

**Compassion in the Context of Capitalistic Organizations: Evidence from The
2011 Brisbane Floods**

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Abstract

Despite common assumptions that capitalism and compassion are contradictory, we theorize that compassion (1) can be compatible with capitalism, and (2) may either manifest or be inhibited within capitalistic society through a range of organizational approaches. These, in turn, result in varying consequences for employees' experiences, feelings, and behaviors. In this article we examine the perceived support provided to employees by their organizations during the 2011 Brisbane flood. Analysis of interview data identifies a continuum of organizational responses: from neglect to ambiguity to compassionate care, each of which engendered various employee experiences, feelings, and behaviors toward themselves, their organizations, and the community at large. The empirical findings lead to theorizing that the perceived organizational responses are consonant with a range of capitalistic tendencies. Perceived organizational neglect is most consonant with neoclassical capitalism, understood as having a primary focus on self-interest and profit maximization. Perceived ambiguity tends to fit with a supplemental capitalism that adds social responsibility to the baseline of classical capitalism. Organizational compassionate care fits with a transformed or conscious capitalism that considers value creation in society to be an organization's primary purpose.

Keywords: Compassion, capitalism, pro-social behavior, virtues.

Introduction

The terms “compassion” and “capitalism” might, at first glance, appear contradictory (George 2014). Yet, over the past decade, there has been a growing professional interest in compassion within the context of capitalistic business organizations.

Indicators of this interest include the proliferation of conferences on compassionate business, as well as in a growing body of academic literature on organizational compassion (Dutton, Workman, and Hardin 2014; Lilius, Kanov, Dutton, Worline, and Maitlis 2012; Rynes, Bartunek, Dutton, and Margolis 2012).

Compassion (a term with roots in two Latin words: *passion*, meaning “suffer”, and *com*, meaning “together”) is widely defined organizationally as the collective noticing, feeling, and responding to another’s suffering in order to provide ease (Dutton, Lilius, and Kanov 2007; Dutton, Worline, Frost, and Lilius 2006; Frost et al. 2006; Lilius et al. 2008). Compassionate organizational responses to employee pain provide a context for meaning and healing after a suffering event (Dutton, Frost, Worline, Lilius, and Kanov 2002) and preserve employee’s personal dignity (Sutton 2009). Benefits of compassion described in the organizational literature include: enhanced work performance (Sutton 2010) and change readiness (Kohlrrieser, Goldsworthy, and Coombe 2012), enhanced organizational resources of positive emotional and relational capital (Dutton et al. 2007), strengthened positive individual and organizational identity (Frost et al. 2006) and greater employee commitment to the organization and to co-workers (Dutton et al. 2007).

Paradoxically, along with this increased interest in organizational compassion, rational capitalistic tendencies have continued, if not increased. These are said to be rooted in an ideology of self-interest, namely in the promotion of individual career tracks (Bergeron, Shipp, Rosen, and Furst 2013; Jackall 1988), and with a short-term focus on maximizing shareholder value (George 2014; Porter and Kramer 2011).

Even the public sector – including health and education departments and non-governmental organizations entities, which traditionally operate under not-for-profit social mandates – has increasingly adopted capitalistic ideologies in its modes of organizing (Fournier and Grey 2000). Application of this ideology is said to result in compassion-less practices such as poor workplace conditions and job layoffs in the interests of squeezing costs (i.e., when employment is outsourced overseas or to contractors requiring inferior workplace safety regulations, minimal work protections, and low minimum wages) (Davis 2009).

Indeed, downsizing and job redundancies in the interests of enhancing short-term profit margins have persisted as a regular mode of doing business. Employees are made redundant even when there are no profit pressures (Kalleberg 2011), while chief executive officers are simultaneously rewarded with multimillion-dollar salaries and bonuses (Reich 2012). Such practices have led to increased inequality within all types of organizations and within most Western countries (McCall and Percheski 2010).

Over the past 30 years income inequality is said to have risen to unprecedented levels (Centeno and Cohen 2010; Kalleberg 2009). Data from Oxfam, presented at the World Economic Forum in Davos, January 2014, shows the combined wealth of the richest 85 people across the globe is equivalent to the wealth of the poorest 3.5 billion. Additionally, the wealth of the richest 1% of people in the world amounts to 65 times as much as the poorest 50% of the world's population (Fuentes-Nieva and Galasso 2014).

Within capitalistic ideology (such as that outlined by Barley and Kunda 1992; George 2014; Pfeffer 2010b), compassionate organizational and societal practices may vary greatly, giving rise to “varieties of capitalism” (Hall and Soskice 2001). For example, several European societies have been found to be more “compassionate” than U.S. society, and within the U.S., varying levels of compassionate practices can

be found in different organizations (George 2014; Kanter 2011; Pfeffer 2007). According to Pfeffer (2007, p. 20), the distinctive feature of companies working “like communities” is that “people take care of each other.” Kanter (2011) argues that despite the logic of short-term profit maximization (prevalent in most U.S. companies), a very different logic nourishes the practices of most high-performing and sustainable companies:

Traditional theories of the firm are dominated by the notion of opposition between capital and labor, disconnecting business from society and posing conflicts between them. According to this view, companies are nothing more than money-generating machines. By contrast, great companies use a different operating logic. They believe that business is an intrinsic part of society, and like the family, government, and religion, has been one of its pillars for centuries (p. 70).

Thus, the alleged contradiction between capitalism and compassion may be more myth than reality, facilitating the endurance of “bad management theories” that destroy “good management practices” (Ghoshal 2005, p. 75).

In this paper, we show that within a capitalistic society, organizations adopt disparate levels of compassionate practices toward their employees. Specifically, we focus on organizational demonstrations of compassion (or lack of it) as perceived by employees during a flood that inundated the City of Brisbane, Queensland Australia in January 2011. This event disrupted the operations of thousands of businesses and created uncertainty and upheaval in employees’ lives. We also present the employees’ responses to these different organizational practices, which had consequences not only for employees themselves, but also for their organization and the community at large. Sepala (2013) states that an understanding of the best way to foster compassion

within organizations is still lacking. The current study contributes vitally to this discussion by submitting for consideration a framework of three general organizational approaches for use within capitalistic society.

We structure this paper as follows: Initially, we provide a review of different perspectives on capitalism. While some perspectives see compassion as antithetical to capitalism, others see care and compassion as intrinsic to the functioning, ethics and spirit of capitalism. Based on these perspectives, we then propose a model that describes three general approaches to capitalism. We suggest that this model is relevant for understanding the relationship between capitalism and compassion. We then present the research context – the flood that immersed the City of Brisbane – our qualitative research methodology, and our findings.

