

WHAT GOOD IS COMPASSION AT WORK?

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Abstract

This paper presents two views on the effects of compassion at work. The first view presents a quantitative model, indicating that experienced compassion relates to employee and organizational outcomes. Through analysis of compassion stories, the second view reveals mechanisms through which compassion has its effects, uncovering how acts of compassion are cues for sensemaking about the self, co-workers, and the organization. Together, the two views provide evidence that acts of compassion at work create important effects.

Keywords: Compassion, Sensemaking, Positive Meaning, Positive Emotion

WHAT GOOD IS COMPASSION AT WORK?

A senior employee dies suddenly of a heart attack. The CEO takes the time to visit each of his management team personally to deliver the news, goes to the home of the deceased person to offer condolences and to offer support to the grieving family. He breaks the news to the shaken staff and provides time and opportunity for members to express their feelings and to offer their own kinds of support. Some offer to visit the deceased's family; others to cook meals or to babysit (the employee had young children); others to pick up the slack created by the unexpected death (Dutton, Frost, Worline, Lilius, & Kanov, 2002).

A death in another company yields a different outcome. The bereavement is noted in a tersely worded e-mail. It is not discussed with managers, nor is there any forum for employees to talk about the incident. It is budget time, and everyone stays buried in his or her work. A palpable sadness hangs unresolved over the office. One staff member later approaches others in her group and asks if anyone would like to attend an informal and very unofficial tribute to the fallen colleague in her office. Many attend and tell her how helpful this is to them, as they had felt stifled and frustrated by the lack of corporate attention to this event (Hayakawa, 2003).

As these stories reveal, the absence of compassion in response to pain in the workplace can heighten stress and generate dissatisfaction, while the presence of compassion often allows people to act and feel positively useful, even in the wake of grief. In the face of loss and pain in employees' lives, co-workers and supervisors often reach out. People want to help. They run errands and take on tasks. They pull up a chair and hold a hand. They extend deadlines or find a way to grant time off. They listen while someone cries. While these are everyday events in the

workplace, few organizational studies address the role of compassion in people's work lives. This paper makes the case that, no matter what its form, the experience of compassion at work is consequential--both for people, and for organizations.

We define compassion as an empathetic emotional response to another person's pain or suffering that moves people to act in a way that will either ease the person's condition or make it more bearable (Kanov, Maitlis, Worline, Dutton, Frost, & Lilius, 2003). The action component of compassion distinguishes it from empathy (von Deitze & Orb, 2000), which is a passive, feeling state (Davis, 1994). A starting assumption of this paper is that compassion is consequential in all types of organizational settings, thereby extending Kahn's (1993) notion of caregiving beyond those organizations particularly susceptible to burnout. It also reveals the damaging effects of a lack of compassion on both the individual employee and the larger organization. The aim of this paper is thus to delineate, both theoretically and empirically, the consequences of compassion at work.

The call to understand the consequences of compassion at work is timely for a number of practical reasons. People in general are spending more time at work, and unsurprisingly they are experiencing more workplace stress (Cooper, Dewe, & O'Driscoll, 2001; Fieldman, 2002; Kruger, 1999). The pains of life are experienced in the workplace at an increasing rate (Hallowell, 1999; Hochschild, 1997), and can spill into the work setting due to the loss of a loved one, a difficult personal relationship, or the illness of friends and colleagues (Harvey, 2001). They may also result from toxic interactions with bosses, colleagues or customers (Frost, 2003), or one's own stress, illness, and exhaustion in attempting to cope with the hectic demands of work and personal life (Hochschild, 1997). While typical organizational norms demand that people leave their pain behind when they enter the workplace (Frost, Dutton, Worline, & Wilson,

2000; Rafaeli & Worline, 2001), the reality is that pain is not so easily compartmentalized. A recent estimate by the Grief Recovery Institute showed that firms lose more than 75 billion dollars annually from employees' grief-related incidents--an estimate that is strongly suggestive of the ubiquity of pain in work settings and the corresponding necessity for compassion (Zaslow, 2002). Despite the significant costs of grief and pain to organizations, and despite the presence of compassion as an important response to that pain, organizational scholars know very little about the ways that experienced compassion at work may affect organizations and their members.

The call to understand compassion at work is also theoretically timely. Compassion has been recognized as an important human activity in its own right, deserving of organizational study (Frost, 1999). Attending to the process of compassion in organizations provides a connection to much that is human in the workplace, helping to bring the "disappeared" world of human interaction back into focus in organizational scholarship, and shedding light on the significance of everyday interpersonal actions at work (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Dutton, 2003; Fletcher, 2001; Frost, 1999; Hallowell, 1999).

Three theoretical streams inform our study of compassion at work. First, a focus on experienced compassion at work provides an opportunity to develop and test ways in which positive interpersonal behaviors contribute to individual and organizational outcomes. Concern about toxic emotions (Frost, 2003; Frost & Robinson, 1999), uncivil behaviors (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Pearson, Andersson and Wegner, 2001), workplace bullying (Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1996), corrosive interactions at work (Williams and Dutton, 1999), and organizational injustice (see Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001, for a review) creates a corresponding need to further understand the contributions that positive interpersonal

interactions can make in the workplace. By examining acts of compassion, we complement work that suggests the importance of various forms of positive interpersonal interactions such as social support (Wills, 1991), helping (Dovidio & Penner, 2001), and organizational citizenship behavior (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). An emphasis on compassion at work builds on these bodies of work in two specific ways. First, while work on social support has highlighted the importance of one's social networks or ties for stress and well-being, a focus on compassion illuminates the significant outcomes associated with one particular supportive action or episode. Second, the study of compassion builds on what we know about helping, broadly defined as "an intentional action that has the outcome of benefiting another person" (Dovidio & Penner, 2001) because compassion is a particular kind of responsiveness that occurs in the face of another's pain. It includes both an action and a dynamic that occurs in an organizational context that, unlike citizenship behavior, is not limited to work-related issues and aid.

Second, a focus on the effects of compassion at work provides insight into how everyday interpersonal interactions serve as important cues for sensemaking in the workplace (Weick, 1995). By illuminating the process by which small, interpersonal acts of compassion can have lasting effects on people's workplace feelings and behaviors, we extend research that has centered on more cognitive aspects of sensemaking (e.g., Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Thomas, Clark & Gioia, 1993), and build on work which highlights the role of relational cues and emotion in organizational sensemaking (Maitlis & Ozcelik, 2003; Patient, Lawrence & Maitlis, 2003; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). While relatively little is known about the emotional aspects of sensemaking in organizations, psychologists have shown the beneficial outcomes associated with making positive meaning of stressful or painful life events (e.g., Park &

Folkman, 1997), such as the ability to cope (McIntosh, Silver, & Wortman, 1993) and increases in felt positive emotion (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). This study thus brings together the two typically separate literatures of positive meaning-making and organizational sensemaking to show how acts of compassion, through positive meaning-making processes, act as powerful cues for understanding the broader organizational context. Thus, this paper draws on the multiple theoretical streams of positive interpersonal behavior, positive meaning-making, and organizational sensemaking to explain the variety of ways that compassion impacts people at work.

