on gradations of relationships: the worst type of relationship treats the other (male or female) as a thing for sex and may even cause harm to the other and the self. The healthiest type of relationship is characterized by a deep affection for the other where sex may be avoided in order not to cause them harm.

Foucault describes the development of a close relationship between the care of the self and the emergence of medical science—an art that developed with tests and prescriptive codified exercises. The care of self involves the conversion of self through changes in behaviors and attention towards self-mastery enabling one to take pleasure in oneself. It is against this background that a medicalization of the ethics of sexual pleasure emerges in Christianity and later in the modern era.

Foucault concludes that making sex an object of allegedly scientific knowledge, is a powerful mode of subjectification of the individual. Control is not only exercised via the disciplines' knowledge of individuals; more significantly, control is exerted via individuals' knowledge of themselves. As the norms established by the sciences of sexuality are internalized, people monitor themselves in an effort to conform to the norm. Control is thereby established over the individual, not merely as an object of the disciplines, but also as self-analyzing, self-conforming subject.

#### *Subjectification in organizational compassion studies*

Nietzsche and Foucault are concerned about the control, self-surveillance, and even self-doubt that emerged from the imposition of certain values upon society by traditional religion. They further express concern about the role science has played in perpetuating this regime of subjectification. Foucault has been particularly critical of the role played by psychology as a mode of micro-power that judges and seeks to rectify individuals who negatively deviate from the social “norm” in their attitudes and behaviors. Among the roles of psychologists, psychiatrists, and mental health workers, none is more controversial than the supposed role of social control agent who uses therapy to conform individual behavior to societal norms (Burman, 2004). In POS, with its rooting in positive psychology, this objective is expanded beyond the normalization

of the individual. While mainstream psychology aims to make people normal, positive psychology aims to identify and understand those things that make people virtuous and strong (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005) through the cultivation of positive emotions such as compassion. This objective is pursued through the methodology of positive deviance sampling, defined as taking interest in “intentional behaviors that depart from the norms of a referent group in honorable ways” (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003, p. 209; 2004, p. 828). Here the objective is not the normal but the extraordinary—“cultivating extraordinary individuals” (Spreitzer & Doneson, 2005).

We next consider the history of the discipline, whence positive psychology, POS, and organizational psychology, have emerged. Historically, the view of the mental health profession as an agency for social control dates back to the 1800s (Dain, 1989).

According to this portrayal, psychiatry was born from an experiment aimed at marginalizing society’s unproductive non-conformists by incarcerating the poor, disabled, and mentally ill, in asylums euphemistically called “mental hospitals” (Luchins, 1993; Wright et al., 2005) in the interests of control and marginalization of unproductive labour. Such accounts were particularly prevalent in the writings of psychiatric ‘dissenters’ who led an anti-psychiatry movement in the 1960s and 1970s (Kushner, 1998). Ultimately, it contributed to the deinstitutionalization of mental health patients in the U.S. (Dain, 1989). Recent invention of pharmaceutical medications such as tranquilizers and anti-depressants, as well as private practice by psychologists, which had begun replacing hospital-practiced psychiatry in the 1920s, made this reform feasible.

The mental health professionals’ collaboration with society becomes even more evident in forensic psychology where therapists are called on to give expert advice in insanity defence trials (Freedman & Halpern, 1999). Offering such expert opinion requires

clinical assessment of the defendant—traditionally conducted under the Hippocratic Oath. The results of forensic assessment, however, are presented before a court (Simpson & Evans, 2005). Defendants are informed of the confidentiality limitations on assessment results, as well as their right to not say anything or withhold incriminating details. However, the powerful influence evoked by the therapist's symbols of authority involving expert knowledge, the title of 'doctor', and the uniform of an expert's white coat, have been shown to reduce the likelihood of the defendant withholding information (Simpson & Evens, 2005). Post assessment, defendants judged unfit to stand trial are sent to a mental institution—often indefinitely (Morris & Maisto, 2005). Alternately, in some cases U.S. courts have overruled defendants' rights to refuse treatment, ordering for them to be medicated to make them competent to stand trial (Heilbrun & Kramer, 2005). Similarly, U.S. courts have ordered forced medication of unsuccessful insanity defendants to make them competent to receive death sentences, and used questionable I.Q. tests taken by defendants, as a necessary condition to evaluate whether a person can morally be given a death sentence.

Other forms of cooperation between the mental health profession and the state, involves psychologists participating in U.S. military. The relationship between psychology and the U.S. military dates back to World War I, when psychologists won contracts to contribute to the war effort through recruitment screening, assessment, and job placement (Muchinsky, 2006). This role in the war effort and receipt of so much authority and recognition helped to legitimize the emerging profession within society. After the war these same practices developed by psychologists during the war were applied to business organizations—the birth of organizational psychology. Of great controversy in the relationship between psychology and the U.S. military today is the involvement of psychologists in military interrogations (Lott, 2007; Okie, 2005).

Current American Psychological Association policy allows for such participation, contrasting with the policies of American Psychiatric Association and those of the American Medical Association. Opponents within the psychology field express that participating in interrogations compromises psychologists' ethical principles. Proponents argue, however, that such considerations must be weighed against a psychologist's ethical obligations to society.

Ethical deliberation of this sort is extremely delicate, for historically a lack of consideration for the rights of individuals in favor of what appeared to be the greater social good has led to horrendous human rights abuses by psychiatrists. One example involves psychiatrists 'treating' political dissidents with 'benign symptoms' of 'creeping schizophrenia' in the USSR (Faraone, 1982; Rich, 1991; Spencer, 2000). Another example involves psychiatrists sterilizing and murdering of mentally ill patients in pursuance of eugenic and racial policies in Nazi Germany (Dudley & Gale, 2002). Against this dismal history of psychology as an agency of social normalization that was of such concern to Foucault, positive psychology and POS are further developments.

Both Nietzsche and Foucault express concern about science taking over from traditional religion in perpetuating a regime of subjectification in promoting certain values as a mode of self-control, self-surveillance, and even self-doubt. This concern is all too warranted with respect to positive psychology and POS where areas of interest include values and virtues such as compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, which through the centuries, have been the traditional domains of religion and philosophy. The difference in approach between traditional approaches and positive psychology, is summed up in Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2001, p. 89) who assert that they are "unblushingly, scientists first" and that work they support "must be nothing less than replicable,

cumulative, and objective”. One tool of positive psychology is the Values in Action (VIA) scale (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman et al., 2005). The VIA is touted as the positive equivalent of the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) Scale, which purportedly provides standard criteria and common language for classifying mental disorders against statistical norms (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Critics of the DSM charge that it privileges the opinions of a small number of powerful psychiatrists (McLaren, 2007), is of dubious reliability and validity (Baca-Garcia et al., 2007; Kendell & Jablensky, 2003), and uses artificial dividing lines between “normality” and “abnormality” as well as between categories (Maser & Akiskal, 2002). It has also received criticism of cultural bias in its establishment of “norms” and its inclusion or exclusion of diagnoses (Bhugra & Munro, 1997; Kleinman, 1997).

The positive psychology answer to the DSM, the VIA was constructed to provide “an agreed upon way of classifying positive traits as a backbone for research, diagnosis, and intervention” (Seligman et al., 2005, p. 203). The scale was constructed by surveying the values commonly stressed in the major faith traditions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam. This survey revealed six value domains of humanity, temperance, justice, courage, wisdom, and transcendence. Statistical norms have been collected for each of these domains to “allow the human animal to struggle against and triumph over what is darkest within us” (Seligman et al., 2005, p. 212).

Within the field of POS there have been efforts towards identifying and constructing a scale to measure the unique traits that are important at the organizational level in contributing to organizational goals and the fulfillment of individuals working in organizations (Park & Peterson, 2003). Positive psychology and POS thereby become the modern day inheritors of the ancient legacy of Nietzsche’s “ascetic ideal”.

POS scholars acknowledge that POS is normative in its assumptions in that it seeks to uncover the core questions about the “good” that creates strength, resilience, and flourishing in organizations. This includes “admittedly” taking a “normative stance towards leadership that might be directed to the cultivation of positive states and processes in organizations of benefit to the ‘common good’ (Dutton & Glynn, 2008, p. 706). Of particular concern in this article are POS’s normative assumptions about organizational compassion. POS advocates for leaders to cultivate and legitimize compassion relations by paying attention to employee suffering (Dutton et al., 2002; Dutton, Worline, et al., 2006), holding regular meetings and constructing buildings with open architecture to ensure that people regularly congregate and notice irregular states of suffering (Kanov et al., 2004), and adopting policies such as allowing employees to donate unused vacation time to employees in need (Lilius et al., 2008).

Thankfully we are not alone in questioning POS’s normative assumptions of the benefits of these policies and practices. In fact, some POS members themselves raise doubt about these assumptions. For example, with regard to the vacation donation time policy, Frost et al. (2006) question if there could be negative social consequences for an employee who chooses not to contribute to the vacation time donation program? Might they be viewed as uncompassionate or uncooperative, thus eliciting psychosocial power over them by inducing feelings of shame and guilt? Another question is related to possible negative consequences for an employee choosing not to accept help when it is offered, resisting the shame of accepting charity that challenges their dignity. Might they be viewed with contempt as ungrateful, different, or branded as not being a team player? Frost et al. further raise the question of the organization having co-opted the compassion of its members by adopting a program that costs little to the organization beyond administration expenses but that creates positive organizational returns. Is it



truly an example of compassion in a caring organization, or that of an organization reinforcing positive rhetoric to secure internal and external resources? Finally, who decides which employees are approved or excluded from receiving support from the vacation donation program?

There is also a risk of compassion becoming over routine and rationalized with institutionalization. Examples of this kind involve *compassion work*, its appropriation in *compassion labor* (Ashforth & Humphreys, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1996), and the related concept of *compassion fatigue* (Figley, 1995; C. Figley, 2002; C. R. Figley, 2002). Compassion work occurs where an individual makes great effort to ‘feel compassionate’ within the home or work environment. This usually transpires when people feel socially pressured and obliged (Nietzsche’s guilt and shame) to express compassionate emotions that conflict with their actual feelings towards a particular colleague, priority, or project (Frost et al., 2006). Compassion labor is the organizational appropriation and institutionalization of compassion work common in professions such as nursing, social work, and counseling (Ashforth & Humphreys, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1996). In such helping-professions employees are expected to respond to others’ pain with compassion as part of their job description. In addition, it has become standard procedure to employ personality tests for potential employees with Myers-Brigg (MBTI) or other tests to evaluate their proclivity for such an emotional value. Employees who are not adequate in this regard may experience censure from their supervisors, while those who are adequate may experience *compassion burnout* (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). The latter entails emotional and physical exhaustion from spending too much time providing care and compassion to others, often at great risk to their own emotional and physical well-being. A related concept is that of compassion fatigue, a state of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion and pain experienced by

those who practice compassion work (Figley, 1995; C. Figley, 2002; C. R. Figley, 2002). These examples provide not only a glimpse into the potential negative power imbalances and outcomes of compassion relations. They also indicate that the experiences of givers and receivers in compassion relations are likely to be multifaceted, ongoing, and indeterminate.

## **Discussion**

Nietzsche and Foucault's approach of genealogical questioning and critique may come across as overly negative, pessimistic, to some nihilistic. However, the nihilism inherent in creating docile bodies through imposed values of compassion or humanism is what they claimed to be fighting against. Nietzsche's genealogy is itself value laden as he used it with the intent of enhancing life and creativity (Mahon, 1992). His purpose in undermining the self-evidences of values is to open possibilities for enhancing creativity, freedom, and life (Hussain, 2011); for as indicated in the subtitle to his book *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche saw himself as providing "a philosophy of the future" (Nietzsche, 1966).

Despite his pointing out the negative dynamics of instrumental or guilt induced compassion that seems to predominate in his writings, Nietzsche also distinguishes a higher compassion which he describes as "my kind of compassion" (Nietzsche, 1968, pp. 198-199), or, the "*more manly* brother of compassion" (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 79). Scholars such as Cartwright (1984, 1988) and Swanton (2011) argue that Nietzsche advocates a mature generosity. This contrasts with vices of unhealthy compassion that are rooted in selfishness and self-sacrificing charity. Compassion rooted in selfishness is provided out of the giver's sense of guilt and resentment on being reminded of their own vulnerabilities, but also in the happiness of their minimal superiority over others.

Self-sacrificing charity on the other hand involves a desire to escape self-aversion through doing good, and losing oneself in a herd, forming congregations and associations of mutual support. The mature generosity advocated by Nietzsche, on the other hand, is characterized by self-strength and a self-love that overflows as generosity towards others. Similar to Foucault's self-creation or empowerment—only through self-mastery and discipline can one be aware of the Other.

While Nietzsche provides a “philosophy of the future” (Nietzsche, 1966) by questioning the past to give value to life, Foucault is the writer of “the history of the present” (Foucault, 1977, p. 31). He is concerned with questioning influence of historical conditions of our current experience in order to provide opportunities. Foucault sees his work as diagnostic and curative. His genealogy, by separating out the historical influences that have made people what they are, seeks to provide opportunity for people to become freed from the confines of accepted “self-evident” knowledge that restricts current thinking and acting. More significantly, in his later theorizing he promotes an ascetic practice of freedom characterized by care of the self, which he says implies caring for the other (Foucault, 1987).

Similarly, although our genealogical critique of the literature on compassion in organizations has been strong, we are not averse to the practice of compassion in organizations—or to the emergence of POS as a discipline. In using the genealogical method to point out the ignoble origins of compassion in organizations, it in no way means we hold compassion or POS to be per se ignoble today. To the contrary we are sympathetic to these concerns. We therefore feel it is our duty to test the theory and research by subjecting it to rigorous scrutiny. Such scrutiny not only enables healthy debate within the discipline but provides heuristic potential for further research, and to the evolution of knowledge. Our analysis in this article has revealed that theorizing and

research on compassion within organizations has a few major limitations. These relate to its focus on compassion as a psychological state, rather than as a social construct; its tendency to neglect the power considerations that are inherent in compassion relations; and its neglect of the negative outcomes of compassion relations that naturally arise alongside the positive ones. In pointing out these limitations, we do not seek to undermine the efforts of POS scholars researching organizational compassion. We see these efforts as an important starting point, to which we seek to contribute by providing a more nuanced and mature understanding of organizational compassion relations—one that accommodates compassion as a social-historical construct, as embedded in power relations, and as having dynamic dualism in terms of positive and negative outcomes—including the subjectification of the individual.

Given that a key component of a theoretical framework is explanatory power, at this point, we are ready to provide a social definition of organizational compassion that accommodates the factors missing from POS theorizing. We define organizational compassion as the organizational members' *ongoing* individual and collective capacity for *concern* about members individual and collective suffering or well-being (knowledge); the *assessment* of members' compassion worthiness (as giver(s) and receiver(s)) (power); and *decisions to respond* with refusal, giving, or receiving, which create or reinforce power relations (subjectification). In this definition compassion relations are seen as complex and dynamic. *Concern* is *ongoing*—indicating that compassion can be expressed as a culture even before the unfolding of a tragic event and great suffering. In an organization where there is a culture of compassion, potential suffering is anticipated and therefore policies and contingencies are established to avoid or mitigate risk of suffering “in the unlikely event” of an emergency. Ongoing concern can be expressed not only in relation to suffering but the individual's well-being,

development, and attainment of their goals and aspirations (Boyatzis, Smith, & Blaize, 2006). Concern leads to a dance of informal and formal practices of *assessment* where (power considerations of) the giver and the receiver's compassion legitimacy and worthiness are considered (Clark, 1987, 1997). *Decision-making* involves judgment of whether to *respond* with refusal, giving, or acceptance of compassion support. The outcomes of such decision-making are dynamically dualistic, experienced as positivity and negativity, caring or manipulation, which reinforces power asymmetries within the compassion relations. Whereas compassion is often thought of as sentimental with an emphasis on feelings, the assessment and decision-making aspects of our definition suggest that compassion can additionally be analytical, rational, and even calculated (Nussbaum, 2003; Woodward, 2002).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion in this article we have applied Nietzsche and Foucault's genealogical method in analyzing ten leading publications by POS scholars on compassion in organizations. We limited the scope of our study to this literature as it represents the most in depth and systematic scholarship within the field of organizational studies. Our genealogical analysis using a framework of Foucault's three axes of knowledge, power, and subject—suggests that interest in organizational compassion, rather than being rooted in a concern with compassion per se, is perhaps more concerned with a more effective mode of employee discipline, motivation, and productivity. The analysis also demonstrated that organizational compassion involves factors that are either neglected or only given token attention in POS theory and research. This involves considerations of compassion as a social-historical construct, rather than a psychological spiritual imperative; as a relational process embedded within power relations between the giver and the receiver, and that its outcomes are experienced dynamically as positive and

negative, and involve the subjectification of the individuals in compassion relations. In light of the above, we have also suggested that organizational compassion includes factors that extend beyond what is described in the POS definition of organizational compassion as collective noticing, feeling, and responding to pain within the organization. As a social relational process, organizational compassion also involves assessments of the legitimacy of receiver and the giver of compassionate support, as well as power related decisions about how to respond—be it in giving, receiving, or refusal of compassionate support. Thus, we propose that ‘in these times of *compassion* when conformity’s in fashion’ (Dylan, 1991) a little deviance from conformity may be in order: organizational compassion is not quite what it has been represented as being.

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## Chapter Two

Nietzsche and Foucault's genealogical method, as discussed in Chapter One, prefigured what has emerged as "practice theory" (Schatzki 1996, 2001), which will provide a framework for analysis organizational compassion in Chapter Two, in a paper under review at *Organization*. Consequently, Chapter Two continues the theme from Chapter One, first by comparing common limitations in current theorising on compassion found both in religious imperatives and the organizational conceptualisations. This comparison suggests that current organizational compassion theory and research is grounded in limited conceptualisations of compassion that are vestiges of theological imperatives. My co-authors Clegg, Pitsis, Lopez, Rego, Cunha and I respectfully acknowledge that religious imperatives compassion's goodness serve an important purpose as an aspirational ideal at the individual level. At the organizational level, however, such imperatives of compassion can be harmful as they hide the power dynamics inherent in all social relations. My co-authors and I propose that an alternative sociological conceptualisation of organizational compassion, one that embraces its complexity and contingency, is of greater importance in organizational studies. To advance this objective, we first review the emergence of practice theory in organizational studies. We conclude our review outlining Feldman and Orlikowski's (2010) summary of various practice theories as three key theoretical moves involving: social construction, mutual constitution, and dualistic dynamism. We use these moves as a framework for analysing theory and research findings on organizational compassion. Our analysis presents a view of organizational compassion as socially constructed in relations of power with mixed outcomes of positivity and negativity. We conclude with a discussion wherein we advance a sociological definition of organizational compassion.

## **Practicing Compassion in Organizations: The Ideal and the Real**

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## **Practicing Compassion in Organizations: The Ideal and the Real**

### **Abstract**

In this theoretical paper we consider theorising and research pertaining to organizational compassion. We make the case that contemporary approaches remain overly influenced by the ideals of traditional religious imperatives, virtue ethics, and psychological perspectives. Consequently, organization analysts of compassion have stressed its positive aspects for organizational functioning and behaviour. We argue, however, that in reality the practice of compassion is a complex social relational process that creates mixed outcomes. If we are to study and apply compassion in organizations, it seems important to understand its complexities as social relations, embedded within power dynamics, and of mixed effects.

**Keywords:** compassion; organization studies; power; practice theory; social theory.

## **Practicing Compassion in Organizations: The Ideal and the Real**

Only insofar as an action has sprung from compassion does it have moral value; and every action resulting from any other motive had none.

(Schopenhauer, 1998, p. 144)

I regarded the inexorable progress of the morality of compassion, which afflicted even philosophers with its illness, as the most sinister symptom of the sinister development of European culture...

(Nietzsche, 1998, p. 7)

### **Introduction**

In a globalised world of increased economic, political, and security uncertainty, facing an ever-present potential for crisis and disaster, compassion is becoming recognized as a crucially important structural pose for organizations to adopt (Dutton et al., 2002; Dutton, Worline, et al., 2006). One reason for this recognition is the heightened transparency and immediacy of organizational actions that increased media scrutiny, aided by the Internet and social media, create (Coombs, 1999; Devitt & Borodzicz, 2008; Goldberg & Harzog, 1996; Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011).

In this study, we wish to extend understanding of compassion beyond the domain of emotionality, religious imperatives, psychology, and moral philosophy, to considerations of sociology. An overview of the organizational compassion research literature reveals a critical gap in its under-acknowledgement of compassion as socially constituted. It appears to be the case that contemporary organizational compassion research still bears idealistic traces drawn from religious morality and from psychology, where compassion is generally assumed to be positive in its effects. One consequence of these traces has been largely to neglect the mix of positivity and negativity constituted by, and present in, organizations' compassion relations. It is our contention that as a

religious imperative, or moral virtue, compassion may provide an aspirational ideal. In the reality of social practice, however, organizational compassion cannot be applied as a general ethical law that is positive in all circumstances. Application of compassion within the social setting of an organization involves complexities of competing values and interests.

The paper provides a sociological perspective on compassion in organizations, one that embraces its many facets, messiness and complexities. Our approach involves engaging with practice theory as a theoretical lens for analysing how compassion relations are dynamically constructed, maintained, and experienced in practice. In this endeavour, we apply three essential principles of social practice theory as summarized by Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) which see all phenomena as: (1) socially constructed, (2) mutually constituted, and (3) dynamically (non)dualistic in their outcomes.

The paper is structured in five sections. First, we consider compassion as framed by the dominant idealistic perspectives of psychology and religion. We consider the influence of these perspectives on organizational perspectives, referring to the work of researchers such as Frost et al. (2006; 2000), Dutton et al. (2002; 2007; 2006), Kanov et al. (2004) and Lilius et al. (2008). Our analysis reveals three limitations in these dominant psychological and religious, and organizational perspectives. Second, we address these limitations by using social practice theory, providing an overview of its development in the writings of social theorists such as Bourdieu (1990), Giddens (1984) and Foucault (1977, 1983), as well as more contemporary social practice theorists such as Schatzki (2002), Suchman (2007) and Clark (1997). Third, we use Feldman and Orlikowski's (2011) summary of practice theory principles as a framework for analysing compassion theory and research under the headings of: (1) social construction, (2) mutual

constitution, and (3) dynamic (non)dualism. Fourth, in the discussion we propose a more complex and nuanced social definition of organizational compassion. In conclusion, the overall contribution of the paper is differentiation between ideal and real conceptualizations of organizational compassion, thereby providing a perspective of greater use to researchers and practitioners seeking to study and nurture compassion within organizations.

### **Constituting Compassion**

*Psychological Perspectives:* Compassion is defined by the Oxford Dictionary (2010) as synonymous with psychological emotions of sympathy, pity, concern, and empathy. Dutton, Glyn, et al (Dutton, Glynn, et al., 2006) distinguish between compassion and sympathy arguing that sympathy merely implies recognition and feeling for another's suffering, whereas compassion additionally includes the component of active responding to relieve suffering. Hochschild (1983) distinguishes between compassion and pity by arguing 'compassion' is expressed towards equals, whereas 'pity' is expressed for subordinates. In Clark's (1987) extensive research, her respondents referred to people in different classes while using the words compassion, sympathy, and pity interchangeably. Nussbaum (1994) argues that the term empathy refers to sensitivity in reading other's feelings but does not necessarily include the element of compassion, for criminals often empathetically read people's emotions to manipulate them. Psychological conceptualisations of compassion describe it as an inherent positive emotion with evolutionary roots (Cameron & Winn, 2012; Sadler-Smith, 2012) that provide survival advantages by 'broadening and building' human thought action repertoires (1998, 2003). Religious imperatives, however, describe compassion as an eternal spiritual quality.

*Religious Imperatives:* In major world religions such as Christianity and Buddhism, compassion is described as an eternal and foundational principle (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In Christianity, God is glorified in Psalms (111:4) as “gracious and compassionate”. Christians are directed in Romans (12:15) to “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” and thereby to emulate God’s compassion. In Hinduism, Bhaktivinode Thakur (2004) describes compassion as the nature of the pure soul. As a conditioned soul becomes purified of material conditioning through spiritual practice, the soul’s inherent compassionate nature awakens and broadens from ones self, to include ones family, society, humanity, and ultimately to include all living beings. In Buddhism, compassion is similarly not restricted just to humans, and is defined as that which moves the heart to quiver at the suffering of other living beings (Narada, 2006). Expressing compassion for others, in Buddhist understanding, is the way to enlightenment and inner well-being (Goldstein, 1993). We hold these imperatives to represent compassion as a motivational and aspirational ideal that may be of greater value to individuals than to organizations. Socially, religious imperatives privilege the experience of the giver over the subject made an object of compassion.

*Philosophical Perspectives:* It is not only the world religions that constitute compassion as a social good. Common amongst these religious imperatives is the assumption that compassion is an essential spiritual principle whose outcomes will always be good and positive. Similar to religious perspectives, Schopenhauer (1998) also declared compassion to be a pure emotion and a pure motive of moral acts, teaching that compassion is the supreme virtue.

It may be appropriate for religion and philosophy to describe compassion in absolute and essential terms. Organizational behaviour, however, is social in nature. Therefore

organizational compassion must be conceptualized socially and justified empirically. In social reality, compassion is not purely positive and beneficial; it is rather complex and messy, especially when the voices of those in receipt of compassion are added to consideration of these imperatives. As argued by Nietzsche (1966, 1968, 2002), the exercising and reception of compassion is problematized by the complexities of power relations.

*Compassion in Organizational Studies:* In organizational studies, compassion is mostly defined as a three-fold process of noticing another's suffering, feeling empathy, and responding in some way to alleviate the pain (Kanov et al., 2004). This definition is expanded to the organizational context as *collective* recognizing, feeling, and responding to suffering. Described as the synthesis "of a long historical tradition in philosophy and theology" that "set up the rich possibilities for inquiry" into organizational compassion (Rynes et al., 2012), this definition has been cited extensively in publications related to management and organizational studies (see 2007; Dutton, Worline, et al., 2006; Frost et al., 2006; Lilius et al., 2012; 2011; 2008).

Organizational research indicates that compassionate dealings with staff, particularly in times of crisis, lead to many employee and organizational benefits. For example, compassion has buffering effects (i.e., allows absorbing systems shocks; (Bright, Cameron, & Caza, 2006), enables healing and learning to adapt after trauma (Powley & Cameron, 2006), predicts organizational performance (Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004), whereas lack of compassion can lead to employee resentment and anger (Dutton et al., 2002). Compassion within organizations not only speeds recovery from suffering (Lilius et al., 2011) but also strengthens positive emotions and employee commitment to the organization as well as co-workers (Frost et al., 2000; Lilius et al., 2008). Other

studies indicate that it also builds resources of pride, trust, connection, and motivation, strengthens values and beliefs such as dignity, respect, and common good, and cultivates critical relational skills through enhanced emotional sensitivity (Dutton et al., 2007). Grant (2008) further suggests that compassionate leaders foster followers' self-efficacy and productivity. Overall, the research indicates that compassion in organizations offers important positive outcomes for individual members, customers, and the organization as a whole (Lilius et al., 2012).

