Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) Capstone Projects

Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) Capstones

8-25-2022

Building Belonging

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Ross, Jacob M., "Building Belonging" (2022). *Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) Capstone Projects*. 239.
https://repository.upenn.edu/mapp_capstone/239

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Building Belonging

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MAPP 800: Capstone Project

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August 9, 2022

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Keywords: belonging, high-quality connections, appreciative inquiry, community

Personal Introduction

The ideas of belonging and positive psychology have always been very near and dear to my heart. This research inquiry comes as a direct result of my life experience, and the ways that feeling a sense of belonging has shaped, and indeed saved, my life. My journey to study belonging began at the age of 20 when, after a lengthy battle with alcoholism and drug addiction, I entered the 12-step world. Having spent most of my childhood feeling alone and isolated, this community was the first place I felt truly accepted and loved for my authentic self. In the years since then, my experience of community and belonging has grown, as has my interest in creating spaces for others to belong and feel a part of something bigger than themselves.

When I re-entered my undergraduate education (after having left my first institution to get sober) I wound up in Dr. Dacher Keltner's Human Happiness class at U.C. Berkeley. It was there that my desire to build community and help nourish cultures of belonging met with the science I would come to know as positive psychology. I was deeply inspired by Dr. Keltner's class and chose to shape my education around his teaching and guidance. I went on to spend a year working at the Greater Good Science Center, helping put on events and workshops. I took a class with Dr. Keltner every semester, and during my final semester there he became my thesis advisor, where he oversaw a thesis I designed for the Interdisciplinary Studies major in which I researched the influence of having a sense of belonging and aligned purpose on intended and achieved organizational tenure.

Following the completion of my education at Berkeley, positive psychology was the only path I was interested in pursuing further education in. I had found my passion, my academic drive, and the subject that I was interested in committing myself to. In my time with the MAPP program, this interest and commitment has grown, and my excitement around the idea of creating

cultures of belonging has been nourished by research and concepts like high-quality connections, Appreciative Inquiry, positive interventions, and other means of deepening well-being that are backed by science. My passion has grown even deeper in researching for this paper, and I become more excited each day to bring my knowledge to the world and help curate communities and cultures of inclusion and belonging that enrich people's lives and leave them feeling more whole and grounded, the way that my communities have done for me.

Introduction

Belonging to something bigger than oneself is a fundamental human need. We are hyper social creatures who have evolved with a need for community support and interpersonal connection. For most adult members of the human species, the workplace dominates our social structure and represents the majority of our daily socialization. Estimates suggest that we will spend about one third of our life at work, making our workplace social interactions among the most important and regular that we will have in our lives (Thompson, 2016). While some people have exceptional experiences in their teams and workplaces, there is massive opportunity for growth and improving the social dynamics within organizational structures to facilitate more of a culture of inclusion and belonging.

The concept of belonging has been a part of mainstream conversation since Baumeister & Leary (1995) declared it as a fundamental part of the human experience. Belonging is defined as strong, stable interpersonal relationships in which there are frequent, non-aversive interactions within an ongoing relationship (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Having an experience of belonging to something bigger than oneself can make enormous contributions to the well-being of members of a workplace and can enrich their personal lives beyond the contributions that it makes to their professional experience (Waller, 2020). There is a wide breadth of literature that I will be

exploring in this paper that validates and expands upon the impact on personal and community well-being that is had by creating cultures of belonging, but the underlying narrative is clear and grounded: being a part of something bigger than oneself and feeling connected to it is nourishing.

The experience of belonging in an organizational setting is measured by a scale known as Psychological Sense of Organizational Membership (PSOM) which is derived from a similar scale designed to evaluate students' experience of belonging to their school populations (Cockshaw & Shochet, 2007). This research gives a solid base for evaluating a sense of belonging in a workplace and helps quantify the experience that I seek to evaluate the necessity of with this work. There are other metrics of workplace belonging and community that have been utilized in evaluating the degree to which a person feels that they belong to their community. One such metric is that of Perceived Organizational Embeddedness or POE. POE helps bring a quantitative metric into the experience of belonging to something bigger than oneself, and and is a contributing factor to the broader metric of Perceived Organizational Support (POS), which looks at how supported one feels by both their organization as a whole, and also how supported they feel by their organizational community (D. G. Allen & Shanock, 2013). These measures help give valuable insight into the influence that certain organizational tools of support and connection have on subjective well-being and how connected one feels to their larger workplace community. They offer a strong quantitative expression for the influence of positive interventions on the workforce, which I will explore more in detail in the second half of this piece.

The modern workplace is treated far more like a machine than a collective of human beings, with productivity and achievement metrics vastly outweighing focus on individual or collective well-being (Rahmi, 2019). While it cannot be said that this is universally true (and

indeed there are many examples of organizations who are doing effective work at prioritizing well-being), there is a culture in workplaces around the world that neglects individual well-being by isolating individuals instead of focusing energy and attention on how to connect them. This isolation and distance between people was amplified tenfold by the Covid-19 pandemic that left most of the workforce isolated from one another, only connecting over zoom and other virtual platforms (Osofsky et al., 2020). The extensive reliance on technology for interpersonal interaction that Covid left us with has deepened the already deep divide created by social media and societal technological addiction (Turkle, 2017). The conversation goes deeper as even those who intentionally seek connection by way of technology lose many of the benefits of social interaction due to the lack of eye contact and physical closeness available by way of those platforms (B. Fredrickson, Personal Communication, 9/2/21). Covid merely brought to the surface the way that we are creating distance between ourselves both personally and professionally.

Covid did not bring about the revolution of societal isolation, though. Robert Putnam spoke extensively about it 22 years ago in his book Bowling Alone (Putnam, 2000). The reality is, our society has been growing into a space of isolation for years, if not generations. The need for interpersonal connection and support is more necessary now than it has ever been. With workforces divided and spread all over the world, and workplace belongingness interventions can help to change what it means to be a part of an organization, and if done properly, can turn work from a drain on one's well-being, to a support of it. In this paper, my intention is to explore in more depth the influence that being a part of a larger community can offer to personal and communal well-being, and how curating one's workplace community can help create an experience of personal flourishing through high-quality interpersonal connections, the process of

Appreciative Inquiry, self-expression practices, acts of gratitude, and deepening relationships with upper levels of management to reduce the strain of hierarchy on organizational dynamics. To execute this intention, I will review the current literature on belongingness, high-quality connections, Appreciative Inquiry, and community dynamics. Following this, I will be recommending a few possible directions that one may take their organizational community building and connection strategy by implementing interventions based on the research I have reviewed. All of this rests on a core thesis: creating a culture of belonging in the workplace nourishes personal and community well-being and improves both personal mental health and the health of an organization.