Capitalism: Evil or Benign

Self-interest and Profit Maximization

It is reasonable to question whether capitalistic organizations can express ethicality and compassion. For instance, Weber (2002) sees the “spirit of capitalism” as rooted in a Calvinistic Protestant ethic that values work and material success as spiritual duties. He expresses concern for the direction of the ethical quality of people living in modern, industrialized societies characterized by materialistic and pragmatic, instrumental-rational calculations that push ethical considerations asunder. In an increasingly rationally-structured society and mode of organization, he considers there to be a corresponding increase in individual compliance, as well as an erosion of autonomy and ethical responsibility. Although people with high religious values founded modern capitalism, Weber postulates that, as time passed and the influence of religion weakened, society may have been left with only a Puritan, rationally calculated mode of organizing that lacks the ethical spirit of being devoted to a cause (Kalberg 2002).

Marx (1848) sees capitalism as exploitative and thus incompatible with an organizational culture of care and compassion. He argues that competitive market pressures and capitalistic demands for larger surpluses force the cost of material goods down by putting pressure on labor and production costs. Clegg, Boreham and Dow (1986) extend Marx's ideas arguing that unsustainable pressures mean that periodic economic crises are necessary for resetting property and labor values and for perpetuating income distribution inequalities in the capitalist system. In other words, practices such as the foreclosures, evictions and prolonged unemployment that destroyed the lives of so many during the recent global financial crisis, are inherent evils of the capitalistic system.

Early classical economists have reinforced the view that organizations are uncompassionate with their prescriptions that profit maximization is the only responsibility of business activity (Porter and Kramer 2011). Nobel prize-winning economist Milton Friedman (Friedman 1970, p. 173) asserts that business executives who contribute corporate resources to social causes are engaged in "pure and unadulterated socialism" and that business "cannot be said to have responsibilities" because "only people have responsibilities." Darwinian notions of survival of the fittest have been used to justify ideas about business as inherently brutal and ruthless (Bannister 2000). Capitalistic practices operating under this theory are considered to have detrimental effects (a) on the environment, (b) on the well-being (psychological and physical) and mortality of employees (through stressful, unhealthy and unsafe working environments), and (c) on clients, by fostering destructive appetites and addictions (Kanter 2011; Pfeffer 2010a, 2011).

A symptom of the negative relationship between businesses and their workforces is found in some striking statistics: Over the last 10 years in the US, the levels of both employee engagement with their workplace has maintained at a dismal 30% while

about 50% are disengaged and about 20% are actively disengaged or even hostile towards their employers (Gallup 2013a). The employee engagement landscape is still poorer in other countries, including Australia and New Zealand (where 24% and 23%, respectively, are engaged) (Gallup 2013b). While the average employee wage has remained fairly constant for several decades, executive pay versus that of the average employee has risen steeply from a ratio of 42:1 in 1980, to 107:1 in 1990, and then to 525:1 in 2000 (Mackey and Sisodia 2013). The global economic crisis saw this ratio reduced to 325:1 in 2010, small consolation for the vast majority on the low end of this ratio.

Alternative Perspectives on Capitalism

The view that capitalistic organizations are calculating, competitive, self-interested, and purely profit focused has been challenged by Solomon (1998). He proposes that these stereotypical chauvinistic views are merely a matter of perception. When employees, managers, and executives perceive their job as fitting such stereotypes, a self-fulfilling prophecy results. Solomon argues that capitalistic corporations – as communities – are in practice also places of humanity, where care and compassion are both an expectation and requirement of various employment positions (see also Pfeffer 2007). Solomon (1998) further posits that the benefits of changing perceptions towards a more realistic and compassionate conception of business are not merely confined to “business,” but are relevant to all citizens living a better quality of life within capitalistic society at large. Frost (1999) likewise argues that although compassion is central to understanding organizations, it has been largely ignored and remains rather invisible in organizational theory. He challenges that organizations cannot be properly understood until this imbalance is righted.

Ghoshal (2005) also does not believe that selfish opportunistic practices of profit maximization, which give business a negative reputation, are inherent to capitalism.

Rather, the dissemination of pessimistic assumptions about the nature of individuals and organizational goals has contributed to the perpetuation of bad management practices. As Ghoshal, Bartlett, and Moran (1999, p. 10) observe:

People are right in their intuition that something is wrong. But this is not because large corporations or management are inherently harmful or evil. It is because of the deeply unrealistic, pessimistic assumptions about the nature of individuals and corporations that underlie current management doctrine and that, in practice, cause managers to undermine their own worth.

Ghoshal (2005) holds the views of economists as partially responsible for such negative assumptions. Economists have sought to explain the workings of capitalism on a basis of simplistic assumptions of self-interest and opportunistic profit maximization. Such maxims may easily translate into elegant mathematical models, but they have little to do with the complexity of actual practice. Unfortunately, these simplistic conjectures have become coded into corporate law as the definition of financial responsibility, and integrated into university textbooks to train future business leaders, thereby creating a cycle of negative business practices (Khurana 2007; Khurana and Nohria 2008). MBA programs have also been criticized for undermining ethics by emphasizing self-interest (Clegg, Jarvis, and Pitsis 2013; Jarvis and Amann 2011). Hühn (2014, p. 533) argues:

Mainstream management theories insist upon amorality. By teaching the mechanical application of tools, declaring ethics to be unimportant, and by making a negative value (selfishness) the central axiom, business programs (especially MBA programs) make it difficult to develop management as a profession.

Summing up, there is concern that the dominant management theories legitimize selfishness and fail in accounting for business practices conducted to promote the supererogatory value of the business activity itself and the contribution it makes to society (Mazutis 2014; Waddock 2010).

Acknowledging that self-interest and corruption have become stereotypical of capitalistic practices Porter and Kramer (2011, p. 6) call for reinventing the “old, narrow view of capitalism” with the concept of “shared value”. They define shared value as “policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates” (p. 6). Similarly, Mackey and Sisodia (2013) argue that capitalism done correctly – as *conscious capitalism* – is essentially good, ethical, noble, and heroic. The *goodness* of conscious capitalism lies in its creation of value for stakeholders; its *ethicality* lies in its basis of free voluntary exchange; and its *noble heroism* lies in its power to elevate human existence by relieving poverty and driving prosperity. Mackey (2011) and Sisodia (2011) describe four key principles of conscious capitalism that differentiate it from other business approaches: (1) doing business to realize good, true, beautiful, or heroic purposes beyond profits; (2) optimizing value creation for all stakeholders (customers, suppliers, investors, and society within the environment) using “win-win-win-win-win” strategies (Mackey 2011, p. 84); (3) having conscious leadership that embodies commitment to the organization’s higher purpose, rather than power or money, which motivates and inspires others; and (4) having a conscious culture that tangibly exemplifies a set of values represented in the acronym “TACTILE”: Trust, Authenticity, Care, Transparency, Integrity, Learning, and Empowerment.

