

# Good relations are golden

Wednesday, 07 February 2018 - Anders Dysvik, Arne Carlsen, Miha Skerlavaj

*Good relations are alpha and omega both when it comes to general happiness and succeeding at work. However, the reward appears to be even greater.*

## BI RESEARCH: WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS

Good relationships in organisations are crucial to both the wellbeing of individuals, as well as their performance, according to international research of the past decade.

In social science, this is often referred to as the relational shift.

Research on anything from brain development to creativity and learning assumes that we as humans first and foremost are relational beings.

### Increase energy

The results show several beneficial effects: Good relationships lead to an increase in the wellbeing, creativity and confidence needed to address demanding tasks. We become more robust when dealing with stress. We perform better at work by learning from and with others.

The opportunity for success in your own career development increases. The same goes for the energy we have, both on and off work. This is good news, especially considering how many of us spend at least a third of our day at work. Good relationships are simply alpha and omega both when it comes to feeling well and achieving success.

A recent study by some American colleagues shows that good relationships are more than just an instrument for attaining personal advantages or performing at work: Good relationships also contribute to personal growth and development, they create the foundation for friendship and are a source of prosocial behaviour.

### Gains in four areas

In an article featured in the well-respected Academy of Management Journal, researchers Amy Colbert, Joyce E. Bono and Radostina Purvanova show how good relationships have four functions, each with their own distinct effects:

1. Task support: Supportive behaviour in the execution of tasks is linked to job satisfaction.
2. Donor behaviour – including the opportunity to assist users/clients and colleagues – is most strongly associated with the feeling of having a meaningful job.
3. Personal friendships have the biggest impact on positive emotions in our daily life.
4. Personal growth from good relationships has the biggest impact on our general life satisfaction.

### Greater advantages

Previous research on the subject has primarily focused on what employees and the community get out of good relationships in terms of results. This study, however, shows that the three dimensions of friendship, donor behaviour, and personal growth and development, explain key individual results in the form of positive emotions, the experience of meaningfulness and general attitude to life.

So what is the practical meaning of all this? In general, we can say that if there is no interest in employees developing good relationships through having the opportunity for collaboration, one

risks missing out on a set of personal and work-related benefits, beyond the fact that employees perform the tasks they have been given in a satisfactory manner.

Indirectly, such effects will also increase the organisation's profitability and performance through an increase in engagement, a reduced turnover, as well as decreasing workplace absence due to psychosocial factors.

## Two tips for leaders

For leaders wishing to act on these insights, we have two sets of practical advice.

1. The first tip is to reward cooperation more than competition. Reward structures should not be designed in such a way that employees are pitted against each other and have to compete internally, but rather where they facilitate cooperation and knowledge sharing. What we refer to as a mastery-based work climate is far more beneficial than a competition-based climate. Individual bonuses may produce short-term rewards, but are often toxic when it comes to relations.
2. The second tip is to encourage donor behaviour. For several years, we have worked on donor behaviour through so-called reciprocity rings where people ask for help and receive help from others. Another similar tool is known as the reflective, best self-portrait. Here, people collect real stories from a dozen others – both outside and at work – regarding how they create value for them. A third tool concerns a systematic practice of giving others more energy throughout the day. These exercises often provide amazing results. Now, we know more about why they do.

## References:

Colbert, A. E., Bono, J.E., & Purvanova, R. K. 2016. Flourishing via Workplace Relationships: Moving Beyond Instrumental Support. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59(4): 1199-1223.

Škerlavaj, M. (2016). Prosocial motivasjon: Inspirert av gode gjerninger overfor andre ... og seg selv. I Buch, R., Dysvik, A. og Kuvaas, B. (Red.), *Produktiv motivasjon i arbeidslivet*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm.

This article is published as an opinion piece in *Kapital* nr. 15-2016.

Questions or comments about this article? Contact BI Business Review by email at [forskning@bi.no](mailto:forskning@bi.no). We also encourage participating in the comment section below.