

## Teaching Note for Chapter 2: Build High Quality Connections

**General overview:** This chapter makes the case for why high quality connections are so important for individuals, teams and organizations. It also outlines a range of interpersonal strategies for building this form of human connection as well as how to create organizational contexts that foster this generative form of connecting. The chapter can be used to introduce a relational perspective into how leaders (and individuals more generally) can be more effective and flourish at work, while at the same time, bringing a relational perspective into how to build competitive advantage based on the quality of connections between people in an organization. This chapter is the basis for a whole course I teach on managing professional relationships as an MBA elective (see <http://positiveorgs.bus.umich.edu/teaching-resources/course-syllabi/>), but can also be used as a stand-alone module in courses on leadership, management, organization behavior or effective teams.

### Core concepts introduced:

- High quality connections (HQCs)
- Pathways for building HQCs
  - Respectful engagement
  - Task enabling
  - Trusting
  - Playing
- Designing for HQCs (organizational enablers)
  - Rewarding for HQCs
  - Build HQC routines and practices
  - Model and value high quality connection building

### Preparation

- Early in class or before class, ask students to think about a high quality connection they have had over the last week. How did they know it was high quality? What in the situation facilitated the high quality connection?

### Possible class flow

1. Introducing/Defining a HQC (sharing stories works well here).
2. Why are they so important? Benefits at the individual, dyad, team and organizational levels
3. Given they are so important, how do you build them (Building a HQC at Lightning Speed exercise – explained in appendix A).
4. Explore each pathway for building HQCs—what is it? What are examples of how to do it? What are the features of an organization that hurt or help the building of HQCs along each pathway?
5. Use of concrete examples of organizations that foster high quality connection building.

## **Supplementary materials**

### **Readings**

Baker, W. and J. Dutton 2007 Enabling Positive Social Capital. In J. Dutton and B. Rags (Eds.) Exploring Positive Relationships at Work: Building a Theoretical and Research Foundation (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers).

Dutton, 2003 Energize Your Workplace: Building High Quality Connections at Work. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers).

Heaphy, E. and J. Dutton 2008 Positive Social Interactions at Work: Linking Organizations and Physiology. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(1) 137-162.

Stephens, J.P., E. Heaphy and J. Dutton 2012 High Quality Connections. In K. Cameron and G. Spreitzer (Eds.), *Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship*. Cambridge: Oxford University Press.

### **Videos**

For illustrating the power of perspective-taking (as part of respectful engagement):  
<http://www.onbeing.org/blog/an-empathy-video-that-asks-you-to-stand-in-someone-elses-shoes/5063>

### **Tools (Reflections, Interventions, Assessments)**

HQC Audit (see appendix B)

## Appendix A: BUILDING HIGH QUALITY CONNECTIONS AT LIGHTENING SPEED

**PURPOSE:** Demonstrate and reflect on how to build high quality connections (HQCs) and their impact

Shows how small moves/actions matter. Illustrates that HQC-building does not take much time

**PROCESS:** 1. Ask everyone to stand up and go stand next to the person they know the least in the room.

Explicitly ask them to not try to connect until you give them the signal

2. Tell them that each person will have a chance to lead in connection building and to decide who will lead first.

3. Give each person 60 seconds each to lead in building a high quality connection to the other person (Great to have a bell or dinger to easily signal when 60 seconds is up.

4. Energy will be electric. Be sure to observe how people are standing, body language, listen

5. When stop after 2 minutes ask each person to give feedback to the other person about what they did that worked in building a HQC. (Generates more energy!)

6. Keep people standing while you debrief. I always stand in the middle.

**DEBRIEF:** 1. Begin with, "What worked?" Explore concrete tactics that people used that others experienced as effective. Help people build on each other. Usual mentions include

- the questions that people asked that conveyed genuine interest

- identifying commonalities (e.g., shared goals, shared histories)

- Revealing something personal that started trust building

- body language- eye contact, open body stance, responsiveness etc

2. "How did you know what the other person was doing was working?" (here trying to probe for how it unlocked energy, created a reciprocity dynamic (a positive spiral) because you could feel yourself open up and want to invest in the other person)

3. "How might you use what you learned from this brief exercise in your work or beyond?"(here I tell them about running conferences and doing this at the beginning to "till the soil" for a meeting. Building good connective tissue at the beginning fundamentally alters the trajectory of possibilities for creativity, risk-taking, engagement, etc .Sometimes we forget the power of inviting people to use their ingenuity and power to build high quality connections with others. This exercise is also powerful because it shows it does not take a lot of time!

## High Quality Connection Audit

Identify the people in your life with whom you consistently have HQCs.

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What patterns do you notice? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is on your list? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is not? \_\_\_\_\_

Implications? \_\_\_\_\_

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