HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES AND HELPING IN ORGANIZATIONS: A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES AND HELPING IN ORGANIZATIONS: A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes linkages between human resource (HR) practices and individual helping behavior. HR practices are expected to influence the nature of relationships and the character of helping within organizations. We suggest certain sets of HR practices promote relational climates that vary in terms of the depth of relationships formed between individuals. By considering the correspondence between practices and their respective relational climates, a better understanding of expectations and outcomes associated with helping can emerge.
At the heart of theoretical and empirical work on helping behavior in organizations is the notion that organizations often depend on such behaviors to deal with non-routine aspects of work. Helping behavior has been investigated under various guises (e.g., Flynn, 2006; LePine & Van Dyne, 2001; Settoon & Mossholder, 2002), all of which involve cooperative support and assistance for individuals in need. It is a robust predictor of group and organizational performance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000), and has become more important in light of movement toward greater employee involvement (e.g., Morgan & Zeffane, 2003), interactive work structures (e.g., Frenkel & Sanders, 2007), and the development of social capital within organizations (e.g., Adler & Kwon, 2002). As helping behavior involves an agentic process through which individuals positively affect others, much organizational research has sought to identify its critical dispositional and situational antecedents. Less work has been devoted toward establishing broader mechanisms organizations can use to harness these antecedents (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006). Thus, although current research offers guidance regarding individual level influences on helping behavior, it is less informative as to how organizations should promote and integrate helping behavior among employees.

In this paper, we propose a template that uses strategic human resource (HR) practices as the conceptual mechanism for integrating helping behavior within organizations. Our basic premise is that by establishing conceptual linkages between HR practices and forms of employee helping behaviors, a more coherent understanding of how helping behavior may be facilitated is possible. Strategic HR scholars (e.g., Collins & Smith, 2006) have argued that through appropriate HR practices, organizations can influence employee behaviors and establish social capital as a potential source of competitive advantage (e.g., Evans & Davis, 2005). However, HR practices most often have been examined in the aggregate and in connection with firm level outcomes rather than individual level behaviors like helping. Although such work provides a conceptual basis for considering helping behavior, it is less useful in uncovering intervening mechanisms and processes that characterize and encourage helping. Indeed, Gerhart (2005) suggested strategic HR researchers need to focus more attention on the individual, rather than the
firm, level and address HR’s influence on employee relationships. Similarly, Becker and Huselid (2006) argued research must begin emphasizing the implementation of HR practices and differentiating among practices directed toward specific employees.

A meso level approach (Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005) is used in this paper to reveal points of congruency between bundles of HR practices and the types of helping behaviors they may encourage. This approach emphasizes helping exchanges within specified types of relational climates associated with HR practices. *Relational climate* refers to employee perceptions and appraisals of policies, practices, and behaviors that foster and support interpersonal relationships and exchanges among employees. We suggest varying relational climates may be found in organizations, as has been the case for other facet-specific climates like service, safety, and ethics (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009). For example, employees may feel encouraged to form close ties in one organization, whereas in another they may develop relationships that are guarded and tenuous.

Because helping is inherently relational, understanding salient features of the socio-cognitive environment surrounding helping behavior could provide insights regarding its facilitation. Penner et al. (2005) suggested that conceptualizing prosocial behaviors within relational climates may make more apparent how facets of helping differ, depending on the climate in which individual relationships are formed. Employing tenets of relational models theory (Fiske, 1992), we first describe a range of relational climates that vary in terms of the antecedents and enactment of helping. We then argue, in line with structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), that HR practices may be delineated in ways such that certain HR practice bundles could be expected to encourage and sustain certain relational climates. Finally, for each relational climate, we offer propositions regarding fundamental characteristics of helping behavior likely to emerge.

**INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND HR PRACTICES**

The decision to help is affected by a stream of evaluations that flow from relationships (Ames, Flynn, & Weber, 2004) and influence present and future helping exchanges (Deckop,
Cirka, & Andersson, 2003). Individuals determine the relevance of their helping behavior in part based on the problems and resolution opportunities afforded by their interpersonal circumstances. As antecedents of helping, relational variables show promise for explaining significant incremental variance over traditional predictors (Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007). This suggests that managers seeking to influence the frequency and magnitude of helping exchanges in the organization should be aware of the broader relational climates in which their employees work. We offer that a principal means by which managers affect the relational climate of the organization is through the application of appropriate HR practices. Empirical support for this notion has begun to surface. For example, Collins and Smith (2006) have shown that HR practices emphasizing employee commitment were positively related with climates for trust, cooperation, and knowledge sharing across a sample of high technology firms. Elsewhere, Takeuchi, Lepak, Wang, and Takeuchi (2007) noted that HR practices congruent with high involvement work systems promoted employee perceptions of a social exchange relationship with the organization, which should boost the level of help exchanged between employees. Finally, Sun, Aryee, and Law (2007) found high performance HR practices were positively correlated with firm-level service-oriented citizenship behavior, and suggested that such behavior should be accompanied by norms that encourage helping exchanges among organization members.

A Range of Relational Climates

The first step in linking HR practices and helping behavior is to differentiate relational climates in which certain forms of helping behavior are likely found. Resolving the dilemma of whether to extend help and its appropriate form depends on the socio-cognitive context in which the need for help arises. We propose that relational models theory (Fiske, 1992) provides a means of distinguishing such contexts. This theory posits four distinct relational forms – *market pricing*, *equality matching*, *communal sharing*, and *authority ranking*. Examined within a number of disciplines, these forms describe interpersonal activities such as how people understand and motivate each other in their relationships (Fiske & Haslam, 2005). Because our
focus is on help exchanged between individuals of similar hierarchical status, and authority ranking addresses exchanges between partners of differing power status, we excluded this form from consideration. The relational forms comprise varying fundamental attitudes, perceptions, expectations, and behaviors that individuals share regarding interpersonal relations, and as such, can be viewed broadly as representing distinguishable relational climates. For present purposes, we use market pricing, equality matching, and communal sharing in reference to specific types of relational climates. We posit that prototypical kinds of helping behavior will be associated with these relational climates. Relationship qualities associated with market pricing, equality matching, and communal sharing relational climates are now briefly characterized.

Relationships occurring in a market pricing climate are predicated largely on means-ends considerations, lasting as long as both parties derive instrumental benefits. Consistent with game-theoretic perspectives, individuals in market pricing climates are guided by a desire to make the most of personal resources by comparing alternatives and engaging in relationships that appear to offer the best cost-benefit ratio (Murnighan, 1994). Merit is the primary means by which status is achieved. Thus, interpersonal access in market pricing contexts is open to all competent participants. The decision to help may have more to do with self-interest than friendship or moral responsibility, and may tacitly convey an impression that the help-giver is more capable than others and is willing to share these capabilities (Bolino, 1999; Rioux & Penner, 2001).

