



Gratitude and Institutional Culture

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Reflective Write

- What am I most grateful for about work and life?

Agenda

- Get to know the audience
- Overview of culture
- Overview of gratitude
- Ideas for building an emotional culture of gratitude
- Practical steps

Please log in to Top Hat

- Please type the following into your device's browser to anonymously respond
- <https://app.tophat.com/e/267327>

Organizational culture

- “...values, beliefs, and assumptions that are held by members of an organization and which facilitate shared meaning and guide behavior at varying levels of awareness (Denison et al. (2014, p. 4)



Fundamentals of organizing

- Coordination of a large number of people pursuing interdependent work
 - Formal control systems
 - Informal (social) control systems
- “As a rule, people grossly underestimate the guiding role that norms play in affecting behavior” (Cialdini, 2005, p. 158)

Culture as social control

- Culture manifests as norms (Chatman & O'Reilly)
- Norms exert control in two distinct ways (Deutsch & Gerard (1955))
 1. Descriptive norms (*how one needs to behave*)
 2. Injunctive norms (*social approval and sanctions contingent on compliance with descriptive norms*)

Organizational culture in the literature

- The common portrayal of organizational culture exists largely along a cognitive dimension...where scholars seek to understand the **set of shared cognitions** in a social unit (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014)
 - Intellectually focused → customer-oriented, innovative, team-oriented or competitive should we be at work?



How should we *feel* at work?

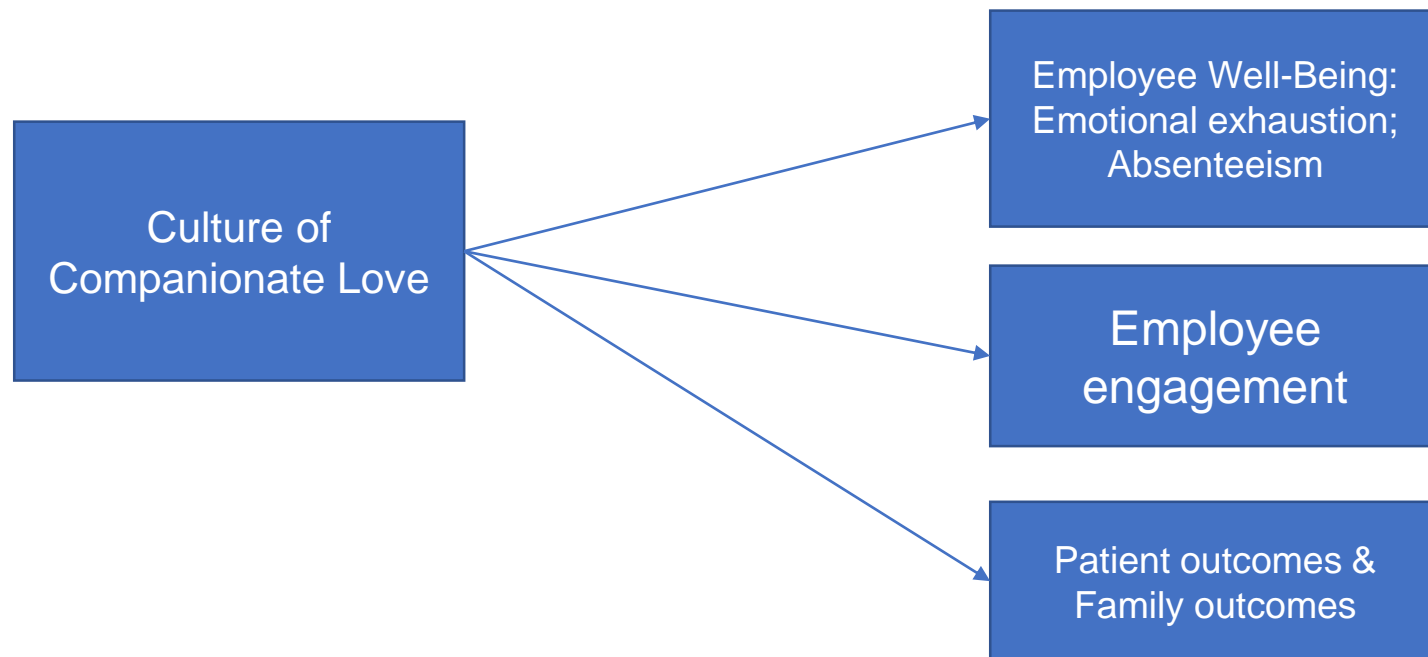
- Often an after-thought
- We still seek guidance from others on how to feel and how to react to events
 - Non-verbal cues
 - Facial expressions (is crying not OK in the committee meeting?)