Strong (2011), Mackey (2011), and Mackey and Sisodia (2013) advocate the framing of a new narrative emphasizing the potential of “conscious capitalism” as the

most effective system for improving well-being, knowledge, prosperity, and overall quality of life. Porter and Kramer (2011, p. 4) similarly describe the potential of capitalism as, “an unparalleled vehicle for meeting human needs, improving efficiency, creating jobs, and building wealth”. These views are especially pertinent in light of social demographic changes that have occurred over the past century. Better education and increasing average IQs have been noted worldwide (Flynn 1998; Neisser 1997). The world has also become demonstrably more peaceful (Pinker 2011). Average life expectancy has increased (Mathers, Sadana, Salomon, Murray, and Lopez 2001; McCallum and Mathers 2008). Additionally, the median adult age has shifted to around 40, leading a macro psychological shift where society is dominated by mid-life values (Wolfe 1998). Mackey and Sisodia (2013, p. 30) argue that with these demographic changes, “[v]alues like caring, nurturing relationships and compassion are ascendant...,” and should act to transform the business landscape. Paine (2002) similarly points to a shift in society, wherein a “growing emphasis on values, culture, ethics, stakeholders, citizenship” (p. ix) means that companies must “demonstrate moral intelligence in their dealings with their employees, customers and other constituents” (p. x). To reclaim the narrative of capitalism from those based upon maxims of self-interest and profit maximization, Mackey and Sisodia (2013, p. 9) appeal for business leaders to “liberate the extraordinary power of business and capitalism to create a world in which all people live lives full of purpose, love and creativity – a world of compassion, freedom and prosperity”.

Another approach, labeled *compassionate capitalism* or *strategic philanthropy*, promotes the utilitarian argument that organizations can be more efficient, effective, and profitable when they engage with their employees and communities by making philanthropy part of their strategic mission (Benioff and Adler 2007; Benioff and Southwick 2004; Brest and Harvey 2008). Proponents suggests that companies

wishing to achieve sustainable success in today's world should invest time, money, and expertise in community service (Kavan 2005). The compassionate mission and strategic mission of an organization should be aligned, and embedded as a living, breathing part of its organizational culture. Investment into compassionate giving should not come at the expense of business objectives; it should support them (Brest and Harvey 2008). Customers and shareholders are likely to be more comfortable doing business with a company that has a good reputation not only in terms of business practices, but also in terms of their contributions to the community. Values of corporate compassion and social responsibility also instill a higher level of integrity within employees. According to advocates, philanthropy should not merely be an afterthought or a tax write-off, it must be an integral part of their business mission – on par with making profits (Benioff and Southwick 2004).

For Mackey (2005), even the dispersion of equal value to mission and profits does not go far enough. He states that making profits should not be an end in of itself: “Just as people cannot live without eating, so business cannot live without profits. But most people don't live to eat, and neither must business live just to make profit” (p. 17). In a critique relevant to the assumptions of *compassionate capitalism* or *strategic philanthropy*, Mackey and Sisoda (2013) argue that the idea of corporate social responsibility is based upon the fallacy that capitalistic enterprise is ethically tainted, and in need of redemption through contributions to social initiatives: “Good business doesn't need to do anything special to be socially responsible. When it creates value for its major stakeholders, it is acting in a socially responsible way” (p. 37). Relatedly, Stubbs and Cocklin (2008) argue that capitalistic organizations will only ever be socially and environmentally sustainable when the dominant business assumptions of capitalism are transformed by – rather than merely supplemented with – social and environmental priorities. In a sustainability business model, the

organization does not exist to make profits; it rather makes profits to exist while fulfilling the higher purpose of providing value to stakeholders.

Three Perspectives

The discussions presented thus far are indicative of three different perspectives on the assumptions of capitalism (which may lie along a continuum): (1) neoclassical capitalism operating on underpinnings of self-interest and profit maximization, (2) supplemented capitalism, for which concerns with social responsibility is added onto the baseline of classical capitalism as prudent business practice, and (3) transformed capitalism or conscious capitalism, which views creating value in society as the primary purpose of capitalistic enterprise and considers profits simply as a means to this end. These three different perspectives may translate into varied ways in which organizations react towards their employees' suffering, particularly in life-threatening circumstances.

George (2014) calls for organizational compassion research within capitalistic society that focuses on identifying conditions that are most conducive to the minimization of harm and suffering. Along this vein, we explore within the context of the flood crisis of 2011 in Brisbane, Australia: (a) the resulting vulnerability experienced by employees during the flood, as well as (b) employees' attitudinal, emotional and behavioral reactions toward their organization's responses. We invited employees from different Brisbane organizations to describe their flood experiences in relation to their place of work. In agreement with the theory discussed above, we expected that employees would describe three types of organizational responses: (1) one rooted in the assumptions of classical capitalism where there would be little care or concern for employee well-being, (2) another rooted in a supplementation model where employee well-being would be addressed as prudent business practice, and (3)

a third approach where employees would feel genuinely cared for and valued above profits.

While there are many variables that can be considered in the analysis and classification of the ways in which organizations express and manifest a range of capitalistic assumptions, the focus of this study is limited to employee experiences of compassionate organizational support or neglect during the flood crisis. It is important to note that we consider different organizational responses only as *indicators* of the mentioned three perspectives/assumptions. It is not possible to conclude that an organization adopting a specific approach, studied in a particular context, is an “epitome” of the respective capitalistic perspective. It is also important to clarify that we characterize the three organizational approaches from the employees’ perspective, i.e., according to how they report their experiences, feelings, and perceptions.

Both social theory and research precedence provide justification for our approach of collecting data at the micro-level (individuals), to make inferences about the meso-level (organization), and arguing that functioning at this meso-level may reflect phenomena at the macro-level (capitalistic society). The theories of Foucault (1977) and Clegg (1989) describe the power of the status quo as mutually constituted, maintained and contested through the interactions of micro – , meso – and macro-levels of social practices. Clegg’s model has been used as a theoretical model for numerous organizational studies (examples include Backhouse, Hsu, and Silva 2006; Davenport and Leitch 2005; Simpson, Clegg, and Pitsis 2014b; Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari, and Santti 2005). Further research precedence for the method of drawing inferences about macro-context from micro-organizational practices comes from Dacin, Munir and Tracy (2010), who apply institutional theory to explain dining practices at Cambridge University (micro-level) as a mechanism for maintaining the

British class system and resisting other powerful pressures of social reform (macro-level).

Research Context and Method

On January 11, 2011, floods inundated the City of Brisbane in Queensland, Australia, forming the context for the current research. During the weeklong period from the first flood warning in the early morning of January 10th to the final warning on January 19th, almost 100 suburbs were affected, people were evacuated from 2,100 streets, rail lines ceased operation, and other infrastructure was broken or completely destroyed. Using a snowball sampling method, we formed a sample of 25 people whose work had been disrupted by the Brisbane floods, most of whom were suddenly ordered to evacuate their work on January 11. Their work positions in 18 different organizations varied, including job types such as security officer, travel consultant, bank manager, and university professor. Not all of these organizations were capitalistic in the sense of being “for profit” enterprises. Nonetheless, all were operating within the context of a capitalistic society, where – in the name of pursuing greater efficiency and accountability – government departments, health and education providers, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have increasingly shifted from the language and logic of providing services to marketing products (DiMaggio and Anheier 1990; Estes and Bergthold 1989; Fournier and Grey 2000; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004).