*Common Limitations:* While the above research and theorizing on organizational compassion is indeed empirically driven, we find it nonetheless limited by common assumptions shared with psychology and traditional religious conceptualizations of compassion. The first limitation is a tendency not to question the assumption that compassion is an inherent disposition, or eternal value or principle. The socio-cultural-historical constitution of compassion in different contexts and conditions, with varying levels of appropriateness, is generally not considered in these interpretations.

A second limitation is the assumption that the outcomes of compassion are positive. Exceptions to this critique within organizational studies do exist, particularly within the literature where Peter Frost was lead author (for example 1999; Frost, 2003; Frost et al., 2006; 2000). Judge et al. (2009, p. 859) also argues "A trusting, gentle, compassionate leader might earn the affection of her followers, but also might be vulnerable to being manipulated or duped by others". However, consideration of the potentially negative outcomes of compassion relations, where it is referenced at all, is generally offered as a secondary consideration, often in the limitations or future research sections of articles.

A third concern is that the experience of the receiver of compassion is relatively absent from psychological definitions, religious imperatives, and in organizational theorizing.

The subjects of practices initiated by “Good Samaritans” are tacitly expected to be grateful for the compassion and care extended. In other words, these definitions privilege the experience of the giver—conceptualizing compassion either as some kind of internal psychological or spiritual state and hence, internal to the giver or as an object lesson for the broader community to follow.

Finally, and specifically in relation to organizational conceptualisations, there is a disconnection between organizational compassion theory and the practice of organizational compassion research. Whereas the definition privileges the experience of the giver, most of the research seeks to describe organizational compassion by investigating the perspectives of the receivers. One consideration is that these are relatively easy to relate, using narrative analysis. Another consideration is that much research on compassion does not focus on actual practices. These facts justify the need to (re)think compassion research in organization studies using a social lens to understand organizational compassion not as an ideal, but as it is actually practiced. A turn to practice theory is required.

### **Practice theory in organizational studies**

*Core Concepts:* Practice theory has re-grounded the field of organizational studies through a focus on what is actually done in practice. Ontologically, the central premise of practice theory is that social reality is produced through practices (Nicolini, 2012). Although the term “practice theory” is relatively new to organizational studies (Corradi, Gherardi, & Verzelloni, 2010), the ideas connected with this term can be traced back to philosophers such as Wittgenstein (1953) and Heidegger (1962). More recently, it can be traced to the practices, field, and habitus of Bourdieu (1990), the social structuration theory of Giddens (1984), the genealogies of Foucault (1977, 1983), Garfinkel’s (1967)



ethnomethodology, and Vygotsky's (1978) theories on work, culture and biosocial development. Although these theorists are different in many ways, there is a widely recognized commonality between their ideas (Corradi et al., 2010; Miettinen, Samra-Fredericks, & Yanow, 2009; Schatzki, 2001; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). While there is no unified definitive practice theory, it is recognized as a broad intellectual terrain in which a multiplicity of sources and approaches cohere (Corradi et al., 2010; Schatzki, 2001).

Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) integrated what they took to be the dominant ideas and influences of practice theory into a single model involving three key moves. They describe practice theory as concerned with: (1) the relationship between actions and the social world in producing social life, which are; (2) relations of mutual constitution; (3) that may appear as dualistic—but such dualisms are only an appearance.

The first principle, that practices produce the social world, relates to what Bourdieu (1990) describes as social life being produced through the generative principle of "habitus". It is also represented in Giddens (1984) idea that practices are recursively produced, enabled, and constrained by "structures", which finds further development in Schatzki's (2002) idea that bundles of human practices enact social orders.

The second principle, the mutual constitution of practices, relates not necessarily to interpersonal relations but to the mutual interdependence of all phenomena. Bourdieu (1990) describes this as a recursive relationship between practice, habitus, and field. Giddens (1984) describes a recursive relationship between agency and structure, where actions and structures continue to constitute and be constituted. Recursivity indicates a constant state of becoming or emergence. Mutual constitution transpires through power relations and the inequalities in access to resources that produce these and that these

produce (Østerlund & Carlile, 2005). This is a move away from ontologizing separate things towards an acknowledgement of interrelated socio-material practices (Suchman, 2007).

The third principle, the rejection of dualisms involves scepticism towards traditional conceptual oppositions such as determinism and freewill, mind and body, subjective and objective, as well as positive and negative. For Bourdieu (1992), this involves a deconstruction of the notions of objectivity and subjectivity as independent concepts, as well as individual and society. Giddens (1984) seeks to transcend agency and structure, integrating the actor and collective, as well as the actor and the context. Rather than treating dualisms as absolutes, they are theorized as constituted dynamically (Taylor, 1993).

### **Applying practice theory to organizational compassion research**

Conceptualizations of organizational compassion based on social practice theory are scarce, although two recent publications by Lilius et al. (2011) and Lilius (2012) are practice theory oriented. In this section we analyse compassion research utilising the framework described above: we will consider compassion's (1) social construction, (2) mutual constitution, and (3) dynamic (non)dualism. We will apply our findings and conclusions to the organizational context.

*Organizational compassion as socially constituted practices:* We begin with the social constitution of compassion relations by considering the knowledge, scripts, values, rules, and expectations that inform compassion relations. Practice approaches hold that all practices are constituted socially in their interpretation. Compassion as a social emotion (Berlant, 2004; Nussbaum, 1996) involves social values, conventions, and knowledge,

all of which are found to change through history due to influences of contextual factors such as emerging culture and even political lobbying.

A clear route to achieving empirical insight into how organizational compassion is socially constructed is to research the categories that are ordinarily used to express compassion relations in everyday life. Clark (1987) and Schmitt and Clark (2006) describes how compassion is practiced on the basis of norms and rules that are fixed on the basis of different categorical devices. Considerations of age, class, gender, and wealth are attributes that can identify some as subject to specific burdens, others as hostage to the balance of fortune, while others are seen as specifically vulnerable or potentially more deserving than others. Institutional entrepreneurs such as doctors and lawyers fix these categories, while others, such as philanthropists, serve to reproduce and perpetuate them. The social world is populated by these categories forming a significant part of the taken for granted scripts and members' categorization devices (Sacks, 1995) through which people make sense of their world and act upon it in their everyday life.

Taken for granted knowledge or cognitive scripts are always specific to different cultures, societies, and traditions. The social assessment of compassion worthiness is never a simple process but rather involves tensions between competing principles that are weighed against one another in a network of relations. For example, the display of mutilations and amputations by beggars outside Catholic cathedrals in Latin countries as an occasion for compassion would not make much sense in the context of the values of a strict Calvinistic Protestantism, with its strictures against charity and idleness (Weber, 2002). For instance, seeking alms on the steps of a church can be constituted as meaning different things by different networks of practice using the church: while at

mass the presence of such beggars may be indulged the situation at christenings and marriages may be quite different, with alms being given, if at all, less in a spirit of compassion and more as a way of ensuring an exit from photo opportunities.

Knowledge and scripts guiding estimation of what is socially considered a plight worthy of a compassionate response evolve through time. Changes in values in compassion assessment and responding is demonstrated by Clark's (1997) discursive analysis of the *New York Times*' Neediest Cases Appeal between 1912 and 1972 with additional case studies from 1982, 1985, 1992, and 1996. Clark found that, the authors the *Times*' appeals implicitly embedded specific criteria that defined the cases' legitimacy as subjects for worthy of compassion. Tellingly, the criteria changed through the century. Whereas poverty was the most important criterion of compassion worthiness in the early years, in the 1940s and 1950s additional plights such as grief, loneliness, anti-Semitism, and those connected with urban dangers emerged, and by the 1970s, cases of people "suffering from" addictions and mental illnesses were added. Similarly, suggestions for how to offer compassion changed. When the appeal began, the authors mostly suggested support through financial contributions. Later in the mid-century, the appeals suggested providing through psychological, grief, and substance abuse counselling, and periodically they suggested that a case was in need of advice and "understanding". Additionally, there was also a rise in the importance given to the individual. Whereas in the beginning, requests were written to recruit support for families, as the years unfolded, appeals increasingly requested support for individuals.

We should question such historical changes as necessarily indicating the emergence of a more "humane", "emotional", or "compassionate" society. For instance, the history of the British Poor Laws, which were introduced to address the issue of vagabonds

between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, when “the commons”, from which the poor eked out an existence, were privatised (Clegg et al., 2006; Lees, 1998), is testament to the entanglement of issues of compassion with questions of power, discipline, and order. While the Poor Laws may be seen as steps in the evolution of a more compassionate society and the reforms and repeals of these Poor Laws over the following centuries often centred on humanitarian concerns, their disciplinary intent was, however, to get the poor into work (Poovey, 1995). As Nietzsche (1998) and Foucault (1977, 1983) suggest, values currently assumed as inherent or eternal principles (1992; 1985) may well have more mundane origins. Nietzsche (1998) and Foucault’s (1977, 1983) theorising reveal the historical importance of efficient forms of social compliance, discipline, and control.

An association between humanitarian concerns and liberal society is clear in terms of the rise of democracy and capitalism (De Tocqueville, 2003; Haskell, 1985; Sznajder, 1998), where the contradiction between humanitarianism and individualism, or compassion and calculated rational self-interest, is only apparent. With democratisation compassion has increasingly become a moral obligation with the emergence of liberal society (Sznajder, 1998). Drivers of this emergence have been the reduction of categorical social and corporate distinctions, along with the aspiration of increasing collective happiness. In earlier times, compassion was enacted as a moral duty to alleviate the suffering of others but not as a social principle with the aim of eliminating pain or cruelty from society (De Tocqueville, 2003). Compassion is expressed through acknowledging personal vulnerability to suffering, identifying with others as similar to oneself, and identifying with their suffering as potentially one’s own (Snow, 1991). Democracy provides such an arena for equality, and thereby provides the basis for a compassionate state. More recently, market perspectives present the scope of compassion being broadened by

defining and extending a field of moral responsibility through the exchange of contracts (Sznajder, 1998). In the market, the boundaries of moral contracts widen to become more abstract and universal – as opposed to narrow, dogmatic, and sectarian.

Compassion thereby becomes an unintended consequence of the market, which makes all people and things interdependent. Whether or not the emergence of concerns with compassion in society has been generated from social discipline and control or accompanied the rise of democracy and capitalism, there is common agreement that compassion is socially constituted.

Applied to the organizational context, management can misappropriate a humanistic and compassionate discourse to promote a totalitarian and exploitative practice, imposing strong limits on the aims of positive humanistic management theories (Alvesson, 1982; Caza & Carroll, 2012; Fineman, 2006a). That is to say, management and organizational practices that are (instrumentally) conveyed as fostering “citizenship” may, in fact, be manipulative and “neo-feudalist” tools promoting employees’ “vassalage” (Hancock, 1997, p. 104), capturing their minds and hearts (Parker, 1997), transforming them into “contented cows” that produce “more milk” (Scott, 1992, p. 65).

The practice principle of social constitution, considered in relation to organizational compassion, indicates the importance of the relationship between organizational knowledge and organizational practices of compassion relations. Practice theory, as an epistemology for studying work practices, orients us to the implicit knowledge that supports organizational knowledge and its constitution as situated action within specific social, historical, and structural contexts (Corradi et al., 2010). We suggest that it would be helpful to understand the relationships between values, categorisation schemas and scripts and practices of compassion relationships within and across different

organizational contexts. Research by Dutton et al (2007) indicates that organizational knowledge, scripts, beliefs, and articulated values emphasising trust, respect, dignity, and the common good, as well as the telling of stories of kindness through word of mouth, newsletters, and speeches, foster relations of compassion within the organization.

Compassion might also be also associated with an espoused organizational value for diversity (Lilius et al., 2012). Policies and practices can be restrictive of diversity or facilitative in supportive non-discrimination or prejudice in terms of gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, and culture. As an example, job recruitment research has found that job descriptions and specifications, as well as competency frameworks and person profiles, can be designed in a manner that is either exclusive or inclusive—in fact, most were found to be exclusive (Almeida, Fernando, & Sheridan, 2011). Rigid and narrow job definitions privilege local knowledge and experience, whereas broad and flexible definitions encourage a variety of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences.

The organizational application of in-group/out-group social categorization schemas is also of relevance to discussions of organizational prejudice (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Research indicates that members of a supervisor's in-group are perceived favourably and assigned positive attributes and performance reviews, whereas those of an out-group are viewed with prejudice and assigned negative attributes and reviews (Heneman, Greenberger, & Anonyuo, 1989). The overall effect of such processes is the perpetuation of an organizational climate of distrust and paranoia (Kramer, 1994) that may even escalate into explicit hostility, bullying, and cruelty (Seabright & Schminke, 2002).

Discrimination is often supported with the use of dehumanizing metaphors referring to the other as a work animal, a human “resource”, or a machine. Animal metaphors deny a person or a group of people’s humanity by attributing to them animalistic characteristics such as coarseness, immorality, lack of self-control, immaturity and incivility (Haslam, 2006). While resource and machine metaphors deny humanity by attributing characteristics of passivity, inertness, coldness, rigidity, and superficiality (Hinton, 2005). Categorisation of the “other” as non-human legitimises discrimination and prejudice by presenting a barrier to identification with the other as a human being, just like oneself. Compassion involves awareness of the potential that another’s suffering could be one’s own and thereby enhance feeling and identifying with the other’s pain (Nussbaum, 2003; Snow, 1991).

A guiding principle that might be theoretically generalised from this discussion of the social constitution of compassion in organizations is that organizations that have broadly defined inclusive and respectful values, beliefs, categorisation schemas, scripts, and policies, will also have a compassionate organizational culture. We conclude that organizational compassion is socially constituted through prevailing categorization devices, interpretations, scripts, values, rules, and expectations of compassionate behaviour. Further, socially accepted knowledge changes through time, influenced recursively by contextual factors such as emerging norms, values, and the lobbying of “emotional entrepreneurs”. Such lobbying and negotiation unfolds through relations of mutual (re)constitution, which will be the focus of the next section.

*Compassion relations as mutual (re)constitution:* Practice theory emphasizes the mutual interconnectedness, interdependence, and constitution of all phenomena (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Giddens, 1984). Socio-material configurations are understood as



referring to both the immediate social relational context in which practice are performed as well as non-human material settings (Orlikowski, 2007; Suchman, 2007). People and their practices are embedded, defined, emerging, and inseparable from socio-material processes and structures (2007, 2010; Wagner, Newell, & Piccoli, 2010).

In this section we will discuss how organizational compassion is mutually constituted through relations with other humans. The principle of mutual constitution of social phenomenon by enmeshed and intertwined human configurations does not imply relations of equality. These are power relations with asymmetric action-taking capabilities and resource access, structures of domination and control, along with other conflicts of interest (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). Here power is not conceived as a thing, title, or position, but as a social relation (Clegg, 1975, 1989; Haugaard, 1997, 2002), which is the basis for all organizational compassion relations (Bamford, 2007; Cartwright, 1984, 1988; Frazer, 2006; Frost et al., 2006).

Power considerations are mostly lacking in the organizational compassion literature. A widely used definition of organizational compassion sees it as collective noticing, feeling, and responding to pain in which the receiver of compassion relations is treated as an object or subject of compassion but is otherwise absent as a being with social agency, which only inheres in the experience of the giver. In contrast, a practice perspective would account for the mutual constitution of compassion relations by both the givers and the receivers. Consideration of power is a tool used by practice theorists for identifying the nature of such relations (Østerlund & Carlile, 2005). For Bourdieu (1990), power is enacted through the appropriation of discourse and the objectification or reification of subjective relations, which are (re)produced and transformed practices.

Power thereby both inhibits and facilitates the capability to enact structures of domination (Giddens, 1984).

Compassion relations should be seen as relations of power. The compassion giver chooses to act in a way that they construct as compassionate. Yet, the subject may choose, or not, to recognise action as, indeed, a positive, compassionate and legitimate action for the other to initiate (as opposed, for instance, to one that is manipulative or patronizing). With respect to the compassion giver, socially constructed discourses of legitimacy and worthiness tend to focus on the power motives of the person providing support. People who are either consciously or tactically aware of compassion dynamics can give compassion to manipulate others into positions of intimacy or indebtedness (1987, 1997; Schmitt & Clark, 2006). Such indebtedness affects power relations and may be imposed rather than freely entered into. Additionally, the giving of compassion can patronize and belittle the receiver by highlighting their problems and deficiencies. Power is also at play when a subordinate uses compassion to belittle or diminish a bosses' power to annoy or intimidate them, which can involve manufacturing a feeling of compassion towards the aggressive boss rather than expressing their real feelings of anger, fear and loathing.

The power of the receiver of compassionate support relates to their power to refuse or accept compassionate support. Refusal by a receiver can diminish a giver's social status, as well as reinforce the status of the person who rejects such support (1987, 1997; Schmitt & Clark, 2006). When a giver's assistance is accepted, public acknowledgment of such help through displays of gratitude can also be a way of raising the receiver's social status through linkages with influential supporters.

The receiver's power also relates to their perceived legitimacy as a victim needy of compassionate support as defined by dominant sociological discourse. Clark (1997) describes how issues are perceived as aligned with one or other end of a blame(less) continuum. The high power end of the continuum constitutes the blameless victim of fate, circumstance, others, or the "system". People who encounter a blameless problem are seen as "plagued", "befallen", or "besieged" and are highly worthy of compassion because they are victims of circumstance beyond their control. Conversely, the powerless end of the continuum is populated by blameworthy victims who impose suffering upon themselves as they "make" themselves sick, "amass" debt, "get into" trouble or "ask for" rape or an attack, through risk taking. Irrespective of a person's suffering, social convention holds that people are less inclined to be compassionate if the sufferer is deemed to be responsible for their own misfortune. Considerations such as these indicate the entanglement of power in compassion relations as mutually recursively constituted through interactions between agents, society, accepted knowledge, and other socio-material configurations.

The mutual constitution and interconnectedness of social relations would indicate that when organizations practice kindness and compassion towards individual employees, they give to other co-workers, clients, and the community. Yet, it is not that simple, because practices are always complex, contingent, and context specific—and relational practices always involve power relations that are generally asymmetric (Østerlund & Carlile, 2005). For instance, Bell's win at patenting the first telephone technology, was a loss for Elisha Gray who tried to patent similar technology on the very same day (Evenson, 2000; Shulman, 2008); Armstrong's "giant leap for mankind" was a defeat for the USSR, which was locked in a "space race" with the US to be the first nation to land an astronaut on the moon (Hardesty, Eisman, & Khrushchev, 2007). Similarly, in

selecting one employee to receive care and compassion, another may feel neglected and ignored (Frost et al., 2006; Frost et al., 2000). Or, the recipient themselves may feel uncomfortable in receiving support, considering it to be a subtle form of manipulation, or obligation. Like all power relations, the outcomes of compassion relations are dynamically (non)dualistic—which relates to our next suggestion.

*Compassion relations dynamically (re)constitute (non)dualities:* Practice theory's rejection of dualisms leads it to view elements that are often treated as dichotomous and antithetical concepts, with suspicion. Such concepts include body and mind, cognition and behaviour, freewill and determinism, individual and institution, subjective and objective, as well as positive and negative (Reckwitz, 2002).

That there are positive outcomes to compassion relations has been the finding and conclusion of most organizational compassion research. A practice approach, however, would advocate a more tempered approach to one committed to the promotion of positivity. Constructs such as compassion ought to be viewed as not necessarily either positive or negative but as a social process involving the dynamic constitution of (non)dualism. Social processes are indeterminate, ongoing, and constantly subject to revisions based upon time, place, circumstances, relevancies, and priorities in any given moment (Taylor, 1993). A situation that appears positive from one point of view, or at one time, often appears as negative from another perspective, or at another time (Carroll, 1998).

Rather than assuming compassion's effects to be positive and beneficial a practice perspective would direct organizational compassion theorists to assume that the experiences of givers and receivers in compassion relations are likely to be multifaceted, ongoing, and indeterminate. Further, the indeterminate, ongoing, and constantly revised

nature of social processes suggests that a situation that appears positive in one point in time often appears as negative at another point of time. In compassion relations, even where the motive of compassion is present, the results may be disastrous for those who are the subjects and objects of such compassion. Clegg et al.'s (2006) account of the policies that produced the "stolen generation" of half-caste Australian aboriginal children taken from their mothers and institutionalized elsewhere clearly demonstrates this point. The action may have been undertaken with a compassionate motive in terms of the social context in which it was enacted; the results, however, have been likened to cultural genocide.

Application of practice theory to organizational compassion suggests that researchers and practitioners ought not to assume positivity from compassion relations but remain mindful and alert to various outcomes on an ongoing basis and seek to redress harmful effects as they arise. Specific harmful effects of institutionalised organizational compassion include *toxic handling* (Frost & Robinson, 1999), and *compassion labour* (Ashforth & Humphreys, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1996), which can lead to burnout due to *compassion fatigue* (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Toxic handlers are managers and leaders in organizations, who "contagiously" absorb their employees or co-workers emotional hurt, becoming vicariously vulnerable to the very same hurt as the people who are the objects of their sympathy (Anandakumar, Pitsis, & Clegg, 2007; Frost, 2003; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993). Similarly, people whose job it is to smile and be kind, such as nurses, and airline stewards, commonly exhibit compassion fatigue.

Traditional objections against providing compassionate support have included that it can be irrational or sentimental, and therefore involve unfair partiality (Nussbaum, 1996). For example, compassionate leadership behaviours may make leaders lose the

“sacred” component of leadership, the healthy separation between the roles of leading and following (Grint, 2010), and render them unable to take hard, although necessary, measures (e.g., closing a plant; firing a friend who is also an incompetent leader) (Rego, Cunha, & Clegg, 2012). Compassion is also often equated with weakness, both of the giver and the receiver. In some cultural contexts (e.g., those characterized by low humane orientation and high masculinity), compassionate leadership behaviours may be interpreted as weak, thus making the leader lose credibility, respect and the capacity to make things happen (Javidan, Dorfman, Luque, & House, 2006).

With respect to the receiver, compassion can be said to undermine a person’s humanity by treating them not as a dignified agent but as a passive victim or subordinate (Nussbaum, 1996). Leaders of some conservative political parties contend that providing social support to those seeking welfare is to treat people as victims of life’s difficulties rather than respecting them as agents independently capable of improving their own circumstances (Berlant, 2004). Advocates of this position argue for replacing the mechanisms of the welfare state, equated with high taxes and underemployment, to a state that protects the income and dignity of individuals by cutting taxes and instituting welfare-to-work programs.

Taking all of these ideas together, we find that compassion practices are not universally virtuous; they involve the duality of mutually constituted positivity and negativity in their effects. Compassion relations, from a practice perspective, are neither positive nor negative but dynamic, with ongoing recursive implications. Interactions and outcomes are mutually constituted by one another, even as they are in the making. Such hybrids are impossible to classify once and for all as positive or negative over time.

Indeed, it might be that compassion that is tempered with a degree of negativity is, in fact, healthier. Adopting an attitude that “more is always better” would be a great mistake in the study of positivity, argues Schuldberg (2002). Compassion may be beneficial at a medium level, fostering well-being, better relationships, and organizational unity. Excessive compassion, however, may turn into sentimentality when making difficult decisions, where it may make leaders unfairly neglect others’ abusive and opportunistic behaviours. It may additionally be driven by opportunism and manipulation of others. Consequently, excessive compassion may facilitate the emergence of destructive climates. As noted by Aristotle (350 BCE/1992), excess or deficit in the same capability is what constitutes vice, while virtue lies in the golden mean (Rego et al., 2012).

We suggest the need to assume that the outcomes of organizational compassion relations will not likely be purely positive but rather dynamically dualistic in their outcomes. The suggestion is supported by more general calls for appreciation of dynamic dualism in organizational relations (Sutherland & Smith, 2011). Contradictory dimensions of continuity and change, positive and negative are a reality of organizing. Rather than seeking to manage them through a definitive artificial resolution towards one dimension or the other, managers and scholars are encouraged to seek more nuanced and textured approaches that incorporate simultaneous synergistic mutuality. Social practices are never purely positive or negative but entail a combination of positivity and negativity that produces “tempered” experiences. Appreciating the dynamic constitution of duality scholars may address organizational compassion in counterintuitive form. They can ask, for example, “what are the risks of compassion in work teams?” or “are there potential negative consequences of a compassion relations

initiative?” Assumptions that outcomes will likely be mixed, rather than purely positive, can alert managers to address unintended negative outcomes that will invariably arise.

## **Discussion**

Our analysis of theorising and research on compassion in organizations using practice theory as a framework suggests several pathways for researching compassion in organizations. It should be kept in mind that the use of practice theory in research demands tolerance with ambiguity and complexity as well as an appreciation of organizational reality as always contingent, multiple, and emergent. Findings from such research are not to be taken as predictions but rather as theoretical generalizations that can be taken as guiding principles. They explain contextual situated dynamics, rather than universal variation, and even though contexts are always different, with reflection they can also be applied to understand other contexts (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011).

On the basis of the discussion thus far, we find limitations in the predominant definitions of organizational compassion as collective recognising, feeling, and responding to pain. To advance the field of organizational compassion theory and research, we propose a new practice based definition of organizational compassion involving capabilities for: ongoing concern, assessment, decisions, and responding to suffering. *Ongoing concern* either relates to a specific episodic event of suffering or the ongoing potential for such suffering based upon an “ethic of care” (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012). The construction of such an ethic is grounded in conventions and rules that are fixed on the basis of established categorical devices. Concern leads to *assessment* of the giver and the receiver’s compassion worthiness on the basis of socially constituted normative legitimacy criteria (1997). Assessments are followed by rational *decision-making* by givers and receivers in terms of whether to *respond* with refusal, giving, or



acceptance of compassion support (Nussbaum, 1996). The outcomes of such responding are positive and negative experiences that reinforce power relations (1987, 1997; Frazer, 2006; Frost et al., 2000; Schmitt & Clark, 2006; van Kleef et al., 2008). We therefore define compassion in organizations in terms of organizational members' *ongoing* individual and collective capacity for ongoing concern about members individual and collective suffering (interpretations of social construction); the *assessment* of members' compassion worthiness (as giver(s) and receiver(s)) (judgements mutual constitution), and *decisions to respond* with refusal, giving, or receiving, which create or reinforce power relations (considerations of dynamic dualism).