Two Views into the Effects of Compassion at Work

This paper presents two empirical views of the effects of experienced compassion at work. Both views are developed from employee responses gathered in the same empirical setting--a large community hospital. The first view is based on standard survey responses, while the second uses qualitative stories of compassion at work. Analyses of these two data sources offer a complementary and more complete picture of why and how compassion matters for employees and organizations. The first view tests a multivariate model of the effects of experienced compassion on a number of important workplace outcomes. The second view employs an interpretive approach to analyzing stories of workplace compassion in order to gain insight into how people make meaning of compassionate interpersonal interactions at work. The goal of View 2 is to build a richer theoretical account of why compassion might come to matter in the ways suggested in View 1 by using the lens of meaning-making. Together, these two windows provide a more complete answer to our research question of "what good is compassion at work?" than either view can provide on its own.

VIEW 1: MODELING THE EFFECTS OF COMPASSION AT WORK

We propose that the experience of compassion in the workplace influences two important organizational behaviors - turnover intentions and prosocial organizational behavior - through two major pathways depicted in Figure 1 and described in this section. First, experienced compassion will influence how people feel while at work (frequency of positive emotion). How people feel while at work relates to how stressful employees find their jobs, which will in turn be related to their stated turnover intentions. Second, experienced compassion, both directly and indirectly through its relationship to positive emotion, will impact how committed people feel to their work organization, which will in turn be related to both turnover and prosocial organizational behaviors. In the following section, we derive theoretical predictions for these pathways.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Experienced Compassion and Positive Emotion at Work

Two theoretical arguments support the claim that experienced compassion creates positive emotion. First, compassionate interpersonal interactions at work can help people who are experiencing personal difficulty to find positive meaning in an otherwise painful event. For example, if a co-worker takes the time to sit and talk with someone experiencing a painful divorce, that person may find meaning in the closer bond that ensues. Positive meaning-making takes several identifiable forms, such as infusing ordinary events with positive meaning or positive reappraisal, and these can give rise to particular associated positive emotions (Folkman 1997, 1999; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). Fredrickson shows that finding positive meanings, even in difficult situations, gives rise to positive emotions, including gratitude and hope

(Fredrickson, 2003; Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003). By providing an avenue for meaning-making in the face of pain, the experience of compassion may increase the likelihood and frequency of positive emotion (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000).

Positive emotions may also flow from workplace experiences that create a sense of self-worth and respect (George, 1998). Compassion represents such an experience, as it conveys respect and provides an affirmation of people's belonging and worth in the group (Frost et al., 2000). Thus, through these two processes of positive meaning-making, we predict that the experience of compassion will be associated with increased levels of positive emotion at work.

Hypothesis 1: There will be a positive relationship between experienced compassion and positive emotion at work.

Positive Emotion and Job-related Stress

Job-related stress is a common experience for many employees (Cooper and Cartwright, 1994). In her broaden-and-build model of positive emotion, Fredrickson (2000) theorizes that positive emotions are restorative, helping people calm and return to normal physiological functioning following stressful, negative emotion episodes. Fredrickson further theorizes that people who experience positive emotions also experience broad-minded coping tendencies, such as the ability to think creatively and generate solutions to problems. In a work context, these positive emotions may become resources that help individuals reduce levels of job-related stress.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a negative relationship between positive emotion at work and job-related stress.

Experienced Compassion and Affective Commitment

Meyer and Allen (1991) view affective commitment as a positive emotional attachment by employees to their work organizations that results, in part, from pleasant experiences at work. Being treated with compassion at work may elicit a desire to reciprocate favorable treatment, and

if the compassion is seen as reflective of the organization, this reciprocation may take the form of greater affective commitment to the organization (Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997). The perception of being valued and cared about by the organization or a work unit may also encourage the incorporation of organizational membership into the employee's self-identity, which strengthens commitment to the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1984). Oftentimes, compassion in the workplace is directed towards someone who is struggling with the health or well-being of a family member. Compassion at work may also help employees balance work and personal life, reducing interrole conflict, which is also related to strengthened affective commitment (Allen, 2001). Thus we hypothesize that experienced compassion at work strengthens affective commitment by activating reciprocity, strengthening cognitive identification, and reducing interrole strain.

Hypothesis 3a: There will be a positive relationship between experienced compassion at work and affective organizational commitment.

The link between experienced compassion and affective commitment also works through positive emotion. The associative theory of attitude formation suggests that objects paired with positive emotion become conditioned as elicitors of positive affect themselves (Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991). Thus, frequent experience of positive emotion at work may lead to pleasant associations with the workplace, and through this association, strengthen affective commitment to the organization. Finally, positive emotional states contribute to employees finding others more attractive (e.g, Daniels & Berkowitz, 1963; Bell, 1978), which may also represent a pleasant work experience that enhances affective organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 3b: There will be a positive relationship between positive emotion at work and affective organizational commitment.

Affective Commitment, Job-related Stress, and Intent to Leave the Organization

Much of the research literature on employee turnover suggests that the decision to quit one's job depends on how committed employees are to their organization (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). The link between higher job stress and intentions to leave the organization is also well documented within the organizational literature (see Cooper et al., 2001, for a review). Following the research findings on stress at work and Tett and Meyer's (1993) meta-analysis of job attitude and turnover intention literature, we hypothesize that job stress and affective commitment will have effects independent of each other on the decision to leave one's job.

Hypothesis 4a: Affective commitment will be negatively related to turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 4b: Job-related stress will be positively related to turnover intentions.

Affective Commitment and Prosocial Organizational Behavior

A considerable amount of work in organizations is accomplished through interactions in which coworkers help each other while carrying out their organizational role (Brief & Motowild, 1986), be it showing a new employee the ropes, sharing supplies, or lending a hand to someone who is behind in their work (Dutton, 2003). We hypothesize that such prosocial organizational behavior may be related to the strength of one's affective commitment. In their three-component model of organizational commitment, Allen and Meyer (1990) describe affective commitment as distinct from two other forms of commitment (continuance and normative) through its roots in an attachment to the goals of the organization and people's identification with the organization. Through its impact on affective commitment, compassion at work may heighten people's identification with the organization and hence increase their work-related helping. Employees who experience this particular form of organizational commitment are more likely to engage in interpersonal helping with their co-workers because it is congruent with their internalization of the organizational mission and their identification with the purpose of the work.

Hypothesis 5: Affective commitment affect at work will be positively related to prosocial organizational behavior.

VIEW 1: METHOD

Research Setting

This research was performed at Fairviewⁱ hospital, a community hospital in a mid-sized urban area in the central United States. Because compassion is a concept that is already familiar in healthcare settings (von Dietze & Orb, 2000), Fairview Hospital provided an ideal setting for the study. Hospital employees were used to discussing compassion in reference to staff-patient interactions; thus, it was an easy transition for them to talk about compassion between staff members. Fairview Hospital employs approximately 2400 full-time employees who work in both patient care and administration. The hospital facility is located separately from the administration facility, and the health system includes several satellite outpatient clinics in a variety of locations. Fairview is one of the largest and most prominent employers in its community and has received national awards for innovative medical care. The research described in View 1 and View 2 targeted all hospital employees.

