

Statement of Research Interests Paul Green, Jr.

In my research, I seek to understand the ways in which interpersonal relationships at work can provide the fuel for employees' improvement, and to develop systematic approaches leaders can use to facilitate employee development. I am interested in both peer-to-peer relationships and relations that occur across different power or status levels (e.g., boss to employee relationship).

Employee growth and development have historically been viewed in the scholarly literature as an informational exercise: feedback processes, seen as methods of enabling improvement, are largely envisioned as providing recipients with insight about their inadequacies—information that is presumed to naturally guide improvement. Unfortunately, structured development and feedback processes are, despite extensive empirical study and an impressive body of prescriptive writing, often seen as dysfunctional by practitioners and researchers alike, with numerous researchers even calling for the abandonment of these processes altogether.

With my research, I argue that individual development is a relational process—that the nature and quality of interpersonal relationships at work can enable, or restrain employees' growth. In fact, my work illuminates a critical paradox: deep interpersonal relationships at work may increase employees' motivation to improve, and their receptiveness to difficult-to-hear feedback, but can decrease the likelihood that relational partners provide the developmental insight or feedback that is so critical to enabling growth.

I seek answers to my research questions in various field contexts including food manufacturing factories; fast-food restaurants; fruit-farming; automotive manufacturing; construction; and professional services. I use a mix of methods to fulfill this research mission, all applied to field contexts. My research stream incorporates econometric analyses of longitudinal archival field data; longitudinal field experiments; large-scale field datasets; surveys; laboratory experiments; and qualitative methods.

Select Projects

My work suggests that though research processes are designed to provide developmental information, they are often ineffective because employees encode the feedback messages as cues about the givers' view of the recipient. The second chapter of my dissertation, ***"Shopping for Confirmation: How Disconfirming Feedback Shapes Social Networks"*** begins with the basic insight that employees look to their relational environment at work as a source of psychological social capital: they look to their colleagues as unique resources that they expect to provide social validation of their self-concept. Feedback processes, though intended as a "mirror" to illuminate unrecognized developmental needs, actually provide an opportunity for employees to discern their peers' view of the self—a unique opportunity to "draw on" this socially conferred psychologically valuable confirmation of the self-concept. We find that disconfirming feedback, rather than inspiring improvement efforts, actually spurs a confirmation shopping process—a

reshaping of the recipients' social network in search of a more hospitable set of work relationships. We analyze four years of peer feedback and social network data from a manufacturing company, and find that employees respond to disconfirming feedback by reshaping their social network—dropping discretionary relationships, and responding to disconfirming feedback from obligatory relationships by seeking new connections from outside of their close-knit circle of relationships, leading to decreases in network constraint. We find that employees who indulged in confirmation shopping performed more poorly than those who demonstrated restraint in the face of disconfirming feedback, and their poorer performance led to smaller bonuses.

The first chapter of my dissertation, *“Unfulfilled Need Expectations: The Suffocation of Work Engagement”* provides a conceptual view into one mechanism that might reduce employees' tendency to shop for confirmation, and instead embrace disconfirming feedback. We provide a theoretical framework showing the ways in which the absence of expected relationships at work can suffocate work engagement—a motivational force that is known to inspire personal development efforts. Close interpersonal relationships at work can both increase feedback recipients' receptiveness to difficult-to-hear feedback, and also provide valuable energy, the motivational lifeblood of developmental effort.

Though one might instinctively seek to strengthen relational ties between employees as a means of eliminating this detrimental response to feedback, my work suggests a more complex dyadic phenomenon is at play; though strengthening the relationship between feedback giver and recipient might cause the recipient to be more prone to receive the feedback, relationship closeness also influences the nature of feedback that givers provide. In *“Speaking With Different Voices: Feedback Changes Based on Perceptions of Recipients' Morality,”* we show that feedback givers are “intuitive investors”, moderating the developmental nature of the feedback they give as a function of their desire to maintain a relationship with the recipient. But there are limits to the benefits of relationship strength: in *“Beneficial Dehumanization: Feedback Effectiveness as a Function of Recipient Dehumanization”* we find that feedback givers who are closer to recipients provide feedback that is qualitatively less developmental in nature. We are reluctant to hurt those close to us, and are thus less likely to provide the important, though potentially hurtful, information so necessary to prime development efforts.

I have a passion for full-cycle research, and aspire to maintain a suite of research that is collectively descriptive, interpretive and prescriptive. In *“Like Family: Belongingness and the Activation of Organizational Purpose”* I qualitatively explore the origins and effects of the “feeling of family” in a fast-food restaurant chain. This research suggests that organizational features or practices can facilitate or inhibit the formation of deep, meaningful relationships at work, leading employees to the experience of intense belongingness—a belief that others in the organization are deeply concerned about your personal well-being, leading to devotion to, though not internalization of, the organizational purpose. I hope for this research to inform additional field interventions that will contribute to the prescriptive aspect of my work.

On the other end of the relational tension—helping relationally close colleagues to overcome the hesitancy to provide much-needed developmental insight—my work embraces both experimental and qualitative methods. In *“The Social Facilitation of Effective Feedback: Feedback Giver Mindset and The Developmental Nature of Feedback Messages”*, we look to provide one method of mitigating the muting effect relational closeness has on developmental feedback by experimentally manipulating feedback giver growth mindset in a field context. This work suggests that feedback giver mindset manipulations may be effective at shaping the developmental nature of feedback provided, showing, for example, that feedback givers exposed to a growth manipulation provide more, and more comprehensive, developmental feedback. In a new line of promising work with Bradley Staats (UNC) and Francesca Gino (HBS), we employ a mix of qualitative, survey and large-scale archival analyses to begin to understand how coach-coachee relationship features influence coachee growth and development over time in a professional services environment. Early qualitative insights from this work suggests that though coaches who feel deeply connected to their coachees may be “company nice”, robbing their coachees of valuable insights, shifting the coaches’ philosophical approach to coaching on two important dimensions may influence that tendency. This research partnership presents an opportunity for true full-cycle research—allowing us to validate qualitative insights with large-scale surveys and archival data from over 100,000 employees and 20,000 coaches, and culminating with targeted interventions.

My late stage and young work, taken together, illuminate a promising avenue of exciting research: employee development and improvement have been considered far too narrowly. Feedback processes are poor motivational substitutes for the power of a caring other to inspire change. Inspiring deep, caring interpersonal relationships at work have great potential to increase employee well-being at work, enhance motivation, and to motivate growth and development—but may represent a double-edged sword. My future work will focus heavily on inspiring and enabling development through relationships, and envisioning and testing structural approaches to overcoming the developmental costs inherent in deep relationships.