We conducted loosely structured qualitative interviews that lasted between 25 and 60 minutes. Although we had a general interview guide, we essentially requested interviewees to simply provide a description of the events that unfolded on the day of the floods and the days that followed, particularly in relation to their work situation. In response, employees shared narratives about their flood experiences. Meetings with interviewees were conducted in cafes, libraries and other public spaces that afforded

the interviewees privacy/anonymity to speak freely. The interviews, 12 hours in total, were conducted under informed consent and recorded using a digital device. The interviewees were also assured of anonymity, both for themselves and their organizations.

The interviews were analyzed using narrative analysis. We transcribed the interviews in full and imported them into a software program (NVivo 9) to conduct qualitative analyses. Using NVivo, we highlighted and categorized key themes and subthemes or “nodes.” Analysis of the experiences of interviewees, representing different organizational contexts, provided for comparisons of narratives from diverse organizational settings. Through descriptions of characters and experiences, the narratives gave us access to the experience of compassion dynamics at both the individual and collective level, and opened up value, belief, and support systems, all of which underlie the established modes of organizational dynamics (Baker 2012, p. 413). In the following sections, we will first provide a summary of our findings, followed by more detailed accounts of (a) how organizational responses were perceived by interviewees (henceforth “employees”), and (b) their emotional reactions to their organization’s response.

Summary of Findings

Organizational Responses

Employees described three types of organizational responses to floods (Table 1): compassionate care (n=16), neglect (n=6), and an ambiguous organizational response (n=3). These three types of responses are consonant with the three capitalistic perspectives mentioned above. Compassionate care was consonant with the perspective of transformed or conscious capitalism, involving empathetic communication, the bending of bureaucracy to suit the situation, the provision of practical and financial support, and an ongoing organizational culture of care that

extends beyond an immediate crisis. The neglectful response was consonant with the perspective of classical capitalism, involving a lack of empathy for the unusual circumstances of the crisis, a policy of “business as usual,” whereby expectations and demands remain unaltered, a lack of communication, a lack of additional support in the extraordinary circumstances, and in some instances, penalization of employees (e.g., docking pay for days away from work). The ambiguous response was consonant with the perspective of supplemented capitalism, said to involve a slow initiation of support, a delivery of excuses (with references to “policy”) for delaying or refusing any extraordinary measures of care, and the presentation of mixed messages of care and neglect. Employees in these organizations felt that support was provided instrumentally or as a token gesture, and that it was borne more out of concern for potential legal claims than out of genuine care.

Table 1 about here

Employee Reactions

Table 2 further represents how each employee reacted to the flood situation, as well as how they perceived their organization’s responses. These reactions were classified into five categories (a - e): (a) emotions of panic, anxiety, or fear (n=14) or no such emotions (n=11); (b) feelings of anger or indifference (n=6) or no such feelings (n=19); (c) positive affective responses (n=9) or no such responses (n=16); (d) the action of providing caring support to others (n=13) or no such action (n=12); and (e) actions of reconnecting with others (n=8) or no such reconnecting (n=17).

Overall, feelings of panic, anxiety, and fear (a) were prominent in the beginning stages of the flood crisis, when employees’ main concerns were with the immediate safety of themselves, their families, and their belongings. Feelings of anger and indifference (b) were prominent among those employees who felt that their organization had not provided proper care or communication. Positive affective

responses (c) included gratitude and appreciation for received support, and happiness while providing support to others. The providing of support to others (d) involved volunteering, donating, consoling, or partaking in other altruistic behaviors that were enacted to alleviate others' suffering. Reconnecting with others (e) was characterized by behaviors such as talking, physical embraces, and other modes of bonding with colleagues and friends, both during and following the floods.

Table 2 about here

An overview of employees' reactions to the flood and the three forms of organizational responding is provided in Table 3. For employees who experienced compassionate organizational care (n=16), eight did not report responses of panic and anxiety and very rarely reported feelings of anger or indifference. Additionally, nine of these 16 employees reported positive affective responses, 11 reported engaging in altruistic behaviors (providing care and support to others), and seven described reconnecting with others.

These accounts contrast to those of the employees who experienced neglect or ambiguous organizational responses (n=9). For these employees, none reported positive affective responses, six described responses of panic and anxiety, and six reported responses of anger, cynicism, or indifference towards their organization. Only two of these nine employees reported an engagement in altruistic behaviors, and only one reported reconnecting with others.

Table 3 about here

Detailed Analyses of Perceived Organizational Responses

Compassion

Organizations that demonstrated a high capacity for care and that were quick to communicate with their employees can be seen to have responded in a manner characteristic of transformed or conscious capitalism. In some instances, these organizations sought to alleviate employee concerns even before they arose by preempting the flood's arrival by communicating contingency arrangements. Information was communicated using a variety of channels, such as face-to-face verbal communication, phone, email, text messaging, social media, organizational websites, and open forums. Two sub-themes were found in this communication: (1) employees were instructed to make a priority of their own and their family's safety, and (2) assured that they would receive full payment for any time that they would be unable to work. Some of these organizations went so far as to communicate that, once the flood had passed, employees should take the time they needed to put their lives back into order before returning to work. One employee, who was working for an office supplies company at the time of the flood, described his boss's reaction when he was told about the flood: "The boss said straightaway, 'Look, you know, it's very important that safety [comes] first...' I believe the boss was actually in India at the time and he sent through text message... saying that make sure you look after, you know, family and everything first and then worry about work second." Similar support was described by another employee of an IT organization: "[Name of boss] rang me up and said, 'Make sure everyone knows that if they can work from home, they can do that. But if they can't work, for whatever reason, then everybody is still getting paid.'"

In these particular organizations (those that were perceived as providing exemplary care), employees who incurred significant loss were also supported with financial gifts, or in kind (i.e., by receiving help with cleanup efforts or childcare arrangements). An employee who was working for a wholesale travel agency and had

her house inundated by water during the floods described the extraordinary support she received: "...when I got back to work, [name] who was my area leader, for the area that I was in at the time said to me, '...So what did you lose? Did you lose your fridge or anything?' I said, 'No, no, no... I mean, what I really lost was all of [her husband's] power tools...' And he said, 'So, well, what we're gonna try and do is we'll see what people need and see how we can help out.' And then there was a couple of days lag and then we were due to have a buzz night. And at that buzz night, he singled me out, called me up and said, 'We'd really like to give you this \$2,000 Bunnings Voucher to replace all of [husband's] power tools...' and then he whispered in my ear when I was giving him a hug that, 'We've also got \$4,000 to put into an account in your name.'"