Study Materials and Distribution

The research team for these studies worked closely with senior human resource executives throughout the study design and implementation. We collaborated with the organization to distribute research materials through the organization's payroll distribution network, which delivers written materials and payroll envelopes by hand to all of its employees on a bi-weekly basis. Research materials consisted of a sealed envelope that contained a letter of introduction and a request to participate, a survey related to experiences of compassion at work (data for View 1), a solicitation for a written story of compassion at work (data for View 2), and a self-addressed stamped envelope. Study materials for View 2 comprised a one-page solicitation for a

story of compassion at work. The top of the page read as follows: “Please provide a story of a time when you either a) experienced compassion at work, or b) witnessed compassion at work,” with blank space on the rest of the page for each respondent to write a story. The research materials arrived at employees’ workstations on September 6, 2001, with a request to return the materials via mail by September 30, 2001.

Fostering Research Participation

The research team undertook substantial efforts to maximize response rates. Prior to survey distribution, we notified employees of the upcoming research via the hospital’s bimonthly newsletter. In addition, an introductory letter encouraging participation was co-signed by the senior researcher and the Vice President of Human Resources. We also organized an activity dubbed “CompassionFest,” to encourage research participation over a five-day period immediately following the study distribution. Members of the research team staffed labeled tables in central hospital locations for a period of five days, offering information about the study for people with questions, distributing extra copies of study materials, handing out candy and colorful flyers promoting the studies, and offering chances to sign up for drawings of gift certificates at local stores.

A few days following the distribution of our study materials, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 occurred. The falling of the World Trade Center and the devastation to the Pentagon affected employees of Fairview Hospital, as it did most of the population, both directly and indirectly. Some members lost family, friends, and loved ones, and the Fairview Emergency Room and clinics treated additional cases of anxiety. As research team members visited the organization each day from September 11-14, we could sense that questions about compassion in the workplace seemed eclipsed by the sweeping need for compassion on a much wider scale.

While CompassionFest and our efforts to foster research participation were planned well in advance of the research material distribution and the terrible events of September 11, they became absolutely essential in order to maintain even a small focus on the research. Thus, we believe that the events of September 11, in effect, stunted our response rate.

Participants

A total of 239 employees completed and returned the survey, representing a 10% response rate. Eighty-five percent of the respondents were women. The average age was 42 years, and the average organizational tenure level was 9.36 years. The modal education level for the sample was “college or bachelor’s degree.” Follow-up interviews with the Vice President of Human Resources at Fairview hospital indicated that participants’ demographic profile closely matched the population of the organization.

Survey Measures

With the exception of the scale for frequency of experienced compassion at work and the frequency of positive emotions at work (5 point Likert-type scales), respondents indicated ratings for all items on 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Composite index variables were formed for all scales by averaging across items.

Experienced compassion. Experienced compassion in the workplace was measured by five items written specifically for this study. Respondents indicated on a Likert-type scale how often (1 = never, 5 = nearly all the time) they experienced compassion a) on the job, b) from their supervisor, c) and from their co-workers. Respondents also indicated their agreement (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) with the following two statements: “The people I work with are compassionate toward me”; and “I work in a compassionate unit.” Since these items came from two differently anchored scales, scores were standardized before a composite

measure of experienced compassion at work was created by averaging across standardized scores. Reliability of the composite scale was acceptable ($\alpha = 0.88$).

Experienced positive emotion. Following Fredrickson et al. (2003), we modified Izard's (1977) Differential Emotions Scale (DES) to assess experienced positive emotions. Respondents were asked to estimate on a Likert-type scale (1 = never, 5 = nearly all the time) how often in a typical week they experienced seven different groups of emotions at work. An example item is: "In a typical week at work, I feel glad, happy, cheerful." Ratings of the seven items were averaged to form an index of experienced positive emotion with acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.90$).

Job-related stress. We assessed stress at work using six items from the Job-induced Tension Scale, a subscale from the Anxiety-Stress Questionnaire (House & Rizzo, 1972). The composite index had acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.82$). An example item is: "I feel fidgety or nervous as a result of my job."

Affective organizational commitment. Affective organizational commitment was assessed using six items from the Affective Commitment Scale (ACS; Allen & Meyer, 1990). The composite index had acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.90$). An example item is: "I do not feel like 'part of the family' at my organization" (reverse coded).

Prosocial organizational behavior. Prosocial organizational behavior was measured using five items from a larger organizational citizenship scale (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). Items were averaged to create a reliable composite index of prosocial organizational behavior ($\alpha = 0.75$). An example item is: "I willingly help others who have work related problems."

Intention to turnover. Intention to turnover was assessed using two items from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (MOAQ; Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, &

Klesh, 1979): “I often think about quitting;” and “I will probably look for a job in the next year”
A composite index had acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.75$).

Analytic Strategy

The principal analyses consisted of structural equation modeling using the EQS program (Bentler, 1995). The structural modeling technique provides simultaneous estimation of the hypothesized regressions using the covariance matrix generated, based on the observed covariance matrix of the measured variables. The estimated matrix is also used for evaluating the goodness of fit between the data and the model. In reporting the results of the structural equation modeling, we follow the guidelines suggested by Raykov, Tomer, and Nesselroade (1991) and report the following goodness-of-fit measures: normed fit index (NFI), nonnormed fit index (NNFI), comparative fit index (CFI), as well as the misfit measure known as root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Indications for acceptable fit are provided by fit indices that exceed .90 and and misfit RMSEA index under .06. All composite reliabilities exceeded .70, which suggests that the specified indicators were sufficient for use.

VIEW 1: RESULTS

Descriptive statistics including scale means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations are presented in Table 1. An important finding to note is that people do, on average, report experiencing compassion in the workplace, with an average score of 4.58 on a 7-point Likert scale (SD = 0.95).

Insert Table 1 about here

The measurement model represents a confirmatory factor analysis of all scales used in the study, and indicated excellent fit ($\chi^2(40) = 57.34, p < .05$; NFI = 0.97; NNFI = 0.98; CFI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.04). Table 2 presents the chi-squared values, associated degrees of freedom, CFI,

and RMSEA for model comparisons. As Table 2 shows, the hypothesized model (Model 1) fit the data well: $\chi^2(47) = 66.10, p < .05$; NFI = 0.96; NNFI = 0.98; CFI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.04. The first comparison tested the a priori assumption that the hypothesized relationships between the latent variables examined in the study exist. The hypothesized model was compared with the structural null model (Model 2) that constrained the paths between latent variables to zero. The change in chi-square was significant, ($\Delta \chi^2(6) = 512.19, p < .05$), and the fit indices for this model were poor, offering support for the theoretical model.

Insert Table 2 about here

To examine the validity of the various effects hypothesized in the theoretical model, we compared the theoretical model (Model 1) with a series of alternative models. First, we compared the theoretical model to Model 3, which offered an alternative to positive emotion as a mediating variable, allowing for relationships between compassion and job-related stress, which is not directly predicted by compassion in the hypothesized model. A reduced fit (CFI = 0.96) and an unacceptable error index (RMSEA = 0.08) indicated that the direct pathways from compassion to job-related stress should remain unspecified and that positive emotion mediates these relationships, offering further support for the hypothesized model. Second, we compared the hypothesized model with Model 4, which showed full mediation by positive emotion of the relationship between experienced compassion and affective commitment, by constraining the pathways between experienced compassion and commitment to zero. Model indices indicated slightly reduced fit and increased error (CFI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.06). This suggested that these pathways should remain specified, providing support for the theoretical model that predicts a partial rather than full mediation role for positive emotion and this variable. Finally, we

compared the theoretical model to Model 5, which dropped the pathways between turnover intentions and prosocial organizational behavior and their predictors (job stress and affective commitment) and added direct pathways from compassion to test whether a model that did not depict the unfolding from compassion to feelings to behaviors would better fit the data. Reduced fit and unacceptable error indices (CFI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.09) provided support for the theoretical model.