In equality matching climates, relationships are founded on egalitarianism and turn taking. Imbalances between partners are undesirable, so matching the others’ contributions over time is a cardinal principle. Such relationships reflect social exchange theory notions that gestures of goodwill will be reciprocated over time (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), and thus have ramifications for future exchanges. Relations in equality matching climates concern direct and indirect needs of exchange partners, and are judged in social and economic terms. In organizations, behaviors such as providing support or sharing knowledge are ideal wares for exchange because they can be readily extended or withheld. Individuals seek evenhanded
resolutions of task-related and interpersonal problems, and attach importance to reciprocity in relationships (Buunk, Doosje, Jans, & Hopstaken, 1993; Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994).

Relationships in a communal sharing climate are based on the concept of equivalence and marked by a sense of solidarity. Group members focus on commonalities and blur individual distinctions in interactions over time. The personal welfare of the other party is considered significant and underlies the basis for exchanges. Thus, individuals tend to be committed to ensuring others’ well-being and are responsive to others’ needs as a matter of course, even if this is at the expense of their personal goals. For employees in communal sharing climates, helping is a by-product of high quality relations (Anderson & Williams, 1996), affiliative feelings (McAllister, 1995) and empathic concern (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002).

**HR Practices as Helping Behavior Structures**

Connecting firm and individual level variables is necessary to examine the effects of strategic HR practices on helping behavior, and Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory is a viable means for doing so. Scholars have begun to use this theory in positing how structural features of an organization are intertwined with employee actions (e.g., Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006; Perlow, Gittell, & Katz, 2004; Toh, Morgeson, & Campion, 2008). Structuration involves the process by which a social system is sustained through members’ use of policies, rules, and resources, which act as “structures” that provide recipes for action taken by organization members. Employees rely partly on structures to operate effectively. Within different social systems, particular modes of social action may be viewed positively or negatively, which signals action appropriateness. Over time, structural properties of the social system are maintained only if the behaviors potentiated by the available action recipes are mobilized.

Through the lens of structuration theory, HR practice bundles can be viewed as coherent social structures. Toh et al. (2008) have noted that HR practices can transform the broader context for behavior in organizations, and then subsequently be affected by this transformation. Thus, it is reasonable to posit that differing HR practices will tend to mobilize different forms of helping behavior in organizations because they affect an emergent relational climate and
engender interactions that are appropriate therein. Cumulative episodes of particular forms of helping would, in turn, reinforce the very structures (i.e., sets of predominant HR practices) from which they arose. Over time, employees come to understand what helping behaviors are reasonable given the HR practices and relational climate in which they operate.

Because there has been some difficulty in developing a comprehensive taxonomy to account for the many variations in HR practices, Lepak, Bartol, and Erhardt (2005) suggested focusing on the purpose of HR practices rather than the practices per se. Using this notion as a guide, we examined the HR literature to determine how extant categorizations of practices might correspond with the relational perspective of helping behavior. Two contrasting alternatives have been widely discussed: compliance-based practices that feature short-term, individual exchange relations and commitment-based practices that feature mutual, long-term relations (e.g., Arthur, 1994; Collins & Smith, 2006; Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997; Zacharatos, Barling, & Iverson, 2005). Although an HR structure lying between these two extremes has not been formally identified, Lepak and Snell (1999) have discussed a collaboration-based configuration as a viable middle ground between compliance- and commitment-based HR practices. This configuration emphasizes primary investment in relationships (versus individuals) as well as cooperation and knowledge sharing. It facilitates employee exchanges of information and assistance, resulting in both individual and synergistic benefits.

We maintain that across organizations, the predominant form of helping behavior will correspond with a relational climate supported by a particular set of HR practices. As explained below, helping behavior associated with compliance-based HR practices is likely to take on characteristics encouraged by a market pricing climate. With collaborative-based HR practices, helping should be marked by features that flourish in an equality matching relational climate. And finally, commitment-based HR practices are most likely to sustain a communal sharing climate, thus helping behavior linked with such practices should bear attributes of communal sharing relationships. The overarching argument is when helping exchanges are aligned with the appropriate relational climates, relationships that are mutually beneficial to employees and
organizations involved should occur. Misalignment of behaviors and the climates could have the opposite effect, and lead to less beneficial exchanges and outcomes for the organization.

To organize our discussion, we focused on four categories of strategic HR practices: selection and staffing, training and development, work design features, and reward and appraisal systems. Although all possible HR practices are not discussed, these are ones that would certainly be expected to influence the relational climate of the organization in which employees operate. Furthermore, these practices have been considered by others as central HR concerns (e.g., Arthur, 1994; Beltrán-Martín, Roca-Puig, Escrig-Tena, & Bou-Llusar, 2008; Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006; Paré & Tremblay, 2007; Toh et al., 2008). Table 1 displays HR practices and the relational climates with which they are posited to correspond.

As will be clearer when connections between HR practices and relational climates are elaborated below, the general nature of employees’ helping interactions could be expected to vary across the climates. We suggest these differences should correspond with distinct motives for helping, which are amplified by norms that influence how employees gauge fairness in exchanges of help. Because helping exposes employees to real as well as perceived risks, mechanisms that increase the confidence one party has in the other increases the sustainability of relationships that are established. Trust development is one such mechanism (Malhotra, 2004), making it critical for successful helping exchanges. Thus, types of trust and accompanying identity orientations expected to emerge in the relational climates are also discussed.

**COMPLIANCE-BASED HR STRUCTURES AND HELPING WITHIN MARKET PRICING CLIMATES**

Compliance-based HR practices are generally described as having the goal of decreasing costs and increasing efficiency (Arthur, 1994; Tsui et al., 1997, Zacharatos, Barling, & Iverson, 2005), and are characterized by the use of well-defined work rules and operating procedures, and
a focus on measurable output criteria. Tsui et al. (1997) described compliance-based structures as emphasizing economic transactions in which organizations offer short-term inducements in return for specified contributions from individual employees.

Typical selection practices emphasize technical competence rather than individual person-organization fit. With an emphasis on efficient access to human capital, there is greater dependence on hiring from external sources and using non-standard employees (e.g., part-time or temporary workers) to acquire requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). Reliance on external labor markets also may reduce the overall level of perceived employment security within the organization. In combination, such practices result in fewer opportunities for employees to develop long-term work relationships. They also discourage close social interaction and increase the likelihood that a market pricing climate would flourish. Stamper and Van Dyne (2001) found that part-time employees engaged in fewer helping behaviors than did their full-time counterparts. This finding was attributed to fewer social inducements being available to part-time workers, which tended to focus their interest on gaining tangible rewards from the organization. Similarly, Broschak and Davis-Blake (2006) found that the proportion of non-standard employees in a work group was negatively associated with the amount of helping exhibited by standard and non-standard employees alike. The presence of non-standard workers can heighten competition for mobility opportunities and impose unwanted responsibilities (e.g., standard employees training non-standard workers). This may exacerbate equity concerns and promote instrumental behavior typical of market pricing climates.