An important finding was the link between the organizational provision of quality care during the course of the flood, and the perceived culture of compassion in day-to-day discursive practices of these organizations. The organizations that provided the best care during the flood were said to have an ongoing culture of employee empowerment, to offer flexible work options that encouraged a healthy work-life balance, and, perhaps as a result, nurtured high levels of trust. These organizations were also reported to have contingency plans to provide support in times of need, and to demonstrate a strong commitment to corporate social responsibility. This data therefore provided a link between employee care, and customer and social care. The general emotional responses of employees to these organizations were reported to involve feelings of pride, loyalty and commitment, as well as a desire to contribute to the well-being of the organization, their co-workers, and society. Social dynamics of this sort reflects a triad of reciprocity (Barry and Elmes 1997; Boje 1993): a view which holds that organizations indirectly contribute to social betterment through

acting virtuously towards employees; who are said to “reciprocate” with positive actions that benefit a third entity.

Neglect

Organizations that demonstrated neglect towards their employees during the floods can be seen to have responded in a manner characteristic of classical capitalism with the demonstration of very little empathy for the unusual circumstances. Some of these organizations were described to have maintained the unreasonable expectation that employees should continue to work during the floods. In others, employees described their obligations to remain at the workplace, even after the evacuation of the city had been ordered. These employees were not only frightened about their homes and families and anxious as to whether they would be able to get home that night, but were also afraid of losing their jobs if they left work without permission. An employee working for an NGO described the situation in her office as follows: “She [the manager] is saying, ‘Oh, no, you should just stay and work’... everyone was thinking, ‘Should we go or not?’ Because we didn’t know how... Like, will we be paid for that? We can’t just walk out, you know... But then, at 12 o’clock, someone said, ‘Look, Ipswich line is not working and this line is not working. If you want to get home, you can’t get home if you catch train. And your car is parked...’ My car was parked at Oxley and it’s the most flooded area. I said, ‘Oh, my God. My car is parked in Oxley. I have to go now.’ And I can’t go because it’s already closed, lines are closed.”

These organizations were also reported to have displayed neglect through non-communication, a failure to enquire about employees’ well-being or need for help, and a failure to update employees about when they might be expected to resume their work. An employee who was working as a security guard on a construction site provided an example of such neglect. While on duty on the day of the flood, he

noticed that his two-way radio had stopped working. He tried to call the site office several kilometers away, but no one was answering the phone. He then received a call from his family, who informed him about the emerging flood situation and that the family home was in an area that was destined to be inundated: “That’s when I thought it’s really getting serious. Somehow or other I was trying to get in touch with the office. I got lucky after a few tries and said, ‘Look, you’re probably aware that the storm is coming and I think I have to be with the family and I’m leaving.’ They said, ‘alright, we know that it’s gonna happen, just hurry because the motorway is gonna be closed.’” In a state of panic, he left his post and packed up his family and drove to stay at a friend’s home on higher ground. Throughout the week of the flood, he received no communication from his organization; though once the flood began to subside he did call in himself to enquire if he was needed back at work. On returning to work five days later, he was not paid for the time that he had been away from work.

Indeed, these neglectful organizations failed, in many cases, to pay employees for periods in which they were unable to work, and instead docked pay from employees’ annual leave. One employee who was working as a manager in a restaurant justified this organizational policy in the following statement: “So we weren’t paid but we did receive the government benefit that they allowed workers to have who were affected by the floodwaters. They gave out, I think it was, it amounted to about \$40 a day for every day of work lost. You were entitled to \$40 compensation by the government...” In all, neglectful organizational responses generally elicited feelings of anger, disappointment, and emotional distancing.

Ambiguous Response

Organizations that delayed their response to the flood, offered ambiguous gestures of support, and communicated mixed messages of care and neglect can be seen to have responded in a manner consistent with the supplemented capitalistic perspective. In

some instances, employees reported having the sense that this care was not provided out of any real concern for them, but rather that it was more concerned with protecting the organization's reputation against any negative fallout that might have arisen from *not* providing support to employees. The fulfillment of legal obligations may have been aimed at avoiding expensive court cases, managing public relations, or maintaining contact with skilled workers in short supply. One employee described this feelings as follows: "I felt it was more of a fulfilling the obligation, legal obligation, and protecting the company's interest and safety rather than true compassion or care."

In some instances, employees felt that different parts of the organizational leadership had sent inconsistent messages – some that were caring, and others that were unreasonable, considering the extraordinary context of the flood. In other instances, employees felt that the care eventually provided had been sincere, but that the organization had taken too long to make a decision on what their response would be. Employees reported having ambivalent emotional responses to these token measures of support.

An employee of a national optometry franchise provided an example of an organization that sent mixed messages of both neglect and support. On the second day of the flood, and with the water less than a meter from her doorstep, she waded through to buy milk for her baby when a text message arrived from her boss: "No excuses, you have to come in for work." Surprised, she made arrangements for her husband to care for their child and waded through the water to work. She spent an anxious day at work, mostly looking out of the shopping complex in the direction of her home and feeling concerned about the rising water levels. On the following days, she was able to get leave. She then received a caring email from head office expressing concern for all of the flood-affected employees in Brisbane. An email

received the following day, however, informed employees that, in accordance with company policy, they would not be paid for the days on which they had been unable to work. This series of mixed messages of both neglect and care left the employee feeling confused, angry, and ultimately disappointed. She summed up her feelings as follows: “[i]t was all about the work rather than ‘We’re glad you’re safe.’ You know, you got [a] typical email sent out going, you know, ‘Our thoughts are with everyone in Brisbane. We hope people aren’t affected.’ But then on the other hand, you get a text message going, ‘Come in to work. Pretty much no excuses.’ It’s kind of a bit two-faced.”

These ambiguous responses can be said to align with a supplemented capitalistic approach, and generally elicited responses of indifference and anger in employees - although in some instances they also elicited pro-social responses. One employee stated: “I think it was more gratitude than anger because there was some support, so it wasn’t completely non-support. So I guess emotionally, there was some support. Financially, you know, I mean, they could do better...” While employees may have appreciated the token effort, they didn’t report feeling any sense of commitment to the organization. This inconsistent organizational effort also failed to nurture a transition to pro-social motivation.

Detailed Analyses of Employees’ Emotional Reactions

Panic and Anxiety

As the Brisbane River broke her banks and the city was evacuated, many employees (14 out of 25) reported feeling anxiety themselves, and seeing it in those around them as well. One employee, a mother with a baby in childcare, described the concern for the well-being of her child when she found out about the flood: “...the phone rang saying you’ve got to evacuate. And it was really raining quite heavily so I panicked a

little bit, got a bit upset at the thought of kindie [kindergarten] flooding with my..., I think at the time he would've been one, one year, 12 months old...”

Mass panic at the train stations as public transport closed down, was also described by some employees. As an example, an employee who worked for a bank shared his experience: “I went to the train station. There were a lot of people there. There was a real anxious mood... You could see people were starting to get anxious and that little hint of putting myself first... I felt a bit of a dark mood amongst people.” Another employee, a restaurant worker, described a similar experience: “...There was rushing to get on the train, people pushing through the doors to make sure that they got on the train. The trains were all overcrowded. There was definitely a sense of panic amongst people.”