Key Studies

In this section I will examine in further detail some of the more contributory scientific studies to the field. The first study I will examine is one done by Chhajer & Dutta (2021) on gratitude as a mechanism to influence the development of high-quality connections in the workplace. This study builds on the research done by Jane Dutton (2003) that explores the positive influence of HQCs on both personal and community wellbeing. The argument that they put forth in this study is that a feeling of gratitude will increase subjective mutuality, positive regard, and vitality. They carried this out by placing gratitude boards in an Indian textile firm on which members of the organization could express gratitude during the workday. They used a questionnaire to survey 179 employees about their experience of work both before the gratitude board intervention and after it was put in place, measuring the responses as they were influenced by the gratitude practice. In their hypothesis testing, there were three correlations to level of gratitude that were evaluated: mutuality (0.56), positive regard (0.43), and vitality (0.39). The effect sizes for each correlation are listed. While positive regard and vitality show low effect

sizes, the correlation between expressed gratitude and mutuality has a medium effect size. Mutuality is one of the core tenets of high-quality connections and indicates a correlation to an increase in HQCs. The study had a few limitations, chiefly that there was no control group, and that the study was conducted within a single organization. With those limitations in mind, though, this still demonstrates that the gratitude intervention implemented showed a correlation to an increase in HQC building blocks, and helps drive home my argument that gratitude can help facilitate the development of high-quality connections.

Alexander Haslam and colleagues (2009) conducted a study that explores the value contribution of social identification with a group larger than oneself on the experiences of social and organizational stressors. This study helps further drive home the point that feeling a sense of belonging and connection to a larger group has a positive influence on one's well-being and contributes to social and emotional coping skills. This study also looks at organizational citizenship and burnout. These concepts also contribute to the larger point that I am arguing because it demonstrates quantitatively that feeling a sense of belonging is not just good for individual well-being, but for the collective well-being of an organization. This research offers great value for organizations by demonstrating to them the objective value of investing in creating cultures of belonging. I am most interested in exploring their first two hypotheses, namely that group identification is a predictor of organizational citizenship behaviors (H1) and that group identification has a negative correlation to burnout (H2). The study used a sample size of 30 participants in a British semi-professional theatre company who ranged in age from 18 to 35. The participants were given self-report surveys at five intervals through the course of the study (approximately 14 weeks). The scales evaluated group identification, burnout, citizenship, work satisfaction, pride, and morale. The correlation between group identification and

organizational citizenship demonstrated a low effect size (0.39), but the correlation between group identification and work satisfaction demonstrated a medium effect size (0.53). Regarding burnout, the negative correlations with citizenship (-0.40) and work satisfaction (-0.41) were both low in effect size. The results of this study help further my argument that having a sense of group identification (belonging) helps to improve satisfaction with work and can, to a lesser extent, mediate stress and burnout.

Introduction to Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is the empirical study of well-being and human flourishing. Where clinical psychology is often concerned with the study of mental and emotional disorder and mental illness, positive psychology tends to focus more on helping healthy people flourish and create more fulfilling lives. The concept was brought to the public eye by Martin Seligman, amassing decades of research on positivity and well-being, in addition to well-known practices like mindfulness meditation and gratitude, and bringing all these studies of human flourishing under one banner that we know today as positive psychology. One of the key differences between positive psychology and the idea of "self-help" is the scientific nature of positive psychology. Positive psych brings empirical, scientific research to the conversation, substantiating its claims about well-being and the influence of these positive interventions with peer-reviewed research.

Martin Seligman's inspiration for crafting the field of positive psychology came in a sweet moment shared with his five-year-old daughter, when she challenged him to change his demeanor (Seligman is a notorious pessimist, and famous grouch) (Seligman, 2006). Previous models of psychology, particular clinical psychology, focus on disorder and dysfunction, trying to help heal people from more affecting mental states that interfere with their lives and well-

being (Seligman & Peterson, 2003). Historically, there have been psychologists who have had more optimistic views of well-being and positivity, notably William James (a personal favorite of the director of the MAPP program) and Abraham Maslow, who famously introduced the idea of his hierarchy of needs to the world. The field truly came into being, though, when Seligman became president of the APA and decided to take the focus of his work in the direction of strengths and flourishing, rather than his previous notable contribution to the field, a concept known as learned helplessness (Maier & Seligman, 1976).

There are many fundamental terms offered by the science of positive psychology, the definitions of which can be found in the APA dictionary of Psychology. I will define here two that will be significant to my work, as well as a third for which the definition is given at the beginning of the next section. The first term to be defined is flourishing, which is given as a state of good physical and mental health. Flourishing is not just a state, but a goal of positive psychology in action, and an ideal to strive towards with the implementation of nearly any intervention (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, 2022). Well-being is defined as an overall good quality of life, including a sense of flourishing and low levels of distress. This is modified by Ed Diener's concept of Subjective Well-being, which is a self-appraisal of one's happiness and satisfaction with their life (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, 2022). These terms appear frequently in my piece, as they are important aims of the work that I wish to do. The biggest focus of my work though, as touched on above, is to achieve well-being and flourishing specifically through creating cultures of belonging, and in this specific instance the aim is to achieve this through workplace interventions.

My goal is supported at every turn by the science of positive psychology. My goal with my work is to convince organizations that modifying their culture to be more focused towards

inclusion and belonging is a worthwhile endeavor. Positive psychology supports this with a hefty breadth of research discussing the importance of having a culture of belonging, and more significantly to my cause, the contributions that belonging makes to well-being as a whole. The literature on high-quality connections discusses at length the contributions that interpersonal connections make to well-being and effectiveness in the workplace (Stephens et al., 2011). High-quality connections are an excellent vehicle for building a culture of belonging, as they strengthen interpersonal connection, and help develop both strong and weak ties to the people in one's organization, which further contributes to a sense of community and belonging to something bigger than oneself (Granovetter, 1973). Appreciative Inquiry helps people take a sense of ownership of the work that they are doing and helps them find meaning in what they are doing, a contribution that my own previous positive psychology research (Ross, 2020) has demonstrated makes a contribution to a sense of belonging (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). The work on the importance of having a culture of belonging has been substantiated by researchers like Baumeister & Leary, Antonsich, Yuval-Davis, Hogg, Allen, Haslam, and many others who have consistently made the argument that community membership makes a vital contribution to well-being and helps those involved create fulfilment in their lives. It is on the shoulders of these giants of positive psychology that I stand in making my own argument.