The standardized path coefficients for our theoretical model, presented in Figure 2, provided further support for our hypotheses. Strong support was found for the relationship between experienced compassion at work and experienced positive emotion (Hypothesis 1). As predicted in Hypothesis 2, positive emotion was associated with lowered job stress. Hypothesis 3a and 3b were both validated, as experienced compassion and positive emotion were related to higher levels of affective commitment. Job-related stress and affective commitment were both related to turnover intentions, thus providing support for Hypotheses 4a and 4b. Finally, affective commitment was found to be predictive of prosocial organizational behavior, supporting Hypothesis 5.

Insert Figure 2 about here

VIEW 1: DISCUSSION

Overall, the results of View 1 support the proposed model of the impact of compassion at work. Both directly and indirectly through its relationship with positive emotion, compassion appears to influence employees' feelings of job related stress and affective commitment, which in turn shapes their behaviors (see Figure 2). Thus, the experience of compassion at work has important consequences for both employee and organizational outcomes. Findings support the theoretical

model developed in this analysis (see Figure 3), and alternative models did not provide improved representations of the patterns of relationships in these data.

The model suggests that acts of compassion have effects that extend far beyond the interpersonal response to a particular painful episode. Compassion leaves a lasting trace on the way that people feel and behave at work. While View 1 provides evidence for these effects, it provides limited evidence about the processes through which they come to be. View 2 deepens the insight provided by View 1 by using stories of compassion at work to examine the processes that fuel these effects.

VIEW 2: MAKING MEANING OF ACTS OF COMPASSION

We hypothesize that one important way that compassion leaves its mark is that it shapes the way people make sense of their experience of work. Organizational research that explores sensemaking about coworkers' actions shows that they are important vehicles for making sense of the meaning of work (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003), for how people construe their jobs (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), and for discerning the culture of an organization (e.g., Drazin, Glynn, and Kazanjian, 1999; Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence and Miner-Rubino, 2002; Louis, 1980). Few sensemaking studies, however, have focused on the ways that people make meaning of positive and proximate everyday interpersonal interactions at work, such as those described in this study--for instance, a smile, someone pulling up a chair to listen, or giving a hug. Studies that have examined workplace relationships and interactions hint at the power of even small interpersonal interactions to shape both positive and negative meanings in the workplace (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Kahn, 1998; Sandelands & Boudens, 2000; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). We build on these findings to examine people's stories of compassion at work as an entrée into understanding how they make meaning of proximate everyday coworker interactions. We

propose that positive meaning-making of positive proximate interactions contributes in significant ways to sensemaking about the larger organizational context.

VIEW 2: METHODS

The research setting and data collection methods were described in detail in View 1 methods.

Participants

A total of 239 participants returned the survey items, but of those only 159 participants provided us with a story of compassion at work. A few participants provided more than one story of compassion, for a total of 171 stories available for this analysis. The average age of respondents was 42 years, and the average organizational tenure level was 9.36 years. The modal education level for the sample was “college or bachelor’s degree.” The demographics of participants in View 2 did not differ significantly from those of View 1 participants. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents were female with an average age of 42 years, organizational tenure of 8.25 years, and the modal education level reported was a ‘college or bachelors degree’. They also did not differ significantly from View 1 respondents on any of the survey measures.

Data Description

The stories were an average of 110 words in length. Approximately half of the stories were about witnessed compassion and the other half were about compassion they had experienced themselves. While the painful situations that triggered the acts of compassion varied, the most commonly described were serious illness or disease (of oneself or of a loved one), the death of someone close to the recipient, marital separation, miscarriage, financial difficulty, or fire.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for View 2 involved an iterative process of naming and categorizing the actions that people describe as “compassionate” in their stories and the meaning that people

make of that experienced compassion. We followed the open coding procedure suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998) with a goal of identifying the full range of meanings that people made of experienced compassion. We did this by coding what story writers said about the: 1) actions that people undertook to provide compassion; and 2) inferences that people made about the meaning of those actions.

The first coding iteration identified the full range of actions that people mentioned as behavior they did or others did in expressing compassion. Three major categories emerged from this coding: giving material support, giving emotional support, and giving time and flexibility. Two coders categorized the data. Cohen's Kappa, a measure of inter-rater reliability that corrects for the amount of agreement that would occur by chance, indicates that the coding was highly reliable, $\kappa = .83$ (see Cohen, 1960).

We used a second coding iteration to identify categories of positive meanings that people derived from these identified compassionate actions in their workplace. The positive meanings fell into three dominant groupings: inferences about oneself (what did experienced compassion mean for who one is or could be at work?); inferences about others (what did experienced compassion mean for who one's colleagues were at work?), and inferences about their workplaces (what did experienced compassion mean about the desirability of this workplace?). These three categories were mentioned in at least 10% of the compassion stories. Each compassion story could have multiple positive meanings mentioned in it. Because we attempted to capture the full spectrum of meanings of compassionate acts, we coded each story for the full set of meanings contained in it. Cohen's Kappa for this set of coding indicated that the coders achieved high agreement, $\kappa = .83$. Any disagreements were resolved by discussion.

In addition to the stories described above, 10 people offered stories that were instances of non-compassion at Fairview hospital. These stories could be easily categorized into the categories of meaning (meaning of non-compassion for the self, meaning of non-compassion for the nature of my coworkers, and meaning of non-compassion for what this organization is like). We used the stories of the meaning of non-compassion to help determine the compassion meaning categories, as they effectively anchor the opposite of the positive meaning that employees derived from experienced compassion.

VIEW 1: FINDINGS

Analysis of the 171 stories reveal that participants most often describe compassionate actions as those that involve 1) giving emotional support including gestures such as hugs, questions about one's well-being, and verbal expressions of support (56% of the stories); 2) giving time or flexibility in ways that go "above and beyond" what is expected or mandated, including driving people on errands, delivering material goods to someone's home, or taking on extra work to provide another with slack (51% of the stories); and 3) giving material support of some kind including money, food, gifts, and cards (36% of the stories) These general categories of compassionate action are summarized and illustrated in Table 3. While the illustrations in Table 3 were selected as stories that illustrate the category in the simplest way, most stories described an experience of compassion in which actions covered a wide range of kinds of emotional and material support, with some provision of time and flexibility. The following story from an employee who was wrestling with a recent diagnosis of a serious disease illustrates the blending of the different forms of action as part of experienced compassion at work:

I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. I was supposed to self-inject medication once a week, but it took me an average of 3 hours to talk myself into it, crying the whole time. My coworkers told me they wanted to help me somehow. My secretary tried to help me through the injection herself, and even brought me roses

and orange juice and bagels. I still couldn't do it. At that point my coworkers arranged for outpatient nurses to help me. One of them calmed me down and gave me Psalms from the Bible. Another has become my 'angel on earth.' She gives me my injection every week without fail, even at time driving over 40 miles to make sure I don't miss a dose. My coworkers showed me more love and compassion than I would ever have imagined. Do I wish that I didn't have MS? Of course. But would I give up the opportunity to witness and receive so much love? No way.