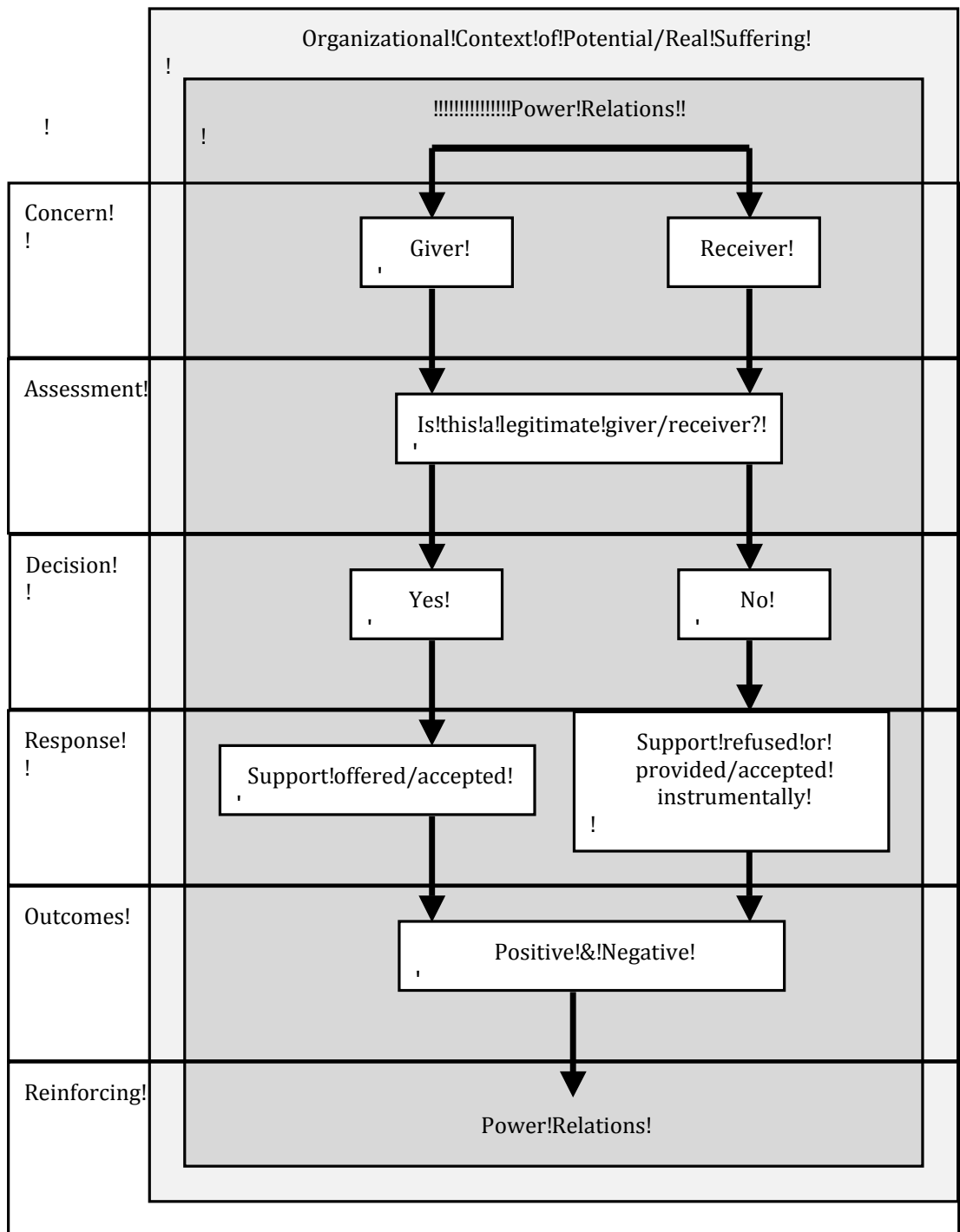


Figure 4: Organizational compassion relations

## **Conclusion**

We see much promise in the positive turn in organizational studies, which has emphasized the study of organizational compassion. Nonetheless, we consider that a tempered approach to the positive is required. To achieve this we have turned to compassion as social practice, for the complexities of organizational compassion are always formed in social practice, as real lived experiences, even when informed by ideals for practice.

While researchers of organizational compassion have been active in exploring the virtuous consequences of a positive approach to work we have argued that this research has been limited by idealistic religious and psychological assumptions. These assumptions may have aspirational value but from the perspective of social practice within an organizational setting that value is limited. In our analysis of theorising and research on compassion in organizations we have revealed several gaps in the literature. These relate to an under-acknowledgement of organizational compassion as a social construct; a neglect of compassion's role in the mutual (re)constitution social hierarchies, and a lack of recognition of compassion's dynamic constitution of positive and negative dualistic effects. We sought to address these gaps through using a practice theory perspective to articulate a more sociologically based definition of organizational compassion.

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## Chapter Three

Chapters One and Two have made theoretical contributions. Both have sought to demonstrate organizational compassion as a complex social relational process. In the preceding chapter, we used a framework based upon three key ideas that Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) summarised from the writings of various practice theorists. In Chapter 3, my co-authors (Clegg and Cunha) and I seek to build on these arguments using the same practice theory framework to analyse empirical data. The chapter is titled 'Expressing compassion in the face of crisis: Organizational practices in the aftermath of the Brisbane floods of 2011', and has been submitted to the *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*. We report findings from interviews conducted with 25 participants from 18 different organizations, affected by flooding that inundated the City of Brisbane in January 2011. The interviews revealed narratives of individual and collective panic, fear, neglect, guilt, rigidity, and anger – as well as compassionate support, flexibility, gifting, gratitude, and commitment. These narratives shared aspects of sensemaking, communication, politics, power, and change, as well as organizational identity and identification. Clegg, Cunha and I analysed these narratives using a practice theory framework to generate three empirically derived insights on organizational compassion responding in times of crisis. These insights highlight our conclusion that organizational compassion responding is an ongoing process nurtured in times of stability, rather than an episodic reaction to a crisis event.

**Expressing compassion in the face of crisis: Organizational practices in the  
aftermath of the Brisbane floods of 2011**

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## **Abstract**

The findings of this study on the compassionate support provided (or not) to employees during and after the Brisbane flood crisis of January 2011 provide insight into crisis management as continuous process rather than a reactionary response to disaster when it arises. Three significant policy implications are generated in relation to organizational response and processes of compassion in times of crisis: First, compassionate discourses and categorization schemas should be clearly articulated within the organization before crisis (i.e. compassionate organizations express compassion as quotidian practice).

Second, compassionate policies and practices need to be embedded in ongoing organizational routines and policies. Third, initiatives framed as compassion responses should not be assumed to necessarily create positive outcomes; rather, outcomes should be assessed on an ongoing basis. We suggest that these insights will be helpful to researchers and managers seeking to nurture compassionate crisis responding within organizations.

## **Keywords**

Compassion; crisis; organization studies; practice theory; social theory; Brisbane floods.

## **Introduction**

The study of compassion in organizations has grown in recent years as a primary area of research and theorizing. Compassion is represented as a dimension of critical importance for organizations, especially those aware of the always-present possibility of crisis and disaster (Devitt & Borodzicz, 2008; 2002; Dutton, Worline, et al., 2006; Goldberg & Harzog, 1996; Veil et al., 2011). The mostly widely used definition of compassion within the organizational literature is as a three-fold process of collective recognizing, feeling, and responding to another's pain (Dutton, Glynn, et al., 2006; 2007; Frost et al., 2006; 2012; 2011; Lilius et al., 2008). Hitherto, the practices of compassion have been taken for granted in terms of this model.

We analyze the above definition as the basis for theorizing and research on compassion in organizations to reveal several gaps. First, it is one sided as it only takes the perspective of the giver of compassion – ignoring the voice and experience of the receiver. Second, it mostly ignores the social dynamics inherent in compassion responding. Third, it generally assumes positive outcomes from compassion relations – when the reality is much more complex. We will address these gaps by invoking a social theory (practice theory) to analyze case data collected from organizational employees affected by the Brisbane Floods of 2010.

We organize the paper in four sections. We begin with a review of the literature on organizational compassion in response to crisis. Next we introduce our research methods, the context of inquiry, and the central research question: What characterizes the social relational process of organizing compassion responding in times of crisis? We address this question through data on organizational responses of support (or not) provided to employees during the Brisbane floods. Our findings and analysis are



introduced as three practical insights that will be of interest to managers and researchers seeking to create compassionate organizational environment, and preparing their organizations for crisis. We conclude that compassion cannot be manufactured in a moment of crisis but needs to be cultivated. By this we mean that it is a feature of everyday practices, an ongoing accomplishment characterizing times and occasions of relative normalcy.

### **Constituting compassion in Organization Studies**

Solomon (1998), was one of the first theorists explicitly to discuss compassion within organizations. Arguing against prevailing notions of organizations as places of brutal Darwinian ‘dog eat dog’ competitiveness, Solomon countered that in practice organizations are also places of humanity, wherein compassion is in fact an expectation required of many employment positions. Frost (1999), another early theorist of organizational compassion, lamented that although compassion is central to understanding organizations’ effects and practices the topic had been mostly ignored, such that it was invisible in organizational theory, an imbalance that needed to be righted, he insisted.

Since these early calls, there has been a growing interest in organizational compassion, with more than 15 theoretical and empirical publications on compassion in organizations appearing in leading journals and edited volumes. The research findings in these publications indicate that compassionate dealings with staff, particularly in times of crisis, can lead to many employee benefits as well as organizational benefits. For example, studies have found that compassionate leadership facilitates healing and growth after trauma, whereas organizational neglect can lead to feelings of resentment and anger amongst employees (Dutton et al., 2002). Compassion within organizations

thereby not only speeds recovery from suffering (Lilius et al., 2011) but also enhances positive emotions along with employee commitment towards the organization and co-workers (Frost et al., 2000; Lilius et al., 2008). Studies further indicate organizational compassion builds organizational resources of trust, pride, connection, and motivation; strengthens values of respect, dignity, and the common good and, by enhancing emotional sensitivity, it cultivates critical relational skills (Dutton et al., 2007). In summary, the research on organizational compassion indicates that it fosters important outcomes both for individual members and the entire organization (Lilius et al., 2012).

Research has focused on mechanisms for organizational compassion responding that include the establishment of a harm notification network (Dutton et al., 2002; Dutton, Worline, et al., 2006). A network of this sort systematizes organizational awareness of individual employee needs and the provision of support that, depending upon the nature and causes of suffering, varies in scope, scale, speed, and specialization. Organizational compassion responses are legitimized, propagated, and coordinated through the cultivation of compassionate policies, routines (Kanov et al., 2004) and values reflecting respect for humanity and individual personality (Dutton et al., 2007; Dutton, Worline, et al., 2006). Examples of such practices include establishing formal employee assistance programs; for instance, allowing employees to donate unused vacation time to other employees in need (Lilius et al., 2008) or the provision of a formal ombudsperson (Lilius et al., 2012). Stress has also been given to the importance of compassionate communication with a caring voice, an empathetic awareness of stakeholder concerns (Coombs, 1999), and use of a variety of channels including the more human modes such as social media (Veil et al., 2011).

We observe that the research findings above are largely sociological in nature, attending more to practices than to individual psyches. Drawing on the social “practice turn” in organizational studies leads us to question the *a priori* construct of compassion in favor of a more empirically grounded account of the ways in which members of organizations ordinarily go about the business of doing (or not doing) compassion. The practice perspective is rooted in the idea that all phenomena such as knowledge and meaning, power, and organized activity, are constituted in everyday social practices (Nicolini, 2012). Social interactions mutually constitute, negotiate, and legitimize social orders. Interactions have been seen to be constantly in flux as they build dynamic collective capabilities for activities as diverse as managing (Feldman, 2010), learning (Antonacopoulou, 2006, 2009), knowing (Orlikowski, 2002), collaborating (Bjørkeng, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2009), and cultivating business ethics (Clegg, Kornberger, & Rhodes, 2007). We therefore suggest that conceiving of compassion as a complex of social relational practices can enhance knowledge of organizational compassionate crisis responding. Consequently, we employ social practice theory to illuminate our empirical research on organizational compassion in the sections that follow. We focus on the situated, immediate, and contextualized nature of specific empirical practices of providing compassionate support in a time of crisis: the Brisbane floods. Our findings may be summarized as three insights designed to facilitate researchers and managers in nurturing compassionate organizations and understanding crisis management as continuous process rather than a response initiated in the moment of disaster.

We do not assume that these insights are generalizable as universal prescriptions that apply in all organizations or situations, namely in all crisis situations, due to specificities of organizations and to those of flood emergencies themselves (de Leeuw, Vis, & Jonkman, 2012). Rather we suggest that researchers and managers might

reflexively engage with these insights, drawing their own conclusions on their applicability in other contexts. Before presenting these insights, we provide some background about the context of the research along with considerations of methodology.

### **Research context and method**

The underlying methodology this study draws on is grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Qualitative research was chosen for this study as it facilitated observance of organizational compassion as a social process. The context for the research was the occasion of the Brisbane Floods of January 2011. Regions of Australia were devastated by summer flooding in December 2010, leaving the sub-tropical State of Queensland as the worst affected area. As the Brisbane River broke its banks at 2:30 PM the City Council ordered the evacuation of workers and residents from 2,100 streets in the Central Business District and other suburbs. Of Brisbane's 150 suburbs, 67 sustained significant damage.

The data for this study was collected nine months after the floods had receded using a snowball sampling method. Established social networks were accessed to contact people whose work had been affected by the floods. Potential participants were approached for an interview concerning how their employing organization had addressed employment relations during the extraordinary circumstances of this substantial flooding. Eventually, twenty-five people from eighteen organizations formed the snowball sample. Each of the interviewees worked in the central Brisbane area affected by the floods. Most had been ordered to evacuate their work areas on January 11, 2011.

The interviews lasted between twenty minutes and one hour. Interviewees were assured of anonymity both individually and organizationally. The interview process involved

collecting stories or narratives of the interviewees' experiences of organizational care or neglect during the Brisbane floods. A loosely structured interview script was used to request participants recount their experience on the day of the flood; how their work was affected; what support was provided by their work organization: whether this type of response was normal; and if they could think of other examples. Comparison between compassion narratives in different organizations, across different industries, allowed us to analyze the dynamics of compassion as organizational practice. The interviewees descriptions of characters and plots provided access to organizational values, beliefs, and support systems (Czarniawska, 2000; Czarniawska-Joerges, 2004), manifest as varying organizational flood responses. Full transcriptions were made of each of the interviews and the transcriptions were imported into software (NVivo 9) used specifically for qualitative analyses. "Nodes" comprising key themes and subthemes were highlighted and categorized using the software. In the process of coding, utterance (rather than respondent) was used as the unit of analysis, thereby more utterances were coded than the actual number of respondents.

The process of coding involved some 350 hours of deliberation, discussion and decision-making. Applying the standard techniques and procedures of grounded theory building (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) descriptive coding was initially used to identify recurring themes and subthemes in the narratives. With further interrogation and re-examination of the data, these categories and themes were further refined as coding progressed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). By setting different narratives against each other, we discovered patterns and contingencies, which we collated under the theoretical dimensions of practice theory. The insights derived are thereby a combination of grounded analysis and use of a well-accepted framework for analysis of practices. We followed phenomenological practice by inductively constructing "social science

concepts using concepts of social actors as the foundations for analytic induction” (Rynes & Gephart Jr, 2004, p. 457). The evidence was consolidated into narrations demonstrating different emergent themes, grouped within the practice framework (Langley, 1999), stressing social construction, mutual constitution, and dualistic outcomes. The overall effect was the retelling and interpreting of individual narratives as a grand narrative of organizational compassion practices. The main themes that emerged from the interviews demonstrate that the flood was, indeed, an extreme event that made compassion relations visible (Eisenhardt, 1989) and provided a privileged window on our topic of interest.

### **Findings: Complexities of compassion**

Use of social practice theory in analyzing the support provided by organizations to their employees during the Brisbane flood crisis reveals organizational compassion as socially complex and even messy rather than merely a virtuous emotion assuring positive outcomes. Further, genuine compassionate crisis responding is an ongoing process rather than a reactive state elicited in a moment of disaster. Three practical insights were generated (Table 1) that can be applied by researchers and managers seeking to nurture compassionate organizational crisis responding as an ongoing endeavor: (1) articulate compassionate discourses and categorization schemas within the organization; (2) embed compassionate practices within the ongoing organizational routines and policies; and (3) assume mixed outcomes accrue to compassion relations and therefore assess outcomes on an ongoing basis. Each of these insights will be expanded upon in turn below.

**Table 1. Research findings on compassion relations during the Brisbane floods.**

Non-supportive Relations (Number of utterances)	Ambiguous Relations (Number of utterances)	Compassion Relations (Number of utterances)
<b>Categorization Schemas</b>		
<i>Employee Defined</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As “resource”, a worker doing a job (8)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As family (3)</li> <li>As person more important than money (7)</li> </ul>
<i>Flood Situation Defined</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As a normal situation – expectations of business as usual (2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As an ambiguous situation – late responses, mixed messages (3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As exceptional – where normal relations are put on hold &amp; exceptional relations established (10)</li> </ul>
<b>Embedded Ongoing Organizational Practices</b>		
<i>Ongoing Practices</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Valuing profits &amp; productivity (9)</li> <li>Organizational control (3)</li> <li>Rigid work arrangements (6)</li> <li>People hired to do a job (2)</li> <li>Overwork with low pay (5)</li> <li>No routine support in crisis (5)</li> <li>Demanding managers (4)</li> <li>Distant managers (4)</li> <li>No concern for community issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ambiguous priorities (2)</li> <li>Limited empowerment (3)</li> <li>People to work hard &amp; win commissions, bonuses &amp; competitions (2)</li> <li>High work load with high pay (3)</li> <li>Clever arrangements to avoid responsibility in crises (2)</li> <li>Managers with conflicting directions of care &amp; control (2)</li> <li>Limited role models</li> <li>CSR valuable for public relations (5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Valuing people over profits (31)</li> <li>High empowerment, autonomy, respect &amp; trust (21)</li> <li>Flexible work options to suit individual needs (21)</li> <li>People hired to fulfill their passions (intrinsic rewards) (2)</li> <li>Emphasis on work/life balance (5)</li> <li>Special arrangements to support employees in crisis (14)</li> <li>Emotionally intelligent leaders (30)</li> <li>Close &amp; caring role models (15)</li> <li>A priori contingency planning and systems (3)</li> <li>Strong commitment to community (CSR) (9)</li> </ul>
<b>Dualistic Outcomes</b>		
<i>Emotional responses to support received</i>		

- 
- Panic (4), anxiety (10), anger (9), distancing (7), no-expectations or disappointment (5)
  - Cynicism (4), anger (1), appreciation (3), gratitude (2)
  - Positive – commitment (3), loyalty (8), altruism (4), trust (4), gratitude (8), peace (4), pride in organization (2)
  - Mixed - Cynicism (4 – see middle row)
  - Negative - disappointment – not enough care (6), taking advantage (5), “government throwing cash”
- 

***Insight 1: Articulate compassionate discourses and categorization schemas***

The first insight relates to the important role organizational discourse plays in framing organizational practices. Knowledge constructs are a powerful mechanism in the constitution of order: socially constructed knowledge provides scripts with which people make sense of and act upon the world in terms of notions such as compassion (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Individuals and organizations use discourse to shape and legitimize organizational practices (Clegg et al., 2006). Knowledge thereby intermingles with power by constituting and ordering the political structures of organizations—and society more generally. In this study the influence of organizational knowledge on organizational responses to the flood situation occurred in two ways.

First, differences between organizational modes of responding were reflected in the different organizational modes of defining the relation between the organization and the employee. Second, organizational compassion responses were also reflected in different organizational modes of classifying the flood event as either *normal*, or *exceptional*, or in classifying it *ambiguously*. Such classification, as we will discuss, results not only from reactions to crisis but also from interpretations prevailing before the crisis: organizations notice crises with the sensemaking tools already in place (Weick, 2003, Forthcoming; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). In the following sections we will look more



closely at both of these sets of classifications beginning with classification of the employee.

### *Classification of employees*

Organizations that demonstrated high compassion capabilities in their responses to the flood situation were, on the whole, either small organizations that viewed their employees “as family” or they were larger organizations that articulated a philosophy of care, communicating that people were more important than money. The claim of prioritizing people in management decisions is a cliché often viewed with suspicion: however, employees in some of these organizations said it actually applied. In those organizations that demonstrated least compassion capabilities in their responses to the floods employees were viewed as workers who were paid to do a job as long as the business was operating—regardless of the situation at the employees’ homes. If employees had personal situations, responsibilities, and duties keeping them from work, the organization would apply normal sanctions for non-attendance such as chastisement, deducting pay, or deducting days from paid leave. If the floods meant that they could not get to work, these conditions applied.

Rousseau (1762/2003) argues that those higher in the social hierarchy are less concerned with the conditions of those below them in class or rank. Dominant categorizations of superiority and inferiority are defined by powerful elites to discriminate and distinguish (Bourdieu, 1984; Clegg et al., 2006). Compassion is based upon our ability to identify with another’s suffering and pain. Nussbaum (2003) argues that identification with the suffering of another requires admission of our own vulnerability, human frailty and weakness, with all the anxiety that this can presage. Compassion therefore requires an acceptance of one’s own humanness, along with an

acceptance of the shared vulnerability of all human beings for common suffering.

### *Classification of the flood situation*

We now turn to considering the relationship between organizational compassion responses with organizational modes of classifying the flood event as either exceptional or normal, or ambiguous. In organizations in which the floods were classified as exceptional, the organization went out of its way to make the event as trouble-free as possible. Arrangements included providing paid leave of absence during and after the event, and suspension of 'business as usual' rules. The overall tendency under this classification was for the organization to demonstrate a collective capability for compassion.

An example of an organization that exhibited a high compassion capability is an IT company in the Brisbane CBD. Prior to evacuation orders even being issued by the City Council, the organization had anticipated the concerns of employees regarding the impending flood. Each employee received a phone call from their direct supervisor who instructed them not to come in for work but to "take care of their families as a number one priority" and to work from home as much as they could. They were further given assurance that irrespective of whether or not they could work, they would receive full pay over the flood period. Over the week of the flood, employees received enquiries about their well-being and need for support. They were also provided with updates on the situation at their workplace.

In organizations where the definition of the situation during the floods was classified as *normal*, organizationally there was no distinction made from business as usual. Here the ongoing organizational capability of concern for the members' potential individual and collective suffering, as well as assessment of legitimacy, decision making, and

responding, was minimal. Under such circumstances, if employees could not make it to work or their personal responsibilities and duties kept them from work, the organization applied normal sanctions for non-attendance.

In between these *normal* and *exceptional* responses were organizations in which the event was dealt with ambiguously, albeit primarily from the perspective of the organization rather than from a compassionate concern for the individual employees struggling with disaster. The overall tendency in these ambiguous organizations was a lack of consistency in the provision of care.

To conclude this section, scripts connect the materiality of settings through members' categorization devices (Sacks, 1972). Our research findings indicate that the quality of organizational discourses and categorization schemas are associated organizational practices of compassion in crisis responding.

***Insight 2: Embed compassionate practices within the ongoing organizational routines and policies***

The second policy implication relates to the significant relationship uncovered between organizational responses in times of crisis and the daily practices of the organization. Practice theory emphasizes the mutual interconnectedness, interdependence, and constitution of all phenomena (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Giddens, 1984), a conceptualization expanded to indicate interconnectedness between organizations (Feldman, 2010) comprising a field. In this article we are concerned with the particular context of the Brisbane flood and the variable compassion practices of organizations during this event. Within that context we found that the most responsive organizations in the flood crisis already had compassionate policies and routines in place. Below we will consider each of these practices in turn.

### *A philosophy of care*

The organizations quickest to communicate care and assurance to their employees during the floods had an established philosophy and culture of care in their daily practices. In contrast, those organizations that did not have a philosophy of care in their daily practices were painfully negligent in responding to employee concerns. In some cases these organizations even added to the weight of employee concerns during the crisis.

### *Empowerment and trust*

One way the philosophy of care was manifested was by empowering employees, providing them with the tools and the trust to do their jobs well, rewarding them for getting the job done, and allocating responsibility not on the basis of age or gender but on merit. In such caring organizations, empowerment and trust were invested openly and abundantly, embedded in the fabric of their everyday organization.

### *Support in times of need*

It was no coincidence that those organizations that demonstrated the most outstanding examples of collective care to their employees before, during, and after the floods were organizations with a culture of care: they provided such care even in times of personal difficulty in their employees' individual lives. Instances of these special circumstances include illness, increased responsibilities as a caregiver, paternity leave, and robbery.

A small organization, which provides office supplies to businesses in the Brisbane region, is an example of an organization that does its best to support its people in times of need. When one employee recently experienced a period of depression she was told to take care of herself as her number one priority, and come in to work when she could. She remained on her regular salary.

### *Role models*

The recruitment and promotion of managers who are role models of care and emotionally sensitive leadership is another key factor in nurturing a compassionate organizational environment. Important characteristics of such leaders are integrity, people skills, a preparedness to exceed prescriptions about roles, as well as empathy towards the concerns of those managed, even when unstated but manifest in physical symptoms of distress. Such role models have time for people, supporting them through mentoring and coaching. And they sponsor training development programs to enable themselves and others to become better-equipped managers and leaders. When employees are supported by leaders of this caliber they are likely to model the behaviors and provide similar mentoring and care to the teams assigned to their leadership. Role models in normal times are credible in times of crisis.

### *Work/Life balance*

Supporting employees' work/life balance is another characteristic of a compassionate organizational environment. Organizations can support their employees' work/life balance by investing in their health, recreation, and family, and providing flexible work options. Flexible work arrangements may also take the form of a "compacted working week," wherein employees' work fewer days but longer hours per week so they can take a day off. It may also involve telecommuting wherein employees complete part of their workload at home. In some organizations, flexible work arrangements are "reason blind," which means employees are not required to provide an explanation for their desired flexible work arrangement. The reason might just as well be to support family needs as to support a hobby such as surfing or sailing. Companies that care about families in normal times are credible when they express care in exceptional times.

### *A priori contingency plans and systems*

Contingency planning to support employees during crises is another characteristic of organizations with a high capability for compassion. During the floods organizations that best exemplified compassionate concern rolled out contingency plans as the floods unfolded. Provisions of this sort ensure that the organization is not dependent on getting employees into work during a crisis situation. Rather employees can be sent home to take care of their families.

An example of contingency planning for times of crisis was described by an interviewee who works for one of the leading Australian universities in the Brisbane region. University representatives travel extensively to international destinations, including the world's crisis "hot spots." To protect employees from harm while on overseas travel the university subscribes to a service that offers emergency support to employees who find themselves in a crisis situation anywhere in the world. Preparing for crisis, in this organization, was part of the cultural fabric, not a reaction to critical episodes.

### *Corporate social responsibility*

A commitment to corporate social responsibility is another characteristic of organizations that offered the best support to their employees during the Brisbane floods. Employees we spoke to were proud both of the way their organization had supported them during the flood as well as their organization's greater commitment towards the needs of the community. These employees saw a link between doing the right thing by employees and doing the right thing by customers and general society. They further argued that when employees are more enthusiastic and confident about promoting products to clients they are confident that the products offer fair value. Some of the

ways organizations can engage employees in corporate social responsibility include matching donations, supporting local businesses, and microfinance.

