

# YOUR WORKPLACE



WORK CULTURE ISSUE

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# BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

The importance of high quality connections

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**T**hink about the last time you interacted with someone who drained the energy out of you. What characterized that interaction? Most likely, the theme of the conversation was predominantly, if not solely, negative. There was lots of complaining and bringing others down. The ‘conversation’ was one-way. The other person shared their thoughts, but when it was time to listen, he or she glanced down at their iPhone. Not surprisingly, like a “motivation vampire”, these exchanges wreak havoc on the internal functioning and effectiveness of organizations.





Now, transpose the above scenario with an encounter that leaves you wanting more. Afterwards, you continue to brim with passion and your energy has shifted significantly upward. You feel a sense of vitality, acceptance, and momentum that is tough to ignore.

These High-Quality Connections (HQCs) benefit us on more than just an emotional level. Research from Jane Dutton and her colleagues from the University of Michigan has shown these relationships to improve our cognitive functioning, creativity, and exhibiting of learning behaviours.

HQCs also motivate employees to exhibit higher levels of organizational citizenship behaviours, which are those invaluable actions that involve going above and beyond the call of duty. Not surprisingly, there are also advantages to these behaviours at the organizational level, where greater overall efficiency and performance has been found when these relationships are in play.

#### HOW DO YOU DEFINE A HIGH-QUALITY CONNECTION?

Dutton and her colleagues discovered that there are several key characteristics to HQC relationships. First and foremost, there is greater depth, as emotional expression that is both valued and accepted. Individuals feel comfortable exchanging in an open and expressive way, which leads to stronger connections.

Another key element of an HQC is the level of understanding that is felt between all parties. Each individual feels understood and respected. The relationship recognizes the perspectives of others and the importance of truly feeling heard. Not surprisingly, this type of respect stimulates openness to new ideas and viewpoints, which are seen to enrich the dialogue. This is why people feel inspired after experiencing such an exchange.

Even when HQC relationships require difficult conversations, the foundation of sharing and understanding allows for a higher level of interaction. The complexity of the exchange through freely sharing both positive and negative emotions facilitates a more productive discussion.

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**Building a positive and vibrant culture is  
a top priority for organizations today**

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#### HOW TO BUILD HQCS WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Given the benefits of HQCs to individuals, teams, and organizations, how do we create these relationships at the office?

##### ■ Be present when interacting with people

This involves turning away from our computers, smart phones, etc. It is tough to feel truly appreciated and understood when someone is glancing at a screen or typing out a text message or email. If you cannot commit the attention to the interaction, it is better to postpone the meeting or conversation. It will be worth it.

##### ■ Engage in active listening

There are several components of active listening that are important for building HQCs with our colleagues. Paraphrasing what someone just shared by summarizing what you felt you understood, is a powerful technique. It allows the other individual to correct you if you are mistaken and also facilitates 'checking in' to ensure you are receiving the message appropriately. This expressed level of concern demonstrates your interest to the speaker.

##### ■ Listen with empathy

A key defining characteristic of an HQC is the sense of being heard and accepted by the other party. What better way to demonstrate this level of concern than through the lens of empathy? Staying focused on understanding the world through the eyes and heart of another person is a gift that can facilitate strong, positive connections.

##### ■ Make it about the other person, not about you

Dutton and her colleagues found that a critical element of building HQCs is in our mutual support of each other. When we feel that other people are looking out for our best interest, a deeper and more connected relationship is possible. Suspending our agenda for the benefit of others very much adds to the quality of relationships we experience.

##### ■ Reward HQC behaviours

If you are a leader within an organization, make it a point to reward and recognize the expression of the above behaviours. Taking the time to highlight their value and reinforce their importance within the culture can leverage the dividends discussed earlier.

Building a positive and vibrant culture is a top priority for organizations today. Not surprisingly, human relationships are at the heart of this equation. Preliminary research strongly indicates that creating High Quality Connections within our work environments brings tremendous benefits to everyone involved. Rather than draining the energy of co-workers, building and maintaining High Quality Connections will boost the motivation and sense of connection within the workplace, facilitating growth and productivity. 