Belonging and Workplace Well-Being

A definition for belonging based on Baumeister & Leary's (1995) work has been given above to create a frame within which to explore the narrative of belonging. Antonsich (2010) furthers the specificities of research around belonging by characterizing it as both a personal experience of being at home in a place, and a broader social and societal topic involving constructs that qualify belonging such as citizenship and other identity groups. This is important

in the context of the workplace because it gives us a sense of what the necessary criteria are for connecting with people at a scale bigger than just the interpersonal. It also lays the groundwork for the benefit of employee resource groups (ERGs) which are explored more later on. These qualities that define belonging are important knowledge for organizations to have so that they can offer the capability of connecting on these levels within the organizational structure. This definition is itself expanded upon that given by Yuval-Davis (2006) which identifies three key tiers of belonging for study; social locations, identities and emotional attachments, and ethical and political values. Social locations describes the physical spaces that one occupies, the people that one comes into contact with on a regular basis, and the immediate surroundings that create one's day-to-day life. Identities and emotional attachments are different ways that one views oneself, ways that one identifies, what communities one sees oneself a part of, and what feels most important. Ethical and political values provide a broader space in which to conceptualize belonging. In such divisive times, one's beliefs and values can be a way to connect with one another and find common ground, find community, and find a larger sense of belonging. These three pieces together craft a strong framework within which to evaluate the importance of having a sense of belonging within a specific social/environmental structure such as a workplace.

When looking at identities and what it means to belong, having a concept of who one is and where one fits in is very important (Antonsich, 2010). This is given some groundwork in the above definitions, but it requires further self-exploration. The three elements of belonging that are given above help give a frame of different ways that one can conceptualize oneself but belonging requires a sense of identity in order to lean into the similarities of a larger community (Yuval-Davis, 2006). These frameworks provide a helpful structure within which to situate one's identity, and from that, get a sense of who one's people are. This is especially pertinent in the

workplace, where there are so many differing identities and points of view among so many different people. These structures and definitions allow people to help acknowledge where they fit in and what communities they seek to be connected to. With that being said, one identity that many often have, particularly if they are happy with or connected to their work, is members of the same organization (Ellemers et al., 2003). For those who identify with their work, there is a direct pathway to feeling a sense of belonging within an organization. These concepts of what constitutes belonging create a pathway for understanding the importance of, and crafting means of nurturing, belonging in a workplace environment.

Impact On Well-Being

As mentioned above, we create tribes and communities by evolutionary design; we are not built to be alone (Keltner, 2009). Humans produce hyper-vulnerable offspring, hence the adage that it "takes a village" to raise a child (Hrdy, 2007). Between the vulnerability of human offspring, the intensive care requirements from new mothers, and the necessity for food, shelter, and protection, evolutionarily we need community to bring children into the world. The need to belong to something greater than oneself is present in the home, the community, and the workplace, and the feelings of belonging and isolation often spill from one realm to the next. One study examined the role of friendly and familial relationships in one's embeddedness in their workplace, showing that deeper ties to the community and family outside of work correlate to deeper organizational satisfaction and organizational commitment (Gonzalez et. al. 2016). Another study examined to a more in-depth degree the impact that embeddedness in one's communities has on happiness (conceptualized in this case as satisfaction with life). Wakefield and associates explored the role that a sense of belonging with family, nationality, and a chosen group of others had on mental health. They found that perceived belonging to all of these groups

improved satisfaction with life, and that the more groups one belongs to, the more satisfied they felt with their life (Wakefield, et. al. 2016). This research furthers the conversation of belonging and happiness greatly and sets the stage for my research on workplace belonging as a vehicle for well-being.

The need to belong is present in every aspect of life, but my interests specifically lean towards the workplace. Alexander Haslam and colleagues (2009) have produced a body of work that examines social support and the impact of having a community that one identifies with on social stresses, demonstrating the positive value of belonging on mediating stressors. This work helps open the gate for further examining belonging in the workplace by explicating the well-being potential of having a sense of belonging and community and explores how we can manage negative or challenging stimuli by embedding ourselves in something bigger. The concept of what it means to belong, and how one builds a culture of belonging, are the core interests that sparked this body of research, and have, up to this point, driven my academic career.

The quality of our interpersonal relationships is what helps define our well-being (Lambert et al., 2015). In other words, the degree to which we feel connected to and reciprocal relationships with others is correlated to a higher degree of satisfaction with life (Ryff & Singer, 2014). Interpersonal relationships are one of the most fundamental elements of human flourishing. When we do not get these quality interactions in our workplace, our well-being can suffer. The experience of isolation is deeply detrimental to mental health and well-being (Taylor et al., 2018). Due to Covid, there has been a massive global increase in the experience of feeling isolated while at work. The throngs of work-from-home employees, massive layoffs, and social distancing, coupled with the already challenging influences of social media addiction, the growing political unrest in both the United States and the world, and other numerous factors,

have all left us with an enormous increase in depression and anxiety over the past 2 years (Ettman et al., 2020). This combined with the more specific research on depression in the workplace as a result of social isolation and disconnectedness highlights the importance of creating cultures of belonging for both healing deficits of well-being, and inducing flourishing in workplaces (Cockshaw et al., 2014).

Work by Howard, Cogswell, and Smith shows that feeling ostracized or isolated in the workplace can have detrimental effects on performance, self-perception, emotional state, well-being, and organizational commitment (Howard, Cogswell, & Smith, 2019). Further, studies of objective and subjective isolation showed that being objectively isolated (physically detached) from friends and family had some impact on the well-being of participants (55 and older), but subjective isolation showed much higher rates of depression and psychological distress (Taylor et. al. 2018). Subjective isolation here is conceptualized as the perception of closeness or lack thereof to one's family, friends, and peers. Both can play a role in the modern workforce, but subjective is liable to be far more prevalent.

Isolation has negative physical effects in addition to psychological ones. A 2010 study from Norway surveyed nearly 6,500 participants and found that loneliness accounted for up to 75% of depression symptoms and up to 40% of somatic challenges that the participants presented with (Aanes et al., 2010). This demonstrates a less surprising, albeit very significant, correlation between psychological distress and isolation, but a more significant demonstration of the health challenges of being alone. This pairs well with the research on the effects of interpersonal dynamics on stress, and the positive relationship between sociality and stress reduction (Haslam et al., 2009). This study highlights the influence that belongingness can have on both our mental and physical health, looking specifically at stress, one of the more detrimental human

experiences (Kemeny, 2003). It explores the ways in which being a part of community can reduce detrimental mental health experiences and help ease tension in our daily lives. This is core to the argument that I am making, insofar as it further solidifies the importance of having a sense of belonging to mental health and social well-being and is an important piece of evidence of the power of the belonging narrative. This research collectively helps to illuminate the challenges that organizations without a cohesive internal structure face relative to employee well-being, mental health, organizational commitment, and productivity.