An employee working for an IT firm further described the flood as a “wake-up” call that shook his entire sense of security: “...it gave like a wake-up kind of call saying, ‘Look, you know, although you think you’re set and you’re very secure, something like that can completely change.’ You kind of felt everything just collapsing. The system is not collapsing but shaking. I remember going to the supermarket, people just buying like crazy (water and all the other supplies). So shelves are empty. People, you can see the stress in the people...”

Experiences of panic and anxiety appear to have been minimized for employees working in conscious or transformed capitalistic organizations that had quickly provided a compassionate response to the flood situation. Overall, employees who experienced organizational compassion were less likely to experience panic and anxiety (8 of 16), as compared with (6 of 9) employees who experienced organizational neglect or ambiguous responses (a 16% difference). Nonetheless, this is a tentative observation, since panic (at least initially) could be independent of

organizational response. There may also be other factors contributing to employee reactions, such as their personality and character.

Anger and Indifference

As seen in Table 3, less than a third (6 of 25) of employees described feelings of anger and indifference towards their organizations, or towards the flood crisis more generally. Consistent with the findings of organizational compassion studies, employees (6 of 9) who experienced ambiguous organizational responses in supplemented capitalistic organizations, or who experienced neglect within organizations operating according to classical capitalism, were more likely to express such negative emotions.

Feeling anger was described by one employee, who related the way in which his wife's organization had mistreated employees during the flood: "The options were, you take leave or you find some way of getting in to work." He further described his wife's reaction: "Her words were, 'Company X are a bunch of F-ers.'" He also expressed his indignation on social media: "I Tweeted and Facebooked about that, citing the company name. And then, that actually got back to the company and the company strenuously denied it. But it was rubbish because they [sic?] were people with email proof that that's exactly what they told the employees to do... And I actually felt really angry..."

A feeling of upset is described by an employee at a wholesale travel agency, who related how he and his co-workers were not permitted to leave work as the city was being evacuated: "We got to know about the situation first from the media, and there was no, there was no quick reassurance from management if we are going to be evacuated even on time... Some people started to be really upset that we already heard of the radio that half of the city are already evacuated, that public transport will soon cease operations. And some roads were already closed."

A sense of injustice at being unfairly treated was conveyed by another employee who lived in a flood affected area. This individual had her pay docked as she was unable to get into work during the flood, while her work colleagues (who lived in unaffected sections of the city) continued to work and to be paid: “You know, some people they have difficulties to get to work. Actually, some people, they were continuing working every day even if it was flood. But they could do it... if you can make your way to the building, then you can work. And some people, they live close, you know, they could do. Some people they couldn’t... I couldn’t work from home. That’s why it was kind of unfair.”

Due to the low commitment culture at some organizations, their employees reacted indifferently, not feeling any particular gratitude or appreciation for any gesture of support provided by their workplace. To provide one example, an employee who had been kept back at the office for many anxious hours after the city had evacuated described his emotional reaction to receiving a phone call from his supervisor once he reached home: “It was done, so it was good but I didn’t feel anything thing very positive. I suppose it was more legislative, basically running through the protocol, getting through the things, ‘We make sure everyone is on time home.’ I was thinking that yes, getting to work or from work is still covered under workplace, under work cover, so whatever accidents happen to work or on the way from work is still the company’s insurance responsibility. So I felt that’s more from that point of view, that follow up call.” Another employee described his emotional reaction to a personal phone call he received from his manager enquiring about his well-being during the flood, but with only slightly more enthusiasm: “Well, I think it’s normal, like, you know, we are humans. But from another hand, we were kind of not really affected. Well, affected but... it’s just like, you don’t have electricity, you couldn’t go anywhere, you just had to stay and watch water come in and, you know,

wake up sometimes, you know, in the middle of the night, just go to have a look where the water comes.”

In some instances, employees did not expect any support and so it did not even cross their minds to be disappointed - only on discussion during the interview did they begin to reflect: “It seems to be they could have done it better. They could have done better. It was my first initiative to call them, to tell them... situations like that are very unpredictable. And, I don’t know, I don’t want to speculate. Maybe they had more things to worry about.”

Positive Emotions and Attitudes Towards the Organization

As seen in Table 3, more than a third (9 of 25) of the employees described feeling positive affective states of pride, gratitude, peace, and happiness - despite the tragedy of the flood situation. In line with the organizational compassion literature (for example Dutton et al. 2002; Frost, Dutton, Worline, and Wilson 2000; Lilius et al. 2008), employees who experienced compassionate support during the crisis were more likely to report responses of positive affect (9 of 16). In contrast, employees who experienced neglect or ambiguous organizational responses did not report any positive affective responses whatsoever.

Peace of mind was the emotion described by another employee who was working for an IT organization. He explained that the ongoing support and communication provided by his organization throughout the flood gave employees a feeling of peace, and, as a result, they were able to take care of their families without worrying about work-related issues: “I think that gave everybody peace of mind, you know, because they could just take care of whatever they needed to take care of without worrying, you know, like in the back of their mind...”

Feelings of loyalty and commitment were described by another employee who stated that the care he received from his organization made him “feel fiercely loyal to the company” and “more inclined to go the extra mile for the employer.” He further stated that the support provided, and the general culture of care within the organization, “makes me more emotionally invested in it... And I pay it forward. You know, I think that’s the big thing here, you pay it forward and you, to quote the Bible, ‘You do unto others as you would have done unto you.’ It’s such a simple idea but it just makes people’s lives so much better for doing it, you know.”

Bonding at the human level, even among employees working for business competitors, was the response described by some employees working in the wholesale fashion industry. One such employee explained that supporting one another during the floods had created human bonds between competitors that were not present before the crisis: “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, [another business} was flooded we also helped... You know, we all bonded with each other. You know, everyone became closer and everyone was thoughtful of others...”

Gratitude for the support they received, along with a noble or compassionate sorrow for the less well-off, were other positive responses described by employees: “You become grateful for the fact... so many people get affected, and it’s sad to see things that you get attached to... can easily go, and it makes me feel [and] sort of think.”

Happiness, generated by the overwhelming community spirit of volunteering to help flood victims, was also reported: “But people were so happy. It’s just like; I was

feeling sad for them. And then you know, you can see this lady, she was probably 65. So can you imagine, whole, like they say, you know they give you this credit for 30 years. So whole life she was paying off this house and one night. It's like this [clicks her fingers], gone. So all her work, all her dedication, you know, raising children, actually all of them came to help, and their husbands, or whatever, wives. So it was a sense of community. You could see, even though it was disaster, people were actually smiling. And they were like, kind of happy.”

Employees' Pro-social Behavioral Responses

Despite the overwhelming panic and anxiety experienced by most employees, many moved through this anxiety to express pro-social behaviors. Two major types of pro-social behaviors were reported in this study: (1) *supporting others* (described by 13 of 25 employees) with compassionate acts of volunteering, donating, and gifting, and (2) *reconnecting* with friends and work colleagues (described by 8 of 25 employees).