New Conceptualization – Emotional Culture

- Visible norms and artifacts, underlying values and assumptions, reflecting the degree of perceived appropriateness and actual expression or *suppression* of discrete emotions within a social unit (Barsade & O’Neill, 2014)

Outcomes of emotional culture

- Initial evidence on emotional culture of companionate love (affection, compassion, caring, tenderness for other) at work (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014)



So what?

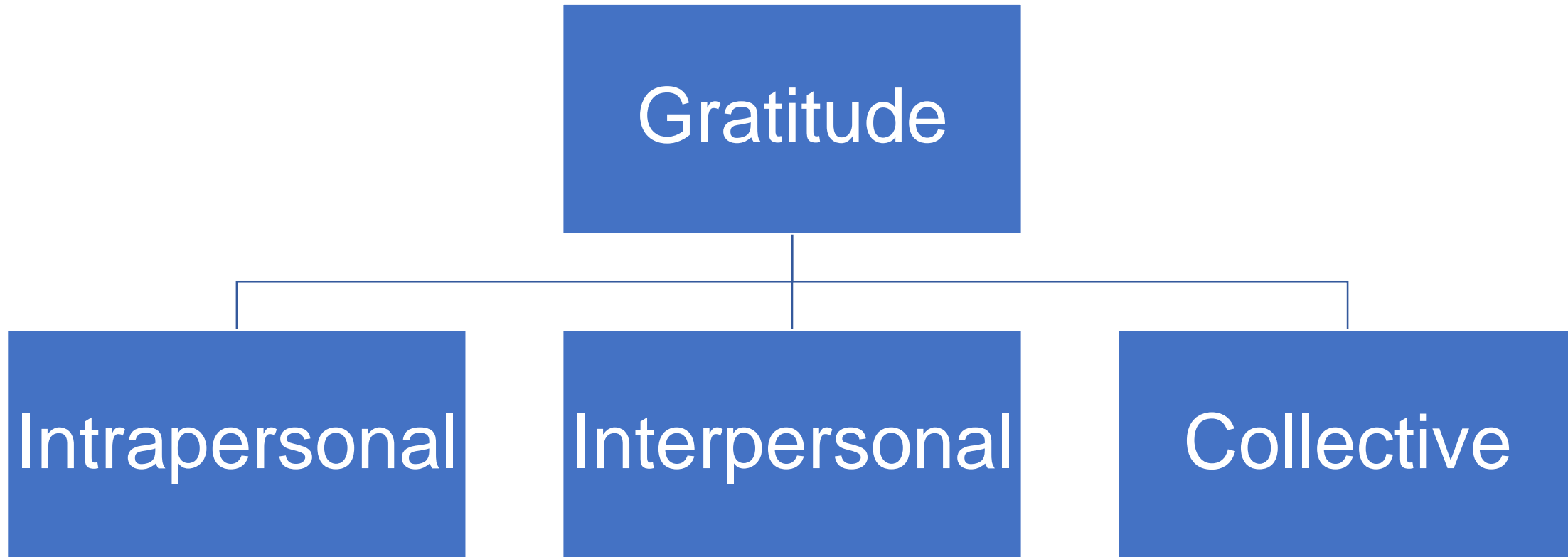
- What could a culture that believes in recognizing and acknowledging the value others bring to us at work do?
- What could a culture that believes in appreciating the ability to impact others in a positive way do?
- In everyday life, gratitude has the power to bring us closer to one another... [The power of gratitude](#)

What is gratitude?

- An affective state (felt gratitude)
 - Recipient of benevolent act that appears **costly, valuable, and given altruistically** (Tesser et al., 1968)
 - An “other-praising” emotion (Haidt, 2003)
- An expression of appreciation (expressed gratitude)
 - Preceded by grateful emotion (Emmons & McCullough, 2004)
- An orientation (grateful disposition)
 - A tendency to focus on the positive aspects of life and towards noticing and appreciating the positive (Wood et al., 2010)



Gratitude at many levels



Evidence on Intrapersonal gratitude – The grateful disposition

- Grateful disposition (Wood et al., 2010)
 - Associated with positive functioning (emotional and relational)
 - Reduced psychopathology
 - Physical health