Effects of Being Part of a Community

Not only can creating cultures of belonging help address mental health deficits and struggles, it can also improve the lives of those who are not challenged by loneliness and isolation, and enrich both social and personal experiences (Block, 2018). Belonging, as stated above, is one of the most fundamental needs of the human experience. Having a healthy sense of belonging and connection amongst our own families can help nourish well-being and external social relationships (Gonzalez et al., 2016). The Prilleltenskys have explored this topic at length, as it relates to both the workplace and external communities, and their conclusion supports those of most other observers of this social phenomenon; our lives are better in community and with a sense of connection and belonging (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). Not only do our interpersonal relationships fulfill the need to belong to something bigger than ourselves, but we can also find this within group membership. Aligning with a collective identity, feeling like we are a part of a larger group or culture, can be enormously helpful for well-being (Wakefield et al., 2017). This can look like racial identity, cultural identity, nationality, sports team fandom, and even membership within a workplace. Being a part of a team, or a member of a larger group,

helps ease a sense of aloneness in the world, and helps us feel connected to one another. It creates pathways for relating to each other and holding common ground.

Existing Theories and Interventions

High Quality Connections

The High-Quality Connections (HQCs) Framework gives insight into the methodology behind creating interpersonal connection and cultures of belonging within a workplace environment. High Quality Connections are short-term, dyadic interactions in the workplace that are subjectively positive and leave the participants feeling seen and authentically appreciated (Dutton, 2003). The principle comes from the field of Positive Organizational Scholarship and can be deeply influential for both individual and collective well-being in the workplace. HQCs come from the core principle that organizations are filled with possibility for authentic and nourishing interpersonal connection (J. Dutton, personal communication, 2/11/22). HQCs have positive implications for well-being in the workplace that range from individual increases in happiness, to collective experiences of belonging, to cognitive strengthening and increases in motivation. Organizations that focus on building HQCs can help uplift individual members of an organization, turn around challenging situations, and increase the organizations collective capacity for positive interpersonal relationships (Sundet & Carlsen, 2019). Having HQCs in a workforce can help nourish an experience of vulnerability and, perhaps most importantly, psychological safety. The key characteristic factors of a High-Quality Connection, as given by Jane Dutton, are:

-Felt Vitality: feeling alive and connected

-Positive regard and mutuality: feeling seen and acknowledged, and feeling that there is space for participation from either party

-Intentionality: feeling like the experience is meaningful and intentional, and not like it is simply something happening in passing or without substance (Dutton, 2003).

HQCs also help show people their value and help them feel like they are appreciated for their authentic self in workplace relationships by nourishing a sense of respect, and through task enabling (a process by which people uplift the productivity of others and help support them in accomplishing their goals). They help us feel like we are a part of something bigger than ourselves, and help us find more grounding in our collective identity by deepening our connections to people who are both similar to us and different, and helping us get a better sense of the value that we have to others in both individual and collective connections (Dutton, 2003). These are some of the key elements of nourishing a culture of belonging, and the research that has been done around HQCs demonstrate that they are a thoroughly effective tool for crafting and upholding such a culture by creating a sense of feeling like one has personally fulfilling relationships within a context that otherwise typically only goes skin deep (Dutton, 2003). Further, the research on HQCs focuses on many different ways of highlighting the value contributions of all members of a workforce from the individual work being done, to collective accomplishments, to personal contributions to the workplace experience, and more (Stephens et al., 2011). This is not dissimilar from the practices of Appreciative Inquiry, which will be touched on in the next segment of this paper. There are many different practices that are outlined by Jane Dutton and John Paul Stephens that can be used to help members of an organization create HQCs, which will be explored in more detail now.

High-quality connections do more than just increase personal and organizational well-being. Beyond the benefits of enriching personal relationships to nurture a sense of belonging to community as a whole, HQCs can also stoke creativity and knowledge creation, and inspire people to think out of the box more effectively, according to a study that demonstrated that when people experience HQCs and an intensified experience of collaboration, they expand their types of interaction and deepen the experience of knowledge creation (Aarrestad et al., 2015). The influence of HQCs on knowledge creation has enormous potential implications for the health of an organization, including reformatting creative teams such that they are more geared towards connection than outcome creation, and ensuring that creative roles are supported with community and interpersonal connection in order to boost their output and knowledge generation. Mostly, though, the implication on the efficiency and contributions that HQCs make to an organization are notable here, and speak to the value that taking time to encourage and facilitate interpersonal connection can create from an organizational standpoint.

Dutton offers four very clear pathways to developing HQCs in the workplace through her research and practice of coaching organizations on how to implement this principle in their daily practice. There are many practices that build from these pillars, and many more to be created. I will touch on them lightly here, but go into much greater detail later on. The four pillars of building HQCs, as defined by Dutton, are trusting, playing, respectful engagement, and task enabling. Trust is one of the core foundations of relationships in both business and interpersonal dynamics. From a workplace perspective, trust is a key factor in the cohesion of a workplace team, with manager-employee trust being a significant factor in the success of working relationships (Krot & Lewicka, 2012). One must have a trusted and vulnerable relationship within the workplace in order to develop a sense of psychological safety and to let one's guard

down. It is critical to the well-being of an organization that there are factors of trust present within the workforce, within tiers of the hierarchy, and to varying degrees between the organization itself and its people. Having a grounded trust relationship can open the door to connection and relationship building and leave both parties feeling that they are believed in and seen for the capability that they bring to the team. Trust is a very necessary affirmation of a person's value, contribution, and work ethic, and is vital within an organizational context.

Play is another deeply important facet of working relationships. Play in the workplace can enhance creativity and productive problem solving without risking a drawback of productivity, making it an invaluable resource for organizations suffering from a deficit of expansive thought (West et al., 2016). It is important, though, that this playful nature of work be oriented towards the well-being of the workforce. When play is used as a productivity tool for the aim of furthering the output of the organization, rather than seen as a way to enhance the lives of those who it may serve, it can backfire and be met with cynicism and distrust (Everett, 2011). Play, laughter, silliness, etc. all add an air of levity to what can otherwise be for some a crushing and overbearing experience of being in the workplace. Not only is laughter good for well-being and the workplace context (Mathew & Vijayalakshmi, 2017), but laughter has also been shown as another pathway to building and nourishing high-quality interpersonal connections (Cooper & Sosik, 2012). There has been extensive research around the necessity of play for developing interpersonal relationships, the benefits of laughter in personal and collective well-being, and the contributing factors of levity in combating stressors, but the important area of focus here is on relationship building, and the key takeaway is simple; laughing with one's colleagues help nourish personal relationships and deepen bonds.

Laughter is another contributor to the creation of HQCs, as research has shown that laughing together and sharing moments of levity and joy can help induce vulnerability and create an authentic shared space between members of a workforce (Cooper & Sosik, 2012). This is similar to the research on play, but more targeted and specific to the experience of laughter. Laughter isn't just conducive to HQCs and interpersonal relationships, though. Laughter can increase both physical and mental health, and contributes to well-being across many different metrics (Bennett & Lengacher, 2008).