Insert Table 3 about here

Beyond documenting the types of compassionate action that take place at people's work sites, the compassion stories also reveal different types of inferences that people make about themselves, their colleagues, and their work organization based upon the provision (or failure) of such actions. The most common types of inferences people described are documented in Table 4 and described in the categories and examples below.

Insert Table 4 about here

Inferences About the Self

In 44% of the stories, employees' experiences of compassion included inferences about how compassion affected themselves at work. Often the inference involves a sense that the employee was better able to carry on with his or her life and work, was more capable of managing pain, or could be more fully him or her self at work. Several of these examples are included in Table 4.

When people are faced with difficulty, their ability to carry on with both their lives and their work are compromised. The experience of compassion in the workplace, however, can not only help people get through hard times, but also have a lasting impact on the way that people see their role in the organization or the kind of person they can be at work. Julie'sⁱⁱ story, below,

demonstrates that the compassion of her co-workers helped her to get through a very difficult period:

I returned to work after 12 weeks off for maternity leave. My child was still very colicky and I continued to nurse after returning to work. My co-workers always brought up my need to eat lunch first and to use the breast pump even when we were so busy, we weren't all going to eat that day. I never felt as if I was a burden to my co-workers. They felt what I was doing was important (nursing/ breastfeeding). Their compassion made my decision to continue to breastfeed easier.

As the story reveals, not only did the compassion demonstrated by Julie's co-workers enable her to get through a difficult time, it also validates the choices she made regarding her child's upbringing and left her feeling like a valued member of her work unit.

The experience of compassion at work does not have to be direct for it to have an impact on the kind of person that people feel they can be at work. Brenda describes how she felt after she and her coworkers came together to help a co-worker in need:

One of our coworkers, a single mother, had her house broken into just before Christmas. Gone were all the presents and all the nice things she already had provided for her three children. She was at the lower end of the pay scale, and simply could not afford to replace that which had been taken. Our boss made it possible to donate our vacation time, at our rate of pay to be paid out in cash to this woman. As a result, she received nearly \$800 and was able to give Christmas back to her children. It wouldn't have worked if we didn't all chip in, and I'm proud to say we all came together at the right time.

Brenda describes being proud of her actions and those of her co-workers, and more efficacious in this role through being able to help her co-worker cope with a terrible situation. Bearing witness to this kind of compassion impacted the possibilities that she saw for herself in that role. When compassion is not extended in times of difficulty, however, the impact can be devastating. Not only does this failure make it very hard to carry on and get through a painful time, but it also compromises people's sense of belonging or of being a valuable organizational member.

Andrea's story, below, illustrates how a lack of compassion can leave employees feeling disconnected from their co-workers and the organization:

Over a year ago my mother-in-law passed away. I called my head nurse who I have worked with or for over 24 years to ask her some questions about getting time off & was told, "I have staff that handle this & I don't want to deal with it . . . I reported to work & missed the evening & afternoon showing at the funeral home. My husband was very upset I couldn't be there. No one offered to help cover me whatsoever that whole week. I got 2 days off only & missed out on a lot. Plus my sister-in-law who also works for Fairview but from another area got the entire week off & had 3 plants arrive from her department. I never received a single call, note, plant or flowers . . . I was hurt and embarrassed when several others noticed the lack of response from my workplace . . . I really believe that my leaving would be of no concern to my present management.

Andrea's particular experience of the failure of compassion during a painful time in her life results in uncertainty about her place as a valued member of the organization, which leads her to question whether she would even stay on as a Fairview employee.

Often these stories also mention several positive inferences, a blend similar to that seen in compassion actions described earlier. For example, Victoria explains how her boss's compassion helped her get back to work after a difficult time:

I was having a very difficult time dealing with a marital separation, when in stopped my boss and took time to listen and give advice. One of his suggestions was to set up a session with the hospital's employee counseling service. It helped me get my act together. I felt that my boss went out of his way to help me get back on track and also understood my feelings through compassion on his part.

This story shows not only that compassionate action impacts oneself at work, but also hints at how experienced compassion often alters how employees see their coworkers.

Inferences About Coworkers

The stories reveal that experienced compassion was associated with inferences about co-workers for 32% of respondents, whose experiences of compassion cued meaning-making about the positive character of their co-workers. This positive meaning is conveyed clearly in Mary's story of how experienced compassion changes how she sees her colleagues:

I was diagnosed with breast cancer a few years ago. As an employee that is loyal to my position and very busy with my growing family, I did not realize that I work with so many caring, giving, wonderful people. I was flooded with hugs, prayers, gifts, and tons of support throughout my various surgeries and chemotherapy. I was so overwhelmed when food was delivered to my house to feed my family. This experience has given me a deeper commitment to my coworkers. They are a nurturing group of women, and I find myself contributing to all other calls for sharing and giving.

The story suggests that the busyness of her life has prevented this employee from noticing these qualities of her colleagues. However, in her own bout with a serious disease, the positive qualities of her colleagues (i.e., caring, giving, wonderful, nurturing) became visible to her, changing her perceptions of them, and in the end, inducing a change in her own behavior towards them.

Bearing witness to compassion can also lead to inferences about co-workers. Peter describes the impact that seeing compassion for a co-worker had on his perceptions of the people with whom he worked:

A 35 year-old coworker with 7 children was admitted to the Hospital. It was discovered that he needed immediate heart bypass surgery, but his disability insurance only gave his family 2/3 of his normal income – we knew that wasn't enough. I set up a Tax Free Trust Fund and ended up getting a little over \$5800.00 - more than enough to cover his losses of being off work for the extended period of time. I couldn't believe that our lab with a total of 75 people came up with that much money in less than 1 week's time. It still means a lot to me – to know I work with such caring people.

While Peter had hoped that his fellow co-workers would respond in this way, he is clearly touched by their generosity and describes how this experience solidified his sense of his co-workers as caring people and how it remains meaningful to him.

These and other stories of non-compassion provide further evidence that meaning-making about one's colleagues is a function of how people at work respond to suffering. In the face of non-compassion, people also made inferences about the character of their co-workers, but these characterizations looked very different from those mentioned above. As illustrated in the Jim's

story below, a lack of compassion can be a potent cue for sensemaking about the kind of people one works with or for:

After working in Fairview maintenance for over 5 years, I have not seen any sign of compassion...when both of my in-laws passed away, no flowers, cards, [not] even a word of sympathy was ever received. When my child was born, no sign of anything was seen, no flowers, card, congrats – nothing. The military showed more signs of caring than do the management and/or their assistants.

This story illustrates that many workers have certain expectations that when personal difficulties arise (in this case, the death of loved ones), co-workers will provide a certain degree of compassion in the form of material gestures or basic words demonstrating emotional support. It also highlights the devastating impact that a lack of compassion can have on the impressions one has of his or her co-workers; in this case, a lack of compassion signals that coworkers are uncaring or unfeeling.

Taken together, these stories demonstrate that both the presence and absence of compassion can be powerful cues for meaning-making about the kind of people with whom one works.