Compliance-based training and development will tend to emphasize technical over social competence. If present at all, mentoring programs would involve control and efficiency considerations (e.g., see Evans, 1984), and focus on skills and abilities related to task accomplishment. Organizations likely would buy needed skills in the external market, turning to in-house development only when the preferred alternative is not available (e.g., in a tight labor market). As such, employee contributions and value will be interpreted largely within a human capital framework (Lepak & Snell, 1999), and their KSAs may even be viewed as commodities.
The emphasis on technical competence can protect against unsuccessful helping attempts. This is important because incompetent help would decrease the perceived utility of exchanges when recipients recognize their problems are not being resolved. Because requesting assistance in a market pricing climate could be interpreted by others in the organization as indicating a lack of self-reliance or ability (Anderson & Williams, 1996), discreetly extended help protects the recipient from harmful perceptions and provides an indication that conditional confidence expressed in the other party is not misplaced (Abrams, Cross, Lesser, & Levin, 2003).

Compliance-based work design practices that may encourage market pricing climates include designing work to be independent (i.e., as opposed to interdependent), clearly defined, and highly prescribed, such that employees have less autonomy or process involvement in the organization. When work primarily requires task independence, workers will tend to perceive less of a need to help one another. For example, Van der Vegt and Van de Vliert (2005) found that peer-rated helping decreased under conditions of low task interdependence. Also, when work tasks are relatively prescribed, employees need to share knowledge with others less often and can accomplish goals on their own. Likewise, where the predominant production technology does not encourage cooperative efforts (cf. Podsakoff, Ahearne, & MacKenzie, 1997) or the organizational culture emphasizes competition, individuals will use relative comparisons as standards when judging the value of helping.

Compliance-based structures tend to be characterized by greater pay dispersion because of an emphasis on quantifiable differences in employee outputs. This could create interpersonal competition for rewards (Shaw, Gupta, & Delery, 2002) and increase expectations that helping behavior lead to goal accomplishment. Indeed, Kang, Morris, and Snell (1997) argued that because there are few social inducements for in-kind reciprocity in such structures, helping is less likely to emerge unless explicitly rewarded. Thus, if a compliance-based organization wanted to encourage helping behavior, it might use formal rewards to do so. Supporting this idea, Podsakoff, Bommer, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie’s (2006) meta-analysis showed that contingent reward behavior by leaders is positively related to employee altruism. Reliance on
explicit rewards for helping behavior is consistent with a minimalist logic likely to be adopted by help-givers in market pricing climates (Bacharach et al., 2000). That is, help givers will attempt to satisfy others’ needs at a low cost and only in direct exchange for some benefit to themselves.

Finally, in compliance-based structures, performance feedback will be more evaluative than developmental, and it will emphasize technical competence over social fit. This emphasis reinforces employees’ desires to avoid appearing incapable and the need for discretion when help is sought. Employee goals established in the appraisal process are likely to be assigned and will tend to focus on measurable outcomes concerning individual rather than group accomplishment (Connelley & Folger, 2004). Such goals are also likely to be characterized more as performance rather than learning goals. Performance goals focus on outcomes rather than information sharing and knowledge acquisition (Seijts & Latham, 2005), and they may foster competitive social comparison (Heslin, 2005). As such, performance goals may constrain non-instrumental exchanges that otherwise would stimulate eventual helping relationships. Thus, compliance-based appraisal practices are likely to lead to a climate that supports restricted types of helping.

Helping Behavior and Compliance-Based HR Practices: Summary Propositions

Because relational climates encompass distinct forms of interpersonal relationships, we expect helping behavior found in a relational climate stimulated by compliance-based HR practices will vary from those associated with other sets of HR practices. To better convey potential differences, we briefly describe helping behavior prototypical of market pricing climates. For this purpose we use dimensions central to interpersonal relationships, and in turn offer broad propositions regarding them.

An undercurrent of self-concern will not necessarily constrain prosocial behavior, but does mean that it will be motivated by work attitudes, career issues, and job considerations of an instrumental nature (see e.g., De Dreu, 2006; Perlow & Weeks, 2002). The emphasis on technical competence and the importance of measurable outcomes in compliance-based structures likely will lead to help being exchanged primarily when it is discreet (e.g., expressly for use by the recipient) and utilitarian (e.g., a problem is sufficiently resolved). Such exchanges
will help sustain productive interpersonal relationships in market pricing climates because they fulfill minimal expectations for transient relationships (Sheppard & Sherman, 1998). When exchange partners evaluate the utility of help received, each weighs the distribution of outcomes. However, because equity is the norm by which fairness is evaluated in market pricing climates, the relative ratio of inputs and outputs of each person is the key consideration rather than some absolute amount. Close social interactions occur less because, on a daily basis, employees must be concerned with their own rather than others’ work goals and responsibilities. As such, judgments about the fairness of help exchanged are likely to be tied to the event level (Gillespie & Greenberg, 2005), meaning that each exchange event is assessed in terms of its instrumentality to the help giver. We therefore posit that with compliance-based HR practices,

Proposition 1a: Helping behavior is motivated by self-interest and perceived instrumentality.

Proposition 1b: Helping behavior is judged according to the norm of equity, and evaluated as fair when input-output ratios of exchange partners are perceived as similar.

An uppermost concern of help givers in market pricing climates is receiving an inadequate return on invested helping behavior. The benefits of receiving effective help are obvious, but may place the beneficiary in a dependent position (Bamberger, 2009). Helping coworkers can enhance personal and organizational status, but even successful help-givers may become over-burdened with responsibilities. Failed helping attempts can be costly to the help-giver in terms of personal embarrassment or decreased status. The lack of knowledge about others and accurate a priori assessments of the costs and rewards of helping are difficult, making relationships in market pricing climates less stable and more dependent on the outcomes of the last exchange. Because of the tenuous nature of interpersonal interactions in this climate, decisions to help will be based in part upon trust that is grounded in the direct benefits anticipated from the relationship. The threat of sanctions for trust violations and promise of rewards for expected behavior will be noticeable. Helping behavior that is reliable and sensitive to its possible downsides may mitigate uneasiness about the risks involved (Sheppard &
Sherman, 1998). When expectations about help-givers’ competence are validated, recipients will more likely view them as trustworthy. Such calculus-based trust (Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006) reduces the perceived risk of unfavorable returns from the helping relationship. This form of trust should be considered fragile because generally it exists when parties have less history of interpersonal exchange. Ineffective helping behavior may erode calculus-based trust because of reduced recipient confidence in the help-giver’s competence. Thus, in work climates influenced by compliance-based HR practices,

Proposition 1c: A principal risk of helping behavior is an insufficient return on invested behavior.

Proposition 1d: The type of trust most likely to develop between individuals who exchange helping behavior is calculus-based trust.