Significantly, employees who acknowledged their appreciation of receiving compassionate organizational support were more likely to describe behaviors of providing support (11 of 16) and reconnecting with others (7 of 16) (see Table 3). In contrast, employees who received neglectful or ambiguous support from their organization were much less likely to report supportive behaviors (2 of 9) or a reconnection with others (1 of 9).

Supporting Others

Providing support to others manifested itself in a number of ways, including the donation of gifts and finance, and volunteering. One employee who was working as an optometrist explained that she donated “a few things from our house,” which made her “feel good and better” about the struggles her own family had endured during the flood. She described thinking, “I’m healthy, they’re not,” and feeling fortunate that she could support others in need. Another employee who was working in a bank,

donated finances (to the Queensland Premier's Flood Appeal) and had her donations matched by her work: "I did that through [work organization, which] has a system where they do dollar for dollar matching... So I purposely saved all of my giving to do it for there so that [the work organization] would match."

Volunteering was another support-giving response reported by employees. For example, an employee who was working for the State Government volunteered with her husband to help flood victims clean their homes: "We went across this river because this is where the water like basically swept all the houses, everything was underwater. We just went to a random house, and actually just selected the dirtiest one because the mud was up to your knee, you know. So we went there and I was cleaning dishes, and [my husband] was taking this rubbish from the back yard with the man."

Cooking food and distributing it to other volunteers helping with the cleanup effort in her neighborhood was a response described by another employee who works as a chef: "I just went to the supermarket and I just brought a whole lot of stuff home. And I just had a friend with me. And I said, you know, 'Let's cook.' And we're just gonna drive around to give all the neighbors... and we did..."

Reconnecting with Others

On returning to work after the floods, many employees described experiencing a strong need to reconnect with colleagues through talking, physical embraces, and other modes of bonding. One employee described the first couple of days back at work as a time when she and her colleagues were more engaged in talking than working: "We basically talked forever. You know, everyone telling the story of how they got home and of their friends, what happened." Comparing stories, sharing fears and anxieties and mourning each other's losses provided a sense of healing and even a sense that things could have been much worse. "Just chitchatting at work with

colleagues, you know, that was enough for me just to do it... that was a real big comfort to me again to appreciate others a hundred times worse off and people lost their lives and things, you know... we're still alive. We've still got our belongings... Yeah, just talking at work.”

Physical contact was described as another mode to reconnect, provide support, and receive help from others during and after the floods, and across all levels of organizational hierarchies. To provide an example, one employee described how she had offered a hug to a work colleague who had experienced great loss in the flood: “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.’” Another employee described the transformational insight of the floods, and how she experienced a resetting of priorities; to value the importance of relationships over material possessions: “I understood the meaning of life, you know? Like, material... But what we really need is this, today, what we are, all working together here around here. They don’t know me and I don’t know them. And, you know... It’s like this young man comes, he’s like, ‘Can I have a hug?’ I said, ‘Of course, come on.’ And he’s like, you know, even that hug it’s so magical.”

Discussion

Our results indicate that concrete organizational actions express different organizational ethos that are aligned on a continuum within three general approaches to capitalism (Cunha, Rego, and Vaccaro 2014) labeled as: classical capitalism, supplemented capitalism, and transformed or conscious capitalism. Our findings further suggest that within organizations operating under the assumptions of classical capitalism, there is little care or concern for employee well-being, and that employees

experience greater negative emotions with a lesser commitment response. In organizations characteristic of the supplemented model, employee well-being appears to be addressed as prudent business practice, and employees express ambiguous feelings towards the organizations as a result. Finally, our results suggest that in transformed or conscious capitalistic organizations, where employees feel genuinely cared for and valued even above profits, the employees express greater positivity, organizational engagement, closer relationships, and a deeper commitment to supporting others in need.

An important observation that can be drawn from the research is that compassion is more than merely a psychological state – it is also a practice of social engagement involving organization, contingency planning, systems, policies, as well as rational considerations and arrangements (Dutton, Glynn, and Spreitzer 2006; Nussbaum 2003). However, the quality of these practices as a culture of compassion also rests upon deeper core assumptions (Schein 1990).

In capitalistic organizations that demonstrate values beyond profits, employees who know they are sincerely valued, experience expressions of care and compassion as genuine, providing them with an opportunity to make sense of their pain and heal, to feel grateful, and to develop and act on empathy for the suffering of others. As described by Dutton et al. (2002), compassionate leaders support the cultivation and legitimization of compassionate relations within organizations by recognizing and attending to employee suffering. This in turn provides the organization with legitimized contexts for meaning, action, and building a collective capacity for compassion. A collective capacity for compassion demonstrates itself both by providing tangible support to its members, and by facilitating an environment in which people can freely express and discuss the way they feel. Thus organizational compassion becomes a collaborative sense-giving and sense-making (Weick 1995)

exercise. Members thrive, and together generate a shared capacity for recognizing, assessing, acknowledging, and responding to varied experiences of suffering and support. In these contexts, employees not only tend to experience positive feelings, attitudes, and behaviors toward their organizations, they also react with beneficial actions toward co-workers and society. The current findings therefore suggest that organizations can be, indirectly, a source of social/community betterment, and that organizationally compassionate actions may be a valuable source of shared “social” ethics (Porter and Kramer 2011).

When organizational compassion is practiced merely as a supplement to core classical capitalistic assumptions, it can have both positive and negative associations. The current study finds support for this view, when examining cases in which employees felt that compassionate care was provided by their organizations in an attempt to manipulate compassion for calculated reasons, rather than out of genuine concern for their well-being. Our finding indicating that organizations may express compassion in the interests of organizational agendas, supports the arguments of philosophers such as Nietzsche (1998, 2002), the theorizing of organizational scholars (Frost et al. 2006; Frost and Robinson 1999), and the findings of empirical researchers (Clark 1987, 1997; van Kleef et al. 2008), all of whom discuss the implications of using compassion as a mode of power over others (Simpson et al. in press; Simpson, Clegg, and Pitsis 2014a; Simpson et al. 2014b). The current study also indicates that employees are often aware when compassion is being provided as a tool for achieving instrumental objectives, such as protecting organizational legal standing, which employees hold as being of less value than compassion offered through genuine concern.

Additionally, this study indicates that when organizations operating under the strict rational assumptions of classical capitalism neglect the suffering of employees,

the resulting pain may fester into feelings of hostility, resentment, and anger towards their employer. This finding is particularly important considering the statistic that about 13% of employees in worldwide organizations are hostile towards their bosses and their work organizations, while more than 60% are not engaged (Gallup 2013a). Data from more than 140 countries, including Australia, not only suggest that employee engagement is low, but also that disengagement has perverse consequences for employee well-being and health, as well as for productivity and a company's per share earnings (Gallup 2013b). Indeed, the estimated financial cost of such hostility and disengagement to U.S. business each year is calculated as between \$450 and \$550 billion (Gallup 2013a).