Inferences About the Organization

The experience of compassion changed the way employees saw their work organization. These experiences serve as prompts to answer the question, “What kind of organization do I work for?” Categories of meaning about the organization these categories of meaning are closely associated with how people make inferences from compassion about their co-workers. What distinguishes this category of meanings is the explicit mention of how experiences of compassion shaped how employees saw attributes of a whole unit or group, as opposed to personal attributes of their colleagues. Eleven percent of the stories mentioned effects of experienced compassion that were related to how they saw the hospital as a workplace. The stories suggest that people revised and

affirmed the meaning of the organization from witnessing as well as directly experiencing compassion at work. This way of understanding the organization, shaped by the experience of compassion, is evident in Andrew's story, quoted below:

Recently I was told my stepbrother had been killed in an auto accident. I called my manager at home to find out what do to about my schedule. My manager was very sympathetic and told me not to worry about any paperwork, she would fill out what was needed so I would not lose any pay. When I returned home, I had already received cards from my manager and coworkers and a plant with a sympathy card from the organization itself. I am proud to work for an organization that is large enough to have the technology and facilities we do, but small enough to know that people are the important part.

Although the acts of compassion described in the above story are carried out by individual organizational members, they are taken to be representative of larger values in the work context, such as concern and care for members. These inferences about the values of the organization then contribute to Andrew's statements of pride in his workplace.

As Michael describes below, bearing witness to compassion also leads to inferences about the kind of organization for whom one works:

I work in the Finance Department at Fairview Hospital. We have a program that allows employees to donate their unused vacation time to a fellow employee who is experiencing undue financial hardships, due to unusual circumstances such as illness, fire, accident, death. I have witnessed an incredible amount of compassion among the staff at Fairview while administering this program . . . it's this genuine caring for those we work with that makes me glad I work at Fairview. I have also witnessed the profound impact this program has on the co-worker receiving their help. It's great!

Seeing the compassionate actions of Fairview employees, and the impact that this has on those experiencing difficult times, leads Michael to feel positively about this organization and his membership in it.

When pain seeps into the workplace setting and compassion is not offered, however, this can also come to be seen as representative of organizational values, which can lead to a revision of the way that employees see their work organization as well. Andrea's earlier story of non-

compassion following the death of her mother-in-law illustrates the kinds of inferences that can be made about the organization following such an episode:

After giving Fairview over 30 years of faithful employment, no one even thought to extend me a bit of compassion. Why should I stay on and work hard for an organization that cares little?

Again, while it was a series of individuals who failed to act with compassion in this case, Andrea sees these failures as reflective of the larger organization that she infers to be ‘uncaring’ and possibly not worth her effort as an employee. This characterization occurs after this employee was actively hindered from being a part of the grieving process with her family, and illustrates the power of small acts of compassion, or their lack, to shape people’s thoughts about the workplace.

Together, these stories illustrate that the existence and failure of compassion are powerful prompts for making meaning about the kind organization in which one works. These characterizations, in turn, are likely to influence an employee’s felt commitment to the organization and their choice to remain as a contributing member of the organization.

VIEW 2: DISCUSSION

This analysis builds on findings from View 1 in two ways. First, we see the different forms of compassion experienced at Fairview hospital – receiving material support, emotional support, and time and flexibility – and see that most experiences of compassion were combinations of these three forms. While View 1 reveals several important effects of experienced compassion, View 2 provides a greater understanding of the nature of the compassion acts.

Second, our analysis offers insight into the far-reaching effects of experienced compassion at work, suggesting that the significance of small acts of compassion becomes magnified through

different types of meaning-making. When compassion is present, it is associated with a range of positive feelings that shape and affirm employees' impressions of their coworkers, the organization, and the kind of people they can be at work. Inferences such as "my coworkers are kind and generous people," or "this organization cares about me and its members" that flow from the experience of compassion at work help fuel positive meanings that people make about themselves, their coworkers, and the organization as a whole.

In addition, while their numbers are more limited, the stories of non-compassion suggest that when the organization and its members fail to offer compassion in response to suffering, these non-responses are associated with negative meanings associated with who one can be at work, the qualities of one's coworkers, and/or a lack of caring in the organization as a whole. Through these sensemaking activities, experienced compassion triggers in employees a range of new constructions about themselves, their colleagues, and the organizational contexts in which they work.

The story analysis provided in View 2 offers a more nuanced view of the meaning processes through which compassion becomes associated with the mediating and outcome variables identified in the quantitative model supported in View 1.

OVERALL DISCUSSION

These two views provide unique yet complementary insights into the impact of people's experiences of compassion in their workplace. While previous organizational research has suggested that compassion is a meaningful part of people's experience of work (Frost, 1999; Frost et al., 2000; Kahn, 1993) and that leadership often calls for compassion (Dutton et al., 2002b; Frost, 2003), this is the first study to systematically document its effects on daily work meanings, attitudes, and behaviors. View 1 tests a model of the effects of compassion at work on

employees' feelings at and about work as well as important organizational behaviors, depicting positive emotion as a critical mediating variable between experiences of compassion and work outcomes. The model tested in View 1 links the experience of compassion at work to reduced job-related stress and increased affective commitment, and to subsequent behaviors such as lowered turnover intentions and increased work-related prosocial helping, behaviors that are critical to organizational functioning.

As described in View 2, everyday interpersonal interactions are workplace cues for sensemaking about the organizational context. People make positive meaning through interpersonal interactions that are construed as compassionate. We found that people engage in a variety of forms of positive meaning-making to understand and explain compassionate interactions at work, and that this positive meaning has the potential to cultivate positive feelings about the kind of person one can be at work, toward coworkers who are construed as compassionate people, and about the organization as a place to work and live. These findings may also provide a window into a critical link identified in View 1--the relationship between experienced compassion and positive emotions--in that it suggests that even small acts of compassion are magnified through different types of meaning-making. Past research suggests that positive meaning cultivates positive emotions (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2000; Fredrickson et al., 2003). Traces of this positive emotion were seen in the compassion stories as people described feeling grateful, joyful, and happy in response to the compassion they experienced directly or the compassion that they witnessed at work. Although preliminary, the data suggest that experienced compassion may be connected to positive emotion through different forms of positive meaning-making.

Together, these two views provide more complete evidence about the large effects of seemingly small interpersonal acts such as lending an ear, extending a hand, or being present for someone in pain.

Contributions of Our Study

We see the contributions of this study as threefold. First, at a basic level, we document the existence and regularity of acts of compassion in the workplace. Co-workers help each other through painful situations that are part of the tapestry of everyday organizational life. People appear to be able to count on their co-workers to behave in ways that are directly supportive and that they perceive as compassionate. Evidence of the occurrence of compassionate acts builds on social support research (e.g., Wills, 1991), caring at work (Jacques, 1993; Kahn, 1993), toxin handlers (Frost and Robinson, 1999), relational practice (Fletcher, 2001), and developmental relationships at work (Higgins & Kram, 2001). All of these research streams intersect in the claim that interpersonal actions that extend support and care have generative instrumental and emotional effects in the workplace. The present study adds to this literature by revealing the different forms that experienced compassion can take in the workplace, and by showing its impact on important employee emotions, attitudes and behaviors.

Second, our findings enrich understanding of sensemaking in organizations in at least two important ways. We illuminate one kind of sensemaking that occurs in an organizational setting, when people make meaning in the face of adversity and others' responses to that adversity. As such, we also add our voice to previous work that advocates the inclusion of 'emotional sense' in the discussion of sensemaking in organizations (Maitlis, 2002; Maitlis & Ozcelik, 2003; Patient et al., 2003), which, despite the highly emotional nature of many of the cues that trigger sensemaking behavior (Weick, 1995), has maintained a largely cognitive focus.