Broadly defined, identity is considered a self-referential description that informs individuals’ sense of who they are in relation to others in surrounding collectives. It assists individuals with self-expression (enacting core values and beliefs), self-continuity (maintaining self across time), and self-knowledge (accessing self with a particular context) (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Identity orientation is particularly pertinent for understanding helping in our three focal relational climates, as it reflects not only individuals’ own values and goals, but also their perceived roles in connection with specific or generalized others around them (Alpert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000). Social identity can influence behavior exhibited on behalf of one’s group, and be especially salient for extrarole behaviors like helping (Blader & Tyler, 2009). Given the motives, risks, and type of trust described in connection with a market pricing climate, it is likely that employees will assume a personal identity orientation (Flynn, 2005). Individuals with this orientation view their relationships in self-other terms, emphasize self-interest, and prefer to participate in negotiated exchanges to determine parity in giving and receiving help. They also base feelings of self-worth on evaluations of their own characteristics in comparison to others. Therefore, in work contexts influenced by compliance-based HR practices,
Proposition 1e: The type of identity orientation most likely to be held by individuals is a personal identity orientation.

COLLABORATIVE-BASED HR STRUCTURES AND HELPING WITHIN EQUALITY MATCHING CLIMATES

As noted, an intermediate HR structure lying between the compliance- and commitment-based approaches has not been formally identified. However, Lepak and Snell’s (1999) collaborative configuration integrates relationally salient elements from both. We thus draw from and expand their description of collaborative practices, focusing on arrangements that are internal to a single organization. Two key features of this structure are (1) investment in effectively functioning relationships as well as the individuals comprising them, and (2) an emphasis on cooperation and knowledge sharing among employees. Although practices associated with this structure use pre-determined policies and procedures to arrange work activities, they allow for flexible work design in producing valued outcomes. Organizational workflow and social systems accentuate interconnections between employees and promote exchanges of information and assistance to facilitate work flexibility. As such, employee exchanges encompass both relational and instrumental concerns, a mix common in equality matching climates.

Collaborative-based selection practices emphasize both technical and social criteria. When both are weighed in the selection process, employees can be more effective because they are more likely to possess KSAs needed for problem-solving as well as social skills required in offering and delivering assistance. When employees understand their work efforts affect those of others in accomplishing organizational goals, they can relate in more heedful ways and are more able and likely to provide help (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). Cooperative exchanges are facilitated by hiring employees who fit or can adapt to a social system that turns on personal interaction. For example, Jansen and Kristof-Brown (2005) found better fit with the general pace of the social environment at work was associated with greater helping. Finally, employees who are interconnected with others in the organization tend to be
more embedded and less likely to leave the organization (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001). This means collaborative-based selection practices will promote longer-term employment and greater development of internal labor markets than compliance-based ones.

Collaborative-based training and development practices likewise stimulate the development of human and social capital. Socialization processes that communicate social support and encourage embeddedness in the organization (e.g., collective and investiture tactics – Allen, 2006) implicitly introduce newcomers to the importance of social interaction. Traditional development and mentoring programs would be in place, but practices recognizing the importance of organizational learning (Borgatti & Cross, 2003) and social networks (Higgins & Kram, 2001) would also exist because both are inherent in collaborative-based structures. Informal networks may form which stimulate organizational learning between employees within and across formal organizational divisions. The potential for informal coworker or lateral mentoring (Raabe & Beehr, 2003) is obviously greater in such climates. Social exchanges not only allow for the delivery of requisite task information, but also embed employees in networks where help is more readily and reliably exchanged. Training programs focused on relationship building and integrating employees from different functions or departments may offer means to explicitly develop such networks (Lawler, 1996).

An underlying purpose of selection as well as training and development practices in collaborative-based structures is the development of social capital. Broadly stated, social capital refers to resources embedded in a social structure that can be accessed to mobilize organizational action (Leana & Van Buren, 1999). Employees learn that their KSAs facilitate task accomplishment and that relationships permit them to benefit from and share KSAs with other employees. In short, collaborative HR practices emphasize the blending of technical competence and social fit through social exchange processes that are hallmarks of equality matching climates. Employees may develop cognitive social capital, that is, a shared language and common perspective on their work (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). This makes employees’ behavior more consistent and predictable, allowing for adaptation, task coordination, and a greater likelihood of
future effective helping (Bolino, Turnley, & Bloodgood, 2002). Exemplars of such behavior were found by Bacharach et al. (2000), who observed that providers weighed the appropriateness of continuing help against recipients’ responses to help previously offered. By efficiently investing their efforts, help providers could be more confident their help would be on target.

Collaborative-based work structure and design practices – particularly those that create task interdependencies among employees – are congruent with equality matching climates. We argue that such practices allow employees to become familiar with others’ needs and problems, and stimulate helping that benefits direct exchange partners as well as others connected through task interdependencies (see e.g., Van der Vegt & Van de Vliert, 2005). Interpersonal exposure to interdependencies affords more frequent opportunities to exchange help, and some research has found greater task interdependency can result in more helping (e.g., Allen, Sargent, & Bradley, 2003; DeJong, Van der Vegt, & Molleman, 2007). Work design characteristics that signal linkages among employees, such as reciprocal work flows, feedback from others, and social support (e.g., Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007), as well as structural features such as social network size (Anderson, 2008), have been increasingly associated with positive work outcomes. More specifically, researchers have found that interconnectedness indicators, such as network centrality (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002) and friendship ties (Bowler & Brass, 2006) are positively associated with interpersonal helping behavior.

Collaborative-based structures may include explicit rewards for helping as one way of managing interdependencies among employees with commensurate KSAs, and as a means of encouraging the goal-oriented cooperation that is characteristic of equality matching climates. Thus, as is the case in market pricing climates, helping may involve formal monetary rewards. Unlike market pricing climates, however, the rewards are as likely to be used to stimulate employees’ awareness that their successes as individuals are yoked to those of others in the organization. As such, pay ranges are apt to be more compressed in collaborative-based structures, so as not to discourage cooperative behaviors. Also, competency-based pay plans may
also be more likely because, when properly structured, they acknowledge the importance of knowledge growth and maintenance within a relational healthy organization (Ford, 2001).

Performance feedback in collaborative-based structures will contain both evaluative and developmental elements. Work efforts will be partly linked through shared tasks and goals, thus performance appraisals will recognize not only how employees perform their own assignments, but also how well they facilitate and cooperate with others’ performance efforts. This allows for deeper consideration of behavioral contributions (e.g., helping) that impact the work of others’. Because effort and goal attainment involve interdependencies, assigning credit for performance outcomes is more complex in equality matching climates. To mitigate assessment difficulties arising from this complexity, greater emphasis is placed on impartiality and equality in appraisal procedures (Connelley & Folger, 2004). Also, relational characteristics that contribute to a climate of cooperation between employees, such as communication and interpersonal skills, may be accorded greater weight. Given the emphasis on information sharing and knowledge acquisition, learning goals (Seijts & Latham, 2005) are likely to emerge as part of the appraisal process.

