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.

Signature of Student

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Ace Volkmann Simpson

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
Simpson, A., Clegg, S. & Pitsis, T. (under review). I used to care but things have changed: A genealogy of compassion in organizations. *Journal of Management Inquiry*. Ace Simpson: Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication. Stewart Clegg: Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication. Tyrone Pitsis: Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication.	Overall 88% Conceptualisation 95% Analysis 95% Writing 75%
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. *Organization*. Ace Simpson: Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication. Stewart Clegg: Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication. Tyrone Pitsis: Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication. Miguel Pereira Lopez: Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication. Armenio Rego: Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication. Miguel Pina e Cunha: Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication.	Overall 75% Conceptualisation 80% Analysis 70% Writing 75%
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. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*. Ace Simpson: Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication. Stewart Clegg: Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication. Miguel Pina e Cunha: Production Note: Signature removed prior to publication.	Overall 85% Conceptualisation 80% Data collection 100% Analysis 80% Writing 80%

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

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.