Evidence from organizations – Intrapersonal gratitude

- Interventions
 - University setting (Kaplan et al., 2014)
 - 2 –week intervention; 3 days per week:
 - *Try to think about the many things in your job/work, both large and small, for which you are grateful. These might include supportive work relationships, sacrifices or contributions that others have made for you, advantages or opportunities at work, or thankfulness for the opportunity to have your job in general. Try to think of new ideas that you have not focused on in the past.*
 - Participants in the gratitude condition showed increased positive affect (positive emotions at work) after the intervention
 - Notably, no significant changes in negative emotions at work

Evidence from organizations - Intrapersonal

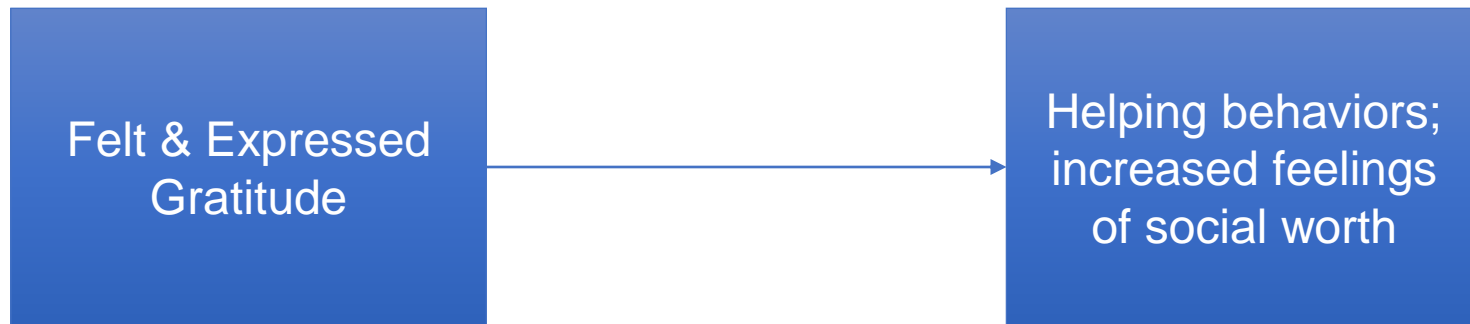
- Interventions
 - Healthcare setting (receptionists, lab techs, nurses, etc.)
 - Bono et al. (2013)
 - Daily surveys about stress and wellbeing
 - Positive reflection intervention – 3 Good Things
 - Results showed
 - Reduced stress
 - Fewer physical and mental health complaints
 - Greater ability to detach from work

Evidence from organizations – Intrapersonal gratitude

- Interventions
 - Adult working professionals (Neumeier et al., 2017)
 - 3 days a week over 2 weeks
 - *Write down three things about your work or workplace for which you genuinely feel grateful today and reflect on them*
 - Compared to the control group
 - ↑ global wellbeing (happiness, life satisfaction, positive affect)
 - ↑ work wellbeing (happiness @work, job satisfaction, work related affect)