Third, we introduce the idea that interpersonal acts can lead to positive meanings that are consequential for individuals and organizations. Meaning-making in the face of pain has been well documented in the psychological literature as a coping strategy (Folkman, 1997; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000), and recent work suggests that positive meaning-making may bolster well-being through increases in positive affect (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larsen, 1998). Our study suggests that, concurrent with acts of compassion, such meaning-making processes have important influences on the kinds of inferences that people about their workplaces and coworkers, allowing them to make sense of the kind of person they can be at work, the kind of people their co-workers are, and what kind of organization they work for. Further, we argue that interpersonal acts of compassion have effects that last after the trauma that prompted the compassionate response, affecting longer-term attitudinal and behavioral tendencies of the employees who experience it. This suggests that compassion at work is more than simply a momentary and humane response to pain; it also fosters important outcomes and leaves its imprint on the organizational landscape.

Study Limitations

First, although we suggest and find support for a theoretical model of the effects of compassion at work, the current studies were not experimental designs, and can provide only correlational support for the effects we propose. Suggestions about causality (even those based on relatively sophisticated statistical design) should be treated with caution. However, because the development and testing of the model was theoretically based, one can hold a degree of confidence in the results of View 1.

Second, the use of self-report survey data raises the possibility that monosource bias could influence the parameters of interest. Future work should include alternate data sources.

Finally, although the research team took extraordinary measures to encourage response rates, the small response rate for this study provides a limitation in our ability to draw general conclusions about the effects of compassion at work. It is possible that those who participated in this research are those for whom compassion is particularly meaningful. Self-selected participation also suggests that there may be many types of response bias in the data, only some of which we can be aware. Though the small response rate tempers our conclusions and the generalizability of these studies, the combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis provides a deeper insight into general trends in the data more fully than either could alone. Further, though the percentage of respondents was small, the data provided a significant number of stories for analysis and a large enough sample to build and test models of the effects of experienced compassion. Moreover, follow-up interviews with members of the organization showed this sample to be typical of the population of the organization.

What Good is Compassion at Work?

Together, these two views of compassion at work help organizational scholars and practitioners see the potency of compassion as a feature of organizational life. This potency is revealed in how experienced compassion at work cultivates positive meanings, which in turn induce feelings that connect people to themselves, to each other, and to their workplace. Compassionate interpersonal acts are rarely large or dramatic, even though they may become so in the minds of the recipients. They tend, instead, to be moments of everyday human action in the places of work, where people live out a large portion of their lives. These findings document the powerful ways that small interpersonal acts of healing infuse individuals and their workplace with meaning and psychological resources. What good is compassion at work? This paper shows that acts of compassion prompt meaning and generate feeling that seeps into people's

attitudes and behaviors at work, powerfully demonstrating Frost's (1999) declaration that compassion does, indeed, count.

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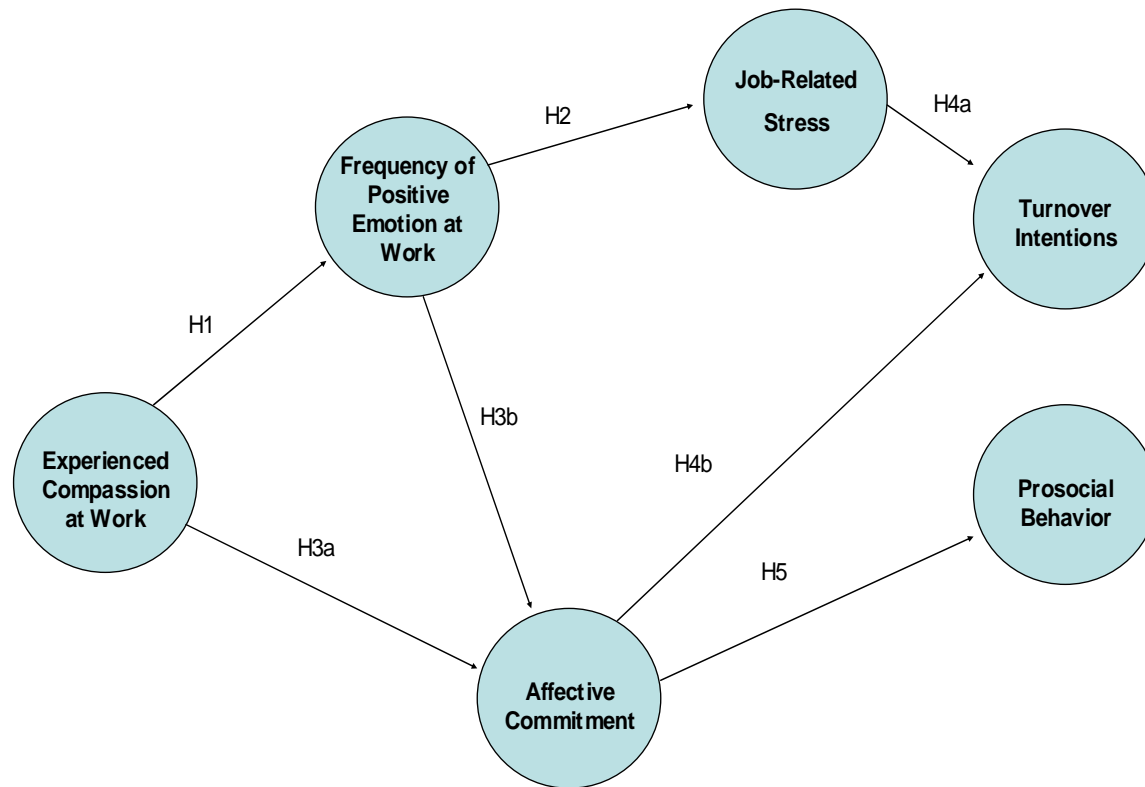


FIGURE 1. Hypothesized structural equation model of the effects of experienced compassion at work