Bringing this section to a conclusion, the most significant finding from the above data is the relationship between support offered and ongoing daily organizational practices. Organizations that offered the best support to their employees have positive power relations and compassionate practices embedded in ongoing daily practices.

***Insight 3: Assume mixed experiences in compassion relations and therefore assess outcomes on an ongoing basis***

The third insight is that the outcomes of compassion relations will always be mixed, ongoing, constantly revised, and therefore indeterminate. Social practice theory views with suspicion elements that are often treated as dichotomous and antithetical concepts such as body and mind, cognition and behavior, freewill and determinism, individual and institution, subjective and objective, as well as positive and negative (Reckwitz, 2002). From the perspective of social practice theory, constructs such as compassion are to be viewed as not necessarily either positive or negative but as a social process involving the dynamic constitution of dualism (Taylor, 1993). Social processes are indeterminate, ongoing, and constantly subject to revisions based upon time, place, circumstances, relevancies, and priorities in any given moment. A situation that appears positive from one point of view, or at one time, often appears as negative from another perspective, or at another time (Carroll, 1998). Even where the motive of compassion is present, the results may be experienced otherwise. Hence, rather than assuming compassion's effects to be positive and beneficial, it is advisable to assume that the experiences of givers and receivers in compassion relations are likely to be multifaceted, ongoing, and indeterminate. Researchers and practitioners should be mindful and alert

to various outcomes on an ongoing basis and seek to redress harmful effects as they arise.

Examples of the negative outcomes of compassion relations are documented in research findings of *toxic handling* (Frost & Robinson, 1999), and *compassion labor* (Ashforth & Humphreys, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1996), which can lead to burnout due to *compassion fatigue* (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). People whose job it is to smile and be kind, such as nurses and flight attendants, commonly exhibit compassion fatigue. Toxic handlers are managers and leaders in organizations, who “contagiously” absorb their employees or co-workers emotional hurt (Anandakumar et al., 2007; Frost, 2003; Hatfield et al., 1993). They thus become vicariously vulnerable to the very same hurt as the people who are the objects of their sympathy. The data from this study show that compassion relations are neither just positive nor negative but dynamic with ongoing recursive implications.

#### *Positive outcomes*

In this study, the *positive* outcomes of compassion were demonstrated as the building of organizational commitment, loyalty, and compassion towards other colleagues, providing opportunities for healing, bonding, and sensemaking. One interviewee stated that receiving exceptional organizational support in times of need it made him feel “closer to the business” and “fiercely loyal” to the company. It also makes him want to “pay it forward” and “more inclined to go the extra mile for the employer when they need the help”. In this way, compassion may help companies to turn a “poison” into “medicine” (Clair & Dufresne, 2004).



### *Negative outcomes*

In addition to the positive benefits of providing compassionate support described above, there were also *negative* outcomes experienced by employees, which should not be ignored. These include perceptions of organizations simply fulfilling obligations, perceptions of support as patronizing, and employees taking advantage of their position as a victim and demanding more support than they may be entitled to.

When employees experience organizational compassion as insincere it is another negative. Here “caring” organizational practices are experienced by employees as being not about compassion but rather about “ticking boxes” to fulfill an obligation, legal or otherwise. This “care” is received as “impersonal general support” rather than “personal support according to the individuals needs”. Providing “compassion” of this sort was seen as more about protecting the organization from negative public perceptions, or protection from legal challenges of employee neglect, rather than about actually protecting the employees.

It is acknowledged that the benefits of compassionate practices extend not only to the receiver but also to the giver. For example Boyatzis et al (2006) argue that when managers show compassion to employees the managers are replenished both neurologically and hormonally, ameliorating the negative impact of chronic stress. Nonetheless, employees can view organizational practices of compassion with cynicism when the organization stands to gain from such practices. An example is that of one employee who works for an IT organization that conducts monthly teleconferences to maintain unity between its disbanded employees maintaining computer systems for several government departments and international organizations at various locations across the city. When the frequency of these meetings was increased to a daily basis during the course of the floods this employee was grateful. Nonetheless, he also

harbored an attitude of cynicism. He couldn't help but consider that the support was provided less out of genuine care for the employees, and more out of an organizational concern to maintain relations with a valuable workforce during a period when the organization could not provide work. This employee and his work colleagues were not paid during the period of the flood.

A traditional objection against compassion is that it can appear *patronizing*—undermining the receiver's humanity by treating them not as a dignified agent but as a passive victim or subordinate (Nussbaum, 1996). Leaders of conservative political parties often contend that providing social support treats people as victims of life's difficulties, rather than respecting them as agents able to self-improve (Berlant, 2004). Organizational compassion can also patronize employees, a concern for a respondent who received exceptional support from her organization during the floods, with extended paid leave and cash donations to clean and refurbish her flooded home. She knew that her boss was genuinely supportive but was not certain how her co-workers would react to the extra load at work while she was away.

The negative outcomes of compassion described by the respondents have thus far considered only the employees perspectives. There are potentially negative outcomes of compassionate relations for the organization as well. Several employees, who praised the high level of trust and compassionate practices in their organizations, described that sometimes this compassion is misplaced, because employees take advantage of it. One interviewee described a case where exceptional arrangements were made to support a colleague with a difficult home situation by creating extremely flexible work arrangements. According to the interviewee, however, the recipient took advantage and didn't even attempt to fulfill her commitments to the organization and later took the organization to court for not providing the support she had been offered. In spite of the

potential for abuse, these organizations adopt a general policy of trusting employees and restricting only when required.

Compassion relations are not inherently positive. Even in organizations that seem to offer the best support to their employees, some employees experienced that support as negative rather than positive, for various reasons. Combining practice theory, with its agnosticism towards dualism, with empirical data, we can state that organizations wishing to cultivate compassionate practices should not assume positive outcomes will accrue to what is construed as good intent; therefore, the outcomes of compassion responding should be regularly re-assessed.

## **Conclusion**

Our empirical findings contribute to a critique of theorizing and research pertaining to crisis responding and organizational compassion. In contrast to conceiving of crisis responding as episodic action, and of compassion as a positive virtue or psychological state with certain positive outcomes, our research indicates they are ongoing social relational processes best cultivated in times of normality, rather than in moments of disaster. More specifically, our research generated three significant insights that we suggest will be of use to researchers and managers seeking to nurture compassionate organizations and effective crisis responding. First, organizations wishing to cultivate compassionate practices should articulate compassionate organizational discourses or categorization schemas. Second, it is not possible to fake compassionate practices in the moment of crisis; compassion needs to be embedded in the ongoing routines and policies of the organization. Third, while organizations should strive for positive outcomes in compassion relations, such outcomes should not be assumed. Rather dualistic outcomes should be assumed and hence, the outcomes of compassion relations

should be assessed ongoing basis.

The insights suggested in this research will be valuable for researchers and managers interested in nurturing compassionate organizations as well as in effectively managing organizational crises. These are not infallible prescriptions applicable to all contexts, but guiding principles that researchers and managers might reflexively engage with, drawing their own conclusions on their applicability in other situated contexts.

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## Chapter Four

Like the preceding chapter, Chapter Four titled ‘The sociomateriality of compassion: A sequence analysis’ and submitted to the *Journal of Business Ethics*, is also empirical in nature. In fact, my co-authors (Cunha and Clegg) and I re-analyse the same empirical interview dataset described in Chapter Three. Although it is the same dataset, we approach it with a different theoretical emphasis and different research methodology. As a result, we highlight a distinct set of findings and generate new insights.

In Chapters Two and Three we used three principles of practice theory as a framework for analysing organizational compassion research and empirical data. In this chapter we make one of those principles, the mutual constitution of social phenomena in relations of sociomateriality, as our theoretical emphasis. Here our focus is on the human-to-human and human-to-object relations in the materialisation of organizational compassion responding. We argue that in times of crisis, organizational compassion responding is materialised not merely through human agency, but through the agency of sociomateriality. Applying a methodology of sequence analysis reveals that organizational compassion responding materialises not randomly, but in a general sequential order of events. The sequence begins with communication, followed by policy concerns to access resources, the providing of tangible support, providing support to others, and reconnecting with others. We argue that ethical accountability in times of crisis demands efforts to rework sociomaterial configurations that cause undue harm, in order to materialise compassionate support.

**The Sociomateriality of Compassion: A Sequence Analysis**

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## The Sociomateriality of Compassion: A Sequence Analysis

### Abstract

Major natural disasters are a challenge to organizational routines. As routines are disrupted, forms of member engagement are transformed and unexpected contingencies arise. During such crises the ethical and moral responsibility of organizations to protect their employees from undeserved harm comes to the fore. In this study we analyze the compassionate support provided by organizations to their employees during and after the Brisbane flood crisis of January 2011. The specific focus of our analysis is how sequences of sociomateriality materialize within the flood context as variable expressions of responses signifying more or less organizational compassion and how these contribute to creating stability, order, and normalcy during the crisis situation and its aftermath. In organizational studies compassion is mostly conceived as an emotion or an ethical virtue and the relationship between the social and the material is often taken for granted. Our argument suggests the entanglement of the human and the material in compassion relations, where the sequential arrangement of material artifacts significantly influences compassion organizing. We suggest, in short, that compassion *materializes* and that it does so *sequentially*.

### Keywords

Compassion; crisis; ethics; organization studies; social theory; sociomateriality; Brisbane floods.

## **Introduction**

Compassion is more than an internal psychological disposition or ethical imperative, as the unfolding of compassion relations involve not only a giver and a receiver but also a sociomaterial context (Berlant, 2004; Nussbaum, 1996). Compassion is not only experienced by humans but also in the context of a world of non-human material objects within which human agency is enmeshed (Pickering, 1995; Suchman, 2007). The ethical implication of this analysis is that ethical practice is more than an internal human disposition; ethical agency is mutually constituted in human-material configurations (van der Velden, 2009).

Human action is often perceived as an effect of human superiority over other species as displayed in technological dominance over artificial material environments (Taylor, 1984), although a persistent trope, since at least Shelley (1999/1831), has been the revenge of human constructs on those that created them. Contemporaneously we address the relationship between humans and objects, the social and the material, in terms of sociomateriality (Schatzki, 2001). Human action is inseparable and integral to material configurations (Orlikowski, 2007; Suchman, 2007), normally articulated in complex sociomaterial networks (Jarzabkowski, Spee, & Smets, forthcoming).

There is a growing awareness and data signifying that human society cannot flourish without the contrivance of nature (Diamond, 2005). Natural disasters caused by adverse weather events, such as floods and bushfires, are one of the most potent occasions for heightened manifestation of this awareness. In responding to events such as floods, a disturbance in the general homeostasis of natural order occurs with the rising flood events, creating a disturbance in social order, precipitating actions that seek to return things to normalcy.

Our specific concern is with the ways in which compassion manifests itself within organizational contexts during the flood crisis. Rather than conceiving of compassion as an internal psychological trait or ethical virtue, we explore its socio-materialization within the context of organizational flood responses. When such events occur organizational actors have an ethical choice: how, if at all, will they respond to the breakdown in normal relations of organization when people's workplaces, homes and transport options are all at risk. Do they insist on business as usual or do they act compassionately, showing care and concern for those in their employ, and, if so, how is this manifested? In short, how does ethical agency become manifest? Following van der Valden (2009, p. 38) we define ethical agency as "the capability to act responsibly toward the 'other', in particular to do no harm". We will argue that agency lies not just with humans but also with material objects. Such objects are not inert, but much as the rising river we watch flowing, always in a constant state of becoming as dynamic sociomaterial interactions constitute, enable and constrain their modes of being.

As we move the conceptualisation of compassion from the psychological and moral to the social-contextual or socio-material we require alternate methods for its analysis (Abbott, 1995). Consequently, in this paper we explore the socio-materialization of organizational compassion using the method of sequence analysis. The essential concern of sequence analysis is the emergence of phenomena within a specific temporal and spatial social context as "an ordered list of elements" (Abbott, 1995, p. 94). Examples of social research that uses sequence analysis include studies on the successive steps in ritual dance performances (Abbott & Forrest, 1986), the stages in a career path (Abbott & Hrycak, 1990; Blair-Loy, 1999; Chan, 1995), the patterns in folktales (Forrest & Abbott, 1990), the rhetorical structure of sociological articles (Abbott & Barman, 1997), the learning of organizations (Bingham & Davis, 2012), as

well as the study of development sequences in organizational information systems (Sabherwal & Robey, 1993, 1995). The critical identifying characteristic of sequences is their ordered nature (Abbott & Tsay, 2000). We suggest that sequences also matter in the management of organizational crisis.

Interest in organizational compassion emerged in the late 1990s and has been growing over the past decade (Lilius et al., 2012; Rynes et al., 2012). Yet, the sociomateriality of organizational compassion responses remains an unexplored area within the literature. The present sociomaterial analysis of organizational compassion responding uses sequence analysis to constitute a unique contribution to theorising and research on compassion within organizations.

We have organized this paper in the following sections: First we provide a review of the literature on compassionate organizational crisis responding. Second, we introduce our research methods and context: the Brisbane Floods of January 2011. Our central research question is: What characterizes the sociomaterial organizing of compassion responding in times of crisis? We address this question through data on organizational responses provided to employees as support during the Brisbane floods. We organize our findings under headings of sequential ‘events’ of compassion responses: communication technologies, policy implications of resource accessibility, tangibles, supporting others, and reconnecting. Characteristic of each of these ‘events’ is their various configurations of sociomateriality. We conclude by discussing the ethical implications of a sociomaterial view. While both humans and objects display agency, in times of crisis humans are responsible and accountable for intervening or not to reconfigure sociomateriality in a manner characterized by compassionate responding.

## **Constituting Organizational Compassion as Sociomaterial Practice**

Suffering is a fundamental part of human experience. Anxiety can be triggered by a traumatic event such as a disaster, illness or injury, and other personal tragedies, including a violent attack, the death of a colleague or loved one, or poor social relations (Dutton, Worline, et al., 2006; Kanov et al., 2004). As organizations are places of human engagement and social relations, invariably they harbor feelings of joy and pain, along with contrasting reactions of both callousness and compassion in response to others' suffering. The cost of human suffering in organizations may include loss of work confidence, loss of self-esteem and health, as well as toxic relations and reduced employee cooperation (Frost, 1999).

Organizational implications flow from the ways in which responses to employee suffering are staged in organizational arenas. Solomon (1998) argues that due to the ever-present potential for human suffering in organizations, compassion and care towards others are requirements and expectations of most employment positions. Burdinski and Dunson (1999) argue that compassion must be the basis for moral decision-making if economic justice is ever to be achieved for society's 'disinherited'; a sentiment that is echoed by Stieb (2009). Awareness of the power of compassion to lessen and alleviate human pain (Kanov et al., 2004; Lilius et al., 2008) has led to growing interest in compassion in organizations (Dutton et al., 2002). Indicators of this growing interest include the "*dare to care*" theme of the Academy of Management's (AoM) 2010 conference and a subsequent special edition of the *Academy of Management Review* (Rynes et al., 2012), as well as the hosting of a conference on compassion research at Facebook's headquarters in Palo Alto California in December 2011.

Research by Frost et al. (2000) found that exercises of compassion in organizations that make others feel connected, cared for and affirmed positively transform employees' experience of pain and suffering. Kouzes and Posner (1992, p. 481) argue that ethical leadership is fundamentally an affair of the heart where "a leader's passion comes from compassion". According to Dutton et al. (2002) leaders can facilitate compassion within the organization by providing a legitimized context for meaning in response to pain and by helping employees to make sense of their pain, seek or provide comfort, and imagine a more hopeful future. When leaders neglect employees' pain, it can lead to feelings of resentment and anger.

Frost et al. (2006) describe that compassionate acts within organizations instill hope and a strengthened sense of self-concept or personal identity, as well as positively transforming member identification with colleagues and the organization. In a similar vein, Dutton et al. (2007) explain that compassion within organizations *builds resources* of trust, pride, connection, and motivation; *strengthens values* of respect, dignity, and the common good and *cultivates critical relational skills*. Further, Lilius et al. (2008) describe similar positive effects of organizational compassion relations, including strengthening positive emotion, individual identity, and organizational commitment. In a similar vein Coombs (1999) and Veil et al. (2011) stress the negative impacts for an organization's reputation when organizational crises are not addressed with compassion and that, conversely, communicating compassion strengthens stakeholder relations.

Frost et al. (2006) describe several modes of expressing organizational compassion, including sending a note, giving a hug, or offering words of comfort to a suffering co-worker. Dutton, Lilius and Kanov (2007) describe compassionate leadership as being exercised through recognising and rewarding compassionate acts, and telling stories to



spread relational resources, values, behaviours, beliefs, and they argue that compassion generates critical skills. Lilius et al. (2008) describe compassionate acts in terms of providing emotional support, time, flexibility, and material goods that support other organizational members in distress.

In this paper we are less concerned with the type of interpersonal peer-to-peer compassion relations between employees described above, although we appreciate their significance. Our concern is with how compassion materializes via the support provided by organizations to their employees in a time of crisis. Although explicit consideration of sociomateriality in current organizational compassion theorising is non-existent, the influence of social contextual factors has been acknowledged within the literature. For example, in keeping with organizational theorists who have written on the importance of “generative architecture” for creativity and knowledge sharing (Kornberger & Clegg, 2004), compassion research findings have indicated the importance of open organizational architecture that facilitates alertness to suffering, such as holding regular meetings (Kanov et al., 2004). Instituting compassionate practices and routines (Kanov et al., 2004; Lilius et al., 2008), and creating formal roles and programs that facilitate recognition and response to suffering within organizations are also significant (Lilius et al., 2012). The importance of compassionate communication, using a variety of channels, including social media has also been stressed (Veil et al., 2011). Other sociomaterial factors that research has indicated as important include the provision of contingencies for addressing emergencies, caring leadership, and internal newsletters for spreading news of care (Dutton et al., 2007). Most significant to the argument of this paper, Dutton et al. (2006) have referred to structuration theory (Giddens, 1982, 1984), to “propose that the process of compassion organizing unfolds through the complex interaction of social architecture and human agency over time” (Dutton, Worline, et al.,

2006, p. 74). Herein, social architecture is described as “the amalgam of social networks, values, and routines that structure an organization” (74).

In this paper we take these ideas further. We provide an explicit analysis of how compassion sequentially materialised within sociomaterial configurations, wherein agency lies not just with humans but also in human-material relations. We approach this by using narrative and sequence analysis to study the different forms of organizational support provided during the Brisbane Floods. In the following section we provide more detail about our research context and methodology.

### **Research Context and Method**

The context for this study was the City of Brisbane, the state capital of Queensland in Australia. Brisbane and southeast Queensland are largely dependent on the Wivenhoe Dam for their water supply, which is upstream on the Brisbane River. As a result of unprecedented and torrential rain fall early in January 2010 the dam was thought to be filling above its capacity and risk parameters by the engineers that controlled its flows. With the release of excess capacity from the Wivenhoe Dam into the Brisbane River as a precaution against the risk of collapse, water began flooding low-lying areas of the state capital of Brisbane on the morning of January 11, 2011. At 2:30 pm the Brisbane River broke its banks and at the City Council ordered the evacuation of the Central Business District (CBD) and other suburbs.

We collected the data for this study nine months after the summer floods devastated the city, using a snowball sampling method by accessing established social networks to contact people whose work had been affected during the floods. Ultimately we formed a sample of 25 participants from 18 organizations, representing a range of positions

including three bank employees, two IT specialists, two restaurant managers, an optician, an employee of a not-for-profit, employees of two universities, and of two travel organizations. Most interviewees worked in the central Brisbane area affected by the floods and had been ordered to evacuate their work areas on January 11, 2011. Each of the semi-structured interviews lasted between 20 minutes and an hour. Interviewees were asked to describe their experiences on the day of the floods and how it affected their ability to work and were further asked about the types of support they received from their employing organizations during the floods. Most interviewees responded in narrative form, by telling the story of the flood. Consequently, the interview process was one of collecting narratives concerning the interviewees' experiences of organizational care or neglect during the floods. A total of 12 hours of interviews were digitally recorded.

The interview data was analysed following standard procedures and techniques of building grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Initially complete transcriptions of each interview were imported into Nvivo9, a software package for qualitative research. Then over a period of some 400 hours, the narratives were coded according to key themes and subthemes. Comparison of the narratives provided insight into effects of different contextual variables in the narratives, such as organizational values, beliefs, and support systems (Czarniawska, 2000; Czarniawska-Joerges, 2004). Setting the various narratives against each other revealed patterns of similarity and difference in the different contexts of organizational compassion responding.

We further analysed the data with sequence analysis, a form of analysis used by researchers for assessing the unfolding of events in a narrative (Anheier & Katz, 2006;

Griffin, 1993). We applied sequence analysis through additional coding of the data according to the *order of events* interviewees described as they recounted their experience of the unfolding of the flood. As there is a tendency for repetition in conversation, we only coded the first time each event was mentioned into the dataset, omitting further references. Where a particular event was not mentioned in the interview, it was not coded into the dataset.

A further level of analysis involved analysing variability within the events. Abbott (1995) explains that sequences need not be one dimensional in nature but can be dependent upon other internal (within sequence) or external (outside of sequence) variables for their completion. Although there was general consistency in the overall sequence of events we uncovered, there was certainly variability within the quality of these events. Consequently, we further coded subcategories of events relating to the quality of compassionate care provided within each event. These were coded as high quality (3), medium quality (2), and low quality (1). There is no single approach to sequence analysis (Abbott, 1995). Consequently, unlike many sequence analysts (Abbott, 1995; Abbott & Hrycak, 1990; Ragin & Strand, 2008), we didn't use software to calculate complex algorithms for assessing the distances between the sequences found in our dataset. We found that our rich qualitative data was sufficient in demonstrating the sequential materialisation of compassion responding in response to the floods without the need for additional analysis using quasi-quantitative-statistical methodologies.

### **Findings: Compassion Responding as Five Events of Sociomateriality**

Applying narrative and sequence analysis approaches to our data on organizational compassion responses in the Brisbane floods revealed a general dominant sociomaterial

sequence of five events: (1) communication, (2) policy and access to resources, (3) tangible support, (4) supporting others, and (5) reconnecting (Table 1). The alphanumeric codes for the events were: communication, coded as C; policy and access to resources, coded as P; tangible support, coded as T; supporting others, coded as S; and reconnecting, coded as R. As described above, each of the events was further coded according to high, medium, or low quality. For example high quality communication was coded as C3, medium level as C2, and low level communication as C1. Similarly, high-level policy and resource access was coded as P3, mid level as P2, and low level as P1.

It should be noted that Table 1 not only indicates the general sequence of the unfolding of the five events but also the significance of the respective events within each narrative. All of the 25 interviews discussed communication, indicating that it was the most significant event. Also significant were policy and resource issues, which was discussed by 19 interviewees, and tangible support, discussed by 22 interviewees. In contrast, efforts to support others were described by only 12 interviewees, and 9 discussed reconnecting. We will now discuss each of these events below, demonstrating how each of these events of sociomaterial context permeates practice in providing compassionate support but also, in some cases, impeding it (Clegg, Cunha, Rego, & Dias, Forthcoming).

Table 1. Organizational compassion responding event sequences and quality

Participant	Event				
	1	2	3	4	5
1	C3	P2	T1		
2	C2	P2	R2	T2	
3	C3	P3	T3		
4	C3	T3	S3	R3	
5	C3	P1	T3	S3	
6	C3	P3	T3	R2	
7	C2	P1	R1		
8	C3	T1	S3	R3	
9	C1	P1	T1	R2	
10	T3	P2	C3		
11	C3	P2	T3		
12	C3	T1			
13	C3	R3	S3	T2	
14	C3	T3	S3		
15	C3	T3	S3	R3	
16	C3	T3	P3		
17	C2	P1			
18	C2	P3	T3	S3	
19	C3	P3	T3	S3	
20	P3	C3	T3	R3	S3
21	P3	C3	R3	T3	S3
22	C3	P1	T1	R3	S3
23	C2	P3	T1	S1	
24	C3	P3	T3		
25	C3	P3			

**Codes**

Communication		Total
Fast	C3	18
Delayed/poor	C2	5
Minimal/None	C1	1

Policy Decisions/Resources		Total
Facilitated	P3	10
Bending	P2	4
Impeding	P1	4

Tangible		Total
Provided pay/other	T3	14
Delayed	T2	2
Not provided	T1	6

Support others		Total
Significant support	S3	11
Minimal support	S2	0
No support	S1	1

Reconnect with work colleagues		Total
Significant	R3	7
Minimal	R2	3
Non-event	R1	0

### **First Sequential Event: Communication**

The first event of compassion responding was communication, which was most significant in the pre and initial unfolding stages of the flood crisis. Coombs (1999) and Veil et al. (2011) emphasize the importance of compassionate organizational communication, expressed with a caring voice and an empathetic awareness of stakeholder concerns during crisis, using a variety of communication channels. In this study communication emerged as an underlying principle that expressed or inhibited compassionate support in times of trouble. Before, during, and after the floods, various sociomaterial configurations of communication technologies were used to communicate care and compassion, confusion, or neglect to employees using a variety of media, including phone, text, and the Internet. Our data indicates a continuum in speed of compassionate communication. At one end, communication was quick, seeking to express care and concern and alleviate the receiver's potential distress. At the other end, communication was slow, which increased the receiver's anxiety.

**Phone, text and email.** As in other crises (Beunza & Stark, 2005), phone, text, and email messages were vital modes of socio-technology used to communicate work expectations, inquire about employee well-being, and provide support. On the day of the Brisbane floods those organizations that displayed a high capability for compassion provided support over the phone, ensuring that all employees had reached home safely, buttressed by supportive text messages. For example, in one organization the manager stayed in the office surveying flood maps, while providing over the phone support directing employees to those roads that were still open and would allow them to return home from work safely. In another organization, the owner sent the following messages to his employees: "your family and your personal safety should be your number one

priority, work comes second.” In contrast, in organizations that we characterised as having a low capability for compassion, employees were either neglected and found out about the flood from other sources before going home or received text messages ordering that they had “no excuses” for not coming to work.

**Social media.** In some organizations, social media was used as a means of providing support for and between employees during the flood. As an example, a team leader in a Queensland Government department, created a Facebook page to facilitate the provision of support among her team members. She sent text messages, emails, and made phone calls, requesting her supervisees to share information updating others within the team about their welfare and the well-being of other team members without Internet access. Students at one of Australia’s leading universities were also encouraged to engage with social media such as Facebook and Twitter to network with and support their mentees and peers.

**Organizational website.** Organizations also used their websites to communicate with their people. In one Brisbane university, Student Support Services used the university website homepage to communicate with students, particularly with those made homeless by the floods. The worst affected students were advised to take advantage of the shelters provided by the City Council for food and clothing. International students were additionally offered information on arrangements that had been made for temporary accommodation. The university also used the home page to provide more general information relevant to all students, including updates about adjusted class schedules. The use of the university website to communicate flood information is a good example of how organizations activated sociomaterial possibilities, using technologies to fit the unique circumstances of the flood.