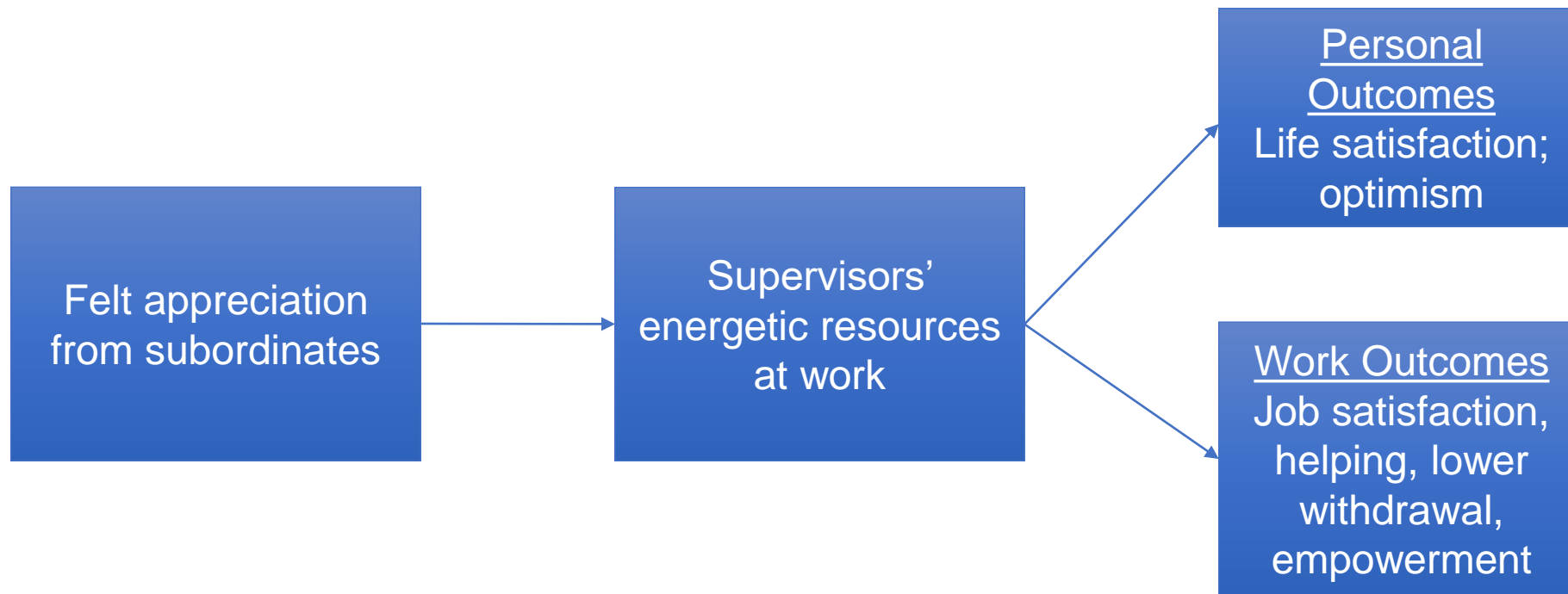
Evidence from organizations – Interpersonal gratitude

- Grant and Gino (2010) – Saying “thanks” to employees
- Spence et al. (2014) – feeling grateful towards coworkers & supervisor



Evidence from organizations – Interpersonal gratitude

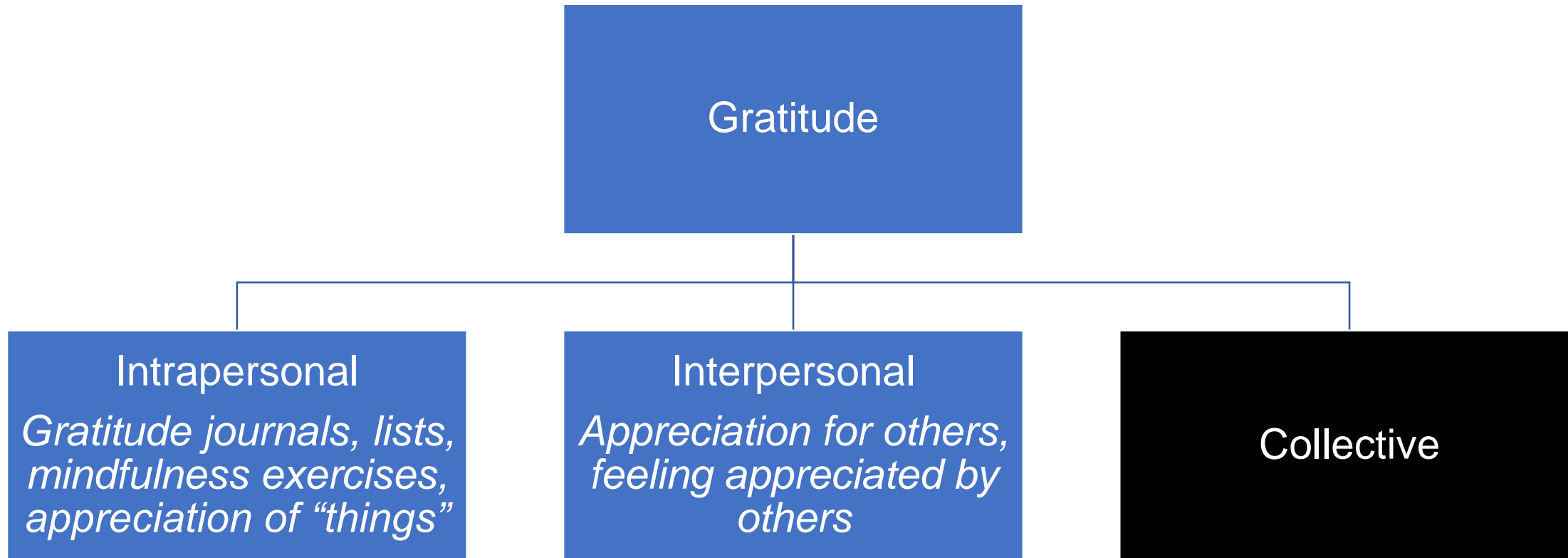
- My own research looks at upward gratitude (subordinates → supervisors)



“Evidence” suggests interpersonal gratitude is rare...