**Helping Behavior and Collaborative-Based HR Practices: Summary Propositions**

Helping behavior found in a climate stimulated by collaborative-based HR practices will vary from that found in alternative relational climates. We briefly describe helping behavior prototypical of equality matching climates using the same characteristics used to describe helping in market pricing climates.

Influenced by social exchange tenets, work relationships are more enduring in collaborative-based structures than in compliance-based structures. Reciprocity is the most widely recognized form of social exchange (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), compelling employees to be mindful of both the long-term obligations and immediate effects of helping acts. The motivation to provide help involves relational benefits (e.g., social support) as well as instrumental ones (e.g., knowledge and advice). However, the preeminence of reciprocity diminishes the self-interested bargaining associated with market pricing climates, and instead
emphasizes that the actions of one person are tied with another’s actions in the long run (Molm, 2003). Maintaining balanced exchanges is important, allowing involved parties to better manage relational indebtedness incurred during exchange cycles. Because reciprocity is integral to equality matching climates, the justice norm by which employees evaluate the fairness of their exchange relationships is equality of input (Fiske, 1992). As employees determine they are fairly treated in helping exchanges with others, they develop fairness perceptions about particular partners that influence future exchanges. Thus, judgments about fairness are likely to be tied to the entity level (Gillespie & Greenberg, 2005) rather than event level as in market pricing climates. Favorable fairness impressions lead to continuing exchanges of help, whereas unfavorable impressions do not. We therefore posit that with collaborative-based HR practices,

Proposition 2a: Helping behavior is motivated by in-kind reciprocity and maintained by balanced exchanges in long-term relationships.

Proposition 2b: Helping behavior is judged according to the norm of equality, and evaluated as fair to the degree that there is equality in exchange partners’ inputs.

Too great or too small of a response to another’s help can induce feelings of over-obligation or short-changing, respectively. Moreover, even when a response is well gauged, too great of a time lag in delivery will render it ineffective. Thus, common hazards in an equality matching climate are unbalanced reciprocity and poor coordination. Well-designed interdependencies can reduce the perceived risk of poor coordination by creating more predictable and consistent contexts for helping (Sheppard & Sherman, 1998). Greater certainty created by collaborative-based selection and training and development practices also creates situations in which exchange partners can anticipate one another’s needs, thereby facilitating knowledge-based trust (Lewicki et al., 2006). Because this type of trust is based on understanding others and their behaviors, it is best developed through regular communication flowing through multiple exchanges. Gradually, the basis for trust shifts from outcome-based evidence provided by the content of exchanges, as commonly found in market pricing climates, to knowledge of help-givers’ integrity. Those whose help has met desired requisites develop
positive reputations, which can magnify the potential for positive helping exchanges in the future (Johnson, Erez, Kiker, & Motowidlo, 2002; Lewicki et al., 2006). Thus, in work climates shaped by collaborative-based HR practices,

Proposition 2c: Principal risks of helping behavior are unbalanced reciprocity and poor coordination.

Proposition 2d: The type of trust most likely to develop between individuals who exchange helping behavior is knowledge-based trust.

Knowledge-based trust is congruent with a relational identity orientation because this orientation emphasizes the fulfillment of role appropriate behavior (Flynn, 2005). In equality matching climates, there is an aversion to explicitly negotiating the amount and timing of help to be exchanged. Instead, individuals are expected to be responsive to others, even if the value and timing of helping returned is undetermined. Such behavior satisfies both self- and other-oriented needs, which in correct proportions promotes reciprocity in exchanges between helping partners. Therefore, in work contexts influenced by collaborative-based HR practices,

Proposition 2e: The type of identity orientation most likely to be held by individuals is a relational identity orientation.

COMMITMENT-BASED HR STRUCTURES AND HELPING WITHIN COMMUNAL SHARING CLIMATES

Commitment-based HR structures fall at the opposite end of the continuum from compliance-based structures. Arthur (1994) described them as creating psychological links between the organization and its employees, and as characterized by high levels of employee involvement, training in group problem-solving, and team-oriented socialization and job design. HR structures consistent with Arthur’s conceptualization have been oft described in the literature (e.g., Lepak & Snell, 1999; Tsui et al., 1997). Such structures feature employer inducements emphasizing employees’ well-being, and as a matter of course, employees engage in behaviors (e.g., helping) that go beyond their specified job tasks. Relationships are open-ended and lead to feelings of mutual investment among organizational members in which they experience
commitment to the organization and other employees. The notion of mutual investment among employees is consistent with helping in a communal sharing climate, as exemplified by Bacharach et al.’s (2000) maximalist support providers who extended the utmost help while disregarding repercussions to themselves.

Commitment-based selection practices create a commonality of beliefs and values among employees and engender prosocial motives for helping. Efforts are made to selectively attract employees who can meet broad work demands, and whose values support an obligation and willingness to work in concert with other employees (Hom et al., 2009). In emphasizing values fit, organizations may make a trade-off between traditional job performance and affect-oriented work outcomes like well-being, commitment, and helping-related behavior (Arthur, Bell, Villado, & Doverspike, 2006). However, because such outcomes support cooperative and team behaviors routinely required within communal sharing climates, performance in the organization on the whole should not suffer. In their review, Dudley and Cortina (2008) identified a number of knowledge and skill components associated with helping behavior. As the worth of these skills becomes established, we suspect the less malleable of these skills will be targeted for selection whereas more malleable skills would be subject to training and development efforts.

In communal sharing climates, organizations generally mandate a range of team and organization responsibilities, which increases employees’ interconnectedness and requires they learn interpersonal and teamwork skills (Hom et al., 2009). Commitment-based training and development practices aim to adapt newcomers to a climate having widespread norms for helping in both task and social realms. Acceptance of such norms facilitates helping behavior in group-oriented contexts (Ng & Van Dyne, 2005). The close ties engendered through shared experiences build group social capital and can prove valuable within groups and the broader organization (Oh, Labianca, & Chung, 2006). Traditional mentoring programs would be available, but include an emphasis on relational mentoring (Ragins & Verbos, 2007) to impart empathy and other social proficiencies. Interpersonal skills, such as listening intently to others or
taking time to talk with a coworker having personal problems, engender an increased sensitivity to others.

Work design within a commitment-based HR context features greater interdependence and involvement than in compliance- or even collaborative-based structures. Communal sharing climates comprise shared communication and dense, multiplexed task and social networks in which employees must integrate their interests with those of the work unit. The close relationships experienced bring instrumental (e.g., task-relevant) and expressive (e.g., emotional support) benefits (Oh, Chung, & Labianca, 2004). Common design practices may include reliance on teams (including self-managed teams), relatively flat hierarchical structures, and participative decision-making. Team-based designs induce employees to develop a shared understanding of critical work behaviors, enabling them to assist with task requirements before help is formally requested (Marks, Zaccaro, & Mathieu, 2001). Helping behavior in such situations may benefit the work group and not just the individual help recipient (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001). For example, “backing up” other team members has been shown to be valuable when synergies are gained and members are mutually invested in the group (Porter, Hollenbeck, Ilgen, Ellis, West, & Moon, 2003), as would be expected in communal sharing climates.