Before concluding this discussion on communication, we will point out a few anomalies in our dataset. According to Silverman (2006) in qualitative research it is sometimes the few or even single ‘deviant’ cases that provide the most important and interesting findings. As visible in Table 1, communication was the most significant initial compassion responding event for all but three of our 25 interviewees. For one respondent (Table 1, participant 10) the most significant initial event discussed in the interview was providing support to others. Whereas for two others (participants 20 and 21) the first event discussed was policies and gaining access to resources. When these anomalies in the table were further investigated it turned out that all three of these respondents were managers. In other words, for employees generally the most significant initial event in organizational compassion responding during crisis is communication; for managers, however, compassion responses might begin with considerations of policy and getting support to others. Too much cannot be made of this, however, as there were six other managers in our dataset for whom the materialization of compassion responding also began with communication. A moderating factor might be the manager’s position in the organizational hierarchy and their level of empowerment as an independent decision-maker.

### **Second Sequential Event: Policy Issues and Resource Availability**

Policy issues and resource availability became increasingly significant in the initial stages as the flood unfolded and organizations rushed, failed, or in some cases scrambled, to initiate a response. The resource based view of the firm (Wernerfelt, 2006), which holds that organizational capability is dependent on access to firm resources such as specialized equipment, and geographic location, is clearly relevant. Fineman (2004) conceives of resources not as limited only to fixed stocks but also as

dynamically altered through their use, such that resources alter and are altered by work practices. Dutton et al. (2006) apply this conceptualisation to organizational compassion responding, focusing on the ways that resources of attention, trust, and legitimacy were extracted, generated, coordinated, and calibrated in interactions in contexts that responded to pain. Consistent with such views, in this study there were instances where bureaucratic procedures and established modes of practice posed a barrier to providing resources for compassionate support in response to the crisis. Consequently, creating exceptions to rules and bending bureaucracy became crucial hallmarks of compassionate responding. In some instances it was only after leaders were reputed to have disrupted norms of behaviour by providing exceptional support, or had been reported as doing so in the media, that others felt authorised or pressured to make similar adjustments to norms or behaviour and access to resources. It was then that active compassion responding gained momentum.

**Policy.** As an example of how limited access to resources and bureaucracy can impede provision of support, a university employee who tried to communicate emergency information to flood-affected students via the home page of the university website was delayed because she didn't have the necessary authorisation. As an example of how organizations bend bureaucracy to provide care, one interviewee explained that the international software firm in which they work had a workplace relations agreement whereby the organization reserved the right to stand down the entire workforce without pay in times of disaster. During the Brisbane floods not only was this right not exercised but also, the day before the rest of the city evacuated, employees were told to work from home if they could. They were further advised that they would be paid regardless. Such a response contrasts with the experience of another interviewee who, in the midst of the flood, was informed by email that "due to company policy" she

and her work colleagues would not be paid for the time that they couldn't work during the flood.

It is worth noting, that those organizations that were most effective in providing compassionate responses to their employees during the flood, were characterized by compassionate people-centric policies and practices outside of the flood context. These included a philosophy of care, a culture of empowerment and trust, leaders who were caring role models, provision of flexible work arrangements tailored to suit the work/life balance needs of the individual, prior contingency planning for emergencies, and an organizational emphasis on social responsibility. A conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that organizational compassion materializes most effectively when it is embedded as an ongoing process in dispositional organizational practices, rather than as an episodic event enacted in a moment of crisis. Relatedly, Lawrence and Maitlis (2012) argue for an organizational focus on an organizational 'ethic of care' over organizational compassion. In their conceptualization an 'ethic of care' is ongoing, regardless of whether or not the 'other' is suffering or flourishing.

**Media and politicians.** The media and politicians played an important role in creating or inhibiting the context of compassionate support during the floods. How they did so is another important example of the significance of embedded sociomateriality in theorising and researching organizational practices of compassion. As the flood unfolded people turned to the media for information. The initial media coverage caused panic. Tragic images of homes flooding and cars washing away were played incessantly over the airways, adding to people's worst fears. A complaint expressed by some interviewees was that while the media aired sensational and tragic images both nationally and internationally, initially there was no information on what Brisbane

residents could do for support, shelter, or for getting home. Families from overseas countries concerned for the safety of their loved ones in Brisbane inundated the phone lines. Universities received calls from concerned parents who had sent, or had been planning to send their children to Brisbane as international students at the beginning of the new academic year, some of whom withdrew their children from the universities.

Positive messages instil hope and a drive for action whereas negative ones spread panic and feelings of anomie. Prompted by the negative media fallout, a group of representatives from various universities and the City Council, as well as business leaders, worked together to get more positive messages on the airwaves. Their focus was on communicating inspiring human stories of survival, compassion, and community spirit emerging amidst the destruction of the floods. One respondent explained this effort: “That’s where the cohort of people that worked together under the Study Brisbane banner really went into action. I got interviews with the mayor and got things pumping as a media response.”

The media’s broadcasting of more positive messages of support and survival encouraged others to pitch in. An interviewee employed by an international travel agency felt that the pressures of the positive messages coming from the media promoted his organization to gradually improve its efforts in supporting its employees during the floods:

The media, the government, and the people, influenced the organizational response but, obviously, mostly the media. There was also pressure, or competition, from how other companies reacted. They don’t want to be the “bad guy”.

### **Third Sequential Event: Tangible Support**

The third event of compassion socio-materialization was the provision of tangible support, which occurred during the flood by providing food, shelter, and medical attention and after flood helping with repairs and cleaning and the provision of financial grants and gifts as well as offers of in-kind goods.

**Financial and other support.** In some organizations pay was not provided to employees unable to work during the flood, while in others employees were not only paid but also financial gifts were made to help employees recover household items that the floods had damaged or destroyed. As an example, when a manager inquired about what one of his employees had lost in the flood, the employee explained that she had not been able to save any of her husband's tools from the garage, including the power tools and lawnmower. At a company social evening some days later, the employee was publicly given \$2000 worth of hardware store vouchers by her manager to replace her husband's work equipment. The employee was appreciative that her manager had taken the time to listen to her needs and provided a gift directly related to her flood losses. While on stage receiving the voucher from the manager, the employee gave her manager a hug of gratitude, when he whispered into her ear that an additional financial gift of \$4000 would be paid into her bank account. What most impressed the employee was that this kindness was not publicised by the organization.

**Government.** The state government's flood response efforts impressed most of the interviewees. They particularly praised the shelters that were set up for people to rest, shower, as well as receive blankets and food, across the region. The government issued grants of \$1000 per person to people from flood affected areas that were without electricity for at least 48 hours. The banks set up mobile units at the shelters to cash

these checks. Some interviewees found these grants wasteful, however, describing the initiative as “throwing cash at the problem”, as many people who were not in need seemed to take advantage of the scheme. Interviewees were also full of praise for how quickly the government, local councils, and volunteers, restored key infrastructure.

One key aspect of this effort was cleaning the piles of rubbish left on the roads by the floods. Local and state government, the Australian army, local contractors, and community volunteers, all worked together to support the clean-up effort. One interviewee, an academic, expressed appreciation for the speed with which the resources mobilised to provide efficient support:

It does make you appreciate being in a wealthy country... In poor countries the infrastructure's just not there to help people. I think that helps... There were huge piles of rubbish all down the streets near us. It looked like a war zone. And then overnight, the Council came through with their big trucks and the army was coming through...they would just pick it up and take it away.

**Banks.** Mobile ‘automatic teller-machines’ (ATM) and facilities to cash the government flood relief checks were set up in the government shelters by Australia’s leading banks. Some banks also offered “hardship arrangements” where customers could put their mortgage and credit card repayments on hold without interest for up to three months. One bank additionally collected clothes and donated them to people in the shelters; they also offered their customers a free service to consult with a psychologist employed by the bank. In contrast to the other services, people were slow to respond to the counselling as one interviewee explained:

Initially, not many people took that up because in a disaster situation, people's minds are more about the now – trying to recover goods, get their work and life back into order. However, as the months went on, people's trauma started to surface and they started to use our psychologists. That was a very good concept.

**Community.** The emergence of 55,000 volunteers armed with brooms and buckets, who helped the clean up effort, was one of the most inspiring stories of the Brisbane floods. The then Brisbane Mayor, Campbell Newman, dubbed them a “muddy army”. Queensland State Premier Anna Bligh described the clean up effort as “operation compassion”.

#### **Fourth Sequential Event: Supporting Others**

The fourth event involved providing support to others. As predicted by emotional contagion theorists (Barger & Grandey, 2006; Barsade, 2002; Hatfield et al., 1993; Pugh, 2001), the effects of receiving compassionate care during the Brisbane floods were contagious. In many cases, once people had received adequate support and were safe, they offered support to others in many cases. In some instances this involved organizations providing special discounts to flood affected customers, in other instances it involved donating to charity, providing physical household goods to people who had lost them, or helping with household clean up efforts. As an example, when one interviewee returned to the home she evacuated when the river first broke its banks, she was relieved to find that the flood had not entered her home. Seeing members of the council, the Australian army, and dozens of volunteers working to clean up the street outside her home made her cry with gratitude. She and her husband were so touched that they decided to volunteer to clean up in other people's homes. Cleaning dishes in a stranger's kitchen, while her husband helped clean the outside yard, she cried again, but

her tears were not of sadness, rather, she said, they were tears of sympathy and appreciation in seeing that, although so many people had lost so much, they were happily helping one another.

Another interviewee who manages a restaurant in the Brisbane CBD told a similar story. While the floodwater came just one step away from flooding her home, others on her street were not so fortunate. As the floodwaters receded she was cleaning her home when an unknown woman knocked on her door and asked if there was any way she could help. This interviewee's heart was so touched by this exchange that she decided she must help too – according to her vocation as a chef. She took a shopping trip to the nearby supermarket and purchased food supplies, which she cooked at home. Piling the food on trays she took it take outside and served it to the volunteers involved in the clean up effort.

### **Fifth Sequential Event: Reconnecting**

The last event of 'reconnecting' could have been placed under the category of communication except that this event is distinguished from communication because it relates to sensemaking (Marshall & Rollinson, 2004; Weick, 1995) and healing after the trauma of the flood had passed. It also related to the bond that people felt for one another after having shared the common struggle of a crisis. Here we consider post-flood reconnecting and bonding in terms of talk between colleagues, discussions in an organization wide public forum, as well as hugging in reconnections of physical bodies.

**Talking.** Talking with co-workers or supervisors was important for employees to make sense of their difficult flood experiences, as well as to seek and provide comfort, to begin the process of healing and overcoming distress via the facilitation of resilience.



Resilience, in this sense, is talked into existence (Beunza & Stark, 2004). As an example, a female employee of the Queensland Government, described that on her first two days back at work she and her colleagues did more talking than working. Talking amongst colleagues provided an opportunity for employees to share fears, anxieties, and mourn their losses, as well as share relief and joy that things were not as bad as they could have been. Another interviewee explained that comparing experiences with colleagues invoked humility and gratitude and inspired her to make donations towards supporting colleagues and other flood victims who had not fared as well as she and her family. Talking, in other words, can be energizing and reinvigorating, not only in normal (Gratton & Ghoshal, 2002) but also in exceptional times.

**Physical embrace.** Research in nursing (Goodykoontz, 2007; Tutton, 1996), physical healing (Ford, 1999), crisis recovery (Justice, 2008), and childhood development (Heller, 1997), indicates appropriate culturally sensitive touch is an important mode of providing support and healing. Theoretically, in terms of sociomateriality, such touching is a consideration of materiality as the physical body (Orlikowski, 2007). Foucault (1978) describes the body as a site of the local investment of the organization of power. For Barad (2003, p. 809), “the body’s materiality—for example, its anatomy and physiology—and other material forces actively matter to the processes of materialization”.

In the Brisbane floods physical touch was sought and provided as hugging at all levels of organizational interactions, between junior, equal, and senior members of the organizational hierarchy. As an example, one interviewee who owns a restaurant in the Brisbane CBD explained that when she and her staff met again she greeted each of them

with a hug. Another interviewee described being asked for a hug by colleague at work who had lost much during the flood and who cried in her embrace:

I gave her a hug 'cos I could see in her eyes that she looked upset. She looked really tired and I just gave her a hug and, you know, actions spoke louder than words. I said to her, "You don't need to say anything. I'll just give you a hug and I'll see you back at work tomorrow." She gave me a hug. And she was just like, "Thank you. Thank you for your support."

**Forums.** Public forums open to all employees provided another way in which organizations could facilitate talking as a mode of sensemaking and healing after a tragic event (Dutton et al., 2002). Once the floods had receded the Registrar at one of Brisbane's main universities organized forums that were open to all staff at each of the university's several campuses. The Registrar used these events to offer public acknowledgement to those who had suffered as well as those who had provided exceptional support and to invite feedback on how the university had responded to the situation. For staff, the forums provided an opportunity to express their feelings freely, to find closure, and hope for a brighter future.

**Better relationships.** Some employees also reported that after the flood experience, there were better relationships amongst employees, as well as amongst others in neighbouring businesses where the relationships had previously been very competitive:

When it's business, it's business. But when you get to know a person when it comes to things like this with the floods, it overrules the whole business side of the relationship. It really comes down to the human nature of "I'm so sorry this is what's happened, you know, but let's just support each other and also in the

business side of things and, you know...” Like, next door, (name) was flooded we also helped... You know, we all bonded with each other.

## **Discussion**

Over the past decade organizational compassion responding has been increasingly appreciated as an important area of academic theory and research (Dutton & Workman, 2011; Rynes et al., 2012). Until now compassion has been mostly conceived as a human emotion or virtue that unfolds in human-to-human relations. In this study we have emphasized organizational compassion as a social relational process wherein human-to-object relations also play a significant role. Objects in human social environments do not just exist but are used for the fulfillment of certain objectives. In the context of the Brisbane floods sociomateriality was generally found to materialize compassion in five sequential ‘events’ of communication technologies, policy and resource availability, tangible support, supporting others, and reconnecting. Our findings have implications for ethical agency, which we discuss next, followed by a discussion on variability within our findings.

**Agency.** Seeing compassion responding as a sequence of sociomaterial events raises questions of material determinism and voluntary human ethical agency. The assumptions of material determinism and of voluntary human agency have been controversial within organizational studies, particularly those relating to the influence of technology within organizations (Leonardi & Barley, 2008, 2010; Orlikowski, 1992). Determinism holds that external material forces, such as technology, culture, geography, biology, and climate shape human behavior. In contrast, voluntarism holds that humans have free will in shaping material environments according to personal values and beliefs.

Social practice theorists argue that both determinist and voluntarist positions are mistakenly based upon a false dichotomy; neither approach has to be exclusive to the other (Bjørkeng et al., 2009; Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Reckwitz, 2002). For instance, Bourdieu (1990) deconstructs notions of subjective and objective, freedom and determinism, individual and society, through his theory of practice wherein he describes a recursive relationship between practice, habitus, and field. Similarly Latour's (2005) actor-network theory locates agency in heterogeneous relations between human semiotic concepts and non-human material things. Agency is attributed both to humans and to matter and is consequently sociomaterial (Orlikowski, 2007).

Materiality is often assumed to be ethically neutral whereas human behavior always displays an ethical register, either as good or harmful (Rundle & Conley, 2007).

According to such assumptions, material objects are neutral 'means' used instrumentally by human agents for the fulfillment of ethically relevant 'ends' (Barney, 2004). Political, social, environmental, economic, and other factors shape the design and production of technology (Stahl, 2003) as well as the ethical choices people make as they engage the material environment. Choices made by human agents are shaped by the boundary conditions of material things but these actors also shape matter in a recursive relationship (Aanestad, 2003). Consequently, people are accountable in terms of the choices they make in their sociomaterial interactions. When material configurations cause harm people have an ethical responsibility to choose or not to enact other sociomaterial configurations and materialize compassion to relieve the pain.

**Variability.** The sequential materialization of 'events' of sociomaterial compassion responding described in our data involved definite variability between organizations and interviewees. Consequently, although we observed sequences in the socio-

materialization of compassion responding in our data, the findings cannot be generalized as infallible predictions applicable in all contexts. For example, the most significant event described by all interviewees was communication, yet even here we found variability. Some organizations preempted the flood to communicate care and send employees home to look after their families. In contrast, others were slow to communicate care even once the flood was in full flow. Still others communicated neglect, either through insensitive demands or through non-communication, which due to communication's autopoietic nature, is also a form of communication (Luhmann, 1992).

Variability was also found in the deviant cases of three managers amongst our 25 interviewees for whom communication was not the most significant initial compassion responding event. For them the initial sequence began with providing support to others, or dealing with policy issues to mobilise resources. We are hesitant to read too much into this, as another six managers in our dataset did describe communication as the most significant initial event. One conclusion might be that organizational compassion responding materializes in a different sequence for higher-level managers empowered with decision-making authority. The significance of sequence variability in activating resources to help materialize compassion is a question that should be pursued through further research.

Overall, the global variability in research findings indicates that they cannot be interpreted as predictive; instead they describe dynamics that are contextually situated. Accordingly, the research is best-used phronetically, to form theoretical generalizations that could be applied by others as guiding principles (Flyvbjerg, 2006). It is up to

researchers and managers to be reflexive in their application of the findings in other contexts.

## **Conclusion**

In this study we have contributed to the literature on organizing compassion by highlighting the roles played by object-to-human interactions in the materialization of compassion responding, and conceptualizing compassion organizing as a sequential sociomaterial process. Compassion organizing is a very complex process, especially in crisis situations such as the one studied here where multiple networks (e.g. victims and helpers, the state, companies and NGOs, insurance and reinsurance) were articulated. Under such complex circumstances grasping sociomaterial complexity seems mandatory for both adequate conceptualization and practical action.

Suffering caused by natural and manmade crises are a reality of organizational life that challenge organizational routines, transform modes of member engagement, and give rise to unexpected contingencies. Such events pose circumstances in which the actions of significant others in acting towards those burdened by the disaster will, contextually, be judged in terms of the extent to which these significant others acted compassionately to relieve the experience, pain and harm. In this study we have analyzed the compassion responding of organizations in relation to their employees during and after the Brisbane floods January 2011. Our findings indicate that organizational compassion concerns more than just emotion or virtue; it is a sequential social relational process in which materiality matters. We suggested, in summary, that compassion materializes networks of human and non-human agency. In this materialization, human agency is held ethically accountable for efforts to “intervene in the world’s becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from

matterings" (Barad, 2003, p. 827). Failure to acknowledge accountability for the sociomaterial life of compassion limits our capacity to understand and to activate it.

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## Chapter Five

In the preceding chapters of this thesis, my co-authors and I have proposed an alternative sociological definition of organizational compassion. We have theorised organizational compassion as a collective capability for ongoing concern about other's well-being; assessment by givers and receivers; and decisions to respond by giving, refusing, or accepting – reinforcing power relations. In support of this definition, the study in Chapter Three indicated that organizational compassion must be an ongoing concern – and not something that can be manufactured in a moment of crisis. In Chapter Five, entitled 'The dynamics of compassion: A framework for compassionate decision making' and submitted to the *Journal of Business Ethics*, my co-authors (Clegg and Pitsis) and I provide insight into the *assessment* aspect of this definition.

The data for this study consists of 278 user comments responding to two online newspaper reports on compassion related concerns. The unsolicited user comments debated the legitimacy of different givers and receivers of compassionate support in different scenarios, demonstrating that this is a highly contested issue. Recognition of a worthy recipient or giver of compassion constitutes a socially recognised claim to power and privilege.

We analysed this data using a methodology of discursive textual analysis, which is an established tradition in the study of power and organizations (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000). This methodology involves exploring subtle concerns of power, not through developing complex measures and scales, but by analysing the mundane discourses of routine practices. We used Clegg's (1998) 'circuits of power' as a theoretical framework, which provided an exclusive focus on micro, meso, and macro levels of organizational power. The model portrays power as flowing through interacting circuits: the episodic circuit of micro interpersonal dealings; the dispositional circuit of meso organizational norms, policies, and routines; and the facilitative circuit of macro socio-regulatory structure and cultural context. The circuits (re)constitute each other through interactions at transitory 'obligatory passage points', where the circuits intersect to negotiate and fix the taken-for-granted rules and norms constituting practices. In this study, at the level of the episodic circuit, we grouped all of the comments relating to compassion as interpersonal relations in a micro context. At the discursive level, we grouped all of the text relating to compassion as a general social theme in an organizational context. At the facilitative level, we sought out text about compassion as it relates to domination and control at the macro level of socio-material cultural norms

and ideologies.

We generated a model of compassion legitimacy dynamics from the findings. The model presents the different social expectations and assumptions of the legitimate giver and the legitimate receiver of compassionate support. We suggest that researchers, managers, and organizational policymakers can use this model to reflexively engage with the complexity of compassionate organizational conduct and assess how others may view the legitimacy of an organization's compassion relations.

**Normal Compassion: A framework for compassionate decision making**

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## **Normal Compassion: A framework for compassionate decision making**

### **Abstract**

In this empirical paper we present a model of the dynamic legitimizing processes involved in the receiving and giving of compassion. We focus on the idea of being ‘worthy of compassion’ and show how ideas on giving and receiving compassion are highly contestable. Recognition of a worthy recipient or giver of compassion constitutes a socially recognized claim to privilege, which has ethical managerial and organizational implications. We offer a model that assists managers in fostering ethical strength in their performance by encouraging reflection on the ethical complexity involved in compassion relations. The model emphasizes the dynamics of both the givers and receivers of compassion and so can also be used by organizations to both assess how others may view the legitimacy of their compassion relations and also to develop a positive organizational ethic of compassionate conduct.

**KEY WORDS:** compassion, legitimacy, positive organizational ethics, positive organizational scholarship, power

As an ethical concept, compassion conveys a range of meanings rooted in cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. In the Buddhist tradition, compassion is described as that which makes the heart of the good move in response to others' pain (Narada, 2006). 'Others', in the Buddhist context, is not restricted to humans but includes all sentient beings. Inherent within the Buddhist understanding is the idea that through compassion for others, one receives personal benefits of inner well-being and enlightenment (Goldstein, 1993). For most managers idealistic definitions of these sorts are probably too broad in scope, if not too confusing to be useful. In the reality of organizational life, compassion is a dynamic relational phenomenon that cannot be fully understood without accounting for power considerations of compassion as 'normal' and 'legitimate'. We question the general assumption that compassion is necessarily good and beneficial. We argue that conceptualizing compassion in terms of how it is realistically experienced has important implication to positive organizational ethics (POE).

For sociologist, Max Weber (1978), social relations gained 'legitimacy' through the processes that bestowed 'authority': that is, what is 'legitimate' is always a social construct. Institutional theorists describe legitimacy as resting upon isomorphic forces, which cause things to become more or less the same (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Scott, 2008). When a person's behavior, and a target group's beliefs about proper action coincide with dominant normative institutionalization, action is held to be legitimate; when these things are outside the dominant institutionalized norms they are deemed as illegitimate (Clegg et al., 2006). In this paper we explore this idea of legitimization to unpack the complexities of 'legitimate compassion' through a grounded theory approach. We summarize our findings as a model representing social conventions relating to what is perceived as

legitimate and illegitimate forms of giving and receiving compassion. The model is based upon empirical data we collected in the form of readers' comments in response to two online articles, one relating to events in Australia and the other to events in the United Kingdom. These were events that one might anticipate would elicit displays of compassion for those involved. The model describes different social expectations and assumptions of the legitimate giver and the legitimate receiver of compassionate support. These legitimizing criteria are complex and dynamic, for while a person may be found to be an illegitimate recipient of compassion at the relational level, they may be found to be worthy of compassion at the organizational or societal levels and vice versa. We offer this model as a tool for managers and researchers to facilitate their assessment of the legitimacy of a person as being worthy of compassion, as well as that of a giver as worthy of providing compassionate support.

Our contribution is within the context of POE – which has sought to change the focus of organizational ethics from suppressing deviant behavior, towards promoting positive ethical practice (Stansbury & Sonenshein, 2012). Lewis (1985, p. 382) defines business ethics as “moral rules, standards, codes, or principles that provide guidelines for right and truthful behavior in specific situations”. Following Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes' (2007) approach to business ethics as practice, we respectfully disagree. Rules, standards, codes, and principles cannot function as surrogates for ethical practices but only help to frame them, often with the objective of repressing deviant unethical actions. POE are constituted by authentic leadership, supportive organizational processes, and an ethical organizational culture aligned as a living code of ethics (Verbos, Gerard, Forshey, Harding, & Miller, 2007). We argue that POE ideas are supported through ethical choice, manifest through deliberation and reflection on the ethics of a situation in relation to the ethical dictates of right conduct. To support such deliberation in

relation to compassion, we offer a model that accounts for concerns of power and legitimacy in the exercise and reception of compassion. We propose that our model of compassionate decision-making can provide a richer, more mature understanding of compassion relations. It can further be used as a framework upon which to act and make sense of compassion, mindful of its complexity and possible unintentional consequences. Consequently it can facilitate the fostering of more durable ethical strength in organizational practices. The research problem that drives our inquiry addresses how collective and individual compassion capabilities of givers and receivers of compassion are legitimated through socially constituted structures. The important point is that just being compassionate is not *simply* ethical and that what constitutes a ‘reasonable person’s’ view of appropriate compassion is complex, subtle and socially situated.

### **Constituting Legitimate Compassion**

Positive Organizational Ethics has expanded from the emerging field of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) (Verbos et al., 2007), where compassion has been a primary area of research and theorizing (Dutton & Glynn, 2008; Dutton et al., 2007). The related discipline of Positive Psychology has also given emphasis to the importance of compassion, focusing on compassion as individual states and traits supporting interpersonal dealings (Cassell, 2002; Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007). In contrast, in Positive Organizational Behavior, compassion has not been included in the construct of Positive Psychological Capital due to the lack of evidence that it can be reliably measured and developed through organizational interventions with measurable performance impact (Luthans & Youssef, 2004; Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007; Youssef & Luthans, 2012). Our treatment of compassion follows the generally more sociological orientation found in POS rather than the micro behavior orientations of

Positive Psychology and Positive Organizational Behavior. POS is committed to studying that which facilitates flourishing, generativity, and strength within organizations (Berstein, 2003; Cameron & Gaza, 2004; Dutton & Glynn, 2008; Dutton, Glynn, et al., 2006).