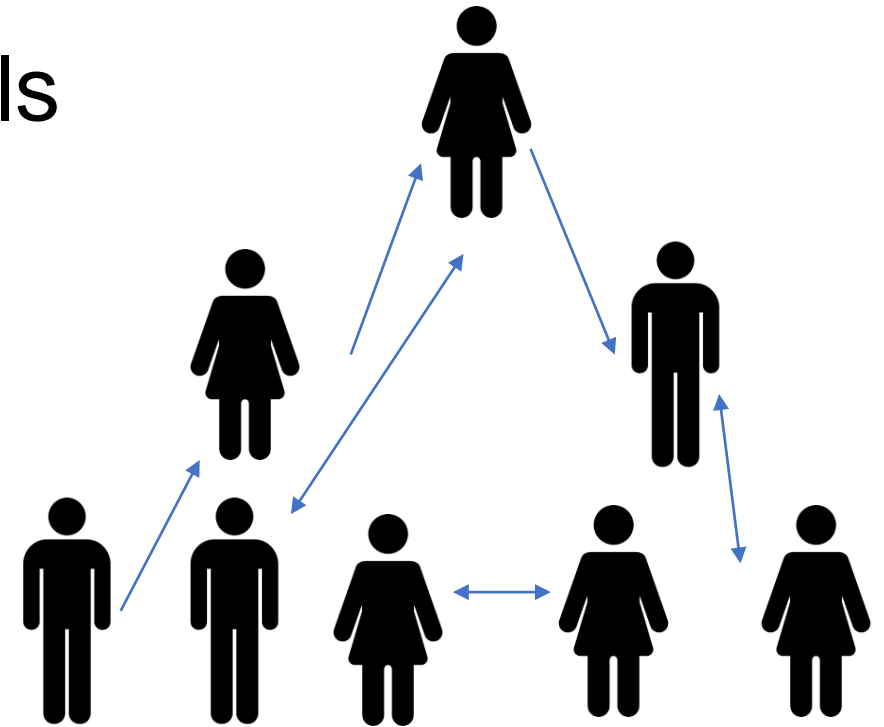
- National survey (Kaplan, 2012)
 - Nearly 70% indicated they rarely, if ever, expressed gratitude to the boss
 - 70 percent would feel better about themselves if their boss were more grateful and 81 percent would work harder
 - 90% described themselves as grateful but only 52% of women and 44% of men express gratitude regularly