Respecting one's colleagues is not only a key contributing means for developing HQCs in the workplace, but it is an important means of conveying value and appreciation for one's colleagues and teammates. Dutton and Stephens (2012) lay out the necessity of approaching workplace interactions with respect. What this means is creating an experience of being valued and appreciated as an equal, a colleague, and a contributing member of the community for the person with whom you are interacting. This has important implications for creating a sense of belonging as well, as it nourishes the sense that one's contributions to community and to others are seen and valued, and affirms one's value to the group as a whole. From an interpersonal standpoint, this makes perfect sense, but the elements of respect that are drawn upon for this narrative are below surface level. Respect (very much like trust) is an affirmation of the value that one brings to a team or organization, and can nourish a sense of embeddedness and belonging to the organization as a whole (Ng, 2016). People want to feel valued by their colleagues. They want to feel seen for their contributions and held as a valued member of a team. This is as much a part of any organizational development toolkit as it is a pillar of the HQC framework. Creating a culture of respect in one's workplace is a crucial part of nourishing High-Quality Connections, and, in turn, a culture of belonging.

The fourth ingredient to HQCs, as directed by Dutton and Stephens (2012), is task enabling. Task enabling is the practice of supporting and enabling the success of one's colleagues in their tasks and whatever it is that they are taking on that they can be supported in. This can be professional tasks, personal tasks, or even relationship building. Task enabling can encourage included parties to feel cared about, looked out for, and respected. Task enabling can be created by using collaborative workplace technologies, implementing group goals or group projects, or simply by creating a culture of respect and reciprocity (Baker & Dutton, 2006). Task enabling helps to nurture a culture of belonging by creating the sense within those involved that their successes are shared, and that when they succeed, the whole team succeeds. Task enabling can also help people feel like those around them have their back, and that they are not alone in their workplace or community, but that there are others around them who support and encourage them.

Another important ingredient in High-Quality Connections, as expanded upon by researchers, is gratitude, and engaging in a regular practice of gratitude amongst oneself and one's colleagues can deeply help reinforce a culture of connection and belonging (Chhajer & Dutta, 2021). Gratitude is a staple of positive psychology, and is one of the most significant things one can do to uphold and uplift one's relationships (Algoe et al., 2008). Incorporating practices of gratitude into interpersonal relationships can help people feel seen, appreciated, and valued for their authentic self. In this particular context, though, it is important to recognize the value contribution that gratitude makes to building HQCs and how that can be deployed in a workplace setting to help nourish those relationships and connections. From a positive psychology standpoint, gratitude offers a deep and direct pathway to well-being through active appreciation of the blessings and abundance of one's life, and research has shown that active

practice of gratitude can boost well-being quickly and effectively (Wood et al., 2010). Gratitude can deepen relationships, as discussed above, can enrich one's life, and should be viewed as one of the most fundamental tools in the building of a culture of belonging.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative inquiry, created by David Cooperrider, is a vehicle for organizational change that uses assessment of the strengths of an organization and its members to contemplate strategies for maximizing positive impact moving forward. Appreciative inquiry focusses on an abundance based ideology, rather than deficit based, and celebrates team members for their contributions instead of critiquing them where they may be able to contribute more. The deficit mindset stems more from the idea of looking for problems and trying to find creative solutions to address them, whereas appreciative inquiry takes a methodological approach in which one appreciates the best of what is, imagines what it might be, designs what it should be, and creates what it will be (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000). This approach, particularly the "appreciate" step, leans into the celebration and contribution that the practice of gratitude can make to a workplace, and explores means of being grateful for the contributions being made by each person. The difference between a deficit based mindset and an abundance based mindset can be the difference between surviving and truly thriving, and is a core contributor to a positive mentality (Linley et al., 2010).

Appreciative inquiry as a tool is multifaceted and offers the opportunity to achieve a number of goals if dedicated to it. In particular for my context, it provides an excellent pathway to building belonging in organizations. Utilizing the methodology laid out below, appreciative

inquiry can help an organization take stock of the value of its members and use a company-wide gratitude assessment to see all of the ways that people contribute to the organization. This can help nourish belonging by giving the opportunity for people to feel valued and appreciated by their organization, and to feel respected and seen for their contribution. By contributing respect to one another, this tool also helps lay the groundwork for the building of HQCs and sets organizations up for interpersonal success. If utilized properly (details below), Appreciative Inquiry can be a direct line to crafting cultures of belonging in the workplace.

Cooperrider's model of Appreciative Inquiry revolves around four major strategies for positive change: Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000). Discovery is the part of the model where participants appreciate their strengths and successes, and appreciate themselves and their teams for what they have accomplished. This is where gratitude plays a major role in assessing everyone's contribution, and where the abundance over deficit mindset comes into the strongest play. In the Discovery step one can ask questions about where the strengths of an organization, team or project come through and how things are succeeding in their current form. This positive evaluation of a community's assets helps to nourish a sense of contribution for those who are making the organization's mission possible. In the Dream step, one moves on to looking at what could be, imagining what kind of impact the organization, team or project could have, including what kind of impact each person might potentially have on that organization. Dreamers evaluate what the world needs, what could be contributed if the company was running at its most effective cadence, and what extraordinary opportunities there are for growth and impact on the world (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2011).

In the Design phase, one takes the best of the past (discovery) and the best of the future (dream) and goes on to prototype possibilities of what could be, in line with the stated goals or

outcomes of the process. For example if, as is relative to the rest of my work, the goal of Appreciative Inquiry was to help nourish a culture of belonging, this would be the phase in which those conducting the inquiry would try and design a workplace that reflects a strong sense of belonging. Within this phase they might be prototyping belongingness interventions that would leverage their existing strengths and work towards the vision of the future they'd articulated. They might design what a dream workplace could look like if everything in the process went perfectly. Within this phase they may imagines using scales of measurement like the POM, PSOM, or POE to evaluate where members of the organization are at in their experience of belonging, how they would set benchmarks for where they would like people to be, and what kind of action planning processes they might take to get there. This phase is all about going from dreams to reality and postulating on what the bridge between the two can look like in practice.

Then there is Destiny. The Destiny phase of Appreciative Inquiry looks like taking the designs, choosing what ideas you want to bring to life, and planning the path to see them realized. Within this phase participants may take the interventions that were prototyped on a small scale and level them up to be put in place across the entire organization. This is the broader action phase, in which participants zero in on the actions that they wish to take that create the highest degree of engagement and excitement in members of the organization. This is also the phase where establishing a clear measurement strategy is so important. If an organization did decide to utilize one of the scales to assess belonging, they might be deliberate about taking a baseline measure, then surveying again after the execution of interventions to determine whether their targeted culture change had any impact on improving their experience of belonging.