POS researchers define organizational compassion as a three-fold process of collectively recognizing, feeling, and responding to alleviate another's suffering (Dutton, Worline, et al., 2006; Frost, 1999; Frost et al., 2006; Frost et al., 2000; Kanov et al., 2004). POS has a generally positive view of compassion (as evident in the special issue on compassion in the *Academy of Management Review*: see Rynes et al., 2012). POS research indicates that compassionate dealings with staff, particularly in times of crisis, lead to greater employee commitment, citizenship, co-worker relations, pro-social behavior, and reduce costly staff absenteeism and turnover (Dutton et al., 2007). POS encourages managers and leaders to support the creation of compassionate environments normatively by encouraging compassionate dealings between employees, developing compassionate policies and systems for recognizing and responding to employees pain (Dutton et al., 2002). Nonetheless, Frost and Robinson's (1999) concept of 'toxic handling' indicates that POS is not blind to the harm that organizational compassion can do. Managers and leaders act as toxic handlers in organizations when they 'contagiously' absorb their employees or co-workers emotional hurt (Anandakumar et al., 2007; Frost, 2003; Hatfield et al., 1993). Toxic handlers thus become vicariously vulnerable to the toxicity of the very same hurt as the people who are the objects of their sympathy.

The Oxford Dictionary (2010) defines compassion as "sympathetic pity or concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others". Note that compassion is herein defined as synonymous with sympathy, pity, and concern. A distinction that is

sometimes made between compassion and sympathy, is that whereas sympathy implies recognition and feeling for another's suffering, compassion includes an additional component of active responding to relieve the pain (Dutton, Glynn, et al., 2006). Some researchers, while acknowledging this distinction, nonetheless choose to define the terms synonymously, equating sympathy also with active responding (Kanov et al., 2004). With regard to pity, Hochschild (1983) distinguishes them by arguing that whereas 'compassion' is felt for equals, 'pity' is offered to subordinates. Clark (1987) responds that although the words compassion and pity might signify greater emotionality than 'sympathy', in her extensive research, respondents used the three words interchangeably in referring to people of different classes. The term empathy is distinct in that it refers to an emotional sensitivity to other's feelings but does not necessarily include the element of compassion. Nussbaum (1994) argues that some criminals, or dictators such as Adolf Hitler, could empathetically read people's emotions and manipulate them. In our study, compassion is equated with the general notions of sympathy – in terms of who is worthy to give or receive an active response of compassionate support.

Boyatzis, Smith, and Blaize (2006) emphasize the benefit of compassion relations not only to receivers in compassion relations but also the givers. When managers show compassion to employees they are replenished both neurologically and hormonally, ameliorating the negative impact of chronic stress: in other words, compassion facilitates positive embodiment. Yet, other organizational research indicates that efforts to relieve others' suffering have a potentially negative side that can cause emotional and physical harm. An example is compassion labor (Ashforth & Humphreys, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1996), wherein organizational caregivers such as nurses, counselors, and airline stewards, whose job it is to smile and be kind, often exhibit the effects of

compassion fatigue (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Compassion is not necessarily a universal virtue. The complexities of the positive and negative outcomes of compassion relations raise questions concerning the legitimacy of compassion in different contexts.

Compassion is a social relational process that extends beyond merely noticing, feeling and responding to the pain of the other; it also involves judgments of the legitimacy of both the giving and the receiving of compassion (Clark, 1987; Schmitt & Clark, 2006). Specifically, the compassion giver chooses to act in a way that they construct as compassionate. Similarly, the subject of that act of compassion may choose to recognize that action as a legitimate action for the other to initiate (as opposed, for instance, to one that is patronizing). Judgments as to the worthiness of givers and receivers within compassion relations are established through assessment of socially accepted criteria that has changed historically. For example, over the past 100 years, the number of plights recognized as legitimate causes for compassion responding has broadened from a narrow focus on injury and poverty, to include grief, mental illness, addiction, and other social concerns (Clark, 1997). Modes of compassion responding have also broadened, from a narrow focus on financial support to include psychological and substance abuse counselling. Theories explaining the emergence of a more ‘humane’ or ‘compassionate’ society relate to power. They include the rise of democracy and capitalism (De Tocqueville, 2003; Haskell, 1985; Sznajder, 1998), the lobbying of ‘emotional entrepreneurs’ (Clark, 1997), and ulterior motives of more efficient social control (Foucault, 1977, 1983; Nietzsche, 1998; Poovey, 1995). Within this legitimacy-power framing we broaden the conception of organizational compassion. We define organizational compassion as the *ongoing* individual and collective capability for *concern* for another’s well-being, which is characterized by relational processes of *assessment* as to members’ compassion worthiness as legitimate receiver(s) and

giver(s), and *responding* with giving, receiving or refusal to give or receive support. Such assessments and responses implicate, produce, and reproduce power relations.

In what follows we will use two empirical cases to consider the legitimacy of both receivers and givers of compassion. It is our intention to develop a model that might serve as a practical tool for increasing awareness of the complexities of compassion. The model we present is designed to support practical ethical reflection on compassion, where the application of religious or philosophical notions of compassion is perhaps too broad or confusing, and codes and rules too instrumental. Specific criteria for assessing the worthiness of receivers, as well as the legitimacy of givers, of compassion will be addressed. Using this model as a lens will enable us to view the dynamics of compassion as an interrelated web of agency, social relations, and social ideologies and values. We contribute to POE by providing a framework that does not assume, a priori, that compassion is necessarily positive but rather treat it as an ethical practice that requires mindful reflexivity, one aware that its positivity and negativity are context dependent.

### **Research Context**

**New media.** Our field of study is on-line newspaper articles and the comments made in response to the ideas and reports in those articles. The benefits of online newspapers include speed of delivery, low cost of delivery, global reach, interactivity, and limited censorship (Reese, Rutigliano, Hyun, & Jeong, 2007), delivered not only to a computer but also to other digital devices. These factors combine together to create a competitive displacement effect on traditional media (Dimmick, Chen, & Li, 2004). A major appeal of Internet technologies is that they can empower users to create, develop, and distribute content easily (Hermida & Thurman, 2008). In this new landscape users are not merely passive consumers but also active participants in the creation of media



content.

The focus in this study is on the ‘comments on stories’ created through user generated content (Hermida & Thurman, 2008). The process allows users to share their views on the content of an article. Such comments are mostly submitted in a form positioned beneath the content of an article. People submitting such comments are often (but not always) required to register with the news site. One of the factors motivating large established news organizations facilitating such user generated comment is a fear of being left behind by or marginalized by other interactive user media. Additionally, there is a growing acknowledgment that some newspaper readers are well informed about certain areas and that user interaction is a means for unlocking that wealth of information. However, online news organizations also recognize the need to moderate such user generated content with pre (required registration of contributors) and post (approving messages before publishing them) screening to ensure the quality of the information and the organization’s own brand (Thurman, 2008). One unobtrusive measure of the criticality of stories as they register in the collective consciousness is the amounts of commentary that these stories attract on-line; indeed, in no small way such comment legitimates these stories as critical incidents.

The proposition that commentary plays the role we have suggested was strongly supported in the response to a major turning point for user generated content in the UK: the event of the London bombings on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2005. On this occasion the BBC and Metropolitan Police requested eyewitness images and accounts and received 22,000 emails and text messages, some 300 photos, and several video sequences on the same day as the events occurred (Torin, 2006). Increasingly such user-generated content is being solicited and incorporated by news organizations to supplement their professional content. The formats used for such solicitation include polls, message boards, comments

on stories, reader blogs, and “have your says” and “your media” (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Thurman, 2008). The emergence of these opportunities for ordinary people to contribute to professionally edited publications has turned on its head the “you write, we read” dogma of traditional journalism. While the July 7<sup>th</sup> 2005 atrocities were one critical incident that served as an occasion for considerable online commentary, we wish to focus on more recent stories, especially the comments on them.

**Critical incidents as occasions for commentary.** The data in this study is generated from user comments to two cases, one each from the online versions of two respected newspapers *The Courier Mail* in Australia, and *The Guardian* in the UK. Case One from *The Courier Mail* described victims of the Queensland (Australia) floods of 2010/2011, with the 109 user comments mostly debating the validity of a receiver’s compassion legitimacy. Of these 109 comments, only two were by the same person. Case Two from *The Guardian* described tourists from the UK and other western countries volunteering in orphanages in developing African and Asian countries, with 159 user comments by 142 people, debating the validity of a giver’s compassion legitimacy. The more than 100 unsolicited user comments from each case provided a rich source of data with divergent arguments indicating the complexity of these topics. In the ethnographic tradition, we emphasize the importance of naturally occurring data in favor of ‘unnatural data’ gathered through formal interview techniques. We thereby make sense of text as the actors write it, rather than interpreting the actors’ responses to questions preconceived and designed to elicit certain responses (Watson, 2011; Whittle, Mueller, & Mangan, 2008). A benefit of this approach is that it removes the potential for researcher preconceptions influencing research participants. In each case study, only a few comments could be constituted as ‘trolling’, designed to be rudely provocative. These are nonetheless important, because it is through response or refusal of these that

the bounds of legitimate judgments are established. Having stated this, it should also be noted that for one of the online newspapers, comments were moderated and in some instances removed. Experimental research indicates that online forum hostility is more likely when an earlier commenter exhibits such behavior (Moor, 2007).

In case study research, cases are chosen not for statistical reasons but for theoretical reasons (Eisenhardt, 1989). In this study two specific cases were chosen because they deal with opinions on ethical assessment of receiving and giving compassionate support. Generalizations from case data are always tentative and the strength of generalizability is always a matter of judgment (Kennedy, 1979). Strength is not merely a matter of the number of observed units but also the kind and range of units as well as common attributes between the sample case and the population of interest. Research into online newspaper comments finds them akin to wired local communities (Rosenberry, 2010). Indeed, a positive correlation exists between awareness of community issues and the level of participation in online newspaper forums (Rosenberry, 2010; Manosevitch & Walker, 2009). Findings further suggest that reader comments manifest both analytic and social processes required for public deliberation, delivering factual information and demonstrating a process of weighing alternatives by expressing positions on issues and providing supporting rationales (Manosevitch & Walker, 2009).

**Analytic strategy.** We used established procedures and techniques of grounded theory building (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to analyze the user comments to the two online newspaper articles. We collected the data from the Internet in March 2011. We imported the data into NVivo 9 for qualitative analyzes, to highlight and categorize “nodes” comprising key themes and subthemes. The unit of analysis coded was the utterance rather than the commenter; hence there are more utterances coded than actual

comments. We also took direction from the analytic strategy of *membership categorization device* (MCD) (Sacks, 1989, 1995), a form of analysis that involves collecting and analyzing descriptive information according to membership categories (Silverman, 2006). As examples, the words *story*, *reading*, and *book* relate to the category “*literature*”, while the words *student*, *teacher* and *class* relate to the category of “*education*”. From our data we initially extracted first order categories that in some cases were further summarized as second order categories. The combined categorical information was finally brought together in several theoretical dimensions forming the basis of our proposed model of conventions relating to what is perceived as legitimate giving and receiving of compassion, and other forms of illegitimate or mixed forms of giving and receiving.

### **Case One – The Legitimate Receiver**

*The Courier Mail* article entitled “Queensland flood inquiry hears triple 0 call from Donna Rice” was published on 11 April 2011 (Elsworth & Madigen, 2011). The article reports on the proceedings of the Queensland Flood Inquiry. A Queensland Police officer was questioned about an emergency call he had taken from Donna Rice, on January 10 2011. Moments after making the call, Mrs. Rice was swept away and drowned with her son, Jordon. The authors note that the phone rang 28 times before it was answered by an officer who “yelled” at Rice, chastising her for driving in the flood waters “despite her desperate pleas for help”. It further states the officer made her spell her name several times before she requested a tow truck and he told her “you ring a tow truck yourself”. The article included a link where an embedded word-for-word police transcript of the phone conversation could be downloaded. The article further reports that the Senior Constable who took the call told the inquiry that he had no recollection of the conversation.

A second desperate call made by Rice's son is also described, which the authors note rang ten times before it was answered. The officer who took the call is said to have told the boy to tell the woman next to him (Rice) to stop screaming. The boy is quoted as pleading with the officer "we are nearly drowning please hurry". The article also notes that Rice's husband was informed that his wife was calm when she died suggesting that the police service account was not truthful. Later, when her husband finally heard a recording of her phone call on April 18<sup>th</sup>, he found that she "was anything but calm". The remainder of the article describes other details from the inquiry regarding warning systems to alert residents of impending dangers.

Many of the 109 reader comments that followed *The Courier Mail* article on the Donna Rice case debated the legitimacy of Donna Rice as a victim worthy of people's compassion. This indicates the complexity of the power plays involved in compassion dynamics. In fact, many comments expressed compassion and sympathy for "the poor old copper" [police officer] "who would have had no way of knowing" the actual situation, and was operating with "stretched resources". The resulting debate in these comments centers predominantly around four issues relating to whether or not the victim: first, had prior-knowledge of the danger; second, was responsible for their own suffering; third, had the means to address the situation, and fourth, whether other systemic factors may have affected the situation. These issues are now addressed in more detail.

**Prior knowledge of risk or danger.** Whether or not Rice or the Police officer who responded to her call had prior warning of the impending danger of flooding was a major topic for debate. Some argued that Rice, along with everyone else, had prior warning, others argued that there is no way she could have had prior knowledge of the risk she was taking. A sample of comments by people who believed she acted

irresponsibly in failing to heed warnings follows.

One commentator wrote that the warnings were broadcast throughout the media, arguing this fact to excuse the officer's brash tone when he responded to the emergency call. Another writer commented that Rice had deliberately ignored these warnings: "It was the lady who ignored warnings in the first place. She was told from the very start not to drive in floodwaters and she ignored that advice". These commentators argued that Rice is an illegitimate victim and thus not a person worthy of compassion, due to having had prior knowledge of the impending danger.

In contrast there were those who argued that there was no way Rice could have known of the impending danger: "Mrs. Rice didn't drive through flood waters deliberately – who would know that a wall of water would flow through a main street?" Another comment of this type states that no one could have known beforehand of the impending danger: "Sorry but all the warnings in the world would in reality have fallen on deaf ears... No one knew it would be that bad, most would have battened down the hatches never expecting the carnage that happened". Comments that Rice had no warning of the impending danger argue for Rice's legitimacy as a valid victim and a person worthy of compassion.

**Personal responsibility for suffering.** Many comments centered on whether Rice intentionally placed herself in the way of impending danger. Some comments suggested that Rice was responsible for her own and her son's death due to deliberately driving into a dangerous situation. One comment stated, "The wall of water that they make out happened, did happen but not in a matter of seconds but over minutes. Sufficient time to make a decision not to drive into deep water". Another comment added:

...we all are at fault when we don't look around us to see with our eyes, to listen with our ears as to what the moments in time tell us about our surroundings. Yes,

there could have been warnings, there could have been other decisions made, yet we in the end are the ones responsible for US and not some government that acts to protect itself and it's officers...

These comments suggest that Rice is not a legitimate victim and is unworthy of compassion. Another group of comments insisted that Rice had not intentionally placed herself in harm's way and that danger came to her unexpectedly. A sample of such comments include: "In this instance ... they were not driving around through floodwater ... they were driving down the road when a wall of water approached, it only took seconds for them to be in trouble". Another comment argued: "What people do not understand is that Mrs. Rice did not drive into the floodwaters, the floodwaters drove into them". These comments, argue for Rice's legitimacy as a valid victim, and thus a person worthy of compassion due to her not intentionally placing herself in danger's way.

**Means to address situation.** Whether or not Rice, or the Police officer, had the means to address her plight was another topic raised in many comments. Many argued that there was in fact nothing either could have done. These were circumstances beyond anyone's control, thus making both victims of circumstance, each worthy of compassion in their own ways. One commenter attributed the events to nature's unstoppable unbridled fury, "Stop looking for somebody to blame these unfortunate events happen and will keep happening we as humans cannot stop Mother Nature at her most furious". Another attributed the events to fate:

It may never happen again, then again it might be ten times worse next time ...

We could have an earthquake tomorrow... is everyone going to carry on about not being forewarned then, IT'S JUST FATE simple really isn't it?

Someone else commented that only a superhuman could have saved Rice, "What

could emergency services have done at that time to save her? She really needed Superman”. Another said that even if a more sympathetic officer had answered her call, there is nothing anyone could have done, “Would a seemingly more ‘sympathetic’ 000 operator have helped these people better in any way - NO”. These comments argue that both Rice and the officer were victims of circumstances beyond anyone’s control, making each of them worthy of compassion. Nonetheless, a majority of the comments charged that the officer’s response was abusive, arrogant, and generally unacceptable, even more so because he claimed not to be able to remember the conversation. One commenter questioned:

How could Jason Wheeler forget anything that happened on that day? Sure he was not responsible for the flood or the outcome but for god’s sake have the guts to recall being a jerk to a panicking drowning woman and her child.

Yet, there were many comments in support of the officer that argued that he was not responsible for the outcomes, and is himself a victim in this episode. An example of such comments follows:

For all of you having a go at the police officer for not remembering taking the call: try to imagine the sheer volume of frantic, panicked calls the operators would have taken that day, and the utter chaos in the region.

One comment supporting the officer was particularly dramatic in appealing for other readers to take compassion on the officer, “Please stop the operator 'bashing' and think about what YOU would do ... perhaps you might find some compassion...” All of these comments suggest that both Rice and the Police officer were victims worthy of compassion because they did not have the means to address their situation or because of the circumstances that were imposed upon them.

**Other complexities.** The comments indicate that considerations of systemic



organizational and societal issues influence considerations of compassion legitimacy and worthiness. Comments of this nature were made particularly to evoke compassionate sympathy for the officer, who was seen as operating within limiting organizational and society contexts. These limitations, it is argued, informed and influenced his individual capacity to respond – making him a victim of the organization and society in which he operated and which assigned responsibility to him for an essentially impossible situation.

At the organizational level comments focused on poor organizational culture, and poor systems and procedures, as well as overstretched resources. With regard to organizational culture one comment stated, “This archaic patriarchal behavior is common in Qld [Queensland] and it’s about time women were treated with respect, especially when in dire straits and male officers stopped misusing their power”. Others targeted overstretched resources, “Blame is being handed out to frontline staff! Anybody who struggled to provide assistance did their best with limited resources”. With regard to the operating procedures of the emergency services one comment argued, “The floods were a freak accident, it is possible though that the operator was in Perth the way things are arranged now”. Another comment stated:

My only experience of calling 000 (in a medical emergency) is that the operators are inflexible and don't listen; they try to follow a script no matter how inappropriate for the situation, and the result is often tragic.

Another target of blame was the city and state government. Blame was cast on to the City Council both for failing to warn people and for not having emergency plans in place, “Emergency warnings are important but are totally useless unless the community has been informed beforehand of where to go and what to do when they get the call”. Others blamed the Council’s poor urban planning, “I think the council is to blame but

not for not warning people etc. but allowing developers to go through Toowoomba and over-develop it, dam up natural causeways for these developments, etc.” Others cast the blame higher up the chain, at the level of the State Government:

The bungling, incompetent Bligh government has been trying to buck-pass disaster management to local councils for the last 5 years or so. Every time that more incompetence and mismanagement is exposed Bligh and Co just lie their way out of it blaming others like councils who do not have and never did have the responsibility or resources to manage what is being dumped on them.

Finally, other writers blamed society’s prank callers, whose “wolf cries” had made the responding personnel suspicious of calls for help from people in genuine need:

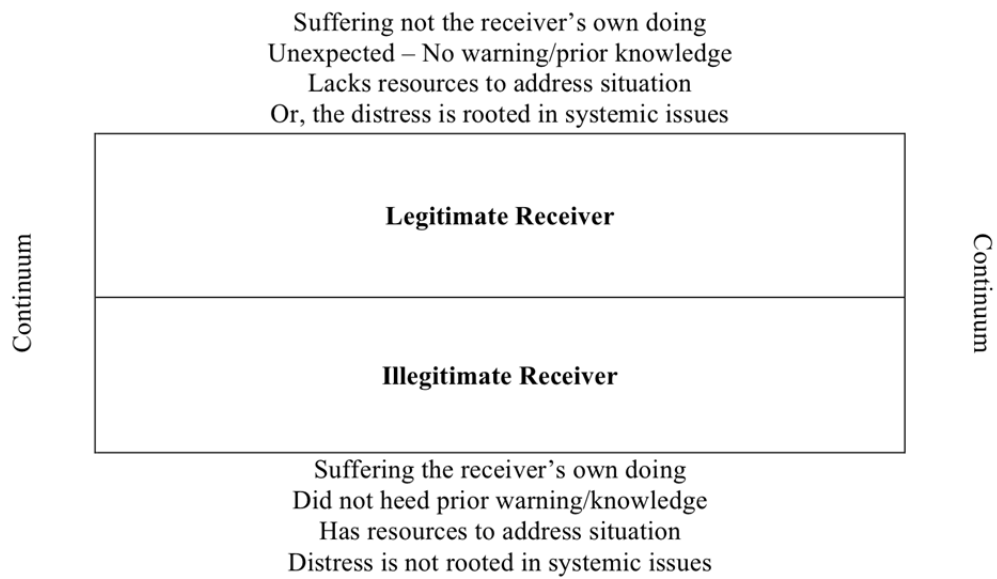
What also needs to be looked at is the public on this day and other days. Calling 000 yelling, screaming, crying because they need a lift home, to pick up a pizza, faking a heart attack to see a friend in hospital the list goes on and on...

The comments above, rather than casting the Police officer in the role of an indifferent or callous abuser, suggest the officer was a victim who is worthy of compassion due to not having the means to address the situations or circumstances that were imposed upon all involved. All of the above comments in this section indicate the complexity involved in determining a person’s legitimacy as a person worthy of compassion. While a person’s personal behavior may be seen to be the cause of their own suffering (relational practices), they might be found to be victims of poor policy or neglect in terms of organizational or social practices,. These considerations are apparent in the arguments supporting the officer who responded to Rice’s call. On the one hand, his manner was inappropriate; on the other hand it is argued that he was under-equipped and uninformed to be able to deal properly with the issues. Similarly, there are arguments that placed the blame at organizational levels, relating to the culture of the

Queensland Police Department, or in relation to the overall social framing, seen in the policies of the Queensland Government. Considerations of compassion legitimacy and validity apply dynamically across relational, organizational, and societal levels as they intersect with one another.

**Propositions concerning the receiver of compassion.** The above findings indicate that people are less inclined to be compassionate if the sufferer is deemed to be the cause of their own misfortune, due to risky behavior or failure to pay attention to prior warnings. Thus, responsibility is indicated as an important factor in considering an agent's compassion worthiness. Assessing responsibility is a complex issue, however, as the causes of people's suffering involve a multifaceted mix of factors. There can be organizational as well as societal factors. A person's responsibility for suffering caused by their own doing can be outweighed by organizational or social factors outside their control. We conclude this section with a summary of our findings on conventions relating to the legitimacy of a valid recipient of compassionate care. We express these findings graphically (Figure 1); in a frequency table (Table 1) that demonstrates the frequency of latent legitimacy imagery in utterances, and in the form of two propositions, each supported by four sub-propositions.

**Figure 1: Receiver legitimacy and compassion worthiness**



**Table 1: Latent imagery of (il)legitimacy of receiver in utterances**

<b>Legitimate receiver</b>		
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub category</b>	<b>Number of utterances</b>
No prior knowledge of risk	Rice	6
	Officer	5
	General	<u>8</u>
	Total	19
No personal responsibility for suffering	Rice	3
	Officer	7
	General	<u>8</u>
	Total	18
No means to address situation	Rice	1
	Officer	16
	General	<u>5</u>
	Total	22
Other complexities and systemic issues	Rice	0
	Officer	4
	General	<u>18</u>
	Total	22
<b>Illegitimate receiver</b>		
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Sub category</b>	<b>Number of utterances</b>
Prior knowledge of risk of danger	Rice	3
	Officer	0
	General	<u>0</u>
	Total	3
Personal responsibility for suffering	Rice	8
	Officer	32
	General	<u>1</u>
	Total	40
Means to address situation	Rice	0
	Officer	3
	General	<u>0</u>
	Total	3
No other complexities and systemic issues	Rice	0
	Officer	0
	General	<u>0</u>
	Total	0

From the model we can develop the first proposition that people generally interpret a sufferer to be a worthy and legitimate receiver of compassion when they present (at least one of) the following characteristics (the more characteristics the stronger the case). The suffering person: 1) is not responsible for their own suffering – it is not of their own doing; 2) had no prior knowledge of any risk or danger; 3) has no means to address the situation; 4) their distress, although self-inflicted, is rooted in deeper systemic organizational or social issues.

A second proposition is that people generally interpret a sufferer as an unworthy and illegitimate recipient of compassion when they present (at least one of) the following characteristics (the more characteristics the less valid the case). The suffering person is: 1) responsible for their suffering; 2) had prior knowledge of the risk or danger; 3) has the means to the address situation; and/or 4) distress has no valid organizational or social explanation.

The above criteria and the utterance counts in Table 1 can be used to make an assessment of the compassion worthiness of Rice and the officer. To begin, there is general agreement that neither Rice nor the officer had proper knowledge of the situation, although a few comments claimed Rice was forewarned. Yet both are held to account as being responsible for the suffering experienced, with the majority of attributions of responsibility falling on the officer (32 comments). There is a general consensus that neither had the means to address the situation – with most (18) comments arguing the case of the underdog officer. People also argued that the officer's response was rooted in deeper social issues that relate to inadequate training, funding, and planning support at the levels of the local and state governments. Overall, these results could be interpreted as indicating that the majority of comments argue that Rice is certainly worthy of compassion – despite deficiencies. The officer is also worthy of

compassion at a few of levels, although he must also assume some personal responsibility for the suffering experienced.

### **Case Two – The Legitimate Giver**

*The Guardian* article entitled “Before you volunteer abroad, think of the harm you might do” was published on 14 November 2010 (Birrell, 2010). The article, based upon an academic paper published in *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies* (Richter & Norman, 2010), describes the negative effects of compassion. These have been identified in the literature previously, for instance in Comer and Cooper (2002), who argue that individuals whose hearts are not truly in their ‘volunteer’ activities will negatively affect the intended beneficiaries of these activities. In the growing ‘voluntourism’ industry this is particularly evident. Tour operators within this industry target the sympathies of well-off young people from Western countries with opportunities to volunteer as short-term caregivers at AIDS orphanages in exotic African and Asian locations. The article describes that although ‘voluntourists’ might have the most compassionate intentions, their impact on children is a growing cause of concern. Short-term caregivers have adverse effects on the orphaned children’s emotional and psychological development. In their striving for adult attention, orphaned children are known to have little discrimination in their friendliness towards adults. Hence, bonds of attachment are quickly built with ‘voluntourist’ caregivers but when the voluntourist departs, also quickly broken, turning to abandonment within days or weeks. Repeated formations of attachment and abandonment upset the children’s short and long-term social and emotional well-being and growth. While the departing voluntourist may have compassionate intentions, the impact of their compassion is degenerative. Further, it supports an industry that is exploitative through its commoditization and marketing of children’s suffering.

Most of the 159 reader comments that followed *The Guardian* article on voluntourism debated the legitimacy of the voluntourist care givers, and the tourism agencies that organize voluntourism packages, as givers of compassionate support. Again, the fact that this is debated indicates the complexity of the power plays in compassion dynamics. The debate that unfolds in these comments centers predominantly around three issues relating to whether or not the givers: first, stand to profit as providers of compassionate support; second, have a legitimate relationship with the receivers; and third, whether or not the receiver gains long-term positive outcomes on account of the support they are provided. We address each of these issues in more detail below.