As with compliance-based HR structures, appraisal and reward practices act to reinforce desired work design outcomes. In commitment-based systems, however, there is also an emphasis on processes (e.g., interdependence, high involvement) that are likely to facilitate affect-oriented outcomes (e.g., citizenship behaviors, attachment) typically associated with commitment-based organizations (London, 2007; Paré & Tremblay, 2007). Performance appraisal is likely to include an ample developmental component through which general expectations for helping are conveyed and the importance of interpersonal skills is emphasized (Reilly & McGourty, 1998). Because of high involvement components in the design of work, appraisal also may include a collective component and goals established during the appraisal process may be participatively set by individuals or groups.
In commitment-based structures, formal incentives for helping behavior tend to be group-oriented but can be individual-oriented when individual activities improve conditions for the group. In their study of helping patterns in three joint ventures, Perlow et al. (2004) found that rewarding team members for helping whoever needed it reinforced patterns of generalized helping among all team members. Elsewhere, Harrison, Price, Gavin, and Florey (2002) found that stronger team reward contingencies positively influenced cooperative interactions among team members. Because informal rewards such as recognition and praise can boost levels of affect and thereby encourage helping behavior, they may be used frequently. At the same time, compensation plans can play a role in encouraging the kind of helping associated with communal sharing climates. Two compensation practices that may be particularly relevant are paying above-market wages and limiting pay dispersion. Researchers have noted that higher wage benchmarks may add to the embedding effects of strong social bonds (Evans & Davis, 2005; Hom et al., 2009). Regarding pay dispersion, several researchers (e.g., Brown, Sturman, & Simmering, 2003; Shaw et al., 2002) have argued and found compressed pay structures can reinforce work interdependence and contribute to employee cohesiveness.

Helping Behavior and Commitment-Based HR Practices: Summary Propositions

Helping behavior prototypical of communal sharing climates is now described, using the same characteristics employed in describing helping in the other two relational climates. Helping stimulated by commitment-based HR practices will vary from that found in a market pricing and equality matching climates.

In communal sharing climates, the welfare of the other party is paramount. Because individuals care about the well-being of group members, their mindfulness of others’ needs reinforces tendencies to extend help to them. The generalized congruency among employees increases the likelihood that prosocial motives will evoke helping and relationships will be maintained for their own sake (Rioux & Penner, 2001). Moreover, giving help can also lead employees to further value the welfare of those to whom help has been given (Batson, Eklund, Chermok, Hoyt, & Ortiz, 2007; Grant, Dutton, & Rosso, 2008). Positive emotions flowing from
exchanges tend to be attributed to the dense web of relationships rather than specific parties involved (Lawler, 2001), which means help may also be extended partly due to affect levels within the collective group. Because resources exchanged during episodes of helping are considered shared and available to individual employees or the group as a whole, fairness is judged by how well needs for help are collectively met for a generalized recipient (Connelley & Folger, 2004). In communal sharing climates, strong relationship fairness entails the experience of belonging, an absence of conflict, a sense of stability, and desire for frequent interaction (Gillespie & Greenberg, 2005). We therefore offer that with commitment-based HR practices,

Proposition 3a: Helping behavior is motivated by prosocial values and affective bonds with relational partners.

Proposition 3b: Helping behavior is judged by a need-based norm, and evaluated as fair to the degree that the needs of a generalized recipient are met.

Helping behavior within communal sharing climates is imbued with empathy and foresight (Sheppard & Sherman, 1998). Empathy develops as relational partners make assumptions about each others’ needs based on previous interactions. With time, employees may develop more accurate person perceptions that allow them to better anticipate each other’s needs (Davis, 1994). However, in close relationships, emotions may sometimes lead employees to feel they know the wants and needs of others, which could increase the risks of misreading others’ feelings (e.g., empathic inaccuracy – Ickes, 1993) and misanticipating others’ needs. These risks may be mitigated somewhat by employee confidence that such actions are unintentional. The mutual understanding gained from stable relationships among employees with shared beliefs and values fosters identification-based trust (Lewicki et al., 2006), which can instill a high level of unstated confidence among relational partners. Multiple motives (e.g., elicitative, compensatory, moralistic) underlie identification-based trust, making it overdetermined (Kramer, Brewer, & Hanna, 1996) and resilient. Thus, in work climates influenced commitment-based HR practices,

Proposition 3c: Principal risks of helping behavior are empathic inaccuracy and the misanticipation of another’s needs.
Proposition 3d: The type of trust most likely to develop among individuals who exchange helping behavior is identification-based trust.

This form of trust comforts individuals during exchanges, perhaps because it supports the formation of a collective identity orientation (Flynn, 2005) that facilitates helping behavior directed toward the generalized group. When employees’ social environment is consistent with their own self-identities, a state of identity confirmation may exist. Milton and Westphal (2005) found mutual cooperation is greater when identity confirmation is relatively high and there is reciprocation among employees. The shared identification that is typical of a communal sharing context is thus central to understanding the character of helping found there. Obligations to reciprocate are implicit and parties may experience shared responsibility for the success of help giving, even though providers and recipients are objectively separate. Therefore, in work contexts influenced by commitment-based HR practices,

Proposition 3e: The type of identity orientation most likely to be held by individuals is a collective identity orientation.

DISCUSSION

Perhaps because of its inherently interpersonal nature, much organizational research involving helping behavior has been limited to the individual level of analysis. As HR managers commonly contend with issues requiring multilevel consideration (e.g., Takeuchi, Chen, & Lepak, 2009), taking only an individual level approach to understanding helping behavior with organizations is somewhat limited. Attempting to integrate both organizational and individual influences, we developed a conceptual framework identifying three sets of strategic HR practices, a relational climate supported by each particular set, and the form of helping behavior expected to emerge in each climate. Propositions characterizing the emergent helping behavior were offered, and Table 2 summarizes key characteristics of helping supported by specific relational climates.
The proposed framework offers a novel means of understanding the potential interplay between helping behavior and HR practices. Considering how HR practices affect broader relational climates may allow managers to positively influence employees’ expectations regarding the nature of both task and interpersonal exchange dynamics occurring in the organization. Such consideration is consistent with arguments made by scholars that shared employee perceptions and attributions concerning HR practices precede employee attitudinal and behavioral reactions (e.g., Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008). While respecting this perspective, we suggest organizations may better utilize such research by creating greater coherence between employee helping behaviors and the meso level HR practices that may influence them. In essence, we argue that the character of help can be shaped by what HR managers do, and offer propositions that highlight how helping may differ across relational climates. Such information may inform managers of subtle constraints associated with forms of helping and assist them in avoiding mismatches between types of helping behavior and relational climates.