Depending on the intervention there will be different strategies for measurement, but whatever they are, this is when they are realized. This part of the process is where the dreams come to life.

Next Steps

Taking into consideration all of the existing literature on the necessity of creating cultures of belonging in the workplace and how much of a contribution it makes to the well-being of all parties involved, it is now time to explore possibilities of what comes next, what can emerge atop the research that has already been conducted, what future research may be needed, and how we can utilize existing scientific knowledge to tailor interventions for any given work force. The next portion of this paper will focus on interventions and strategies that one can implement when trying to nourish a culture of belonging in one's workforce. The approach that I have constructed focuses on two main target populations within an organization: the leadership tier, and the employee community. Based on what I have learned from the Appreciative Inquiry approach, I have concluded that in order to effectively cultivate an environment of belonging and inclusion, one must create high-quality connections at all levels of an organization in order to thoroughly build nourishing community throughout, and reduce the strain of hierarchy on teams such that all members of a workforce feel that they have a measurable contribution to make to the organizational goals (which is also accomplished by cultivating HQCs throughout the breadth of an organization).

The interventions that I have included here will be geared towards creating high-quality connections, creating a sense of ownership of the work being done by all members of a team, deepening an active practice of gratitude, enriching self-expression, and encouraging playfulness in the workplace. Seeing as how there is deep interplay between many of these concepts, the interventions will overlap in which of the value points they touch on. For example, gratitude

interventions can do a lot to nurture HQCs, and can also help springboard an Appreciative Inquiry very effectively. Play and laughter interventions can help both the creation of HQCs and also help facilitate personal well-being and physical health (Gonot-Schoupinsky et al., 2020). Similarly, meditation interventions can help nourish belonging, and self-reflection can help one deepen their relationship with those around them (Chisman & Brooks, 2018). One of the exciting things about the field of belonging and interpersonal connection is that there is a huge overlap between interpersonal relationships and community well-being, and many of the interventions that are aimed towards personal growth and reflection can also serve communities and the experience of belonging greatly if tailored for the circumstances.

The first intervention that I suggest for enriching a sense of organizational belonging is engaging in an active practice of gratitude, which can open the door to both HQCs and Appreciative Inquiry. As referenced previously, gratitude is a powerful tool for nourishing high-quality connections, and can deepen interpersonal relationships immensely. From the standpoint of the leadership level, expressions of gratitude can help create a sense of value and being appreciated amongst employees (one of the foundational elements of high-quality connections) and demonstrate to them that they are seen for the contributions that they make and respected for what they contribute (Di Fabio et al., 2017). This touches on the Discovery facet of the appreciative inquiry toolkit and opens the door for examining growth areas within a container of appreciation. An active gratitude practice can take many forms, and my suggestion for its execution is that it be touched on at all levels of an organization. Research has shown that an active practice of gratitude can help facilitate the experience of belonging to one's surrounding community, and that focusing in on an abundance mindset can be beneficial on the road to building belonging (Qin et al., 2015).

On the interpersonal level, gratitude practices should be done in both dyadic interactions or team connections. Both practices touch on the Discovery phase of Appreciative Inquiry and require participants to reflect on the contributions that their teammates make to both themselves and the team as a whole. Dyadic interactions can help create and deepen high-quality connections, as noted in the research above. These should be executed by pairing colleagues and offering them the opportunity to reflect on how the person they are paired with makes a contribution to them, to the organizational community, and to the world, in whatever way they see contribution being made. In an intervention that I crafted for my service learning partner, participants were given a week to connect with their gratitude sharing partner, during which time they were guided to pay close attention to the contributions that that person made to the organization and themselves (Baccash et al., 2022). At the end of that time, they would have the chance to share their reflection with their partner, focusing on the contributions that they see that person make to the community as a whole, and then also how they felt personally enriched by that person. Within this interaction, the pair has the opportunity to form a connection that can enrich both their professional and personal lives, and further solidify a sense of belonging.

From the group standpoint, sharing gratitude for others on one's team, and for the work being done by the team as a whole, can help nourish a sense of belonging within a group (Qin et al., 2015). For this practice, I encourage team leaders to offer a structured space in which team members can share their gratitude to the team as a whole, to their team leaders, and for the organization at large. This practice can help groups get to know each other better, see what's important to them, and help understand and align with their values. Getting aligned with the purpose of one's teammates can help build team cohesion and nourish a sense of belonging in the same way that having one's purpose aligned with that of their employer is good for well-being

and a sense of belonging (Esfahani-Smith, 2017). This practice can also help colleagues understand what parts of being on a team are valuable to one another and can give them each insight into ways that they can contribute to one another's well-being by highlighting and leaning into those areas. Above all else, though, having a collective sense of gratitude and appreciation creates value for both the individuals and the organization as a whole, elevating well-being and paving the way for deepening of high-quality connections (Müceldili et al., 2015).

A group gratitude practice is an excellent springboard into the Discovery phase of Appreciative Inquiry. Taking time to appreciate the value of one's team and look at all of the things that they have accomplished together, in addition to being a building block of nourishing high-quality connections, can also be folded into the Discovery phase of Appreciative Inquiry. In the Destiny phase, the team can take the momentum that they have generated from evaluating all of the ways that they are successful together and make contributions to one another and look forward at what's possible, what kind of obstacles they can overcome together, and what kind of challenges they may be able to face as a unit when implementing the projects that have emerged through the appreciative inquiry process. Taking on tasks together and facing collective challenges can stimulate a sense of belonging to the team one is working with, and help people feel like they have partnership in the work they are doing. This is an excellent way for team members to practice task-enabling, another building block of HQCs. Giving teams collaborative projects, group goals, and collective inquiry can all help deepen HQCs by fostering task-enabling and respectful interpersonal dynamics (Baker & Dutton, 2006).

These practices of gratitude and the first stages of an Appreciative Inquiry help line up personal purpose as well. Feeling like one's drive and the meaning in one's work are aligned with the missions and goals of an organization are major contributors to happiness and well-

being in the workplace, and add immensely to organizational longevity and commitment (Madrigal et al., 2018). Having alignment of purpose at work can contribute to overall happiness and life satisfaction. Kawachi and Lee give some support for operating upon purpose driven work in their 2019 piece in which they examine the happiness levels of individuals based on their priority of particular values (Lee & Kawachi, 2019). While their research is geared primarily towards the correlations of values and happiness, their results demonstrate that when one operates in alignment with their personal principles, they are more inclined to be happy and fulfilled. Ann Ewbank also examined the influence of core value alignment in her 2011 paper in which she observed the tendencies of librarians to stay on with their employers if said employers were actively abiding by their organizational core values and practicing their decided upon principles in their day-to-day work (Ewbank, 2011).