**Personal profit not dominant motive in providing support.** Most of the comments argued that the tourist agencies, the charities, and many of the volunteers were not worthy providers of compassionate support because they had more to gain personally from providing support than from not providing support. Hence, the support offered was seen more as self-interest rather than altruism. As one commenter wrote, “They call it charity, in fact it's enlightened self-interest”. Or in the words of another, “Charity is never about the recipient, it is all about the donor”. The self-interest people strive for in providing support can be subtly motivated by guilt or a desire to clear ones conscience or joy in the idea that others need their help. One respondent wrote, “Some people seem to enjoy the thought that others starve and thus need their help”. Some comments advocated the views that while a certain level of self-interest is inherent in all philanthropic endeavors it should not be the dominating factor, particularly when it results in ultimately harming the recipients. Comments of this kind were directed towards voluntourism operators, charities, religious organizations, and students.

**Voluntourism.** Most respondents spoke out against packaging charity alongside



tourism. One respondent commented, “the harsh truth is that ‘voluntourism’ is more about the self-fulfillment of westerners than the needs of developing nations”. The following comment from a veteran voluntourist indicates the internal doubts she had about the benefit she (or the organization she was volunteering with) were providing for the local population:

I worked as a volunteer for three months in a school in the Andes earlier this year for a 'volunteer' organization ... I felt that the project, although five or more years old, is not integrated enough into the local community.

While acknowledging its potential for abuse, however, not all comments described voluntourism as a necessarily bad thing. One author, after complaining that *The Guardian* article was too one sided, emphasized the need for voluntourists to be discriminating and have the right attitude actually to make a difference: “...if you are planning to go on one of these projects make sure you are willing to WORK HARD and act responsible, in order to actually benefit the local community and not simply to get the ultimate Facebook picture”.

**Charities.** As well as leveling critique at voluntourism operators, comments were also critical of charities that collect funds from gullible donors in the name of providing aid to needy populations. The following comment from a volunteer stationed in Cambodia is particularly critical of “fake charities” which exist only to benefit those who run the charity:

As a foreigner in Cambodia, I have seen how voluntourism can create fake charities, keep the country's people poor, promote corruption, create more performers and actors and snake oil salesmen than skilled workers, subsidize the charity with free labor and money, and create a false economy with propped up jobs, jobs with salaries so inflated by donations they could never compete or

indeed, survive, in the real world...

**Religious organizations.** The comments above indicate that people who run tourism agencies or charities might provide aid as a means to the end of generating more personal power as money, position, and influence. Other comments raised the issue of religious organizations that provide aid in impoverished areas as a means towards converting new recruits and generating donations. The following comment is indicative of such a view describing "...extreme religious right wing nuts who exchange opportunity in return for affiliation". Another comment criticized televangelists who collect money for causes and used the money to build their religious organizations in different parts of the world.

**Students.** Some of the harshest criticisms that were leveled against voluntourism were directed towards student volunteers. One of the major criticisms was that their motive for volunteering has "little to do with helping impoverished people". Rather, "It's about burnishing your CV to get into the best universities and graduate employment programs". A former student, who hadn't volunteered before undertaking her tertiary education, wrote of the culture of competition amongst those who had been student volunteers prior to entering university:

I went to university as an untraveled, working-class girl, to find those who could not shut up about their charity escapades abroad. I'm sure they were in competition with one another; someone's work in an orphanage would be trumped by another's work in an AIDS orphanage.

Another, a tutor, spoke of first-hand experience tutoring students who volunteer only to enhance their chances of being accepted as a university entrant. These comments indicate that people are skeptical of compassionate support that is provided when the benefactor stands to gain from providing such support. Whether, in fact, such

action is authentically compassionate is a moot point.

**Legitimate relationship between givers and receivers.** The discussion as to whether or not the giver had a legitimate relationship with the receivers centered on several factors. First there was concern about whether the volunteers had a recognized professional skill (such as a doctor) that they could engage to benefit the receivers. Second there was concern over whether the volunteer was prepared to make a time commitment to actually learn about the needs of the people they sought to benefit and build relationships of care. Third the respondent's discussed the virtues (or lack of virtue) in being associated with a reputable agency (government, or not-for-profit) with local connections.

**Professional skills.** Many respondents argued that in order to really help others in the developing world, the volunteers should seek to provide skills that are in need such as those of a doctor, teacher, or builder. One respondent articulated this idea as follows, "if they really want to make a long term difference – learn a trade or skill that is in short supply in the country they want to visit". Similarly, another respondent offered, "I know of fully qualified, well placed doctors who take a year out to go and really help where they are needed – that is true judicious charity. Respondents also suggested that for people who didn't have needed skills to volunteer, they could provide support by funding those who do have the required skills. In this respect one respondent argued, "if you really want to be so altruistic why not give the money you would have spent to the professionals in the field to use more productively and instead spend that year at home doing something useful there too".

**Time commitment.** Genuine relationships are built and endure through the tests of time. For many respondents, a donor merely wanting to volunteer a professional skill was insufficient. A time commitment was also described as an additional necessary

ingredient of care, required to build relationships with the local people and learn about their pains and needs. One respondent articulated this idea as follows:

If someone wants to volunteer abroad I'd suggest do it properly (min. 6 months), have a skill (which is likely not to be in supply) and make sure the organization you'll be working for has real links to local area and community (there are tons of domestic organizations looking for skilled volunteers with no ties to Western groups).

**Legitimate organizations.** Another way that respondents suggested people could support others, particularly people in developing countries, was by supporting a reputable organization with established longstanding relationship with local communities. Others argued that even international government aid agencies offer foreign aid to developing countries with strings attached, such that the recipient country must open up their economy to foreign investment by Western businesses. In this regard one respondent commented, “This article should not just be aimed at volunteers but businesses and international 'development' agencies too... Volunteers can mess lives up but organizations do so on a much grander scale and yet are all too easily supported here...” Nonetheless, many respondents expressed the view that donors should use discretion to discover genuine aid agencies and support only them, “If you want to help people, its best to do it through well-known and/or honest NGOs, not as part of a tour package (where they might get kickbacks from sham outfits like these fake orphanages)”. In this regard, another respondent shared their personal experience in working with a reputable agency that had local connections, respect for local customs, and was aware of the types of support that was needed:

VSO attempts to match requirements of the local governments for expertise with the available volunteers. It is taken as given that in every way it is a second best

solution, as it would be far better if local people could do the job. The emphasis is on training possible local replacements, and it was emphasized that a good placement was one where after two years you had worked yourself out of a job, as you had helped a local person to obtain the skills to do it.

Some respondents also suggested that people who were really concerned about doing volunteer work should consider volunteering in a less glamorous environment closer to home where they can make a long-term commitment and thus gradually make a difference. One respondent questioned, "... why do they want to go abroad to 'make a difference'? There are plenty of poor or disadvantaged people in this country who may not be as photogenic". Someone else offered, "Instead of being compelled to go to the 'third world', why not cancel out all the other volunteering activities and work camps closer to home?"

**Receiver's long term overall benefit.** Many comments expressed concern regarding a conflict between explicit and implicit objectives. While the explicit objective of providing compassionate support is to alleviate the distress of the recipient, too often it is the implicit objective of personal agendas that often lead to the recipients of compassionate support being exploited, abused, and harmed. Harm can occur in the way of raised and then disappointed expectations, as well as by inducing shame that is implied by receiving charity. Harm is also caused through the creation of relationships of dependency, as well as causing suffering as a consequence of political interference.

**Disappointed expectations.** Some writers were particularly concerned about introducing people in developing countries to Western values or technologies that lead to disappointment within the recipient's cultural context. As an example, one respondent wrote of a benefactor who donated half a dozen radio-controlled cars to an orphanage, believing the children would get endless pleasure from them. The children's

joy was short lived, for each car used 10 batteries:

One battery cost the equivalent of a day's wages for an agricultural worker – if, indeed you could source 60 batteries locally. Result: brief excitement followed by frustration, tears and a pile of shiny but useless cars. No doubt the donor felt good but, frankly, everyone would have been better off if she'd just given them the money.

**Induced sense of shame.** Some respondents expressed concern that Westerners providing charity humiliate third world recipients. Even at a person-to-person level, receiving charity induces a sense of pity and shame in the recipient, “No starving man from Bolivia wants rice dolled out to him by some well-fed, well-manicured blond woman from London. Can you imagine the damage that can do to people's pride, and the resentment it would foster?”

**Relationships of dependency and manipulation.** Not only might receiving another's aid cause the recipient to lose their sense of personal pride and dignity but it can also create relationships of dependency. The dark history of how the recipients of Western aid or compassionate support have been exploited, manipulated, and harmed, by power plays in the name of Western aid was provided as one such example:

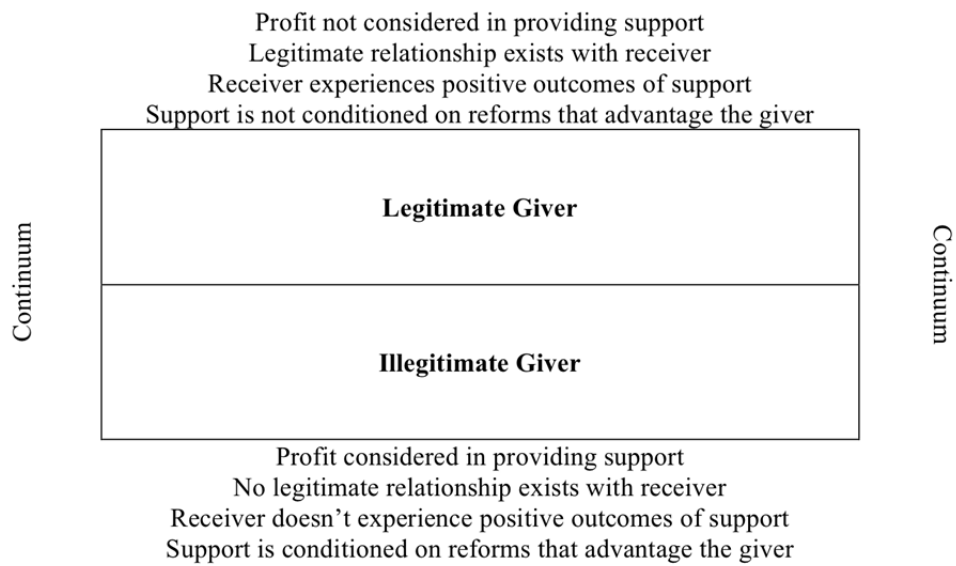
If you choose to call the West's efforts to relieve its guilt and cultivate an altruistic image while exploiting the [expletive] out of the impoverished third world "good intentions," then it would appear that the road to hell is well and good paved with them... The CIA ran a secret program to keep the Khmer Rouge armed and cashed-up. The US government ensured that it was the genocidal Khmer Rouge, and not the legitimate government, that represented Cambodia at the UN until 1993, 14 years after Vietnam brought Pol Pot's murderous regime down. That's why Cambodia remained a war zone until 1999

and is still racked with poverty today while neighboring Vietnam has been able to pick itself out of the ruins of the Yank war and become a middling Asian tiger. It's because the Yanks and their vassals are able to get away with murder and genocide that Cambodia has all those orphans that Western tourists can play with to relieve their guilt. And guess how the CIA paid for the Khmer Rouge's guns and ammo? Through the World Food Program, in the form of "aid" for "Cambodian refugees" in Thailand. That's real Western altruism for you.

Whatever the validity of the history in the above account, the fact that Western 'aid' offered to developing nations often comes with conditions requiring them to enact deregulation of their economies and open their doors to foreign investment by multinational enterprises is well supported by academic writings (Hodge, Coronado, & Duarte, 2010). The overall effect of such "aid" is an overall net outflow of resources (Morgan, 2006).

**Propositions concerning the giver of compassion.** We conclude this case study with a summary of our findings on conventions relating to the legitimacy of a valid giver of compassionate care. We express these findings graphically (Figure 2); in data count (Table 2) that demonstrates the frequency of latent legitimacy imagery in utterances, and in the form of two propositions, each supported by three sub-propositions.

**Figure 2: Considerations of (il)legitimacy as a giver of compassion**





**Table 2: Latent imagery of (il)legitimacy of giver in utterances**

<b>Legitimate giver</b>		
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub category</b>	<b>Number of utterances</b>
Personal profit not dominant motive in providing support		
	No personal profit	13
	Acknowledge complexity	7
	Positives of volunteerism	<u>12</u>
		Total 32
Legitimate relationship between givers and receivers		
	Professional skills	23
	Time commitment	8
	Legitimate organizations	<u>28</u>
		Total 59
Receiver's long term overall benefit from the support received		
		Total 17
Support not conditioned to advantage giver		
		Total 1
<b>Illegitimate giver</b>		
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub category</b>	<b>Number of utterances</b>
Personal profit dominant motive in providing support		
	Relieve guilt/conscience	10
	Voluntourists	40
	Sham charities	11
	Religious proselytisation	8
	Students/CV	<u>9</u>
		Total 78
Limited or no legitimate relationship between givers and receivers		
	No professional skills	8
	Not legitimate organizations	8
	No time commitment	<u>4</u>
		Total 20
Receiver experiences negative outcomes		
	No long term benefit/harm	10
	Disappointment	2
	Induced shame	2
	Relationship of dependency	<u>5</u>
		Total 19
Conditions of support advantage the giver		
		Total 2

Our analysis suggests there is great complexity involved in compassionate giving, with its potential to be implicated in all kinds of power plays. In essence we draw the following conclusions regarding legitimate compassionate giving. As a third proposition we may state that people generally interpret a person as a worthy and legitimate giver of compassionate support when they present (at least one of) the following characteristics (the more characteristics the stronger the case): 1) profit is of little consideration in providing support; 2) the giver has a legitimate relationship with receiver (either as a friend/colleague, family, an authorized professional caregiver (doctor, police, etc., government department, or reputable NGO); 3) the receiver experiences positive outcomes as a result of their support; and/or 4) the provision of support is not tied to conditions and reforms designed to give the provider greater advantage and control and make the receiver a dependent.

A fourth proposition is that people generally interpret a person as an illegitimate giver of compassionate support when they present (at least one of) the following characteristics (the more characteristics the stronger the case): 1) there is a major opportunity for profit in providing support; 2) there is a limited relationship or no relationship at all with receiver (either as a friend/colleague, family, an authorized professional caregiver (doctor, police etc., government department, or reputable NGO); 3) the receiver experiences negative outcomes as a consequence of the support; and/or 4) the provision of support is tied to various conditions and reforms designed to give the provider greater advantage and control and make the receiver dependent.

## **Discussion**

**A multidimensional framework of compassion legitimacy.** The findings of our cases illustrate our contention about the complexity of compassion being entangled with power relations: not all purported compassion relations are legitimate. More specifically,

the findings provide a clearer understanding of how collective and individual compassion capabilities of givers and receivers of compassion are assessed and legitimated – the question driving our research.

Legitimacy is interwoven with power relations and so the definition of organizational compassion we presented earlier overtly assumes that compassion relations produce and reproduce power relations. The central concern of the paper is with how the legitimacy of givers and receivers is assessed in compassion relations and how responses serve to create, produce, and reproduce power relations. We expand on Clegg's (1989: 214) 'circuits of power' model to provide our analytic framework. The model likens power to electricity that flows through three distinct interacting circuits (Backhouse, Hsu, & Silva, 2006). In the past, power relations have often been thought of as structural, as dimensions of ever-deeper analysis (Lukes, 2005). The model eschews this imagery and instead suggests that power relations flow through distinct circuits. We will analyze the data from our two cases by classifying it within the three power 'circuits'. The first of these deals with explicit power episodes, where overt social actions are launched. Here an agency A attempts to do something to an agency B that B may resist. The *episodic circuit* is constituted at the micro-level through irregular exercises of power as agents try to assert their will and resist such impositions, as they address feelings, communication, conflict, and resistance in day-to-day social relations. The outcomes of the episodic circuit are both positive and negative. The second conduit or circuit of power is concerned with the habitual dispositions that are embedded in the dispositional-level rules and socially constructed meaning and membership that frame member relations and legitimate knowing in specific settings. These are developed through practices that crucially involve the normative evaluation of a collective. Within this level, normative patterns of behavior unfold, and the power exerted is the power

that lies in continuing or contesting “business as usual”. The *facilitative circuit* of power is constituted by macro-level structures, institutional rights and duties as well as the technologies of power embedded in socio-material structures that institutionalize disciplinary frameworks as ways of sense making. Such structures empower and disempower and punish and reward expressions of agency in the episodic circuit as well as inhibit or generate norms in a practicing collective. The facilitative circuit is changeable by agency in the episodic circuit and by the collective constitution of norms in the dispositional circuit, as well as by the impact of random events and unanticipated contingencies.

The three circuits interact, and are constituted by, and constitute each other as “obligatory passage points”. These are the conduits through which traffic through the circuits must pass, given the current fixity of social relations, channels that effectively empower some agencies as they disempower others in terms of fixed and extant social relations. Obligatory passage points are also the places where power shifts can be enacted and observed.

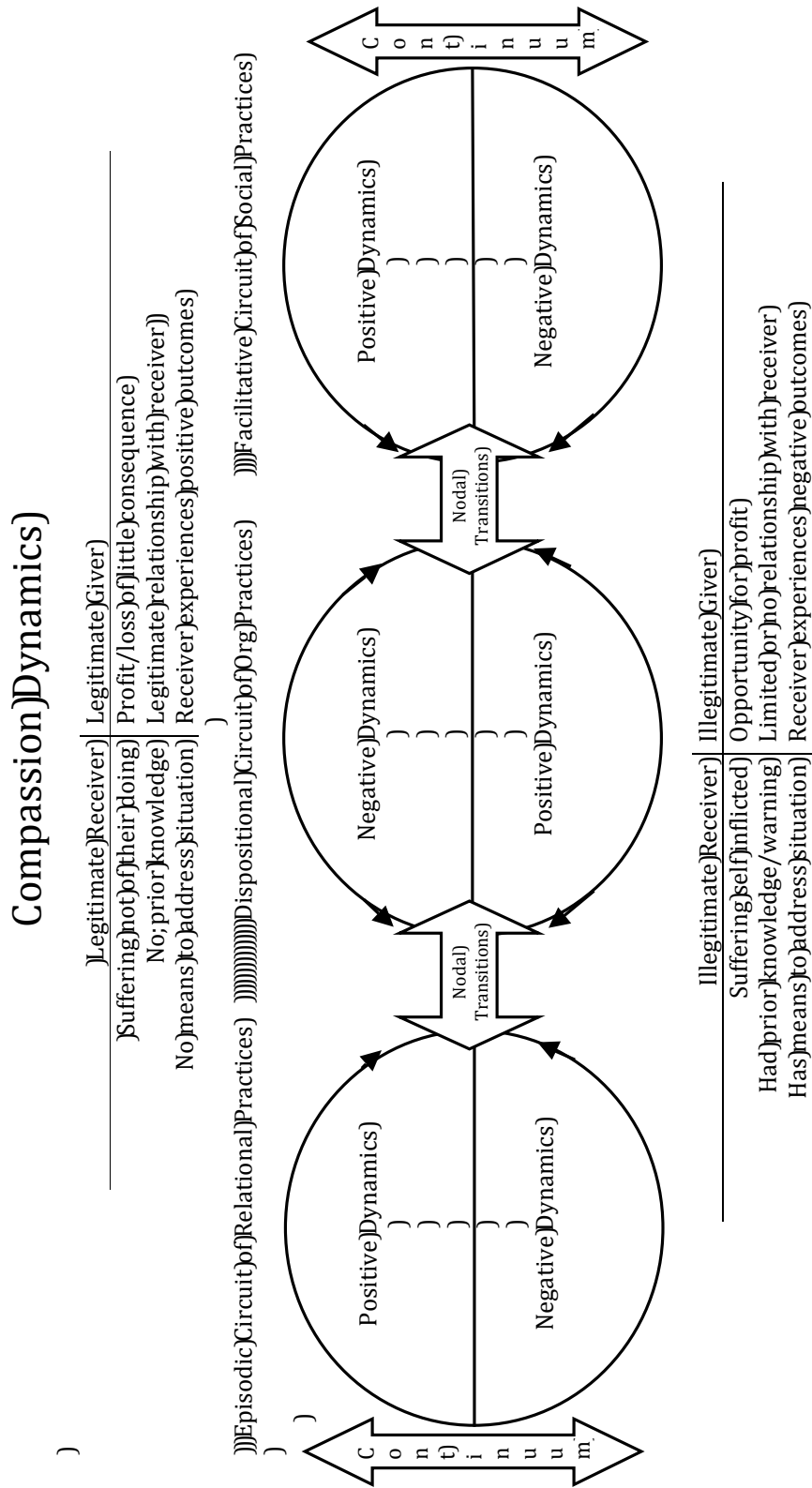
Using the power framework allows us to bring together the findings of both Case One and Case Two into a Multidimensional Framework of Compassion Legitimacy Dynamics (Figure 3). The assessment criteria for legitimate compassion receiving are depicted on the top left side of the model, while the criteria for illegitimate receiving on the model’s bottom left side. Conversely, the assessment criteria for legitimate giving of compassionate support are depicted on the model’s top right side, while the criteria for illegitimate giving is depicted on the models bottom right. In the middle of the model are three circles indicating three circuits of episodic, dispositional, and facilitative power. In these circuits positive and negative compassion dynamics of legitimacy and illegitimacy are seen to flow, converge, and diverge, indicating the power complexities

involved in compassion legitimacy determinations. On the right and left side of these circles are arrows indicating that the legitimacy criteria described at the top and bottom sides of the model will tend to blend and mix – with considerations of both legitimacy and illegitimacy represented in almost each and every case study.

**Compassion legitimacy.** Compassion is represented in this model as having potentially both positive and negative dynamics. Where the motive of compassion is present the results may, nonetheless, be disastrous for those who are the subjects and objects of such compassion. Clegg et al.'s (2006) account of the policies that produced the 'stolen generation' of half-caste Australian aboriginal children taken from their mothers and institutionalized elsewhere is a case in point. The action was done with a compassionate motive in terms of the social context in which it was enacted; the results, however, have been likened to cultural genocide. Our case data gave many such examples. One involved compassionate donation of a battery operated toy cars for children, which quickly led to disappointment, as the batteries were too costly for these people to replace. Another was the concern that receiving food dished out by western foreign aid workers can induce a sense of shame and loss of dignity for people in third world countries.

Issues of legitimacy and power are always complex, mixed, and never entirely pure. According to Habermas (1975) élites attempt to manipulate public perception and to achieve legitimization for favored ideologies is a form of covert power. Similarly, this study has demonstrated how people try to manipulate other's perceptions of themselves (or their organizations) as legitimate receivers or givers of compassionate support. Individuals, organizations, professions, and leaders seek legitimacy as a means of gaining apparently authoritative power (Clegg et al., 2006).

Figure 3: Compassion legitimacy and worthiness model



In a socially responsible society, or at least one that prides itself on being such, a legitimate victim commands the power to receive other's compassion through special favors, exceptions, and rewards. Such favors may include financial compensation, honors, and personal attention from the media and high placed dignitaries. Due to the power commanded by the recipient of compassion, their 'right' to compassion must be established based on their status as a valid or legitimate victim. Not all people who suffer are innocent: suffering may be self inflicted and thus viewed as not worthy of compassion. In some instances, a sufferer may be source of moral outrage and the target of socially legitimized abuse.

**Power plays.** The *episodic circuit* represents irregular micro-level exercises of power in compassion relations. Givers of compassion can enact power over receivers by providing compassionate support to manipulate them into positions of indebtedness or intimacy (Clark, 1987, 1997; Schmitt & Clark, 2006). Such providing of compassionate support can further belittle and patronize the receiver by highlighting their problems and limitations. Giving compassion to belittle the power of a person in a high position such as a mean boss, by feeling sorry for them rather than feeling anger, hatred, or fear towards them. Refusing compassionate support where the would-be receiver minimizes the giver's social status, and reinforces their social standing is another form of power play. Even when a receiver accepts compassionate support they can still raise their own social status through public displays of gratitude, which indicate the receiver's connections with powerful persons.

In the findings of this paper examples of power-compassion episodes include the interaction between Rice who pleaded for help, and the officer who refused support – or maybe (from his perspective) provided support through a tough-love reprimand about personal responsibility. The *dispositional circuit* is constituted of socially constructed

rules and meaning that frame member relations and legitimate knowing. Examples of normative ways of displaying compassion at the dispositional circuit include the activities of voluntourism, which is often enacted in order to enhance the voluntourist's résumé, and the established activities of different charity groups and religious organizations operating in the name of service to the poor while in fact pursuing ulterior purposes. The *facilitative circuit* is constituted of macro-level rights, duties, facilitating and inhibiting technologies, and constituted by institutionalized and disciplinary frameworks. In this study, examples of compassion enhancement or inhibition at the facilitative level are found in the regional and state governmental policies that effect the capacity of members of the Queensland Police Force and other government agencies to perform their responsibilities in providing compassionate support. Such policies can relate to the adequate funding and administration of government agencies, including decisions to centralize emergency responding at a state level or place that responsibility on local agencies that may or may not be equipped to deal with such non-routine circumstances.

*Nodal transitions* occur as the 'obligatory passage points' where the three circuits interact, constitute, and are constituted by each other. Analyzing compassion as power relations through these circuits allows us to see how micro, meso, and macro levels of compassion legitimacy are connected to and influence each other. A relational dependency exists between levels that are necessary to understand and analyze the implications of compassion in organization. Thus, assessing the legitimacy of a giver or receiver is a complex issue, as the causes of peoples suffering involve a multifaceted mix of factors. These can entail personal relational factors (episodic circuit) organizational factors (dispositional circuit) as well as societal factors (facilitative circuit). As such, a person's responsibility for suffering caused by their own doing



might be outweighed by other organizational or society factors outside of their control. Whereas a person may look unworthy as a recipient of compassion (as in the case of the officer who took Rice's call), by crossing to a different circuit via these nodal transitions, innocence can be argued, and power regained as a victim of the system.

**The legitimate receiver reanalyzed.** The findings of this article provide many examples of how these circuits intersect. Consider the officer who responded to Rice's call in Case One. At the episodic level his responding behavior was inappropriate, yet some argued that he was nonetheless a victim due to dispositional level considerations of being under-equipped and uninformed to properly deal with the issues, or that the culture of the Queensland Police Department was to blame. Others held him as a legitimate victim, due to deeper systemic facilitative level issues, issues that were reflected in the policies of the Queensland Government.