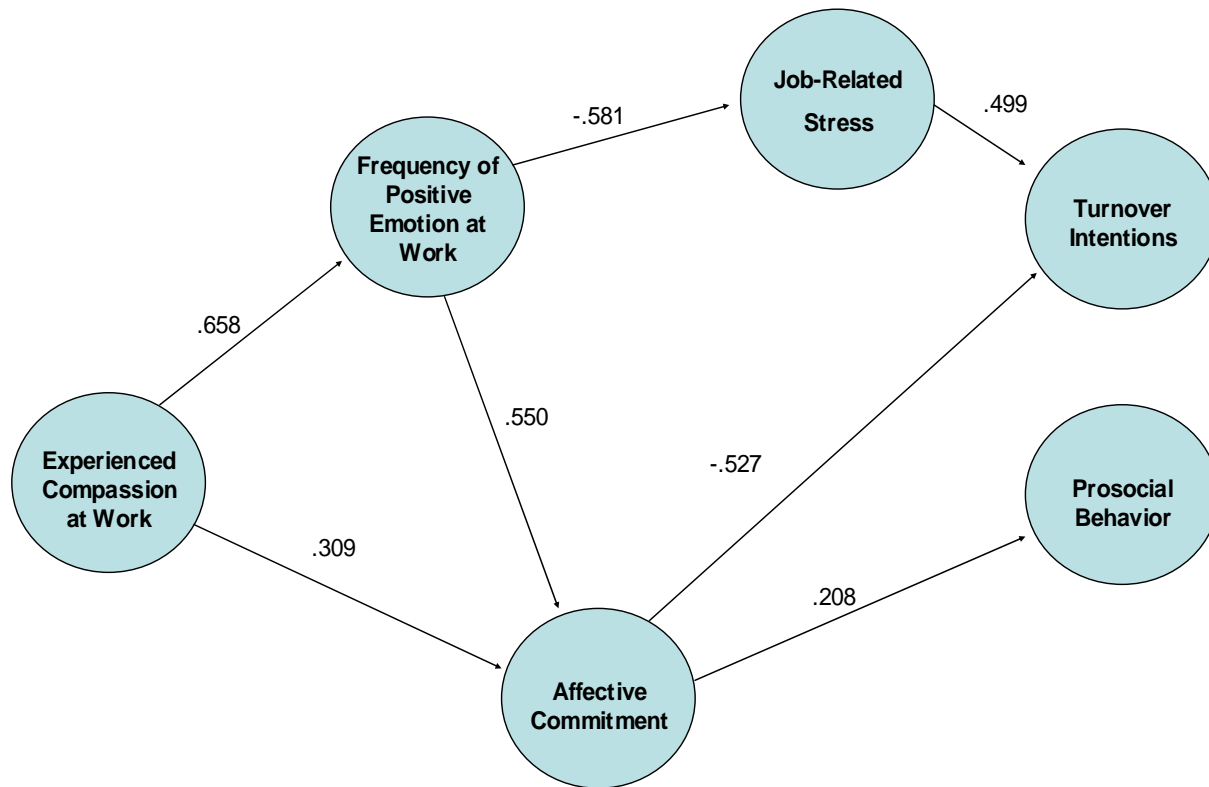


FIGURE 2. Retained structural equation model of the effects of experienced compassion at work. $\chi^2(48) = 71.97$. Normed, nonnormed, and comparative fit indexes are 0.96, 0.98, and 0.99, respectively, with root-mean-square of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.05. All parameter estimates shown are significant ($p < .01$).

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	n	1	2	3	4
1. Sex	1.85	.36	237				
2. Age	42.11	11.43	223	-.105			
3. Education	2.39	1.06	231	-.079	.082		
4. Tenure	9.36	8.53	225	-.037	.507**	.006	
5. Exp. Compassion	4.28	.95	239	.090	.131	.074	-.069
6. Positive Emotion	3.52	.76	236	-.082	.238**	-.019	.033
7. Job Stress	3.67	1.33	239	.100	-.080	.195**	.105
8. Affective Commitment	4.71	1.36	239	-.018	.249**	.045	.101
9. Prosocial Org Behavior	5.92	.71	239	.071	-.104	.037	-.092
10. Turnover Intentions	2.99	1.77	239	.014	-.224**	.068	-.054

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Variable	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Sex						
2. Age						
3. Education						
4. Tenure						
5. Exp. Compassion						
6. Positive Emotion	.599**					
7. Job Stress	-.280**	-.498*				
8. Affective Commitment	.608*	.707**	.354**			
9. Prosocial Org Behavior	.384**	.330**	-.036	.410**		
10. Intent to turnover	.375**	-.612**	.536**	-.621**	-.169**	

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

TABLE 2

Model Comparisons

Model	Description	χ^2	df	RMSEA	CFI
Model 1	Hypothesized model	71.97	48	0.05	0.99
Model 2	Structural null model	584.16	54	0.21	0.68
Model 3	Alternative to positive emotion as mediator: Path from positive emotion to job stress dropped, direct pathways from compassion to job stress added	113.11	48	0.08	0.96
Model 4	Positive emotion as a full mediator: Direct pathways from compassion to affective commitment dropped	89.02	49	0.06	0.98
Model 5	Alternative to the unfolding model: Pathways between feelings (affective commitment and job stress) and behaviors (turnover intentions and prosocial behavior) dropped; direct pathways from compassion to turnover intentions and prosocial behavior added	135.95	48	0.09	0.95

TABLE 3
Compassionate Actions in the Workplace

	Definition	Illustration from data	% Stories
Giving Emotional Support	This action consists of offering words or gestures designed to recognize pain or extend comfort. Apparent in stories in which people mention “support” or “supportive” directly, and in stories that describe gestures of noticing pain such as hugs, listening, or questions about well-being.	My daughter recently had a baby. Prior to the birth her husband left her. It was a very difficult time for myself because I would work the unit she would be a patient on, so everyone would know what had happened. My co-workers were very supportive and understanding. It certainly helped me through all of this “trauma.”	56%
Giving Time or Flexibility	This action consists of people in the workplace offering or giving freely time or work task flexibility. This action is often expressed as coworkers giving something in limited supply and in a sense that coworkers are giving “above and beyond” what is to be expected.	A co-worker was diagnosed with breast cancer. Our entire department knew about this with our co-worker’s permission. We all decided how to best handle the absences of the co-worker. She happened to be a single mother, so it was important to help her at home during her chemo. Our department set up a rotating schedule to bring the family dinner each night for a six- week period, and to cover her work activities as well. The whole department felt a queer bonding through this person’s problem.	51%

Giving Material Goods	This action consists of giving a tangible material good or goods, such money, cards, flowers, or food. The gifts of material goods range from very small tokens to coordinated collections of money.	One of my coworkers brought me a little gift one day. I was going through a divorce and when I came to work one day there was a bag with my name on it. In it was a jar of potpourri with a string of lights in it with a doily on top. The card said, "I hope this lights your day up." It meant a great deal to me.	36%
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TABLE 4
Inferences Drawn from Experienced Compassion at Work

	Definition	Example Inferences	% Stories
Inferences about self at work	Sensemaking in response to experienced compassion at work leads to inferences about oneself at work, including a sense that one is better able to carry on with one's life and work, one is more capable of managing pain, one is capable of helping others manage their pain, and that one is more holistically values and can be more fully oneself in the workplace.	<p>"It sure cut down on the amount of anxiety I would have had"</p> <p>"Even though this didn't solve her problems, we helped her get through her days"</p> <p>"Just knowing someone cared enough to do this made a tremendous difference for me"</p> <p>"Their compassion made my decision easier"</p>	44%
Inferences about others at work	Sensemaking in response to experienced compassion at work leads to a sense that others are noticing and responding to pain (or are not doing so) and generates associated inferences about the depth of interpersonal relationships at work and the character of others as good people who can be trusted and counted on to respond when pain arises.	<p>"We all shared a moving experience. It brought us all closer not just as co-workers, but as friends"</p> <p>"It still means a lot to me to know I work with such caring people."</p> <p>" I did not realize that I work with so many caring, giving, wonderful people. This experience has given me a deeper commitment to my co-</p>	32%

		workers. They are a nurturing group of women ... we are truly a TEAM”	
Inferences about the organization	Sensemaking in response to experienced compassion at work leads to inferences about the desirability of being a member of the work organization. Acts of compassion are taken to be representative of larger values in the work context such as concern and care for members and contribute to statements of pride in one’s workplace and one’s membership in the organization.	<p>“All turned out very well, my grandson is fine, and I still work for this great organization”</p> <p>”I felt this person’s act to be representative of organizational values, and this was a material factor in accepting my permanent position here”</p> <p>“I am proud to work for an organization that is large enough to have the technology and facilities we do, but small enough to know that people are the important part.”</p>	11%

ⁱ The identity of the research setting has been disguised for confidentiality.

ⁱⁱ Names have been disguised for confidentiality.