The last stage of this Appreciative Inquiry, built on the foundation of gratitude practice and sharing, is the Destiny phase, in which the team begins to execute on their plans for their future. This is perhaps the most agentic element of the process, as it sees the participants begin to bring their skills and co-working prowess to life to actually create the change they wish to see in the world. If the process is done properly, this pipeline from gratitude to action can help nourish high-quality interpersonal connections, reinforce organizational commitment and a sense of organizational membership, and increase the overall well-being of those who take part. When team members feel that they are a part of the organization as a whole, and see a sign of collective identity through their mutual struggles and collective victories, they are strongly likely to feel that they belong to something bigger than themselves, and cultivate a sense of belonging in their workplace. In order to see the gratitude intervention through, the organization must also see the Appreciative Inquiry through.

The next recommendation that I have for an intervention to increase HQCs and a sense of belonging focuses on playfulness. Many of the ways that we create joy and connection in our lives are learned and cultivated in childhood, and we lose much of this to the conversation of appropriateness and maturity. Friedrich Nietzche (1907) once said that "maturity [is] to have regained the seriousness that [one] had as a child at play" (pg. 49). Much of our work lives are devoid of playfulness and laughter, causing us to feel crushed by the seriousness of life at times, when the truth is that bringing playfulness into our daily lives not only deepens interpersonal connection and HQCs but improves well-being and personal life satisfaction (West et al., 2016). Bringing a sense of play into the workplace can enhance creativity and deepen team cohesion (Mathew & Vijayalakshmi, 2017). The next series of intervention I suggest involve playfulness and laughter and are designed to bring levity and joy to the workplace. Much like with the other interventions, it is a good practice to offer participants evaluations of their sense of belonging and connection both before and after to gauge the effectiveness of them in your own workplace. Different communities respond differently to interventions, and, much like with other positive psychology interventions, it is important to find the best fit for each community in order to get the best effect (Lyubomirsky, 2008).

There are many different ways to elicit laughter and play in the workplace. My recommendation is to prioritize utilizing known interventions and means of creating a space of laughter and levity. That said, there are some methods that may be successfully deployed in an organizational setting. Play can look like many things to many people, and one of the first things to consider when designing or deploying play interventions is to ask community members what brings them joy. This can be a very valuable fact-finding mission, and it can also leave people feeling respected and listened to. As was touched on above, play is one of the ingredients of

HQCs, so supporting habits of play amongst an organizational community can help nourish these connections, which in turn, helps a sense of belonging flourish. Additionally, asking people what's important to them and getting to know them better in a context that goes beyond simply assessing their workplace value can create respectful engagement, another key piece of the HQC equation. It can also help create common ground when people discover shared interests and commonalities in what makes them laugh and feel playful. All this to say, the first intervention for discovering how people like to play and what makes them laugh is to ask them.

Self-expression is a major contributor to well-being, and also an excellent vehicle for play (Al-Khouja et al., 2022). Creating different environments for organizational community members to stand in their self-expression can be a very playful practice. This has been effective across a wide variety of circumstances, such as talent shows, creative sharing spaces, open dress codes, encouraging community members to decorate their desks and offices, and more. Self-expression is most nourishing when it is authentic, and it is deeply important to create space for people's authentic expression within the workplace instead of calling them to wear a façade that may actually do more harm than good (Bailey et al., 2020). Self-expression takes many forms, be it music, art, clothing, hobbies, performance, etc. Encouraging self-expression starts with leading by example, and leaders who wish to encourage an expressive workplace should lean into their own desired forms of self-expression, be it clothing, office décor, or whatever feels good and authentic. Clothing is a particularly valuable form of self-expression, and has an influence on well-being in and of itself (Kim & Lee, 1999). Leading by example is a good way to start creating a more expressive culture, but there are other ways that leaders can help cultivate self-expression in the workplace, that have the added benefit of being playful.

Intentional non-work-related community gatherings within the workplace can be very impactful on community relationships and can also be a great opportunity to bring some fun into work. This can look like creative sharing opportunities in which people can share their music, art, and other talents with the rest of the community. Engaging in the arts and humanities can be deeply impactful for well-being, and can deepen relationships by strengthening empathy and interpersonal connectivity (Fitzgerald & Green, 2022). To this end, office book clubs are another excellent means of connecting and deepening a sense of community that can result in a stronger experience of belonging within one's workplace (Petrich, 2015). This can extend to out further, though, to things like talent shows, art shows, and even game nights/afternoons. Regardless of the medium, self-expression is contributory to well-being, play helps form HQCs, and engaging in the positive humanities nourishes well-being, so be sure to find the best fit for your organization and don't be afraid to try out different things. Every intervention won't work the same for every person, this is the principle behind Lyubomirsky's (2008) person-activity fit model. That said, if it is an intentional community connection that enrolls members of your workforce, it will have a positive impact.

These types of interventions can begin to become difficult when taking into consideration the isolation factor that Covid has contributed, and the extent to which teams are distanced by remote work and the increasing global structures of organizations. This does not mean that it is impossible to maintain and create these kinds of valuable connections, and there are ways to employ HQC building strategies on digital platforms that can nourish a sense of belonging (Atkins et al., 2021). In some cases, it's the little things. One study demonstrates that utilizing the chat function or other social elements of remote platforms can help nourish a sense of belonging to the community, highlighting the importance of casual and informal interaction

amongst members of a team in a remote work environment (Hafermalz & Riemer, 2016).

Communication goes deeper than the casual, though, and teaching strategies for how to

communicate as members of a shared space can be a very valuable intervention to be

implemented by leadership. This can look like authentic communication coaching using tools

from the Authentic Relating movement or bringing in coaches who specialize in communication

skills to teach team members to speak more from a shared identity. The point here is not to force

people to communicate if they do not want to, but rather to offer them different ways of looking

at their communications that can make them feel more nourishing and valuable as members of a

team.

Another strategy for creating virtual communities is to encourage and facilitate the

creation of virtual employee resource groups, or ERGs. ERGs are likeminded, identity driven

communities in which people who share certain aspects of themselves, can connect in

likeminded ways and build community with those who are similar to them. ERGs do not have to

be exclusive, and members can belong to any number of them. Research on virtual communities

has demonstrated that when people share spaces that require commonalities for membership (in

the case of this research it was online gaming communities) there is the capacity to develop very

real community and a very nourishing sense of belonging to something bigger than oneself

(Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006). This research also discusses the capacity of these spaces to

become a new type of "third place", a sociological concept which describes spaces in which

people gather for similar purposes but have the opportunity to be exposed to differing ideals in a

respectful context, as opposed to the echo chamber isolation model of modern social media

algorithms. Virtual ERGs can create a third place within a workplace community where people

with similar but not identical viewpoints and identities can gather and get to know one another, discuss their experience of sharing that identity, and support one another in a meaningful way.