The arguments presented here have relevance for the “black box” problem involving HR practices and organizational performance outcomes (cf., Becker & Huselid, 2006). One approach to understanding how HR practices are translated into organizational outcomes is the behavioral perspective (Jackson & Schuler, 1995), which holds that practices generate the employee behaviors required for an organization to achieve certain aspects of performance. Scholars have highlighted two unresolved issues, however, that limit the behavioral perspective’s ability to explain how HR practices affect outcomes. First, there is the ongoing dilemma of which practices should be included in overall systems of HR (e.g., Becker & Gerhart, 1996). By specifying HR practices that are generally agreed upon as core to employee behavior and also likely to influence relational climates and associated helping behavior, we attempted to partly
address the first issue. Second, it has been suggested HR researchers be more explicit regarding the kind of performance they are predicting (e.g., Lepak & Shaw, 2008). Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), of which helping is a major component, has sometimes been proposed as a mediating construct between practices and firm performance. Unfortunately, little attention has been given to how specific HR practices affect helping. The same has been noted regarding specific connections between climate and OCB/helping (Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, & Niles-Jolly, 2005). The proposed framework suggests how certain qualities of HR practices and emergent relational climates support three forms of helping, partly addressing this second issue.

**Implications and Future Research**

We have portrayed helping behavior as a proactive element that can increase organizations’ flexibility to meet competitive demands. In essence, flexibility gives organizations more dynamic capacity to address changing environmental conditions (Beltran-Martin, Roca-Puig, Escrig-Tena, & Bou-Llusar, 2008). One aspect of flexibility subject to influence by HR practices, skills flexibility, concerns human assets that can be drawn upon to meet specific needs (Wright & Snell, 1998). Another aspect of flexibility, behavioral flexibility, concerns broader adaptive processes that can be mobilized to meet unspecified future needs and involves employees’ learning to apply appropriate discretionary efforts. Because helping behavior is often discretionary, we suggest that it represents a critical means of building behavioral flexibility in organizations. Wright and Snell (1998) described behavioral flexibility as partly emerging through scripts which employees gain knowledge of during workplace interactions. Our framework describes the tenor of three potential helping “scripts” that may develop depending on the relational climate. A greater awareness of differences among relational climates may allow for insights into processes by which flexibility is mobilized.

As reflected in Table 2, it is important to recognize that the character of helping prevalent in an organization may be dependent on the particular relational climate. An implication of this recognition is that encouraging more helping in general is not necessarily better. When
implementing new HR practices to increase workforce behavioral flexibility, managers should consider the form of helping behavior that is most congruent with particular strategic objectives. Bhattacharya, Gibson, and Doty (2005) found that flexibility in the exchange of requisite skills was associated with cost efficiencies at the firm level. Where there is strategic value in efficiently completing cyclical tasks, it may be more appropriate to implement practices that encourage helping that fits with a market pricing climate. Practices that lead to the development of human capital assets would better fit in this climate, as helping would involve short-term calculative exchanges leading to identifiable task outputs. In instances where there is strategic value in creating broader forms of flexibility (see, e.g., Beltran-Martin et al., 2008), practices congruent with an equality matching climate might be more appropriate. Helping in these climates would emphasize the behavioral flexibility that is needed for knowledge sharing and sensemaking in turbulent work environments.

Organizations should be aware that institutional pressures may shape the potential for congruence between predominant HR practices and likely types of employee helping exchanges. For example, assistance and cooperation among employees in social service organizations could take on a different form than in financial service organizations. Because interpersonal support and care are a hallmark of their missions, social work or health care organizations may find that HR practices supportive of helping associated with communal sharing climates would enable greater employee effectiveness. The relational architecture (Grant, 2007) of work performed in such organizations is such that close ties and empathic concern may facilitate the delivery of services required to benefit clients and customers. In contrast, organizations that operate in environments marked by employee striving in the midst of competitive forces (e.g., financial services) may find that a market pricing climate is more appropriate for framing employee expectations regarding the nature of helping behavior.

Researchers have noted the importance of aligning HR practices so that they work effectively together in an organization. Internally aligning practices facilitates commonalities in understanding across different organizational functions and units (Werbel & DeMarie, 2005).
For similar reasons, we underscore the importance of communicating and implementing various practices in a coherent manner vis-à-vis relational climates. Perlow et al. (2004) noted that differences in reward systems were associated with distinctive patterns of helping, and certain helping-reward system configurations may be further reinforced by broader institutional conditions. Practices may not only be directly associated with emergent relational climates, but they may interact in ways that enhance or dilute another’s effects. For example, in organizations where socialization and training protocols emphasize individual competencies, it would be counterproductive to use a team-oriented incentive system to determine the distribution of rewards. Employees would begin their organization tenure learning that instrumental help (i.e., market pricing climate) is paramount only to discover after experiencing a few performance appraisal cycles that such behavior is not rewarded and incurs social costs from coworkers who have developed behavior norms reflecting interpersonal sharing and concern (i.e., communal sharing climate). If managers want to increase the chances that employees will develop similar expectations regarding helping exchanges, they will need to first enact relationally consistent bundles of HR practices and then determine through employee feedback and observation whether the practices accomplish targeted relational effects.

Broader processes that strengthen the effect of HR practices on climate generally (cf. Bowen & Ostroff, 2004) could be used to assist in implementing practices coherently. Evidence has accrued in the climate literature that managers may act as climate engineers (e.g., Naumann & Bennett, 2000), and that it is important for managers to behave in ways that demonstrate preferred climate characteristics (Schneider et al., 2005). Thus, the roles that managers play in establishing focal relational processes should be underscored. With regard to relational climates, managers may affect climate directly by adhering to the strategic focus of the selected HR practices and insuring coherence in implementation. For example, managers implementing a commitment-based HR practice bundle should insure that work design, rewards, and appraisal practices signal the importance of shared/team activities. Managers may also influence climate indirectly through role modeling and demonstrating competencies reflective of the preferred
climate. For example, managers employing a collaborative-based HR practice bundle should use opportunities to share knowledge and distribute information in routine interactions with employees. In both formal and informal interactions with employees, it is important for managers to operate in ways consonant with the relational bent of the practices being administered. This could increase their relational prototypicality and social identity salience (van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003), according managers greater influence in shaping patterns of employee helping behavior toward congruence with the particular relational climate.