Gratitude at many levels

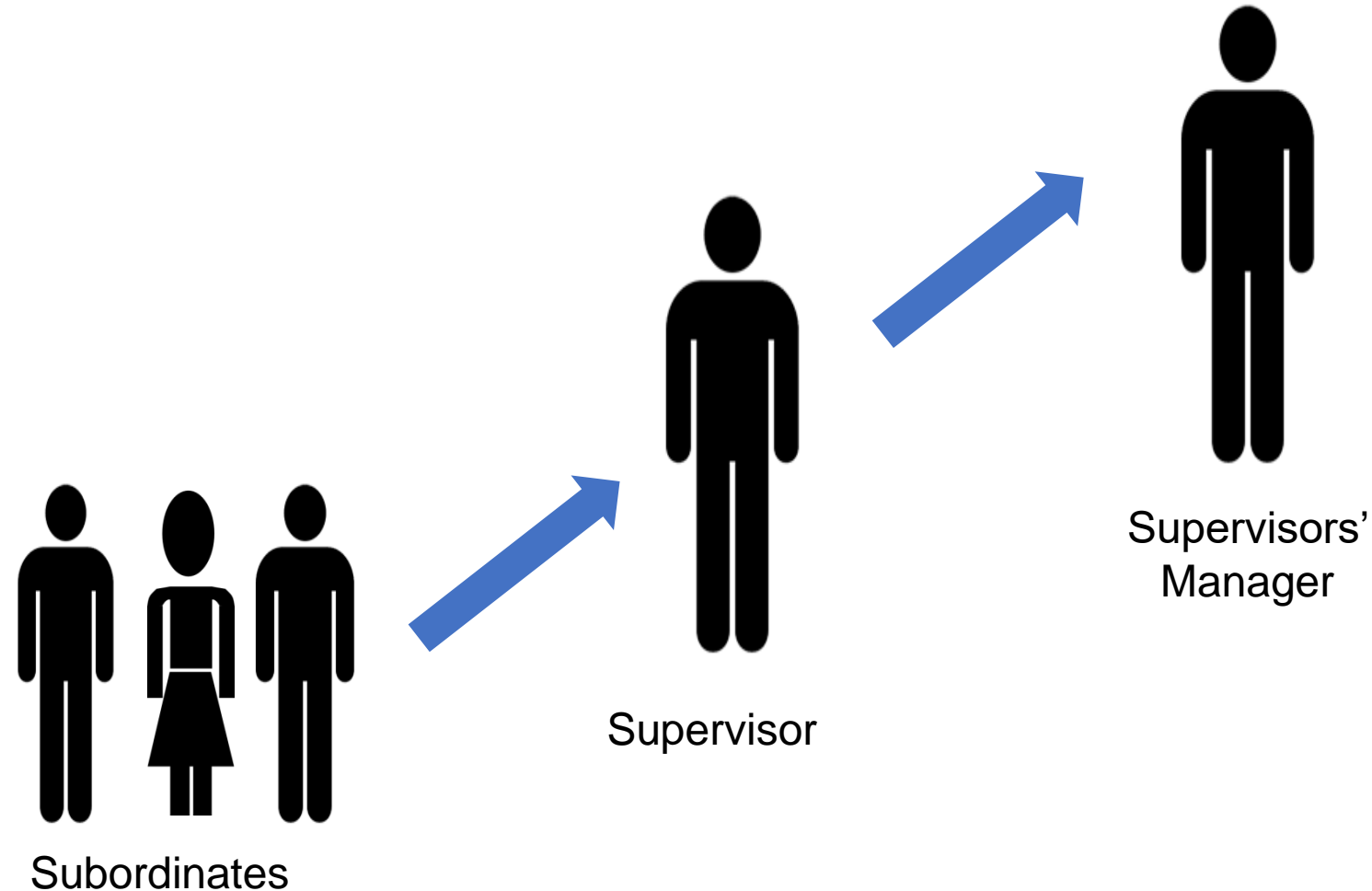


Collective gratitude

- Fehr et al. 2016 proposed an emergent process
- Persistent gratitude felt by individuals *trickles-up* and becomes a *shared perception*



Collective gratitude: A trickle-up process



Collective gratitude: A contingency perspective

- The trickle-up or emergence of gratitude becomes more likely when:
 - HR systems are aligned (Fehr et al., 2016)
 - Appreciation programs
 - Way for employees to connect with the beneficiaries of their work
 - Developmental feedback
 - Other recognition policies
 - Multiple practices are more likely to generate persistent gratitude at the employee level
 - Persistent gratitude → shared perceptions → emotional culture of gratitude
 - When work is interdependent → greater social interaction

Practically, what can we do?

- Top Management
 - Emotional support
 - Financial resources
- Middle Management
 - Could have the most impact on emotional contagion
 - Incorporate into office practices
 - Support and facilitate positive relationships and connectedness
- Human Resources
 - Socialization policies that foster connectedness
 - Interview questions that identify fit between employee and the emotional culture

Practically, what can we do?

- As individuals
 - Maintain or create desired culture through small acts and “micro-moments” of gratitude
 - Intrapersonal – taking time to reflect on what/who deserve our gratitude
 - Interpersonal – act on our gratitude; express it
 - Do not underestimate the power of your gratitude to move someone
 - Experimental research has found expressers significantly underestimated how surprised recipients would be about why expressers were grateful, overestimated how awkward recipients would feel, and **underestimated how positive recipients would feel**. (Kumar & Epley, 2018)

An ending note

- Gratitude is not a panacea
- Rather than gloss over the negatives, it *makes room* for the positive things that are happening and that we appreciate
 - This helps us cope with the demands of work and brings us closer together, improving our resilience and mitigating the intensity of negative thoughts and feelings at work
- Start with yourself first...focus on the intrapersonal and see where it takes you!
- Thank you!!

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Write & Discuss

- Reflect and address the questions in the handout (p. 3) in writing.
- When most of the people around your table are wrapping up, begin a table conversation.

Debrief

- Common themes?



Thank you!