There is extensive evidence supporting the capacity of virtual communities to connect people and create a sense of belonging when done properly. One such piece of evidence addresses the value created in the LGBTQ+ community in the wake of the 2016 Orlando shooting, and how a whole identity group came together to grieve, discuss, and hold space for one another's experience from afar (Jackson, 2017). This study explores the nature of virtual identity groups and the way that they can help one another heal and grow. While obviously this example is in response to a heartbreaking tragedy, it still highlights the value that can be contributed to communities by engaging on a virtual platform. Moreover, in a world plagued with social identity threat, doing more to uplift and support historically marginalized communities is deeply necessary, and can convey to those communities that their team and their organization is committed to their well-being and growth. Actions like creating ERGs and giving a voice to the historically voiceless can make a massive contribution to the sense of belonging felt in an organization by both those being uplifted by these actions directly, and those who take pride in their organization's commitment to equity and inclusion.

One of the biggest contributors to feeling a sense of belonging within virtual community spaces is having trust (Blanchard & Markus, 2002). In addition to being an essential ingredient for high-quality connections, trust is critical for creating a sense of belonging in community, and the virtual world is no different (K.-A. Allen et al., 2021). As with every intervention in this paper, the aim of creating a virtual communal space as I suggest it is to nurture a sense of inclusion and belonging among members of an organization. There are many different ways to build trust, but one of the most critical ways to do so is to safely express vulnerability within a

community (Hogg, 2007). To this end, when curating a workplace virtual community, leaders ought to set a precedent and once again lead by example in the form of expressing vulnerability and demonstrating to their community that they, too, are human. Demonstrating vulnerability, and more importantly creating trust, in leadership can inspire community members to share vulnerably, and can make organizational leaders more accessible and able to have better working relationships, which, in turn, inspires a sense of belonging in organizations (Krot & Lewicka, 2012).

Limitations

As with any scientific endeavor, it is of vital importance to evaluate the limitations of what I have suggested here, as well as the limitations of the concepts as a whole. The first limitation that I must acknowledge within my own work and suggestions is that, while many of my interventions are based on similar work and reasonably comparable interventions, the ones that I have suggested are my own creations, substantiated by research, but largely undeployed. I make note many times of the necessity of flexibility and adaptiveness in crafting and implementing these suggestions because it is important to view what I have laid out here as waypoints towards a culture of belonging, not as gospel. Further examination of the value of these interventions should be executed along with their implementation to see what creates the most value for your organization.

Another limitation to the works that I suggest is the infancy of the study of belonging. While Maslow's Hierarchy suggested the need to belong as a fundamental human need, the science that explores the human need to belong to something bigger than oneself and the value that it contributes to well-being is still relatively new and is expanding in scope and validity every day. While I stand behind my suggestions, it is important that if one is seeking to create a

culture of belonging in their workplace, that they examine the new research, newly created interventions, and rapidly emerging ideas within the field of study that is the psychology of belonging. As with any cutting-edge science, even the most effective ideas can be refined and improved upon by research and new data that emerges.

Going along with the above is a limitation that is present in much of positive psychology. Sample sizes and the scope of most research could be broader in order to demonstrate a higher degree of validity. While this does not undermine the value of the research or the concepts upon which it is based, this also factors in to the above point about the evolution of the field and how it will constantly grow and change. Positive psychology interventions can be very effective without necessarily having large experimental groups, but some may not view this as such, and the new and expansive nature of the field may provide fodder for skeptics. This is not an invalid viewpoint, and those who doubt the value of these interventions and this science may wish to utilize more heavily researched ideas or practices. This will be true of not only this topic (belonging), but of much of positive psychology. Skeptics of the science will likely require further scientific convincing.

Conclusion

In this piece I have given a brief overview of my own passion for the study and practice of building belonging, a cursory introduction to the science of positive psychology, a review of some of the most pertinent research and existing interventions in circulation for creating nourishing cultures of belonging in the workplace, and my own crafted, research-informed interventions for how to maximize community and belonging in your workplace. The study of belonging is one that has become more and more prevalent in the modern scientific conversation, as well as in organizational psychology and business development conversations. As the research

continues to be done and refined, it will become more and more clear that having a culture of belonging in the workplace is a necessity for organizational well-being. My goal with this body of work is to make this science and these ideas more easily digestible so that I can better spread the message of the value of belongingness.

Belonging is defined as strong, stable interpersonal relationships in which there are frequent, non-aversive interactions within an ongoing relationship (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). It is a fundamental human need that spans interpersonal necessities, evolutionary development, and collective well-being. Community doesn't just enrich lives, though, it can save them. As I described in the very beginning of this paper, my life was in complete wreckage at the age of 20. When I entered the 12-step community, I didn't feel l had a place, an identity, or a future. They held me, and loved me until I could learn to walk again. The love and support I received from that community forever changed my life for the better, and set me on the path of researching, teaching, and building belonging. Through my time with MAPP I have learned a few key things about how to do just that.

I've learned about high-quality connections, and how having reverent, reciprocal, and supportive interpersonal relationships can enrich one's wellbeing. I've learned about how Appreciative Inquiry can be utilized with gratitude as a springboard to help solidify the communal nature of an organization. I've learned about the importance of play, laughter, and self-expression in building relationships and community, as well as in nurturing a personal sense of well-being. From these learnings I have crafted my own ideas for how to best embrace those relationships in a way that can strengthen communities and push them from surviving to fully thriving. It is my hope that these ideas can help inspire organizational leaders to vitalize their communities and embrace the human need to belong.

In a world that has been rocked by distance and isolation, particularly in the last two and a half years, but even more broadly throughout the lifespan of social technologies, these principles and practices are more important than ever. With workforces spread all over the world, people becoming acclimated to working from their homes, and remote learning and working slowly becoming the norm, rather than the exception, it is vital to embrace the idea of belonging and to build bigger communities. There is a saying that when one has more, one should not build bigger walls, but instead a bigger table. Our collective well-being can be a thing of celebration and can enrich the lives of millions and more around the world if we turn towards the idea of lifting each other up and celebrating our similarities instead of tearing one another down and seeking out differences. It is my deepest wish for you, the reader, that this work, these concepts, and the field of positive psychology as a whole inspires you to bring more around you into your sphere and to seek out ways to enrich the lives of those who cross your path. We are stronger together, and there is great beauty to be found in what we co-create. I hope that you can take some of what I have written here out with you into the world and use it as the foundation on which to build your bigger table, and I hope that all of the seats around it are someday filled.

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