Although suggesting that particular relational climates would tend to be propagated by certain sets of HR practices, we recognize there are obstacles to this happening. In this vein, it has been documented that disconnects can occur between intended HR practices and actual practices as experienced by employees (M. Lengnick-Hall, C. Lengnick-Hall, Andrade, & Drake, 2009; Liao, Toya, Lepak, & Hong, 2009; Nishii et al., 2008). With regard to relational climates, managers may unintentionally promote varying practices across departments or plants, or realize that diverse relational requirements are present across units and require suitably different practices be brought to bear. Managers might also wish to encourage one relational climate among core employees and another among support employees (Lepak & Snell, 2002). Because helping behavior has been infrequently examined in connection with HR practices, the challenge of implementing relationally coherent practices should be addressed in future research.

Complicating the issue of coherent implementation, managers must deal with top down as well as bottom up dynamics that may influence what is viewed as viable help in each of the three relational climates. In organizations where market pricing relational forces are active, top down dynamics may exert more influence on helping behavior. Managers could more easily structure work relationships because task goals are, in comparison to other relational climates, better known. Management influence will not necessarily lessen the amount of cooperation and assistance that occurs, but the significance of such helping behavior and the auspices under which it occurs would derive more directly from top management preferences and expectations (Frenkel & Sanders, 2007). In organizations marked by lateral networks, project teams, and self-
managed groups, bottom up dynamics would be expected to become more prevalent in
determining the character of helping. Because of greater interdependencies, employees would
likely engage in more prosocial sensemaking (Grant et al., 2008) regarding their identities and
relations with other employees. Conceivably then, bottom up dynamics could influence
managers to adjust HR practices to accommodate emergent social interactions. Recent research
suggests bundles of HR practices are adopted to fit ongoing social, structural, and managerial
processes (Toh et al., 2008), which is consistent with the broader notion of structuration
(Giddens, 1984). Researchers have examined HR flexibility in regard to firm level performance
(e.g., Beltrán-Martín et al. 2008), but the idea of adjusting to relationally driven phenomena like
helping behavior has not been broached.

Recognizing the likely character of helping within their units, managers can encourage
behaviors that maintain balance within helping exchanges in specific relational climates. Balance
can be important, as individuals who strike an even balance in helping exchanges tend to be seen
as productive and accorded positive social status (Flynn, 2003). Arguments presented here
suggest managers should attempt to discern their units’ relational climate, and acquaint
employees with the respective risks that helping exchanges entail. Our framework could also be
useful to managers in reducing interpersonal obstacles to helping within their units. Employees
who need help tend to underestimate the likelihood of receiving it (Flynn & Lake, 2008).
Counseling employees about the interpersonal risks and ways of mitigating them may assist in
the development of helping relationships appropriate to particular relational climates. Such
discussions may simultaneously legitimize help-seeking by employees and encourage suitable
help-giving responses (Bamberger, 2009). Recent research suggests that when helping is viewed
as normatively acceptable, employees are less reticent to seek help (Hofmann, Lei, & Grant,
2009). Facilitating employees’ sensemaking regarding help appropriate in particular relational
climates could reduce their hesitancy to both seek and give help.

Our framework may encourage greater emphasis on an overlooked intersection of the
micro- and macro-oriented HR practice literatures. Micro approaches have tended to focus on the
effects of single practices (e.g., rewards) as judged against the criterion of in-role task performance. Although in-role performance is obviously important, the greater flexibility desired by many organizations suggests a need for more fluid, discretionary forms of performance as well (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). It is clear that employees’ work behaviors extend beyond those specified in job descriptions, but how HR practices can shape such behaviors has been infrequently addressed. Our thesis is that managers contemplate the broader effects of HR practices on employee flexibility and cooperation in contributing to organizations’ success. Doing so might require assessing HR practices (e.g., recruitment, selection, training, and evaluation practices) not only in terms of in-role performance, but behaviors (cooperation, helping, knowledge sharing) that contribute to organizational performance indirectly through the development of broader social capital.

Conclusion

We have argued that researchers should begin to consider connections between HR practices and helping behavior, with the idea that bringing about a coherency between the two will become more important in future organizations. It is important that organizations understand the processes that ultimately lead employees to exchange help over time. Whereas in the short-term helping behaviors have consequences for interpersonal relationships, in the long run they may well have consequences for the organization as a whole. Research has shown that helping behavior is associated with an array of positive interpersonal outcomes, but broader organizational implications such as greater flexibility or coordination have not as yet been documented. Hopefully, the framework presented here will stimulate future research on meso level connections between strategic HR and helping behavior, and promote the growth of viable relational climates with organizations.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific Practices</th>
<th>Compliance-based</th>
<th>Collaborative-based</th>
<th>Commitment-based</th>
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<td><strong>Staffing</strong></td>
<td>External labor markets</td>
<td>External &amp; internal labor markets</td>
<td>Internal labor markets</td>
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<td>Use of part-time, temporary, non-standard employees</td>
<td>Long-term employment</td>
<td>Long-term employment</td>
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<td>Emphasis on technical selection criteria</td>
<td>Emphasis on technical and social selection criteria</td>
<td>Emphasis on social selection criteria</td>
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<td><strong>Training/development</strong></td>
<td>Individual competencies</td>
<td>Individual &amp; social competencies</td>
<td>Shared competencies</td>
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<td>Human &amp; cognitive social capital</td>
<td>Relational social capital</td>
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<td>Reciprocal interdependence</td>
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<td>Low involvement</td>
<td>Moderate involvement</td>
<td>High involvement</td>
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<td>Structural barriers to interaction</td>
<td>Integrated lateral networks</td>
<td>Dense networks, teams</td>
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<td>Individual &amp; group-based rewards</td>
<td>Team-based rewards</td>
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<td></td>
<td>For quantifiable task outcomes</td>
<td>For task and social outcomes</td>
<td>Shared outcomes</td>
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<td>Dispersed pay structures</td>
<td>Compressed pay structures</td>
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<td><strong>Appraisal Emphasis</strong></td>
<td>Evaluative</td>
<td>Evaluative &amp; developmental</td>
<td>Evaluative &amp; group developmental</td>
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<th>Emergent Relational Climate</th>
<th>Market Pricing</th>
<th>Equality Matching</th>
<th>Communal Sharing</th>
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TABLE 1
HR Practices and Emergent Relational Climates
### TABLE 2
Relational Climates and Helping Behavior Characteristics

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<th>Market Pricing</th>
<th>Equality Matching</th>
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<td>Self-interests</td>
<td>In-kind reciprocity</td>
<td>Social and emotional bonds</td>
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<td>Knowledge sharing</td>
<td>Prosocial values</td>
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<td><strong>Justice norm</strong></td>
<td>Equity</td>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>Need-based</td>
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<td><strong>Perceived risks</strong></td>
<td>Insufficient return on invested behavior</td>
<td>Poor coordination</td>
<td>Misanticipation of others’ needs</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unbalanced reciprocation</td>
<td>Empathic inaccuracy</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Type of trust established</strong></td>
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<td>Knowledge-based</td>
<td>Identity-based</td>
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<td><strong>Identity orientation</strong></td>
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