Alternative Interpretations

Considering this evidence, a question arises: why has compassion been widely neglected as an important facet of capitalistic organizational functioning? There may be several explanations (see Rego, Cunha, and Clegg 2012). One relates to biology, which suggests that human nature contains the capacity for both good and evil (McCullough, Root, Tabak, and Witvliet 2009; O' Hear 1997). Human beings are said to be hardwired for opposite tendencies (i.e., they are built into genetic heritage and codified in the genes over generations of use), such as the capacity for violence and greed, as well as for cooperation, affection, and kindness. The "village" (Newton 2006, p. 12), where business was conducted within small communities, provides an example of how fostering a communitarian ethos can promote moderation, compassion, restraint, and decency. However, the anonymity of the industrialized, urbanized, and globalized world is said to have freed individuals from the village's social and moral precepts, leading them to pursue a life dominated by the "greed" genes (p. 24).

There are reasons to believe, however, that the emergence of democratized digital technologies has increased the degree to which organizational actions are scrutinized (Bennis, Goleman, and O'Toole 2008). In this new “old village”, organizations are likely constrained from engendering employees’ suffering and encouraged to adopt more virtuous/compassionate actions (Cameron and Winn 2012; Rego et al. 2012). The recent attention “compassion” has received from scholars and practitioners may well reflect such a change in the business landscape, as practices are being more widely and deeply scrutinized than they were previously.

Another alternative explanation of our findings, not considered in this research, is that of trait theory. Studies indicate that those with greater dispositional optimism and resilience are able to more easily overcome the negative effects of traumatic experiences (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996; Thompson 1985). It is therefore possible that employees in this current study who displayed a more optimistic disposition or extraverted personality may have been more likely to accept the support received as an expression of genuine compassion, and, in turn, to have become inspired to support others during the crisis event, and to reconnect with others after it had ended. Such an explanation is worthy of further consideration and future studies may aim to examine how the relationship between organizational compassion and employees’ responses is moderated by employees’ dispositional characteristics.

The findings of this study may also be considered as providing support for the theorizing of Grant and Wade-Benzoni (2009). These authors suggest that when employees (shaken by sudden mortality awareness) are given the opportunity to discuss their concerns rather than merely sweeping them under the carpet, their mortality awareness is transformed into generative mortality reflection, as predicted by generative theorists (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996; Tedeschi, Park, and Calhoun 1998). Such a generative response contrasts with the withdrawal-inducing mortality

anxiety that is predicted by terror management theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon 1986; Greenberg et al. 1990; Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 2000).

Going beyond what Grant and Wade-Benzoni (2009) propose, our findings indicate that when employees are provided compassionate support during a crisis, it creates a generative spiral of positivity involving positive affect, commitment, and proclivity to support others. Additional research could further investigate other details of Grant and Wade-Benzoni's hypotheses, which, when applied to the compassion context, indicate that younger employees are not only more vulnerable to mortality anxiety in times of crisis, but are also more in need of compassion than older employees.

Another idea derived from Grant and Wade-Benzoni (2009) is their distinction between employees who are motivated by one or other of career, calling, or job orientations (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, and Schwartz 1997). A culture of compassion might encourage generative behaviors among employees who are career and calling oriented. For job-oriented employees, financial incentives for initiative might be required to motivate them towards generative behaviors. Such incentives might additionally motivate career-oriented employees.

Limitations and Future Research

A limitation of the current study is the small sample ($n=25$), whose results cannot be statistically generalized to the entire population. We make no assumption that our findings represent universal "facts" or "truths." Qualitative research rather embraces ambiguity and complexity, and acknowledges that organizational reality is ongoing, contingent, multiple, and emergent (Silverman 2010). Indeed, findings from qualitative sociological research are not predictive; they are theoretical generalizations that might be applied as guiding principles (Flyvbjerg 2006). Nor does qualitative research explain global variation; instead it describes 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 should engage with such findings reflexively, and should draw their own conclusions while taking into consideration their applicability in another context.

The level of our analyses is also worthy of further discussion. As mentioned earlier, our data was collected at the micro-level (individuals), from which we drew inferences about the meso-level (organization), which we suggest may, in turn, predict macro/societal-level phenomena. Our premises were that (a) employees are appropriate sources from which to learn about organizational functioning, and (b) organizational functioning, although conditioned by the overall paradigm (capitalism), may assume different formats. More specifically, we worked under the assumption that capitalistic societies support different degrees (and natures) of organizational compassion, and that employees are able to identify such differences, evaluate them accurately, and respond accordingly.

Following on from this research, future studies could pursue several potentially interesting paths. First: Future studies could characterize organizations using data collected from several sources; both inside and outside the organizations (i.e., external observers/stakeholders). Second: It is important to distinguish individual leader's compassionate actions from organizational compassion. Although they may be related, it may also be possible to identify dissociations. To provide an example of how these two sources of compassion may be related: A leader may act in a compassionate way (i.e. as a "human shield" Sutton 2010, p. 106) in order to minimize the effects of "burdensome organizational practices" or the actions of other toxic leaders (Frost 2003). Similarly, an organization may also adopt compassionate actions with the aims of minimizing employees' suffering caused by toxic, destructive

leaders. Third: Future studies might test the degree to which different compassionate sub-cultures develop within an organization, which could result from different leadership profiles. Fourth: Future studies might also scrutinize the social, economic, political, and cultural conditions that facilitate the development of different types of organizational compassion. Finally, it may be crucial to study how different types of organizational compassion affect the community surrounding an organization, and how the “dialogue” between both entities develops over the time.

Conclusions

The current study investigated the perceived support provided to employees during the 2011 Brisbane flood crisis. Results indicated there to be a continuum of organizational responses, which range from neglect to ambiguity to compassionate care. We theorized that these responses are consonant with a continuum of general tendencies of classical capitalism, supplemented capitalism, and transformed or conscious capitalism. We found that these organizational stances drew corresponding responses from their employees. In organizations where neglect was experienced, employees were more likely to express negative emotions and to have a minimal sense of commitment towards their organization. Within organizations that displayed business-prudent, instrumental care, employees expressed ambiguous feelings towards their workplace. Conversely, for organizations in which employees felt valued and cared for beyond any profit motive, they expressed positive emotions and organizational commitment. These employees also described behaviors demonstrating the formation of closer relationships with colleagues, and were more likely to provide support to others in need.

Overall, these findings indicate a range of organizational practices that are consonant with (a) a continuum of general capitalistic tendencies, and (b) varying levels of compatibility with an ethic of compassion. At one end of the spectrum are

organizational practices of neglect in which employees are treated as a means to an end. In the middle range of the spectrum are organizations that provide care instrumentally, and in which employees are still used as an ends to a means. At the other end of the spectrum are organizations that provide practices of conscious care that resonate with Drucker's (2002, p. 70) assertion: organizational members are "not employees, they are people." These findings further indicate that organizations seeking to foster compassion must do so, not merely through the introduction of supplementary changes to organizational rhetoric or external practices, but also through the transformation of core assumptions at the deepest level of organizational culture [Schein's (1990) level 3].

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