

**Call for Papers**  
**Academy of Management Review Special Topic Forum**

**THE CHANGING NATURE OF WORK RELATIONSHIPS**

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Work relationships form the foundation of an array of organizing processes, such as how organizational units interrelate, how managers and employees lead, how individuals manage their careers, and whether alliances succeed or fail. Interestingly, there is widespread acknowledgment that the nature of careers, organizations, and work, as well as the composition of the workforce, has changed profoundly in recent decades (Barley & Kunda, 2001; Kalleberg, 2009; Okhuysen et al., 2013). Yet we lack theories of work relationships that account for these *contextual changes*—that is, changes with the potential to affect the development, quality, and outcomes of work relationships. Work relationships (in light of these contextual changes) may, in turn, help the workforce and organizations deal with such changes, while at the same time introducing new and underexplored challenges. In this special topic forum we invite contributions that develop new theories of work relationships, or alter existing theories, to take into account the changing nature of careers, organizations, work, and the composition of the workforce.

**WHY WORK RELATIONSHIPS?**

Work relationships are integral to our understanding of work as a direct focus of inquiry (e.g., mentoring relationships, customer-employee relationships, employee-employee relationships, and social networks), as integral to organizational processes (e.g., socialization, coordination, collaboration, identity formation, institutionalization, sensemaking, and social exchange), and as a core component of high-performance work systems. Scholarship on this topic has occurred across multiple fields and levels of analysis (Kahn, 2007). In recent years organizational scholars have begun to place work relationships “front and center” as a topic of study (Ragins & Dutton, 2007) by looking

across existing domains of relationships research (cf. Eby & Allen, 2012; Ferris et al., 2009; Sias, 2009) and initiating an organizational “relationship science” (Berscheid, 1999). One purpose of this special topic forum is to answer questions raised by this emerging body of work, as well as to connect it to emerging forms of careers, organizations, work, and the composition of the workforce in ways not previously considered.

**WORK RELATIONSHIPS AND THE  
CHANGING NATURE OF CAREERS**

Today’s employees are more likely to work at multiple organizations for shorter periods of time and with less job security, as well as more likely to work as independent contractors (Cappelli, 1999; Kalleberg, 2009). Much of this change has been initiated by organizations over the past several decades, with individuals adapting to the uncertainty accompanying such change (Leana & Rousseau, 2000). Potential research questions include: What is the role of relationships in such basic aspects of a career as mentoring, learning, and making career transitions in an era of uncertainty and shorter-term commitments? Are there different kinds of relationships that are important to establish, sustain, and nourish a job, career, or calling—in short, one’s career identity—when one’s time horizon in the organization is relatively short or when one’s primary place of work is at home or a coworking site? We need to understand more about the development, quality, and role of these relationships for individuals and organizations.

**WORK RELATIONSHIPS AND  
CHANGING ORGANIZATIONS**

Many organizations face turbulent and uncertain environments and are called on to

change on an ongoing basis. Researchers have found that work relationships are a critical mechanism for change. Yet organizational change can threaten existing relationship patterns, disrupting them when they are needed most (e.g., Cameron, 1994, 1998). How might organizations preserve or build relational capacity in order to meet the demands of the turbulent and uncertain environments they face? This special topic forum presents an opportunity for scholars to further explore how people engage in work relationships or how organizations structure work relationships to facilitate or block organizational or institutional change.

An era of frequent organizational change may also have implications for work relationship transitions and relational mechanisms. Scholars have argued that relationships are a primary means by which people become attached to organizations (e.g., Kahn, 2007), but if organizations undergo more frequent change and therefore provide fewer opportunities for forming relationships, what are the implications for how attachment occurs? Similarly, if shared commitment to an organization serves as a foundation for work relationships (Hogg & Terry, 2001), how does a decline in commitment to a particular organization change the nature of our relationships at work?

### **WORK RELATIONSHIPS AND THE CHANGING NATURE OF WORK**

If work is the effortful accomplishment of collective tasks (Okhuysen et al., 2013), how work is accomplished has undergone tremendous change in recent decades. There are at least two ways in which the changing nature of work invites new theorizing about work relationships: (1) increasing and shifting interdependence and (2) the presence of technology.

Organizations continue to evolve in response to the changing nature of work, from bureaucracies in which workers are focused on their own tasks, isolated from their colleagues in other functions and organizations, to networked or relational organizations in which workers are continuously coordinating their work with colleagues and clients within

and across organizational boundaries (Adler, Kwon, & Heckscher, 2008; Gittel & Douglass, 2012). Contributions to the special topic forum might address such questions as: What challenges does this evolution present, both for employees and organizations, for managing work relationships? Do some organizations choose to keep work less interdependent in order to avoid the challenges of managing networked or relational organizations? Are there hybrid organizational forms emerging, and how effective are they relative to their pure bureaucratic or pure relational counterparts?

In many types of work, relationships with clients or customers are at least as important as relationships with coworkers, in terms of employee attachment. As a result, interdependencies in organizations have shifted as well. Relationships that span organizational boundaries, such as strategic partnerships between supplier and client or care relationships between caregivers and clients, begin to blur the lines between coworker and client-based relationships. Such relationships are often long term and sustaining, despite their change in form. New theorizing in the area of relationships may be required to address such questions as: How do client relationships affect and inform employees' relationships with organizations and with others in their profession? How are these relationships developed and sustained? What opportunities or challenges might they present to the people in these relationships and to the organization itself?

The presence of technology has become widespread in our everyday lives, through the proliferation of personal devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets) or through the ease of surveillance of the workforce via video cameras. Individuals and organizations increasingly rely on a wide range of technologies to facilitate work interactions (e.g., video conferencing), with some work relationships experienced entirely virtually. Some unexplored questions to consider include: How does the increasing use of technology affect the formation, maintenance, repair, or decay of relationships? How does interacting through technology affect such relational processes as coordination, collaboration, and connection?

## WORK RELATIONSHIPS AND THE CHANGING COMPOSITION OF THE WORKFORCE

Just as work has changed in recent decades in the ways described above, the people who populate organizations are increasingly diverse along multiple dimensions, including gender, race, ethnicity, class, generation, religion, and nationality. Contributors to the special topic forum may choose to theorize about how dimensions of difference—particularly as they can be linked to the changing nature of work, organizations, and careers—affect work relationships, relational processes, and organizations. Further, the ways in which work, organizations, and careers are changing may be quite different across nations or regions, providing important opportunities to generate a novel theoretical understanding of relationships. We can advance our understanding by developing theories that both acknowledge and understand differences between diverse groups, as well as similarities.

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### TIMELINE AND SUBMISSIONS

The deadline for submissions is **July 15, 2016**. All submissions must be uploaded to the Manuscript Central/Scholar One website (<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/amr>) between **June 15, 2016** and **July 15, 2016**. Guidelines for contributors (<http://aom.org/Publications/AMR/Information-for-Contributors.aspx>) and the *AMR* Style Guide for Authors must be followed.

For questions about submissions, contact the managing editor via [publications@aom.org](mailto:publications@aom.org). For questions about the content of this special topic forum, contact Emily Heaphy ([eheaphy@bu.edu](mailto:eheaphy@bu.edu)), Jody Hoffer Gittell ([jodyhofferjgittell@brandeis.edu](mailto:jodyhofferjgittell@brandeis.edu)), Carrie Leana ([leana@katz.pitt.edu](mailto:leana@katz.pitt.edu)), David Sluss ([David.Sluss@scheller.gatech.edu](mailto:David.Sluss@scheller.gatech.edu)), or Gary Ballinger ([ballinger@virginia.edu](mailto:ballinger@virginia.edu)).