**The legitimate giver reanalyzed.** In terms of the legitimate giver of compassion, what can appear to be compassion at the episodic level of interpersonal relations, might in fact be a form of manipulation by managers who use compassion as a front at the organizational level, or by a government who use compassion as a front for large-scale political manipulation. Examples of such considerations were found in the comments of our second case study. Respondents described the corrupt practices of 'sham charities', as well as religious organizations that provide charity support (episodic) in exchange for people's conversion into their religious organization (dispositional, facilitative). They also narrated a history of political interference by the US government in Vietnam and Cambodia (dispositional, facilitative) – funded under the guise of a World Food aid program (episodic). The providing of Western aid (episodic) in exchange for investment opportunities (dispositional, facilitative) that end up draining third world economies is another example of such dynamics.

The dynamic arrows pointing to each side of the power circuits in the model indicates the interdependence of the circuits. They also indicate that compassion is an ever emerging and *ongoing* dynamic power process – as stated in our definition. In taking this approach we view compassion as more than *concern* for others suffering, it is additionally composed of distinct practices of social relations such as *assessment* that informs *responses* of giving, receiving, or refusing. Our compassion dynamics framework provides some insight into how these power dynamics work and is therefore a valuable tool for guiding decisions and policies as they relate to the giving and receiving of compassionate support.

## **Conclusions**

In this paper we have questioned the default assumption that organizational displays of compassion are necessarily positive and beneficial. We have presented a more complex view of compassion as a practice wherein one needs to consider the voices of givers and receivers in compassion relations. Such consideration reveals power inequalities with outcomes that are sometimes beneficial and at other times not. We have supported these views with empirical data derived from the comments of the readers of two cases published by two leading online newspapers, one in Australia the other from the UK. Our data indicate that not all purported compassion relations are legitimate. We have used this data to construct a model of compassionate decision-making for understanding the complexity of legitimate and illegitimate compassion relations. The model presents the different social expectations and assumptions of the legitimate giver and the legitimate receiver of compassionate support. These are distilled and presented as four propositions related to both the receiver and giver of compassion.

The findings of this study are limited by the context of online social media comments (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Thurman, 2008), within a Western cultural context. It is also possible that the opportunity to comment anonymously behind an alias allows people to share views that they might otherwise not reveal in a face-to-face context. The opportunity to comment anonymously might also provide an impetus to trolling (Bowman, 2011), a possible advantage for research access to unfiltered candid perspectives. It is also possible, however, that some comments will just be made for the sake of harassing or disturbing others in the forum and are thus not representative of actual opinions. While there were a small number of comments that could be judged to inflame opinion, people commenting online sought to moderate extreme comments. More importantly, where behavior was moderated online, people were more likely to adhere to norms set by previous commentators, irrespective of whether the person making the comments was anonymous or required to provide their name and location (see Moor, Heuvelman, & Verleur, 2010). Although people who comment do have public anonymity in such forums, they are required to register before they can leave comments, and the newspaper mediates the forums and the online moderator will delete or edit comments if they seek to make extremely inflammatory comments, thus establishing norms that can restrict extreme comments. Amongst our data from the *Guardian* article there were two comments that had been removed with the following message: “This comment was removed by a moderator because it didn’t abide by our community standards. Replies may also be deleted”. Thus, people are not entirely free to comment as they wish; they are held accountable for offensive and hateful comments. Aside from that, even such deliberately provocative comments are valuable because they bring additional perspectives to the debate on the legitimacy of givers and receivers in compassion relations.

Another limitation to the study is that some other individual factors may account for the patterns in the responses coded. For example, peoples' differing operational philosophy may account for how they see who and why someone might be worthy of concern. If they are pragmatic, then the efficacy argument works well. But if the reader is more humanitarian, they might offer different rationales and criteria for legitimacy and normalcy.

Future research could seek to overcome the boundaries of the limitations imposed by the context of this study by testing the compassion legitimacy and worthiness model in a variety of other contexts – including face to face, and especially in different cultural contexts. For example, several vignettes could be composed based upon the various compassion legitimacy criteria and respondents asked to rank the compassion worthiness of the receivers and givers in these vignettes. Similarly, the model could be tested statistically by developing a compassion legitimacy and worthiness scale where respondents rank compassion legitimacy and worthiness criteria as described in this study. Such a scale would need to be correlated against other validated scales in order to determine response norms in a large population of respondents. The development of these research projects would facilitate deeper understandings of social conventions relating to the legitimate giving and receiving of compassion. Increasingly, such research is important, because with increased scrutiny and demands for ethical integrity demanded of contemporary managers, reflection on the ethical complexity involved in the showing or withholding of compassionate support is necessary.

Our purpose in conducting this research has not been to dismiss the positive benefits of compassion as described in spiritual or theological texts or the findings of POS research. Rather our point is to bring more subtlety to the discussion through articulating other nuances that, as our research reveals, are present in the popular

consciousness. The model we propose provides practical value for advancing the POE objective of promoting a living code of ethics (Verbos et al., 2007), as it provides a framework for systematic ethical reflection, sensitizing managers' discrimination in the expression of compassion within organizations. Managers can use this model to develop an organizational code of compassionate conduct that considers specific criteria for assessing the worthiness of the receiver, as well as assess how others may view their legitimacy as a giver worthy to provide compassionate support. This model can be applied to improve the design of policies and decisions that embody positive organizational ethics in a range of contexts and situations where ethical decision making is central to organizational life: these can include organizational and managerial responses to mental and physical illness and disability of staff and customers; maternal and paternal leave, bereavement, and other family related phenomena; the discipline and punishment of staff, as well as a range of other issues pertaining to the expression of compassion.

Using this model as a lens will enable managers to view the dynamics of compassion as an interrelated web of agency, social relations, and social ideologies and values. Consequently, they will make 'better' decisions by reflecting on the frameworks upon which they base their actions in relation to compassion that leads to a questioning of idiographic psychological value judgments. In this conceptualization, compassion is embedded within relations of power conceived not as an individual possession or title but as the *quality* of the relationships *between* individuals or structures (Clegg et al., 2006). Managers using this framework will be able to build power in a positive/ethical manner by designing organization relations and encouraging organizational practices that are founded upon a respectful appreciation of the other. Compassionate action is always a social relation and a social action that involves another – our intention is to

ensure that judgments of the otherness of others are given due attention and consideration.

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## **Thesis Conclusion**

### **Answers to research questions**

The essence of my quest in this thesis has been to investigate and argue for compassion as a complex social relational process – embedded within relations of power. I have expanded this essential idea in the form of different related research questions in each chapter of this thesis. In some cases, my co-authors and I also articulated policy implications from the answers to these questions, because it is my intention that my work not only makes a scholarly contribution to theorising and researching compassion, but also can make a practical contribution to policy making that is compassionate and accounts for the complex relational dynamics in the organization of compassion. Each chapter dealt with various dynamics that uncover the complexities of compassion as a relational process.

#### *Technology of power*

In Chapter One, we asked if the growing emphasis on compassion within organizations might be interpreted as a technology of power employed for greater domination and control. To answer our question we employed the genealogical method developed by Nietzsche (1998) and refined by Foucault (1992; 1985). Application of this method involves questioning values generally assumed as eternal principles by tracing the ignoble conditions of their historical emergence. Our analysis found that rather than being rooted in a compassionate concern for employee well-being, the history of compassion in organizational theory is in fact rooted in a concern with more efficient employee discipline, motivation, and productivity. In pointing out the ignoble origins of compassion in organizations, it was not our intention to argue that organizational compassion is per se ignoble. Rather, it was to provoke debate and provide a more nuanced and mature understanding of organizational compassion relations as a social-historical construct, embedded in power relations, and as dynamically dualistic in terms of producing outcomes that can be experienced both positively and negatively.

#### *Insights from social practice theory*

In Chapters Two and Three, we questioned psychological and theological assumptions about organizational compassion by asking what are the characteristics of organizational compassion responding as a social relational process? We attempted to

answer this question by applying three key ideas of social practice theory summarised by Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) as a lens for viewing organizational compassion practices. The first of these ideas is that daily practices are what produce the various conditions of social life (Giddens, 1984). The second is that all practices are mutually constituted in relations of power. The third is to view with suspicion dualisms commonly assumed to be dichotomous, antithetical concepts (Reckwitz, 2002).

In Chapter Two, our analysis of organizational compassion literature through the lens of practice theory led us to conclude that idealistic psychological and theological imperatives advocating the absolute goodness of compassion is of limited value in the organizational context. The contextual nature of social practice is such that compassion cannot be applied as a general ethical law that is good in all circumstances. Consequently, we concluded that a sociological perspective of compassion that accounts for its power dynamics and contingent outcomes is of greater benefit to the organizational theory practice.

In Chapter Three, we applied a social practice theory framework to interview data collected from employees describing the organizational support they received (or lack of) during the Brisbane floods. Our analysis allowed us to generate three practical insights that can be applied by researchers and managers seeking to nurture compassion within organizations. The first insight is that employees should be engaged with using compassionate humanising categorisation schemas and discourses – rather than those that are dehumanising, such as describing an employee merely as a worker. We supplemented this data driven conclusion with the reasoning of Nussbaum (2003), who argues that compassion is based upon the human ability to identify with another's suffering and pain. When the other is categorised as different, sub-human or as a non-human, it poses a barrier to identification with the other as 'just like me'. Throughout history the categorisation of the other as different and therefore not worthy of compassion has legitimised perpetration of prejudice and discrimination. As an example, in Cambodia the Khmer Rouge characterised political prisoners as animals, microbes, vermin, and disease. Subjugation of prisoners to dehumanising conditions of abuse and torture confirmed these characterisations to the guards and supported the need for the prisoners' elimination as a public health hazard (Hinton, 2005).

The second insight generated from applying insights from practice theory to our data is that compassion must be embedded within an organization's ongoing practices and contingencies. The crisis situation forces a moment of truth revealing actual organizational values and concerns. If compassion is not an intrinsic part of the organization's ongoing practices, it is doubtful that it will be part of its mode of crisis responding. Ongoing compassionate practices and routines that were identified in this study included an articulated philosophy of care, a culture of empowerment and trust, leaders who are role models of care, flexible work arrangements to suit the work/life balance of individual employees, the establishment of contingency plans for emergencies, and an emphasis on social responsibility.

Finally, the third insight derived from applying practice theory to our data is that organizational recipients of care and compassion will experience it in both positive and negative ways – even when the intention of the provider is genuine and sincere. Our data from this study showed that most employees will be grateful for the support they received; however, this was not always the case. We concluded, therefore, that where organizational mechanisms, policies and practices are put in place to provide care, positive outcomes should not be automatically assumed. Rather, the outcomes experienced by employees should be assessed on an ongoing basis.

### *Socio-materialisation*

In Chapter Four, we analysed the same data (from the study in Chapter Three) focusing on the principle of mutual constitution through interactions of sociomateriality (Schatzki, 2001). Social practice theory emphasises that human social behaviour is enmeshed with material objects and events in sociomaterial configurations (Orlikowski, 2007; Suchman, 2007). We apply this principle to organizational compassion by asking: What characterises the sociomaterial organizing of compassion responding in times of crisis? Our analysis of organizational compassion responses in the Brisbane floods revealed that sociomateriality materialises compassion as five sequential events: 1) communication; 2) policy issues and recourse availability; 3) provision of tangible support; 4) offering support to others, and 5) reconnecting. In this finding, agency is located in multiple heterogeneous networks involving humans and matter. Further, matter is not considered ethically neutral as it is (re)configured in social, political, historical, and economic contexts that are both good and harmful (Aanestad, 2003). We

conclude that although both humans and objects display agency, humans are ethically accountable for intervening or not to reconfigure sociomateriality in a manner characterised by compassionate responding in times of crisis.

### *Legitimising compassion*

In Chapter Five, we asked how the collective and individual compassion capabilities of givers and receivers in compassion relations are socially legitimised? Our findings suggested that compassion relations are indeed tied in with considerations of power and that the legitimacy of the givers and receivers in compassion relations is highly contested and debated. According to our data, a person is generally interpreted as a worthy recipient of compassionate support when they are in a condition of suffering that they are not responsible for; had no prior knowledge of the risk they are in; have no means to address the risk; or they are in a situation rooted in deeper social issues (such as childhood neglect, abuse etc.). As more of these criteria apply in a given case, the stronger the legitimacy of that case becomes. Conversely, these criteria apply in reverse for the person who is not a legitimate receiver of compassionate support. With respect to the compassion giver, a person is viewed as a worthy and legitimate provider of compassionate support when profit is of little consideration in providing support, there is a legitimate relationship with receiver (either as a friend/colleague, family, an authorised professional caregiver, government department, or reputable NGO), the receiver experiences positive outcomes, and support is not tied to conditions that advantage the giver in making the receiver dependent. Again, the reverse of these criteria applies to the illegitimate giver of compassionate support, and the more of these criteria that are met, the stronger the case. We suggested that this model could assist researchers and managers by encouraging reflexivity on the ethical complexity involved in compassion relations. Further, managers could use the model to evaluate how others might perceive the legitimacy of their compassion relations. Finally, we also suggested that this model might also be used to develop an organizational code of compassionate conduct.

### **Limitations**

#### *Small sample and generalisability*

A possible limitation in the empirical research presented in Chapters 3 and 4 is the small sample size of 25 participants. How can the findings from this research be generalizable



to entire populations? The reality is that they can't. In qualitative analysis, there is no assumption that a quantity of like responses justifies the findings as 'fact' or 'truth' that is universally generalizable (Silverman, 2010). Qualitative research involves ambiguity and complexity and demands an appreciation that organizational reality is always ongoing, contingent, multiple, and emergent. Findings from qualitative sociological research are not predictive; they are theoretical generalisations that might be applied as guiding principles (Flyvbjerg, 2006). They do not explain global variation; instead they describe contextually situated dynamics. Despite differences found across contexts, the findings of qualitative research can nonetheless be applied to understand the dynamics in other situated contexts. Researchers and managers seeking to apply the findings of qualitative research must engage with the findings reflexively, drawing their own conclusions on the applicability of the findings in another context. The validity of the findings is not dependent on sample size, but on the quality of analysis. Qualitative research is concerned with rich data that is not quantifiable using the mathematical formulas of statistical methodologies. This limitation of qualitative research is also its strength, for sometimes it is the single 'deviant' case that presents the most interesting findings (Silverman, 2006).

### *Subjectivity*

Subjectivity of interpretation is an inherent factor of qualitative narrative research. Rhodes and Brown (2005) describe the specific contributions of qualitative narrative studies to organizational research in contrast to positivist studies as an emphasis on temporality, plurality, reflexivity, and subjectivity, themes that disappear in positivist approaches. *Temporality* relates to the narrative methodology's locating of stories in time rather than assuming observations to be forever fixed (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1997). Hence, organizations are presented as involved in fluctuating processes with the paradoxes and complexities inherent in social relations, rather than being a constant, consistent, and homogenous entity. *Plurality* in narrative research is an acknowledgement of the many and potentially competing ways that a story might be told, highlighting that organizations are dynamic co-constructions rather than stable artefacts (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). *Reflexivity* is called for in narrative research, as it requires reflection of the researcher in acknowledging their role in deciding what to include or exclude in the reconstruction of organizations through the retelling of organizational narratives (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). Finally, *subjectivity* is an

ontological acknowledgement on the part of the researcher that meanings are co-created by both respondents and the researcher, as opposed to the assumed objectivity of the positivist ontology (McKinley, 2003).

Subjectivity also features in Czarniawska's (2000) description of qualitative research – particularly relating to the interpretation of narratives. She proposes that interpretation can be done using Hernadi's (1987) hermeneutic triad of explication, explanation, and exploration. Explication is a naïve or semantic reading of the text, implying the reader's humility in 'standing under the text' by asking what it says. The researcher must decide which meaning to reproduce and which to ignore. In the attempt to reconstruct an 'authentic' reproduction of a text that can never be entirely 'authentic', the researcher struggles with both 'over interpretation' and 'under interpretation'. Explanation has the reader standing above the text critically or semiotically deconstructing the conflicting logics, implications, and inconsistencies embedded within a text. Finally, exploration has the reader standing in for the author, and involves the researcher's reflection on their construction of their own story through analysis of the text.

In my study of organizational compassion dynamics, I engaged in *explication* by collecting and reproducing narratives of positive and negative experiences of organizational support during the Brisbane floods. I engaged in *explanation* by analysing these narratives in relation to organizational norms and deeper structures that facilitate or inhibit the experience of compassion within the organization. Finally, I engaged in *exploration* through personal reflection on my practice as a researcher as I constructed and enacted theory from these organizational compassion narratives.

### *Online context*

The limitations of the research presented in Chapter 5 relate to the context of online social media comments (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Thurman, 2008). There is a possibility that anonymously commenting to an online newspaper using an alias allows people to express views that they might otherwise not reveal. Further, they might write comments that seek to inflame and harass, typically referred to as 'trolling' (Bowman, 2011). From one perspective, this could be an advantage, as it allowed the researcher access to perspectives that are candid and unfiltered. Research indicates that the extremity of online comments responding to events differs little from opinions

expressed in other forums (see Moor et al., 2010). Further online comments are moderated with required registration and assigned mediators who delete or edit comments if they violate established guidelines of online community standards. People are thereby not free to make comments that are offensive and hateful. Apart from these considerations, even comments that are deliberately provocative are valuable for a researcher because they bring additional perspectives to the debate.

### **Pathways forward**

The questions raised and answered in this research have opened up fresh lines of inquiry for advancing understanding of compassion in organizations. Potential streams for further research include exploring the relationship between organizational categorisation schemas used to describe employees with practices of compassion within the organization; assessing the organizational policies and practices that embed compassion within the organizational culture and support compassion responding during crises; studying the relationship between organizational compassion and clusters of other positive emotions; and testing of the proposed compassion legitimacy criteria using different research methodologies.

#### *Organizational categorisation schemas and compassion*

In Chapter Three, our findings suggested that the greatest compassion capability was demonstrated by organizations that used humanising categorisation schemas and scripts for describing employees. Here employees were described first and foremost as human beings, and only secondarily as employees or workers. Support for this finding is provided in reverse by theorists who describe knowledge as a form of power, where categorising the other as different, inferior, and disgusting is used to create distance and legitimise different forms of prejudice, domination, and abuse of other human beings (Bourdieu, 1984; Clegg et al., 2006; Nussbaum, 2003). Assessment of the relationship between organizational categorisation schemas and compassionate practices and policies could be assessed using different qualitative methodologies including narrative, discursive, and ethnographic studies.

#### *Embedded compassion practices*

In Chapters Three and Four, our findings have further suggested that there is a significant relationship between the daily practices of the organization and

organizational crisis responses. The best support was provided by organizations that had compassionate practices embedded within their ongoing daily practices. Our study identified these practices as a philosophy of care, a culture of empowerment and trust, leaders who were role models of care, flexible work arrangements tailored to suit employees' work/life balance, and an emphasis on corporate social responsibility. Further studies could seek to identify other important practices, or to determine which practices are most significant. As an example, researchers have suggested the need for organizational training programs for increasing compassion awareness and nurturing compassionate practice (Rynes et al., 2012). Studies into the development or effectiveness of such programs, however, are currently non-existent.

### *Clusters of emotion*

Our research in Chapter Three also indicated that those organizations with a high capability for compassion additionally had high capabilities of other positive emotions such as gratitude, trust, and kindness. Further research could study the relationship between these emotions to assess if they are mutually interdependent and come in clusters as opposed to being single positive emotional capabilities. The same question can be asked in reverse with regard to negative emotions, such as anger, resentment, a sense of neglect, or cynicism. Then again, perhaps this framing of the question is too naïve. Our research indicates that compassion is complex and can involve both positive and negative experiences. Is it possible that there are groups of positive and negative emotions that cluster to temper each other for optimum functioning? Could the healthy receiving or giving of compassionate support involve a little negative doubt wherein the legitimacy of the giver or receiver is assessed before decisions are made on whether or not to respond with giving, receiving, or refusal? Our research, and the definition we have provided, has suggested that this might be the case – further research could explore whether or not this is so.

### *Legitimacy criteria*

In Chapter Five, our research of 278 online newspaper comments indicated that people use socially legitimised criteria in the assessment of the worthiness of a giver or receiver of compassionate support. As more of these criteria apply to a case, the stronger the legitimacy of the case becomes. Future research could test these compassion legitimacy criteria in a variety of other contexts using a range of

methodologies including statistical methods and vignettes. Quantitative statistical testing could involve developing a compassion legitimacy scale where respondents rank these compassion legitimacy criteria – for example on a five-point Likert scale. Qualitative studies using vignettes could involve composing short stories based upon the various compassion legitimacy criteria and asking respondents to rank the compassion worthiness of the receivers and givers in these stories.

### *The ideal and the real*

Although my critique of the literature on compassion in organizations has been strong, I am not antagonistic to promoting compassion in organizations. To the contrary, I strongly identify with the objective of nurturing more compassion in organizations. Consequently, I feel that I have made an important contribution in subjecting the organizational compassion literature to rigorous scrutiny and testing. Scrutiny facilitates healthy debate and evolves the current knowledge, which in turn spawns further research. My analyses have revealed a few significant limitations in the current literature. These relate to maintaining a traditional perspective of compassion as an eternally beneficial moral imperative, rather than as a social construct, embedded in power relations, with positive and negative outcomes. In pointing out these limitations, I seek to provide a more nuanced and mature understanding of organizational compassion relations.

As argued in Chapter 2, as an ethical imperative compassion provides aspirational ideals for practice. Ideals do not necessarily match practice, of course, because organizational compassion cannot be applied as a general ethical law that is good in all circumstances. As with all social research findings (Flyvbjerg, 2004, 2006), applying compassion within an organization requires considering competing values and interests and making difficult choices by drawing upon practical wisdom (Aristotelian *phronesis*). The complexities of organizational compassion are always formed in practice, as real, lived experiences, even when informed by ideals for practice.

### **Summary**

All worthwhile research should open up new lines of questioning and generate further research. I have raised various research questions about the relationship between organizational compassion and power. For answers, I have engaged in theoretical

studies and empirical research using genealogical, narrative, sequence, and discursive methodologies. My thesis is that compassion cannot be adequately understood as a one-dimensional construct, one that is taken at face value to be inherently a positive trait or act. Rather, it is through a social lens that we can best make sense of compassion as a complex process; compassion has givers, receivers and contexts and so power enmeshed social relations should be the central idea of compassion in organizations.

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## **Appendix: The Interview**

## Participant Information Sheet

**Research Project Title: The Dynamics of Compassion in Organisations (HREC 2011-253)**

### **Who is doing the research?**

My name is Ace Simpson and I am a PhD student at UTS. My supervisory panel are Associate Professor Tyrone Pitsis and Professor Stewart Clegg.

### **What is the research about?**

This research on “The Dynamics of Compassion in Organisations” is focusing on people’s experiences of compassionate support, or a lack of it, from their workplaces during times of disaster. Such support can include emotional, financial, or other practical forms of care and assistance, either expected or unexpected.

### **What will participation involve?**

If you agree to participate, we will have a formal discussion for approximately one hour, at a location of your choice. I will record the discussion on a digital recording device.

### **Why have I been invited?**

You have been invited based on your meeting the criteria of a person whose home or workplace falls within the area of a disaster zone.

### **Do I have to agree?**

You don’t have to agree, **your participation in this study is purely voluntary** and you may withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason.

### **Will my responses remain confidential?**

Your identity as a participant and the name of the organisation where you work, and the responses you provide will remain strictly confidential. Only my supervisors and I will have access to the data. Additionally, I will use a transcription service to transcribe the files, but I will use a professional transcription service that is UTS approved and bound by UTS policies on handling sensitive data.

### **Are there any risks?**

The questions are not designed to cause embarrassment or physical or social harm. There is, however, depending on your experiences a risk that you may experience feelings of emotional distress due to the sensitive nature of the information you will be asked to recall, discuss, or consider.

### **What are the benefits of participating?**

Answering the questions may help you to think about issues considered beneficial in terms of what facilitates or impedes compassion within organisations. The data gathered will be used to develop a thesis as a requirement for a PhD degree. It may be further used for publication in journals and books and used to offer a model for assisting people and organisations in dealing with and responding to traumatic events.

### **What if I have concerns or a complaint?**

If you have concerns about the research that you think I or my supervisors can help you with, please feel free to contact me (us) on [REDACTED]. If you would like to talk to someone who is not connected with the research, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer on 02 9514 9772, and quote this number 2011-253.

**Research Project Title: The Dynamics of Compassion in Organisations (HREC 2011-253)**

**Consent Form**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (*participant's name*) agree to participate in the research project “The Dynamics of Compassion in Organisations”, HREC number 2011-253, being conducted by Ace Simpson of the University of Technology, Sydney for his PhD degree. I can contact Ace using the following information, Email: [Ace.Simpson@uts.edu.au](mailto:Ace.Simpson@uts.edu.au), Phone: \_\_\_\_\_).

I understand that this research on “compassion within organisations” is focusing on people’s organisational experiences of compassionate support, or a lack of it, from their places of work during times of disaster (such as the recent Qld floods of 2010/2011 or Cyclone Yasi). Such support can include emotional, financial, or other practical forms of care.

I understand that my participation in this research will involve giving an interview by answering some questions for approximately 1 hour, at a location of my choice. The interview will be recorded and only the researcher and his supervisors, as well as a research assistant will be authorised to handle the data.

I am aware that I can contact Ace or his supervisor(s) Associate Professor Tyrone Pitsis (**Email:** [Tyrone.Pitsis@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:Tyrone.Pitsis@newcastle.ac.uk), **Phone:** +61 2 9514 3371) and Professor Stewart Clegg (**Email:** [Stewart.Clegg@uts.edu.au](mailto:Stewart.Clegg@uts.edu.au), **Phone:** +61 2 9514 3934) if I have any concerns about the research. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this research project at any time I wish, without consequences, and without giving a reason.

I agree that Ace has answered all my questions fully and clearly.

I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in academic publications in a form that does not identify me in any way, and that I will have the opportunity to read any paper before publication if I so wish.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (participant)

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (researcher or delegate)

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

**NOTE:**

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (ph: 02 9514 97772, email: [Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au](mailto:Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au)) and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

**Contact Persons in Relation to this Study on  
The Dynamics of Compassion within Organisations**

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## Interview Questions Outline

How did the disaster affect your life – including your work life?

Did the experience confront your sense of mortality?

Has it affected your perspective on life?

Did anyone from your work communicate with you about your work responsibilities (coming in to work or not) during the disaster?

Did your work (or colleagues, or managers from work) offer any emotional, physical, or financial or other forms of support to you or your work colleagues during or after the disaster?

How did this make you feel?

Do you know how it made your colleagues feel?

Is such a response towards people in times of need, normal within the organisation where you work?

Are there any specific workplace or organisational factors that contributed to such a response?

Does the organisation where you work have specific policies and practices in place to ensure the care of employees in times of difficulty?

How does this make you feel?

Can you think of any examples where such policies were engaged to help you or any other employees in times of need?

If so, how did you feel in those instances?

Do you know of any other instances within your organisation relating to the support people received (or didn't receive) in times of difficulty?

If so, how did you feel in those instances?

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